

Town and parish digest



Listening Learning Leading

FEBRUARY 2007

Calendar of meetings

At its meeting on 14 December 2006, Council agreed a calendar of meetings for the 2007-2008 municipal year. The approved calendar is attached.

For further information please contact Steven Corrigan, Democratic Services on 01491 823049 or email steven.corrigan@southoxon.gov.uk.

Consultation on amendments to the model code of conduct for local authority members

In 2005, the Standards Board for England undertook a consultation on amendments to the code of conduct for local authority members. On the basis of the consultation, the Standards Board recommended making the code clearer whilst maintaining a rigorous approach to the identification of serious misconduct.

As a consequence, the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, issued in October 2006, indicated the Government's intention to put in place a clearer, simpler and more proportionate code of conduct for local authority members.

The Government's consultation on amending the code of conduct is now available. The consultation can be downloaded from the Communities and Local Government (DCLG) website at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1505696>

Alternatively, the publication is available free of charge from Communities and Local Government Publications, PO Box 236, Wetherby LS23 7NB, telephone 0870 1226 236, fax 0870 1226 237, textphone 0870 1207 405, email communities@twoten.com. You are asked to quote product code 06 LG 04359 when ordering. Further information is available on the website.

Parish councils may respond directly to DCLG on the consultation but are also invited to send any comments to Margaret Reed, Monitoring Officer, email margaret.reed@southoxon.gov.uk, telephone 01491 823656 before 28 February 2007. The consultation is open until 9 March 2007.

Guidance for councillors on the use of Council facilities and publicity during the election period

As we approach the May 2007 district and parish council elections, the Council's Monitoring Officer, Margaret Reed, has prepared a guidance note for district councillors on the use of Council facilities and publicity during the election period. Whilst the issues may be less relevant to some parish councils, particularly smaller ones, they could equally arise at parish level. A copy of the guidance note is therefore attached for use by parish clerks and parish councillors.

For more information contact Margaret Reed, Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, telephone 01491 823656 or email margaret.reed@southoxon.gov.uk

South Oxfordshire Outburst

South Oxfordshire Outburst is an online magazine website featuring short video clips of news and information. Outburst includes:

- news roundup - a monthly news section to keep you up to date on what's happening in the district
- your council - an interview with a member of the Council's staff
- question time - a question and answer session with a local councillor
- focus on - a closer look at an issue affecting the district
- online poll - take part in our poll on a topical subject
- your Outburst – a chance to get your own videos featured

Catch the latest question time video – in this edition we interview Councillor David Turner about what it means to be leader of the opposition and what his role involves.

Don't forget we also update the online news video broadcast every month. To watch the latest news and David's interview go to www.southoxon-outburst.co.uk

We are also inviting residents and community groups to send in their own Outburst videos to feature on the website. Find out more on the Outburst website.

If you have ideas or questions about Outburst, contact Vic Bucket-Hipgrave on 01491 823108 or email victoria.buckett-hipgrave@southoxon.gov.uk

Travel tokens

We are currently in the process of changing the way we distribute travel tokens. At present, town and parish councils distribute tokens for us and people have to go to collect them. We are introducing a new system from 1 April 2007, where National Transport Travel Limited will send out travel tokens on our behalf, direct to people's homes. We hope that this will help people who live in rural areas and disabled people.

If you received travel tokens in 2006/07, we will send you a simple renewal form to sign and return to us. National Transport Tokens Limited will post the travel tokens directly to your home by recorded delivery. If you are applying for travel tokens for the first time, you will need to complete an application form and supply evidence of residency and age or disability, if relevant.

If you are disabled or aged over 70, you have a choice between £20 worth of travel tokens or a free bus pass, but not both. Disabled residents and their companions are also eligible for travel tokens. If you are aged 60 or over and a permanent resident in our district, you may apply for a free bus pass.

For further information please contact Julia Leppard, Team Administrator on 01491 823124 or email julia.leppard@southoxon.gov.uk.

Capital projects grant aid

Application forms are now available for community capital projects within the district of South Oxfordshire. The next closing date is 31 March 2007.

Who can apply?

Any community-based organisation, including parish and town councils, may apply. The Council will not fund public sector bodies, such as Oxfordshire County Council or primary care trusts. Because education is a function of Oxfordshire County Council, we will not accept applications from schools. Businesses and individuals are not eligible to apply for a grant.

Visit our website at www.southoxon.gov.uk for further information and an application form or contact Jayne Bolton, Grants Manager, telephone 01491 823136, email jayne.bolton@southoxon.gov.uk or Veronica Taylor, Grants Officer, telephone 01491 823614, email veronica.taylor@southoxon.gov.uk

Hedgerows

Hedgerows are not only valuable habitats for wildlife but are also important for farming, landscape and archaeological reasons. Hedges traditionally served two purposes, to act as stock proof barriers and to define property boundaries. Unfortunately, since the middle of the 20th century, many hedgerows have been lost due to removal and neglect.

