

ITEM CC9
Green Group Amendments

Green Group Budget Amendments

9 February 2010

The Green Party believes it is the duty of Oxfordshire County Council, especially in this recession, to defend and improve the economic well-being of the people of our County. These amendments do that. In the five years of the MTFP we would:

- 1) Invest £4.5 million to provide free insulation to thousands of homes. This investment would bring in at least as much again from the government and energy companies. **Householders would save at least £18 million in energy costs.** Most of that money would be spent locally.
- 2) Invest £5 million to provide an accessible and effective system of benefits Information, advice and advocacy to serve older people, adults with disabilities, children with disabilities and their families, people on low incomes and the unemployed. Similar services elsewhere in the country show a return of 5-10 times the investment. **This will bring at least £25 million pounds to be spent in every locality of the County, creating profits and further employment.**
- 3) Our new programmes and the restoration of £20 million pounds that the Conservative Cabinet plans to remove from vital services for people with disabilities and children will **restore the more than 500 posts that would be eliminated.** The County cannot afford the loss of income for more than 500 people and the more than £10 million they spend in the shops and services of the County.

We make major provision for improvement in the following areas:

- **Reducing Carbon Emissions**
- **Improving economic well-being and reducing poverty**
- **Creation of a coherent structure for the improvement of Adult Social Care**
- **Restoration of cuts to services for older people, learning disabled people and people with mental health problems**
- **Restoration of cuts to archive and library services**
- **Restoration of cuts to services for Children, Young People and Families**

How do we pay for these investments?

The major source of extra funding is the creation of moderate charges for the Park and Ride (P and R) sites and on-street parking in Oxford on evenings and weekends. These charges would bring in more than £20 million over the 5 years. It is wrong to subsidize these schemes because they increase the use of cars and add to traffic congestion. The initial

purpose, when P and Rs were developed in the 1970s was to encourage drivers to keep out of city centres. Research over the last 15 years show that they increase miles driven in the countryside by more than they reduce city driving. And in the cities the increase in bus traffic is greater than the reduction in car traffic. Half the users of Park and Rides would have used buses for their entire journey in the absence of P and R. The tax payers of Oxfordshire should not be subsidising a service which increases carbon use, pollution and congestion. The same is true of on-street parking.

We plan on a level 2.75% increase in Council Tax for each of the 5 years. This is likely to be little more than inflation. It is the same as the Cabinet levy in Year 1 and lower than the 3.75% increase they propose for Years 4 and 5. They rely on a Conservative Government to bail them out with taxpayer money collected by the Government in Years 2 and 3. We do not. Council Tax is an unfair and regressive tax. Unfortunately, the Conservative and Labour governments of the last 30 years have made Income Tax the same.

REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS

Carbon reduction is a major responsibility of all public bodies. Oxfordshire is failing. The per capita emission of carbon in Oxfordshire is substantially higher than the national average and even higher than the South east average. Carbon use will certainly be massively reduced. Our choice is whether to do it in a planned and fair manner or be forced to do it late, expensively and at the expense of the poorest people. Our budget will massively reduce carbon emissions in the following ways:

1) Insulating 18,000 houses: The £4.5 million investment discussed above would bring in at least another £4.5 million from Government and Energy Companies. This would insulate some 18,000 houses at £500 per house. The level of take-up would be great because the service would be free. The average energy savings of about £240 per year would give householders some £18 million over five years. The savings would, of course, continue long after. The carbon savings would be substantial. The areas of the County with the highest proportion of poor people would be tackled first. This would quickly lead to a substantial reduction in the numbers of people living in fuel poverty.

2) Renewable energy produced in thousands of homes: We would adopt the RE-charge scheme which has been pioneered in Kirklees. The County would borrow £3 million over 3 years. Interest free loans of about £10,000 each would be made to home owners to install approved renewable energy. The loans need not be repaid until the property is sold. As loans are repaid a revolving fund will be created, permitting more loans. The scheme will deliver CO₂ savings of more than 1,000 tonnes a year. The estimated cost to the County is £1.5 million over 40 years.

