

Housing Petition Talking Points	
Housing	The Petition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a burgeoning housing crisis in West Oxfordshire, and too many residents have no hope of getting on the housing ladder, even to rent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank you for cross party support of this petition, issue that is affecting and is supported by a huge variety of people across our community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are no council-owned housing stock in West Oxfordshire and it is something we believe should return. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The community have used their voice in this unprecedented way and it is the responsibility of the district council to use their position and influence to think creatively about how to use the reserves they have to better the lives of those they're elected to represent. This issue is pressing, vital and affects all.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Houses are being built, but in the wrong place (greenfields, not brownfields) and at a price that is inaccessible to many who really need it - it's not solving the problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - That this petition has got further than any other illustrates what a crucial issue it is and how much feeling there is locally.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WODC is in the unique position of having money available to it - it should be investing in house-building, thereby providing safe, secure, affordable homes, as well as a boost to the local economy, and a guaranteed source of future revenue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is the first ever petition to make it to this stage and therefore has the chance to reinvent the process by which we conduct politics in West Oxfordshire. The people are asking for change.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Housing is NOT affordable, and the plan to simply build more expensive houses will not solve the problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The petition has been groundbreaking - we hope for a similarly groundbreaking response to the issues and questions raised in it.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What we are asking now is that you, our representatives, creatively find a way to use the success of this petition to access reserves and deliver what our community is asking for. Safe, Secure, Affordable Housing.

**BUDGET SPEECH BY COUNCILLOR JAMES MILLS
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL - 28 FEBRUARY 2018 MEETING
OF WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Mr Chairman, as Leader of the Council, I have the pleasure of presenting to Council the recommendations of the Cabinet in relation to my second budget as Leader of the Council.

The last year has been somewhat of a whirlwind affair with proposals for unitary government in Oxfordshire which have now transformed into the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal. I am proud of the role this Council has played in developing the Deal which will secure government funding of £215 million in Oxfordshire. The Deal will provide funding for:

- investment in improved infrastructure (£150 million);
- investment in much needed affordable housing (£60 million); and
- Capacity funding (£5 million) to boost capacity to deliver a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan, accelerate delivery of our housing commitments for the future and update and maintain the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS).

Also during the year the Council implemented a new waste and recycling service at the same time as changing the service provider. Although the implementation of the new service got off to a rocky start, I am pleased that our residents are now seeing the benefits of an improved service. We also entered into a new leisure contract and are planning for the next phase of investment in leisure facilities in Carterton.

I extend my thanks and appreciation, as ever, to the members and officers of the Council for their valuable contributions to this budget process. I particularly extend my thanks to Cllr Toby Morris (and my other Cabinet colleagues) for their efforts over the last few months.

Over the past few years the Council has been putting in place a number of building blocks which are now delivering financial benefits which are reflected in this budget. Some of these have been based upon difficult decisions; decisions we would rather have not had to make but which we have been pushed into by funding reductions.

Of these decisions the introduction of charging for garden waste has been the most difficult bearing in mind the level of charge in comparison to our overall level of Council Tax. I have to say the public have taken this decision in their stride as they clearly value the garden waste service and we have exceeded the target set in the budget process with over 30,000 licences issued for 2017/18.

The latest Local Government Finance Settlement was the third year of the four year spending review delivering the anticipated reduction in Revenue Support Grant funding of a £0.25 million for this Council. The next two years will see Revenue Support Grant totally removed.

It is heartening to note that further changes proposed for the New Homes Bonus were not implemented in the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2018/19. The Council also benefited from an increase of £48,589 in the amount of Rural Services Delivery Grant payable to this Council reflecting the additional costs incurred in delivering services to sparsely populated areas such as ours.

For the past two years we made the difficult decision to end the five year freeze in Council Tax because of the budget and funding pressures facing us. We did this with the backing from the public who told us that a modest tax rise of £5 per band D equivalent property was appropriate to protect valuable local services. This year there has been a mixed response to our proposals to increase Council Tax by a further £5. We have listened to feedback and I will announce revised proposals for Council Tax shortly.

Of course the tax increases are only a small part of our approach to resolving the budget conundrum. In terms of efficiency savings our shared services approach with Cotswold District Council (and others) has now reached savings of more than £16m between the two Councils since we started with a further £4m to come in 2018/19. This £2m a year saving to each Council is generating an annual and recurring tax saving of around £50 per Band D property. This remains a central strand of our efficiency and service transformation approach which has enabled us to support front line service provision to residents.

The letting of a new Leisure Contract for the District will deliver significant savings to the Council whilst increasing the opportunities for the community to take part in a wide range of sports and leisure facilities with the associated health and wellbeing benefits.

The savings set out above together with other significant savings made throughout the Council and increased revenue streams from garden waste, retained income from business rates, commercial property and treasury investments means that we can once again protect our services despite the significant cost pressures imposed on the Council by central government. We believe we can do this even though our Revenue Support Grant is falling by over a quarter of a million pounds in 2018/19 alone.

