

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS DECEMBER 2023 FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

OCC REVEALS FIRST DRAFT OF BUDGET PROPOSALS FOR 2024/25

The Liberal Democrat/Green administration at OCC has revealed its first draft of Budget proposals for 2024/25. The opposition parties have criticised the administration for failing to engage with them at an early stage, given the Budget cannot pass without opposition support.

Proposals to save more than £9.8 million in 2024/25 have been set out by the administration as it seeks to set a balanced budget. The council continues to experience demand-led pressures and the effects of the growing nationwide costs of supporting children and young people; the rising cost of social care and care placements for both children and adults; and a national shortage of social care workers leading to a reliance on agency staff and higher costs. All of these pressures combined amount to approximately £29.8m. The council proposes to add to contingency funding for risks including inflation by £6.2m meaning an overall pressure of £36m. After taking account of proposed savings, funding changes and other factors that help meet pressures, the county council currently has a £9.1 million funding gap. It will work to close this and present a revised draft balanced budget in the new year after the government has confirmed its financial settlement for local government before Christmas and further financial information has been received from the city and district councils.

New for this year, residents can [take part in the budget consultation \(for 2024/25\)](#) until 10 January using an online budget simulator, which will be hosted on the council's digital consultation and engagement platform Let's talk Oxfordshire. The simulator allows residents to try to balance the council's budget, weighing up tough choices and impacts. People will also be able to comment on the [council's proposed budget](#) with feedback captured using an online form or in writing by Freepost.

The council is also running [three online Oxfordshire Conversations](#), which offer an opportunity for cabinet representatives to connect with residents on their priorities for local services. The events are open to all and will run on the following dates:

- Monday 4 December 1pm to 230pm
- Wednesday 6 December 7pm to 8:30pm
- Monday 11 December 4:30pm to 6pm.

The Conservative Opposition is calling for cuts to vanity projects and will put forward its arguments in future debates.

COUNCILS FAILING TO GET TO GRIPS WITH CHILD CARE COSTS

Local authorities in England are reportedly paying as much as £63,000 a week for single children's social care placements, according to figures published by the Local Government Association (LGA). The data reveals that the number of placements for the care of vulnerable children costing over £10,000 a week has risen to more than 1,500, equivalent to at least £780m a year. The LGA has described the market for children's social care placements as broken. Association of Directors of Children's Services president John Pearce said: "*Local authorities are the sole purchasers of placements...It cannot be right that the largest 20 independent providers of children's social care homes made more than £300m of profit last year, every penny of which came directly from the public purse.*" OCC is projecting to overspend by £11.8m on Children's Services, taking the total to a staggering £180.9m.

DRAFT ACTION PLAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

On Tuesday 24 October, the Oxfordshire local area partnership submitted a draft priority action plan to the Department for Education (DfE) to address urgent action required to improve the support for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This follows Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission's local area partnership inspection of SEND services in July. The local area partnership members include Oxfordshire County Council, NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. They have been working together with the county's parent carer forum (PCF), as the official body for the voice of parent carers, and professional subject matter leads, to develop the priority action plan detailing clear and measurable service improvements.

Ofsted will provide feedback on the draft plan within 70 days of the report submission date. After this point, the report will be finalised. However, action to deliver and implement improvements has already begun.

On 16 November, the DfE published an [improvement notice](#) that has been issued to the county council. This is an official document sent to councils following inspections that have similar outcomes, outlining the steps needed to evidence progress in the improvement of services. The partnership has committed to continual dialogue with families, children and young people and professionals, and will hold a variety of mid-term information gathering and sharing sessions (online and in-person), including in educational settings, to gather feedback. This will be supported by existing meetings with the parent carer forum and other parent and carer support groups.

OXFORDSHIRE RESIDENTS URGED TO RECYCLE VAPES

Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council and Oxford City Council will together provide new vape recycling services across the county. They want to prevent the disposal of single-use vapes in litter bins, general waste or mixed recycling where they can contaminate other recycling and, in some instances, cause fires in bin trucks or waste facilities.

New vape recycling points in public spaces offer convenient and easy access for recycling vapes. This is one of more than 40 UK projects funded by Material Focus, the not for profit leading the Recycle Your Electricals campaign who have provided over £40,000 for Oxfordshire to be one of the first county councils to lead the way by recycling vapes. The funding is part of a wider initiative to make it easier for 10 million UK residents to recycle their electricals.

The Recycle Your Vapes campaign will:

- Add up to 60 new recycling collection points for vapes at small retailers, shopping areas, bars and cafes across Oxford, Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. Look out for the three-foot high, clear plastic tube vape recycling collection points. The tubes have bright pink recycle your vapes posters and images of vapes on the posters.
- Provide new public recycling bright pink bins at each of the seven household waste recycling centres (HWRCs) in Oxfordshire.
- And introduce a new separate kerbside collection for vapes in Cherwell.

The new household waste recycling centre (HWRC) bright pink vape bins were installed on Wednesday 29 November, which will also see the roll out of collection points in other locations. In all other areas of Oxfordshire, vapes can be recycled at the kerbside with other small electrical items. How they are collected in each district council area varies, residents should check the [Waste Wizard](#) or their district council's website to check the local area's collection service.