3) Renewable energy projects in every school in the County: We provide £1,725,000 over 5 years so that every school in the County will receive almost £6,000 to invest in solar or wind power. This will reduce carbon emissions and save significant sums which can be used by the schools. Even more

importantly, all our children will learn about the importance and practicality of renewable energy.

4) Shared spaces- a more walkable Oxfordshire: Pedestrian use of the streets is healthy, enjoyable and low carbon. The recent publication by the Oxford Pedestrians Association “A More Walkable Oxford” proposes many ways to enhance such use, based on the principle of putting the pedestrian at the centre of the design process, rather than the car. We provide £500,000, £100,000 for five years, to make these changes possible. The approach should be applied to the entire County.

5) Pedestrian Officer: We fund this post at £40,000 per year, for five years, to make sure that the needs and views of pedestrians are represented in all discussions about streets and traffic. Increased walking is healthy and carbon saving.

6) Cycling Officer: We fund this post at £40,000 per year to make sure that the needs and views of cyclists are represented in all discussions of streets and traffic. Safe cycling is healthful and allows a substantial reduction in car use.

7) Research Light Tram Line: There have been significant developments in the design of light tram lines in recent years. They would be a better solution to the problems of Oxford City than the super-size buses which have been suggested. They could lead to a substantial reduction in car use, congestion and pollution. We provide a one-off fund of £100,000 to investigate the possibilities.

8) Research congestion charge: A congestion charge can be an important part of a system of reducing car travel, reducing carbon emissions and pollution. It can also raise substantial amounts of money to improve public transportation. What are the possible outlines of such a policy for Oxford City? What would be the advantages and disadvantages? We propose £100,000 as a one-off sum to commission the research and consultation to answer such questions.

IMPROVING ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND REDUCING POVERTY

The economic well-being of the people of Oxfordshire and the reduction of poverty should be major concerns of the County Council. The proposals discussed in the opening paragraphs of this paper show how we would bring over £60 million to the people of the County. The projects listed below give more detail of how we would improve well-being and reduce poverty.

1) Major increase in information, advice and advocacy: The recession increases the need, already not fully met, for access to free, reliable Advice and Advocacy for mortgage, tenancy, benefit and debt management problems.

Thousands more families will be affected by unemployment and hundreds will be at risk of loss of their homes. We know that tens of millions of pounds in disability, pension and low-income benefits are not being claimed by the people of this County. We will change this. We will work in partnership with the District Councils, the PCT and voluntary sector organisations. We would provide a £740,000 per year increase, for a total of £3,700,000 over the five years. This would make possible weekly sessions in virtually every General

Practice surgery in the County and in Village Halls, Schools and other community facilities. Every family in danger of losing their home would have first-class advice and representation. These services will help many people with disabilities and their carers to make the complicated submissions necessary to successfully claim Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance which can enhance their lives. This service is an important part of the overall Green plan for a full life for Older People and People with Learning Disabilities. Similar services and take-up campaigns elsewhere in the country show that they can be expected to bring to claimants five to ten times the money spent on them. In our case that would mean at least £18 million. Access to employment would always be an integral part of take-up work.

2) School focused benefit take-up projects- significantly reduce childhood poverty: Allied to the above project would be one which focuses on the benefits of disabled children and the families of children living in poverty. We provide £260,000 a year, for a total of £1.3 million over 5 years. We would finally make a realistic attempt to reduce childhood poverty. The need to tackle it is even more urgent in hard financial times. Poverty affects the health and educational attainment of children. It affects their sense of self-esteem and their mental health. Projects focused on children have an even better return on investment than more general projects. We would be likely to help them receive benefits to which they are entitled to a value of much more than £6.5 million. Employment prospects for parents and older children would be an essential part of the programme.

3) Credit Union Development: Many of the people of Oxfordshire are unable to access credit, no matter how necessary or affordable, except by use of extortionate money-lenders. The Credit Union is an established and vital addition to the banking system. It is largely run by volunteers and helps create community cohesion. There is only one in Oxfordshire. We provide a one-off fund of £50,000 to help expand that Credit Union and establish such others as might be needed and viable.

