

District Councillor Report Jan 2023

Sam Casey-Rerhaye

As we move into the New Year, I'd like to look back on some of the decisions made towards the end of 2022 that will have a positive impact on the residents of South Oxfordshire, reflecting the priorities we set out when we took over the administration back in 2019.

A new **Housing Delivery Strategy and Action Plan** has been adopted to help residents on lower incomes access safe and secure affordable housing. This will enable the Council to build its own homes for social rent and will also help us to tackle the climate emergency to reduce carbon emissions by encouraging developers to use sustainable materials while building well-designed energy efficient housing. It also aims to encourage housing providers and residents to access grant funding to help retrofit their homes to reduce their carbon footprint. In December a further £2m was allocated to this programme, putting those CIL payments to good use.

We formally adopted a revised **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule**, which came into effect on 3 January. This will increase significantly the amount of money developers are required to pay on new developments and introduces a levy for developments including student housing, build-to-rent housing and elderly person's accommodation, all of which are currently exempt from charges. This is a really positive development as it will ensure we make progress toward bridging the large community infrastructure gap we have in the district. Examples of community infrastructure include playgrounds, leisure facilities, zebra crossings etc. Parishes with adopted Neighbourhood Plans can also expect their CIL receipts to increase significantly since they are allocated 25% of all CIL contributions.

The Council has produced a useful guide to help residents struggling with the rising **Cost of Living**, which is available on the Council's website (www.southoxon.gov.uk). Anyone experiencing hardship should contact our continuing Community Hub where officers can guide residents to the support that's available: 01235 422 600 or communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.

We opened a third round of the **Household Support Fund** in January to support households who can't afford essentials over the winter months. Support will be tailored to individual needs but will focus on food and fuel vouchers. Details of eligibility will be published on our Cost of Living website pages mentioned above.

The Council -funded **CCTV** operators have helped support nearly 100 arrests across South and Vale districts in the past six months. Our most recent CCTV report gives information on how we've contributed to tackling crime and helping safeguard vulnerable people in our town centres. Operators working across Didcot, Henley, Thame and Wallingford supported 363 incidents, gave 47 evidence packs for potential court proceedings and supported 42 arrests.

Coming in 2023 – Voter ID

A new law passed in 2022 requires all those casting votes in local and national elections to show some form of photo identification at the polling station. This law was passed despite there being virtually no evidence of voter fraud in the UK, and the acceptable forms of ID seem designed to make it difficult for younger citizens to cast their vote. We passed a motion condemning this new law, but we have to implement it. This change will affect all voters at the next local elections on **4th May 2023**, so make sure you don't lose your democratic right to vote by ensuring you have an acceptable form of ID or by registering for a postal vote. Look out for more details as the elections approach.