A month ago Cabinet indicated it felt confident enough to confirm yet again proposals to protect key voluntary sector organisations from significant grant reductions next year. This is the seventh year we have deferred this reduction as we seek to protect those voluntary services that have

struggled with fundraising in the tough but now improving economic climate.

To finance the Council's revenue expenditure and capital programme, Cabinet is proposing an annual Council Tax of £94.38 at Band D in 2018/19.

I am confident that the proposed increase to our Council Tax will still leave our Council levying the second lowest charge out of the all the shire District Council's in England and still the lowest in Oxfordshire by some margin – meeting one of our key Council objectives.

We will be setting a truly balanced budget insofar as we will **not** need to draw on our revenue balances to balance our budget over the next year. Indeed we plan to replenish reserves by £199,159.

The Council's Medium Term financial position is much improved compared to this time last year. This is largely due to the financial contribution expected from the new leisure contract. However, the Council faces challenges from 2020 onwards when the outcome of a review of local government funding takes effect. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy incorporates the anticipated further reductions to core government funding and forecasts the Council being able to set a balanced budget and maintain its level of revenue reserves.

Of course, not only are we meeting the budgetary challenges but we also continue to provide first class services to our residents. The Council is proud to maintain its policy of free car parking throughout the District which contributes to the vibrancy of our town centres and helps underpin our buoyant economy. Despite ongoing difficult times, unemployment and crime rates within the District remain some of the lowest in the country and continue to fall, tourism spend continues to rise, and our leisure facilities attract more users.

You can be assured that we won't rest on our laurels but will continue to look for the next challenge and area of need. Indeed Cabinet are recommending that we include a sum of £250,000 in our Capital Programme to enable us to provide facilities for electric vehicles to be charged in our car parks. This will further encourage shopping in our local shops, visits to our local restaurants and cafes and other local businesses.

As a Council we provide local choice – we are the only Council in Oxfordshire to provide free parking 24/7 – let's keep it that way with local decision making for West Oxfordshire. West Oxfordshire is different - West Oxfordshire is special and we, and quite clearly our residents, wish to keep it that way.

In light of all this Mr Chairman, I think the Council Tax proposals set out by Cabinet represent continuing excellent Value for Money for West Oxfordshire residents. A £94.38 annual charge equates to an average of around £1.82 per week per Band D household. Our charge remains less than half the national average charge and less than a third of that charged by nearby Oxford City. We will continue to ensure that local residents benefit from our determination to use as little of taxpayers money as possible whilst providing the services which help to ensure our district continues to be recognised as one of the best places to live, work and visit but also, importantly with local decisions being taken by local people.

I move and commend this budget to Council.

Thank You

James Mills
28 February 2018.

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
WEDNESDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2018
AGENDA ITEM NO. 10: QUESTION ON NOTICE

Question (from Councillor Ms E P R Leffman):

“At the Publica meeting in Cheltenham last October, members were told that the 2020 Partnership Joint Committee would seek out the views of Councillors on the establishment of a group of Non-Executive Councillors to consider the performance and progress of Publica. Please can the Leader tell us what progress has been made on this?”

Answer (from Councillor J F Mills):

“During the course of informal briefings and presentations to Scrutiny Committees across the partnership feedback has been sought on the proposal to establish a Member Liaison Group. The key points arising from consultation with Councillors are as follows:

- The Member Liaison Group should not undermine or erode each Council’s Scrutiny role which should remain sovereign and independent in line with the fundamental principle established for joint working*
- Each Council should have a direct relationship with Publica for the provision of services and costs associated with those services*
- The principles of a company established with independent Non-Executive Directors requiring reserved matters being agreed by Leaders in their company voting capacity should not be undermined or eroded*
- Each Council should determine a process for Leaders Decisions on Reserved Matters being open, transparent and subject to Scrutiny*
- The Member Liaison Group could have a role in assisting Leaders in their stated desire to reach consensus on reserved matters where there is a difference of view across the Councils*
- The Member Liaison Group could have a role in developing shared learning and innovation for the Councils*

The Leaders and lead Portfolio Holders of the Partnership met on 12 January to consider the feedback. It was agreed the following communication and liaison opportunities will be offered to each of the Member Councils:

- Present its Annual Report to a meeting of the Full Council*
- Present its draft Business Plan to Scrutiny and Cabinet annually in February/March of each year*
- Attend appropriate Scrutiny Committees for the Quarterly Performance Monitoring reports*
- Provide a monthly Keeping You Connected e-mail update to Councillors*
- Meet with informal Cabinets together with invited members of other parties/scrutiny representatives on a Quarterly basis to discuss progress against the Business Plan, identify any key risks and challenges outside of the company or council’s control, budget monitoring and service delivery matters*
- Develops informal mechanisms to share best practice, learning and Councillor Development*

I have requested that the Head of Democratic Services to liaise with Opposition Groups and Scrutiny Committee Chairs to confirm nominations and agree dates for the Quarterly Member Liaison meetings”