4) Food Purchasing Cooperative: In the recession many people will need to find ways of buying nutritious food at reduced cost. These cooperatives are able to buy food wholesale at much lower cost than retail. The purchases, repacking and distribution are done by volunteer members of the Cooperative. We provide a one-off grant of £50,000 to help develop as many local organisations as are needed and wanted, throughout the County.

IMPROVING ADULT SOCIAL CARE

The large increase in the number of people living to an age at which they require help and the large increase of the numbers of people with Learning Disabilities surviving childhood and having increased life spans are major accomplishments of our society. Our challenge is, not merely to keep people alive, but to make it possible for them to have full and socially involved lives. If they are isolated in their homes, staring at four walls, it would not be much to be proud of. They need to be surrounded by a system of prevention, early intervention and alert and empowered communities.

We propose a funded policy with four main elements:

- **Care based on villages and neighbourhoods**

We propose a team of 10 Community Development Workers, employed by the County or funded through voluntary sector organisations to help people in each community in the County to work together to make life more interesting for all those who would like to participate, to fill gaps which presently exist and to support all those who are already active. They would also be able to help local people make sure their voice is heard by all the other voluntary and statutory organisations. Most communities would have local buildings: schools, village halls, community centres at which there would be meals and a variety of activities, as well as a variety of home visiting and outings. We provide £400,000 a year, for a total of £2,000,000. This team would provide the time and skill to bring about the wished-for increase in volunteering, place-making and mutual help. These things do not happen by accident. The present Community Development team is too small to do what is needed.

- **Subsidised transport to stay in touch with the world**

People, whether they have disabilities or not, want to travel to be with other people, to attend classes and performances, to see friends, to see and be in touch with nature. In addition to the various subsidies presently in place we propose £200,000 a year for a total of £1,000,000 over five years to support local voluntary schemes, to provide backup in the case of illness, to provide insurance and to subsidise taxi travel.

- **Support for carers**

It is fully accepted now that Carers are the backbone of all statutory and voluntary care for people with disabilities. Oxfordshire has made substantial improvements in support of Carers but there remains much to be done to assure them the rest that they need to continue to care. We propose an additional £2,275,000 over five years for these purposes.

- **Cultural and Adult Learning Services**

A full life means learning, enjoying and doing. The County, within its employ and outside, has many gifted and willing teachers, artists, writers and performers. We propose an expenditure of £100,000 a year from 2010 to 2014, a total of £400,000, to make these joys available to many more people with disabilities than are presently involved, whether they are in their own homes or in Nursing or Care Homes or long-term in hospital.

RESTORING SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE, PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

The Cabinet budget proposals contain large and damaging reductions in essential programmes. The Transforming Social Care project has many good elements. These will be put at risk if funding is inadequate. The preventive measures need a lot more time and monitoring before we will know if they save the kinds of money being removed from the system by the Cabinet proposals. Many people can live at home but only if their services are good enough. Many people will eventually need residential care. Good quality care must be available for them. These reductions will cause pain and hardship for the vulnerable and their families. We therefore restore the following services:

- **Saving on care home and home care expenditure for older people.** Restore the full £1.1 million over 5 years.
- **Large packages of home support for older people.** These packages are provided only for the most disabled. We restore half of these cuts, for a total of £875,000 over 5 years.
- **Savings from increased investment in reenablement for older people.** The idea of providing intense rehabilitation to people at an early point in their disability is sound. Many will be strengthened enough to require less continuing support. This cut, however, is too much, too soon. We restore half of the reduction, a total of £1.25 million over 5 years.
- **Savings on redesign of service delivery with the voluntary sector for people with mental health problems.** This is not so much redesign as severe damage to a useful partnership which provides valuable help in a preventive manner. Oxfordshire has historically been among the least helpful authorities for people with mental health problems. This is a tradition to leave behind. We restore the full amount of £530,000 over 5 years.
- **Savings from the supported accommodation review (for people with Learning Disabilities).** This is another one of those reviews which know the results in advance. Supported living has been a real success for this Council. This cut will harm many people with Learning Disabilities and their frequently aged parents. We restore the full £1 million over 5 years.
- **Saving from delayed admission to supported living (for people with Learning Disabilities).** This cut intensifies the pressures on struggling families and is bad for the sense of independence of those who have shown they are capable of more independent living. We restore the full £1.6 million over 5 years.

