

Oxford City Council Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019-20 to 2021-2022 and 2018-19 Budget for Consultation (Equality Assessment)

The following assessment gives more details from an equality and diversity perspective on the Council's 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 2017 to January 2018.

The draft budget has been structured so that it is in balance for the next four years, and although post Brexit national economic pressures on local government are ever present, it recommends revisions, efficiencies and small reductions in service but aims to protect frontline services as far as possible, particularly for the most vulnerable. Despite an assumption of zero central government revenue support grant funding by 01/04/2019 it also includes efficiencies, increased income and service charges and outlines proposals to facilitate capital investment for large scale regeneration projects which will bring economic growth, jobs, more decent homes and wider interventions to ensure social inclusive communities and opportunities: underpinning the Council's vision of "Building a World Class City for Everyone".

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 an expected 2.99% for 2018/19 followed by subsequent annual increases of 2.99%, and maintain the existing Council Tax Support Scheme
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	This is an annual consideration. The Provisional Finance Settlement December announced changes in the referendum levels. Authorities are able to increase council tax by an additional 1% in 2018-19 and 2019-20 and remain within the referendum level. The recommendation is for the council to increase council tax up to the maximum level at which a referendum is not required. The current assumptions are for a 2.99% council tax rise 2018/19 followed by increases of 2.99% thereafter AT 1.99% on the basis that levels higher could be capped by the Government
What are the likely risks?	<p>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).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased arrears due to benefit changes arising from the roll out of universal credit

What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	There will be further opportunities for comment on the level of council tax increase as part of the public consultation in January 2017. The Council has already consulted on changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme which are minimal and aimed at increasing efficient administration rather than reducing support to claimants. The Council is one of only 35 councils in the country that has retained the parameters of the existing scheme introduced in April 2013.									
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	The City Executive Board agreed in December 2017 the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme on the same basis as that introduced on 1st April 2013. This, in essence, continues the previous level of entitlement provided by Council Tax Benefit, and has not passed on the reduction in government funding for council tax relief to those on the lowest incomes in the city. It is estimated the scheme will cost the Council £1.2 million in 2018/19, with the full cost of the scheme of £1.6 million being borne by the Council when the Revenue Support Grant is reduced to zero with effect from 01/04/2019.									
Overall assessment of the equality risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • Currently the total net caseload is 10,825 receiving Council Tax Benefit & Housing Benefit, with 5,000 of those receiving CT benefit on full benefit and therefore the 1.99% increase will have no effect. <table border="1"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Race Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Disability Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Age Neutral</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Gender reassignment Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Religion or Belief Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Sexual Orientation Neutral</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Sex</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Pregnancy and Maternity</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Marriage & Civil Partnership</td> </tr> </table>	Race Neutral	Disability Neutral	Age Neutral	Gender reassignment Neutral	Religion or Belief Neutral	Sexual Orientation Neutral	Sex	Pregnancy and Maternity	Marriage & Civil Partnership
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Budget Proposal	Rent setting: Decrease in council house rents by 1% per annum for the next three years and then by CPI +1%																																								
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>The Welfare Reform and Work Bill introduced a policy with effect from April 2016 that social housing rents must be reduced by 1% per year for 4 years from their 8 July 2015 position.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rents in social housing to be reduced by 1% a year for four years. Local authorities and housing associations will need to find efficiencies to fund the rent reductions • Forced Sale of High Value Council Housing (HVCH) • Associated rates of housing benefit capped at the relevant local housing allowance 																																								
What are the likely risks?	<p>The Government have indicated that local authorities will be set guideline rent increases of CPI +1% with effect from 1/4/2020 for a period of 5 years. Given this guideline, actual rents are assumed to increase towards formula rent over a four year period 2020/21 to 2023/24 which equates to 4% per annum. The impact on rents for 2018/19 and summary for the next three years is shown in the table below:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="5">Table 7 : Effect of Rent Changes on Average Rent 2018/19 to 2021/22</th> </tr> <tr> <th rowspan="2"></th> <th colspan="3">Actual Average Weekly Rent</th> <th rowspan="2">Formula Rent</th> </tr> <tr> <th>Change</th> <th>Change</th> <th>Average weekly Rent</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>%</th> <th>£</th> <th>£</th> <th>£</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2018/19</td> <td>(1.00)</td> <td>(0.85)</td> <td>104.58</td> <td>108.89</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019/20</td> <td>(1.00)</td> <td>(0.85)</td> <td>103.73</td> <td>107.80</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>4.00</td> <td>4.19</td> <td>107.92</td> <td>111.04</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>4.00</td> <td>4.26</td> <td>112.18</td> <td>114.37</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Table 7 : Effect of Rent Changes on Average Rent 2018/19 to 2021/22						Actual Average Weekly Rent			Formula Rent	Change	Change	Average weekly Rent		%	£	£	£	2018/19	(1.00)	(0.85)	104.58	108.89	2019/20	(1.00)	(0.85)	103.73	107.80	2020/21	4.00	4.19	107.92	111.04	2021/22	4.00	4.26	112.18	114.37
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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?	In the initial years the 1% reduction in rents should not cause additional financial problems to customers. Issues may arise from the implementation of universal credit which is being monitored by the Council. Additional staffing in rent collection should assist in providing an early warning mechanism of arrears increasing and a resource to help tackle the issue.									
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Should not be material in the early years given the rent decreases being implemented. The increases in the later years of the plan aim to drive rents towards target providing additional resources for future house building. This may affect more customers more than others with 70% of all tenants currently in receipt of housing benefit.									
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Budget Proposal	Roll out of Universal Credit									
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	The roll out of universal credit commenced in Oxford on 18 th October 2017 for all working age claimants replacing a number of existing benefits and tax credits. Full roll out to all claimants is likely to take until 2022 .Within the Council budget, provision has been made for changes arising from Universal Credit which will impact on staffing. Staffing reductions will only be made from 2018-19, to									

