

District Councillor Annual Report 2025-26 – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye

There have been some major changes in the governance of the District Council. Last May, the LibDem group decided to govern as a single group and end the five-year partnership with the Green Party group.

This was, however, after the four-year Council Plan ('The Way Ahead') that I led when Cabinet member, was agreed and which the LibDem group is still using – so you could say the Green influence will be felt for the last few years of this council even if we are no longer in the Cabinet.

- The political leader, Cllr David Rouane (LD) stepped down and the new leader is Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers (LD).
- The Chief Executive, Mark Stone, left, and the deputy, Adrianna Partridge has been appointed as the new Chief Executive.
- The head of planning, Adrian Duffield, retired after more than 25 years at this District Council, and the new head, Jeni Jackson (now called Director of Planning) has just been appointed and will start in July.

I have been chairing **the Scrutiny Committee** which is the statutory committee that challenges the governing Cabinet and holds them to their stated policies and strategy, as part of the 'opposition'.

This year the committee has examined annual delivery plan for the council' overall activities, the housing strategy and temporary accommodation policies, the new waste strategy and site, the new strategy for Cornerstone and the budget and financial out turn for the council.

We continue to challenge the Cabinet on keeping to their commitments to adhere to the ethical financial policy, ensure services are available equally across the District and that key issues for the District, like flooding, are high on their agenda.

As part of the Green group, I challenged **the budget put forward for next year**, adding amendments for more grant monies for nature projects and for small housing groups such as Community Land Trusts to develop projects. These were accepted.

Other amendments for an expanded enforcement team and an expanded conservation area team in planning were rejected by the LD cabinet, unfortunately.

We also pressed the LibDems to acquire more electric waste vehicles rather than all diesel, but again this was rejected for reasons that weren't entirely clear.

I put **a motion to the Council** with Cllr Barlow, that was passed unanimously, asking the Leader of the Council to write to the Minister about the SESRO Thames Water reservoir proposal and the lack of emergency plans.

The current proposal does not include an emergency plan in the event that the reservoir needs to be emptied urgently – this would cause catastrophic flooding across South Oxfordshire.

We are horrified that this is not a requirement before the reservoir is agreed when so many homes and land are at risk.

I had £7,500 allocated for **councillor community projects** this year (a 50% increase instigated by the LD/Green partnership) and it was very oversubscribed!

These grants are always important for communities and this year I was delighted to support more play equipment in Nuneham Courtenay, furniture for Long Wittenham pre-school, bench repair in Clifton Hampden Rec, and a contribution to a reading programme to improve the reading skills for children in the ward.

Other applications, for example for solar panels for a community area, and a generator for a village hall, I hope will be eligible for other grants available at the Council.

A lot of time and effort has been spent by councillors and Council officers on **the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals**.

A proposal was put forward by South Oxfordshire for two unitary councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. I support this, being the most sensible size for economies of scale but also small enough to be near local communities.

The focus on LGR has meant that some of the ambitions we as the Green councillors had to use some of the council reserves on land purchase for a nature park can no longer go ahead because of government regulations. This is very disappointing.

It is also disappointing that so much of the energy and time of the council has to be put into these proposals. This feels to me like a low priority when so many other things are needed in the country.

The long-running saga of the **Joint Local Plan 2041** has continued over the past year, with interventions from the Planning Inspectorate and the

housing minister, first pausing progress on the examination and then restarting it in February 2026.

This has been taking place against the backdrop of new national planning legislation, a new planning policy framework (December 2024) and a consultation on a completely new framework which closed on 10th March.

We expect part 2 of the inquiry on the plan to take place over the summer, which would enable us to adopt the new plan in early 2027.

A few recent updates for May/June 2026

Help towards the high price of heating oil

The South and Vale Community Hub is currently supporting residents who are struggling to afford household oil heating costs – which includes financial support available through the Oxfordshire Crisis Support Scheme.

Please help to spread the word about the scheme. You can find more information on the [Oxfordshire Crisis Support Scheme | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Waste Survey Live

The Waste team at the Council has launched their latest survey to find out what residents think about their waste collection, street cleaning services and waste reduction initiatives.

Last year, more than 2,100 people took part in the 2025 survey with more than 81 percent of respondents indicating they were satisfied or very satisfied with the waste collection service.

Residents are encouraged to complete the 2026 survey by visiting – southandvale.gov.uk/WasteSurvey. Comments are open **until 4th June**.

If anyone has questions or requires the survey in an alternative format (for example large print, Braille, audio, email, Easy Read and alternative languages) they should email waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk or call 01235 422146.

As a result of the feedback from last year's survey, staff received extra training to help ensure bins are returned correctly after emptying, further checks were put in place around litter bin emptying and measures put in place ensure street cleaning standards across the area are maintained.

There has also been increased communication on which items go in which bin, especially around food waste.

New Waste Vehicle Depot

The Council is currently working on a long-term vehicle depot at the former Haseley Trading Estate in South Oxfordshire, for the waste collection and street cleaning vehicle fleet.

The new site, owned by the Council since last year, will be used as a depot for parking all vehicles associated with the waste and cleaning service and vehicles where members of staff will operate from.

This includes 97 parking bays for operational use and 186 parking bays for staff and visitors. The contractor commenced construction work on site earlier this year.

The site is a replacement for the current one which is rented by the council at Culham No1 site, which is designated as an industrial growth area and has a current planning permission application in at the council for redevelopment with new industrial units across most of the site.

Find out more at: www.southandvale.gov.uk/haseley-trading-estate

Capital Grants Scheme opens

The latest round of our Capital Grant Scheme will go live later this month.

The grant gives organisations a financial boost towards capital expenditure such as making improvements to buildings or play areas with applications of up to £75,000.

The grant will launch on **Tuesday 26th May to Monday 20th July**. Head to our website southoxon.gov.uk/grants for more details.

Park Sports Centre Energy Efficiency retrofit

Work on installing energy-saving measures at Park Sports Centre in Wheatley to replace end-of-life gas boilers is progressing well as contractors have just finished installing 268 solar panels on the centre roof. This follows extensive insulation work.

The solar panels are expected to create 113,045kWh per year (equivalent to the electricity used in 40 average UK homes). The council successfully bid for government funding towards installing sustainable energy measures. The next stage is installing air source heat pumps.

If you have any questions or issues you would like to contact me about: sam.casey-rerhaye@southoxon.gov.uk.