

## Talking Oxfordshire Executive Summary

### Introduction

1. The council has to set a balanced budget every year. As part of this process, residents, services users and stakeholders are consulted, with their views formally reported upon and taken into account by all councillors as part of the budget setting process.
2. The 2015 Talking Oxfordshire budget consultation was designed to inform people about the council's financial situation and to seek public and stakeholder opinion at an early stage in the 2016/17 service and resource planning cycle. The consultation was set against the following backdrop:

As government reduces funding to local government, the county council has to continue to make budget savings. At the same time demand for our services is increasing, partly due to our ageing and growing population, and increasing demand for social care.

The council has already saved – or has plans to save – a total of £292 million between 2010/11 and 2017/18. We now think we will need to save up to £50 million more in the four years between 2016/17 and 2019/20. As a result, county council services will be reduced and some may stop altogether. The services left will be targeted at those who really depend on them – particularly children at risk of abuse and neglect and adults who cannot look after themselves.

### Consultation approach

3. The Talking Oxfordshire consultation ran between Tuesday 20 October and Monday 30 November 2015, and comprised of:
  - Explaining the council's financial situation and budget pressures using a consultation document, budget savings options document and feedback form that was made available in all public libraries and from council offices on request . A summary leaflet was also produced and handed out at all the public meetings.
  - An online consultation comprising written background information, video content, a presentation, and a structured feedback form.
  - Three public meetings held in south, central and north of the county, including live tweeting from the meeting to give people who could not attend a taste of the proceedings.
  - One stakeholder meeting for parish and town councils delivered by Community First Oxfordshire (formally Oxfordshire Rural Community Council) focussing primarily on rural issues.

- Giving people other opportunities to engage in writing via email, letter, petition or social media.
  - Raising the profile of the consultation through a range of direct and indirect communications to ensure as many people of possible were aware of the exercise and how to have their say.
4. People were asked to give their views on one or more of the 95 savings options across all areas of the council (excluding public health, which has a ring-fenced grant from government). They were also invited to comment on the future priorities for the council and council tax levels.

### Analysis and reporting

5. All the responses to this consultation are being analysed and will be included in the detailed report. The online data has been cleaned to remove duplicate responses and incomplete responses. The table below summarises the response pattern across all channels. It should be noted however, that the council sought to make Talking Oxfordshire an open and inclusive process, and as such we did not place any limitations on how people could respond. With this in mind, it is possible that some people will be double counted in this table.

| Activity   | Number   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online responses including data entered forms</li> <li>• Letters/emails from service users/members of the public</li> <li>• Formal responses from stakeholder organisations</li> </ul>  | <p>3,631 (across all three online forms, including those data entered by the council)</p> <p>223</p> <p>40</p> |
| <p><b>Petitions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed closing of the health and well-being Centres in the County (16 November 2015)</li> <li>• Everyone Deserves a Chance (Proposed closure of health and wellbeing centres)</li> <li>• Don't cut care (Age UK Love later life, part of a national campaign)</li> <li>• The Elms health and wellbeing centre Witney</li> </ul> | <p>204 signatures</p> <p>964 signatures</p> <p>1,100 signatures</p> <p>64 signatures</p>                       |
| <p><b>Public meetings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Booked a place at Oxford public meeting event</li> <li>• Booked a place at Banbury public meeting event</li> <li>• Booked a place at Wallingford public meeting event</li> </ul>  | <p>126 people</p> <p>102 people</p> <p>120 people</p>  |
| <p><b>Attended parish and town council event</b></p>   | <p>106 people attended representing 75 councils</p>  |

## Main Findings

### Written consultation

6. The council received over 3,000 representations from residents and services users in response to the 95 savings options presented. The table below summarises the number of savings options put forward by each directorate and a count of responses received in response to each. The clear majority of responses were negative in tone, objected to savings being made or expressing concern about the impact.

