

# Oxfordshire County Council

## Budget and Business Planning 2023/24

### Overarching climate impact review of 2023/24 budget proposals

#### Context & Background

1. This overarching climate impact assessment provides an assessment of the potential impact of proposed changes to the budget on the council's ability to meet climate action commitments.
2. The [strategic plan 2022 - 2025 \(pdf format, 3.6Mb\)](#) sets out the council's vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. This commitment is strengthened further by the Councils' priority to 'put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work'. The council's adopted climate action framework also commits the council to:
  - Being carbon neutral in its operations by 2030
  - Enabling a zero-carbon Oxfordshire by 2050
3. The council has a cross-organisational work programme to deliver on these commitments. The latest report on this programme can be found at [Decision - Climate Action Update | Oxfordshire County Council](#). In the 22/23 budget setting process the council made additional investment of £0.824m in climate action and resilience measures including:
  - Supporting community activity to cut carbon emissions and helping the transition to electric vehicles (EVs), as well as increasing its capacity as the lead flood authority for Oxfordshire.
  - Supporting plans to develop a countywide nature recovery strategy, develop a tree and woodland strategy and support the development of a new local nature partnership for Oxfordshire.
  - Investing in supporting the retrofitting of residential homes to improve energy efficiency and support the delivery of a zero-carbon route-map for the county.
  - Working work with partners to expand EV charging capacity across the county and sustain the benefits of Project Local Energy Oxfordshire (LEO). Project LEO is running energy trials in the county to help build a greener (zero carbon), more flexible and fairer electricity system.

4. It is currently unclear what the impact of the national financial position will be on delivery of the national Net Zero Strategy (both through financing and bringing forward supportive policy). This is outside the scope of this report but will be a key factor in enabling the delivery of local climate objectives as the council bids for both capital and revenue funding for climate action. Decisions made by central government in this context will also influence private sector investment in this area.

## **Purpose of a Climate Impact Review**

5. The review is intended to ensure that our decisions are aligned with our climate action commitments. It provides a high-level overview of the impacts of the budget proposals to increase or lessen our ability to meet such commitments with potential benefits maximised and possible challenges mitigated, within overall funding available. It is part of our ongoing pledge to embed climate into all our decision-making.
6. Services are asked to assess how their budget proposals affect the council's ability to reduce emissions from our buildings, highways, fleet, staff travel, purchased products and services (including construction), and to enable emission reductions in maintained schools and at a county level.

## **Revenue Proposals Climate Impact Review**

7. As identified within the budget and business planning report, issues and volatility in the wider economy, including the ongoing impact of inflation which increased by 10.7% in the year to November 2022, workforce shortages and supply side issues mean that similar to local households the council needs to pay more to maintain the same level of service provision.
8. No revenue proposals were identified as materially negatively impacting the council's overall ability to meet its climate action commitments.
9. A one-off reduction in revenue budget for the climate action service (24EP23) is proposed. This is offset by a multi-year commitment to increase staff resource in this area agreed in the 2021/22 budget setting process. The one-off reduction will be delivered through less reliance on consultancy resource made possible by greater in-house capacity.
10. The impacts of national government policy on removing charges for DIY waste (24EP9) will be monitored and any negative impacts be addressed through the waste partnership. The national influence of limited care placements locally and nationally (24CS4) may create pressures on need to travel both for our staff and families. This may in part be mitigated through the council's low carbon business travel project set out in the capital programme.
11. A number of proposals will positively contribute to the delivery of climate commitments;
  - Prevention of unsorted waste at Household Waste Recycling Centres will increase diversion to recycling (24EP20)
  - The council is now predicting lower overall growth in waste tonnages driven by a range of national and local factors (24EP21 and 24EP22)

