

Labour and Co-operative Party Official Budget 2026

I would like to start by saying a big thank you to the Section 151 Officer and other members for her team for the support they gave to us in preparing these amendments to the Administration's Budget. I would also like to thank Cllr Phillips and Councillor Baines for their input.

As we set this budget, probably the last budget for the County of Oxfordshire which will be set in County Hall, I would like in particular to thank Lorna Baxter for her dedication to Oxfordshire County Council. She has ensured over many years that Oxfordshire has remained financially stable. In some years that has been a challenge particularly in 2015 when the final settlement came in at the same time we were scrutinising the already published budget. Thank you Lorna.

This year has also been a challenge as we waited for the impact of the Fair Funding Formula. I am sure no-one in this Marmot Place Council would argue that funding based on Fairness across the country was needed. It is also needed in Oxfordshire as we set this Budget. Oxfordshire is one of the most unequal places in the country with some of the richest people in the world, never mind the country, living or seeking to live here. Yet we have many people living in areas of multiple deprivation some among the poorest in the country. We also have one of the biggest disparities in relation to educational attainment. This needs to be addressed urgently.

The Labour Government struggling with funding issues which they have inherited have been able to deliver the Fair Funding Review which has been promised for years. They have also delivered multi-year funding which Councils have been requesting for some time. They have rolled some specific grants into the general fund and have given money directly to councils to enable them to deliver better outcomes for the poorest: Best Start Family Hubs, Youth Hubs, 30 hours free childcare for under 5s, and Breakfast Clubs. In addition, the Review into Adult Social Care and the White Paper in relation to SEND will enable Local Authorities better able to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Both these issues have been ignored by successive governments. Our crumbling roads have also received £167.9m.

A Marmot Council is guided in policy delivery by emphasising 8 principles to guide policy. They also need to ensure that delivery is at a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of need. Health and Health Inequalities are mostly shaped by social determinants of health:

- where people are born
- the families they are born into,
- where they live,
- where they go to school,
- where grow, work and age.

The aim of Marmot is to create fairer, healthier communities. That does not mean spreading ever decreasing resources across all communities. It is impossible to lift people out of deprivation without understanding and delivering equity in funding. The Pupil Premium increases school budgets for children on free school meals but

increasingly this money is used to provide necessary tailored educational interventions rather than the enriching experiences children living in poverty need. If children are to be given the best start in life they need to be treated in school in a way that is reasonable right and just to make up for the challenges they face in relation to the social determinants in health.

I would urge the Cabinet to look at the massive educational inequalities in Oxfordshire in relation to the budgets of our schools and alongside the work being done in Public Health. If we really are a Marmot Place, we have to change what is happening and make it fairer across the County. In short, we need A Fair Funding Policy for Oxfordshire.

Another area which needs to be addressed is that of the continually rising deficit in the High Needs Block. The Labour Government has started to address the issue which has just been getting worse year on year since the unfunded 2014 Act. As we await the SEND White Paper, we expect that we will still have to pay off some of the debt and that the General Fund will have to support it. The Enhanced Pathways need to be made sustainable and be seamlessly developed into Secondary Schools. Imaginative Alternative Provision needs to be developed both inside our mainstream schools but also in other settings. Children won't maximise their capabilities unless they have access to a wide range of experiences. Many of the increasing number of young white males who have some of the lowest educational attainment in this county could be a Picasso or an Andrew Lloyd Webber if they had been exposed to Art or Music.

My hope for this Budget is that we will take up the mantel of the Labour Government and commit to spending money on making Oxfordshire a Fairer Place where all can thrive.

The Financial Amendments we have laid out, and which Cllr Baines will set out were based on our belief in Fairness and I urge you to support our very modest amendments.

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Oxfordshire County Council