

Liberal Democrat Budget Amendment 2026/27

This budget amendment trims back on administration giveaways, introduced late in the budget process, which while nice to have, we believe can be better directed to improving our city and people's lives. In exchange, we provide funding to help resolve our Temporary Accommodation crisis, improve standards for renters, provide more free access to the Museum of Oxford for local people, and invest in public facilities that are looking tired and run-down.

Labour's late budget bids (those not in the budget for consultation, but rather added later in the day) include several items which we feel can be trimmed back while retaining their core purpose. The administration budget would spend £142,000 in the first year and £102,000 a year thereafter on subsidising bulky waste collections. The theory goes that this will reduce fly-tipping. However, we won't know if this is actually the case until it is tried – perhaps it turns out fly-tipping is mainly driven by the effort involved in arranging proper collection, not the cost. We propose to instead experimentally reduce the discount rate zero while leaving the main rate as-is. This will help discount-eligible people (those on lower incomes, who are also most likely to respond to pricing, and least likely to have a car to take items to the tip) and so allows us to find out whether the measure is effective at a much lower cost, saving £317k over four years.

The administration also plans to invest £100,000 a year in community sports development. This is admirable in its intent, though too-tightly focused – there are many other kinds of community organisation we would wish to support, such as arts, volunteering and community support organisations. We propose to allocate their proposed funding just for the financial year coming rather than tie ourselves to a sport-specific new funding pot indefinitely; we can then review the level of uptake and decide afresh how community grant funds should be allocated this time next year.

Finally, the administration would devote £20k a year extra to international links funding. While if money no object we would wish to present a rich welcome when entertaining dignitaries from our twin cities, this would be a change mainly noticed by councillors and those who follow the council closely. We think this would be better spent providing improvements more directly felt by people across the city.

Turning to our new proposed spending, most importantly we intend to fund two new officers to address our housing crisis. One would work to help people currently in Temporary Accommodation (TA) to get back into a secure living situation; this would help not only those living in TA, who could otherwise be at risk of falling back into homelessness, but also people on the social housing register, who may be able to take up TA units no longer needed for that purpose. A second officer would beef up

the council's enforcement of standards in rental properties, helping to ensure everybody in Oxford has a decent home to live in. The TA officer is funded as a medium-term post since the TA crisis is a relatively recent phenomenon, while the post addressing rental property standards is funded long-term since this is expected to be an ongoing requirement.

Second, we will fund free access to the Museum of Oxford during the summer holiday period. The Museum began charging entry this year, with only limited opportunities for local people to visit for free; by extending this to cover the school summer holiday period we hope to encourage more people to experience our city heritage.

Third, we will invest in improving our street scene, to restore pride in our public spaces. We will fund renovation of two of our public lavatory blocks, which are presently looking run-down; this can encourage graffiti and other anti-social behaviour, while also presenting a depressing, decrepit appearance to the public sphere. We will also fund renovating and maintaining community noticeboards; these are likewise very visible faces of the Council, and allowing them to remain in poor repair can convey an unwelcome sense of general decay of the street scene.

Finally, we will make small seed investments to kick off two longer-term improvement projects.

Firstly we would investigate utilising under-used public green spaces (while keeping them green): for example, one successful project undertaken by other authorities is to provide a short-term campsite centred around events. This both encourages visitors who might otherwise be put off by expensive accommodation, and supports local businesses by making summer events more viable. It would also bring a welcome income source to the council, though at this early stage we don't assume any in our budget.

Secondly, we would pursue improvements to the National Cycle Network within Oxford City. This could help to improve public safety, as well as encouraging more green travel.

Finally, we earmark £50k of Community Infrastructure Levy to support the Summertown United Reformed Church's conversion into a community space. These funds are developer contributions; they are not drawn from the general fund.