- The council is investing in staff resource to continue the decarbonisation and resilience of its estate particularly in buildings and fleet. Proposals are also included associated with increasing efficiency operation of the fleet asset, reduction of property footprint and more efficient use of office space and replacement of ICT with more efficient equipment (24CCCS3, 24CC10, 24CC05, 24CCCS16 and 24CC07)
  - The council is investing in measures to improve public transport services for residents including rural services
  - The council is investing in measures to make active travel more accessible for example supporting active travel options for young people and developing Transport Hubs
  - The council is investing in practical projects working with Parish Councils to improve drainage and reduce flooding in the worse impacted areas.
12. A number of budget lines include changes to contracts or service design. These offer opportunities to seek improved environmental outcomes through use of the council's social value policy eg. the Live Well contract making better use of our travel hierarchy identified within the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

## **Capital Proposals Climate Impact Review**

13. A fundamental review of the current capital programme has been undertaken, prioritising the schemes and initiatives using the framework included at [Annex 4a](#) of the report to Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 9 December 2022. This includes an assessment of schemes contributing to Climate Action or Active Travel (Prioritisation Category 3).
14. Climate Impact Assessments will be carried out as full business cases are developed following the council's capital governance process. Potential climate impacts have been identified from the information available to us at the current time.
15. No capital proposals were identified as materially negatively impacting the council's overall ability to meet its climate action commitments.
16. The central Oxford property strategy looks to rationalise our property estate as less overall office space is required, reflecting new ways of working. Funds generated will be used to re-invest in the remainder of our property portfolio including upgrading existing buildings, investing in energy efficiency measures and renewables, development of green infrastructure and essentially providing comfortable working environments for staff.
17. When procuring homes for vulnerable children within the County the priority criteria is to find a house in a safe location. However, provision has been made in the overall budget to bring any homes purchased up to a good energy efficiency rating. Homes are generally within suburban areas with good access to public transport.
18. Low carbon business travel - a strategic intervention is included in the budget to reduce carbon associated with necessary operational high mileage business travel. Although, certain roles currently require frequent travel this represents only a small fraction of staff (approx.1%) who are high mileage operational users. This measure therefore needs to be taken forward in the context of a wider travel management plan

working with services to reduce overall mileage, explore alternative travel options within teams and promote and enforce the travel hierarchy. Further actions should be included in the annual renewal of the councils Carbon Management Plan in May.

19. Several investments support active travel by making the option safer and more accessible i.e. the Vision Zero programme and repair works to the Thames Towpath.
20. A site for a replacement mortuary has not yet been identified, however, due to the nature of the facility it is likely that a new build will be required. This will be built in accordance with our net zero carbon building standards policy.
21. The utility spaces in 4 out of 6 of our designated gypsy and traveller sites will be upgraded improving both facilities for residents and energy efficiency at the sites.
22. The expansion of special schools – as these schools are classed as free schools and therefore building works are designed, planned and executed by the Department for Education (DfE) and not Oxfordshire County Council. The DfE has adopted net zero carbon requirements for its schools.
23. Provision has been made within the programme for investment in transitioning the council's fleet to electric vehicles, reducing the impact of the council's front line business travel, and delivering the councils property strategy which support the council's commitment to be net zero by 2030.
24. Provision is also made for piloting an energy efficiency loan scheme for maintained schools to support schools to invest in energy efficiency improvements.
25. £3m has been prioritised for further climate priorities. The pathway to zero carbon Oxfordshire report recognises a need to plant 23,000 trees by 2050 across Oxfordshire. Many organisations and landowners are working on this and this investment will help the council to meet its own tree policy aspiration of replacing every highway tree felled, with two new ones. Between 2015 and 2022 a total of 3,942 highway trees had to be felled as they were at the end of their life, dead or dangerous. These have not been replaced and this funding will support the aspirations of the council's tree policy of replacing any tree felled with two new ones.
26. £24m of investment need in decarbonising our estate has been added to the capital pipeline for consideration to fund from 2024/25 supporting meeting our net zero targets and increasing the resilience and energy efficiency of our estate, following decisions made in our property strategy in 2023/24.
27. Investment in household waste recycling centres is also identified in the capital pipeline for future consideration, following agreement of a household waste recycling centre strategy. This investment will in part support more sustainable management of waste through greater provision for recycling and reuse.