

Councillor Graham report Jan/Feb

County Councillor Priority Fund-Woodstock Division

The remains of the councillor priority fund have now been allocated to Tackley, The Bartons, Combe and Stonesfield parish councils/community groups in addition to the awards previously made to Bladon, Woodstock, Wootton pcs /community groups. It is hoped that this fund will continue 23/24 and 24/25 to support worthy causes in our communities. Requests can be made directly to me for consideration via the parish councils or directly by community organisations.

OCC news: Budget

Oxfordshire County Council will set its 2023-24 budget at the February full council. The budget is delivered within a context of high inflation and rising pressure for services, particularly in adult social care and children's services.

The administration will propose a 5% rise in council tax, including a 2% adult social care precept. Judicious savings, a rising council tax take from increased population, and a 2 better-than-expected government settlement also support the budget and mean drastic cuts can be avoided, despite the gap between the council tax rise and the rate of inflation.

Children's Services & SEND: I am delighted to say that children's services will see an inflation busting boost of 12.3% (£18.8m). In this climate, providing a real terms increase (+1.6%) to children's services, including for special educational needs and other vulnerable children in care, has been difficult to achieve, but reflects the priorities of the administration. £500,000 will be spent to speed up needs assessments (EHCPs) for children with SEND.

Adult social care: Accounts for approximately half of OCC's budget and is particularly sensitive to inflation due to the labour intensive nature of care. Because of the size of the budget, it is difficult to provide an inflation matched rise, however, adult social care will get a 6.8% (£14.4m) increase to support its work, which will soften the impact of inflation. The 'Oxfordshire Way' reforms also support more efficient use of budget.

Highways and travel: We will be investing an additional £1.6m to reduce flooding on roads – clearing ditches and cutting through red tape (riparian rights!) that prevent action on the ground. Monies will also be used to clean signs and improve road markings. By investing in flooding prevention, we can reduce damage to road surfaces and save taxpayers money. However, it remains the case that successive grant reductions from government means that we have too little money to manage such a large network.

Climate: It's easy to talk the talk on climate – but walking the walk is much harder. Amongst other initiatives, there is increased funding for trees planting (essential not only for carbon capture, but also localised climate resilience).

Voluntary organisations, libraries, and other services: Library services will be supported as they account for the loss of income from DVD rentals etc. Voluntary organisation will also again be given a year's rent holiday where they pay rent to OCC.

OCC news

Sustainable warmth grants: Home energy efficiency grants can be applied for online (*Deadline: March 2023*). OCC secured funding from the government's Sustainable Warmth Fund. Homes connected to the mains gas grid can apply for up to £10,000 and homes not connected can apply for up to £25,000 (means tested)

Call for hosts - Homes for Ukraine: A campaign encouraging people to come forward who are willing to accommodate families from Ukraine has been launched. While the government is reducing payments from the current £550 to £350 in April, or £500 for those hosting beyond 12 months, OCC has committed to maintaining the current rate of £550. 3

Active travel: OCC has secured over £0.5M from the government's Active Travel Capability Fund to invest in improving access to active travel. The county is also developing a plan for a 'Strategic Active Travel Network' that will link towns and villages. While only a plan at this stage, the data collected and planning done puts OCC in a good position to bid for government money when it arises.

Potholes: Freeze thaw conditions over the past couple of months has seen a large number of potholes emerge. OCC are dealing with the backlog but will take some time. Please continue to report potholes using fix my street (reporting each pothole separately).

Coronation: Apply for up to £10,000 funding from the national lottery. See also the government's guide on street parties.

Electric buses: First vehicles in a fleet of 159 electric buses set to arrive in September.

Verges: Revised policy to go to Cabinet in February, with call for trial sites.