

BUDGET SPEECH 2019

Ian Hudspeth, Leader of the Council

Thank you, Chairman,

I would like to start by thanking the Directors as well as Lorna Baxter, chief finance officer, who has been invaluable in helping to prepare this budget. She has been ably assisted by Katy and the rest of her team.

I would also like to thank Cllr Bartholomew for his hard work. Cabinet member for finance is always a challenging portfolio.

I would like to thank my independent colleagues who have supported the budget process to enable a stable administration to deliver this budget.

We have taken difficult decisions in the past as we have to produce a balanced budget every year. Taking those complex decisions has meant we are in a more solid financial position however budgets are still tight, and we still have to deliver more savings through transformation and partnership working.

By focusing resources where they have greatest impact, I can present an affordable budget to Council. I am confident we can and will deliver those savings to protect services for the most vulnerable adults and children across the county.

As in previous years, I have been open with the opposition parties by providing information on the budget process. Given the current state of national politics if we can agree a united budget; we could send a clear message that Local Government are able to deliver the best services possible for our residents within the strict financial constraints we face.

We have had some additional short-term funding which is good, but we really need to have a good settlement from the Spending Review and the new Fair Funding formula to ensure that we can deliver quality services in the future.

In proposing this budget, we have considered comments from Performance Scrutiny Committee and public responses to the

consultation. That can be seen in the way we altered the budget around the mental health proposals however I'm concerned that the funding should go to the front-line service organisations and will work with them to ensure it does. Although it's been deferred by a year, there is still the saving of £600,000 over 2 years to reprofile the way some of our social work is delivered. We either must identify an additional £600,000 saving or make that difficult decision not to provide extra support to SEND adults.

This will be a test of how we work with the NHS as the move is towards a more integrated system however we do need a sustainable future for Social Care otherwise the NHS will not be able to deliver its 10-year plan.

In this budget there is Investment of almost £6m by 2023 to increase care packages to meet assessed needs for adults with learning and physical disabilities.

An increase of £5.8m is proposed to be added to the budget in 2022/23 in adult social care to meet projected increased need as a result of the aging population. The council's existing planning up to 2021/22 already includes provision for budget increases of £15.6m for adult social care.

People are rightly concerned about the impact of savings on services, and on the voluntary sector that does so much in our communities.

I am concerned about this too and believe this budget will make the best use of scarce resources.

We have provided some financial help, but it is those community groups that have made it happen. That is what we mean by 'thriving communities'.

This year I'm pleased to announce a £1 million fund for youth provision across the county. This fund will be available over the next 2 years to assist youth provision across the county; groups and organisations will be able to come forward with proposals before a cross party group who will determine the outcome. I am clear that I see the proposals as locally led with the support of the local Councillor.

Locally and nationally, the number of children at risk referred to social services is increasing. The number of children taken into care by the county council has increased by 80 per cent since 2011. Last month, the Local Government Association released figures showing more than 1,000 children a day are being referred to social services across the country.

To make sure the growing number of children at risk of abuse and neglect are protected, the children's social care budget has increased annually from £46m in 2011 to £78m in 2018/19. Next year, the children's services budget will need to increase to £83m, and up to £95m in 2022/23 – more than doubling in ten years.

We are Investing £4.0m up to 2023 to support the increasing number of children qualifying for special educational needs school transport. And, recognising the growth in demand in special educational needs, we are putting up to £16.8m into a reserve over the medium term to manage demographic risk.

From 2010, when we started a savings programme, to the end of this financial year we will have saved around £400 million. Most of that money has been be reinvested in services, particularly for vulnerable children and adults.

This has been set against a back drop of the number of adult care packages we provide nearly doubling since 2010. The number of looked after children has increased by 60%, and demand for child protection services continues to grow.

With these sorts of budget pressures, we must target our resources to provide vital services to those vulnerable adults and children who require them most.

It's a tribute to our staff that we have been able to make the savings while continuing to run services - day in, day out - that help our communities thrive.

Here are just some examples of the services we deliver:

Received over 13,500 new requests for adult social care services

Providing long-term social care for 6,300 adults

Organising a million hours a year of support a year, as well as assisting thousands of informal carers.

Assessing almost 6,000 children, including over 1,500 child protection issues

Supporting, currently, 789 looked after children, and 602 on a child protection plan

Working to turn around 974 families with real problems so they can thrive

Registering 20,000 births, deaths, and marriages

Maintaining almost 3,000 miles of road

Issuing or renewing over 30,000 concessionary bus passes in year

Managed 285,000 tonnes of household waste in 2017/18

Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service responded to over 6,250 incidents in 2017/18

That's what business as usual looks like at Oxfordshire County Council. But demand for services continues to rise as our population grows and ages.

This year the government enabled us to increase Council Tax by an additional 1% in recognition of inflationary pressures on all services.

This will mean we will raise the council tax by the maximum allowed without triggering a referendum of 2.99%.

I do not believe in raising taxes unnecessarily. I understand the impact on our residents who may not have had an increase in their wages.

However, I am confident that people understand about the rising cost of social care.

In return, we will always ensure the money is spent as efficiently as possible.

Oxfordshire has an ambition for a thriving economy;

To help deliver that the Conservative government has recently provided an additional £7.4 million for road repairs which when added to the £10 million this year that cabinet agreed as part of the new £120 million infrastructure fund, has given the highways team the opportunity to deliver real improvements to the road network. Following on from the bad winter last year they have repaired over 40,000 defects

The 10-year capital programme means we can take a longer-term view of the costs and benefits of road repairs. We will be investing over £1 billion in Oxfordshire across our estate and schools including a £41m street lighting improvement programme, with traditional lanterns to be replaced with more energy efficient LED lighting, saving money in the long-run.

Within the capital programme is the Oxfordshire Growth deal, worth £215 million which we are now seeing been delivered across the county including £60 million to help deliver more affordable homes in Oxfordshire. These are large amount of investment, that will fund the infrastructure needed to support the predicted growth in jobs in Oxfordshire and ensure our economy continues to thrive.

We are not stopping there as we have recently submitted the Housing Infrastructure Fund bid for the Didcot area worth £218 million which will deliver vital infrastructure to help deliver more homes. We are optimistic that we'll be successful with this bid we should know by the end of March and have been encouraged to submit another HIF bid for the A40 corridor worth around £140 million to help relieve the pressure on businesses in the area.

With these 2 additional bids we could see additional funding of over £350 million coming into the Oxfordshire economy.

An Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study is currently in preparation. This study is looking at the impacts of growth and what is required in future on the rail network. This will include consideration of future rail service improvements at Culham which relate to the proposed housing allocation there. Promoting an improved level of service from Didcot to

Oxford In parallel, work is being undertaken on a business case for re-opening the Cowley Branch Line.

In last year's budget I proposed the Councillor priority fund as I wanted to make sure that communities had a say in how money is spent. This has been successful in helping small organisations deliver much needed services that otherwise would not receive funding such as the Our Bus service in the Bartons. A community project that I'm happy to support and goes from strength to strength, in fact the latest community project is a community library in the stores.

The councillor priority fund will continue alongside the new youth provision fund enabling local communities to deliver what's best in their area.

This budget for 2019/20 is not only compassionate as it is:

increasing the funding on adult social care by £8.8m

increasing the funding on Children's social care by £9.0m

increasing the funding on Education by £3.0m

It is also about localism as we are providing funds that will deliver local solutions by County Councillors who know their divisions best.

This is a budget that delivers for Oxfordshire people and Oxfordshire's thriving communities.

COUNCILLOR IAN HUDSPETH

Leader of the Council