

The Rt. Hon. Robert Jenrick, M.P.
Secretary of State for Housing,
Communities & Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities
& Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
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Councillor Emily Smith
Leader of the Council

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2 November 2020

Dear Robert Jenrick MP

We are writing to you on behalf of all Oxfordshire councils to seek ongoing financial support to enable us to continue to support the response to the Coronavirus pandemic, and to continue to provide all the services that our communities need.

All of the Oxfordshire councils remain committed to providing the support and services that residents and businesses need at this time, and to protecting our communities. So far during the pandemic we have:

- Maintained all of our key services in the face of increased demand in some areas, such as social care and homelessness
- Provided support to shielded and vulnerable people
- Passed grant funding to all eligible businesses
- Paid self-isolation grants to eligible individuals

However, the pandemic has had, and continues to have an impact on the finances of all councils. All councils have had to re-forecast or revise their budgets to reflect the increased expenditure and lost income that Coronavirus has caused in the current financial year. Whilst the additional government funding is welcome, even with the latest award across all councils it is not sufficient and in year budgets have been balanced by a mixture of savings and through drawing on reserves.

We call on the government to support all council losses, both in terms of increased expenditure and reduced income, suffered during 2020/21. The sales, fees and charges compensation scheme is welcome but it does not make good all council income losses, and our councils are affected by losses which are not covered, including:

- Commercial and investment income, and

- Collection fund losses.

Supporting the councils in this way will mean that the pandemic does not have a detrimental impact on their ability to deliver services in future years.

The councils are now starting work on their budgets for 2021/22 and beyond. These budgets were going to be challenging for all councils, particularly due to the uncertainty around the future of local government funding, on which as yet there is no further clarity. In particular, clarity is urgently needed on the future of New Homes Bonus and whether there will be a business rates reset.

The budget setting challenge has now been exacerbated by the inability to progress transformation activity during 2020/21 which was intended to improve the councils' financial position. This activity has not been able to proceed as the response to Coronavirus has been prioritised. In addition, the financial impact of the pandemic will affect councils long after the end of the 2020/21 financial year and will undermine the financial standing of the councils across the medium term. This is particularly the case with income streams and councils will need support to deal with ongoing losses from these key sources of funding for services.

We note the news that there will be a one year spending review and that one of the areas of focus will be:

Giving our vital public services enhanced support to continue to fight against the virus alongside delivering first class frontline services

We ask that government recognise the impact of the pandemic on future council finances as part of a long term, sustainable financial settlement for our councils for 2021/22 and future years.

Yours sincerely



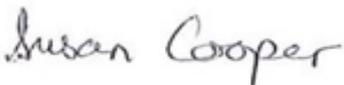
Cllr Emily Smith
Leader, Vale of White
Horse District Council



Cllr Ian Hudspeth
Leader, Oxfordshire County
Council



Cllr Barry Wood
Leader, Cherwell District
Council



Cllr Sue Cooper
Leader, South Oxfordshire
District Council



Cllr Susan Brown
Leader, Oxford City Council



Cllr Michele Mead
Leader, West Oxfordshire
District Council

CC: Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer
Luke Hall, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government
Emran Mian, Director General, Decentralisation and Growth
Mark Stone, Chief Executive South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council
Yvonne Rees, Chief Executive Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council
Gordon Mitchell, Chief Executive Oxford City Council
Giles Hughes, Chief Executive West Oxfordshire District Council