	allow for dealing with any adverse workloads.																		
What are the likely risks?	Risk to the Council in terms of increased rent and council tax arrears arising from claimants moved onto Universal Credit. Risk in terms of increased homelessness.																		
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Public consultation on Council Tax Reduction Scheme																		
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	The Council has slipped savings in its MTFP in The Housing Benefit and Customer Services areas to future years to mitigate against increased workloads. In addition it has increased staffing in the Incomes Team to deal with increased arrears. The Council has also set aside a sum of money in a hardship fund to help claimants in most need. The Autumn Budget statement made concessions in the Universal Credit Scheme which may mitigate adverse financial implications for claimants.																		
Overall assessment of the equality risks	<p>Strong governance and review will mitigate against any adverse impacts, although none have been flagged</p> <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Race</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Disability</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Age</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> </tr> </table> <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Gender reassignment</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Religion or Belief</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Sexual Orientation</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> </tr> </table> <hr/> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Sex</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Pregnancy and Maternity</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Marriage & Civil Partnership</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Neutral</td> </tr> </table>	Race	Disability	Age	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Gender reassignment	Religion or Belief	Sexual Orientation	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Sex	Pregnancy and Maternity	Marriage & Civil Partnership	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
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Budget Proposal	Increases in Fees and Charges across Council services																		
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	The Medium Term Financial Strategy for the next four years allows for fees and charges to increase over the medium term resulting in increased income of around £2.4 million by 2021-22. In 2018-19 there are increases in the areas shown below (details of which will appear in the main																		

	<p>CEB Budget report):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Garden waste bins - £2 per bin per year ii. Pre-application advice for planning services - 4% iii. Leisure activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual Swimming – 10p (2.2%) • Adult gym – 20p (2.4%) • Adult Skating - 20p (2.4%) • Adult Tennis – reduction 50p (8.3%) iv. Pest Control increases for rats and mice £10 increases to more accurately reflecting the cost of the service v. Cemeteries increases range from (1.0% to 2.5%) - £5 to £20 vi. Off street Car Parking – increases of around 50p per hour vii. Garages – 65p per week (4.3%).
What are the likely risks?	That customers will be unable to afford to purchase council services
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Budget consultation annually (December 2017/ January 2018).
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<p>The Council gives concessions to customers that are in receipt of Housing Benefit in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonus Concessionary Leisure Card – qualifying benefits such as : Job seeker’s allowance, Unemployed / interim payment, Youth training courses / new deal, Income support, Housing benefit, Council Tax benefit, Pension credit, Asylum Seeker, Invalid Care Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) - Disability Living Allowance, NHS: AG2, AG3, HC2 or HC3 Certificate holders, and Foster Carers • Free Swimming for children under 17 at various sessions during the week

