

COUNCIL – 10 FEBRUARY 2012
SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING – 2012/2013
Report by the Leader of the Opposition

Introduction

1. The Liberal Democrat opposition have always made it clear that the Council needs to invest in the basic frontline services that local people rely on every day. Our budget concentrates on three priorities: children and young people, elderly and vulnerable people and communities.
2. We have already seen evidence of the adverse impact that changes to youth services and to services for the elderly are having, and we have put forward some measures to ease the pain within the financial constraints that we have to accept. Part of the solution lies in helping communities to work together with the council; this needs starter funding, but not necessarily on-going costs.
3. We set out in the Annex our proposals to amend the Cabinet's budget to invest more in these priorities, whilst making savings to back office functions and income-generating proposals, and setting a council tax increase of zero in the first year.

Investment and saving proposals

Children, Young People & Families

4. Our children are our future. Every child should be given the best possible start in life. Our amendments put an additional £1.230m into the Children, Young People & Families budget.
5. We are very pleased that the Cabinet has seen fit to maintain child protection services, and we agree with this priority.
6. We consider the youth service has undergone radical changes, especially in the way the service is now run. However, as the new 'hub' models are still bedding in, we believe that by investing an additional £0.210m to employ extra outreach youth workers, or full time equivalent, but working across the whole area and spread across 3 years, this will enable some basic support for the youth service during this transitional period. This is a modest increase, on which we would hope to build when the financial situation is better.
7. We are concerned by cuts in grants, and will instead provide an additional £0.090m each year in grants to youth organisations and advice centres.
8. We are providing £0.700m towards family intervention projects. We know that this is an area where the Coalition government has committed to giving match funding help where it is needed most to enable real support

and early intervention to support struggling families. If not addressed, then this brings increased costs to the council in future years. This will also help the council in its objectives to help break the cycle of deprivation.

9. Finally, we understand how important it is for some who do not speak English as their first language, but who are trying to function in society, to have help with basic English classes. We have therefore, proposed to spend £0.050m in this area, which we believe will also help attainment in schools by engaging parents better with teachers and children's services.

Adult social care

10. Adult social care is facing dramatic changes in Britain as people live longer. Our residents should grow older feeling valued, fulfilled and healthier. We are therefore investing an additional £3.820m in social care services for adults.
11. Without the voluntary effort of family and friends, the quality of life of disabled, ill and elderly people would be much lessened, and more people would of necessity have to rely on limited and cash-strapped social and health services. We want to show these carers how valuable they are, and to provide them with the support they need, including respite. We therefore invest an additional £0.200m a year in family carers.
12. We know how important it is to ensure that people are able to stay in their own homes, however this can be difficult for the elderly or those with disabilities. We therefore propose investing £0.250m each year for occupational therapists and £0.050m on the equipment budget for the elderly and vulnerable.
13. We are very concerned about the measures to charge for transport to Day Centres and the effect this may have on the users of the day centres. We therefore propose not taking the savings in this area until plans are in place to deal with this which totals £1.3m over the next 3 years.
14. Finally, because we understand the problems with the complicated assessments for those with learning disabilities, mental health needs and other cases, we propose £0.340m a year towards helping to alleviate this situation.

Community Services

15. We propose £0.100m for support to Post Office regeneration, knowing how vital this service is to our communities particularly in rural areas and that now is an opportunity to do this especially as Oxfordshire has been chosen as one of the 25 pilots in the Coalition government's programme with Post Office Ltd.

Roads and the environment

16. We recognise that Oxfordshire's highways continue to need investment. However, we accept that the use of the Area Stewardship Fund is a new mechanism to ensure that maintenance work and other schemes previously covered by the highways budget can be spent in the different localities in the county. We support this and believe that more investment could be made in this area and therefore propose an additional £0.600m to go into this fund.
17. Public transport is important in our rural county and we propose an additional £0.050m a year to spend on bus subsidies.
18. We are pleased to put £1m in our Capital budget to ensure early design work can begin on the railway station at Wantage Road, Grove in line with the aspirations of the Oxfordshire Rail Transport Strategy. We believe it is important that the County Council show real commitment to this project.

Savings

19. We pay for this investment in front line services by cutting backroom functions, by cutting reserves, by energy efficiencies and by potentially increasing income.
20. We note that our previously proposed savings in many backroom functions have been accepted now by the Cabinet. However, we feel that a small additional saving can still be made from the marketing budget.
21. We make some changes to reserves:
 - contributing £1.059m from balances
 - contribution from the Efficiency Reserves
 - reducing the Change Fund which we think is over inflated
22. We believe that there are more energy efficiencies which can be made by reducing energy use across the council and we are therefore taking an additional saving of £0.050m a year in this area.
23. There is a Collection Fund surplus of £2.419m that can be used.
24. Taking £0.500m from the pensions past service deficit budget in Strategic Measures in the second year. There is so much uncertainty about pensions for 2014/15 so we will reassess our position nearer the time and make good any shortfall if needed.

Council Tax

25. We accept the zero Council Tax rise this year, because it is being funded by Government. In the following two years, we propose Council Tax rises in line with the Cabinet proposals.

Conclusion

26. We consider that these amendments show our commitment to investing in our priority, frontline services, whilst removing the worst excesses of the Cabinet's cuts, particularly in Adult Social Care where the sweeping cuts are hitting the most vulnerable in our society. They strike a balance between spending on the essential services that residents in our community rely upon and the need to keep Council Tax levels as low as possible.
27. **We therefore RECOMMEND Council to approve:**
- (a) **a budget for 2012/13 and a medium term financial plan for 2013/14-2016/17 as amended in Liberal Democrat Annex 1;**
 - (b) **the Council Tax for 2012/13 as set out in that annex and in particular a Council Tax for Band D equivalent properties of £1161.71.**

COUNCILLOR ZOE PATRICK
Leader of the Opposition