

Consultation on proposed changes to charges for Adult Social Care Services

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council is consulting on proposed changes to how much we charge for some adult social care services provided to people at home.

Councils regularly review how they charge for services to make sure charges reflect their current financial situation. Our overall approach to asking people to contribute towards the cost of their care follows the Care Act 2014 and national guidance.

We are asking for your views on three proposed changes:

- reducing the initial Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance
- introducing a charge for transport arranged by Adult Social Care
- introducing a charge for everyone who uses telecare services

You may be affected by one, two, all three, or none of these proposals, depending on the services you receive.

The proposals do not affect people living in residential or nursing care homes.

The Adult Social Care Contributions Policy explains how the council works out whether someone needs to pay towards the cost of their care, and how much they may be asked to contribute. National rules require councils to charge for some services where people can afford to pay.

Nothing has been decided yet. Before any decisions are made, we want to understand how the proposed changes could affect people who use these services.

Your views will help councillors decide whether to go ahead with the changes, and if so, how they should be applied fairly.

Who this consultation is for

This consultation is particularly relevant if you:

- receive adult social care support at home
- pay, or may pay, a contribution towards your care
- use transport arranged by Adult Social Care
- use the council's telecare service

Background

Oxfordshire County Council supports people to live as independently and safely as possible. We work with others to help people get the right support so they can stay independent, make their own choices, and live well in their community.

Adult Social Care services aim to be fair, give people choice, and help them have more control over their lives.

But social care is not free. National rules say councils must charge for some services where people can afford to contribute. The Care Act 2014 allows councils to charge a reasonable amount for care, based on a person's financial circumstances.

Contributions from people who can afford to pay towards their care, help the council to provide adult social care to those who need those services

Over 6,200 adults are supported by Oxfordshire County Council's Adult Social Care, which includes older people and people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health needs. The council spends around £330 million a year on adult social care.

Costs are rising due to:

- an ageing population
- more complex care needs
- higher care and staffing costs
- reduced government funding
- wider national and global pressures

To continue supporting people despite rising demand and limited budgets, the council works in partnership with others and with people who use services to work more efficiently, make better use of technology, and improve services.

Our proposals

Councils regularly review how they charge for services to make sure charges reflect the current financial situation. Our overall approach of asking people to contribute towards the cost of their care follows the Care Act 2014 and national guidance.

The proposed changes we are asking about are:

- reducing the initial Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance
- introducing a charge for transport arranged by Adult Social Care
- introducing a charge for telecare services

You may be affected by one, two, all three, or none of these proposals, depending on the services you receive.

Proposal 1: Reducing initial Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance

When Oxfordshire County Council works out how much someone should pay towards their care, we must consider the extra costs they may have because of their age or disability. This is called Disability Related Expenditure (DRE).

Currently people can keep 35 per cent of their disability benefits (such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP) daily living, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) care or Attendance Allowance) to help cover these extra costs such as higher heating bills, extra laundry, specialist clothing, equipment etc.

What we are proposing

When we compared our initial DRE allowance with other councils, we found that Oxfordshire's 35 per cent allowance is much higher than most others.

We propose to reduce the initial DRE allowance from 35 per cent to 25 per cent of disability benefits, meaning that people will be expected to contribute more to the cost of their support. This proposed 25 per cent initial DRE allowance rate is still higher than many other councils allow and is sufficient to meet DRE expenses.

This proposal only affects people with the initial DRE allowance. Anyone whose actual costs are higher than the initial allowance can still ask for an individual assessment. People who already have an individual DRE assessment will keep it.

The table below shows how much DRE people would keep if the allowance were reduced from 35 per cent to 25 per cent. The award amounts shown are examples.

Benefit	Award Amount	How much people can currently keep for DRE costs 35% allowance	How much people would be able to keep for DRE costs 25% allowance	Difference
Attendance Allowance Higher DLA Care Higher PIP Daily Living Enhanced	£114.60	£40.11	£28.65	£11.46
Attendance Allowance Lower DLA care Middle PIP Daily Living Standard	£76.70	£26.85	£19.18	£7.67
DLA Care Lower	£30.30	£10.61	£7.58	£3.03

Proposal 2: Introducing a charge for transport services by Adult Social Care

We know that reliable transport is essential for many people to attend activities and services as part of their support plan. We also understand that introducing charges may be a concern.

