

Labour Group Budget Amendments 2017 Leader of the Opposition Overview

Once again Lorna Baxter and her staff have worked tirelessly with staff across the Directorates to deliver a Budget which is balanced and within the restraints put on Local Government by Central Government. This has been done against a backdrop of over £300m of cuts, 2/3 of which were re-invested in services to meet the rising demand for Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Our staff has also had to cope with re-organisation and the transformation of how services are delivered. Through all of this they have kept the needs of the most vulnerable people in this County at the heart of what they do and for that we thank them.

This year the Government agreed that Adult Social Care needed extra funding and allowed Local Authorities to increase Council Tax by 6% over the next 2 years rather than 3 years. The Cabinet has agreed to recommend the Council to use this freedom to increase the Council Tax this year by 3% to fund the widening gap in the increasing needs of the spiraling number of Older People and others who rely on Adult Social Care. As the Adult Social care precept is only available for 2 years and beyond that the precept is limited to increases of only 1.99% additional money will need to be found and this will be a risk unless governance arrangements in Oxfordshire change and the new authority uses its power to fund these crucial services. The Labour Group supports the use of this additional freedom to raise the precept, but believe that Local Government should be freed from the diktat of Central Government in relation to how it raises the money to meet the needs of the community it serves. If Oxfordshire were able to raise the tax on the top 2 bands of property, remove the single person's discount for those who are not on any form of benefit and increase the tax on second homes, the income would go a long way to alleviate some of the enormous budget pressures in Adult Social Care and that would be real devolution. But the problem in Adult Social Care in Oxfordshire is not just financial.

The economy in Oxfordshire is thriving. Thousands of new jobs will be created this year in 2 developments alone; the Westgate Shopping Centre and expansion of Bicester Village. These attractive additional jobs and the fact that there is a chronic shortage of places for people to live, mean we are simply not able to recruit the number of carers we need. This is also true in the Health Service. This has been a major threat to Adult Social Care for some time and is getting worse. Home Care Companies have closed down because of their inability to retain Carers and not being able to fill their many vacancies. Using money from the higher precept to create a better work environment for carers is welcome, but this needs to go further. Oxfordshire should be employing its own carers. As a large employer Oxfordshire would be able to offer better terms and conditions of employment, ensure that progression and continuous professional development is in place and so raise the status of Carers, hopefully resulting in more recruits to this crucial work.

A further threat to Adult Social Care is the Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) for the area covering Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire (BOB). These plans are convoluted and opaque. There is no clear accountability for delivery or for responsibility if it goes wrong. Oxfordshire has one of the largest pooled budgets with Health and in any transition we must be able to ensure the money put in for Social Care does not get sucked into Health Care, leaving vulnerable people in the community without the support they need. The Health Service is a National Service, accountable to the Secretary of State for Health and various quangos. It is free at the point of delivery which makes it very different from Adult Social Care which is means tested and part of Local

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Government. There is, however, a real need for the 2 services to work together at local level. The joint work done to reduce the number of people stuck in hospital unnecessarily is testament to that. The STP will remove £200m from the Budget of Health and will reduce the beds available at a time when people are lying on trolleys in corridors. The fear that treatments could be rationed, as hip and knee replacements have been in other areas, will lead to further groups of older people losing their independence and needing carers. Oxfordshire Adult Social Care Services are judged externally to be better than those available in other areas within the BOB. The Labour Group will be resolute against any threat the STP poses to these services and to the wellbeing of Oxfordshire residents.

The change to Chief Executive and 3 Strategic Directors, (one of which is the Chief Executive) has delivered some £500k savings already. We hope that the new structure will result in better joint work and therefore further economies. This could be better achieved if the Cabinet Posts reflected the roles of the Strategic Directors. This would also save money. We need to look further at that budget. Councillors not only get paid an allowance which is to support them in their role as Councillors but they are also given equipment, broad-band access at home and consumables including paper etc. A Councillors Reference Group should be asked to bring forward proposals to cut the rest of the councillors overall budget by 10% and this would produce £210k of savings in total which could be used towards additional funding to support Children, Young People and Families within the new service which has been set up as a result of the closure of Children's Centres and the Early Intervention Hubs. In particular this would support open access sessions at such places as Donnington Doorstep and open access sessions for young people.

