**District Councillor Report- Cllr Robin Bennett, January 2023**

**£2 million boost for community and neighbourhood facilities**

South Oxfordshire District Council has been allocated £1 million each the government’s UK Shared Prosperity Fund to provide better community and neighbourhood facilities and improve public open spaces to help increase the health and wellbeing of residents. The council are already starting work to support community facilities, including those in Berinsfield, to reduce their energy bills and lower their carbon emissions. Another study has begun to see where and how the councils can provide more arts and culture opportunities and leisure activities in areas that need it most.

Businesses will also benefit from the funding over the next two years, with projects to support their sustainability, help deliver enterprise facilities and increase peoples’ skills. Plans include increasing access to green skills courses to help residents gain a new qualification and advice for businesses to help them to move towards low-carbon operations. A new strategy is also being developed to promote tourism and encourage visitors to stay in the area to enjoy local attractions.

To help businesses further, the councils will be offering opportunities for local organisations to tender for contracts to help deliver the projects taking place in both districts.

Businesses can keep up to date on these opportunities by signing up to the councils’ Business Support newsletter by visiting the South and Vale Business Support website – [www.svbs.co.uk](http://www.svbs.co.uk)

As Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Regeneration, I will be chairing the steering group for this project. I’m confident we can use this fund to benefit our local businesses and community groups, helping them become more sustainable both economically and environmentally, and work in partnership with the community to tackle inequalities in our area.

To find out more, visit [www.southoxon.gov.uk/UKSPF](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/UKSPF)

**Bulky waste collections**

Bookings have just opened again for our bulky waste collection service.

SODC normally pause this service during catch up collections after Christmas to allow for the crews to collect the extra Christmas waste presented. This year the suspension was extended to allow staff time to carry out necessary work behind the scenes.

Bulky waste collections will now take place during the week, Monday – Friday with both electrical and non-electrical items collected on the same day, these items will be collected separately by two different vehicles.  This is because we have to dispose of electrical and non-electrical items at different locations.

For more information, and to make a booking, residents should visit

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/what-cannot-go-in-your-bins/bulky-waste-collections/>

**Free mediation to help resolve a dispute**

We’re able to offer our residents a free mediation service as a member of the South and Vale Community Partnership. Mediation Bucks can bring together residents struggling to resolve a dispute to listen and help find a solution. Please let residents know they can find out more information on our website [**southoxon.gov.uk/mediation**](http://www.southoxon.gov.uk/mediation)

**Community well-being and climate action in South Oxfordshire’s 2023/24 budget**

Action on climate change and key projects to enhance community wellbeing and support those most in need can progress thanks to South Oxfordshire District Council’s improved financial position.

The council can focus on these priorities because councillors have approved a budget for 2023/4 that shows a financial position in a healthier state than previously forecast thanks to the careful budgeting work in recent years. It also means the council needs to draw over a million pounds less from its reserves to balance the budget than it had prepared for a year ago\*.

£1 million will be invested over the next two years to drive the council’s corporate plan priorities, including ‘Everyone Active’, an active communities grant scheme, and continuation of the Community Hub to support the district’s most vulnerable residents.

The Community Hub plays an important role supporting the council’s ongoing response work for refugees and asylum seekers and works with partners to lead and deliver programmes to address inequalities.  As well as providing wide-ranging support and advice for residents the Community Hub delivers cost-of-living help for those in most financial need, such as the Household Support Fund.

The budget also recognises the housing pressures within the district and allocates ongoing support for the council’s dedicated homelessness prevention work across the district.

The budget identifies £4.6 million of capital growth linked to the government’s Local Authority Housing Fund, responding to the UK’s humanitarian duties to assist those fleeing war. The £4.6 million represents the council’s share of the cost towards providing a supply of ‘move-on’ and settled accommodation initially for refugees and asylum seekers.  This all complements £2 million of funding to secure homes for people in need that was formally agreed in December having been allocated in last year’s budget.

The capital budget will be used to improve South Oxfordshire’s infrastructure, including flood prevention, leisure centre improvements and resurfacing and lighting replacement at the council’s car parks. Decarbonisation funding, including some Government support, will contribute to retrofitting energy saving measures at Cornerstone Arts Centre.

Retaining its investment in climate action, the budget includes funds to progress some significant outcomes from priority projects already begun, including tree planting and meadow creation, an extension of last year’s No Mow May called ‘Let it Bee’ and supporting water quality work including an application for Bathing Water Status for a stretch of River Thames.

This year the council will increase its share of the council tax by £5 a year for an average Band D property, so for 2023/24 residents will pay a Band D rate of £141.24 per household for the vital services provided by the district council. This represents a below inflation increase of 3.6 per cent. In 2022/23 the Band D rate was the nineth lowest in the country for a shire district council.

Whilst the short-term position is more positive, there is uncertainty around future local government funding, especially from 2025/26 onwards. The council has set its medium-term financial plan to 2027/28 to help deliver its corporate priorities and continue to provide high-quality frontline services in the meantime. Financial pressures in that medium-term timeframe predicted to affect all councils are the state of the national economy and the lack of clarity on local authority funding.

**Cost of Living** A reminder that the Council has produced a useful guide to help residents struggling with the rising cost of living. <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/cost-of-living-crisis-advice-and-support/>

Contact our Community Hub on: 01235 422 600 or communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk

**Free litter-picking equipment**

More than 200 people got in touch with our waste team earlier this month to get hold of free litter picking equipment after we announced a giveaway on our social media channels.  We offered the packs, using money from the one-off 2022/23 South Oxfordshire discretionary fund for projects supporting climate action, nature recovery and community wellbeing, to help encourage people to get involved with [**Keep Britain Tidy’s Great British Spring Clean event**](https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/get-involved/support-our-campaigns/great-british-spring-clean), from 17 March - 2 April.

If you are planning a group litter pick or a one-off event you can borrow our equipment for the event.

To get hold of or borrow equipment, contact [**waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk**](mailto:waste.team@southandvale.gov.uk), ideally at least two weeks before your preferred date. Regular litter-pickers can also get equipment on long-term loan.