

## **District Councillor Report – Sam Casey-Rerhaye, August-September 2022**

### **Councillor Grant Scheme**

A reminder that this has reopened with a new round of funding, with the deadline for applications being midday **on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022**. Advice can be sought from [grants@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:grants@southandvale.gov.uk) as early as possible if you are thinking about applying – they are really helpful.

As I said previously, grants applications that focus on our Council priorities of climate change mitigation & adaptation, nature recovery, community well-being, openness & transparency and financial responsibility, are most likely to be successful. Information of course is also on the council website at [www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants).

If this deadline is too soon, please get in touch with me asap and I can see if I can extend it, but there will another round early next year with money rolled over.

### **Cost of Living Emergency**

As a Council we have declared a cost of living emergency – here is the Council motion passed in July:

#### ***Council declares that we have moved from a Cost of Living Crisis to a Cost of Living Emergency***

Council asks the leader to call on the Government to:

- Urgently review the energy cap regime and provide much greater protection to consumers, as other European countries have done.
- Make an immediate reduction in VAT, which proportionally helps those most in need
- Increase benefits in line with inflation and reinstate the Universal Credit uplift
- Urgently provide financial support to public transport to avoid service reductions
- Recognise that councils like South Oxfordshire will need additional funding to support services affected by high inflation

Council further resolves:

- To call for a local Cost-of-Living Emergency Summit with stakeholders, including Oxfordshire County Council, Citizens Advice, Food Banks, and others, and to invite both local MPs to attend to work towards a community response to the emergency.
- To ensure Council continues to maximise opportunities to inform and support residents in need, directing them towards services that advise

on heating bills, employment and skills and wellbeing support via our Community Hub

- To continue to offer up to 100% Council Tax reduction, subject to circumstances, and to advise our residents through all channels of communication how to apply for the scheme.

We have created a page on the website where all possible help and support sign posted here:

[Cost of living help - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk) and on the household support fund open to pensioners only now: [www.southoxon.gov.uk/household-support-fund](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/household-support-fund)

I have been out with fellow councillors in Didcot and will be in other areas in coming weeks giving out information on how to get support and the contact details that are on the website page above.

### **Household Support Fund**

This is **now only available to pensioners**. If you're unable to fill in the form online and email it, a paper version of the application form is available by contacting our Community Hub:

Tel: 01235 422600 Email: [communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk](mailto:communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk)

There are limited funds and a deadline of **30<sup>th</sup> September 2022**, so please do apply asap.

### **Oxfordshire 2050**

The five Local Planning authorities in Oxfordshire have been working together on a joint development plan for Oxfordshire to 2050. We were unable to reach agreement on the approach to planning for future housing needs within the framework of the Oxfordshire Plan.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 work programme will end and we will now transition to a process focused on Local Plans. The issues of housing needs will now be addressed through individual, mandatory Local Plans for each of the City and Districts. The Councils will cooperate with each other and with other key bodies as they prepare their Local Plans.

Much of the work that has gone into Oxon2050 will be used in these Local Plans, and South Oxfordshire and the Vale have already agreed to work on a Joint one for our two Districts, because we have similar policies and priorities, share officers and recognise this will save public money and resources.

## **Councils withdraw from Oxfordshire-Cambridge Arc project**

Both South and Vale council leaders have confirmed that they do not support proposals for a pan-regional partnership across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

You can read South Oxfordshire's Leader, Cllr David Rouane's letter here, where he says:

“Partnerships, whilst vital, need to have a purpose, as they can be time-consuming and can incur significant cost to the public purse in both their creation and maintenance and so my test of them is always to ask ‘what value do they add’. I must admit that any added value of the Arc is not obvious to me.”

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/David-Rouane-letter-to-Cllr-Barry-Wood-re-Arc-1-1.pdf>

## **Move to Abbey House**

Approximately at the end of September, to significantly reduce unnecessary costs, the Council will be moving to some temporary office space in the Vale's Abbey House building in the centre of Abingdon where we plan to stay for a couple of years while we complete the development of a new office building at Didcot opposite the railway station.

