

Title	County Councillor's Report
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Flood Summit

Dr Pete Sudbury, Cabinet member for Climate Change, Environment & Future Generations, recently co-ordinated a Flood Summit in Oxford with attendees from the Environment Agency, Thames Water, other stakeholders and local communities to talk about how to improve flood response and resilience in Oxfordshire, which is clearly going to become a more and more vital issue as we face more extreme storms and wetter conditions.

While the County Council is the 'lead flood authority', the work needed is shared by multiple governmental bodies as well as landowners. Communities are encouraged to develop their own flood groups and partner with neighbouring communities for emergency planning.

This summit (which was postponed from earlier in the year) came just as the County Fire Service and other officers were responding to the impact of Storm Bert. The latest flooding information is at <https://www.oxfordshirefloodtoolkit.com>

County Council Budget Process Begins

Oxfordshire County Council and fellow local authorities across England are waiting to hear how new funding for local government pledged by the Chancellor will translate into grant funding levels for the 2025/26 financial year.

The first draft of the council's budget for next year contains £14.1m to meet financial pressures, £5.4m of new investments and £17.9m of savings.

Funding will not be known until December when the government will issue the draft financial settlement for local government. A budget is finally set in February at Full Council.

Although Oxfordshire's finances are well-run, rising costs and ever-increasing demand means that current and future challenges very much remain, especially in children's services and adult social care.

A public consultation on the substance of the 2025/26 budget proposals is now live and will run until 2nd January 2025 on [Let's talk Oxfordshire](#).

People can comment on the council's proposed budget with the online form or in writing by

Freepost. <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/budget-consultation-2025-26>

The consultation follows extensive engagement with residents over the summer on their priorities, including on the budget, through the council's annual residents' survey and participatory engagement opportunities using an online budget simulator, focus groups and sounding boards for children and young people.

Citizens' assembly on future travel and transport

In February, the County Council will be facilitating a citizens' assembly on Transport in Oxfordshire – I am part of the councillor advisory group for this.

This is a deliberative participatory project that brings together 40 members of the public, chosen to be broadly representative of the county's population.

They will come together for 30 hours in early 2025, to consider a simple overall question about what transport in Oxfordshire could look like by 2050.

The panel get presentations on a wide range of data and evidence before having their own discussion and drawing their own conclusions to support future decision-making.

Current constitutional rules don't allow such assemblies to actually take decisions yet; similar projects have brought very interesting results around the world, and can help to reduce conflict over contentious issues.

Remote attendance

The government is currently consulting on allowing remote attendance and voting for local government meetings, including County, District and Parish councils.

The consultation is at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/enabling-remote-attendance-and-proxy-voting-at-local-authority-meetings/enabling-remote-attendance-and-proxy-voting-at-local-authority-meetings>

This was of course enabled for a time during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Future Oxfordshire Partnership, reform and devolution

There have also been rumblings about Local Government reform and Devolution; we still await the government White Paper on this.

In the meantime, Oxfordshire council leaders have decided to simplify the Future Oxfordshire Partnership – which was originally created by previous regimes as the Oxfordshire Growth Board as part of the Housing and Growth Deal in 2017 or so – into a much simpler joint committee, removing extra non-elected members and non-public meetings to increase transparency and accountability.

I think this simplification is a good thing!

Funded projects

My councillor priority fund has now closed for this two-year period. Thanks to everyone who applied and for doing such great projects to improve our local area! There are always more things I'd like to have supported that missed out this time.

Recent Priority Fund allocations:

Oxfordshire Play Association – Berinsfield Play and Activity Day
Berinsfield Day Centre – funding towards summer trip
Dorchester PC – Pavilion Refurbishment Phase 1 contribution
Nuneham Courtenay – Playing field improvements
Warborough & Shillingford Society – Village Book Exchange
Newington PC – speed survey around the nursery school

I had previously funded:

Berry Youth Centre – Holiday Scheme
Newington – Solar-powered Defibrillator
Garsington PC – Replacement Boundary Sign
Berinsfield PC – Rugby posts installation.