

**COUNCIL – 10 FEBRUARY 2012  
SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING – 2012/2013**

**Green Group Proposed Budget Amendments**

**WE CAN'T STAND IDLY BY**

1. The Conservative budget is a disaster for severely disabled people of all ages in Oxfordshire. There were cuts last year in services for Older People, for people with Learning Disabilities, for people with Physical Disabilities, and for people with Mental Health problems; there are cuts this year, and the promise of worse to come. The services that are affected are not luxuries. They help people get out of bed, to get dressed, to wash, to eat, to get out and have a life. The starting point for these cuts was an already inadequately funded service.
2. A County Council cannot completely protect even its most vulnerable residents because so much depends on national government grants, which have been slashed. The Conservative/Liberal Democrat government has embarked on a long-term programme of cutting public services. We predicted last year that the cuts would weaken the economy and increase the national debt. We have been proved right. The Government is trying to rescue the situation by printing tens of billions of pounds. This will also fail. The weakening of the economy will increase unemployment, increase the national debt and lead to calls for further destruction of local government.
3. Even if we were wrong about the effect of the cuts on the economy we would still budget for better Social Services. This is a rich county in a rich country. For us to deliberately develop plans which leave thousands of people in conditions which threaten their health and dignity is wrong. Two weeks ago AGE UK said that their research revealed that England is in “a social care crisis”. They were supported by the Alzheimer’s Society which said “It is completely unacceptable that spending is falling in this vital area.” This applies with equal force to Oxfordshire.
4. These amendments are an attempt to deal with this crisis and other shortcomings. Over the five years (2012-2017) of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) we propose to make available an additional £56 million pounds.

**HOW WE WOULD RAISE THE EXTRA MONEY:**

5. First is a question of priorities. There is no reason why Oxfordshire’s Park & Rides should be subsidised at the expense of people desperately trying to make a life for themselves. A modest £2 a day

maximum parking charge would bring in £4.5 million during the period of the MFTP.

6. The larger amount of extra money that we raise is through an inflation-based increase in Council Tax of 3.5%. We do not do this lightly, because we know that the £40 a year (£3.38 per month) extra payment is a lot of money to many people. It is because of this that over the last five years the Green group has proposed the lowest increases of any Party in the County Council. But this year we are convinced that the crisis has to override this concern.
7. The Coalition Government has offered a 2.5% grant to authorities which freeze their Council Tax. It is, on the face of it, attractive. In reality it is a device for accelerating cuts. Freezing the tax revenue would result in needing an 6.5% increase the next year- or large cuts in public services.

#### **HOW THE EXTRA MONEY WOULD BE USED:**

##### **We would be able to restore nearly £24 million to Social Care.**

8. In addition, we would invest £3.355 million to keep our libraries fully professionally staffed, prevent homelessness, which is rising rapidly, expand Credit Unions which keep poor people from having to use loan sharks and provide English language classes so that our new citizens are able to fully participate in the life of our community We would expand the successful Apprenticeship system by £1.5 million.

##### **We would also invest £6.1 million to bring in about £35 million for the people of Oxfordshire.**

9. We do this by providing free home insulation to all the households in the poorest areas of the County. The £3.5 million we invest would attract about £10 million from utility companies under their Carbon Emission Reduction Target obligations. This would virtually end fuel poverty in the County. Thousands of people would be rescued from the pain and ill effects of cold and would be able to save £15 million, over the 5 years in reduced energy costs. This is money which they would spend locally rather than paying to the energy companies. We would increase the amount of Debt and Benefit advice for people with disabilities and for those being affected by the long recession by £2.5 million over 5 years. There are hundreds of millions of pounds of unclaimed pensions and disability benefits in a county like Oxfordshire. Past experience suggests this would bring at least an additional £20 million into the County.

#### **BRINGING EXTRA EMPLOYMENT TO THE COUNTY:**

10. The insulation work will provide about 100 decent-paying jobs; the increase in spending on Apprentices would pay for about 30 more apprentices per year. About 200 more people would be needed to provide the additional care services, for a total of over 300 useful jobs.

**RESERVES:**

11. The Conservative's balance their budget by using over £11m from the Efficiency Reserve. After 3 years, when this reserve has been spent the Conservative plans leave the County £5.5million in the red, necessitating more cuts or a Council Tax increase. By contrast, at the end of 5 years of this MTFP, we would need to make £5.9million less savings and would have over £10million left in the Efficiency Reserve to allocate.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

12. **We RECOMMEND Council to approve:**

- (1) **A budget for 2012/13 and medium term financial plan for 2013/14 – 2016/17 as amended in Green Group Annex 1;**
- (2) **A Council Tax Requirement for 2012/13 of £294.455m**
- (3) **The Council Tax for 2012/13 as set out in that annex and in particular a Council Tax for Band D equivalent properties of £1,202.25**

**COUNCILLOR LARRY SANDERS**