

Appendix 9

Oxford City Council Budget 2013-2014: “A Fair Future for Oxford” (Equality Assessment)

The following assessment gives more details from an equality and diversity perspective on the various budget proposals.

Budget Proposal	Increase Council Tax by 1.99%
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	This is an annual consideration. The Autumn 2012 budget statement lowered the local authority tax referendum threshold to 2%. The new national Council Tax Support Scheme has been approved by parliament and will be implemented in April 2013.
What are the likely risks?	Council Tax rises are likely to have the hardest impact on the most economically disadvantaged groups such as part time and low paid workers.
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Initial joint consultation with other Oxford Districts was undertaken from August to September 2012, with 152 respondents within the City (10% from BME communities) with further opportunities for comment as part of the public consultation between December 2012 and January 2013.
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<p>The Council has agreed to suffer the loss of 10% of grant and to keep the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in place. Oxford will absorb central government cuts so should be able to minimise the impact on the low paid.</p> <p>The anticipated Council Tax collection rate has also been reduced from the current 98% to 97% due to proposed welfare benefits changes anticipated to lead to greater arrears.</p> <p>Currently 10,420 receive Council Tax Benefit, with 75% of those receiving CT benefit on full benefit and therefore the 2% increase will have no effect. Of the remaining 25% those hardest hit will be on part time or in low paid work.</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	<p>Although there was a 5.5% rise in welfare benefits in 2012/ 2013, future immediate rises will be below Council Tax uprating from April 2013, with a government cap agreed in January 2013 at 1% until 2016</p> <p>The equality risk is low/ medium and will be about proportionate rather than negative impacts. These risks were presented as part of the budget proposals to CEB in December 2012.</p> <p>Customer Services are able to provide a more detailed analysis of the numbers in receipt of full Council Tax benefit.</p>

Budget Proposal	Consider the level of Council Tax exemptions and discounts
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	October 2011 government proposals gave billing authorities greater discretion over setting "reliefs".
What are the likely risks?	Some income gains are expected
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	The proposals are being consulted on as part of the public consultation between December 2012 and January 2013
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	Positive outcomes could arise through the proposals to implement a 25% exemption for Class A and Class C properties (for 12 and 3 months respectively), a 0% exemption (e.g. full charge) for Class L and Second Homes, and a 150% council tax charge for Empty Homes after two years left unoccupied/ unfurnished.
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Low/ minimal
Budget Proposal	Increase in council house rents by 4.61% (in alignment with a national convergence formula that local authorities have a statutory obligation to follow)
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	There is a regular review of housing rents. 4.61% is equivalent to £4.27 per week (average rent will be £96.83/ week) and is expected to produce an additional £1.58 million per annum. Rent increases follow government formulas and form part of the management of the HRA, the direct ability of the Council to meet its HRA repayments and to continue to invest in Decent Homes through insulation and other improvement programmes.
What are the likely risks?	There is a possible risk of a rise in rent arrears (also factoring in the change to direct payments). But tenants in receipt of full or partial HB will be covered against rises. Tenants on low incomes are at a greater risk. A more detailed analysis of the groups at greatest risk is required to enable proactive work to prevent social housing tenants being placed at risk of being served notices seeking possession
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Agree to consult on an increase in council rents and service charges through special focus groups of council tenants/ leaseholders
What mitigating actions will	Housing hold an equalities breakdown (wherever tenants have self-declared) of all tenants and will

