

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS FEBRUARY 2021 FROM CLLR CARMEN GRIFFITHS

GENERAL OCC REPORT

This month we focus entirely on the County Budget proposals for 2021/22

FRONTLINE SERVICES GIVEN PROTECTION WITH NEW INVESTMENTS

Frontline services are being given high levels of protection and new investment as part of OCC's budget proposals for 2021/22. This includes a proposed 1.99% rise in basic council tax rise, plus an extra 1% specifically for adult social care, making a total of 2.99%.

The council's Cabinet met on 19 January and formally proposed the budget ahead of the annual meeting of all 63 county councillors on 9 February when the budget will be agreed and set.

Next year and beyond, the council is committing to strengthening its approach towards climate action, an enhanced focus on addressing inequality, developing its youth offer and delivering its COVID-19 recovery strategy.

A total of £19.6m of savings are being proposed in total across all services. £14.6m of these savings were already planned and are centred on the transformation of services to make them more efficient while protecting the frontline.

The council is also dedicated to investing in services that will have positive long-term impact for local communities. The budget proposals reflect this with more than £25m of additional funding included. Some of this funding has been previously agreed but £9.5m of this is newly proposed for 2021/22 to help meet additional demands, including within adult social care.

New investments

Each year as part of its budget process the council identifies any new pressures that need to be funded and new priorities. The council needs to meet annual inflation costs and plan for the increase in demand for adult social care due to continued rises in life expectancy and long-term population growth. Proposed investments include:

- A total of £1m long-term funding would be invested in expanding the youth offer in Oxfordshire. A study is due to report in the Spring on the needs of young people and how the wider partnership of the voluntary, community and public services can best provide support. An additional £500,000 of one-off accelerator funding will also be provided to develop sustainable long terms approaches and help tackle the impacts of the pandemic on young people.
- An extra £4m will be added to the adult social care budget for 2021/22. This includes a total of £1.35m for managing risks such as provider sustainability.
- The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a programme spanning both the NHS and local government. It seeks to join up health and care services so that people

can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. For 2020/21, the county council agreed with health partners that £1.2m of the improved BCF for Oxfordshire would be used to support activities agreed to deliver better outcomes over the winter period in the county. However, it was one-off funding. The council is proposing to continue the funding for 2021/22, which would be used to support measures to help people be discharged from hospital and enable new ways of working and better outcomes for residents.

- The number of adults of working age with physical disabilities has increased in 2020/21 and there are forecast overspends for both care at home and for residential care. While this is being managed within pooled resources between the NHS and council in 2020/21, it is not anticipated that this can be maintained in the longer run. Pending a review of the needs and activity for these service users, £750,000 has been proposed to support expenditure on assessed care needs from 2021/22.
- OCC has been part of a joint partnership to procure and manage services for single homeless people in Oxfordshire since it was formed in 2017. A further one-off contribution to the partnership of £500,000 was included in the budget, with £250,000 of this allocated for 2020/21 and the same in 2021/22. The council is proposing to continue the council's support for the partnership from 2022/23.
- During the period of the pandemic, more people have chosen to take up drugs and alcohol residential rehabilitation services and this has led to the council proposal to put £50,000 more into existing services.
- An extra £400,000 is proposed for highway maintenance focused on additional resource for vegetation and drainage clearance plus supporting the roll out of a trial currently being undertaken enabling parish councils to implement 20mph schemes in their villages.
- A £300,000 fund to support innovative community-developed projects and activities that improve people's health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire is proposed. A total of £150,000 of this will be new funding and £150,000 will come from existing public health budgets.
- An extra £330,000 will be invested into children's services on increasing early intervention services, increasing the skill base of children's social care workers and special educational needs related services.
- A total of £100,000 would be invested in issues linked to digital exclusion.
- A total of £81,000 would be invested in domestic violence services and £150,000 into apprenticeships.

Proposed savings

Some of the proposed savings at the start of this year's budget are listed below. The council does not set its final budget until February 2021. These proposals may change once further financial information is received from the government and consultation responses from the public have been considered.

- The council proposes to carry out more checks to make sure companies who have been granted permits to carry out roadworks finish on time. This will ensure that late finishers are fined (up to £10,000 per day). This should generate £225,000 in 2021/22.
- The council is carrying out a review of its winter service. This would save £100,000. This would not change the current network of roads treated and there would be no change for the winter of 2020/21.
- For adults with care support needs, the council intends to focus on maximising the use of existing contracted capacity and looking at creative ways to meet needs at a lower cost. This would be done while also helping residents to live as independently as possible. It is anticipated that it will be possible to save £1m (around 1 per cent of the total budget) in each of the adults with care and support needs and Better Care Fund pooled budgets in 2021/22.
- A £430,000 increase was planned in the waste management budget in 2021/22 due to the forecast rise in the number of homes in the county. It was expected this would lead to more waste. However, new homes have not been built at the predicted pace and this investment can be deferred beyond 2021/22.
- A set of projects are underway to focus on outcomes for children the county council cares for to improve the ability to meet their needs through local placements, particularly children with complex needs. This includes two projects – one looking at providing the right type of foster placements for children and the other looking at the provision of small residential homes (two to three beds). The aim is to be able to provide the placements within Oxfordshire wherever possible. This would save £1.02m.
- Funding was originally allocated for growth in demand for school transport, based on new build housing. However, housing hasn't been developed as quickly as anticipated. As such the council can save £700,000 in 2021/22.
- The county council will benefit from £1.66m of savings it has been able to make through the retendering of its insurance contract. This is based on an analysis of amounts that have been required in recent years.
- Based on activity in 2020/21 and looking forward to longer-lasting changed ways of working in 2021/22, the council estimates it will be able to save £750,000 on staff travel budgets and £100,000 on printing. This would be closely monitored throughout the year.

- The county council's property team will save £1.95m in 2021/22 rising to £3.3m in 2022/23. The focus in 2021/22 will be on joint working with Cherwell District Council to blend the two property teams and jointly find more efficient ways of working.

The council's annual net budget in 2020/21 is £474.6m. In 2021/22, taking into account all savings and investments, it is currently forecast to be £485m.