

Corporate Plan Performance Reporting

The Council adopted its new Corporate Plan towards the end of 2020, so 2021-22 was the first full year of its implementation. As part of our commitment to Openness and Transparency, we now publish quarterly performance reports at <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/corporateplan> and these are a very useful point of reference on the highest priority areas such as Nature Restoration, Taking Action on the Climate Emergency, Improving Economic and Community Wellbeing and Rebuilding our Financial Viability. This annual report to the Parish Council will provide an overview, but for more detail we would encourage you to refer to these quarterly performance reports.

Covid-19 Support for the South Oxfordshire Community

Throughout the past year SODC teams have continued to provide support, finance and guidance to residents and local businesses as we have moved from one phase of the pandemic to the next (and back again!). Working in close collaboration with other public authorities across Oxfordshire, the council has supported vaccine roll-outs, handled multiple different grant schemes, delivered food parcels and reached out to vulnerable residents via the Community Hub. We also provided materials to support our towns and businesses during the gradual re-opening of our high streets.

Climate Action Plan

A highlight of this past year has been the creation and adoption of a Climate Action Plan, which will help the Council to achieve its objective of being Net Zero in its own operations by 2025 and to show leadership to the whole District in getting there by 2030. Examples of actions that have been taken include the creation of a new Tree Planting Policy, which has enabled community groups to plant trees on SODC-owned land, installing EV charging points in all of our market towns and implementing flood alleviation schemes (e.g. in Chalgrove) to combat risks arising from climate change.

Of course, SODC is only responsible for a small percentage of the carbon emissions in the District, and so we are very dependent on local communities, businesses and individuals playing their part too. We support such actions through regular communications campaigns (such as Food Waste Action Week in March) and we are working with our colleagues across the County to develop a new website which will provide practical examples of actions that can be taken by individuals to change their behaviour and reduce their own climate impact.

Improving our Finances and Investing to Save

In February 2022 we delivered a budget representing a step-change in how the council invests in our communities and collective priorities. If our first budget responded to the council's poor financial position, and the second to the existential challenges of the pandemic, this third budget is the first fully realised expression of the projects in our corporate plan.

Our administration's approach to bringing services back in-house is a clear reversal of our Conservative predecessors' policy and has put us in a much stronger position both financially and practically. As a result, Heads of Service can manage costs more effectively, improving the long-term position and freeing up £500,000 for immediate additional investment. We have split these funds between three of our key priorities in the Corporate

Plan. This will enable us, for example, to accelerate activity to support the retrofit of homes and development of green construction skills, run green business fairs in towns, and support car-sharing clubs.

There's also funding to invest in access to green spaces and our rivers. We have campaigned to raise awareness and take action on sewage pollution in our river, which runs 47 miles along the length of the district. We have also allocated funds to renovate our much-needed public toilets and support community litter picks and children's activities.

As well as bringing services in-house, we're saving money by working on a joint local plan with our neighbouring Vale of the White Horse district. We are planning to move out of expensive rented offices in Milton Park this summer by making a substantial investment in the centre of Didcot Garden Town for a new civic building. We're buying houses to use as temporary accommodation for homeless families rather than paying for hotels.

Delivering Genuinely Affordable Housing and Improving Community Facilities

Although South Oxfordshire has one of the lowest levels of council tax of any shire district, it's vital that we deploy all the funding we can access, especially to support facilities used by our residents, whatever their income level. By introducing new action and policies on developer funding contributions, we have improved the council's ability to spend them more quickly, and as a result, we are able to make substantial investments. In this budget, we have released nearly £2 million to support community leisure and wellbeing facilities, as well as in some cases supporting a specific need, such as improved access to the Thames for wheelchair users.

We are now planning a £5 million investment over two years, using affordable housing funds from developers to enable the council to purchase and invest in its own council housing, another vital step toward reinstating the council as a provider of housing for those most in need. This follows major commitments last year to Henley and District Housing Trust and for our own Didcot Broadway development of new low-carbon council housing.

In addition, in the first 3 quarters of the 2021/22 financial year, we delivered 214 affordable homes through s106 agreements with housing developers.

Improving our Efficiency and Modernising our Infrastructure

Over the past year Council officers have been working hard on an IT Refresh and a Customer Transformation Strategy which will modernise and integrate the various systems used to interact with residents across the district. With so many officers working from home, and residents, parish councils and local businesses interacting with the council using increasingly digital channels, this work will help to integrate the information we hold about them and use to deliver our services in a more efficient and customer-oriented way. This is a challenging project, since we have inherited such a patchwork of outsourced contracts and distributed customer records, but it will hopefully improve satisfaction with Council services and enable us to be more responsive in how we engage with our many and varied groups of stakeholders. It will also give us better resilience and will deliver operational and financial savings over time.

Diversity and Inclusion

In addition to the statutory duties for equalities as a public sector organisation, the Council has made a strategic commitment in our Corporate Plan to focus on strengthening and improving diversity and inclusion across our communities and council services. Several

motions have been passed by Council in the past twelve months relating to diversity and inclusion and we have also published a Diversity calendar which we use to highlight social campaigns on these matters. We strive to create an environment where everybody feels that they belong and have a voice that will be heard. We embrace our differences, our unique talents, our beliefs, backgrounds and abilities and commit to improving community well-being as we collectively emerge from the pandemic and tackle the challenges presented by climate change and social injustices.