

BUDGET SPEECH 2020

Ian Hudspeth, Leader of the Council

Thank you, Chairman,

This is the 8th budget I've had the privilege to propose as Leader of Oxfordshire County Council;

For the first time I can genuinely say that I'm proposing an investment budget that will provide much needed services for all of Oxfordshire's residents. That is due to additional one-off funding from central government as well as the fact that we have taken many difficult decisions over recent years that have put Oxfordshire County Council in a sound financial state. Although we can not ignore the fact that we have a deficit for next year of £24.3 million which will need to be addressed

The decisions are taken on the facts and figures provided by our officers who are led by Lorna Baxter, Hannah, Emma and Graham. Its not just the finance officers who work on the budget but all officers across all the directorates so thank you to Ansaf, Claire, Lucy, Nick, Paul, Simon and Stephen all guided by our CEO Yvonne...Thank you all.

This is an investment budget delivering on our vision for a Thriving Economy alongside Thriving communities that will enable thriving residents.

One of the main areas for public engagement is Highways and I'm pleased to say that we are investing £30 million in highway maintenance per year over five years.

In last year's budget I was hopeful that we would be successful with our Housing Infrastructure Fund bid for Didcot for £218 million bringing vital infrastructure to enable residents to travel around. I'm pleased to say that we were successful with that bid which will deliver 2 new bridges and roads that will transform the current crossings at Culham and Clifton Hampden.

Not only were we successful with the Didcot bid we were successful with our 2nd Housing Infrastructure Fund bid of £102 million for the A40 Smart corridor this along with our current work on the A40 of £32 million will help to ease the pressure on the A40 with the increase in vehicles.

Along with the Growth Deal of £215 million since 2018 working constructively with the City and District councils we have attracted £535 million to Oxfordshire.

These projects are not just car-based projects as they will all improve the bus and cycling connectivity across the county.

For instance, currently to cycle from Great Western Park in Didcot to the world leading Culham science park is a journey along narrow lanes and roads with a river crossing that has tailbacks at peak hours with vehicles sitting waiting with their engines on.

Once we build the new bridges there will be a dedicated safe cycle path having minimal interactions with vehicles that will encourage more residents to cycle reducing the reliance on vehicles.

We now must make sure we deliver these projects for the benefit of the residents.

We are investing an additional £30 million into Adult & Children's social care including an additional £8.1 million from central government. The additional funds from central government are welcome although we do need a longer term solution especially with regard to Adult Social care. I will continue to work with Government in my role as Chairman of the LGA Community and Well being board to find a sustainable solution. However, it's not just limited to Social care as we need the fairer funding formula and business rates retention to be resolved.

Some of the examples of the investments are:

An Initial investment of £2.3 million in a new approach to supporting families in difficulties, including parenting, substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health. The new model was developed in Hertfordshire and has been independently assessed as a successful way to improve the chances of keeping families together safely. Net savings are projected at £1.8 million by year four.

In line with national trends, the numbers of young people in care has risen in recent years requiring an increase in fostering and residential placements. The county council proposes to invest £1 million in internal fostering services to increase the number of local foster careers, including increasing support and payments to foster families.

An investment of £1.8 million in community networks, capacity, winter projects and alternatives to formal care, funded from the improved Better Care Fund to enable people to be better able to support themselves, and help communities help the most vulnerable locally. Developing these informal care networks is critical to managing future demand for adult services.

We will expand services for the growing number of for people with learning disabilities, mental health issues and autism, with an additional £7.4 million a year. There will be a further one-year investment of £2.8 million to improve current housing support for people with mental health issues and/or autism. Proposals also include the withdrawal of a previously agreed saving proposal of £0.3 million for social workers to support people with mental health issues and/or autism. Proving yet again we do listen and react to public consultation

We are increasing support for people to adopt healthier lifestyles and reduce risk of long-term health conditions. The council currently funds 200 places for community weight loss programmes such as Slimming World, Weight Watchers and Men vs Fat but the funded places are at full capacity. We are proposing to increase funding by

£0.2 million in 2020/21 (and the same in 2021/22) to help tackle obesity by kickstarting individuals' weight loss journey.

Increased funding of £1.2 million to support children with special educational needs or disabilities by increasing the number of case workers to meet the growing number of requests for education, care and health plans (EHCPs) and expanding the educational psychologist service. An additional £3.8 million is being added to the budget for home to school transport. Further investment is planned for the following year, including a new service that will help schools to access support for individual children and support learners with identified needs in mainstream schools.

By working with our City and District council colleagues to provide many new homes including affordable across Oxfordshire It means that developers will be providing money, through part of the planning process via Section 106 agreements, which enables us to provide the extra pupil places needed locally. An additional £50 million has been added to the capital programme over ten years.

We will continue our joint working with Cherwell to not only save money but more importantly deliver better services to our residents who do not differential between the different levels of council. Transformation will continue but not as a separate part of the organisation but in built into every department as business as usual.

We will be investing in energy and carbon reduction in the coming years. The county council has already reduced its own carbon emissions by 50 per cent since 2008 and is now ramping up its efforts to become carbon neutral by 2030. The hard work that the county has already done with its district councils means that Oxfordshire is the best county for recycling in the country.

The budget includes a £0.7 million investment in “pump-priming” so that the council can implement new ways of working that will bring cash and carbon savings. This work will include renewable energy generation, improved energy efficiency of our buildings and enabling “cleaner” staff travel.

The council's new electric vehicle purchasing policy will switch our car and van fleet to electric wherever possible. Over the next five years we will be spending £40 million replacing 56,000 bulbs with new LED technology which will not only provide excellent quality lighting but also drastically cut the amount we pay for electricity and greatly reduce our carbon footprint.

As well as investing in directly reducing its own carbon footprint, the council is also making major investments that will help more Oxfordshire residents to travel more sustainably. Our policy now means that all of our transport improvement schemes allow for cycling facilities wherever possible – this supports the work we are doing to

tackle congestion on the roads and encourage more and more people to use sustainable transport.

Some of the investments in sustainable major capital projects we are current delivering or will shortly start work on, funded through Section 106 Local Growth Fund and Growth Deal include:

- £9.1 million on the Botley Road corridor improvements including walking, cycling and buses
- £4.6 million on the A361 safety improvements with a new shared path
- £4 million on Riverside routes in Oxford improving non-road cycle routes
- £53m for Kennington Bridge

The council is also proposing to invest £0.5m in improving sustainable travel plans to ensure bus, cycling and walking routes are integral to new housing and business property developments.

The county council also proposes to continue investment in communities by continuing the popular Councillor Priority Fund, which was established two years ago. In that time, councillors have used this money to support a range of community initiatives, many of which have secured match funding to increase the local investment. During 2018/19, there were over 170 different community and charity groups that received funding involving over 60 different towns and parish organisations. This is devolving decision making down to local councillors who best know their divisions.

I am proud to be proposing a balanced budget that is investing in services to benefit the residents of Oxfordshire.