The Council has been based at Milton Park since the summer of 2015, a few months after an arson attack at the headquarters at Crowmarsh Gifford, near Wallingford.

The vast majority of our staff now have hybrid working arrangements meaning they can work from home or other remote locations, or in the office. This means we need significantly less office space than before, and so the building at Milton Park is much too big.

We've taken an opportunity to bring the lease to an end now, meaning there will be significant savings in rent while operating out of the much smaller office space at Abbey House.

## **Survey on SODC's Inclusion and Diversity strategy**

Please do respond – we really want to hear your views. As a major employer, contractor and provider of services to all the community it's really important we hear from as many people as possible:

This is open until 19<sup>th</sup> September:

<https://express.adobe.com/page/wje8xce4Xc1ze/>

## **Environment Agency responds to sewage concerns**

The Environment Agency has responded to a letter from Council Leader David Rouane regarding sewage treatment capacity and discharge concerns. You can read it here:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/08/220809-EA-Response.pdf>

## **MyVision (OAB) Oxfordshire (Revenue Grant)**

The Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (AOB) is changing its name to MyVision Oxfordshire. **SODC has approved a revenue grant application for £80k** over two years to fund a dedicated Community Engagement Worker working in the South Oxfordshire district.

This person will provide advice, information and guidance specific to sight loss, within the community and in individuals homes. The service will include:

- Creating dedicated information days at local libraries and community centres once a month.
- Setting up and supporting social gatherings in local coffee shops and community centres, providing peer-to-peer support.
- Visiting clients within their home, for those who cannot attend a local information day.
- Setting up befriending partnerships locally with the support of the volunteer coordinator.
- Providing Visual Impairment Awareness Training to local community groups and organisations.
- Working with other organisations to ensure joined up support is provided

## **Citizens Advice (Revenue Grant) - £238k over two years**

In their grant application, Citizens Advice wrote as follows:

We will provide a full advice service for five days per week from the three main advice centres: Didcot, Henley and Thame and from our outreach projects in RAF Benson and Wallingford:

- Deliver advice on benefits / tax credits, debt, employment, housing and family / relationship problems plus any other issues clients bring to us.
- Access specialist Citizens Advice services on topics such as immigration.
- Recruit more volunteer advisers. Post Pandemic, demand for our advice is increasing and client problems are more complex.

- Deliver this advice by phone, webchat and face to face.
- Give SODC access to a rich source of information about problems faced by communities in the district.

### **Wallingford 'Bathing Water Status' application**

We have applied for the bathing area in Wallingford to be given this status, which means information on the status of the water for bathing purposes will be made regularly available to the public. I will let you know if this is approved.

As I am sure you have heard about the sewage outflows into the Thames, I think you'll agree it is vital that people know the state of the water in popular bathing areas.

### **Civil Parking Enforcement**

If there are areas in your parishes that have cars parked regularly where it is not allowed, please let me know and I will alert our officers. Sometimes it only takes the odd traffic warden appearance to prevent further problems.

### **Full Year of Performance Reporting against our Corporate Plan**

The annual performance report for 2021-22 (year to May) is available on the SODC website. We have introduced a Performance Management Framework, which is fundamental to the achievement of the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2020-24. It also allows residents to see how well the Council are doing and how the Council intends to improve.

The Corporate Plan 2020-2024 contains six strategic themes and the council reports against these, with projects listed under each heading in the report:

- Theme 1: Protect and restore the natural world
- Theme 2: Openness and accountability
- Theme 3: Action on the climate emergency
- Theme 4: Improved economic and community wellbeing
- Theme 5: Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs
- Theme 6: Investments that rebuild our financial viability

The report is here, listed as Q4: [Corporate Plan 2020 - 2024 - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/corporate-plan-2020-2024-south-oxfordshire-district-council)

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