

Oxford City Council Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-24 to 2025-2026 and 2022-23 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 2021 to January 2022.

The draft budget has been structured so that it is in balance for the next four years, and although 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 to bolster our service provision in a number of areas and 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”.

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Budget Proposal	Increase Council Tax by an expected 1.99% for 2022/23 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 Referendum Principles when the Government announces the Provisional Finance Settlement, in mid December. 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 £6.25 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). • 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 2021 to January 2022. The Council is consulting on the Council Tax Support Scheme. 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 will consider its Council Tax Reduction Scheme when it meets in January. The Council has a limited amount of Government Grant that it may use at its discretion to assist vulnerable individuals effected by the increase. The Council is willing to have discussions with individuals to ensure that they are claiming their full entitlement to benefits.																		
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 14,000 receiving Council Tax Benefit & Housing Benefit, with 3,300 of those receiving CTR discount in full and therefore the 1.99% increase will have no effect. <table border="1" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <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> <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> <tr> <td>Neutral</td> <td>Neutral</td> <td>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	Rent setting: Increase in council house rents by 4.10% per annum for 2022/23.																		
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	From 1 st April 2020 under the 2020 rent standard, the Government have determined that rent will be increased by CPI +1% for a period of 5 years for local authority and housing association social rents. For 2022/23 the relevant CPI rate at September 2021 is 3.1% and hence council house rents are estimated to increase by 4.1% from 2021-22 levels, with 3% increases estimated for future years.																		

What are the likely risks?	The increase for 2022-23 represents an average of £4.51 per week. There is a risk of increased rents arrears which could rise 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 has been delayed by the Government to 2025 .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 2024-25, 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 £0.3 million by 2025-26 largely from car parking revenues In 2022-23 there are increases in the areas shown below</p> <p>Increases in Fees and Charges –</p> <p>a) Car parks - £0.50, £0.20, £0.10 per hour for off street city, suburban and parks car parks respectively</p> <p>b) Garden waste bins - £57 per year to £60</p> <p>Leisure activities:</p> <p>c) Sports - 60p -£2.00 – (3.08% to 3.96%)</p> <p>d) Adult Casual swimming increase of £0.50 (10%)</p> <p>Other</p>									

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