

District Councillor Report – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, February 2026

Budget 2026-27

We are approaching the final major budget for the council before the government confirms the future council configuration for our area (which will then limit our ability to commit funds to things due to the accompanying legislation).

The good news I am hearing is that there will be no cuts to services in 2026, and a strong prospect of further investment in facilities and community grants, subject to approval at the council's budget meetings on 12th February.

One thing already under discussion is a community cohesion project, to make sure as best we can that all our communities feel welcome, supported and included in South Oxfordshire, at a time when division is in the air.

I and my fellow Green councillors are scrutinising the budget papers on 3rd February, where I chair the Scrutiny Committee; and we intend to make suggestions for other activities/projects where the District Council can add value to our public services using the substantial returns on investment from reserves that are reported in the budget.

Anyone can look at the budget papers on the SODC website Scrutiny Committee agenda page.

A secure short-term future for our local leisure facilities in uncertain times

With the government planning to reorganise councils in Oxfordshire in the coming years, a short-term contract extension - rather than a new long-term deal – has been agreed for leisure centres and pools in our area.

The council's current long term leisure services contract is nearing its end in August 2026.

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL), a charitable community interest company who operate under the brand 'Better', has been the provider for leisure services on behalf of both District Councils since 2014 (and separately for both councils for several years before that).

This covers seven locations in South Oxfordshire and four in Vale of White Horse, including outdoor pools in both areas, at Wallingford and Abingdon.

Changes within the new three-year extension will generate cost savings for the councils without any change to the service.

There is also further significant investment earmarked for facilities across both districts in the remaining lifetime of the council, which is good news at a time when many councils have sold off or closed their leisure centres.

Councillor Grants agreed

I had lots of applications for this grant this year, which is great. It does mean that not all the applications will get the whole sum applied for, however. Working with the Council grants team, I have worked through them and applicants will be informed soon.

Talking of grants....

The **CIL community grant** is now open for applications.

Applications for the second round of the Community Infrastructure Levy Grant Fund opened on Friday 30th January for town and parish councils and not-for-profit community groups in South Oxfordshire.

A total of £750,000 is available to support projects that improve or create new community amenities, such as community centres, sports and cultural facilities, play areas, and open spaces.

Grants of £75,000 to £250,000 will be awarded for projects that are needed as a result of more development in the area.

More information, including details on how to apply, is available on our website: [**Community Infrastructure Levy \(CIL\) Grant Fund - open - South Oxfordshire District Council**](#).

The closing date for applications is 30th March 2026.

LGR – government consultation launching soon

The government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) consultation is likely to launch in early February. They will seek views on **all** the three proposals put forward to reorganise local government in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

The District Council is working on an extensive communications and engagement campaign to run alongside the government consultation to publicise this and to encourage as many people as possible to take part.

This includes a refreshed TwoCouncil.org website, which will be launching soon – this explains the option the District Councils in South and Vale are favouring (Ridgeway and North Oxfordshire councils) plus

links to the other two options, One Oxfordshire and the City Council's Greater Oxford three councils proposal.

New Council Tax billing method

Residents can now get their Council Tax bill by email instead of a paper bill in the post without needing to sign up for an online account with us.

As part of the work to encourage people to use the digital services if possible, the easy e-bill sign up will reduce paper use and reliance on postal services, saving the councils money too. Residents can fill in a form on our website to switch to e-bills.

If you do want to set up an account to handle everything online, you can do that on the Council website too.

Garden Waste Permits for 2026

Existing garden waste permits will expire on **31st March**. To continue receiving fortnightly collections from **1st April** and to avoid any interruption to their service, residents will need to buy a new permit. **New permit sales will open mid-February.**

The vast majority of the 69,000+ customers will be able to buy their permit via their 'MyAccount' or by visiting southandvale.gov.uk/gardenwastepermit

Offline Support: Residents who need assistance, should call the Customer Services team on **01235 422422**

Free Business Webinars

As the decarbonisation work – replacing gas boilers with air source heat pumps and solar panels – continues at Park Sports Centre in Wheatley, the construction company AtkinsRéalis has, as part of its social value commitment, organised free online webinars for local community to develop a range of new skills. Please share

- [Carbon Literacy for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises](#) **11th February | 11am – 12.30pm**
- [Building Blocks for a Social Media Strategy](#) **20th February | 10.20am – Midday**
- [A Social Value Guide for Small Businesses](#) **24th February | 11am – Midday**

Retirement

The Head of Service for Planning, Adrian Duffield, has announced his plans to retire after over 40 years working in local government and

nearly 25 years at the councils, including 17 years jointly at South and Vale.

Cornerstone music events

Enjoy three standout nights of live music at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot this Spring. Beginning with **Katy Rose Bennett & ISCA** on **Friday 6th February**, bringing heartfelt folk songs, rich storytelling, and stunning a cappella harmonies from one of the UK's most distinctive vocal groups.

Then on **Saturday 14th March**, award-winning singer and actress **Patti Boulaye OBE** presents Here I Am, a joyful one-woman show filled with unforgettable songs and hilarious stories from her remarkable career on stage, screen, and beyond.

And to finish with a bang, **King Pleasure and The Biscuit Boys** hit the stage on **Saturday 28th March**, delivering high-energy swing, blues, and rhythm & blues from one of the world's most celebrated vintage bands.

You can book [Cornerstone website](#) or call the box office: 01235 515144

For any support or queries please email me: sam.casey-erhaye@southoxon.gov.uk.