

**PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY – 16 December 2013**

**SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING 2014/15 – 2017/18**

**Cross Cutting Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) – Initial Assessment December 2013**

**1. Introduction and approach to budget setting**

- 1.1. Based on existing plans the county council will have saved £200 million by 2017 as part of a government plan to get the nation's finances in order. Now we have to find another £60 million over the next four years and these savings will be harder to make. Our net budget (excluding schools which are funded by a ringfenced grant) is currently £586m.
- 1.2. In order to make the best possible decisions we have engaged with the public at an early stage, holding seven public meetings across the county to discuss people's priorities, and hear which services they most value, which they could do without, and their ideas for doing things differently. We have worked more closely than ever before across the political parties to look for solutions to the challenge which faces us.
- 1.3. While we continue to work hard to find savings from efficiencies and those with minimal impact on the front line, the greater the reductions needed, the harder this becomes. In finding the required level of savings, and to ensure best value for the money we will still spend, some significant changes will be made to services.
- 1.4. These changes may have an impact on communities and particular groups defined in equalities legislation due to characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity, or the groups we additionally believe should be specifically taken into account - deprivation, and geography (rural or urban). While it will not be possible to avoid such impacts entirely given the scale of the financial challenge, we wish to ensure that they have been considered in developing proposals, and mitigating measures put forward where possible.
- 1.5. This report therefore provides a summary of key issues arising in the full assessments produced for each change, and highlights possible implications arising from the proposals that will be considered by Performance Scrutiny Committee on 16 December including the potential cumulative impact of these proposals. A number of individual proposals are at an early stage, and more detailed SCIA's will be produced as they develop. Similarly, SCIA documents from previous years' budgets, or for policy proposals falling outside the annual budget cycle, will be updated where necessary as proposals develop. SCIA documents for individual proposals are available on the website at <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/service-and-community-impact-assessments-scias>.

## 2. The Council's Assessment Process

2.1. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act") imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard when exercising its functions to the need to:

- eliminate any conduct which is prohibited by or under the 2010 Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share any of the protected characteristics listed in section 149(7); and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

2.2. Complying with section 149 may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but only to the extent that that does not amount to conduct which is otherwise unlawful under the new Act.

2.3. The need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need:

- to remove or minimise disadvantages which are connected to a relevant protected characteristic and which are suffered by persons who share that characteristic,
- to take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs of other people, and
- to encourage those who share a relevant characteristic to take part in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.

2.4. The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding. Compliance with these duties may involve treating some persons more favourably than others; but that does not permit conduct which would otherwise be prohibited by the 2010 Act.

2.5. One way in which the Council can show that it has had due regard to the statutory needs is by assessing the impact of proposed budget and services changes on service users and Council-paid staff, particularly in relation to people with a "protected characteristic". These protected characteristics are:

**Age** (people of different age groups)

**Disability** (e.g. physical or sensory impairments, long-term illnesses and conditions, hidden impairments such as a heart condition, frailty, learning disabilities or mental health problems)

**Gender and Gender Reassignment**

**Ethnicity** (including race and nationality)

**Religion/belief** (including people with no religion or belief)

**Sexual orientation**

**Marriage and civil partnerships**

**Pregnancy & Maternity**

2.6. In addition to the characteristics above, the Council also considers the effect of the proposals on those in particular geographies (in particular rural and

urban areas) and on deprivation. Data on the above characteristics is contained in Appendix 1.

2.7. The assessment process the Council has undertaken involves:

- A high-level Council wide assessment of the broad cumulative impacts on the groups and interests defined above. This paper considers the impacts of key budget proposals being made this year, but does not consider proposals already agreed.
- An individual service-level assessment of the potential impact on vulnerable groups for each proposal, where a significant change to the service is proposed and/or a significant impact has been identified. These are available on the council's public website <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/service-and-community-impact-assessments-scias>.

2.8. Some proposals are at a relatively early stage of development, meaning that the detail is not yet available. Others may change as a consequence of consultation with service users and residents. In these cases the assessments will be revised when a different or more detailed proposal is made. Comments on draft and initial assessments are therefore welcome and help ensure we have fully considered the impact of decisions on communities and staff.