| <b>Service area</b>            | <b>Savings option</b> | <b>Count</b> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Adult social care              | 31                    | 1,431        |
| Children, Education & Families | 13                    | 332          |
| Environment & Economy          | 27                    | 512          |
| Fire & Rescue Service          | 8                     | 61           |
| Libraries and Culture          | 2                     | 744          |
| Corporate Services             | 8                     | 73           |
| Corporate Measures             | 6                     | 31           |

7. The most frequently commented on savings options (> 50 submissions) are presented in the table below. Many people chose to submit comments on a single savings option rather than several.

| <b>Reference</b>    | <b>Savings option</b>                             | <b>Count</b> |
|---------------------|---|--------------|
| LCS2                | Cease funding of arts centres                     | 548          |
| SCS22 (was SCS24)   | Housing related support                           | 265          |
| SCS 21b (was SCS22) | Health and Wellbeing Centres                      | 244          |
| SCS 21a (was SCS21) | Tier 2 Day Services                               | 221          |
| LCS1                | Library Savings                                   | 164          |
| SCS18               | Planned support (known as warden control schemes) | 123          |
| CEF12               | Early Intervention and Hubs/Children's Centres    | 79           |
| EE23                | Subsidised bus consultation proposals             | 76           |
| SCS1                | Prediction of demand for service                  | 57           |
| SCS13               | Intervention and prevention service - HIV         | 56           |
| EE22                | Rights of way                                     | 54           |
| SCS2                | Land and Property                                 | 53           |
| CEF13               | Services for disabled children and families       | 51           |
| EE1                 | Patching work                                     | 51           |

8. A detailed analysis of the comments received is currently being finalised and the full report will be made available as soon as possible for councillors and the

public in advance of the performance scrutiny meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December. This report will be accompanied by a complete deposit of all the consultation responses. It will also include the full responses from key local stakeholders including the five district councils, Thames Valley Police and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

### **Public meetings**

In total, nearly 350 people attended the three Talking Oxfordshire public meetings. Each meeting was chaired by an independent host from the Consultation Institute. Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Leader of the Council and Lorna Baxter, Chief Finance Officer, introduced the council's budget position and why we are required to make savings.

9. Following the initial presentations, Councillor Hudspeth and Lorna Baxter were joined by Peter Clark, Head of Paid Service for the public debate session about the council's 95 budget savings options. A wide range of issues were discussed but a large proportion of the each meeting was concerned with discussing savings options for adult social care and children, education and families.
10. The main talking points common to at least two or more of the public meetings were:
  - The need to **protect the most vulnerable** in society.
  - Concern on many fronts about the possible closure of **children's centres**, including negative impact on families, risk of missing early warning signs, cascading pressures to other service.
  - Concern about the closure of **health and well-being centres**, including negative impact on service users and their carers, cascading pressures to others services.
  - the need to **lobby/challenge government** and make representations about the council's financial situation.

## Stakeholder meeting

11. Overall, 75 parish and town councils were represented at the Talking Oxfordshire stakeholder meeting, which was organised and hosted by Community First Oxfordshire on behalf of the council. This meeting was to give local councils the opportunity to discuss the impacts of the savings options on their communities and the possible responses that could be put in place. The main points raised were:

### **The impact of the proposed options being implemented:**

Concern at the loss of preventive services:

- Children: childrens' centres
  - Adults: day care, transport, mobile libraries
  - Bus subsidies
  - Road maintenance and gritting; maintenance of footpaths
- 
- Concern that reducing expenditure on these services may actually cost the County Council and NHS more in the long run.
  - Growing resistance to Government budget cuts.
  - Taking on services\_– not all parish councils are willing or experienced enough to take on services from the County Council.
  - More rural isolation of the elderly with associated health consequences.
  - Over-reliance on the same, small number of volunteers without adequate support.
  - Closing Waste/recycling centres – increase in fly-tipping.
  - Drainage and flooding problems may increase in some areas.