The Hedgerow Regulations 1997 were introduced to protect the important hedgerows of England and Wales. A hedgerow is considered to be important if it is at least 30 years old, longer than 20 metres and meets a number of criteria. The criteria are based on the historical value of the hedge, the number of species within it, its archaeological value and the number of associated features such as banks or ditches. If a hedgerow is to be removed then the Council's consent is required. If a hedgerow is removed without permission, this could result in an unlimited fine and/or the requirement to replace the hedgerow. The way in which the regulations apply to individual hedgerows is quite complex and you are therefore advised to contact the Countryside Section for advice and guidance on this issue.

For more information please contact Dominic Lamb, Countryside Officer on 01491 823133 or email dominic.lamb@southoxon.gov.uk

South Oxfordshire Design Guide Review

South Oxfordshire District Council has employed Roger Evans Associates (REA) to undertake a review of the South Oxfordshire Design Guide. The purpose of the guide is to assist householders, professionals and developers in dealing with and submitting development proposals and to act as a set of guidelines, which will help the Council, and its consultees, assess the design implications of planning applications. The new guide is intended to be flexible and should not constrain innovation. It will build on existing advice and, in line with Government guidance, include additional information covering sustainable construction, protection of biodiversity and advice regarding trees.

We intend to consult parish councils and other stakeholders on the first draft in March 2007 prior to the formal public consultation, which will be held in mid May 2007. The new guide is scheduled to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPD) in October 2007 and will form part of the Council's emerging Local Development Framework (LDF).

Garden waste service – update

To date, we've taken orders for 10,215 brown wheeled bins for our garden waste service, but we still have plenty in stock!

To order yours, visit our website at www.southoxon.gov.uk, call 01491 823416 or email public.amenities@southoxon.gov.uk.

Listening Learning Leading

May 2007

Thurs 3	District Council Elections
Thurs 17	Annual Council
Thurs 24	Licensing Acts/General Licensing (10.00am)
Wed 30	Planning

June 2007

Tues 5	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Thurs 7	Cabinet
Tues 12	CIF panel (10.00am)
Wed 13	Planning
Mon 18	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Tues 19	CIF panel (10.00am)
Thurs 21	Council
Tues 26	Audit and Corporate Governance
Wed 27	Planning

July 2007

Tues 3	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Thurs 5	Cabinet
Tues 10	Housing Appeals panel (10.00am)
Wed 11	Planning
Tues 17	Standards
Thurs 19	Licensing Acts/General Licensing (10.00am)
Mon 23	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Wed 25	Planning
Tues 31	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny

August 2007

Thurs 2	Cabinet
Wed 8	Planning
Thurs 16	Licensing Acts/General Licensing (10.00am)
Wed 22	Planning

September 2007

Tues 4	Benefits Appeals panel (10.00am)
Wed 5	Planning
Thurs 6	Cabinet
Mon 10	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Tues 11	Housing Appeals panel (10.00am)
Thurs 13	Council
Tues 18	Standards
Wed 19	Planning
Tues 25	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Wed 26	Audit and Corporate Governance

October 2007

Wed 3	Planning
Thurs 4	Cabinet
Tues 9	Benefit Appeals panel (10.00am)
Wed 17	Planning
Mon 22	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Wed 31	Planning

November 2007

Thurs 1	Cabinet
Tues 6	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Tues 13	Housing Appeals panel (10.00am)

November 2007 (con't)

Wed 14	Planning
Thurs 15	Council
Thurs 22	Licensing Acts/General Licensing (10.00 am)
Tues 27	Standards
Wed 28	Planning

December 2007

Mon 3	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Wed 5	Audit and Corporate Governance
Thurs 6	Cabinet
Tues 11	Benefit Appeals panel (10.00am)
Wed 12	Planning
Thurs 13	Council (10.00am)
Tues 18	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Wed 19	Planning

January 2008

Tues 8	Housing Appeals panel (10.00am)
Wed 9	Planning
Thurs 10	Cabinet
Mon 14	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Wed 23	Planning

February 2008

Wed 6	Planning
Thurs 7	Cabinet
Tues 12	Benefit Appeals panel (10.00am)
Tues 12	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Wed 20	Planning
Thurs 21	Council
Mon 25	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Thurs 28	Licensing Acts/General Licensing (10.00am)

March 2008

Tues 4	Standards
Wed 5	Planning
Thurs 6	Cabinet
Tues 11	Housing Appeals panel (10.00am)
Tues 11	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Wed 19	Planning

April 2008

Wed 2	Planning
Thurs 3	Cabinet
Mon 7	Customer and Community Scrutiny
Tues 8	Benefit Appeals panel (10.00am)
Wed 9	Audit and Corporate Governance
Wed 16	Planning
Thurs 17	Council
Tues 22	Corporate Improvement Scrutiny
Wed 30	Planning

May 2008

Thurs 1	Cabinet
Wed 14	Planning
Thurs 22	Annual Council

ALL MEETINGS COMMENCE AT 6.00PM, UNLESS STATED. MEETINGS OF COUNCIL, CABINET AND PLANNING ARE WEBCAST.

