

Conservative and Independent Alliance

Oxfordshire County Council, County Hall, Oxford OX1 1ND

Safeguarding taxpayers' money, protecting the vulnerable and helping – not hammering – our families and businesses.

On 6 May 2021, evenly split election results led to the formation of a 'Fair Deal' Alliance of Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Councillors ('the FDA') in County Hall. In those elections, the Conservatives secured 37% of the popular vote, with Liberal Democrats recording 26% and Labour, 21%. Independents and minor parties took the remaining 16%.

The present budget marks the half-way point in the current Council cycle (2021-25). In consecutive years, the administration has pursued a 'max tax' agenda that seeks to increase its share of Council Tax by the legal limit. The FDA's budget would, if passed, see a further £83.00 added to a Band D bill which, alongside parishes, districts and the Police and Crime Commissioner, would exceed £100.00.

The Conservative and Independent Alliance ('the CIA') considers that a sensible, businesslike form of politics is needed that safeguards frontline public services and protects the robust financial position left to the current administration by the last.

The CIA believes that Councillors should focus on delivering the frontline services for which this Council has a direct and/or statutory responsibility, rather than using the Council chamber as a platform for virtue-signalling and symbolic gestures that relate to matters beyond the Council's competence, and for criticising the government, whose proper responsibility it is to tackle policy matters of national and international importance.

Above all else, Oxfordshire County Council exists to provide social care services to vulnerable children and adults, maintain and improve the county's roads, deliver government-funded infrastructure projects, and maintain essential community services.

Despite additional investment from government of some £37 million this year and a robust financial legacy, the FDA's budget proposals represent millions of Pounds of extra public spending, including on projects for which there is little or no public mandate.

The CIA believes that such discretionary spending should be removed, with the Council seeking instead to offer residents a lower Council Tax rise as part of an overall package that puts the most vulnerable members of our community first and helps visitors to, and businesses in, our world-beating City of Oxford.

Given the above, the CIA's budget amendments set out to achieve the following five aims:

1. Cut the FDA's unnecessarily high Council Tax rise and send a clear message to residents that this Council will always spend taxpayers' money wisely;
2. Provide extra investment in the Council's Special Educational and Disability Needs ('SEND') service to tackle the county's Educational and Healthcare Plans crisis and shift services towards positive early interventions following recommendations from the independent Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum.
3. Increase the Council's Home to School transport budget in light of the ongoing Spare Seats debacle, which will see parents' and pupils' lives thrown into as chaos as 235 students attending predominantly rural schools have a safe and dependable bus

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service to school withdrawn without care or consultation, with many more set to be affected unless the Council reverses its position.

4. Make Park and Ride free next year at all Oxfordshire County Council facilities to stimulate trips into our wonderful City, rather than penalising people visiting and working in Oxford through the administration's punitive policies of Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods and Traffic Filters; and
5. End funding for anti-business schemes, including the Workplace Parking Tax, and reorient Council funding towards frontline public services, putting services for the youngest and most vulnerable members of our great county first.

We commend this alternative budget to the Council.

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In readiness for Full Council on 14 February 2023