

Explanatory note to Labour administration budget amendment

Introduction

Oxford City Council is in a position of no overall control. We owe it to people in Oxford, and our excellent workforce, to ensure a smooth, stable budget process, and indeed we delivered this in similar circumstances last year.

The administration was pleased to see that the areas of deviation between different groups were relatively small, and we hope that with this amendment the budget will be able to pass unanimously.

Justification of changes

Council tax reduction scheme: We expect to retain full council tax reduction for those on the lowest incomes throughout the next four years, and remain one of relatively few councils to do so. This year, we have changed the treatment of income of those on Universal Credit, to bring it in line with those relying on other sources of income, but to cushion the impact have increased bands and therefore levels of entitlement. We anticipate bringing this back in line with our previous scheme next year, but do not wish to propose the full level of saving proposed by the Liberal Democrat group here. We think it is wise to retain some flexibility in case further phasing or additional discretionary hardship funds prove necessary.

Revenue consequences of sale of unused assets: We believe any sale should only occur after consultation. In practice, unless there is a one-off consultation, this will be next year's budget consultation, so we have amended the saving accordingly. There is sense in including this in the budget consultation so that members of the public can consider the trade-offs.

Increased yield from parking fees: We are interested in exploring the idea of weight-based charging and would expect in any event to keep charges under review, but have reduced income projections as we believe a higher level of projected income would bring with it too much risk.

Increase Discretionary Housing Payments from year 2: We believe that it is wise to increase levels of DHP to prevent homelessness.

Add homelessness prevention officer: We support increasing the level of homelessness prevention work, and this will reduce risk around TA spend. However, we have built in time to recruit in year 1 of the budget (a slight change to the Liberal Democrat proposal).

Add planning enforcement officer (short lets focus): We propose an additional planning enforcement officer to assist with work to ensure any short lets comply with planning rules and to undertake other duties as necessary. We have included 50% funding in year 1 in recognition of the need for time to recruit an officer with the appropriate skills and experience.

Pavement works: We have already included in the proposed budget funding for gritting of pavements to ensure they are safer for pedestrians. We note and support the proposal by some other groups on this, but propose phasing in funding in year 1 to ensure appropriate design of measures.

City Centre play development (feasibility and funding subject to site being found): The Full Council adopted a motion in support of the principle of a play site in the city centre, but obviously allocated no funding. The administration has been working behind the scenes to look at potential sites, but recognises that it will be beneficial to add funding in (initially for feasibility and then for development) to support the project. Clearly development cannot take place until a site is found.

Development of smart parking charges: We have previously committed to exploring car park charges varying according to, for example, vehicle size, and wish to support some feasibility work in this area. We anticipate this being a desk-based exercise, either delivered directly or commissioned, and therefore are making appropriate funding available.

Capital: To note that we are not making any additions to the capital programme. Some items in this list and in changes to the consultation budget proposed by cabinet, may potentially be included in the capital programme, but we do not wish to add items in there until such time as a scheme is worked up, to abide by principles of good capital programme management, and so revenue funding at this stage is made available.

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