

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT  
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TALKING OXFORDSHIRE EVENTS

The Leader of the County Council Ian Hudspeth has been holding a series of events across the county talking to local people about the increased budget cuts being imposed upon the council by central government.

In addition to the previous round of cuts, a further £61million has to be found over the next four years.

Together with Chief Executive, Joanna Simons and other County Councillors, Ian has been listening carefully to the concerns of local people because we are now at the stage where there simply are no easy options. Whatever is saved from one service, will have to be compensated for by a cut in another, and it is important that the people of Oxfordshire should understand this and be consulted.

The overall impression has been that a group protesting against the proposed cuts to the county's network of Children's Centres dominated the discussions at every meeting. While I can appreciate and sympathise with their concerns the Council has no intention of withdrawing support from the most vulnerable and needy young members of our society. It is a pity that other members of the public were on a couple of occasions drowned out and prevented from making their points of view heard.

A number of people wanted to know why OCC doesn't just raise the Council Tax in order to stop the cuts. The problems here is that the Government has imposed a cap of 2% on tax rises, which would not be nearly enough. The penalty for going over 2% is an automatic referendum that would cost £500,000 to organize, and would most likely result in a 'No' vote since people are unlikely to vote for higher taxes.

Income generation, agile working, using reserves, amalgamating into one unitary authority, selling property, reducing road works, more use of volunteers, more private sector involvement, reducing street lighting and giving up the new government proposal for all young children to receive free school meals were all offered by residents as suggestions to offset savings. The County Council has, and is considering some of these ideas and others. I would be happy to hear from anyone in my Division if they think we may have overlooked something.

We have to set a budget by February. Whatever the decisions we eventually take, I would like to re-assure residents that we will protect our essential services, look after the most vulnerable elderly and young people in our county and meet our statutory obligations.