

Section 4.7

Overarching Equalities Impact Assessment

1: Summary and Context

What is Being Assessed:

Oxfordshire County Council's Budget and Business Plan proposals for 2026/27, covering both capital and revenue, are being assessed for their overall impact on various community groups, particularly those protected by the Equality Act 2010, as well as on broader community and societal outcomes. This Equalities Impact Assessment provides a public summary of how the proposed budget may influence equality in Oxfordshire and outlines steps to address any concerns. The assessment systematically reviews how budget decisions could affect people with protected characteristics or other vulnerable groups, ensuring the Council fulfills its legal duty to prevent discrimination, promote equal opportunities, and encourage positive community relations when setting the budget.

Current Budget Setting Context:

Like many councils, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) faces a challenging financial landscape. Demand for key services (especially in adult and children's social care) is rising while resources are constrained. The Council must find substantial savings and efficiencies to deliver a balanced budget. At the same time, central government is undertaking a 'Fair Funding Review' of local government finance from 2026/27 which creates uncertainty about future funding levels. In essence, the Council must plan prudently amid budget pressures and an evolving funding formula, ensuring vital services continue for those who need them most. This tight fiscal context makes it even more critical to assess equality impacts: we need to save money in ways that do not unfairly burden any community or protected group. The Council's financial strategy is to protect frontline services and vulnerable people as far as possible despite the constraints on reserves and spending.

Summary of Assessment: Neutral/ Positive

After reviewing all 2026/27 proposals, no changes are intended to negatively or disproportionately affect any protected group. Most adjustments are internal or technical with neutral equality impacts, while some investments – such as in community services and infrastructure – will benefit protected groups. Many proposals are still in early stages; proposal-specific Equalities Impact Assessments (EIAs) will be updated as plans develop and further information is gathered, with public consultation ensuring any unforeseen impacts are addressed. At this strategic level, the 2026/27 budget is assessed as having a neutral or positive effect on equalities, with no evidence of intentional disadvantage. Some proposals, like

improvements to rural transport and maintaining community hubs, may improve opportunities for those in remote or less-mobile populations. The EIA is an ongoing process; each proposal will receive further analysis as it progresses. The Council will engage with communities, monitor impacts, and adjust plans as needed to avoid unintended harm. In conclusion, the 2026/27 budget proposals are not expected to Negatively impact any protected group and will be continually reviewed to ensure fairness and inclusion throughout Oxfordshire.

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2: Detailed Context and Background

Financial Challenges and Fair Funding Reform:

Oxfordshire County Council enters 2026/27 facing significant financial challenges. There are severe budget pressures driven by rising demand in services like Adult Social Care and Special Educational Needs (SEN), inflation in contract costs, and legacy budget shortfalls. Compounding this is the Fair Funding Review 2.0 by central government, which will overhaul how councils are funded from 2026/27. This reform aims to redistribute council funding based on updated needs formulas; together with a business rates reset, it will deliver the most significant change in the distribution of funding to local government in over a decade. The Council is therefore being cautious in its 2026/27 budget and avoiding new long-term commitments. It also underscores the need to build resilience and fairness into our budget; we must ensure vital services (especially vulnerable groups) are sustainable even if resources shift.

Oxfordshire's Community Profile:

Understanding Oxfordshire's population helps in assessing potential equality impacts. Key points:

- Our county has an ageing population (the proportion of residents over 65 is growing, especially in rural districts where around 20% are 65+ vs roughly 12% in Oxford City). There is also a significant youth population in urban areas (Oxford's median age is just 31, partly due to our high student population).
- Census 2021 indicates 14.5% of residents are disabled under the Equality Act; a further 7.9% have a long-term condition not limiting daily activities; combined, 22–23% report a condition or disability.
- We have an increasingly diverse ethnic makeup: overall about 23% of residents are from non White-British backgrounds, with Oxford City having an almost 50% non-White British population.
- Smaller but important communities include a growing number of LGBTQ+ residents, a thriving network of faith communities, and a notable population of Armed Forces personnel and veterans linked to local bases and reserve units.
- There are also significant rural communities (about one-third of our population lives in smaller towns/villages and rural areas) and pockets of deprivation – for example, parts of Oxford (Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill), Banbury (Ruscote) and Didcot have higher unemployment and poverty rates despite the county's overall affluence. According to the Indices of Deprivation 2025, 2 small areas in Oxfordshire fall in the most deprived 10% nationally, and 9 in the most deprived 20%.

This varied profile means the impacts of budget changes can differ across Oxfordshire: e.g. a proposal affecting public transport could particularly matter for rural elderly residents, while changes in library or youth services might impact

families in poorer urban areas. Ensuring an intersectional balance of equalities implications is paramount to the council's ambitions for a fair and equitable county.

Our Equality Objectives and Approach:

The Council's Strategic Plan emphasises making Oxfordshire “*a fairer, greener, and healthier*” county. Internally, the Council has a four-year inclusion strategy, the “*Including Everyone*” framework (2024), which commits to tackling discrimination and advancing equality in all we do. The 2026/27 budget has been developed in line with these values. Throughout the budgeting process, officers were instructed to consider how to minimise negative impacts on vulnerable groups. For example, in identifying savings, priority has been given to back-office efficiencies and income generation over frontline service reductions wherever possible. Some proposals explicitly aim to improve equity – for instance, investing in community transport to serve isolated rural communities, or funding digital tools that improve access to services for people with disabilities.

(Note: This EIA recognises that many proposals are still at an early design phase as of budget-setting in late 2025. This is common – ideas are put forward to meet financial targets, but detailed designs will follow. The purpose of this overarching EIA is to ensure there are no major unforeseen equalities implications at the point of budget decisions. Detailed, proposal-specific EIAs will be developed as plans progress.)

In the detailed impact assessment below, we group findings by:

- **Protected Characteristics,**
- **Additional Community Impacts,**
- **Wider Impacts.**

Each section outlines current context for the group in question, the overall impact rating we assign (Positive, Neutral, Negative, or Mixed) and why, the specific budget proposals that contribute to those impacts, and any mitigation actions identified (with who will lead on those actions and relevant timelines for review).

3: Impact Assessment by Protected Characteristic

Protected Characteristic: Age

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Context: Oxfordshire has a total population of around 725,300, with about 18% aged 0–15, 64% aged 16–64 (working age), and 18% aged 65+. The county's older population (65+) has grown in recent years – now, numbering about 129,800 people – and is projected to increase further as life expectancy is high. Many rural areas have an even higher proportion of elderly residents, leading to concerns about isolation and access to services. Meanwhile, the presence of two universities means Oxford City has a younger skew (median age 31), and countywide there are about 132,500 children under 16. Key age-related issues include providing for the rising care needs of the elderly, ensuring services for children and youth are maintained (education, youth clubs, etc.), and enabling working-age adults to access employment and transport.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Age:

- **Emergency Oxfordshire Telecare Provision (Adult Social Care):**

Description: Funding an urgent new telecare service after the previous provider failed, to ensure lifeline alarm support continues for elderly and disabled residents living at home.

