

CORPORATE PLAN AND SERVICE & RESOURCE PLANNING 2015/16 to 2017/18

Budget speech 2015

Thank you chairman

I would like to start by thanking Lorna Baxter, Chief Finance Officer, who has been invaluable in helping to prepare this budget. She has been ably assisted by Katy Jurczynszyn along with the rest of her team.

Also I would like to thank Cllr Stratford who has taken over the finance portfolio, coming to grips with all the issues quickly. I hope that he continues in this role for many a year as this is my 3rd budget as Leader of the council and he is the 3rd Cabinet Member presenting it.

Once again I had hoped that it would be easier than last year's budget however that has not been the case mainly due to the pressures of Adult & Children's services.

I would like to thank my independent colleagues who have supported the budget process to enable a stable administration to deliver this budget. I think the residents want that stability rather than us all arguing and trying to point score at today's meeting.

I have been very open and transparent with the main opposition parties by providing information on the budget process prior to any announcements, sharing information with them since October.

My reason was quite simple.

This budget will be a major challenge for us and there is no way we can disguise the cuts, if there were any areas we could work on, then I was content to see if we could deliver a united budget today.

Yet again I suspect this is a budget that no group would really want to put through as it's a cutting budget. I know this is not the reason we came into Local Government however we have to be realistic and acknowledge that this is a cutting budget and it's simply not possible to have no cuts what so ever.

In proposing this, we have taken into account comments from Performance Scrutiny Committee and stakeholders responses to the consultation through the Council's website. Now that the final funding has been confirmed, I am pleased to say that having listened to the concerns around the cut to Community Action Groups, that the funding of

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£70,000 can be reinstated. It also allows us to put some funding into reserves and contingency and reduce the savings required on highways maintenance by £300,000.

I had hoped to deliver a budget with an increase of 1% to allow us to take advantage of the freeze grant. Unfortunately that has not been possible so I am proposing an increase of 1.99% that will enable us to put money back into reserves otherwise our balances held for emergencies would be dangerously low.

It is the 3rd year in a row I have proposed an increase of just 1.99% this is once again the lowest actual increase by the County Council.

This small increase of just 46p per week has enabled us to protect some vital services across the county.

In 2010 we started a programme of reducing the budget by £201 million.

The spending review announcement in the summer of 2013 meant we had to find another £64 million of savings. By the end of this year we will have achieved £204 million of savings. With the added pressures from Adult and Children's services this takes the total savings from £265m to £292 million.

The future for Local Government funding is not looking rosy as the Chancellor indicated a further £49 billion of savings following the election. With areas such as the NHS, overseas aid and defence ring fenced then the savings must come from other departments.

With this stark outlook for our financial position we have to think differently about Local Government, that's why I commissioned the Ernst & Young report into Local Government in Oxfordshire. They looked at 3 options and I was clear that I was not wedded to 1 option and would be prepared to look at others. The main question for me is how best we provide the vital services to the residents of Oxfordshire.

I'm sure we would not start with the current structure as the general public do not differentiate between Woodstock town Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the County Council. They simply see us all as the Council and want us to reduce our costs whilst still retaining the services that they value.

As part of the budget proposal I'm proposing the removal of the CEO position this will mean funds can be used to provide vital services to the vulnerable of Oxfordshire. This may seem a radical move but other counties work well without a CEO such as Wiltshire & West Sussex

This is about the position not the person as Joanna has been a fantastic servant to the residents of Oxfordshire over the last 10 years and will be missed.

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This is in addition to the restructure that has already taken place.

We have reduced directors by 50%, senior management by 40% along with overall staff reductions of 30%.

It's a tribute to our staff that we have been able to make the savings and still have basically the same service delivered to our residents.

We have had to redesign services. Share functions such as IT, finance and HR with Hampshire County Council. Trading standards provide services for other councils making that service almost cost neutral to Oxfordshire residents. Sharing the back office functions of the fire service with other councils. These are some of the innovative ways we have worked to reduce costs.

I want to reaffirm my statement about the Living wage, we are committed to deliver the Living wage and are working towards implementation with our partners as soon as practicable.

The City Deal, Local Growth Deal and working with our partners at the Local Enterprise Partnership has seen millions of pounds invested in Oxfordshire. Previously residents would complain we weren't addressing the transport needs of the county, ironically now the complaint is we are doing too much. We have a clear planned work programme:

London Road Improvements	May 2015
Milton Interchange	January 2016
Cycle City: The Plain	July 2015
Featherbed Lane and Steventon Lights	November 2015
Harwell Phase 2 (Hagbourne Hill)	November 2015
Chilton A34 Junction – North facing slips	December 2015
Frideswide Square (Phase 2 -Main Square)	December 2015
Wolvercote Roundabout	January 2016
Cuttleslowe Roundabout	January 2016
Harwell Oxford Entrance	July 2016
Harwell Phase 1	February 2017

These will provide a real boost to the transport network and promote growth in the county. Ensuring Oxfordshire continues to be a World class economy.

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Underpinning the budget is the Corporate Plan. This year's plan has undergone a light touch update which focuses on what we have achieved in the last year and where we plan to focus our activity in the coming 12 months.

I hope that all members will vote for the budget to ensure we continue to provide vital services to all of Oxfordshire's residents especially those vulnerable in most need.

COUNCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH

Leader of the Council