

Oxford City Council Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021-22 to 2023-2024 and 2020-21 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 2019 to January 2020.

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. In addition it includes additional expenditure on work on the prevention of homelessness including the opening of new accommodation and assessment centre for rough sleepers at 1 Floyds Row. It also outlines proposals to facilitate capital investment for large scale regeneration projects which will bring economic growth, jobs, more social and affordable housing and wider interventions to ensure social inclusive communities and opportunities: underpinning the Council’s vision of “Building a World Class City for Everyone”. In addition it assumes additional investment of £14.8 million in infrastructure and transformation in Oxford Direct Services Ltd to drive additional surpluses back to the council of around £3 million per annum by the end of the 4 year plan.

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Budget Proposal	Increase Council Tax by an expected 1.99% for 2020/21 followed by subsequent annual increases of 1.99%, and maintain the existing Council Tax Support Scheme
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	This is an annual consideration. This assumes no new changes in the The Provisional Finance Settlement in December 2019 to those already announced by the Government. Currently District authorities are able to increase council tax by up to 2% or £5 whichever is the higher. For district councils the referendum level is exceeded if council tax is to be increased by 2% or more and more than £5.00 on a Band D property – i.e. an increase of more than 2% is permitted as long as it does not exceed £5.00 on a Band D property. The Council is proposing an increase of 1.99% since the increase at that level is £6.13 per annum
What are the likely risks?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased arrears due Council tax increases 															
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 during the period December 2019 to January 2020. The Council has already consulted on changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme which are minimal. 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 Council is currently consulting on minor changes to the CTR scheme for 2020-21 and these minor changes are expected to be approved at Cabinet in January 2020.															
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 9619 receiving Council Tax Benefit & Housing Benefit, with 5,000 of those receiving CTR discount on full and therefore the 1.99% increase will have no effect. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">Race</td> <td style="width: 33%;">Disability</td> <td style="width: 33%;">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> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>Neutral</td> <td>Neutral</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sex</td> <td>Pregnancy and Maternity</td> <td>Marriage & Civil Partnership</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
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Budget Proposal	Rent setting: Decrease in council house rents by 2.70% per annum for 2020/21.											
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	Following a 4 year period of 1% rent reduction under the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, in 2017 the Government announced that from 1 st April 2020 under the 2020 rent standard, rent would be increased by CPI +1% for a period of 5 years for local authority and housing association social rents. For 2021/21 the CPI rate is 1.7% and hence council house rents are estimated to increase by 2.7% from 2019-20 levels, with 3% increases estimated for future years.											
What are the likely risks?	The increase for 2020-21 represents an average of £3.06 per week. There is a risk of increased rents arrears which could arise as a result of the increase. Issues may arise from the implementation of universal credit which is being monitored by the Council											
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?	Additional staffing in rent collection should assist in providing an early warning mechanism of arrears increasing and a resource to help tackle the potential increased rent arrears. Currently around 70% of council tenants are 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 has been delayed by the Government to 2024 .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 2022-23, 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?	There is no further public consultation on the roll out of Universal Credit		
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.		
Overall assessment of the equality risks	Strong governance and review will mitigate against any adverse impacts, although none have been flagged		
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Budget Proposal	Increases in Fees and Charges across Council services
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>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 £2.7 million by 2023-24. In 2020-21 there are increases in the areas shown below</p> <p>Increases in Fees and Charges – Fees and charge income is projected to increase by around £2.9 million per annum by 2023-24 inclusive of income from Oxford Direct Services. Details of specific fees and charges increases in 2020-21 are given in Appendix 8 with summary details below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Garden waste bins - £2 per bin per year (4.08%) ii. Leisure activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports - 40p -£1.50 – (2.65% to 3%) • Summer activities – £0 - £50p- (0% -7.7%) • Casual Swimming – 10p (2.1%) • Adult gym – 30p (3.4%) • Adult Skating - 30p (3.5%) iii. Pest Control increases – no increase iv. Cemeteries adult right of burial £10 (1.01%) v. Off street Car Parking – No increase Garages – £0.27 -1.69%
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 2019/ January 2020).
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	Concessions are given to users of the services who are in receipt of housing benefit, Council Tax Reduction and the housing element of universal credit re in receipt of Housing Benefit in the following areas:

	<p>Leisure Services –</p> <p>The concession is given for various leisure activities including free swimming for children under 17 at various sessions during the week -</p> <p>Garden Maintenance for housing tenants</p> <p>Pest Control</p> <p>Garden waste</p> <p>There are approximately 19,000 garden waste customers and 3,000 (16%) that are provided the service for free of charge.</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" data-bbox="622 715 2036 1117"> <tr> <td data-bbox="622 715 1144 906"> <p>Race</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1144 715 1592 906"> <p>Disability</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1592 715 2036 906"> <p>Age</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="622 906 1144 1015"> <p>Gender reassignment</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1144 906 1592 1015"> <p>Religion or Belief</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1592 906 2036 1015"> <p>Sexual Orientation</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="622 1015 1144 1117"> <p>Sex</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1144 1015 1592 1117"> <p>Pregnancy and Maternity</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1592 1015 2036 1117"> <p>Marriage & Civil Partnership</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Race</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Disability</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Age</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Gender reassignment</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Religion or Belief</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Sexual Orientation</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Sex</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Pregnancy and Maternity</p> <p>Neutral</p>	<p>Marriage & Civil Partnership</p> <p>Neutral</p>
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