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free one off winter garden clearance for council tenants in receipt of Council tax reduction or housing benefit and physically unable to carry out work • A range of pest control visits for mice, rats, wasps, ants, moths, fleas, squirrels and other pests where the customer is in receipt of Housing Benefit • Garden waste collection where customer is in receipt of benefit <p>Each Council service area proposing fee increases will undertake a separate analysis of service users (where identifiable) to assess any issues of potential adverse impact.</p> <p>All fees and charges have been applied across the board. In many cases, the small increases being proposed follow a period where no increases were applied. Where statutory provisions allow, discretionary reductions will be applied to be both responsive to and influence best practice around compliance (rewarding high standards).</p> <p>With the withdrawal of Housing Benefit in favour of Universal Credit, it will not be possible to identify all such benefits and whilst the numbers on Universal Credit are limited at present they will grow over the next 12-18 months. It is therefore recommended that concessions for the fees and charges identified above are granted where claimants are either in receipt of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Universal Credit, or in the case of leisure concessions for the allowances identified above until such time as those benefits are phased out.</p>									
Overall assessment of the equality risks	<p>There may be groups adversely affected by specific service fees, however, consultation and monitoring will take place with these groups once identified.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Race</td> <td>Disability</td> <td>Age</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>Neutral</td> <td>Neutral</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gender reassignment</td> <td>Religion or Belief</td> <td>Sexual Orientation</td> </tr> </table>	Race	Disability	Age	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Gender reassignment	Religion or Belief	Sexual Orientation
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Budget Proposal	Significant pressures on the Council's ability to deliver a balanced MTFP and continue to provide services to the public:		
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>General economic claimant remains uncertain with :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast that the UK economy would grow by 2% in 2017, a slightly slower rate in 2018, before picking up to 2% in 2021. • Britain's budget deficit has fallen to its lowest level in any September for the last 10 years and if tax and spending plans remain on course for the rest of the year the forecast deficit position for 2017-18 will undershoot by £10 bn pushing it closer to £48 billion than the forecast £58 billion • The Monetary Policy Committee met on 2nd November 2017 and voted unanimously to increase the base rate by 0.25% to 0.5%. It is yet to be seen whether this will be a one off increase in the short term or the start of a slow, but regular, increase in Bank Rate; while there is so much uncertainty regarding the Brexit negotiations, consumer confidence, and business confidence to spend on investing, it is far too early to be confident about how the next two years will pan out • Revenue support grant reduces to zero from 1/4/2019 		
What are the likely risks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council need to reduce spend or run down balances and reserves to stay within budget envelope 		
What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Budget consultation annually (December 2017/ January 2018)		
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set against a background of economic/ financial uncertainty Members have exercised constraint in terms of adding ongoing new items of expenditure into the budget from 2018-19. • The budget assumes transfers to and from the working balance which as at 1/4/2017 were around £3.620 million; the minimum level recommended by the Councils Chief Financial 		

	<p>Officer that the Council should hold. Over the four year period of the MTFP balances will remain at this level provided a useful cushion for any unexpected adverse financial issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contingencies held against unachieved savings and efficiencies • Establish a local authority trading company to increase trading and return increased income to the Council 									
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Budget Proposal	General Fund Capital Programme									
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>Appendix 6 gives details of the Councils draft capital programme and includes significant items such as the Museum of Oxford £2.842 million, £2.6 million on flood relief schemes, community centre improvements £3.8 million, Disabled Facility Grants £4.5 million, parks, open spaces and athletics facilities £5 million, car parks resurfacing and improvements £1.2 million, ongoing renewal of council vehicles £9.2 million, £69 million loans to companies, investment in ICT £2.4 million and improvements to investment properties £9.2 million.</p> <p>Funding of the Programme is by revenue £16.1 million (11%), Capital Receipts £38.3 million (26.1%) Community Infrastructure Levy £4.0 million (2.7%), borrowing £81.9 million (55.9%) and Government Grants and third party contributions £6.3 million (4.3%). All revenue costs have been included in the General Fund revenue budget</p>									

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Budget Proposal	Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme									
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>The revised programme of £81 million over the next 4 years includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Estates enhancement of car parking and other infrastructure £3.6 million • Barton Regeneration £2.4 million • Improvements to doors, windows, controlled entry including the Oxford Standard - £3.2 million • Replacements of kitchens, bathrooms, roofs, heating and electrics -£21.2 million • Blackbird Leys Regeneration - £5.4 million – to undertake regeneration at the heart of the estate • New Build housing at Bracegirdle and Salford Rd and the East Oxford site • Purchase land or property for development - £1million • A contingency of £23.1 million to mitigate the potential financial effect of the Government's initiatives around High Value Council Housing in lieu of selling high value council housing 									
What are the likely risks?	<p>The main risks to the Capital Programme are set out in Appendix 8 and summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposals as detailed before are not secured causing a shortfall in funding of schemes 									

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimate for payment to Government in respect of HVCH is insufficient • Slippage in Capital Programme and impact on delivery of priorities • Robustness of estimates 		
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