

Title:	District Cllrs Report	
Chinnor District:	Aston Rowant, Chinnor, Sydenham and Towersey	
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Date:	January 2026	

### **1. SODC Budget Update**

SODC has been busy with its budget preparations for 26/27 financial year. Under the Government’s Fair Funding Review, the council is assessed as having a lower level of funding need than in previous years, which would normally result in a reduction in income. However, it is currently protected by the government ‘funding floor’, meaning transitional protection is applied so that core funding (government grant and council tax) does not fall below 2025/26 levels in the short term. This protection, alongside strong investment income, allows the council to set a balanced budget for now. Looking ahead, the position becomes more challenging: the funding floor is temporary, and the Medium-Term Financial Plan shows that once this protection ends the council becomes increasingly reliant on reserves from 2028/29 onwards.

For the upcoming financial year it is fair to say that SODC is in an enviable position, with no proposed cuts. Councillors will consider a number of revenue and capital growth bids as part of upcoming scrutiny, cabinet and full council meetings.

### **2. Joint Local Plan Update**

A procedural meeting will be held on **Thursday 12th February 2026 in Meeting Room 1 of Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon, OX14 3JE commencing at noon**. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the way forward for the Examination in light of recent announcements surrounding the Duty to Co-operate. The Inspectors have provided a Note and Agenda for the meeting ([ID14](#)). Participation will be limited to the Inspectors and the Councils although interested parties are welcome to attend and observe should they wish to do so. The room will be limited in capacity, however it is intended that the meeting will be live streamed and these details will be released closer to the date on this Examination webpage.

### **3. Government proposed changes to planning processes**

The Government is seeking views on proposals for a [revised National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) and other changes to the planning system](#).

SODC will be running an event for Town and Parish Councils on **Tuesday 3 March, 6:00pm – 7:30pm at Cornerstone Arts Centre, 25 Station Road, Didcot, OX11 7NE**

In addition to an introduction about current planning reforms, JLP and an update about our new planning IT system, there will be workshop sessions based around the following topic areas:

- Commenting on planning applications
- Enforcement
- Biodiversity
- General planning queries / questions

#### **4. SODC is officially Disability Confident!**

Following an independent assessment and validation process with the Department for Work and Pensions, we are delighted to confirm that the councils have achieved the Level 3 Disability Confident Leader status! The Level 3 status is the highest available within the scheme, reflecting the councils' continued commitment to equality and our inclusive values.

This achievement also reflects the huge efforts of the People and Culture Team and SMT, who were praised by the external validator for their enthusiasm, commitment and high level of expertise. We've updated our website and letter headings to reflect this achievement.

#### **5. Consultation: Private estate management arrangements**

The UK Government consultation published on **18 December 2025** seeks views on how to reduce the prevalence of private estate management arrangements on housing estates in England, where communal infrastructure (like roads, green spaces and drainage) is maintained privately rather than being adopted by public authorities, leading to unfair charges and limited homeowner protections. It proposes measures to increase public adoption of estate amenities, introduce common standards, consider mandatory adoption for some infrastructure, remove financial incentives for non-adoption, and improve transparency and data on estate management arrangements, while inviting evidence on impacts for homeowners, developers, local authorities and management companies; [the consultation is open until 11:59 pm on 12 March 2026](#).

Residents affected by private estate management charges are strongly encouraged to respond to this consultation, as it is a key opportunity to share real-world experiences and help shape reforms that could improve long-term protections for homeowners.

#### **6. South Oxfordshire District Council withdraws from X over safeguarding concerns**

SODC has decided to remove its profile from the social media platform X following recent incidents involving the platform's integrated AI tool, Grok, which has been used to generate and share harmful content considered unacceptable and inconsistent with the council's values. The council had already significantly reduced its use of X due to its declining effectiveness in engaging local communities, but safeguarding concerns, particularly for women and children, prompted a complete withdrawal. Residents will continue to receive council updates through alternative channels including Facebook, Instagram, Threads, BlueSky, Nextdoor and WhatsApp, as well as via the council's website, email newsletters and local press and broadcast media, while SODC continues to explore new and emerging ways to communicate important service information.

