

Budget Proposals Consultation

Introduction

1. Oxfordshire County Council has to set a budget every year. As part of that process we invite comments residents, service users and stakeholders to have their say on our budget proposals. This year we also sought feedback on the proposed Council Tax level for 2017/18 that is included in our budget forecasts, and on the broad purpose and priorities of the council.

Approach

2. On 8 December 2016 we published our budget papers for consideration by the Performance Scrutiny Committee on 15 December 2016. At the same time we opened an online consultation, hosted on the council's eConsult portal for people to have their say on our proposals and distributed paper copies of the documents to all public libraries.
3. The consultation was open from 8 December 2016 to 9 January 2017 and was publicised. A Freepost service was offered for paper submissions. People were invited to read the papers and prior to commenting. They were also provided with the following high level contextual information:

'Your county council provides more than three-quarters of the local government services in the county. Our long term planning over many years to cope with increased demographic pressures in social care means that we will set a budget for 2017/18 - 20/21 on a solid and resilient financial footing after six years of difficult funding decisions. We have identified £16m of new financial pressures for the period 2017/18 to 2020/21 and have made proposals on how these pressures can be met.'

In total nine responses were received, including eight from Oxfordshire residents and one from a stakeholder group. Many people reiterated their points across all questions to reflect their strength of view.

Comments on the council's budget proposals

4. The tables below summaries the views expressed by question and theme. With regards to Council Tax, nobody actively disagreed with the level of increase but two submissions stated that the level of increase was 'unfair' and one person said it should be means tested.

Table 1: Feedback on individual budget lines

Theme	Comment
<p>Adult social care Concern about/disagreement with cuts to adult social care including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disproportionate cuts to adult social care/fair funding • Learning Disability Services / Day Services • Services for Carers • Pressure on teams • Dementia Support Service 	2 mentions
<p>Children's social care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking clarification on why numbers are increasing and what is being done to address this • Concerns about cuts to learning disability services • Concerns about children centre closures and its impact on mothers' and babies' health and wellbeing 	2 mentions
<p>Early years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification on 30 hours free early learning for 3 & 4 year olds 	1 mention
<p>Going Digital First</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not suitable for everyone • Supportive of council's mention to review impact across all protected characteristics 	1 mention
<p>Home to school transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about appropriateness of transporting children and adults with special needs • Concern about the impact on traffic and the environment 	1 mention
<p>Household Waste Recycling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive of this service 	1 mention
<p>Homelessness in Oxford</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request to reinstate funding 	1 mention
<p>General comments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those with the most money, should contribute the most for services for those with the least • Central government funds are not inadequate and the county council should make representations/query about how the council is challenging this 	1 mention 2 mentions

Table 2: Feedback on individual budget lines on the proposed Council Tax increase of 1.99% (+2% adult social care precept)

Theme	Mentions
Unfair given the property prices in Oxford	2 mentions
Agree with the rise but funds actually should come from central government	2 mentions
No comments if used for the purpose	1 mention
Council tax to be spent on providing services that benefit ALL council tax payers and not on a small minority	1 mention
Should be means tested	1 mention
Agree with the increase and the future increases if necessary	1 mention

Table 3: Feedback on the council's purpose and priorities

Theme	Comment
Going Digital First <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not everyone has access to a computer • Some people would prefer talking to people 	1 mention
Services for all <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public services for all • Considering needs of residents outside of the city • Services in towns for those who cannot access transport • Clarification on proposals for reducing traffic caused by toll collections on the Toll Bridge between Eynsham and Farmoor • Adult and children social care need to be prioritised • Thriving economy does not automatically benefit everyone • Agree with priorities with concerns over achieving them due to lack of funds • Emphasis on homelessness • Low and moderate needs escalating to more complex needs due to lack of preventative support 	1 mention