

Oxford City Council Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2027-2028 and 2024-25 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 2023 to January 2024.

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 2.99% for 2024/25 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. In the Autumn Statement announcement on 17 th November 2022 the chancellor changed the Referendum Principles. In his statement the chancellor increased the referendum limit for District Councils to 3% or £5 whichever is the higher. The Council is proposing an increase of 2.99% since this increase at £10.06 per annum is the higher
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 to 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 2023 to January 2024. The Council is consulting on the Council Tax Support Scheme. The Council is one of a small number of councils in the

	country that has retained the parameters of the existing scheme introduced in April 2013. And is proposing to keep the scheme as is for the first year.																		
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 continues to be the one of only a few authorities to maintain a Council Tax Reduction Support Scheme covering 100% of the council tax although with the current budgetary pressures it is uncertain how long this can continue to be supported. Currently the total net caseload is 10,000 receiving Council Tax Benefit & Housing Benefit, with 4,400 of those receiving CTR discount in full with a further 500 having to pay less than £1. The 2.99% increase will have limited or nil effect on these accounts. <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 7.70% per annum for 2024/25.																		
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. Last year in the Autumn Budget the Chancellor confirmed the maximum level as 7%. With base rates at 5.25% and CPI at 6.7% the Council would need to make reductions on service should the rent rise not be at least 7.7% (based on CPI at September 2023 which is recommended within this Budget paper.																		

What are the likely risks?	The increase for 2024-25 at 7.7% represents an average of £9.27 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?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As of end of October 2023 there are a total of 4930 HRA tenants (65.2%) claiming Housing cost element of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. This is made up of 2651 Universal Claimants and 2279 Housing Benefit claimants. The amount claimed by each tenant will vary depending on their individual circumstances. 									
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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.									

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.									
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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 inflationary increases in fees and charges. In 2024-25 there are increases in the areas shown below</p> <p>37. Fees and Charges – Details of specific fees and charges increases in 2024-25 are given in Appendix 8 with summary details below:</p> <p>a) Off street Car Parking – 30p on all car parks on all tariffs with increases ranging from 2% to 13.6% on city centre car parks, 2% to 50% for other car parks outside city centre and in parks.</p> <p>b) Park and Ride – 50p on all tariffs but with first hour free. Increases ranges from 4% to 25%</p>									

	<p>c) Garden waste bins - £75 increased to £85 (13% increase) with an increase in the concessionary rate from £47.16 to £50 i.e. 6.02%</p> <p>d) Replacement bins – for the replacement of two wheeled blue, green and brown bins - £30 increasing to £35 i.e. 17% increase</p> <p>e) Bulky Waste collection: Current charge of £20 per item increasing to £22 (10%) and from £30 to £33 (10%) for larger items, e.g. refrigerators, washing machines etc. with concessions remaining unchanged</p> <p>f) Land charges- 10% increase</p> <p>g) Planning fees – At the time of writing this report the Council have yet to receive notification from the Government of the increase.</p> <p>h) Building control – Increases ranging from 1-5%</p> <p>i) General Licenses – increases of up to 5%</p> <p>Leisure activities The Council are currently out to tender for the future operation of its leisure centres from April next year. Fees and charges will be set in consultation with the incoming operator when the results of the tendering exercise are known</p> <p>Other</p> <p>j) Cemeteries- exclusive rights of burial - £10 (0.96%)</p> <p>k) Pest Control – rates, mice etc. – £9.37 (10.4%)</p> <p>l) Dog warden collection - £15 – (10.1%)</p> <p>m) Taxi Licenses - (6% - 8%)</p> <p>n) Garages - £1.25 – 7%</p>
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 2023/ January 2024).

<p>What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?</p>	<p>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> <p>Leisure Services – 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 – 50% -60% concession for most services, with 27% concession for rats and mice treatment</p> <p>Garden waste – 33% concession</p> <p>Bulky Items – 50% concession</p>									
<p>Overall assessment of the equality risks</p>	<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="622 799 2033 1203"> <tr> <td data-bbox="622 799 1122 895"> <p>Race Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1122 799 1621 895"> <p>Disability Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1621 799 2033 895"> <p>Age Neutral</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="622 991 1122 1086"> <p>Gender reassignment Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1122 991 1621 1086"> <p>Religion or Belief Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1621 991 2033 1086"> <p>Sexual Orientation Neutral</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="622 1086 1122 1203"> <p>Sex Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1122 1086 1621 1203"> <p>Pregnancy and Maternity Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1621 1086 2033 1203"> <p>Marriage & Civil Partnership Neutral</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p>Race Neutral</p>	<p>Disability Neutral</p>	<p>Age Neutral</p>	<p>Gender reassignment Neutral</p>	<p>Religion or Belief Neutral</p>	<p>Sexual Orientation Neutral</p>	<p>Sex Neutral</p>	<p>Pregnancy and Maternity Neutral</p>	<p>Marriage & Civil Partnership Neutral</p>
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