#### **7. Statement by SODC on Fair Treatment and Community Cohesion**

We condemn all intimidation, violence or harassment of minority groups in South Oxfordshire. We continue to stand in solidarity with everyone who has made South Oxfordshire their home. Misinformation and the fear, suspicion, and intolerance that it generates must be challenged. We are a cohesive and welcoming district, and we will use all our influence and power to challenge any attempts to intimidate any minority group in our district.

Building healthy, safe, and resilient communities are key priorities for our area. We will stand up to intolerant attitudes and behaviours - to stop their deeply harmful impact. Fair treatment is embedded in the design and delivery of our services. This is reflected in how we allocate social housing, support residents facing financial difficulties, include and enable people with disabilities, work to ensure the safety of everyone, value and support our LGBTQ+ community, and ensure that people of migrant

background are treated equitably and with respect. We do this not only because we have a legal duty, but because we recognise our moral responsibility to treat all residents fairly.

Working closely with our partners, from our work as part of the Community Safety Partnership to address crime and protect vulnerable people, to our proactive role in the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership, we continue to mitigate the impact of increasing hostility toward individuals and families who are simply trying to live their lives. The statement follows the passing of the '[Fair treatment and cohesion](#)' motion at Council on Thursday 23 October.

**Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council said:** "These are difficult times for many. When the cost of living is rising, access to basic services feels harder, and politics seems broken, it becomes easy to look for someone to blame. But punching down at vulnerable communities will not fix any of this.

"Let us recognise that we're actually on the same team. It will take all of us to ensure we have services and a district that works for everyone. One that supports opportunity, dignity and fairness for every person who calls this place home. This is the South Oxfordshire I believe in, the Britain that I love.

"As this council's first leader of migrant background, I know firsthand the damaging impact that misinformation and intolerance have on individuals and communities, and it must stop. Each and every one of us who has made South Oxfordshire our home is welcome here and valued. We cannot, and must not, allow bad-faith actors to divide us."

## **8. Waste and Recycling Guides**

New easy-to-read guides are available to help residents with waste and recycling, including bin usage, missed collections, and waste reduction. Paper copies will be provided to new homes. Guides are available for [houses with wheelie bins](#) and [flats/communal bins](#).

## **9. Town and Parish Council Support**

South Oxfordshire District Council is highlighting the growing role of town and parish councils in local climate and nature action, pointing to tools such as a free carbon-emissions calculator, thermal-imaging camera loans, grant funding for community projects, and guidance on improving energy efficiency and managing green spaces. The council notes that many local bodies are already reducing their own emissions, preparing for extreme weather, and developing neighbourhood and nature-recovery plans, reflecting a wider shift toward community-led responses to environmental challenges. See new [resource pages](#)

## **10. Energy Saving Measures**

Updated [energy saving leaflets](#) provide guidance on insulation, air source heat pumps, and funding options including the Warm Homes Grant. For more information please visit our [website](#).

## **11. Pollutant levels fall by half at a site previously identified as having air quality issues**

Air quality has improved significantly at several former pollution hotspots in South Oxfordshire, with nitrogen dioxide levels **falling by around 54% in Watlington** and **31% in Henley** since they were first identified as problem areas, and **Wallingford** already seeing its Air Quality Management Area revoked in December 2024. Monitoring over the past five years shows steady reductions in traffic-related

pollution across all three locations, meaning Henley and Watlington have now also met national air quality targets and will have their AQMAs removed in line with government guidance. The improvements reflect cleaner vehicle technologies and more electric cars on the road, and the council will continue to keep a close eye on air quality while encouraging walking, cycling, public transport and low-emission vehicles.

Air quality throughout the districts will continue to be monitored by the council's Environmental Protection Team through the existing diffusion tubes and analysers and the results will be available on the Oxfordshire-wide air quality website [oxonair.uk](https://oxonair.uk)

## **12. Election Timetable Clarification**

South Oxfordshire District Council elections **are not** affected by the election postponements set out in the [Written Ministerial Statement](#), and will still take place in 2027, in line with the normal elections timetable. The 2027 elections will be for the new shadow authority, which will operate alongside the existing district and county councils during the one year transition period. **In 2028**, once the new unitary authority (or authorities) formally goes live, the current district and county councils will be dissolved.