<p>the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?</p>	<p>be able to produce data highlighting tenants in full receipt of housing benefit and whether there might be issues around vulnerability to greater debt/ inability to pay the increases within tenants on low incomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will work in accordance with the steer from central government and the rent calculation formula. • Note: A provision for bad debt of around £500k (3%) has been put in place as a contingency. The real risk for the social housing sector is around the government policy of welfare reform, particularly “bedroom tax” and benefit caps. An initial assessment has identified around 635 tenants directly affected by this, e.g. negatively impacted financially through either 14% or 25% benefit cuts for under occupation by one or two rooms. The net result of this, coupled with a £500 p/w benefit cap, is an overall gap of £500k per year for those tenants. To proactively manage this risk the Housing Service is playing an important partnership role (in addition to linking in with financial inclusion strategies) within the DWP Welfare Reform pilot managed/ led by Customer Services. As part of this project an Outreach Worker has been appointed to liaise immediately and directly with those tenants at greatest risk and the Housing service is considering secondments of skilled Options/ Sustainment and Homelessness officers to further assist with this project. An online support tool covering benefits advice, education/ training providers and the network of local work clubs has also been developed. Welfare Reform/ Direct Payments pilot reports have been presented to the January 2013 VAP Scrutiny Committee and strong governance is in place which includes elected Councillors from the wards most affected by the changes in welfare reform.
<p>Overall assessment of the equality risks</p>	<p>The initial impact could be high but the longer term risk is low/ medium. There could be a residual risk that some groups might be disproportionately affected. The Council is confident that arrears will be held at current levels.</p>
<p>Budget Proposal</p>	<p>Increase in council house service charges by 3.1% & removal of the service charge limiter subject to a cap of £1 per week per annum on the increase</p>
<p>Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?</p>	<p>There is a regular review of leaseholder charges and these will be linked to increases in the RPI. The proposal to approve a reduction of £1 per week is spread over a four year period to reduce the impact and to end the unfairness of tenants paying different rates for the same services.</p> <p>Council’s rent accounts have “service charge limiters” that effectively reduce the level of charges payable. Annual value of limiters is c. £650,000k. The historic position was principally based on affordability</p>

What are the likely risks?	<p>It is estimated that 2,800 tenants will be initially affected. The Council will need to determine the greatest areas of disadvantage and whether any specific protected groups are placed more at risk</p>
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	<p>Agree to consult on an increase in council rents and service charges through special focus groups of council tenants/ leaseholders</p>
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<p>The proposal will remove inequity/ anomalies that tenants living side by side and in receipt of the same benefits associated with service charges are being charged different amounts. Tenants in receipt of HB will see the service charge increases covered.</p> <p>Housemark sector benchmarking indicates that the average landlord spends £157 per property on estate services each year and that spend is increasing, therefore this is a prudent financial measure to help to maintain the quality of housing stock and services.</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	<p>Low/ medium</p>
Budget Proposal	<p>Increases in Fees and Charges across Council services</p>
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>There will be an annual review of all fees and charges by each service area to reflect the cost of delivering Council services and the need to generate income to reinvest in service delivery.</p> <p>Increases are proposed in the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leisure activities average 3.2% (City Leisure) • License fees approximately 2% (Environmental Development) • Planning 15%, pre application 10% (determined by central government) (City Development) • Garden waste bins by 5% (Direct Services) • Car Parking 2% (following a two year freeze) (Direct Services) • Park and Ride from £1.50 to £2.00 (Direct Services)
What are the likely risks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some potential risks around both the loss of income/ service users, the loss of some HMOs, as well as some community groups being disproportionately affected by specific fee increases. Some fees have been determined by central government but it is important to note that the 10% rise in planning pre application charges (set by Council as part of its budget last

	<p>year) follows no increase for three years and that 2012/ 2013 saw an increase in the number of pre-application requests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has recognised that affordability of services is a significant problem for those in receipt of benefits. It has built in protections accordingly: with c. 2400 residents (accounting for 23.5% of all service users) receiving free garden waste services. Given the current economic climate for the public sector the ability to sustain this free service will be reviewed but any proposal to change would seek to minimise the impact on vulnerable communities. It remains an aim to maintain a universal and free service wherever possible and to minimise the impact of any charging to minimal or zero levels for those in receipt of benefits. Previous charges for garden waste collection services have been set below market rates. Note also that over 1000 residents receive assisted collections and that cases are reviewed annually. • Environmental Development has continued to maintain subsidised services and have regard to the ability to pay where it is not a business transaction. There is no evidence to suggest that service users are dissuaded from making initial applications or renewing licences.
<p>What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?</p>	<p>Budget consultation annually (December 2012/ January 2013). Consultation was undertaken on the new Community Infrastructure Levy in July/ August 2012. Landlord Survey undertaken by Environmental Development 2012.</p>
<p>What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Council service area proposing fee increases will undertake an analysis of service users (where identifiable) to assess any issues of potential adverse impact. City Development has put a process in place since 2011 where the Council's Equalities Business Partner receives the Weekly Planning List in order to flag up any potential issues around access at an early stage. • Crucially, the Council is committed to continuing with protections and exemptions in place. Discounts and subsidies have been put in place, with concessions frozen for Fusion/ Council Slice Card leisure membership, initiatives such as free swimming for U17s is preserved, and the Council has also created a new season concessionary ticket scheme for park and ride car parks. City Leisure is also in the process of implementing a 12 week pilot scheme for free organised sessions for U17s to be run at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre. • All fees and charges have been applied across the board. In many cases, the small increases being proposed follow a period of two years where no increases were applied. Where statutory provisions allow, discretionary reductions will be applied to be both responsive to

	<p>and influence best practice around compliance (rewarding high standards). Environmental Development undertook a Landlord Survey (via telephone) of landlords known through the licensing scheme. Market conditions seem to be the main drivers for increasing rents. Environmental Development presented these findings to VAP Scrutiny Committee in January 2013 and indicated that they would carry out a more detailed survey in the future in the next 12 months. There is a Tenancy Relations Officer (TRO) service for the private rented sector providing advice to both landlords and tenants. A newsletter and landlords Forum (both of which enjoy high awareness amongst landlords) provide other opportunities to promote the TRO service. Going forwards, although HMO licensing is a self-financing scheme, there may be room to explore movements in fees to reward good landlords.</p> <p>Generally low/ medium, but there may be groups adversely affected by specific service fees.</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Generally low/ medium, but there may be groups adversely affected by specific service fees.
Budget Proposal	New Homes Growth Bonus Payments
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	A system introduced by central government in 2011/ 2012 to pay grant based on the net growth in housing
What are the likely risks?	The net growth in housing and affordable homes will have a positive impact on regeneration projects and impact strongly on groups in receipt of benefits and in work but on lower incomes
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	The Council will monitor potential growth estimates until 2016/ 17
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	Conservative estimates indicate a positive return above £1 million for each of the years.
Overall assessment of the equality risks	The New Homes Bonus will continue to at least 2020.
Budget Proposal	Low/ minimal
Budget Proposal	Expansion of contracts by Direct Services and City Leisure
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	Developing new opportunities through proactively bidding for and winning new tenders with other authorities and Housing Associations, e.g. highway maintenance and housing, grounds maintenance contracts (such as schools)

What are the likely risks?	Positive (revenue reinvested in the business and the creation of jobs) Currently provide contributions to offset overheads in the order of £500k
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Not applicable
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	Contingencies have been put in place in lieu of income shortfall
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Low/ minimal
Budget Proposal	Apprenticeships
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	There is an existing approved/ signed off £200k budget for a current cohort of 11 apprentices over two years. This cohort of trades and administrative apprentices was recruited in September 2012. There is a further commitment to invest £150k in 2015/16 and 2016/17 and to develop the principle of an apprentice cohort being recruited every two years.
What are the likely risks?	It is not anticipated that there are any negative risks. The proposal represents a further opportunity for positive action in recruitment and community leadership, targeting the 16-19 age group and increasing employment.
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Undertaken through the budget consultation processes
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	Targeting Oxford City postcodes to develop local talent and potentially underrepresented groups within the Councils' current workforce profile (returns from the 2011 census indicate that the 15-29 group in Oxford has experienced the largest growth). The Council continues to take positive action in recruitment and promotion provisions within the Equality Act 2010 (s.159) to suggest that candidates aged 16-25 meeting the essential criteria will be guaranteed an interview/short listing (similar to a reasonable adjustment for disability under the Two Ticks scheme). Section 158 & 159 might also enable the Council to encourage more women and BME groups to apply for roles in the trade areas. The current successful scheme will be extended over the life of the plan with a commitment to plan a new cohort of apprentices every two years.

Overall assessment of the equality risks	Low/ minimal
Budget Proposal	Educational Attainment
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	There is an existing £400k per annum budget allocation ring fenced for the duration of the MTFs. This initiative provides additional funding (to that provided by the County Council) to assist with enabling children from underachieving schools and communities to access extra support.
What are the likely risks?	There is likely to be a significant positive equalities impact as the instructional programme aims to narrow the gap for children from areas of disadvantage and who have English as an additional language. All school leaders, teachers and teaching assistants in 12 schools serving communities of poverty and with the greatest need will be provided with support. In the schools that receive the support, all children in the 11 schools doing the leadership programme will benefit, and in the schools delivering the instructional programme all children benefit as this programme is delivered through whole class teaching in an inclusive way.
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Through the budget consultation processes
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<p>As of January 2013, the programme includes 12 primary schools, reaching 44% of all children in the City's primary schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% of all primary school pupils in Oxford are eligible for free school meals. The 12 schools in the World Class Teaching programme include 68% (1,265) of children eligible for free school meals, a significant percentage • 46% of all primary school pupils in Oxford are from ethnic minority groups. The 12 schools in the World Class Teaching programme reach 49% (1,566) of ethnic minority primary school children • 28% of all primary school pupils in Oxford have a first language known or believed to be other than English. The 12 schools in the World Class Teaching programme include 51% (1,011) of these children <p>The Council will need to ensure best practice is shared so that children in other schools, whose head teachers have not opted into the programme, benefit from the learning in the selected schools. Some</p>

	<p>secondary schools are already beginning to show an interest in the programme. To ensure project resilience and to maximise its impact the programme will be delivered by Oxford University Education Department, Oxford Brookes and a consortium of secondary schools, a programme of public seminars with leading edge presentations from researchers and practitioners, action learning sets to stimulate action research and share learning, coaching and mentoring to support individual leaders and core workshops to share best practice between schools. To date the project has seen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The leadership for Learning Course was launched on 17th January • KRM programmes started in two schools and will be being implemented in 6 schools by the end January. 9 schools will be involved by Easter 2013. <p>The City will be monitoring the programmes through regular meetings with the providers and the schools to ensure their long term sustainability.</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Low/ medium
Budget Proposal	Youth Activities
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	Existing £240k per annum ring fenced for the duration of the MTFS.
What are the likely risks?	The greatest risks are that the provision is not targeted to areas of greatest need and the Council is unable to expand extra activities to improve life-chances, or that any budget under spend might be then used for other projects.
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Through the budget consultation processes
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	This initiative will in part help address the County Council's reductions in youth provision (where appropriate and to the extent affordable) and will target key areas of deprivation across the city. The initiative also offers the possibility of potential partnership funding levered from other organisations such as Sport England. It also offers opportunities under the Youth Ambition grant

	<p>programme.</p> <p>The effectiveness of the investment can in part be evidenced through parts of the annual grant commissioning reports to City Executive Board that outline assessments of the impact/ value for money of commissioned projects across the city.</p> <p>Case studies are also being developed by the Positive Futures Programme Manager covering effective interventions and expanding the reach of the programme through more widespread commissioning of positive futures services by community groups and through the Youth Ambition Programme pilot, an innovative part of Oxford's ambition to provide a better service for young people through 50k of grants available for youth activities up to the end of March 2014. The current corporate target is for positive activities to reach 4000 through holiday activity programmes. A needs assessment is currently being undertaken before the writing of a strategy (provisionally scheduled for summer 2013).</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Medium risk of deprived communities not receiving critical youth services or of the Positive Futures programme employing fewer sessional staff
Budget Proposal	Disabled Transport
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	New investment
What are the likely risks?	Responsibility for concessionary fares has been transferred from the City to the County Council who have made a decision to reduce the Dial A Ride service from two to one bus per week, removing coverage across the City. There is a minimal risk that the contingency set aside in the budget may not be sufficient to cover the full cost of re providing a full City service.
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Through the budget consultation processes
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	City Council officers to negotiate an increased service with the County Council. A contingency has been earmarked for this negotiation process that has anticipated the full costs (including fees) of up to £55k required to re-establish the service.
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Low