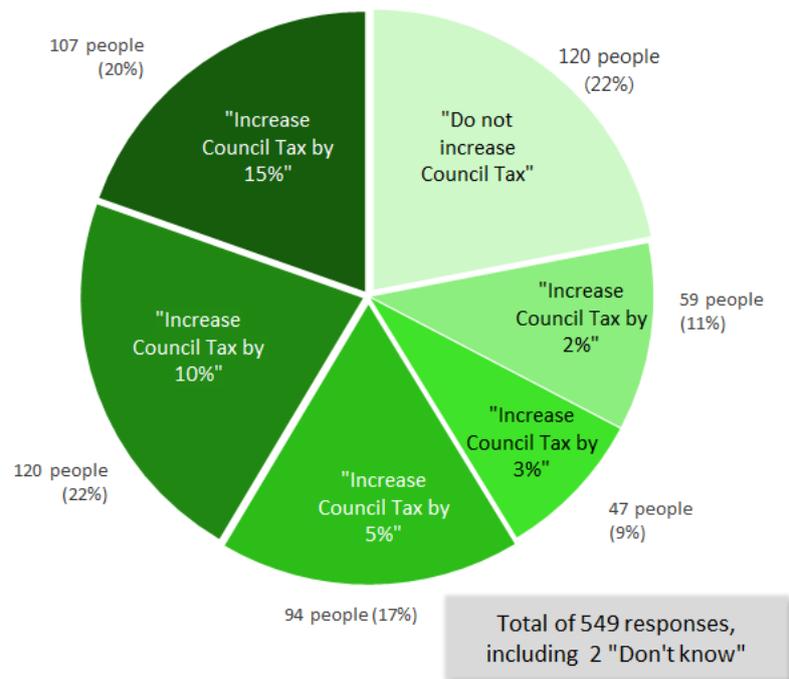
### **Suggested responses by participants:**

- The vulnerable must be protected.
- Challenge Government policy with other councils and the LGA.
- Deliver services more cost effectively:
  - Understand the full cost of services and assess their benefits.
  - Insist on more efficient, outcome based commissioning.
  - Consider delivering profitable services in house or via not for profit bodies.
  - Devolve services to parishes and incentivise accordingly.
  - Bring bus providers together with communities to improve viability of rural routes.
  - Promote unitary government: there are too many tiers of government.
  - Explore delivering some services at a sub-regional level.
  - Sell local authority assets.

- Income generation should be a priority. The county council should consider:
  - Holding a referendum to increase Council Tax above 2%; schedule it at the same time as other elections to reduce costs.
  - Consider drawing on investments, not reserves.
  - Charge for services; many people are prepared to pay more for some services (buses, waste centres etc.).
  - Concessionary bus passes: a voluntary scheme should be set up so only those that need them use them.
  - Cut councillors' allowances.
- Lengthsmen: the county council should support Lengthsmen – share across parishes.
- Parish councils should survey residents on raising precept – this will need to be done quickly if they are to factor an increase into the next year.
- New Homes Bonus: use for key infrastructure.
- Volunteers: need more training and professional support. Strengthen arrangements for recruiting younger volunteers so the responsibility is shared. Scope for using local volunteer labour on some tasks such as grass cutting.
- Support enterprise: help villages or clusters of villages develop social enterprises such as 'Village Companies'.
- Transitional funding must be made available.
- Community transport: support volunteer car schemes properly.
- Resource sharing website: car sharing / furniture / time.

### **Attitudes towards Council Tax responses**

12. As part of the consultation people were asked about their attitudes towards council tax levels, based on the scenario that an increase in council tax levels could help to protect frontline services. In total, the council received 549 comments via the online form including two don't know answers.
13. The pie chart below summaries their preferred council tax increases. There was equal support (c. 20%) for a council tax freeze and a 15% rise, with the majority (59%) supporting for a rise of between 5-15%.



14. Council Tax levels were also discussed at all three public meetings and the results of the straw poll at the Wallingford meeting was in favour of a rise. Polls were not taken at the other two meetings.

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December 2015