### **Useful South Links**

- [Calendar of South committee meetings](#)
- [Recent planning applications lodged](#)
- [Planning appeals lodged](#)
- [Planning appeals decided](#)
- [Tree works](#)

County Councillor Report  
Chinnor division  
2<sup>nd</sup> February 2026

Cllr Georgina Heritage



**What I've been doing - Meetings and Council Activity**

I was away for part of January so please accept my apologies if I haven't yet responded to any correspondence... I have been working through emails for the past few days and have nearly caught up!

With traffic concerns continuing to be the ongoing and most contentious issue in the Chinnor division, I'm still engaging with officers – and in particular Place officer Andy Sweeney - to encourage a much-needed OCC overview of Chinnor village traffic considerations... as well as raising Aston Rowant's need for a footpath from the Lambert hotel to the Lewknor Turn bus stops (which would also effectively make the Lewknor and Aston Rowant parishes more accessible to each other).

This follows an online meeting in January between officers, Chinnor PC and I to discuss residents' concerns regarding Lower Icknield way. As we already know, there are sadly no quick fixes to many of these issues... I'm very aware that residents are unsatisfied and, understandably, frustrated by the lack of funding/budget for highways projects, due in large part to statutory requirements for other services. I too am disappointed that we can't always address issues quickly, but I am continuing to press for an holistic approach to Chinnor's traffic issues and am still engaging with OCC officers about this on an ongoing basis.

At the recent Teams meeting officers from the Vision Zero, Traffic & Road safety and Place Planning teams spent nearly two hours working through the Lower Icknield Way issue and Chinnor's traffic situation more widely. We had a thorough discussion, were shown some of the systems used by officers (for data on traffic movement and collisions for example) and then did a GPS "walk-through tour" of Lower Icknield Way towards Lower Road.

Officers are sympathetic to Chinnor's situation – they know the village has experienced a huge growth in development and therefore population which has impacted traffic and road use. The problem is that the current highways budget is already committed to projects that require urgent attention. By this, I mean roads that suffer high levels of evidenced speeding and serious incidents.

However, officers are going to work with the parish council to look at what might be achievable in the village to alleviate some of the traffic pressures. The parish council can create a list of improvements required in Chinnor (such as crossing points, electronic signs, traffic improvements) and these will be included on Highways' traffic improvement list for consideration as budget allows.

With regards to 20mph zones, it was noted that officers will soon start monitoring and evaluating the new speed limits on a county-wide basis which should give us further opportunity to consider speeding issues in the area.

There is definitely a will to act for the benefit of residents... the obstacles are really (as always in life) financial restraints, when there are so many projects throughout the county that need consideration. Children's services and adult social care have to take priority of course, and then with highways projects it's inevitable that those roads with the most urgent and severe problems will be prioritised.

A speed survey was carried out last year on Lower Icknield Way, however the results were within the 80 percentile that highways officers use as a guide. If residents think this data might not reflect the current reality, the only way forward seems to be to work with TVP on a Community Speedwatch programme. I know this is not popular with many residents, but I can only ask that people might consider it if we want to capture live speed data. Speed cameras were discussed in the Teams meeting, however permanent speed cameras are not generally installed anymore. Mobile units are now used by TVP so again, if Community Speedwatch captures sufficient evidence of speeding, TVP might be interested in setting up a mobile camera. Chinnor parish council already has the kit for this – they are just lacking volunteers.

I feel that progress has been made in terms of getting representatives from several operational teams around one (albeit virtual) table and getting Chinnor on their radar by highlighting the needs and issues around the village generally and Lower Icknield Way area specifically. This is something we can continue to follow up on. Also, that resurfacing, crossing points and other factors on Lower Icknield Way were given the attention they need. Both the parish council and I will keep engaging with Highways and will continually make sure Chinnor is at the forefront of their minds for all potential opportunities. I have also highlighted this as my priority with officers in the OCC Henley & Thame localities group.