2.9. We hold and actively use data and other evidence to ensure that the council, as far as is possible, is aware of and able to serve the needs of particular communities and groups in Oxfordshire. Key datasets about the Council are available on the [Oxfordshire Insight](#) website, for use by staff, partner organisations, and the wider community. We use all these tools as a guide to support individual service level impact assessments and ensure that decisions that are being taken, as far as possible, protect services for those most in need.

## **Early Assessment of possible implications of proposals**

### **3. Rural and Urban Communities**

3.1. Four of Oxfordshire's districts are classified as rural. Two-thirds of the population live in built-up areas with a population of 10,000 or more people. The largest settlement is Oxford with a population of close to 152,500 (23% of the county's population).

3.2. Prioritisation of reduced resources may mean a smaller number of physical locations for local services as authorities move towards more co-location, or aim to achieve economies of scale by merging services. This will need careful consideration in order to balance the need to prioritise the preservation of services where they are most needed (with concentrations of deprivation generally found in Oxfordshire's more urban areas) with recognition that the accessibility of services in a smaller number of locations is likely to have a larger effect on rural service users, facing longer distances to access alternatives.

- 3.3. Other proposed changes which may have a particular geographic impact include savings from highway-related work, which is likely to be more noticeable in rural areas. For example, rural communities are likely to be impacted to a greater level by reductions in verge maintenance services due to the increased amount of vegetation compared to more urban areas. The reduction in grass and tree maintenance is likely to therefore have a disproportionate impact on the aesthetic of the environment in these areas.
- 3.4. We will continue to prioritise the overall highway maintenance budget (including rural routes) on the basis of good asset management principles. We will ensure that the condition and safety of the county's roads, as well as issues arising from customer feedback are addressed within the scope of the available resources. While it will not be possible to satisfy everyone within the resources available, on-going dialogue with local councillors and communities will ensure that maintenance issues are captured and prioritised accordingly.
- 3.5. Work to deliver efficiencies from the county's transport spending will also be of particular interest to rural residents, since the overwhelming majority of subsidised bus services serve rural routes.

#### **4. Deprived Individuals and Communities**

- 4.1. Oxfordshire has low overall levels of relative deprivation. However there are ten areas in Oxford City and two in Banbury which fall within the 20% most deprived areas in the country.
- 4.2. Deprivation also exists beyond these specific areas, with averages across an area not always telling the story of the individuals and families within it - nationally it is estimated that while few rural areas are deprived on average, the number of people living in poverty in the countryside is greater than the population of Birmingham.
- 4.3. Deprived communities and individuals are necessarily often more intense users of many public services. The budget proposals aim where possible to ensure that services are effectively targeted so that we continue to meet our obligations and protect the most vulnerable.
- 4.4. Nonetheless the cumulative impact of proposals on deprived areas and individuals has the potential to be significant. There is also a risk that a move to protecting only the most vulnerable across a range of services may create a 'cliff edge' effect for those just outside this threshold, potentially compounded if the voluntary sector is unable to sustain the advice services which may offer these people alternative routes to access help.
- 4.5. Some proposed savings will predominantly impact on deprived individuals and areas of deprivation. For example passing on the government's reduction in funding formerly badged as 'supporting people' will impact most on those areas with high levels of unmet housing need. Similarly, applications to the Oxfordshire Support Fund are predominantly from residents in deprived areas.

- 4.6. In addition, those suffering deprivation, but who do not live in areas of overall deprivation, may be affected if services are targeted based on geography, either because they rely on physical service outlets, or because disaggregation to the individual level is either impossible or impractical.
- 4.7. Mitigation measures for this risk will include ensuring that we have the required evidence base for making decisions about service consideration and change, and as far as possible protect those services which are needed by the most vulnerable.

