**Vale’s budget for 2023/24 protects frontline services, funds future-proof projects for climate and communities and helps with the cost-of-living**

Careful financial management means Vale of White Horse District Council can continue providing support for local people affected by the cost-of-living crisis and can secure investment in reducing the carbon impact of council-owned buildings like leisure centres. Councillors voted unanimously to approve a budget for 2023/4 that shows a financial position that continues to improve considerably.

Thanks to the council’s good decision making over the last few years the council is now able to take advantage of millions of pounds worth of funding schemes to improve leisure centres, reduce their carbon impact and make them more energy efficient and cost-effective to run for the future.

The Vale continues to charge one of the lowest district council tax rates in the country. The budget includes a below-inflation increase in Council Tax of 3.4 per cent for 2023-24 to fund services delivered by the district council. For a Band D property, this equates to £5 a year (just under 10p a week), bringing a total charge of £151.69 a year (£2.91 per week) - which is more than 25 per cent lower than the national average.

Cllr Andy Crawford, Cabinet Member for Finance at Vale of White Horse District Council, said: “Despite very high inflation and a continuing real terms reduction in government support we have been able to set a balanced budget for 2023/24. This will mean no cuts to frontline services. Careful budgeting means we’ve been able to add £2.6 million to our reserves this coming year – we’ve turned that around from an expected shortfall of £5.6 million four years ago.

“The ongoing national financial turbulence and Covid-19 has put a considerable strain on our resources both in terms of reduced income from services including planning and car parks and in the extra demands the Covid-19 response has had on our services.  Despite this, council tax for services provided by the Vale will increase by considerably less than the rate of inflation.

“Despite the lack of certainty about future local authority funding, we’ve been able to set our Medium-Term Financial Plan to remain solvent throughout the next five years. This is in contrast to the situation in 2019/20 just prior to the last district elections which saw the council predicting negative reserves.

“We’re delighted to have been awarded £6 million in decarbonisation funding to install air source heat pumps and solar panels at Wantage Leisure Centre and White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre.

“This work is expected to reduce the council’s overall energy use by 25 per cent, delivering considerable cost savings making the centres more viable in the long run. It will have a very significant impact on the council’s CO2 emissions, helping us move closer to our carbon neutral targets and will also maintain the centres for sports and leisure use by residents for many years to come. In Wantage the council plans to invest £2 million in a new learner pool and work on a new artificial turf pitch in Faringdon is scheduled to start in the new financial year.”

Continuing its commitment to help people as much as possible with the rising cost-of-living, the council’s budget also includes funding to run its Community Hub for a further two years. Originally set up in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Community Hub now provides ongoing practical support, advice and funding to the district’s most vulnerable residents. It plays an important role supporting the council’s ongoing response work for refugees and asylum seekers in the district and works with partners to lead and deliver programmes to address inequalities. The Community Hub delivers cost-of-living help for those in most financial need, such as the household support fund.

From April 1,400 households in the Vale who need financial help will benefit from a more generous council tax support scheme.

**ENDS**

The budget report and papers [can be viewed on our website.](http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=108&MId=3044)

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