In the meantime:

- 1) A section of Lower Icknield Way will see some road resurfacing next month (weather depending) which should alleviate some of the associated noise of traffic for residents;
- 2) The existing road markings around the buildout have been noted as in possible need of a refresh – This has been noted so it can be considered for next financial year;
- 3) The Speed limit 'terminal' signs will be checked to ensure they are in good condition and free of overgrowth etc.

- 4) A 'missing' dropped kerb opposite Walnut Tree Close was identified – an officer is making enquiries as it appears that this may have been overlooked from the development of the Close.

The officer mentioned above, Andy Sweeney, also visited Towersey in January to consider options for the issue of shortcutting through the village, and has since presented a proposal for the parish council's consideration which would allow Towersey to become a "Quiet Way". I am also looking to him and his team to offer advice and support for the Traffic Advisory Committee.

On the 321 and 322 school bus problems to Lord Williams (from Sydenham) and Icknield Community College (from Chinnor) I have had some meaningful engagement with Red Rose Travel's operations manager as well as OCC's cabinet member for children's services, and I hope parents and children are seeing some improvements. I encourage parents and parish councils to stay in touch with me about this.

For my committee work, in January I sat on two Overview & Scrutiny panels - People and Education & Young People.

At People OSC we considered the Unpaid Carers Strategy and a review on Supported Independent Housing.

At Education & Young People OSC we considered the progress made by the local area partnership in addressing the issues raised by the 2023 SEND inspection. Partners for this include the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum and the SEND Youth Forum. We looked at the new SEND Priority Action Plan to further progress our improvement journey in Oxfordshire. We also reviewed the Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) Guidance Report by the Director of Children's Services and commented on the final EOTAS guidance and Toolkit. Not every council has such a toolkit and I hope it will prove to be helpful to parents who find themselves navigating this path for their children.

Next week's full council will be our Budget meeting, and there is some information on this and the government's funding cuts below:

### **OCC continues work to cope with government funding cuts**

Proposals to close a gap of £5.4m for the 2026/7 Oxfordshire County Council budget have been made and were considered by cabinet on 27 January.

A major change to the way the government distributes grant money to councils means it and many other local authorities will face real challenges from 2026/27 with more significant reductions then required in the following two years.

Although there will also be a significant number of [investments in to budgets for adult social care \(£14m\), children's services \(£19m\), libraries and other services in 2026/7](#) savings are now also being proposed to ensure a balanced budget.

The council knows that it will need to find further savings of at least £14m in 2027/28 (in addition to the £5.4m in 2026/27) because the government provided funding information for three years. As such there will need to be planning work throughout 2026 to meet this large challenge. Further savings will be needed in 2028/29, the first year of local government reform in Oxfordshire. By 2028/9 the reduction in grant funding is £27.2m.

**Councillor Dan Levy, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Property, Finance and Transformation, said** "This year's budget features a number of positive investments with significant extra money for adult social care and children's services to cope with demand. However, we have had to propose some savings to ensure budgets are balanced and we are going to start facing real challenges in future years. We need people to hear that message loud and clear.

"The government has cut grant funding and assumed the council will make up most of the difference with maximum Council Tax rises. The effect of this is that we will have to put up Council Tax by 4.99% each year, but a lot of this money will immediately be subtracted by the government and sent elsewhere. This is both financially difficult and hard to square with local accountability and choice. Even with 4.99% Council Tax rises, the effect will be that Oxfordshire will have less money to spend on services for residents.

"Money is being redistributed away from Oxfordshire and other areas on a large scale by the government. There will be very real impacts on our budgets and our services in future.

"We respect the government's desire to put extra money into areas of the country that have higher levels of deprivation. However, we do not think this should be at the expense of Oxfordshire and its residents."

#### Savings to close the £5.4m budget gap in 2026/7

There are proposals to save £3,9m by setting less money aside for pay inflation; assuming more money will be accumulated in bank interest on money waiting to be spent on services during the year and by reducing contingency funding.