Whilst transport can be part of meeting someone's care needs, according to national Care Act guidance, councils are not required to provide free transport. Most councils charge for transport in some form.

Currently, Oxfordshire County Council's Adult Social Care provides transport support in various ways.

Where possible, we expect people to use active transport options, such as walking or wheeling, public transport, community transport schemes, or Motability vehicles. Local authority funded transport is only to be used in exceptional circumstances and must be approved by Adult Social Care prior to any travel arrangements being made.

What we are proposing

We propose to introduce a flat charge of £10 per day when Adult Social Care arranges transport.

The proposed £10 flat charge would only apply when transport is arranged by Adult Social Care.

For people who receive DLA or PIP Mobility, we expect these benefits to help cover the cost of transport. If this is not enough, the cost can be considered as part of a financial assessment under Disability Related Expenditure (DRE). If the initial DRE allowance is not enough, we can look at a person's individual situation. In exceptional cases, the charge may be reduced or waived.

The only exception to the above would be for young people who have transport provided by Adult Social Care to attend their school or college placement. Young people who have transport provided by Adult Social Care to attend an educational institution will not be charged. However, if a younger person uses Local Authority transport to attend other activities such as a day service separate from their education provision, then the £10 charge per day would apply.

Proposal 3: Introducing a charge for everyone using telecare services

The telecare service helps people stay safe and independent in their own homes. It uses equipment such as sensors, alarms and pendant alarms, which connect people to a 24-hour monitoring centre and an emergency response service.

Telecare is not a service that councils are legally required to provide. Because of this, many councils charge for telecare.

The current charging arrangements for telecare in Oxfordshire are:

- People who receive certain benefits are not charged for telecare.
- People who do not receive these benefits either:
 - have a financial assessment to work out how much they should pay, or
 - choose to pay the full cost.

The cost for the telecare service is £6 per week for 26/27.

Around 3,500 people in Oxfordshire use the telecare service. Although many people value telecare for reassurance, research shows mixed evidence about how much it reduces demand on other services or supports people to remain independently in their own homes.

What we are proposing

- We propose that **everyone** who uses telecare pays the full cost of the service. Currently, this cost is £9.87 per week, but it may change in future. The charge is reviewed annually when the Council sets its budget, fees and charges.
- Where telecare is being used to support a discharge from hospital, we propose to offer a free 6-week trial of telecare as part of a reablement package. After this 6-week trial period, the person can decide if they want to continue paying for the service or stop using the service and return the equipment.
- For people who already receive other adult social care services, the new telecare cost would be treated as Disability Related Expenditure (DRE). The proposed 25 per cent DRE allowance should cover this cost. If it does not, we will offer an individual assessment. In exceptional cases, the charge may be reduced or removed.

Have your say

We want to understand how these proposals could affect people's lives.

- Please share your views.
- Your feedback will inform what happens next.

What happens after the consultation?

We will carefully consider everything people tell us through this consultation.

We will read and analyse all responses and prepare a report for councillors summarising what we have heard and the key issues raised.

This report will be considered alongside a range of other information, including for example: financial information, legal information, an equalities impact assessment, etc. at a meeting of the council's Cabinet later this year. This feedback will help inform Cabinet's final decision.

Once final decisions have been made and if changes to charges are agreed, we will:

- offer everyone who currently pays towards the cost of their care a financial reassessment
- explain clearly what this means for you
- make sure you are left with at least the minimum income required by law
- look at individual circumstances where costs cause hardship

No one would be left with less than the minimum income set out in the Care Act 2014. Where appropriate, we would work with people to review their care and look at different ways of meeting their needs to help reduce any increase in costs.

If your contribution changes, you will not be asked to pay backdated charges for services received before the new policy starts.

Thank you

Thank you for reading this. We hope that you will let us know your thoughts. They are important to us.