Impact: **Positive** for older people. Telecare allows older, vulnerable residents to live independently at home with 24/7 emergency support (e.g. fall detectors, personal alarms). The new contract prevents a gap in service that would have disproportionately affected older individuals.

Mitigations: This is an enhancement, not a cut. The Council's commissioning team is closely monitoring the new provider to ensure stable staffing and a smooth transition. No negative impacts identified.

- **Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) Traffic Restrictions Pilot (Highways – Capital Project):**

Description: A pilot scheme to impose weight restrictions and re-route HGVs away from certain towns/villages (e.g. Henley, Windrush Valley) to reduce heavy traffic in rural communities.

Impact: **Positive** for older people and children. Reducing HGV volume will make village streets safer and quieter, which especially benefits older pedestrians (who may feel intimidated by large lorries) and young families walking or cycling. It should also improve air quality – beneficial to older residents with respiratory conditions and to young children. No direct negative impact on youth beyond general safety improvements (e.g. children walking to school will have safer roads).

Mitigations: This scheme is being monitored during the pilot. If new issues arise, the traffic plan will be adjusted. Community feedback (across all ages) is part of the pilot evaluation.

- **School Expansions (Children's Services – Capital, via CIL funding):**

Description: Using developer contributions (Community Infrastructure Levy) to expand Tetsworth Primary School and to fund the relocation and expansion of St Nicholas' CE Infant School into a full primary school, to meet growing demand from new housing developments.

Impact: **Positive** for young people (children) and their families, particularly in rural or growing communities. Providing additional school capacity in the right areas ensures that children can get a school place locally, avoiding overcrowding and long travel distances. Improved access and modern facilities facilitate better learning outcomes and educational experience.

Mitigations: As with any change in education provision, families will be kept informed about changes to school capacity or catchment areas. Engagement and consultation with parents and the local community are integral in the school expansion planning process. By involving stakeholders early, the expansion can proceed smoothly without disadvantaging any pupils during transitions.

- **Adult Social Care Funding Pressures (Adult Social Care):**

Description: The budget includes additional funding to meet growing needs in adult social care (e.g. more home care hours, residential placements) and covers a shortfall that arose after an external care provider's sudden liquidation.

Impact: **Positive/Neutral** for older adults. By allocating extra funds, the Council ensures no older person loses care support due to budget cuts. For instance, more older people needing help with daily living will receive services, preventing unmet need or waiting lists. This avoids a potential negative scenario of rationing care due to lack of funds. This proposal itself is a mitigation against what would have been a negative impact on the elderly if funding were insufficient.

Mitigations: This is a proactive measure. The Council will continually monitor demand. In summary, this funding top-up is designed to maintain service levels for older people, ensuring they are not adversely affected by rising demand.

- **Children & Youth Services – Maintained Provision:**

Description: Notably, **no cuts** were proposed to children's services, youth clubs, or early help programmes in 2026/27. In fact, one budget line adds funding for children's social care placements to cover cost increases.

Impact: **Neutral/Positive** for children and young people. Maintaining current service levels means there is no loss of support for families or youth. Key services like children's centres and family support, continue unchanged, preserving vital developmental and social opportunities. The additional funding for care placements ensures that vulnerable children (e.g. looked-after children) continue to be placed appropriately even as costs rise, thereby safeguarding their welfare.

Mitigations: Since there are no reductions, specific mitigation is not required. The Council will continue to engage with young people to identify any emerging needs and ensure services remain responsive.

- **Library and Education Infrastructure (Resources/Cultural Services – Capital):**

Description: Capital plans include projects like a new **Banbury Library** (planned for 2027 in partnership with the district council) and improvements to other libraries. While these facilities will not be delivered in 2026/27, the budget confirms ongoing commitment to these community assets. For instance, the capital programme includes refurbishments at Wantage Library (£360k) and Goring Library (£750k over two years), which will create more flexible, accessible spaces for community use. There is also funding to expand Didcot Library (£550k) to serve a growing young family population there. These library investments benefit children (providing better study spaces, literacy activities) and older residents (offering social, educational opportunities and internet access)

Impact: **Positive** in the medium term for both young people and older residents. Libraries provide study space and educational resources for children, and social hubs or lifelong learning opportunities for older adults. An improved library in Banbury (which serves areas with higher deprivation and many young families) will particularly benefit children's literacy and after-school activities and also offers older adults a welcoming place and social connection. Many of these libraries will also include spaces for confidential conversations, opening the possibility for confidential service provision on site also. In the short term, the 2026/27 budget keeps funding on track for these projects, so there is no negative effect on current users. *Mitigations:* Ensure new facilities are age-friendly in design – e.g. children's sections and activities for various age groups, quiet areas and accessible features for seniors, and dementia-friendly layouts for those with cognitive impairments. Although the major benefits of the capital investments will be realised in coming years, preserving the funding now mitigates any risk of delay. Meanwhile, existing libraries will remain free to use and accessible; if any refurbishment causes temporary disruption, alternative provisions (such as mobile libraries or outreach services) will be arranged to avoid leaving any age group without access.

Overall Mitigation Measures for Age: Across proposals, the overarching approach is to safeguard and enhance services that support both ends of the age spectrum. For older people, additional measures include integrating services like health and social care (so an elderly person can have a "one-stop" experience), providing information in accessible formats (large-print, telephone support for those who are not online). In summary, the budget is designed to protect both older and younger residents, and where new initiatives are introduced (transport, safety, education infrastructure), to specifically improve their quality of life.

Protected Characteristic: Disability

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Context (Disability in Oxfordshire): According to the 2021 Census, around 165,500 Oxfordshire residents (23% of the population) have a disability or long-term health condition that limits their daily activities to some degree. This includes people with physical disabilities, sensory impairments, learning disabilities, and mental health conditions. National surveys estimate about 20–21% of people in South East England have a disability (broadly defined), so Oxfordshire is in line with national prevalence. Within this group, a subset has significant needs: for example, roughly 11,960 older residents receive Attendance Allowance for severe disabilities in old age, and about 1,430 adults with learning disabilities are supported by the Council's Adult Social Care services. Ensuring accessibility of services, adequate social care, and equal opportunities (employment, education) for disabled people is a key equality objective. There are also around 2,600 children with autism in local schools and thousands with special educational needs (SEN), highlighting the importance of inclusive education and smooth transitions to adulthood. The Council has committed to being a "Disability Confident" employer and to making Oxfordshire inclusive – for instance, through the "Including Everyone" strategy which emphasises accessible infrastructure and information, and by providing reasonable adjustments across our services.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Disability:

- **Emergency Telecare Service (Adult Social Care):** *[This is the same proposal noted under Age.]*
Impact: Positive for people with disabilities as well. The new telecare contract supports not only the elderly but also younger disabled adults who rely on pendant alarms or sensors (for example, individuals with epilepsy, mobility impairments, or learning disabilities living independently). Continuity of this critical assistive technology service is ensured. Telecare can be lifesaving – providing confidence that help is one button-press away for someone with a disability living alone. As noted above, the new service consolidates previous contracts and improves resilience (preventing a sudden loss of service).
Mitigations: Same as for Age – close contract management to guarantee service quality.
- **Supported Living Contracts – New Framework Rates (Adult Social Care):**
Description: A proposal to save money (approx. £750k) by moving some Learning Disability supported living services onto a new framework contract with standardised rates, including modest annual reductions in paid support hours (around 2% per year over five years through service efficiency measures). This affects supported living homes for adults with learning disabilities and/or autism across the county (in areas referred to by the

acronym “HOWDAB” – encompassing Henley, Oxford, Witney, Didcot, Abingdon, Banbury). The intent is to provide the same support outcomes more efficiently.