The remaining £1.5m is proposed to be from services by way of the following:

- In 2025/26 the council took the unprecedented step of moving to annual gully clearance, backed by £1.5m of new investment, a significant improvement on previous years. Against the challenging backdrop of central government cuts, the council proposes to maintain additional investment while spending it carefully in order to address the most pressing needs and not duplicate or carry out unnecessary clearances. This means an additional £1.2m is still planned, and the capital budget

will include a £2m investment in each of 2026/27 and 2027/28 to improve drainage systems that have been found to require major repair after years of neglect

- The council will seek to reduce operating costs by £250,000 in transport services that it provides in adult social care/children's services/home to school transport etc. The aim is that there will be no negative impact on the end user. This will be achieved by seeking efficiencies with organisations such as taxi and bus companies. A £1 million saving in this area was included in last year's budget and the overall budget for this area is £43m.
- The council's adult social care charging policy currently makes a standard allowance for Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) of 35 per cent. Subject to a full consultation process the council's proposal is to consider a reduction of the DRE to 25 per cent which would produce a potential in year saving of £500,000. Following consultation, the council will consider next steps and in the event that it decides not to proceed with this proposal, alternative savings will need to be found.
- After reviewing its inflationary pressure Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue can absorb a previously listed financial pressure of £120,000 for personal protective equipment without any impact to the public or firefighter safety.
- The council has a school improvement team that operates in non-academy schools to support improvement in standards. The team will continue to offer support, and schools do pay towards this without covering the full cost. A government grant that helped towards this was withdrawn over the last three years, and the council has substituted this from its own funds. A first move to schools fully paying for the service is planned, which will allow a saving of £100,000. More than half of Oxfordshire primary schools are academies and all but one secondary school and will therefore not be affected by this proposal.
- By paying for some staffing costs out of its capital programme budget for major projects the council can save £150,000 from its day-to-day revenue budget.

### **Funding approved to help disadvantaged young people find work**

A charity which aims to transform young people's lives, unite communities and tackle inequality of opportunity in Oxfordshire has been awarded funding of £150,000. Oxfordshire County Council has granted [Oxfordshire Youth](#) £50,000 annually for three years. The funding will enable its [Business Guardians](#) programme to engage with more companies and support more young people across the county.

By 2028, the grant should enable Business Guardians to reach 500 additional disadvantaged young people in the county – including care leavers – who are most at risk of being excluded from the labour market.

The grant will enable the charity to work with employers to tackle youth unemployment, provide industry specific workshops, events, work placement and work experience offers, and organise mentorship programmes.

Businesses already involved with the charity are ARC Oxford, Blenheim Palace, BMW Mini, Cleenol, David Lloyd Clubs Oxford, Ebbon Group, Freeths, The Oxford Collection and Lucy Group.

The council will also join the programme as principal sponsor and strategic partner.

The council identified the Business Guardians as a key part of Oxfordshire Works – the county’s response to the government's Get Britain Working Plan to reform employment, health and skills support to tackle economic inactivity and support people into good work.

The Business Guardians will collaborate with Oxfordshire Youth over the next three years to unlock employability opportunities for young people facing multiple barriers to work, including access to apprenticeship pathways, work placements, employability workshops and mentorship.

## **Oxfordshire County Council withdraws from X**

Oxfordshire County Council is joining other councils, including district councils in Oxfordshire, in being deeply concerned about the rise in online hate speech and abuse targeting women and girls on the social media channel X.

The council welcomes Ofcom’s decision to investigate the platform under the Online Safety Act. Safeguarding residents and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion are central to the county council’s responsibilities, and these principles extend to how and where we communicate online.

The council regularly reviews its use of social media to ensure our channels remain effective and accessible for residents. In recent months, we have seen that X has become less effective as an engagement channel and has contributed to a less safe online environment for local communities.

As a result, we have reduced our activity on X and focused on sharing council news and information through other social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram as well as newer channels such as WhatsApp.

Following a recent internal review of our social media channels, we can confirm that we will be withdrawing from the X platform.

Public bodies have a responsibility to stand up against hate and abuse, particularly when it targets women and girls. Social media can be a powerful tool for engagement, but only when it is properly regulated and moderated.

Where platforms fail to provide a safe and respectful space for communities, we must make clear and principled choices about how we communicate.

OCC will continue to use our other social media channels and our website to keep people informed and engaged.

- [Facebook](#)
- [Instagram](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Nextdoor](#)
- [Blue Sky](#)
- [WhatsApp](#)
- [WhatsApp travel](#)
- [YouTube](#)