

Service and Resource Planning 2015/16 – 2017/18 Cross-cutting Service and Community Impact Assessment

Initial Assessment

Purpose of assessment:

This report provides a summary of the key issues arising in the Service and Community Impact Assessments (SCIAs) produced for savings proposed in the latest round of Service and Resource Planning. It highlights possible implications arising from the proposals, including the potential cumulative impact.

A number of individual proposals are at an early stage, and more detailed SCIAs will be produced as they develop. Similarly, SCIA documents from previous years, or for policy proposals falling outside the annual budget cycle, will be updated where necessary as proposals develop. Comments on draft and initial assessments are therefore welcome and help ensure we have fully considered the impact of decisions on communities and staff. Where potential negative impacts are identified for particular groups we will consult where appropriate to fully understand this, and/or will communicate directly with the people affected.

A handful of this year's SCIAs are revisions of those published last year. As these reworked SCIAs outline the same impacts as were identified last year, this cross-cutting SCIA will focus on those SCIAs developed for the new proposals.

SCIA documents for individual proposals are available on the website at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/service-and-community-impact-assessments-scias-201415>

Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act") imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions. The three needs are:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.

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.

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,
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs other people, and
- 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.
- take steps to meet the needs of disabled people which are different from the needs of people who are not disabled and include steps to take account of a person's disabilities.

The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

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
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership

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.

Social Value

Under the Public Services (Social Value Act) 2012 the Council also has an obligation to consider how the procurement of services contracts with a life value of more than £173,934¹ might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the area affected by the proposed contract, and how it might act to secure this improvement. However, it is best practice to consider social value for all types of contracts, service delivery decisions and new/updated policies. In this context, 'policy' is a general term that could include a strategy, project or contract.

¹ [EC Procurement Threshold for Services](#)

Context / Background:

Based on existing plans the County Council will have saved £265 million by 2017/18. Our net budget (excluding schools which are funded by a ring-fenced grant) is currently £585m.

In September 2014, Cabinet agreed that given the uncertainties over future levels of government funding due to the forthcoming General Election that the medium term planning period would not be extended beyond 2017/18 with limited adjustments made to the existing Medium Term Financial Plan to reflect any changes to spending assumptions. Therefore, this cross-cutting SCIA should be read in conjunction with the version produced during the 2014/15 budget, here: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/service-and-community-impact-assessments-scias>

2015/16 is the second year of the four-year directorate business strategies approved by Council in February 2014. Directorates have identified proposals to meet on-going expenditure pressures and any new expenditure pressures emerging during this planning round and refresh their strategies accordingly. In addition, at a Corporate level, it is proposed that these pressures are also addressed via one-off use of reserves, a reduction in pay budgets and a reduction in contract inflation.

We continue to work hard to find savings from efficiencies and those with minimal impact on the front line, but 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.

Service 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 – areas of deprivation, and rural geographies. 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.

Evidence / Intelligence:

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.

Impact Assessment:

Impact on Individuals and Communities:

In assessment, the majority of the new proposals have not been found to have impacts on specific groups. Rather, by withdrawing funding, for example, from Councillor Community Budgets, or from trading standards enforcement and testing, the impacts are county-wide, affecting all populations alike, including deprived and rural communities. However, where potential negative impacts are identified for particular groups we will consult where appropriate to fully understand this, and/or will communicate directly with the people affected.

Some of the specific groups with protected characteristics highlighted in the SCIA are:

Age and Disability

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. 21% of the population is under the age of 18 and the birth rate is at its highest level since 1973.

It is important that our Customer Services Centre is accessible to all. In moving to a digital by design approach for customer contacts the Council is proposing to introduce support mechanisms where customer service advisors complete transactions on behalf of customers who cannot self-serve, due to lack of digital infrastructure, or for reasons of safeguarding or incapacity, for example.

Similarly, where the council's funding of the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2) is ending, that organisation will continue to provide grants to promote access to green spaces, with young, older and disabled people their target groups.

In relation to the proposal to cease the Area Stewardship element of road maintenance the council has made clear that road defects in the vicinity of doctors' surgeries, day care centres etc., will still be categorised as requiring particular attention and any urgent repairs will be addressed as priority. Signing and lining for those registered disabled to allow parking outside their homes will continue to be delivered, and dropped crossings will continue to be assessed on a needs basis as identified by communities or individuals.

Rural communities

The move to a 'digital first' approach to customer service contacts may have a particular geographic impact as accessibility is reliant on the availability of the

Internet. Oxfordshire is a rural county and there are areas that either do not have broadband or have poor speeds that mean that people are reluctant to transact online. However, the Better Broadband programme will see internet speeds and availability in rural areas improve, and 90% of Oxfordshire premises are on track to have access to fibre enabled broadband by December 2015. This will mean that more people in rural communities will have access to online services and will be able to engage with the Council through its website.

In relation to the proposal to cease the Area Stewardship element of road maintenance the Council 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.

Areas of deprivation

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.

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.

Cutting the funding to the Community Action Group Project (CAG) is likely to affect deprived and low income families more than less deprived communities as the network helps households to reduce their bills by preventing food waste and through energy efficiency. A phased reduction in the budget over three years however will allow the CAG network to alter their funding model, helping to mitigate the impact of this reduction.

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.

Nonetheless if we bear in mind that these new proposals are in addition to those agreed in last year's budget, 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.

Mitigation measures for this risk 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. 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.

Sex

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. 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. Again, the cumulative impact of the savings proposals has the potential to be significant for this group.

Mitigation measures for this risk include ensuring that we have the required evidence base for making decisions about service consideration and change.

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.

Other protected characteristics

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:

Race
Religion/belief
Marriage/civil partnerships
Pregnancy & Maternity
Sexual orientation
Gender reassignment

Social Value

While the Social Value Act does not have direct relevance for the majority of the proposals under consideration, the Council is committed to the principles within it. When making decisions around contracting we consider how our commissioning activity might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area.