## **5. Age and disability**

- 5.1. 17% of the population is over 65 and this is expected to increase to over 20% by 2031. Numbers of the very elderly (85 years plus) are projected to more than double by 2031. In the 2011 Census 14% of residents reported having a limiting long-term illness, health problem or disability which limited their daily activities or work.
- 5.2. As well as those issues identified above, older people and those with disabilities are more likely to be users of social care than the rest of the population. Savings from this part of the council budget will therefore require the skills and knowledge of our staff to ensure that they are implemented in a way which maintains the high quality outcomes Oxfordshire achieves across most measures. This will be helped by protecting adult social care services through the use of the Integration Transformation Fund, recognising that effective social care can reduce demand for more expensive NHS services.
- 5.3. The Council continues to move social care to self-directed support, meaning that individuals can take responsibility for their own care and are able to arrange the provision of services most beneficial to them. As the commissioner of services in future the council will play a role in clustering suppliers and managing the costs of services. A specific reduction proposed is to stop subsidising the service supporting people with shopping, laundry and meals. We will make sure no-one who is eligible for care is left without support, including through amalgamation into eligible people's personal budgets, and the exploration of alternatives including charging. Another is to achieve further efficiencies in the Learning Disability service – extending current plans by a further year and increasing the savings targets over the four years. We will continue to work with learning disability service users and providers to find new ways of working whilst ensuring assessed needs continue to be met.
- 5.4. At the other end of the age range, savings also need to be found in the services provided by our Children, Education and Families directorate. We will continue to look for ways to minimise the direct impact of these, but a number will mean either finding alternative provision (for example directly through schools, or by individuals and community groups) for some services we currently provide. We will be considering the impact not just on parents, but on individual children and young people themselves, when we put forward the detail of these savings.

5.5. Our proposals continue to assume a greater dependence upon informal carers. We know that two thirds of carers are women (Carers Survey 2013). Spending on carers has been protected in the proposals in recognition of their contribution and the vital role they play.

5.6. Proposals to move to agile working through more flexible use of premises and IT will need to be monitored in order to ensure that consideration is given to the needs of disabled staff members. At present 1% of staff have declared a disability (OCC quarterly manpower report, Q2, 2013), but this figure is lower in comparison to the results of the 2012 staff survey where 8% of respondents declared themselves disabled through this anonymous channel.

## **6. Gender**

6.1. Women use some public services more than men. For example there are more women in old age than men and therefore women are more likely to need social care.

6.2. In addition, women are overall likely to spend a much greater proportion of their time on caring responsibilities – for children or elderly relatives, meaning that they are more likely to access services targeted at young families.

6.3. Over 70% of the Council's workforce is comprised of female workers (rising as high as 96% in some services such as Early Years). Changes in staffing or conditions might therefore affect women in greater numbers. We will continue to carefully monitor the impact of changes to the workforce as a result of the budget proposals, to ensure employment policies are applied fairly and to minimise any disproportionate impact on any particular groups. The Council annually publishes a review of its progress in promoting equality of opportunity within the workforce.

6.4. Finally, there is a gender dimension to changes which have a real or perceived impact on crime and community safety, such as reductions in funding to community safety partnerships, or savings from street lighting. Fear of crime is often higher among women, particularly those walking alone at night; the risk of violent crime is generally higher for men, however. As part of the changes it is proposed to retain funding to support the Domestic Abuse Co-ordinator post.

## **7. Ethnicity**

7.1. People from minority ethnic backgrounds make up 15.4% of the county's population, with variations across the districts ranging from 6.6% in West Oxfordshire to 34.7% in Oxford City. In addition, 14.1% of the county's population were not born in the UK.

Few proposals in the budget are likely to have a differential impact on individuals because of their ethnicity or nationality. The removal of the Refugee Resource grant affects a service provided to asylum seekers and refugees coming from other countries, but is mitigated by the fact that the

charity receives significant funding from other organisations and is developing alternative forms of income to enable it to continue to provide services to its client group.

7.2. As well as those issues identified in the discussion above, many minority ethnic groups such as refugees, recent migrants and victims of racial harassment may have particular service needs which are impacted by the budget proposals. We will use our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and other evidence to ensure that as far as possible we protect service provision for those most in need.

## **8. Sexual orientation and Gender reassignment**

8.1. Few proposals in the current budget round have been identified as likely to impact on individuals specifically as a result of their sexual orientation or gender reassignment.

8.2. There is some anecdotal evidence that people identifying as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) are more likely to experience crises in homelessness or poverty, but research figures suggest that their numbers are closely in line with national figures with the average proportion of LGBT clients dealt with by a homeless project cited at 7% by HomelessLink, against an estimate of 5-7% of the general population being LGBT cited in the same report.

## **9. Other protected characteristics**

9.1. At this stage we have not identified any specific impacts of our proposals on people sharing the protected characteristics listed below, beyond those issues discussed above:

**Religion/belief**  
**Marriage/civil partnerships**  
**Pregnancy & Maternity**

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