All meeting dates can be found on the Council website www.southoxon.gov.uk

If you would like any further information about any of the meetings, please contact Legal and Democratic Services at South Oxfordshire District Council on 01491 823049.

Guidance for councillors on the use of Council facilities and publicity during the election period

1. Introduction

The purpose of this note is to remind councillors of their obligations in relation to the use of Council facilities. We are circulating it now in view of the sensitivity of this issue in the period leading up to the elections on 3 May 2007. It also deals with the application of a publicity embargo between the publication of the notice of election (27 March) and polling day.

2. Background

2.1 In accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Council adopted a new code of conduct for councillors on 25 April 2002. Paragraph five (b) of that code provides that councillors must, when using or authorising the use by others of the resources of the authority:

- (i) act in accordance with the authority's requirements; and
- (ii) ensure that such resources are not used for political purposes unless that use could reasonably be regarded as likely to facilitate, or be conducive to, the discharge of the functions of the authority or of the office to which the councillor has been elected or appointed.

2.2 A breach of the code may be the subject of a complaint to the Standards Board, which has powers to investigate complaints or refer them to the Monitoring Officer for investigation. If the Standards Committee or an Adjudication Panel finds a breach of the code, it may publicly reveal what the councillor did wrong, suspend them or disqualify them.

2.3 If a councillor becomes aware of any conduct by another councillor which he or she reasonably believes involves a failure to comply with the Council's code of conduct, the councillor is under a duty to make a written allegation to that effect to the Standards Board.

2.4 In view of the potentially serious nature and consequences of a breach of the code, we are issuing this guidance to help councillors ensure that they act appropriately and comply with the Council's code, particularly during this period.

3. General principles on the use of Council facilities

The general principles of which councillors should be aware are:

- Councillors may only use the Council's facilities, equipment and name for Council purposes unless there is specific authorisation for other use. Councillors should direct any queries about authorisation to the Chief Executive or the Monitoring Officer.
- Councillors must not use the Council's facilities, equipment and name for election purposes.

- The Council cannot assist (financially or otherwise) any election candidate and this would include allowing use of its facilities for election purposes.
- This note applies to the use of Council facilities for all election purposes and for any candidate's benefit, whether they are currently members of this Council or not.
- Any breach of the Council's requirements may lead to the withdrawal of facilities (in addition to any sanctions arising from complaints to the Standards Board).

4. Use of photocopiers

Councillors may only use the photocopiers available for their use in the Council Offices for the purpose of Council business. They must not use them for copying documents for election purposes, including leaflets or campaign material. We monitor the use of photocopiers and, to avoid the necessity of having to ask for an explanation regarding any large amounts of photocopying, councillors should ask Sue Aldington or Jeanette Cox to carry this out. To further assist, councillors should regard a large amount as anything in excess of 30 sheets of copied material.

5. Use of telephones, fax machines and mobiles

Similarly, councillors may only use telephones and fax machines available for their use in the Council offices for the purposes of Council business and not for personal or election purposes. If councillors have a Council-owned mobile phone they may likewise only use this for Council business unless they have an agreed arrangement with the Head of ICT for making and paying for personal calls. Council mobiles may not be used for election purposes.

6. Use of PCs and laptops

Councillors may use PCs available for their use in the Council offices for the purposes of Council business but not for election purposes.

Some councillors have the use of Council laptops and related ICT equipment and facilities including ISDN lines. They have signed the Council's protocol for use of such facilities and should re-read that protocol and ensure that they abide by it. They are reminded that use of the equipment for any election purposes is not permitted. This includes preparing material for printing and publication and emailing documents to party members or the wider electorate that are election related.

7. Email addresses

Councillors must take particular care to ensure that they do not use the southoxon.gov.uk email address for election purposes, either for sending or receiving emails or on any publicity such as election leaflets.

8. Use of other facilities

Councillors may only use any other facilities provided for them, including stationery such as envelopes and headed or plain notepaper, for Council purposes.

9. Publicity

Legislation requires that local authorities must not publish material which supports or might affect public support for a political party. To back this up, the government has produced a Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Between the date of the publication of the notice of election (27 March) and polling day (3 May) the Council will not issue publicity or make statements which:

- deal with controversial issues
- report views or policies in such a way that identifies them with individual councillors or groups of councillors
- contain quotations from councillors.

During this period, please pass all media enquiries to the Council's Communications Manager, Shona Parsons.

Officers will also avoid holding Council events involving councillors during this period.

10. Further Advice

Please refer any queries about the advice in this note or its application to the Chief Executive, David Buckle, or the Monitoring Officer, Margaret Reed.

January 2007