

**COUNCIL – 18 FEBRUARY 2014
SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING – 2014/2015**

Report by the Leader of the Liberal Democrats

Introduction

1. The Liberal Democrats have always made it clear that the Council needs to invest in the basic frontline services that local people rely on every day, and this year is no different. Our budget concentrates on three priorities: children and young people, elderly and vulnerable people and the environment. We also have an emphasis on supporting local communities.
2. We set out in Annex 1 our proposals to amend the Cabinet's budget to invest more in these priorities by reducing some of our management costs, hiring out our corporate buildings and making use of prudential borrowing. We would achieve this by setting a council tax increase of 1.99% in 2014/15, which is the level we are allowed before triggering a referendum

Investment and saving proposals

Children, Young People & Families

3. We understand how important it is for our young people who wish to leave school at 16 to undergo training, apprenticeships and work experience, but are not able to drive to their employment or college places. Also, due to the recent large sum of government funding coming to the Local Enterprise Partnership and the investment in local skills and jobs, this is an opportune moment to ensure that young people can access those opportunities. We are also investing £10m in the school capital programme.

Adult social care

4. Adult social care is facing dramatic changes in Britain as people live longer. We are aware that our elderly residents appreciate the value of their day centres, and so we are not taking the increase in these charges. We do need to focus more on early intervention and enabling more of our elderly residents to be supported in their own homes, so we are investing in more occupational therapists to help them. We also wish to retain the laundry service.

Roads and the environment

5. We recognise that Oxfordshire's highways continue to need investment. We are therefore proposing a total investment of £10m by using prudential borrowing. This will enable us to undertake large capital schemes and to invest in our road system rather than the constant repairing of potholes. We are also investing in regular gully clearing, which in the light of the current flooding around Oxfordshire, will be money well spent.
6. We wish to support cycling schemes around the county and want to make sure that we do not miss out on funding streams from national government, so we are putting a contribution towards that.

Chief Executive's Office

7. We wish to continue to support Village Hall grants because we know how much local communities value their own facilities. We also wish to maintain part of the grants to the Military and Choose Abingdon partnership, given the fact that these are valued by local residents.

Savings

8. We will pay for this by combining directorates and reducing the number of directors. We also wish to make use of our corporate facilities by hiring out the Grand Jury Room and Gallery Café for private functions at evening and weekends.
9. We will save by sharing our services and letting joint contracts with neighbouring authorities.
10. We will make maximum use of prudential borrowing and invest in our roads and our schools by using £20M to enable us to do this work.

Council Tax

11. We accept the 1.99% Council Tax rise this year because it is the amount we can take without triggering an unnecessary and costly referendum. We also feel that in these austere times, this is a reasonable sum of money to help retain our vital services.

Conclusion

12. We consider that these amendments show our commitment to investing in our future. Our highways and our schools do need investment given the extra housing growth that is being proposed. We aim to future proof some of these pressures in our county. They strike a balance between spending on the essential services that residents in our community rely upon and the need to keep Council Tax levels as low as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. **We therefore RECOMMEND Council to approve:**
- i. A budget for 2014/15 and a medium term financial plan for 2017/18 as amended in Liberal Democrat Annex 1;**
 - ii. The Council Tax for 2014/15 as set out in that annex and in particular a Council Tax for Band D equivalent properties of £1,208.41.**

**Cllr. Zoe Patrick
Leader of the Liberal Democrats**