

Title	District Councillors' Report to Goring and South Stoke PCs
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Budget 2024-25

Quality, cost-effective local services, significant support for community projects and investment in local facilities are guaranteed in South Oxfordshire after members voted to approve the 2024-2025 district council budget.

£500,000 will be made available to support community projects, such as to help improve people's quality of life, improve local facilities and increase action on climate change. £60,000 will be made available to support the arts across South Oxfordshire and £405,000 to improve the facilities at Cornerstone Arts Centre.

Thanks to the careful budgeting work and targeted investment in council operations in recent years, the district's financial position remains positive and the council has not made any reductions to services.

This means funding will continue for the council's Community Hub which provides vital support for vulnerable residents. There is increased funding for homelessness prevention, an expansion of the housing team and continued support for active communities.

The council's capital budget includes significant planned investment in social housing and decarbonisation of leisure centres to reduce energy usage and ongoing costs.

The council tax for 2024/25 has been set at £146.24 for the year for a Band D property. This means residents in South Oxfordshire will continue to pay one of the lowest rates in the country for services provided by a district council, ensuring they receive good value for their money.

Cllr Pieter-Paul Barker, Cabinet Member for Finance and Property Assets at South Oxfordshire District Council, said: "Despite the major challenges we continue to face, such as high inflation, the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing economic and political uncertainty, we continue to maintain positive finances and provide quality local services and support for our communities."

"Following approval of the 2024/25 budget, we can now build on our successes of the last year and help even more people to lead active lives and continue to help those who are struggling financially. We will also continue to work with our partners towards delivering more affordable housing, improved local infrastructure and on local projects that help to reduce emissions and tackle climate change."

"SODC is in a much more positive financial position than many other authorities but we will remain extra vigilant and stay focused on our goal of achieving long-term financial stability."

Where your council tax goes

The annual council tax bills are going out this month and we've put together these videos (see below) as a handy explainer to show residents who provides which services and where the money goes. To find out more, visit our [council tax area \(south\)](#)

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund

South Oxfordshire District Council has launched a new grant scheme called the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Grant Fund. Town and parish councils and not for profit community groups and organisations can bid for between £75,000 to £250,000 for a wide range of infrastructure needed as a result of population growth in the district.

The council collects CIL funding from developers in order to deliver infrastructure. The pilot scheme helps to fund local organisations to deliver infrastructure for their community required as a result of development.

- The fund is available to town and parish councils and not for profit community groups and organisations only.
- Proposed projects need to have a genuine focus on providing the infrastructure needed as a result of development and must be delivered in the South Oxfordshire District Council area.
- Proposed projects must support the delivery of physical infrastructure. It can be new infrastructure or improve or expand the reach of existing infrastructure. It is not able to cover costs for scoping or pre-planning of projects.
- We will prioritise projects that support our corporate priorities and other key criteria to ensure deliverability, sustainability, inclusivity and climate and ecological impacts.

How to apply: Submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) from week commencing 19 February 2024. The EOI stage will be open for six weeks. Following the EOI process, applicants whose projects meet the funding requirements will be invited to submit a full application.

If you have any questions, please contact infrastructureobligations@southandvale.gov.uk.

Top Recyclers in the Country

Congratulations to our residents in South Oxfordshire, who are officially the best recyclers in the country, according to a government league table published yesterday.

The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) officially published the [recycling performance league table](#) on Wednesday 31 January. South Oxfordshire has been in the top 5 for the last five years.

Alongside the high performing collection rates, a recent waste satisfaction survey has yielded encouraging results for the councils' household waste collections, indicating a high level of resident approval with this side of the service. An impressive 82% of respondents expressed satisfaction, or high satisfaction, with the overall quality of the waste and recycling services provided.

Household Support Fund voucher scheme

There are now less than four weeks left for local people who are struggling with cost-of-living pressures and the rising cost of food and energy bills to receive vouchers through the current Household Support Fund.

The current round of Household Support Fund closes on 31 March 2024 (or sooner if all funds are spent). Following the announcement of the temporary extension of the Household Support Fund for a further six months, the councils will shortly be considering the next round of funding. More details to follow in due course.

For more information contact our Community Hub team by calling 01235 422600 or email communityconnectors@southandvale.gov.uk

Joint South and Vale Local Plan

Consultation on preferred options has closed but materials can still be viewed online, including [a virtual exhibition](#). A full draft plan is expected in Autumn 2024.

New Graden Waste Permit Scheme

Last week we announced changes were coming in 2025 to the way people pay for their garden waste service in South Oxfordshire.

