

Oxfordshire County Council - 17 February 2015

Leader of the Opposition Overview

I want to begin by thanking Lorna Baxter and her team for the help and guidance given to the Labour Group throughout the year. We have been involved in the process of setting this budget for many months. We have also had numerous briefings about the enormous extra pressures emerging in relation to Adult Social Care, Adult and Children's Safeguarding and Children's Social Care and for those briefings we thank the Directors and Deputy Directors.

The Coalition Government since 2010 has cut grant to Local Government and has imposed restrictions on the level of Council Tax raised locally with any increase above 2% requiring a costly Referendum. These restrictions on Local Democracy apply only to England where local people have no say over how the services provided locally are funded. The Labour Group has taken the view that any referendum would be unlikely to get the support of this Council or the people of Oxfordshire and would simply look like gesture politics costing money which would be better spent on services.

Over the 5 year period of the Coalition Government there have been cuts of £292m to services in order to keep within their imposed straitjacket. Since 2010 there has also been increased pressure to provide additional services for the most vulnerable residents of this County. This has led to further cuts in other areas of the budget in order to meet this need and we see this again with the Administration's Budget which is now before us. We are not in a position to control the increased pressure on the budget due to greater need and we are morally obliged to meet the cost of the pressure which has stemmed from:

- **Meeting the needs of Children and Young People**

The need to keep our children safe from danger, the majority of which sadly they face in their own homes from those who should be protecting them but also from Child Sexual Exploitation. Oxfordshire has seen a number of perpetrators successfully prosecuted and has set up the innovative Kingfisher Team. The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hubs have also now been developed. Within the budget presented we see that much of the other services within Children's Centres and the Hubs is under threat and is not affordable in the current financial climate.

The Labour Group take the view that as we move to make the enormous cut proposed we should be considering what sort of provision we need for Children and Young People growing up with all of the pressures of a digital, global age. We have many excellent buildings. Where they are located is of course an important concern, as is how they are used, who uses them and for what purpose. Locating the services for 0-5 year olds transferred to Public Health also needs to be taken into account. But within our communities we need to galvanise the support of all to the common end in order to protect our children from abuse while ensuring our children and young people have sustainable services to support them particularly through the stormy waters of adolescence. We need to bring those professionals, para professionals and voluntary/ community groups together in those buildings within our most disadvantaged communities to meet the needs of children and young people living in those communities. That may mean closure of some buildings.

- **Older People**

The increasing number of Older People requiring services needs to be addressed. Not least because of the need to keep this group of people safe from abuse by others. The number of safeguarding alerts concerning Older People has increased along with problems of recruitment of carers and of the cost of residential care. The Labour Group would investigate setting up a Direct Labour Organisation such as there are in other parts of the country. That way we could ensure that carers would be paid the Living Wage. In short running such services ourselves instead of putting large sums of money into organisations which need to make a profit could save money, provide better conditions for carers and maintain or indeed enhance the quality of service.

- **People with Learning Disabilities**

There is enormous pressure on services for people with learning disabilities. This could be attributed to previous cuts which have not been delivered but there has also been an increase in the number of people requiring services due to changes in circumstances such as older parents no longer being in a position to care. The Labour Group will watch carefully how the outcomes of the Big Conversation are taken forward. New and more innovative ways need to be found to provide services and enrich the lives of Adults with Learning Disability.

- **Changes to the budget**

Whilst the Labour Group are deeply concerned about the cuts which have been imposed on Local Government and would want to see a shift from this method of funding, we realise that within the straitjacket which has been imposed on us we need to work differently.

We do not support the large increase in the amount of money to be paid in Councillors allowances. We would not fund the additional allowances at a cost of £160,000 and would find an additional £40,000 in that budget. The additional money could be found from reducing the number of Cabinet Posts by 2, by inviting members to opt for electronic delivery of council and committee papers and sending no third party mail by post to members. We would transfer £200,000 to the Integrated Transport Budget to protect the Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride Schemes throughout the County. In doing this we recognise that these services enable those people unable to get to a bus stop and suffering from loneliness and isolation to maintain some independence. Any cuts to these services will lead to further pressures on Adult Social Care.

This is a clean and simple approach which respects the Leader's comments in relation to stability.

RECOMMENDATION

We RECOMMEND Council to approve:

- 1) a budget for 2015/16 and medium term financial plan for 2016/17 – 2017/18 as amended in Labour Group Annex 1**

LIZ BRIGHOUSE

Leader of the Opposition

Labour Group Budget Amendments

	2015/16 £000	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000	TOTAL £000
Cabinet Net Pressures (+) / Savings (-)	-4,767	2,955	-5,337	-7,149
<u>Environment & Economy</u>				
Reduce the savings needed from Supported Transport (15EE14 & 16EE5)	200			200
<u>Chief Executive's Office</u>				
Do not fund the pressure arising from the decision to increase Members' Allowances (16CEO1)	-160			-160
Reduce the number of Members on the Cabinet by two	-40			-40
Revised Net Pressures (+) / Savings (-)	-4,767	2,955	-5,337	-7,149
Change to Cashflow Position	0	0	0	0