

**COUNCIL – 19 FEBRUARY 2013  
SERVICE AND RESOURCE PLANNING – 2013/2014  
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, and this year is no different. Our budget concentrates on three priorities: children and young people, elderly and vulnerable people and the environment. We also have an emphasis on supporting local communities.
2. We are concerned about the impact that changes to youth services and to services for the elderly and vulnerable 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; in some cases, 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 the marketing and communications budget, sharing some of our management costs with other authorities and reducing the amount of inflation on contracts. We would achieve this by setting a council tax increase 1.99% in the first year, which is the level we are allowed before triggering a referendum

**Investment and saving proposals**

*Children, Education & Families*

4. Our children are our future. Every child should be given the best possible start in life. Our amendments put an additional £2.059 m into the Children, Education & Families budget. For this reason, we are proposing to phase the amount of savings on management costs to the Children's Centres of £0.400m. This will give us more time to bring about these changes, whilst assessing how this will impact on the more rural areas of the county.
5. We are pleased that the Cabinet is increasing the investment in children's social care because this is a key area where caseload management means that having experienced officers in the front line may help to alleviate problems early on. However, we are still concerned about our Corporate Parenting role, and therefore only propose taking half the savings of £0.180m to ensure that we have a more efficient, but robust service in place.
6. We consider the youth service has undergone radical changes, especially in the way the service is now run. The hubs have taken some time to get themselves up to speed with all the changes, so we believe that an extra £0.100m per year to employ outreach youth workers, will enable some

basic support for the youth service especially in the more rural areas. This will help support the services already running, especially for some of the more vulnerable young people.

7. Finally, we understand how important it is for our young people who wish to leave school at 16 to undergo training, apprenticeships and work experience, but are not able to drive to their employment or college places. We propose doing a feasibility study at a cost of £0.025m in 2013/14 followed by a pilot year of funding concessionary bus travel for these 16-18 year olds in 2014/15 at a cost of £0.325m. However, we are expecting that once the scheme has bedded in and the bus companies and employers are on board, we shall be able to bring in some matched funding to continue to support the scheme in future years. We also hope that if the economy improves, this will also mean that we can review the situation in the longer term depending on the success of the scheme and any further costs to the council. This fits in well with our immediate concern about getting young people into work and training.

### *Social & Community Services*

8. 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 pleased that we are now taking on the public health responsibility in Oxfordshire, and endorse the joint work we already do with the NHS and our Director of Public Health. However, until we focus more on early intervention and enabling more of our elderly residents to be supported in their own homes, we feel that we need to invest an additional £2.378m in social care services for adults.
9. 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 £0.400m next year to help alleviate the pressures on the learning and physical disabilities budget. This will be reviewed next year when the situation may be clearer about the demand and whether we will have sufficient funds to cover this particular budget pressure.
10. We understand how important it is to ensure that people are able to stay in their own homes, and how difficult this can be for the elderly or those with disabilities. We therefore propose investing £0.202m each year for 5 occupational therapists. This will cover one extra post per district and help to support those who are in need.
11. 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 centres. We therefore propose not taking the full savings in this area, but just half the amount in the Cabinet budget. We feel that the price rise proposed is too great, though do accept that a modest rise to £2.50 instead of £5 would be

## CC9 (Liberal Democrat )

acceptable. This means that our cost to cover this amounts to £0.400m over 4 years.

12. We do not propose increasing the charges for attending our day centres at the current time, because we know how much our elderly appreciate this chance to get out of their homes during the week to socialise, enjoy a meal and take part in activities. We also do not wish to risk the viability of the centres by the clients choosing not to attend due to the increased costs. We will continue to monitor the situation in the future. By not taking this saving, this will amount to £0.720m over the four year term.
13. Finally, because we value our elderly residents, we are proposing a 'Silver Sunday Events' initiative which is to give £0.050m towards pump-priming communities to get together to provide an afternoon tea event on a Sunday afternoon, for those who may feel lonely and isolated.

### *Environment & Economy*

14. We recognise that Oxfordshire's highways continue to need investment. We are therefore proposing a total investment of £2.620m. 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, but do believe due to the success of the scheme in enabling county councillors to put forward measures for their individual communities, we would like to allocate an extra £0.630m to enable councillors to have an allocated budget of £10,000 each for improvements in their local area.
15. We are aware of the problems with the wet summer we have just endured and the pressures on gully maintenance and flood prevention. We are therefore proposing to invest in this area an amount of £0.600m over the next four years. Regular gully emptying will reduce flooding and we think it is important to take remedial steps here.
16. We believe we can save more in our property portfolio by reducing this by a further 5% and this will make a saving of £0.075m. This will be monitored in future years. We also feel that more could be done to reduce energy usage and again we believe a saving can be made here of another £0.050m.
17. We also propose a capital spend of £0.250m to help match fund grants for potential cycling and pedestrian schemes around the county. We are aware that there is government money available for these initiatives and we are keen to take advantage of them to benefit our communities.

### *Chief Executive's Office*

18. We propose keeping the Big Society Budget for another year, recognising the importance of being able to support local projects in our communities which has become very popular. As this has only been allowed for one

## CC9 (Liberal Democrat )

year, we would like to extend this for another year for all 63 councillors at a cost of £0.630m. We will then be in a position to review how the money is being spent.

### *Savings*

19. We pay for this investment in front-line services by cutting some backroom functions, by cutting reserves, by energy efficiencies and by potentially being able to share some of our services with other local authorities and organisations. The current CPI inflation rate is only 2.7% so we feel that 2.75% is adequate for the contract inflation figure at this stage, rather than the 3% in current contracts. This results in a saving of £0.432m. We understand the difficulty with not being able to change already agreed contract positions, but this is something we would have done differently if we had been part of the original negotiation. Sometimes, like in the case of the Area Stewardship Fund, we have found local contractors able to complete one-off projects at a much cheaper rate.
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 of £0.050m.
21. We make the following change to reserves:
  - Contributing £1.831m from Directorate Earmarked reserves.
22. We are proposing to save £0.200m by using shared management with other councils and organisations where joint-working will be more cost-effective. We have already started this process and we believe that more could be done to explore this option further.
23. Taking £0.500m from Strategic Measures for pensions. This is because there is so much uncertainty about pensions for 2014/15 that we shall need to reassess our position nearer the time and make good any shortfall if needed.

### **Council Tax**

24. We accept the 1.99% Council Tax rise this year; because it is the amount we can take without triggering an unnecessary and costly referendum. We also feel that in these austere times, this is a reasonable sum of money to help retain our vital services. In the following two years, we propose Council Tax rises in line with the Cabinet proposals.

### **Conclusion**

25. 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, which in some areas of social care are hitting the most vulnerable in our society. They strike a balance between spending on the

## **CC9 (Liberal Democrat )**

essential services that residents in our community rely upon and the need to keep Council Tax levels as low as possible.

26. We therefore RECOMMEND Council to approve:
- i. A budget for 2013/14 and a medium term financial plan for 2014/15-2016/17 as amended in Liberal Democrat Annex 1;
  - ii. The Council Tax for 2013/14 as set out in that annex and in particular a Council Tax for Band D equivalent properties of £1,184.83.

**CLLR ZOÉ PATRICK**  
**Leader of the Opposition**