Impact: **Mixed** for adults with disabilities (specifically learning disabilities or mental health needs in supported living). The intended outcome is neutral or even slightly positive if reinvested – the service will continue, potentially with more consistency under one framework, and a focus on outcomes. However, there is a risk of negative impact if the reduction in support hours results in individuals not getting all the help they require for independent living. Any diminution of support must be carefully managed to avoid reducing disabled tenants’ community participation or personal care. Recognising this risk, this proposal is flagged for further detailed assessment.

Mitigations: The saving profile allows flexibility – it can be realised through back-office efficiencies or different commissioning methods rather than front-line cuts if needed. Close monitoring is planned: responsible officers will review outcomes regularly (monthly) through the rollout, to ensure residents’ wellbeing is not compromised. **This proposal remains under review** – any sign of detrimental impact on this disabled group will trigger corrective action or a pause. In short, the change will be implemented gradually and consultatively, with the paramount principle that all tenants continue to have their assessed needs fully met.

- **“Connect to Work” – Employment Support Reconfiguration (Adult Social Care):**

Description: A budget saving of £100k by integrating the Oxfordshire Employment Service (which helps adults with learning disabilities, autism, or mental health conditions to find and sustain work) into a new fully-funded “Connect to Work” programme run in partnership with Department for Work & Pensions. A new central government-funded scheme is replacing parts of the Council-run service, enabling the Council to reduce its own expenditure without withdrawing support. The new programme is intended to have wider eligibility and reach more people, funded externally.

Impact: Intended **Neutral** (no reduction in service to disabled people seeking jobs, and potentially a broader service). The proposal explicitly states that the new Connect to Work offers “far wider eligibility” and covers functions that were previously council-funded. If executed properly, people with disabilities should continue receiving employment support uninterrupted – and possibly more individuals will qualify under the new scheme than they did under the previous model. This could even be a Positive if the external funding increases capacity or introduces new support offers (like more job coaching or employer engagement).

However, there is a potential negative risk if the transition is not smooth – for example, if some current service users experience a gap during handover to the new programme, or if the new criteria exclude someone who was

previously supported. Recognising this, the change is carefully planned.

Mitigations: The Council is working closely with the DWP and other partners to ensure no current service user “falls through the cracks.” All individuals who were receiving Oxfordshire Employment Service support will be seamlessly transferred to Connect to Work or an equivalent provision. The Council’s disability employment advisers will remain involved to advocate for those with the highest needs. As with the supported living contracts, this change will be accompanied by a detailed EIA and stakeholder engagement (including users of the current service and advocacy groups for people with learning disabilities or mental health needs). This will help identify any early issues (e.g. if the new programme leaves out a certain group, the Council can plan a local solution). We will keep this under close review during 2026 – any sign of detriment (like a person losing access to help finding work) will be addressed by bridging support. The aim is that this budget saving is achieved entirely through use of external funding, with no drop in support – and that will be treated as a condition of its success, monitored by Adult Social Care commissioners.

- **Accessibility in Infrastructure Projects (Highways, ICT, Property):**

Description: Various capital and operational projects (e.g. roads and pavement improvements, new digital systems) are included in the budget. Though these are not framed as “disability” projects, they incorporate aspects that affect people with disabilities. For example, the Highways capital programme includes footpath and cycle path improvements which will incorporate accessibility features like tactile paving for visually impaired pedestrians and step-free crossings for wheelchair users and prams. Similarly, new IT investments (such as improved public-facing online systems or AI assistants for customer service) will be designed to meet modern accessibility standards (WCAG for web content), so that residents with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairments can use Council services online without barriers. These considerations are embedded in project planning as standard practice.

Impact: **Positive** for disability inclusion. By proactively embedding accessibility into these projects, the Council continues its commitment to removing barriers and promoting independent living. For instance, upgrades in town centres or along rights of way typically include features like disabled parking bays and hearing loop systems in public facilities. While these may seem like small design details, cumulatively they make Oxfordshire’s infrastructure more navigable for people with disabilities. These are incremental improvements rather than standalone budget lines, but they are important to note as part of the wider equalities impact – the Council is not deferring or cutting any planned accessibility measures due to budget, and in fact continues to invest in them.

Mitigations: The Council’s corporate accessibility policy ensures that all new

builds and digital platforms meet or exceed statutory requirements. In short, inclusion is built into project delivery. Any capital proposal that might temporarily affect disabled people (say, roadworks affecting disabled access) will have its own EIA and mitigation (like alternative routes or signage) as part of that project's management. This overarching budget does not curtail any disability accommodations; on the contrary, it preserves funding to continue such efforts.

- **Disability Related Expenditure (Adult Social Care):**

Description: The Council's Adult Social Care charging policy currently makes a standard allowance for Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) of 35 per cent. Subject to a full consultation process the Council's proposal is to consider a reduction of the DRE to 25 per cent which would produce a potential in year saving of £500,000. Following consultation, the Council will consider next steps and in the event that the Council decides not to proceed with this proposal, alternative savings will need to be found.

Impact: **Negative** for disability inclusion. Reductions in Disability related expenditure would have a detrimental effect on those with disabilities, as they will experience a cut to their allocation, and so will be required to further fund their care. This proposal, however, would move DRE back to 25%, which is an approach taken by many local authorities, and in reality, is a fairer offering to residents than is provided by other local authorities.

Mitigations: The Council will undertake a full consultation and EIA process in line with our statutory obligations. This will give residents the opportunity to share their views with the council before proceeding with the changes. A full EIA will also be required to ensure that the Council is able to understand and mitigate negative impacts where possible to deliver the best possible standard of service to communities

Overall Mitigations for Disability: In summary, the budget largely protects and even enhances support for people with disabilities. Key mitigation measures:

- **Engagement and Co-production:** Disabled residents and advocacy groups (for example, the Oxfordshire Community Voluntary Action disability forum) will be engaged in any significant changes. Formal EIAs will highlight potential issues before decisions are finalised, and co-production will be used wherever possible to design solutions (as was done successfully in previous service redesigns).
- **Monitoring Outcomes:** The Council will enhance monitoring of outcomes for disabled service users during these changes. We will also keep an eye on indirect indicators; statutory support remains unchanged (all eligible disabled individuals will continue to receive social care based on assessed needs, as required by law), but we will watch for any early warning signs like increased carer stress or complaints.

- **Accessible Communications:** Information about service updates or changes will be made available in accessible formats – easy-read versions for those with learning disabilities, etc., as needed.

With these mitigations, the Council aims to avoid any disproportionate harm and continue advancing equality of opportunity for people with disabilities. While a few disability-related proposals carry some uncertainty and are flagged for careful oversight (as discussed), the overall thrust of the budget is to maintain or improve services that help disabled residents live independently and participate fully in community life.

Protected Characteristic: Gender Reassignment

Impact: Neutral

Context (Trans and Non-Binary Residents): The 2021 Census included, for the first time, a question on gender identity. In Oxfordshire, 3,477 residents (0.6% of people aged 16+) answered that their gender is different from their sex assigned at birth – slightly higher than the national average (0.5%). This count includes roughly 600 trans men (0.10%), 550 trans women (0.09%), and 600 non-binary or other gender-diverse people (0.10%), with the remainder of the 0.6% not specifying. Additionally, 7% of the population did not answer the gender identity question, so the true number might be a bit higher. Trans and non-binary individuals often face discrimination and higher rates of mental health challenges. The Council has policies to support trans staff and residents – for example, allowing use of preferred names/pronouns in all interactions, and supporting the LGBTQ+ community through events and youth groups. It is important to note that most council services are universal and not specifically gendered; the main aim is to ensure inclusive, respectful treatment and to remove any barriers for trans people in accessing services. (*Legal context update:* A recent UK Supreme Court judgment (*For Women Scotland Ltd v Scottish Ministers* (UKSC, 16 Apr 2025) clarified definitions related to sex and gender under the Equality Act 2010. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is updating its Code of Practice accordingly. The Council will follow any new guidance, but at present continues its established approach of inclusion for trans and non-binary people.)

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Gender Reassignment:

- **All Budget Proposals (General):** There are no budget proposals in 2026/27 that target or differentiate services by gender identity; no specific proposal has an identified impact (positive or negative) on trans or non-binary people as a group.
- **Impact:** Taken together, the impact is **Neutral** with ongoing best practice. No service is being reduced or changed in a way that would uniquely affect transgender or non-binary people. In some cases, as services are improved generally (e.g. more things done online), this can be beneficial to trans and

non-binary individuals who might otherwise face uncomfortable in-person interactions – but these are indirect, minor positives. Overall, we anticipate no negative or differential outcomes for this group from the budget.

In summary, the budget is not expected to have any disproportionate or unique impact on people due to gender reassignment. All changes are either neutral or broadly applied across the population. The key mitigation is simply maintaining our inclusive approach in implementing all proposals, ensuring that transgender and non-binary individuals continue to feel respected, welcome, and safe using Council services or working for the Council. We will remain vigilant, but at this stage no specific budget measure requires corrective action related to gender identity.

Protected Characteristic: Marriage & Civil Partnership

Impact: Neutral

Context (Marriage & Civil Partnership in Oxfordshire): This characteristic is distinct in the Equality Act – it mainly protects individuals from workplace discrimination based on marital status. In service provision, it is less frequently a factor, except in ensuring equal access for married vs. unmarried couples and recognition of civil partnerships. In Oxfordshire, the 2021 Census recorded 132,060 households of married couples and 983 households of same-sex civil partners. A significant portion of adults are married (around 47% of adults), while others cohabit or are single. The Council's Registration Service handles marriages and civil partnerships – officiating approximately 2,000 ceremonies per year (pre-COVID levels). There is no known inequality of service in that domain; same-sex couples have had access to marriage since 2014, and civil partnerships are now open to both same-sex and opposite-sex couples. In employment, the Council applies policies equally regardless of marital or partnership status (e.g. pension and next-of-kin rights, leave entitlements).

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Marriage/Civil Partnership:

- **Registration Service and Ceremony Provision:** The 2026/27 budget does not cut or change the Registration Service. All statutory registration functions (weddings, civil partnerships, births, deaths) continue as before.

Impact: Neutral. Couples planning to marry or form a civil partnership will see no change in fees or availability as a result of the budget. Ceremony services and appointments remain fully provided.

- **Employee Benefits/Policies:** No budget proposals affect employee benefits related to marital status. The Council will continue to ensure that policies (like parental leave, pensions, etc.) apply equally to those who are married, in civil partnerships, or neither. If any internal restructures occur, selection criteria will not include marital status (as per law and our policies).

Impact: Neutral on staff. All genders and marital statuses are treated the same, and nothing in the budget alters that.

- **Service Access:** No Council proposals create different rules for married vs. unmarried people in accessing services.

Overall, being married or in a civil partnership does not change one's service experience with the Council, and nothing in the 2026/27 budget changes that. No specific project or saving has been identified that would affect people based on this characteristic.

Mitigations (Marriage & Civil Partnership): Since no negative impacts are identified, no targeted mitigation is required. The Council will maintain its standard practice of equal treatment:

- In conclusion, the budget has no direct impact – positive or negative – on equality in relation to marriage and civil partnership. The Council will continue to provide services (like wedding ceremonies and staff benefits) in a way that treats married, civil-partnered, and unmarried people equally. We will remain vigilant to avoid any form of discrimination or differential outcome in this area, but none is anticipated from these proposals.

Protected Characteristic: Pregnancy & Maternity

Impact: Neutral

Context (Pregnancy & New Parents in Oxfordshire): Oxfordshire sees about 7,300–7,400 live births annually. In 2021, there were 7,380 births, a slight uptick (6% increase from 2020). Pregnancy and maternity as a protected characteristic is about ensuring pregnant women and new mothers are not discriminated against, particularly in employment, and that they have equal access to services. Key relevant services for this group include maternity healthcare (largely NHS-run), health visiting and children's centres (joint NHS/council responsibilities), and childcare/early education (partly council-commissioned). The Council also has duties as an employer – offering maternity leave, flexible return-to-work arrangements, etc., which it does. One direct area of Council service touching on maternity is the network of Family Centres, which provide support groups for new parents (e.g. breastfeeding support, baby clinics, stay-and-play sessions). Oxfordshire generally has good outcomes in maternity care (low teenage pregnancy rates, strong uptake of antenatal services), but rural access and support for postnatal mental health remain areas of focus. The Council works with partners to ensure services like housing and social care consider the needs of expectant and new mothers (for example, priority housing status for pregnant women at risk).

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Pregnancy/Maternity:

- **Children's Services & Family Support Funding:** The 2026/27 budget does not cut funding to Children & Family Centres or related early years support services. All existing eight Family Centres remain open with their current services.

Impact: Neutral to Positive for those who are pregnant (and their partners). This means expectant and new parents can continue to access antenatal classes, baby groups, health visitor clinics, and peer support at these centres just as before. By avoiding reductions, the Council ensures that vital preventative and support services (which can help with maternal mental health, breastfeeding, parenting skills, etc.) are sustained.

Mitigations: Because there are no changes in this area, no new mitigation is needed.

- **Workplace Policies (Council as Employer):** None of the proposals reduce staff benefits or protections around pregnancy and maternity. The Council will continue its generous maternity leave policy and flexible working options for returning mothers.

Impact: Neutral for staff who are pregnant or on maternity leave. We will meet all our legal duties as an employer.

Overall, the budget is friendly to the needs of pregnant women and those on maternity – it does not introduce any new hardships or remove supports.

Mitigations (Pregnancy & Maternity): Given the neutral stance, the main actions are to continue current good practice:

- In summary, the 2026/27 budget is neutral regarding pregnancy and maternity. It preserves crucial community services and does not create any new barriers for this group.

Protected Characteristic: Race (including Ethnicity and National Origin)

Impact: Neutral to **Slight Positive**

Context (Ethnic Diversity in Oxfordshire): Oxfordshire's population is increasingly diverse. In 2021, about 168,000 residents (23% of the population) identified as being from a minority ethnic background (i.e., not White British), up from about 16% in 2011 – a significant rise. The largest minority groups are "White: Other" (including European nationals), Asian/Asian British (notably Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Chinese communities), and Black/African/Caribbean British. For example, the county's Muslim population is roughly 23,500 (3% of residents) and Hindu population around 6,300 (1%), reflecting the size of South Asian communities. Oxford City is a minority-majority city (approximately 47% of residents are from non-White British backgrounds) while rural districts have smaller proportions (often under 10%). Race intersects with other factors – some ethnic communities experience higher deprivation (e.g. parts of East Oxford and Banbury have concentrations of South Asian and Black African families in more deprived areas) and may have language barriers or different needs in service delivery. The Council has an objective to "tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire," which includes addressing racial inequalities. This involves ensuring equal access (e.g. offering translation of key information, culturally

appropriate services where needed) and fostering a diverse workforce trained to eliminate discrimination.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Race:

- **Libraries, Hubs, and Community Services:** The budget keeps all libraries and community hubs open; no closures or reductions are proposed. This is relevant because these facilities are often vital resources for ethnic minority communities.
Impact: Neutral/Positive. By not cutting these services, minority ethnic residents continue to benefit from them. For instance, in Banbury (which has a significant Pakistani and Bengali community), the plan for a new library in coming years is on track. In Oxford City, libraries serving diverse neighbourhoods (e.g. Cowley, Barton) remain operational; these libraries are frequented as study space for students from minority backgrounds. Maintaining these services contributes to equity by ensuring access to information and community life for all groups.
- **General Service Provision:** During the EIA process, each budget proposal was examined for disproportionate impact on any ethnic group. All proposals came out either neutral or positive in this regard. For example, savings were focused on back-office efficiencies, procurement, or countywide service areas rather than specific community grants or cultural services. This approach avoids unintentionally hitting disadvantaged or minority communities that often rely on public services. Additionally, many of the investments in this budget (transport, libraries, social care) benefit areas with diverse populations, thereby indirectly supporting racial equality by improving services in urban and deprived locales where more minority residents live.

Impact Summary: None of the budget changes are designed in a way that differentiates by race, and because we have largely protected frontline and community services, people of all ethnic backgrounds will continue to access services similarly to before. If anything, maintaining services in areas of need (which often have higher minority populations) is a slight positive for race equality outcomes.

Mitigations (Race/Ethnicity): Even with no direct harms identified, the Council will take steps to promote race equality through implementation:

- **Continued Support for Minority Community Groups:** The budget includes a £100k Discretionary Rent Concession fund to help voluntary/community groups with premises costs. Several of these groups in Council properties serve ethnic minority communities (e.g. community associations for particular national groups, advice centres in East Oxford). By funding this concession, the Council indirectly supports those groups' sustainability

- **Inclusive Consultation & Communication:** As we roll out changes or new initiatives, we will use culturally appropriate engagement.

In conclusion, none of the 2026/27 budget measures create an inherent disadvantage based on race or ethnicity. By maintaining key services and targeted support, the Council upholds its Public Sector Equality Duty to foster good relations and advance equality for Oxfordshire's diverse population. The above mitigation and engagement steps will help ensure that as changes are put into practice, racial and cultural differences are respected and catered for, keeping the impact neutral or better for all communities.

Protected Characteristic: Religion or Belief

Impact: Neutral

Context (Religion in Oxfordshire): Oxfordshire has a mix of religious affiliations. In the 2021 Census, about 47% of residents identified as Christian (down from 60% in 2011), 40% stated they have no religion (up from 28%), and the remainder belong to other faiths or did not answer. The largest minority faith communities are Muslims (3% of the population, as mentioned 23,500 people) and Hindus (1%, 6,300 people), followed by smaller numbers of Buddhists, Jews, Sikhs, and others. There is also a growing secular/non-religious population. The Council's services must accommodate religious needs where relevant (for example, providing halal or other special dietary options in social care meals, allowing prayer space or breaks for employees, scheduling around major religious holidays for important public events). The Council also has staff networks and community forums that include faith representatives to ensure inclusion.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Religion/Belief:

- **Operational Services:** None of the budget changes adversely affect how any religious group accesses Council services.
Impact: Neutral. People of all faiths (or none) will experience Council services much as before.
- **Employee Considerations:** The Council will continue to support employees' religious observance needs (e.g. flexible leave for Diwali, Eid, Yom Kippur, etc.) per HR policies.
Impact: Neutral for Council staff of various faiths.

In general, no religious or faith group should experience any change in how they access services or are treated due to this budget.

Mitigations (Religion or Belief):

- **Respectful Implementation:** As we implement any changes or new initiatives, we will remain mindful of religious calendars and needs. For example, if a public consultation meeting about a budget-related service change were needed, we would avoid scheduling it on major religious

holidays or at times of day that might exclude observant practitioners (e.g. avoiding dusk during Ramadan fast breaking time if consulting a Muslim-majority community).

- **Engagement with Faith Communities:** The Council will continue to use its Faith Forums and direct contacts with religious leaders to disseminate important information about services or changes.
- **Equal Treatment in Service Design:** We will maintain our approach that council services are provided in a secular, impartial way but are accommodating in practice.
- **Monitor Feedback:** We will monitor any complaints or feedback that might indicate a religion/belief issue emerging indirectly.

Overall, the budget is neutral regarding religion and belief. It continues the Council's approach of providing services in a way that people of all faiths (and none) can use them without barriers. The mitigations above are ongoing good practices to ensure that remains the case through any service adjustments.

Protected Characteristic: Sex

Impact: Neutral

Context: This section considers the impacts on people due to sex (being male or female). Oxfordshire's population is almost evenly split by sex – about 50.1% female and 49.9% male. Many Council services are used roughly equally by all genders (roads, waste disposal, libraries, etc.), but some services and outcomes have a gender dimension. For example, women make up the majority of older service users in adult social care (because women live longer on average) and also form the majority of carers both paid and unpaid. Certain Council initiatives specifically focus on one sex – for instance, domestic abuse services primarily support women (though male victims are also supported), and some public health programmes target men's health or women's health issues. In the Council's workforce, women are well-represented overall but concentrated in particular sectors (e.g. social care and customer services have predominantly female staff, whereas the fire service and some highways teams are predominantly male). Ensuring budget decisions do not inadvertently create or exacerbate gender inequalities – either among the public or our staff – is important. We also consider representation and voice: ensuring both men and women have their say in consultations and service design.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Sex:

- **Domestic Abuse Services (Community Safety):** The budget does not reduce support for domestic abuse victims or prevention services. The domestic abuse budget, which is largely funded via government grants and our Community Safety funds, is maintained.

Impact: Positive for women, who are the majority of domestic abuse

survivors. Services like refuges, helplines, and advocacy for victims (e.g. the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor service) remain in place and are being expanded to meet legal duties. The Council's commitment to domestic abuse services means that women facing abuse will continue to have access to support and a route to safety. Male victims of domestic abuse (who form a smaller proportion) also continue to have access to support – this remains unchanged.

- **Services for Children and Families:** No cuts to childcare, early years, or parenting programmes are in the budget (as noted under Age). Consequently, support that often benefits women – who still frequently are primary caregivers – remains intact.
Impact: Neutral/Positive for women (and for fathers too, but mothers statistically use these services more). Keeping these services open ensures women are not further burdened at home due to service withdrawal.
- **Adult Social Care and Carers:** The budget invests in adult social care to meet demand (see Age and Disability sections). This benefits both men and women in need of care, but it is worth noting that a large proportion of carers (both paid care workers and informal family carers) are women. *Impact: Neutral* (with a preventative positive effect for many women carers).
- **No Disproportionate Reductions in Any Gender-Skewed Service:** We have not identified any service cut that would primarily hit one gender.

Mitigations (Sex): Since the impact is assessed as neutral, no major mitigation is required specifically on the basis of sex. In summary, we expect neither men nor women to be adversely impacted by these budget proposals. We have highlighted positive steps, such as continuing funding for domestic abuse support (benefiting women's safety) and ensuring social care is funded (indirectly relieving many women carers). Mitigations are largely about continuing these vigilant practices and making sure implementation of the budget is fair.

Protected Characteristic: Sexual Orientation

Impact: Neutral

Context: Oxfordshire has a sizeable LGBTQ+ population, though exact numbers are not precisely known. National estimates suggest around 2–3% of people identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), which in Oxfordshire's population would be on the order of 15,000–20,000 people, but this may be an underestimate as younger generations report higher percentages and not everyone declares it. The 2021 Census included a question on sexual orientation for the first time, and results for Oxfordshire show a few percent identifying as LGB+ (with a significant portion not answering). In recent years, public acceptance in Oxfordshire is generally high, and the Council has been supportive of LGBTQ+ visibility (e.g. flying the Pride flag during Pride month, supporting LGBT History Month events). The Council also has an internal LGBTQ+ staff network and supports youth groups like TOPAZ and

MyNormal (which are for LGBTQ+ young people, often funded via community grants or youth service support). Key considerations for this protected characteristic often involve ensuring that policies (from housing allocations to social care assessments) treat same-sex couples equally to different-sex couples and that any needs specific to LGB individuals (such as older LGBTQ+ people who may lack traditional family support networks) are not overlooked.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Sexual Orientation:

The budget has *no* proposals that explicitly or implicitly draw distinctions based on sexual orientation. All services remain available regardless of whom one loves, and none of the changes create barriers unique to LGB individuals. For instance:

- **Access to Services:** Library memberships, school admissions, social care eligibility, etc., remain based on need and circumstance, not orientation. Nothing in the budget or its implementation will alter these fundamental equalities.
- **Community Support and Events:** The Council provides some support to community initiatives, including those for LGBTQ+ people. Typically, these might be small grants for events (e.g. Oxford Pride celebrations, LGBTQ+ history exhibitions) or officer support for internal networks.

Given all the above, the effect of the 2026/27 budget on sexual orientation is **neutral**. There are no differential outcomes expected.

Mitigations (Sexual Orientation): The Council will continue its inclusive practices to ensure the impact stays neutral:

- **Inclusive Engagement:** For any public engagement related to budget changes, we will ensure outreach to LGBTQ+ communities where appropriate.
- In summary, we foresee a neutral impact on residents and staff regardless of sexual orientation. The Council's ongoing commitment to equality and inclusion for LGBTQ+ people will ensure support and visibility are maintained.

3 (continued): Additional Community Impacts

Beyond the nine protected characteristics, the Council also considers impacts on other groups that are important in our local context, such as rural communities, the armed forces community, carers, and those facing socio-economic disadvantage. While not mandated by the Equality Act, assessing these areas aligns with our commitment to fairness and the spirit of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance priorities. Below, we outline these additional impacts.

Additional Community Impact: Rural Communities

Impact: Positive

Context (Rural Oxfordshire): A significant portion of Oxfordshire's population lives in rural areas. Outside of Oxford and the larger towns, we have hundreds of villages and hamlets. Roughly one-third of residents live in settlements under 10,000 population. Rural communities face distinct challenges: limited public transport, greater reliance on cars and local roads, fewer local services (post offices, shops, schools may be farther away), and often a higher average age profile (many rural villages have older populations as younger people sometimes migrate to cities). On the other hand, rural areas generally have lower rates of deprivation than urban centres in Oxfordshire, but issues like isolation, access to healthcare, and digital connectivity remain concerns. The Council aims to 'rural proof' its policies, meaning we check that decisions do not inadvertently disadvantage those in the countryside.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Rural Communities:

- Highways Maintenance, infrastructure and HGV Traffic Pilot**

- (Environment & Highways/Economy & Place):**

Rural areas will benefit from the significant capital and maintenance funding allocated to highways. The budget ensures that routine road maintenance (pothole repairs, resurfacing) continues across the network, much of which is rural roads. Additionally, the Drainage interventions project (£4m over two years) will proactively fix drainage on roads to prevent flooding – many rural lanes flood in heavy rain, so this project will directly help rural communities by keeping roads passable and reducing property flood risk.

- The HGV traffic restriction pilot is targeted at rural towns/villages (like the Henley area and Windrush valley) to reduce lorry through-traffic on unsuitable roads. If effective, this will significantly improve quality of life in those rural areas (less noise, safer roads, less damage to roads/bridges). The budget provides £1.6m in 26/27 (and more in future years) to implement recommendations from the pilot studies – a clear plus for those rural communities affected by heavy traffic. Another funded project is the Wantage Market**

Place pedestrianisation scheme (£150k) – while Wantage is a market town (semi-rural), this will enhance its town centre for pedestrians, benefiting local

residents and businesses by creating a more pleasant, accessible environment.
(Impact of infrastructure projects

- *Impact: Positive* for rural communities. Well-maintained rural roads improve safety and connectivity for those living in smaller villages and farming areas – fewer potholes and better drainage mean less risk of accidents or isolation due to impassable roads. The HGV pilot should enhance quality of life in affected rural towns/villages by reducing heavy lorry traffic: villagers will experience less noise, vibration (which can damage old cottages and church buildings), and pollution on their narrow streets. It also can prolong the life of rural roads and bridges not designed for modern HGV weights. Better drainage and flooding measures improve both physical and psychological safety for residents in communities who have long suffered with the challenges posed by adverse seasonal weather resulting in flooding. There is a great amount of benefit in the pedestrianisation of Wantage Market Place. Improved accessibility, and a more pleasant environment benefits local residents and businesses, and offers further opportunities to meet in the local community in a safe and equitable way.
- *Mitigations:* The highways maintenance programme will be scheduled considerately to avoid cutting off villages for extended periods during works. Advanced notice and alternative route signage are standard practice and will continue. For the HGV pilot, mitigation focuses on monitoring unintended consequences – e.g., ensuring one village's restriction does not simply push trucks into another equally unsuitable route.

In summary, the budget explicitly considers rural needs and allocates resources to improve conditions in the countryside. There is no urban-centric reallocation that leaves villages worse off; indeed, rural communities see direct investment.

Mitigations (Rural Communities):

- **Communication Infrastructure:** Recognising that rural communities may have communication challenges (some areas still suffer from poor broadband or mobile connectivity, and not everyone reads social media), the Council will use appropriate channels to reach residents about new or changing services.

Given these proposals, rural communities stand to gain from the 2026/27 budget. The mitigations are mostly about ensuring these gains are fully realised across our villages and are sustained beyond the initial launch.

Additional Community Impact: Armed Forces Community (Serving personnel, veterans, and families)

Impact: Neutral

Context (Armed Forces in Oxfordshire): Oxfordshire is home to a notable Armed Forces presence, including the large RAF Brize Norton airbase, smaller Army reserve units, and many veterans who have settled in the area post-service. According to Ministry of Defence data, we have around 5,800 service personnel stationed here and 23,541 veterans in Oxfordshire. Under the Armed Forces Covenant, the Council and its partners commit to ensuring that those who serve or have served, and their families, are not disadvantaged in accessing public services, and that special consideration is given in certain circumstances (especially for bereaved families or those injured in service). The Council has a Civilian-Military Partnership that meets regularly to address issues like school admissions for service children (who often move frequently), healthcare for veterans, and advice services. OCC has achieved Gold status in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme for our support to the Armed Forces community as an employer.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Armed Forces Community:

- **Armed Forces Covenant Work:** The Council's work to support Armed Forces Covenant activities (such as supporting the partnership board, s, or contributing to events like Armed Forces Day) will continue to ensure service families and veterans are integrated and supported.
Impact: Positive (sustained). The Armed Forces Community – including serving personnel, spouses, children, and veterans – will see no reduction in the Council's commitment.

No instances were identified where a budget cut would negatively impact Armed Forces communities.

Impact: Neutral (possibly slight positive in that continued focus means previously identified issues can be worked on).

Mitigations (Armed Forces Community):

- **Covenant Governance:** The Oxfordshire Civilian-Military Partnership Board (which includes Council, military, health, education and charity representatives) will continue to review any major service changes for Covenant compliance.

In summary, the duties and support for the Armed Forces community are upheld in this budget. There is no detriment to armed forces personnel or families, and the mitigations are continuations of how we honour the Covenant in practice.

Additional Community Impact: Carers (Unpaid family/friend carers for adults or children)

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Context (Unpaid Carers in Oxfordshire): Carers are people who provide informal, unpaid care to relatives or friends due to illness, disability, or age. According to the 2021 Census, Oxfordshire had 52,674 residents providing some level of unpaid care – about 10% of the population. Notably, 13,636 people provide over 50 hours of care a week (2.8% of residents); this group often experiences significant strain and a higher likelihood of health problems themselves. Carers are spread across all ages – including young carers (under 18s caring for a parent or sibling). Areas of Oxfordshire with higher deprivation (parts of Oxford city like Blackbird Leys, parts of Banbury) have slightly higher rates of intense caring (up to 4-5% of residents providing 50+ hours). The Council and NHS support carers through information/advice services (like **Carers Oxfordshire**, which we commission), carers' assessments (which can lead to respite services or direct payments), and various community grants (for carer support groups, breaks, etc.). A key equality concern is that carers, while not a protected group in law, are often impacted by changes to services for the cared-for person – if formal services are cut, the burden falls back on carers (often disproportionately on women as noted). Conversely, investments in services can ease carers' loads.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Carers:

- **Adult Social Care Funding Increases:** As detailed earlier, the budget puts extra resources into adult social care to meet the rising demand. This means eligible needs of people receiving care can continue to be met mostly through formal services (home care, day services, etc.), rather than expecting families to fill gaps.
Impact: **Positive** for carers. By bolstering formal care provision, the Council ensures that family carers are not asked to do even more than they already are.
- **Supported Living Contract Changes (Learning Disability services):** One flagged area that could affect carers is the proposal to achieve efficiency savings in supported living for adults with learning disabilities (the HOWDAB contracts). If not handled carefully, a slight reduction in paid support hours might mean families (ageing parents of learning-disabled adults, for instance) could be asked to provide additional help or supervision. This is recognised as a potential risk.
Impact on carers: **Potentially Negative** if mismanaged.
Mitigations for carers: The Council has committed that any changes in supported living will involve thorough consultation, including with families of those in supported living. We will conduct a full EIA specifically for this change, which will explicitly assess carer impact. If it appears that a particular planned reduction would shift care tasks to families, we will reconsider or put in mitigating actions.
- **Young Carers Support:** Under Children's Services, our support for young carers (those under 18 who have caring responsibilities) continues. The

Council funds a young carers' team (which works with schools to identify young carers and provides activities and support through a commissioned provider). There are around 800 known young carers in Oxfordshire receiving support. The budget does not cut this.

Impact: Neutral. Young carers will still receive help like homework clubs, or having a designated staff member to talk to. Not cutting this service means we avoid a negative impact on a group that often has poorer educational and social outcomes if left unsupported.

In summary, carers as a group benefit from the budget's protection of social care services and are not targeted by any cut. The only area of caution is the efficiency in adult disability services, which will be carefully handled to avoid shifting burden to families.

Mitigations (Carers):

- **Consult Carers in Service Changes:** For any changes to services used by cared-for persons, the Council will actively seek input from their family carers.
-

Overall, the budget largely supports carers by sustaining or improving services for those they care for and by not reducing direct support to carers themselves. The only caution is around the supported living efficiency – which, with the mitigations planned, aims to be achieved in a way that does not harm carers' wellbeing. We believe, with these measures, the net impact on carers will be neutral or slightly positive (owing to general service improvements and no new burdens placed on them).

Additional Community Impact: Areas of Deprivation / Socio-Economic Disadvantage

(Note: Socio-economic status is not a protected characteristic in law, but the Council chooses to consider it in our EIAs, in line with our commitment to tackling inequality.)

Impact: Neutral (some targeted positives)

Context (Deprivation in Oxfordshire): Oxfordshire is overall one of the least deprived counties in England, but it contains pockets of significant deprivation. According to the Indices of Deprivation 2025, there are 2 small areas (Lower Super Output Areas, each a few thousand people) in Oxford City that rank in the most deprived 10% nationally, and 9 areas in the most deprived 20%. These include parts of Oxford (Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill, Littlemore), parts of Banbury (Grimsbury and Ruscote wards), an area in Abingdon and one in Witney. These communities often face higher unemployment, lower incomes, poorer health outcomes, and lower educational attainment. Additionally, the high cost of living (especially housing) in Oxfordshire means that even some working families struggle financially – so socio-economic disadvantage can be widespread in certain respects (e.g. many families

qualify for some level of Council Tax Reduction or other support). The Council has adopted the principle of considering socio-economic "poverty" impacts to ensure our policies do not widen inequalities. Key issues include: ensuring charges for services remain fair, that we continue support for those on low incomes (like welfare assistance), and that we channel resources to where need is greatest.

Budget Proposals & Impacts on Socio-Economic Disadvantage:

- **Council Tax and Council Tax Reduction (CTR):** The budget for 2026/27 assumes a Council Tax increase (within referendum limits). Recognising that this can be regressive (a flat percentage tax affects lower incomes more), mitigation largely lies with the District Councils' CTR schemes (which the county does not set but works closely with districts on). All Oxfordshire district councils have chosen to maintain or slightly enhance their CTR schemes for 2026/27, meaning households on the lowest incomes continue to get a significant reduction or complete exemption from Council Tax.
Impact: Mitigated Neutral. A low-income household on benefits in Oxfordshire will still pay little or no council tax, so the budget's council tax rise does not directly hit them.
- **Household Support & Welfare Assistance:** The budget includes the continued use of national grants like the Household Support Fund (HSF) to help residents with essential costs (food, energy) during the ongoing cost-of-living pressures. While this is ring-fenced government money, the Council's role is to ensure it is distributed effectively to those in need in our communities. *Impact: Positive* for people on low incomes/in poverty. Struggling families will continue to access emergency support when needed. No reduction in that frontline assistance means we are still addressing socio-economic inequality.
- **Service Access Costs:** A principle in the budget has been to avoid introducing any new charges that would disproportionately affect those on low incomes. For example, there was no new charge introduced for formerly free services. Maintaining free library services (including free internet access in libraries) is very important for low-income residents who may not have broadband. *Impact: Neutral to Positive* – by preventing additional costs for individuals, the Council is not exacerbating financial hardship.
- **Services in Deprived Areas:** We paid special attention to not cutting services that are heavily used in our more deprived communities. The budget sets aside public health funding for targeted community initiatives to continue. Also, as part of budget negotiations, the Council decided to fund some specific initiatives that benefit deprived communities, such as discretionary rent relief for charitable groups (£100k) which helps, among others, some food banks and family centres in poorer areas by removing rental costs. *Impact: Positive* as far as targeted help continues for those communities.

- **Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Support:** The budget includes an item of £100k to extend discretionary rent concessions for voluntary groups using Council-owned premises (as mentioned under Race, but it is a socio-economic measure too). Many of these groups directly support disadvantaged populations – e.g., food banks, advice centres, children’s charities. By waiving their rent, we enable them to focus resources on service delivery. This is a clear positive for those who rely on these charities (often low-income residents).

To summarise: the 2026/27 budget does not worsen socio-economic inequalities in Oxfordshire; it maintains support for low-income groups and even improves certain aspects (through things like targeted funds).

Mitigations (Socio-Economic):

- **Proactive Outreach:** We will ensure that people in the most deprived areas are aware of the services and support that the budget sustains or enhances.

Overall, the Council has taken a cautious approach to ensure this budget is as fair as possible socio-economically. Many proposals actively cushion or improve the situation for those with fewer resources. With mitigations focused on maintaining that fairness in implementation, we assess the impact as neutral (not aggravating inequality, possibly slightly improving it through targeted measures).

Health Impact Statement

Overall, the proposed Capital programme shows predominantly positive or “likely good” health impacts, especially where projects enhance access to nature, active travel, and community infrastructure. Examples include the Oxfordshire Tree Propagation Project, library refurbishments (e.g., Wantage, Goring, Didcot), Benson Mobility Hub, Controlled Parking Zones, and reuse initiatives linked to HWRCs—each of which can social connection physical activity, affordability, and air quality improvements. Several highway and safety schemes (e.g., Road Safety, A34 Lodge Hill, Didcot central corridor) also align with injury prevention and modal shift objectives. These strengths are consistent with core Health Impact Assessment principles that seek to maximise benefits across the wider determinants of health, particularly where green and blue infrastructure and walkability are designed in from the outset.

However, the review identifies material gaps that should be addressed to meet a Health in All Policies approach to tackle inequalities. Several schemes have insufficient detail or reference to health outcomes, where health could be negatively impacted (e.g., Improving Highway network, Bridges, or ARP Phase 3 – reduction of OCC estate, North Oxford Fire), with limited coverage of rural communities relative

to towns and insufficient plans to monitor and evaluate health outcomes (e.g., no clear research/evaluation proposals, nor metrics to track equity impacts over time). To mitigate these risks, schemes should explicitly reference Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Oxfordshire as a Marmot Place, commit to green infrastructure and access to nature actions and include longitudinal evaluation plans to capture benefits and unintended consequences, so that other priorities do not widen health inequalities.

Additional Community Impact: Other Considerations (Staff and Social Value)

Finally, a brief note on some other considerations not covered above:

- **Impact on Council Staff:** The budget includes some efficiency measures that affect staff, but these are handled via our organisational change processes with full staff consultation and support. No across-the-board job cuts or pay cuts are instituted; instead, any staffing impacts are limited to specific restructures. The Council has provided for the nationally negotiated pay award in the budget, so staff will get the expected pay rise – that is a positive for staff welfare and helps lower-paid staff cope with inflation. We anticipate the overall impact on the Council workforce to be largely neutral; we will monitor staff morale through our regular surveys to ensure the changes are not causing undue stress. Wellbeing resources remain available for any staff affected by changes.
- **Impact on Service Providers / Contractors:** Many Council services are delivered by external providers (care agencies, charities, etc.). The budget provides inflationary uplifts for key contracts (like adult social care providers, transport operators), which helps prevent provider failure that could disrupt services to residents. For voluntary sector partners, we maintained grant funding and even bolstered it in some cases. This strengthens the sector's capacity to support communities (especially protected groups and deprived communities).
- **Social Value:** The Council includes social value clauses in procurement. Nothing in the budget reduces our commitment to social value in contracts. Conversely, as we invest in capital projects and new contracts, we have opportunities to generate more social value. We will pursue those in each relevant procurement.
- **Fees and charges:** The council has not introduced any new fees or charges for services that were previously free for Oxfordshire residents. New charges have been introduced for non-Oxfordshire residents wishing to use our HWRCs, which means that those from neighboring areas will be contributing to the upkeep of our services in a more equitable way.

4: Future Monitoring

Although many proposals are still in design phase, it is our view that the budget does not unduly negatively impact communities in respect to our statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As we progress from design into implementation stages and beyond, we will regularly review our proposals, develop complete EIAs and ensure that we are working collaboratively with communities and partners to develop the best possible outcomes. We will keep a close eye on the actual impacts as the budget is put into action:

- We will check in with services to make sure that we are implementing inclusive services and programmes of work, and where we anticipate any negative impacts, we address those within dedicated EIAs.
- If any unintended problem comes up – for example, if a particular group of people feels a decision has caused them difficulty – we will investigate and try to fix it. The council will always take on board the views and challenges of residents.
- We will also continue to do what we can to improve equality in Oxfordshire, not just avoid harm. That means seeking opportunities, like making our services more accessible, encouraging diverse participation in consultations, and supporting community projects that promote fairness.