There are massive pressures in Children's Social Care: the new Children's Homes which Oxfordshire has established will start hopefully to reduce the high cost of Out County Placements which some vulnerable children and young people need. Even with this new provision, we will not have the ability to meet the needs of the most vulnerable who because of emotional and behavioral problems need to be in secure accommodation. There is a need for such accommodation and Oxfordshire could use some of its land to set up such a facility which could also offer places to other authorities struggling in the same way as Oxfordshire in providing for this group of children and young people.

Homelessness and an adequate supply of Housing are interlinked. There is a need at all levels to ensure that there is housing available which meets in particular the needs of vulnerable young people, young families and older people who need care. We welcome the work that has been done as a result of stopping the cut to the Homeless Pathway budget last year and in particular that this has resulted in the District Councils beginning to recognise that they need to put money in - however frugally. Oxfordshire could use some of its land, including land on school sites, to meet some of the shortfall in housing, by setting up a Land Development Trust. The assets and work which has already been done in the Districts/City would enhance such an initiative. There is also a need to find ways to put together housing and education projects for the majority of young people who do not go to University. We are not meeting the basic needs of these young people and many are living in overcrowded homes as they struggle to navigate their way into adulthood. Most go completely under the radar. Many of these young people end up on the streets. Co-production of projects has worked well for other groups. There may be some benefit of working with the wide range of people with differing needs who find themselves on the streets to find solutions to this problem. One size doesn't fit all and early intervention could go some way to try to alleviate the suffering of those who only have a doorway to call home.

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Every County Councillor hears several times a week about potholes in their area. A small amount of money made available for potholes could enable councillors to identify those in need of urgent filling in the next financial year. In the longer term we need to find the money to invest in the technology and equipment now available to identify and mend potholes.

We propose to use £690k from the additional business rates and saving on inflation in addition to the £210k identified in a cut to the Councillors Budget. This would fund £170k in relation to potholes, £640k for open access sessions to support those young people and families who used the old Early Intervention Service including Donnington Doorstep and £90k would go towards the Homelessness Pathway and a co-production plan, which will enable users to be involved in designing early intervention services for those at risk of homelessness.

In setting the Budget there are many challenges for Oxfordshire. The Labour Group are well aware that without structural change these challenges cannot be met and the blame culture which has existed between the various public bodies and in particular the local authorities will continue while the majority of those living in our local communities carry on with their lives largely unaffected. It is those with the greatest need, who rely on their carer to get them out of bed, the child who needs to be protected from neglect and violence, the youngster without any structure or stability in their lives, the family living in poverty in overcrowded housing, and the lonely and isolated who suffer. These people living in urban areas and in the towns and villages across Oxfordshire need to be at the heart of what politicians do.

Recommendations

The Council is RECOMMENDED (in respect of revenue) to:

- approve a budget for 2017/18 and a medium term financial plan for 2017/18 – 2020/21 as amended in Labour Group Annex 1;

Liz Brighthouse
Leader of the Labour Group and the Opposition
Oxfordshire County Council

Labour Budget Amendments to Cabinet Proposals

REVENUE	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total All
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Net Pressures/Savings	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Do not add funding back into contingency (18CM7)	-0.690				-0.690
Saving on Members Budget	-0.210				-0.210
Potholes funding	0.170				0.170
Open access sessions to support young people and families who used the Early Intervention Service including Donnington Doorstep	0.640				0.640
Homelessness Pathway and co-production plan for early intervention services for those at risk of homelessness.	0.090				0.090
Revised Net Pressures/Savings	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000