

Title	District Councillor's Report
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Councils pay out more than £8 million to help with energy bills

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have paid out more than £8 million in energy bill rebates.

All households living in properties which are in council tax bands A-D are entitled to a £150 payment. The government is providing this money, also known as the 'council tax rebate', to help people with the rising costs of energy bills with the payments being made by local councils.

Over 54,000 households across South and Vale who pay their council tax by direct debit have now received the rebate payment from their district council. They will also receive a letter confirming the payment.

Councils can pay the money directly to someone's bank account if they are the person responsible for paying council tax at the property. Following checks, around 70 percent of those entitled to the rebate in South and Vale were able to receive the money this way.

The councils will now send a letter to all remaining eligible households (those not on direct debit, or whose bank account can't be matched to those liable for the council tax at the property) asking them to complete an online form to confirm their bank account details so they are able to receive the money.

Anyone who is not able to complete the form online will be able to call a special customer service team for assistance.

Further information about the rebate scheme can be found on the South and Vale websites and on the government's updated fact sheet.

Details of a discretionary scheme to support those on low income living in council tax band properties E-H who are not eligible for the rebate will be confirmed in the coming weeks.

Cornerstone showcases art inspired by nature for Oxfordshire Artweeks

Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot is celebrating Oxfordshire Artweeks 40th anniversary by hosting an exciting exhibition by two local artists. The 'Inspired By Nature' exhibition is now on and runs until 1 June and features work by Denny Webb and Charlie Davies.

The special exhibition includes a diverse selection of paintings celebrating the local landscape, nature, and the concept of bringing the outdoors inside. Through their work the artists hope to encourage visitors to enjoy the beauty of nature and their surroundings.

Cornerstone is also hosting art classes for adults including 'Learn To Draw', 'Printmaking' and 'Life Drawing' this Summer. These classes aim to be fun and friendly introductions to the skills and techniques needed to build confidence and artistic abilities. Classes are weekly but residents can sign up at any point during the season and a free taster session is available too.

Details of Cornerstone's classes and how to join in are on its website www.cornerstone-arts.org. Visitors can see Oxfordshire Artweeks 40th Anniversary exhibition 'Inspired By Nature' in Cornerstone Arts Centre's gallery until 1 June for free during their regular opening hours. To find out more visit www.cornerstone-arts.org or call the box office on 01235 515144.

Councils to let wildflowers bloom during No Mow May

Wildflowers could bloom in more public areas next month after South Oxfordshire District Council pledged their support for No Mow May. The council already designates wildflower meadows which they only cut two to three times a year but this year they will trial leaving several additional areas of land uncut for No Mow May, a national campaign which encourages people to not mow gardens and public areas to help boost biodiversity and provide a feast of wildflower nectar for bees. Not cutting lawns for a month encourages more flowers to grow and May is the point at which grass starts growing at its fastest rate.

At the end of the month, people are asked to take part in Every Flower Counts, a survey which will help to reveal how many bees the UK's lawns can feed and the council will also review how the trial has impacted each area.

We're really keen to increase the biodiversity and boost wildlife on our public land and so this year, as promised in our new Climate Action Plan, we'll review how we carry out grounds maintenance to see if there any opportunities to reduce grass cutting and for wilding and tree planting to take place.

For more information about how the councils carry out grass cutting in their districts visit southoxon.gov.uk/NoMowMay or whitehorsedc.gov.uk/NoMowMay

For more information about No Mow May, visit the Plantlife website.

Over half a million pounds in funding awarded to community organisations in South Oxfordshire

Voluntary organisations in South Oxfordshire whose work includes supporting young people, providing vital help and advice for residents, and protecting the environment have been awarded £667,992 in grant funding. South Oxfordshire District Council awarded the funds to 22 organisations to help them improve the quality of life for the residents and communities they serve, whilst making sustainable plans for their future work.

Environmental charities including Earth Trust, River Thame Conservation Trust and Wild Oxfordshire were awarded funds to help with their work in our natural world benefitting nature and residents. All applications for the grant were asked to consider how their organisation, activities and services are working towards addressing the climate emergency – a key priority as set out in our Corporate Plan.

Supporting vulnerable residents is also a focus of the funding, with local information and advice services awarded funds. Riverside Counselling, a charity based in Henley, with services also in Wallingford, Didcot and Berinsfield, were awarded £45,568 to help them provide counselling services to adults and young people from the age of 12. Thomley Hall Ltd in Thame, a charity for children and families with autism and complex needs, received £70,000 from the grant scheme. Funding was also provided for BIVC and the Berin Centre.

This funding comes from the South Oxfordshire District Councils Revenue Grant scheme that was launched last year to applicants. It offers two years of financial support to community and voluntary organisations working to improve the quality of life for the residents of South Oxfordshire.

The funding that has been allocated will cover two years from April 2022- March 2024. As part of this funding, the council also wishes to offer support to organisations to diversify their income streams, providing funds to invest in fundraising/income generation activities to further boost the sustainability of their organisation.

There's more information about the grant schemes at South Oxfordshire District Council [**southoxon.gov.uk/grants**](https://southoxon.gov.uk/grants)

Note: this is additional to the currently-open Berinsfield Garden Village Grant scheme