

Title	District Councillors' Report
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Parish	Warborough Parish Council
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Latest News on Local Government Reorganisation

This continues to be the main topic of discussion at councils across the country, now that the Devolution Priority Programme has been confirmed (not including Oxfordshire). Oxfordshire has until 21st March to submit its proposals for unitarization to MHCLG. There are likely to be two (or more) alternatives put forward; one for a "one Oxfordshire" Unitary Authority (UA) and one for a merger of SODC, Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire, with "something else" for the rest of Oxfordshire. Leaders of all authorities are in regular discussion, although it's clear that there are significant differences of opinion across the county.

There are still many unknowns surrounding this whole process, including how a new Mayor would be elected and how many Councillors will represent residents at the new Unitaries, but we will aim to keep you informed as plans evolve! Previous models have doubled the number of county councillors for an existing county council if the new UA has the same geography; this would mean approximately 138 councillors (2 per new division) for a single Oxfordshire UA – not sure where they would hold their meetings!!

A motion submitted by the Green Group to a special meeting of SODC Full Council on 20th Feb asking for the Council to support a fairer voting system for the Regional Mayoral election (ie. not First Past the Post), to remove the financial barriers for standing as a candidate and to call for more representative oversight and scrutiny of the Mayor's decisions was defeated.

Also at this special Council meeting Members raised concerns about the risks of moving ahead so quickly with the reorganisation, but also about the impact of uncertainty on staff morale and retention. Well-run District Councils like SODC are concerned that reserves will be transferred to new Unitary Authorities to finance statutory duties such as adult social care and that non-statutory services such as planning enforcement, the provision of community support services and grants and the running of leisure and sports facilities could be jeopardised. The lack of public consultation has also been criticised, so it is essential that we all play our part in raising awareness and explaining the changes that are coming our way.

SODC 2025/26 Budget

On Thursday 13th February SODC approved its capital expenditure and revenue budget for 2025/26 and the Medium Term Financial Plan for the next 5 years. It is worth repeating that 2025/26 will be the first year since 2015 that the Council will have a small operational surplus and so we will not need to use our reserves to plug the gap. The 2025/26 budget delivers:

- No cuts to any services
- A fully funded Community Hub
- Increased capital investment (up to £10m) in affordable social housing
- A fully funded and resourced Nature and Climate Action Plan
- Further decarbonisation of the Council's Leisure Centres
- An increase in the Councillor Grant from £5k each to £7.5k

Council tax for services provided by South Oxfordshire District Council between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026 will be set at £151.24 for a Band D property. This means just £2.91 per week for a wide range of services including waste and recycling collections, community support, leisure services, parks and play areas, housing and planning services, environmental health and licensing.

New Council Plan – The Way Ahead – approved for 2025-2029

Alongside its budget, SODC Council also approved the strategic plan for the next four years, which has evolved from the one we've been following since 2020. It focuses on five strategic priorities around Nature Recovery and Climate Adaptation, Housing Delivery, Community Wellbeing, Financial Stability and Accessibility & Accountability. Each priority theme has three or four sub-themes and an annual delivery plan with performance indicators and measurable targets. The plan will soon be available from the SODC website [here](#).

Garden Waste Changes – new payment system now open

The new system for paying for Garden waste collection permits is open – www.southoxon.gov.uk/gardenwaste. To receive garden waste collections from 1 April 2025, residents must purchase an annual permit. This will replace direct debits, which are surprisingly troublesome to collect each year.

Garden waste customers can also sign up for an online account on our website to make things easier when they purchase the next permit in 2026. Anyone who cannot easily sign up for a permit online can call us on 01235 422422 for support.

Consultations Now Open

Until 24th March - Wallingford Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan - <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wallingford-lcwip>

This is an online map where you can drop pins and make suggestions about how existing infrastructure can be improved or where new infrastructure is needed to encourage more people to choose to walk, wheel or cycle for short local journeys.

Until 18th March - Social housing allocation policy changes

Our public consultation on proposed changes to the Joint Housing Allocations Policy opened on 18 February. The policy underpins our work on providing homes to those who need them most, setting out the criteria to join the housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated.

Last updated in 2019, the policy needs refreshing to reflect current housing priorities in the districts. There are four main proposed changes to the policy – all designed to help ensure no one is disadvantaged when it comes to allocating social housing.

<https://theconversation.southandvale.gov.uk/housing-and-environment/review-housing-allocations-policy/>

The consultation runs until 11.59pm on Tuesday 18 March 2025. Please do help encourage people to share their views.

Grant funding advice session

We are holding a grant funding advice session at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot on **Thursday 20 March, appointments available from 12.30pm to 4pm**. Voluntary and community organisations will have the opportunity to discuss projects, ask questions about the application process including eligibility for any of the upcoming grant schemes.

Places are limited, so organisations are encouraged to book a time slot by emailing grants@southandvale.gov.uk or phone 01235 422405. Alternatively, if you are unable to attend, the team are happy to book a phone call or Teams meeting at a more convenient time. Please help us to spread the word! For more information visit www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants.