

Oxford City Council Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015-16 to 2018-19 and 2015-16 Budget for Consultation (Equality Assessment)

The following assessment gives more details from an equality and diversity perspective on the various on-going budget proposals. It provides an initial commentary, incorporating input from Heads of Service and specialist officers, to indicate the potential risks and actual mitigating actions already in place or planned to support the investment proposals before the wider public consultation period from December 2014 to January 2015.

The draft budget has been structured so that it is in balance for the next four years, and although anticipating a more difficult national economic position ahead for local government (with some estimates from the Local Government Association of as much as 40% cuts for the sector), it recommends revisions, efficiencies and small reductions in service. Despite an assumption of zero of central government funding by 2018-19 it also outlines proposals for both continued and new investment in our communities which will bring economic growth, jobs, more decent homes and wider interventions to ensure social inclusive communities and opportunities, and to make Oxford a fairer and more equal place to live and work.

Amendments raised by the City Executive Board discussions and public consultation will be reflected in the final working document.

Budget Proposal	Increase Council Tax by 1.99% for the next four years, and maintain the existing Council Tax Support Scheme
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	This is an annual consideration. The Autumn 2012 national budget statement lowered the local authority tax referendum threshold to 2%. It has been confirmed that the local authority tax referendum threshold for 2015/16 has been set at 2% and so a 1.99% increase in Council Tax is being proposed which will mean that the Council will not be eligible for Council Tax Freeze Grant as in previous years.
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 (although these are mitigated by the council tax support scheme, which is being maintained in full).
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	The Budget Consultation consulted on a level of council tax increase at 1.5% together with an increase up to the referendum level of 1.99% and also a council tax freeze along with the Council Tax Support Scheme as part of the public consultation in January 2015.
What mitigating actions will	The Council has agreed to keep the Council Tax Support Scheme in place on the same basis as that

<p>the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?</p>	<p>introduced on 1st April 2013. This scheme will cost an estimated £200k per annum and will minimise the impact on the low paid.</p> <p>The anticipated end of year target collection rates for 2014/2015 are projected to be 97.4% but, reflecting a trend recently highlighted by the LGA and the predicted difficulties caused by changes to welfare payments and levels of benefits, Oxford is currently 0.5% behind this profile.</p> <p>Currently the total net caseload is 12,422 receiving Council Tax Benefit & Housing Benefit, with 75% of those 10,159 receiving CT benefit on full benefit and therefore the 1.99% increase will have no effect. Of the remaining 25% in receipt of some benefits those hardest hit are likely to be in part time or low paid work and will be variably impacted on a case-by-case basis. This means that the remaining 48,000 CT payers will be directly affected by the increase. The Welfare Reform Team was established to support people affected by changes to the benefits system. Although they focus on people affected by the Bedroom Tax, Benefit Cap and Local Housing Allowance changes, anyone struggling to pay their rent and other bills can be supported. As of late November 2014 they had helped 96 people into work, as well as providing support to people in downsizing, managing their debts and in breaking down a range of barriers to work.</p> <p>The 1.99% increase or £5.44 per annum for an average band D property will see the Council gain an additional £237k of income in 2015-16 and be seen in the positive context of a capital investment programme of £35million over the next four years and a £0.9 million extra spend from the previous years' budget.</p>
<p>Overall assessment of the equality risks</p>	<p>It is difficult to estimate the dimensions of equalities risks around CT increases. The Council has put in place proportionate mitigating actions such as the CT Support Scheme and the work of the Welfare Reform Team to protect the most vulnerable and economically challenged communities across Oxford.</p>
<p>Budget Proposal</p>	<p>Increase in council house rents by 3.49% (in alignment with a national convergence formula)</p>
<p>Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?</p>	<p>There is a regular review of housing rents. 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.</p> <p>The Council is recommending a move back to the rent convergence formula CPI+1%+£2 to mitigate against a potential loss of £4.5 million over the next ten years of the plan and to assist in funding additional investment of approximately £100million over the next 10 years in new build, refurbishment and energy related works</p> <p>The average rent increase after 2015/16 is assumed to be around 4.6% (assuming CPI of 2.5%) until</p>

	rental convergence is reached in 2018/19, generating additional resources of approximately £3million/year onwards infrom 2018/19.
What are the likely risks?	<p>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 but not in receipt of housing benefit are at a greater risk.</p> <p>The Housing service conducts a detailed analysis of the groups at greatest risk to enable proactive work to prevent social housing tenants being placed at risk of being served notices seeking possession.</p> <p>The Council owns 7695 properties. Across these the average increase will be 3.49% (with a maximum of 6.25%). This translates to a £3.59 increase per week and a weekly rent average of £105.77. The highest increases were at £4.91 per week for a four bedroom bungalow which affected just two tenants.</p> <p>The significant majority of Council properties have seen rent rises kept below 5%:</p> <p>1071 one bedroom flats @ £2.34 per week 1332 two bedroom flats @ £3.36 per week 2825 three bedroom houses @ £4.28 per week 235 four bedroom houses @ £4.39 per week</p>
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 the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<p>Note:The real risk for the social housing sector is around the government policy of welfare reform, particularly the “bedroom tax” and benefit caps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has earmarked reserves to meet the costs of rising homelessness. At 31-03-2015 these are estimated to be around £1 million but with no further transfers into the reserve planned; • An amount of £3.5 million in 2014-15 and 2015-16 has been allocated within the Councils capital programme to purchase dwellings to house families requiring temporary accommodation if required. This is a reduction in the budget allocation made last year and reflects the anticipation that the new homes at Barton will relieve some of the pressure currently being experienced: • In 2013/14 Oxford City Council was part of a pilot to show how a local authority can support

people affected by welfare reform. This work has continued and has been supported by a successful bid for European Social Fund money. This work forms an important part of our aspirations to mitigate the impact of welfare reform upon local people. Up until November 2014, the Welfare Reform team had worked intensively with 266 people of whom 93 have been supported into work. In addition the team provide one off housing or work related advice to anyone who requires it.

- This government initiative restricts the amount of money a family without work or working under 24 hours per week can receive in state benefits £500 per week. It includes child benefit, child tax credits and housing benefit, and so is particularly likely to affect households with several children or in the private rented sector. Up to November 2014, 193 households in total had been affected by the Benefit Cap, with 140 live cases at that point. Of these cases 65 are in the social rented sector and 128 in the private rented sector. The 140 households currently affected by the Cap are losing £520,000 of Housing Benefit annually. DHP awards totalling £166,000 have been made to many of those affected. We are notified of new capped cases on a weekly basis, so this figure will increase. The typical profile of people affected by the bedroom tax change is individuals and couples who are over 45, and have had children who have left home. Towards the end of 2013/14 the number of cases affected by this measure stabilised at around 670-700 of which approximately two thirds are Council tenants. Although the overall numbers of people affected are stable there is a significant degree of movement in and out of this group as a result of changes in circumstances. The annual loss in Housing Benefit for this group is approximately £ 640,000. By the end of September 223 cases had received a Discretionary Housing Payment to meet the Housing Benefit shortfall in order to give the claimant time to find a permanent solution. The total amount awarded to date is £48,000
- Of those cases that have been capped, the impact is as follows: 10 are losing over £200 per week in Housing Benefit, 19 are losing between £100 and £200, 34 are losing between £50 and £100, while 77 are losing under £50.
- 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 and led by Customer Services. An Outreach Worker liaises immediately and directly with those tenants at greatest risk, the Housing service is seconding skilled Options/ Sustainment and Homelessness officers to further assist with this project, and an online

	<p>support tool covering benefits advice, education/ training providers and the network of local work clubs has also been developed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare Reform/ Direct Payments pilot reports have been regularly presented to Scrutiny Committee and recently the new Inequalities Scrutiny Committee, with strong governance in place which includes councillors as well as monthly highlight reports. • Part of the money raised is being spent on energy efficiency audits in council properties and an energy audit for every tenant. This could be expected to reduce fuel bills quite substantially and off-set the rent increase.
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Overall, and particularly because of the combination of high levels of deprivation in parts of Oxford, and also very high housing costs, Oxford City Council remains especially exposed to adverse financial pressures resulting from welfare reform and the need for support is critical
Budget Proposal	Increase in council house service charges by 3.7% in 2014/ 15 and CPI + 1% thereafter & removal of the service charge limiter subject to a cap of £1 per week per annum on the increase as agreed in the 2013/ 2014 budget
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>There is a regular review of leaseholder charges (caretaking, cleaning, CCTV, communal areas) and these will be linked to increases in the RPI.</p> <p>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. The removal of the limiter will see an increase in service charge income from £168k in 2103/ 14 to £80k in 2015/ 16 and a further £50k in 2016/17.</p>
What are the likely risks?	<p>It is estimated that 2,800 tenants were potentially impacted in the last financial year. This figure reduces significantly each year as the limiters are removed.</p> <p>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?	Agree to consult on an increase in council rents and service charges through special focus groups of council tenants/ leaseholders
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative	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.

impacts?	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.
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Strong governance and review will mitigate against any adverse impacts, although none have been flagged
Budget Proposal	Increases in Fees and Charges across Council services
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>The MTFS allows for fees and charges to increase over the medium term in line with “what the market can bear”. In reality this means that most charges remain at the 2014/ 15 prices. Increases are proposed in the following services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garden waste 5.0% increases in charges(Direct Services) • Licenses including sex establishments, bingo premises, betting and gaming centres, HMO licenses ranging from 1% to 4% increases; • Leisure activities including swimming, tennis, membership fees, fitness gyms, sports pitch and changing room hire where the majority of fees and charges show a proposed increase of 10p to £1.20 or 2% to 4.35%. Annual Slice card increases range from £2 to £33 per annum or 2.1% to 5.5%; • Pest Control increases range from 1.19%, representing a £1 increase for moths up to 3.17% representing £2 for ants; • Cemeteries increases range from 2% to 2.78% for exclusive burial rights, representing a £25 increase for purchasing 50 year adult grave rights for residents and £50 for non-residents. • Car Parking – increases of between 10p and 30p or 2% and 8% largely relating to the suburban car parks with a £1 increase proposed for 2018-19 on park and ride sites • Garages - 5% increase across the aboard plus an additional £2 for premium sites • Additional 2% income from car parking charges and a separate increase in Park & Ride charges
What are the likely risks?	<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

	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. Although pest control charges for people in receipt of benefits will increase they are still lower than for other customers and the ED service has put plans in place to develop a different and more cost effective way of delivering pest control services, e.g. to develop an online resource that will give advice and guidance and allow for more cost neutral/ low cost treatments to be purchased from the Council, with a pest controller delivering the products (in a sense a DIY treatment option) and an advice sheet to service users. • Increase in commercial lease income and an increase in income from Land Charges/ Development Control fees are not considered to have any risks of adversely affecting any protected group under the Equality Act 2010.
<p>What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?</p>	<p>Budget consultation annually (December 2014/ January 2015).</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. For example, 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 the concessions continuing for Fusion/ Council Slice Card leisure membership and subsidised initiatives such as free swimming for U17s preserved for the duration of the MTFs, but with reduced financial support where user reviews indicate that take-up does not merit maintaining the initial estimated investment required. • All fees and charges have been applied across the board. In many cases, the small increases

	being proposed follow a period where no increases where applied. Where statutory provisions allow, discretionary reductions will be applied to be both responsive to and influence best practice around compliance (rewarding high standards).
Overall assessment of the equality risks	There may be groups adversely affected by specific service fees, however, consultation and monitoring will take place with these groups once identified.
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; supporting strategic housing and other local economic growth priorities through Local Enterprise Partnerships
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 next three years. No further New Homes Bonus has been assumed for 2018 and beyond
Overall assessment of the equality risks	The main risk is that variation in the income from the New Homes Bonus as a result of new homes constructed and occupied during a given 12 months period is lower than expected which might impact on a reduction to the Council's Capital Programme
Budget Proposal	Apprenticeships
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	The Council previously committed to invest £150k in 2015/16 and 2016/17 to support an apprentice cohort being recruited every two years (with the aspiration to recruit between 5-10 apprentices each cohort and to explore the development of new apprenticeships at higher/ advanced levels as well as potential professional traineeships). From 2015/16 it is proposed to reduce support by £50k although cohorts will continue to be recruited every two years.
What are the likely risks?	The impact in 2015/16 is that service areas hosting apprentices will need to pay a greater contribution necessary to retain their apprentices.

What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Undertaken through the budget consultation processes between December 2104 and January 2015
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<p>Council officers reviewed the number of apprentices that can be afforded within the new £100k parameters and two open apprentice vacancies will be withdrawn in order to meet the budget reduction and ensure a sustainable programme. Services will need to contribute a bigger % of the overall costs</p> <p>The current successful scheme will still be run over the life of the plan but with a reduction in the number of apprenticeships offered every two years for each new cohort</p> <p>The Council will continue to take positive action in recruitment and promotion for apprentices using provisions within the Equality Act 2010 (s.159): where candidates aged 16-24 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.</p> <p>It also potentially gives the Council a different opportunity to engage with NEETs, for instance developing new Street scene/ cleansing apprenticeships at NVQ Level 2, and to look for alternative sources of financial support to make such schemes sustainable</p> <p>The Council will reassess its work experience policy in order that every possible avenue for understanding and developing employability skills for students within OX1-OX4 postcodes can be opened up to improve both the quality of future applicants and a clearer understanding of the future opportunities in the 2016-2018 cohort.</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	There are no estimated equalities risks posed by the decision to reduce the budget.
Budget Proposal	Service reduction: Educational Attainment
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	There was a previous commitment to a £400k per annum budget allocation ring fenced for the duration of the MTFs. This initiative provided additional funding (to that provided by the County Council) to assist with enabling children from underachieving primary and secondary schools and communities to access extra support to deliver a step change in educational attainment, which in Oxford City is amongst the lowest in the country. Preliminary 2014 test results show higher attainment

	<p>levels. Some key gaps have narrowed, e.g. girls vs. boys and children on free school meals vs. children not on free school meals.</p> <p>The impacts of the proposed phased reductions in the budget over the next two years (£43k in 2015/16 and down to £23k in 2016/17) are difficult to anticipate as by its nature the success of the programme does not just lie in the measurements from examination results.</p> <p>A smaller programme from 2015/2016 will logically see a diminution in an opportunity to tackle areas where income deprivation and ESOL do have links with literacy, numeracy and gaining qualifications that can help, in the longer term, to secure employment at or above the living wage</p>
<p>What are the likely risks?</p>	<p>It is still likely to have significant positive equalities and social inclusion impacts in those schools still involved in the programme, as the instructional programme aims to narrow the gap for children from areas of disadvantage and who have English as an additional language.</p> <p>In the schools that continue to receive the support, all children in the 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.</p> <p>Up to 75 school staff have participated in a series of sessions led by international experts and leading scholars from the two universities. There were also regular meetings of 'action learning sets' in which teachers worked together on shared challenges. The co-sharing of best practice will continue in order that maximum advantages can be gained by the reduced investment.</p>
<p>What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?</p>	<p>Through the budget consultation processes</p>
<p>What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?</p>	<p>The City is also continuing to support schools through an assisted housing scheme and two schools have initially taken up the offer to advertise posts with an offer of assistance in order to retain stable leadership teams.</p> <p>The City Council has also agreed that it will support Headteachers to continue sharing best practice</p>

	<p>by providing pump priming funding for a collaborative partnership project led by city primary school Headteachers.</p> <p>The Deputy Director of the programme, Prof Debra McGregor of Oxford Brookes School of Education, says: “We were always determined to ensure that the programme would lead to continuing leadership development in these schools – in other words that the developments would continue after this programme had finished.”</p> <p>It is also significant that the schools themselves are establishing a network through which they will continue to provide support to each other. Attainment in the 11 schools on the leadership programme has improved in 2014. Overall for 7 year olds, over the two years, there has been a faster rate of progress in target schools than nationally</p> <p>The Education Attainment Budget has also supported a Business in the Community initiative for three years until 2016/17: where the Council has linked with Cherwell School and financed two other Oxford cluster schools as a partner to deliver mentoring, careers workshops et al linked specifically to the leadership, curriculum (STEM subjects), enterprise and employability and wider issues identified by each school. The Council has quickly become a lead partner and has already trained over 30 mentors who have been matched with students in Year 11 and Year 12 to undertake a regular monthly mentoring programme. There is an action plan in place for further interventions throughout 2015. This partnership will also enable the Council to help Year 7-9s with citizenship and life skills and might see staff volunteer as reading buddies to help students develop confidence with literacy. The BiTC programme will develop strong links with Careers guidance leads in all cluster schools and interventions have already started to have an impact across the partnership.</p>
Overall assessment of the equality risks	<p>The educational attainment programme has arguably had a high positive impact on reducing social inequality in key regeneration areas across the City. But it is important to note the comments from Programme Director Professor Ian Menter (University of Oxford, Department of Education) to put these impacts in context of other interventions before trying to determine what the equality risks might be:</p> <p>“However, we should be cautious about suggesting there is any direct link between this programme and improvement in the schools’ performance. The tests measuring the performance of children have</p>

	improved but these improvements will have been achieved over a period of time. I think this progress reflects the deep and sustained commitment of the staff, the children and their families.”
Overall assessment of the equality risks	There is a risk of deprived communities not receiving critical youth services or of the Positive Futures programme employing fewer sessional staff, but the Council’s decision to invest in this area can only have positive impacts at a time when County Council funding is under threat of cuts.
Budget Proposal	Living Wage
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>Oxford City Council has an underlying commitment to pay rates that will always exceed the national rate. The proposal to continue to uplift the living wage should not be confused with normal pay bargaining mechanisms nor will it act as a unilateral agreement on pay. It recommends a way to prudently manage consequential contractual inflation in alignment with medium term financial planning for 2014/ 15 onwards.</p> <p>The Council has already paid considerable attention to its lowest paid staff as part of its five year pay bargaining deal and is already paying staff above the living wage.</p> <p>Note that rates for unskilled/ new Apprentices will be different depending on existing industry rates and apprentices are paid at 85% of the Living Wage. It is the aspiration of the Council’s apprenticeship programmes that qualified apprentices are succession planned into full time positions where posts are available at the end of their initial fixed term apprentice contracts.</p>
What are the likely risks?	It is anticipated that the only direct potential impacts are (1) those on the future costs of procurement rather than on an individual level, and (2) ensuring that adjustment mechanisms to the OLW are applied each April to allow time for budgeting and implementation.
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	The basis for determining and applying any future increase in the OLW will not require wider consultation as it merely appends a current policy commitment reflecting significant leadership as an employer and in terms of our community and wider social responsibilities. The new London living wage has been announced and it is increasing from £8.80 to £9.15. The Oxford Living Wage has been set at 95% of the LLW. This will increase our wage from £8.36 to £8.69 and will be implemented with effect from 1st April 2015 . Note that the lowest non-apprentice grade scale point is paid at £8.98 per hour
What mitigating actions will	It is not anticipated that significant adjustments in the medium term financial plan will be necessary to

<p>the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?</p>	<p>meet these additional costs. The proposal to introduce and maintain a percentage differential between the Oxford Living Wage and the London Living Wage will be subject to an annual review by the Head of HR and sign offs from Finance and Legal.</p>
<p>Overall assessment of the equality risks</p>	<p>The Council believes by being only one of 18 local authorities committed to paying the national living wage (£7.85), and indeed going well beyond this level (to a proposed rate of £8.69 effective from April 2015), that the policy has a strong socio economic impact across all protected characteristics recognised under the Equality Act 2010 and might encourage other local employers to follow suit.</p> <p>The most significant impacts of paying an OLW are therefore likely to have positive effects on the Council's recruitment and retention, improved staff morale, motivation, productivity and the broader reputational impacts of being an ethical employer, campaigner and community leader influencing other employers to pay a living wage</p>
<p>Budget Proposal</p>	<p>New Investment and Service Enhancement proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BUNGEE: £8k in 2015/16 for a new mobile phone app for young people, designed with input from Ice Station Digital/ Film Oxford. This app was launched over the 21st/ 22nd November 2014 and will enable easy access to all the sporting, cultural and social activities going on across the county. A "geo positioning" feature will enable users to see where the events are. It is estimated that around 40,00 activities take place each year so this app will enable young people to "play more, see more, do more" (http://www.bungeeoxford.com/) • Tenancy Sustainment Post(mental health support): £36K to fulfil a growing need for tenants requiring specialist support associated with mental health conditions • City Ambassadors: The Oxford City Centre Ambassador project was launched in July 2014, in response to the reoccurring nuisances and anti-social behaviour that often blights the city centre. Complaints from traders, members of the public and councillor's included begging, rough sleeping, street drinking, illegal street trading, graffiti and litter. As trained Security Industry Association accredited personnel, combined with on the job training (delivered by the

City Centre Manager and Community Response Officers) the Ambassadors have a unique ability to negotiate, influence and persuade such unwanted activities to cease their behaviour. The role of City Centre Ambassadors is not just to deal with anti-social behaviour but to welcome and provide information to city centre visitors. This is the role the general public tends to see most. They support the activities of the security and police services, interface with businesses and undertake minor environmental duties. They are the "eyes and ears" for both City and County councils, checking for general maintenance of the city, e.g. lighting, street furniture and incorrectly presented commercial waste, promptly reporting it through to the council department or service provider responsible for managing and rectifying such matters. Ambassador duties could extend to assisting in reducing the collection time of sharps (needles) and other drug paraphernalia that is sometimes discarded around the city centre, removal of fly posters, assistance with stewarding city centre events and issuing fixed penalty notices for littering, dog fouling and failing to obtain a permit to distribute free printed matter. The Council will commit £32k per annum to continuing the City Ambassadors scheme which will help to maximise the quality of the visitor experience in Oxford City Centre through their commitment to a safer, cleaner and greener public realm, which will no doubt result in the city centre's reputation being enhanced further and repeat visits increasing

- **Graffiti removal from private buildings-** £33k per annum to initially fund a post to obtain agreements with key private property owners in the city
- **Energy Efficiency officers – £100k**to provide resources for the next 2 year period to undertake energy survey work within Council properties and provide remedial changes for tenants.
- **HRA Capital Programme:** Gradual annual increase in Disabled Adaptations from £573k in 2015/2016 to £617k in 2018/19, an uplift in investment in the Oxford Standard for the Councils' social housing stock from £624k in 2015/16 to £702k in 2018/19, the maintenance of investment levels in the Great Estates (enhancements and regeneration) programme over the MTFS, significant investment in Homes at Barton rising from £615k in 2015/16 to £5,472,000 million in 2018/19, and investment committed for Barton Underhill Circus (parades and shops with maisonettes) starting with £885k in 2016/17

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Fund Capital Programme: Investment in new skate parks (location to be agreed between Bertie Place, Rose Hill, Marston/ Northway) of £70k, investment in the Hard of Hearing Centre of £50k from the CIL in 2016/17, and significant investment in improvements to the Westgate area public realm of £567 per annum between 2016-18
<p>Budget Proposal</p>	<p>Noting changes to positive equalities initiatives and investment proposals established in the budget in 2012/13 which are assumed to continue within the Council's base budget and will provide on-going support for the Council's Corporate Plan objectives for a Vibrant Sustainable Economy, Meeting Housing Needs, Strong Active Communities and a Cleaner Greener Oxford:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of free swimming: This will deliver a substantial programme to ensure that young people, notably from backgrounds which are less likely to access free swimming, are aware of and take advantage of the opportunity. Following a review of the impact of this initiative a reduced amount of £5,400 per annum will be allocated from 2015/16 to support the programme, although this is an efficiency saving and is not expected to have a front-line impact. It is considered a low equalities risk • Groundworks Environmental Improvement Programme: This will deliver a social enterprise programme to clear watercourses, ditches and streams to improve flood protection. £6k per annum. Further investment of £100k in environmental sustainability has been added for 2015/15 only to support advice on the Thames water catchment study with regards to the foul water network • Events – providing events in the city - £50k per annum. The events budget will be reduced by £16k per annum from 2015/16. The Lord Mayors celebration will be discontinued but it is not anticipated that this will have a significant effect on the ability of the Council to deliver a diverse range of events going forwards. Low risk.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleaner greener area based door-to-door campaign: This budget extends successful work to promote the “Cleaner Greener” Oxford agenda, improving recycling and street cleanliness throughout the City. £12k per annum. This budget will be removed from 2015/16 but it is not anticipated that there will be any negative equalities impacts or reduction in services.• Dial a Ride transport costs: The Council has continued to set aside £50k per annum to contribute to the costs of sustaining a book in advance door-to-door minibus service for people with mobility problems who cannot use normal public transport and do not have private transport. Users will typically have mobility difficulties, visual difficulties, severe learning difficulties (provided the person can travel on their own or is provided with an escort throughout the journey), and age-related frailty or other significant difficulties in using conventional public transport. Escorts and guides can also travel with a registered user. Previously it was our intention to release this money to the County Council, provided it agreed that it would supplement, not displace, its own funding, but so far no such agreement has been reached. As a consequence, we will explore other ways of providing additional dial-a-ride services with local groups.
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