RESTORATION OF OTHER COMMUNITY SERVICES

- **Reduction in Archive Services.** This is an unnecessary cut in a much valued service. More people are becoming interested in using these fascinating resources to increase understanding of their own families

and of the history of which we are part. We restore the cut in full; £200,000 over 5 years

- **Reduction in book expenditure.** The Library service is of inestimable value to the people of the County. Books are the heart of the Library Service. This is a sad cut. We restore the full amount of the cut: £189,000 over 5 years.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMES FOR SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

- **Asylum seekers with Mental Health problems.** Asylum seekers waiting long periods for final determination, not allowed to work, on reduced or no benefit income are in dire difficulties. Those with significant mental health problems are even worse off. We propose £100,000 a year for five years, a total of £500,000, for basic housing and living needs for these people.
- **Reducing pressures on Adult Social Care.** There are very large amounts of reductions which have not yet been found in the later years of the MTFP. As a contribution towards reducing the need for cuts we create a fund of £2.5 million in Years 4 and 5 for a total of £5.0 million.

RESTORING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Some of the most important services of this Directorate are being sacrificed to the mistaken priorities of the current Administration. We restore them in full.

- **Savings on services for disabled children.** These are destructive and wasteful. The lack of services now will put fearful pressures on the families and reduce the chance for more independent lives for the children as they become adults. We restore the full £250,000 over 5 years.
- **Savings on early years and children's centres.** These have been immensely effective innovations in support for children and their families. Oxfordshire has done excellent work in these areas. These cuts will have damaging effects which will be seen for decades, if not for generations. We restore the full cuts of £2.4 million over 5 years.
- **Savings on Respite Care for Children with Disabilities.** Respite care is often the saving grace for families under immense pressures. It often provides a taste of independence and fun for severely disabled children. These cuts are unthinkable. We restore the full amount of the cuts: £1 million over 5 years.
- **Saving on restructure of ASET and EMAS (educational services for the children of Traveller families and for children from Ethnic Minorities).** Both groups of children frequently have difficulties in education. Some of these are connected with the need to learn and improve English Language skills. There is room for improvement in these services. The massive cuts proposed will not accomplish them. They will simply create unnecessary problems for children and the adults they will become in becoming prosperous members of society. We restore the full amount cut: £2.330 million over 5 years.

ADDITIONAL SERVICE FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

Support for parents of children with severe disabilities. A recent Mencap report noted the number of parents of children with severe Learning Disabilities who were at “breaking point”. This is one of many such reports. It is the County’s responsibility to reduce the enormous pressure on parents of children with every form of severe disability and it has not yet done so fully. We propose an additional expenditure of £400,000 a year, £2 million over five years to significantly improve the short break facilities for these families.

CROSS-SERVICE PROVISION

Increase number of Apprentices. There has been a drastically increased level of unemployment amongst young people as the recession deepens. Those who might have had difficulties in finding employment in better times, including Care Leavers, will have more difficulties. There are many young people for whom Apprenticeships are a good way in which to enter rewarding work lives. We propose an increase in funding for the County to employ Apprentices in all Directorates of £100,000 a year for five years, a total of £500,000.

The Green Group therefore RECOMMENDS Council to approve the recommendations set out in the report of the Cabinet subject to the following amendments:

- (a)(1) a budget for 2010/11 as set out in Annex 4 and a medium term financial plan for 2010/11-2014/15 as set out in Annex 1 to the Cabinet’s report as amended by the proposals set out in Annex 1 to this report.**