

Oxford City Council Budget Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022-23 to 2024-2025 and 2021-22 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 2020 to January 2021.

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”.

Budget Proposal	Increase Council Tax by an expected 1.99% for 2021/22 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 results of its Spending Review on 25 th November. 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 2020 to January 2021. The Council is consulting to 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 and therefore it is unlikely that the overall cost will reduce although there will be changes to the administration of the scheme aimed at simplifying it and reducing admin costs.									
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 2021-22 and these changes are expected to be approved at Cabinet in January 2021.									
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 14,850 receiving Council Tax Benefit & Housing Benefit, with 3,500 of those receiving CTR discount in full and therefore the 1.99% increase will have no effect. <table border="1" data-bbox="624 820 2029 1225" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td data-bbox="624 820 1120 916">Race Neutral</td> <td data-bbox="1120 820 1568 916">Disability Neutral</td> <td data-bbox="1568 820 2029 916">Age Neutral</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="624 1011 1120 1107">Gender reassignment Neutral</td> <td data-bbox="1120 1011 1568 1107">Religion or Belief Neutral</td> <td data-bbox="1568 1011 2029 1107">Sexual Orientation Neutral</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="624 1123 1120 1219">Sex Neutral</td> <td data-bbox="1120 1123 1568 1219">Pregnancy and Maternity Neutral</td> <td data-bbox="1568 1123 2029 1219">Marriage & Civil Partnership Neutral</td> </tr> </table>	Race Neutral	Disability Neutral	Age Neutral	Gender reassignment Neutral	Religion or Belief Neutral	Sexual Orientation Neutral	Sex Neutral	Pregnancy and Maternity Neutral	Marriage & Civil Partnership Neutral
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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 2021/22 the CPI rate is 0.5% and hence council house rents are estimated to increase by 1.5% from 2020-21 levels, with 3% increases estimated for future years.									
What are the likely risks?	The increase for 2021-22 represents an average of £1.57 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 is 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 2023-24, 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.																		
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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 style="text-align: center;">Increases in Fees and Charges –Most fees and charges are held at last years levels given the impact of COVID 19 on the councils income streams. Details of specific</p>																		

	<p>fees and charges increases in 2020-21 are given in Appendix 8 with summary details below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Garden waste bins - £54 per year to £57 (5.55%) reduced to (£45) of the fee for concessions <p>Leisure activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> b) Sports - 40p -£1.30 – (2.58% to 3%) c) Casual Swimming – 10p (2.0%) d) Adult gym – 20p (2.2%) e) Adult Skating - 20p (2.25%) <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> f) Pest Control – domestic- increases – £2 to £6 (3% - 5%) g) General licencing – zero h) Building control – zero i) Off street car parks and park and ride - zero j) Cemeteries adult right of burial £30 (3%) k) Garages – zero <p>In 2021-22 the Council plans to introduce a new for bulky waste items charging a flat rate of £20 per item plus £30 for fried/TV. Residents on universal credit or Housing Benefit will have a reduced concessionary charge of 50% of the actual charge</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 2020/ January 2021).
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	<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 –</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="624 584 2029 986"> <tr> <td data-bbox="624 584 1133 775"> <p>Race</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1133 584 1592 775"> <p>Disability</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1592 584 2029 775"> <p>Age</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="624 775 1133 879"> <p>Gender reassignment</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1133 775 1592 879"> <p>Religion or Belief</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1592 775 2029 879"> <p>Sexual Orientation</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="624 879 1133 986"> <p>Sex</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1133 879 1592 986"> <p>Pregnancy and Maternity</p> <p>Neutral</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1592 879 2029 986"> <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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Budget Proposal	Increases in Fees and Charges across Council services									
Is this proposal new or subject to an annual review?	<p>Going cashless – During the COVID lockdown the use of cash and cheque payments has been vastly reduced as the council no longer sees customers face to face. Cheques received in the post are difficult to distribute to processing staff who are based largely at home. Most shops now encourage payment by bank card to reduce the transmission of the virus. The council announced a temporary suspension of this method of payments for all debits in July 2020 and has undertaken work to establish whether this could continue</p>									
What are the likely risks?	Customers may not be able to pay for council services									

What public consultation has been planned/ taken place?	Budget consultation annually (December 2020/ January 2021) plus widespread communication to residents on roll out									
What mitigating actions will the Council implement to offset any negative impacts?	A report in undertaken in April 2019 as published in the Guardian newspaper gave details of research undertaken on the number of adults with bank accounts. This report outlined that 15-20 years ago around £2.5 million people in the UK were without a bank account (around 4% of the population). By 2017 this number had reduced to 1.2million i.e 1.7% of the population. Whilst the numbers of residents without bank accounts is low those that still remain without accounts will still be able to pay for services though Paypoint outlets in the city. The largest savings will arise from a roll out of cashless car parks. A trial roll out of this will be undertaken in limited car parks									
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