

District Councillor Update – 10 January 2022 (!)

Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr Lorraine Hillier

Local Government Finance Settlement

The government announced its provisional local government finance settlement on 16 December, the fourth consecutive one-year settlement. It amounts to a real-term cut in council funding for SODC and for many other councils around the country. While government has claimed the settlement amounts to a 4% increase in funding, just 1% of this is government funding, the rest requires local authorities to increase council tax by the maximum allowable without a referendum.

Cllr David Rouane, leader of South Oxfordshire District Council, expressed disappointment at the settlement. “Despite the government’s claims of an overall increase in spending, this amounts to a real-terms cut in our finances. Councils like ours around the country are working hard to balance the books – a job that is made significantly more difficult by government cuts and by the lack of any long-term clarity.”

“It’s really not clear how the government expects councils to make medium or long term financial plans when it repeatedly provides one-year settlements – something it began doing long before the pandemic.”

The New Homes Bonus will continue though it’s unclear what will replace it, adding to the uncertainty around budget setting in future years. The New Homes Bonus is worth around £2m a year in South Oxfordshire.

The council will be responding to the government’s consultation on the settlement proposals and intends to publish its response shortly.

Vouchers for residents struggling

With the cost of living crisis impacting families across the country, a reminder that the Council is supporting residents struggling to afford household essentials.

Using money from the Government’s Household Support Fund, we are helping pay for vulnerable households’ food, energy, and water bills and other essential household costs.

The funds are not restricted to people who receive benefits, and a range of factors are taken into consideration when assessing applications. The scheme ends in March 2022. Please see details on our website: [Household Support Fund - South Oxfordshire District Council \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](https://southoxon.gov.uk)

Please guide your parishioners towards these funds!

Homelessness in South Oxfordshire

The Council’s housing team worked intensively in the weeks up to Christmas to ensure households at risk of homelessness had sustainable accommodation. Two placements were made over the Christmas period for people with a connection to the Vale of White Horse.

It is pleasing to report that the number of rough sleepers recorded as of 31 December 2021 was **zero** for both South and Vale. This is the first time since 2013 there has been no rough sleeping recorded across both Districts, and is testament to the success of the Councils’

strategy of preventing homelessness. South Oxfordshire was the first council in Oxfordshire to adopt the groundbreaking Housing First approach to preventing homelessness, a system that has since been adopted across the county.

Garden Waste Collections

A reminder that we are now able to start taking on new customers for the garden waste service. Anyone interested should go to <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/south-oxfordshire-district-council/recycling-rubbish-and-waste/garden-waste/>

Parental Leave Policy

Following similar moves by councils across the country, South Oxfordshire District Council has adopted a new policy on parental leave for councillors. The policy aims to provide a positive and supportive environment for members with family responsibilities. It will help to ensure members are representative of our community, contribute towards increasing the diversity of experience, age and background of councillors, and also help us to retain experienced councillors. The new policy was agreed by council at the Full Council meeting on 9 December and can be viewed here:

democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/ecCatDisplay.aspx?sch=doc&cat=13195&path=0

CCTV

The Council's CCTV reports have been published, detailing how CCTV is used in our town centres. In South Oxfordshire, CCTV was used to review 554 incidents, producing 59 evidence packs for possible court proceedings and supporting 54 arrests. You can view the report here:

[Microsoft Word - South First Half 21-22 \(southoxon.gov.uk\)](#)

Planning Enforcement

The updated **Planning Enforcement Statement** has been approved by Council. The statement sets out the new approach to the triage and handling of complaints to improve efficiency and transparency and to help address the large backlog of complaints that has built up since the start of the pandemic. The team currently has some 700 live investigations with 241 matters still unallocated across the two Councils.

The Planning Enforcement Statement was previously been updated in 2016. The new Enforcement Statement and approach will be subject to quarterly appraisal as part of the Council's ongoing performance review process and the Statement itself will be reviewed after 12 months.

[Microsoft Word - 2021-12-17- Enforcement Statement Final \(southandvale.gov.uk\)](#)

New Gambling Policy

At Full Council on 6 December, Council also agreed a new gambling policy. A key change is the passing of a "No Casino" resolution meaning that applications for casinos will not be considered in the District. This was agreed on the basis that the district is not a suitable location for a casino, that casinos bring the potential for criminal exploitation and money

laundering and that casinos expose the vulnerable to the risk of gambling harm and problem gambling.