

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 11th March 2024

SODC budget 2024-25

In 2019 the outgoing Conservative administration's budget showed a deficit of £(3.3)m in 2019/20 and a forecast deficit rising to £(6.1)m in 2023/24 - when there would only be less than one year of General Reserves to fund a deficit remaining.

Instead for 2024-25 the SODC budget – after intervening inflation – is for a deficit of £(1.5)m rising to £(3.2)m in 2028-29 - when there would be numerous years-worth of General Reserve funds remaining. (On paper 7.5 years- worth, but there are some contracts due for renewal before then that could reduce that a bit).

This is a dramatically improved position, reflecting increased incomes and contained costs – without harming services; this despite poor government funding for councils generally.

CIL and s106 funds are being deployed thoughtfully – including investment in decarbonizing Leisure centres etc to reduce both running costs and their carbon footprint. There is also a significant and developed capital expenditure programme. A new CIL grant fund – with funding from the SODC share of CIL – provides new scope for community facilities, in addition to those provided directly by SODC. Investment continues in transformation to provide IT and other productivity benefits. Action on homelessness and social housing provision continues – as does the community hub to help vulnerable residents and action on climate change and biodiversity.

SODC has one of the lowest council charges of any English districts – despite operating in the expensive South East. The Band D equivalent tax increase this year is £5, for the year – in line with the funding presumption of central government.

SODC and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan

The regulation 18 part 2 consultation on the JLP has now closed. Responses will be analysed and the draft plan for the regulation stage will hopefully be ready for the Autumn – that will be the last consultation prior to final tweaks and being put to council to go forward for examination by the appointed Inspector.

Garden Waste (Brown Bin) changes

Over time SODC has had imperfect information on resident contact details for the Brown Bin service and indeed some addresses seem to have had a legacy brown bin following the home-move of the past resident. In future there will be a standardised year for the service from April to March; transitional arrangements will enable that. Also in future all registered and paid-for bins will have a serial code/barcode identifier sticker; any without a sticker will not be collected until registered. To start off the new service residents will need to go online to register their contact details and card payment. In future this will enable better communication and service. Presently contact details are not always up-to-date and complications can arise when residents change bank etc. This sticker system has been applied elsewhere and crews will be able to have much more information on the registered brown bins.

Ukrainian refugees

At its council meeting on 22nd February councillors unanimously approved a motion expressing continued support for Ukrainian refugees and calling for greater clarity on ongoing scope to stay in the UK. The situation in Ukraine remains difficult and the news of the sudden death of Alexei Navalny is disturbing.

Easter activities in South Oxfordshire

Fun activities and community days, family exercise, a museum of marvellous things and a cartoon circus are just some of the free and low-cost activities available for children and their families to enjoy during the Easter holidays.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils are providing activities and events at venues across the area from 29 March to 12 April.

For a full run down of what's on and details on how to book, visit southandvale.gov.uk/holidayactivities. SODC's leisure centres run by GLL for the council also have a range of family activities to get involved with this Easter.

'National Landscape'/AONB extension

Work on the AONB extension continues with consultants having produced a final submission version for Natural England. Parishes have endorsed the material. Note that due to a national change AONB is now re-termed "National Landscape"! The next stage of contributions will now be put together.

Covid-19

With the lack of reliable national reporting it now seems appropriate to cease ongoing reporting here.

Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins

District Councillors