

LibDem Alternative budget February 18th 2013

Our priorities are to provide as much support as possible to Oxford citizens in the current economic situation. This includes increasing direct advice on financial problems, advice on how to reduce their energy bills through the Green Deal and other funds, providing English classes for mothers in particular so they can access all available information for themselves and their children.

We believe that ward councillors know their areas best and should have the funds to support those most in need rather than a central fund with attendant bureaucracy and lack of local knowledge.

In the same way we believe that local members are the best people to determine local planning applications and decide on local grants – the reinstatement of Area Committees should help to avoid such disasters as the recent Port Meadow building fiasco. We are proposing a small fund to support those communities who want to gain influence over local planning policy by developing Neighbourhood Plans.

The wet and cold winter has dramatically worsened the state of our roads. We have identified £100,000 extra for repairs to city roads to reduce the danger to pedestrians and cyclists posed by potholes.

We have found the funds to provide these extra services by cutting the budget for consultants by 5%, making a small reduction in special responsibility allowances for executive board members and reducing their number from ten to seven; this should be plenty for a budget the size of the city's. We also propose halving the extra allowances for opposition group leaders so that reductions are shared across all parties. Other councils have made large savings by sharing services or outsourcing some. We propose investigating this area and expect that even bigger savings than the modest ones we propose could be made over time. The City Council has over £10m in earmarked and contingency reserves. On the prudent assumption that not everything will go wrong at once, we propose a review of these to achieve at least a 1% saving which can be used to provide much-needed services now.

Far too many families in Oxford are suffering from severe overcrowding. There are very few large council or housing association properties available with serious consequences for the health and wellbeing of those families. We propose that a quarter of a million pounds is earmarked in the next two years in the Housing Capital Programme to enable extensions to be provided where most needed and most practicable.

The lack of a second Dial-a-Ride bus has been the subject of much concern for the last year. We propose that the £50k labelled 'contingency for disabled transport' should be released immediately to provide this much-needed bus for the elderly and disabled citizens of Oxford.

Jean Fooks
Leader
Oxford City Council Liberal Democrat opposition group.

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