The councils' have agreed the introduction of a permit scheme from April 2025 which will include subscribers receiving a sticker for their bins to identify them as fully paid-up garden waste customers. This kind of scheme is offered successfully by many other local authorities, including in neighbouring West Oxfordshire.

When customers sign up and pay for the scheme in 2025, they will be sent a garden waste permit sticker to put on their bin/or bins, which will help the waste collection crews identify which bins should be emptied. The permits will act in a similar way to a parking permit as a proof of subscription payment. All subscribers will receive a new sticker annually each time they renew. This will help to ensure that only households that have paid for the service have their brown garden waste bins emptied.

The changes are part of the councils' ongoing work to improve the efficiency and value of public services.

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Find out more about these changes and read the full FAQ here: [South FAQ](#)

Free Compost Giveaway

With spring just around the corner, we are holding two compost giveaways in March to help residents to get their gardens flourishing, save money and reduce waste. People can fill up to three bags of high-quality compost per household, but they must bring their own bags and a spade! The offer is only available while supplies last.

The event take place on Sunday 17 March (South residents only) - 9am -11am in Crowmarsh at the land of the former council office on Benson Lane. Our friendly Waste and Recycling team will also be on hand to share tips composting and answer questions.

Retrofitting measures

We have setup new webpages to help residents who want to retrofit energy-saving measures to their properties but are unsure if they need planning permission. This specially created online guide offers information whether people want to add simple insulation, solar panels, air source heat pumps or cladding to their properties.

They can be found at www.southoxon.gov.uk/retrofitting-rules

Pre-Election period reminder

The Police and Crime Commissioner election takes place on Thursday 2 May. The six-week pre-election period begins on Monday 22 March. During this time, we are unable to promote policies, changes to services or any council activity that could be perceived as favouring one candidate or political party.

For more information, please see the guidance on the [LGA's website](#).

Playing Pitch and Leisure Facilities consultations

We have launched our Playing Pitch and Leisure Facilities Consultations. These will be sent out to sports clubs and organisations but please do share with any sports groups in your wards and encourage them to get involved. You'll be able to view the consultation on our [Join the Conversation](#) website when it launches.

Strengthening planning policy for brownfield development

On 13 February the government published a consultation on planning policy for brownfield development, seeking views on our proposed approach to updating national planning policies related to brownfield land in the National Planning Policy Framework and other topics. View the full consultation document and take part [here](#). The consultation ends on 26 March 2024.

Permitted development rights

On the 13 February the Government launched a consultation on changes to permitted development rights. The changes include enabling householders to improve and enlarge their homes, 'building upwards' rights, the right allowing the demolition of buildings, changes associated with charging electric vehicles and the right to install air source heat pumps.

To find out more and take part, visit the consultation website [here](#). The consultation closes on 9 April 2024.

Homes for Ukraine Motion

The recent council meeting passed the following motion.

Council notes that:

- South Oxfordshire is a welcoming place for all, including people seeking sanctuary.
- The council is committed to playing its part in supporting people displaced by war and persecution of any background, evidenced by the key role officers and councillors play in coordinating and delivering support in Oxfordshire for people from across the various government schemes.
- South Oxfordshire is home to around 400 Ukrainian refugees who have arrived under the Home for Ukraine, Family and the Ukraine Extension schemes.
- These schemes are temporary for 3 years, sit outside immigration rules, and do not provide a route to settlement.
- Russia's war on Ukraine sadly continues and people's ability to return remains uncertain.
- Thousands of temporary visas are set to expire in 2025 which is already causing problems in terms of securing employment and tenancies. Ukrainian refugees are also unable to plan for the future of their children in terms of education and other commitments, significantly impeding their quality of life and future prospects.

Council Believes that:

- Government needs to urgently remove uncertainty around Ukrainian's ability to make the UK their home
- Ukrainians that come to the UK under the Ukraine Family Scheme, Homes for Ukraine, and Ukraine Extension scheme should be able extend their stay and apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain (in line with other refugee schemes) with minimum cost and bureaucratic burden on families, hosts and support agencies.

Council resolves to:

- Ask the leader of South Oxfordshire District Council to write to the Minister of State for Immigration to request that Ukrainian refugees are provided with a route to settlement.
- Make information accessible to Ukrainian refugees who are considering their options on the services and support available, and signpost to appropriate (legal) advice.
- Continue to collaborate with Oxfordshire councils, statutory and voluntary sector partners in the development of a strategic approach for supporting people seeking sanctuary from any background which is coherent, effective, and compassionate.