

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET 28 July 2026

Consultation on Proposed Changes to Adult Social Care Contributions Policy Report of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
 - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Adult Social Care Contributions Policy at its meeting on 04 June 2026. The report set out the proposed amendments to the policy, including changes to the treatment of Disability Related Expenditure (DRE), and proposals relating to telecare and transport charges.
4. The Committee welcomed the opportunity to consider the proposals and acknowledged the financial pressures facing Adult Social Care, as well as the need to ensure that the contributions policy remains sustainable, equitable, and aligned with statutory guidance.

5. The Committee would like to thank the Cabinet Member and Victoria Baran, Deputy Director, and Level Chingalembe, Head of Social Care Finance, for attending and for their engagement with Members' questions.
6. During its consideration of the report, the Committee examined the proposed changes in detail, including their intended financial impact, the practical implications for service users and officers, and the extent to which the proposals aligned with the Council's wider policy framework, including the Oxfordshire Way.

SUMMARY

7. The Committee considered the proposed amendments to the Adult Social Care Contributions Policy, with discussion focusing on the rationale for change, the practical implications for service users, and the potential impact on wider system outcomes. Officers introduced the report, outlining the financial context and the proposed changes, including the reduction in the standard Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance from 35% to 25%, and the introduction or adjustment of charges for services such as telecare and transport.
8. Members explored the benchmarking presented by officers, which suggested that Oxfordshire's current 35% DRE allowance is higher than that applied in most comparable authorities. While some members accepted that the proposed 25% rate would bring the Council more in line with typical practice, others queried whether this comparison alone provided sufficient justification for the scale of change, and whether alternative, more gradual approaches had been considered.
9. A significant part of the discussion focused on the policy intent behind the proposals. Several members questioned whether the changes were being driven primarily by the need to achieve savings and sought clarification on how the proposals aligned with the Oxfordshire Way, particularly its emphasis on prevention, supporting independence, and enabling residents to live well for longer. Concerns were raised that increases in contributions could, in some cases, have unintended consequences if they discouraged engagement with services.
10. The Committee also discussed the practical implications of moving from a higher standard allowance to a lower default with greater reliance on individual assessment. Members noted that, while this could improve accuracy by more closely reflecting actual expenditure, it would likely result in an increase in the number of detailed financial assessments undertaken. Questions were raised as to the impact this could have on administrative workload and whether the additional complexity might present challenges for some service users in navigating the system.

11. Discussion of telecare and transport proposals focused on their role as preventative services. Members highlighted that, although the proposed charges were relatively modest, there was a risk that even small increases could have a significantly outsized effect on residents affected, particularly among more vulnerable residents. Concerns were expressed that reduced uptake of these services could have wider implications, including increased isolation or a greater likelihood of more intensive care needs arising at a later stage.
12. In this context, members explored whether the proposals allowed sufficient flexibility to reflect individual circumstances, particularly for those most at risk of adverse impacts, and considered the potential for a more tailored approach in certain cases.
13. The Committee makes three recommendations which, together, are intended to achieve greater clarity on the policy's strategic alignment, assurance on its operational proportionality, and a more considered approach to the potential impacts on vulnerable service users.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14. A central theme of the Committee's discussion was the extent to which the proposed changes are framed within, and consistent with, the Council's wider strategic objectives, particularly the Oxfordshire Way. Members noted that the Oxfordshire Way places strong emphasis on prevention, maintaining independence, and supporting residents to live well within their communities for as long as possible. These principles are intended to underpin service design and decision-making across Adult Social Care and wider council activity.
15. While Members acknowledged the financial context underpinning the proposals, several questions were raised as to how the proposed approach supports these objectives in practice. Members explored whether increases in contributions, or the reduction in standard allowances, could risk discouraging engagement with preventative services or placing additional pressure on individuals to manage without support. It was recognised that such impacts may not be uniform and may affect some groups more than others.
16. Members therefore consider it important to ensure that the policy is clearly grounded in its intended objectives, and that there is a transparent link between those objectives and the proposed approach.
17. This includes demonstrating that the preferred option delivers these aims more effectively than the current policy, rather than being driven primarily by the requirement to achieve savings. Clarifying this relationship would support confidence that the proposals are strategically coherent and aligned with the Council's broader direction.

Recommendation 1: That Cabinet demonstrates how the proposed policy changes are in line with the Oxfordshire Way.

18. The Committee also devoted significant attention to the operational implications of the proposed changes, particularly in relation to the anticipated increase in individual financial assessments. Members noted that reducing the standard Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance from 35% to 25% would likely result in a greater number of service users requiring detailed, case-by-case assessment of their expenditure. While it was acknowledged that this approach may provide a more accurate reflection of individual circumstances, Members explored whether it may also introduce additional complexity into the system.
19. In discussion, Members highlighted two interrelated areas of concern. Firstly, there is the potential impact on the Council, including increased administrative workload, additional officer time, and associated costs. Members queried whether these factors had been fully considered alongside the anticipated savings, and whether there was a risk that increased administrative effort could offset some of the financial benefit of the proposals.
20. Secondly, Members considered the potential impact on service users. Increased reliance on individual assessment may require more detailed evidence gathering and engagement with council processes. Members noted that this could present practical challenges, and cause uncertainty and worry for some individuals, particularly those who may find it more difficult to navigate more complex systems and may therefore affect accessibility or outcomes in practice.
21. The Committee considers it important that the overall approach remains proportionate, represents an efficient use of resources across the system, and is supported by continued efforts to identify and address waste and inefficiencies within the Adult Social Care budget.

Recommendation 2: That Cabinet demonstrates how the proposed changes would not result in a disproportionate increase in administrative costs or complexity for either the Council or service users and represent an efficient and proportionate use of resources.

22. The Committee considered the proposed changes to telecare and transport charges, with discussion focusing on their potential impact on service users and their role within a wider preventative system. Members recognised that these services can play an important role in supporting independence, reducing isolation, and preventing escalation of need. As such, their use can contribute to wider system benefits, including reducing demand for more intensive forms of care and support.
23. While Members noted that the level of charges proposed was relatively modest, significant concern was raised that, for some residents, particularly those who are older or more vulnerable, even small increases in cost could influence behaviour. Members discussed the possibility that additional charges

could lead some individuals to reduce or withdraw from services, potentially increasing risks to wellbeing and independence over time. The Committee therefore explored the extent to which the proposals took account of these potential behavioural responses and their wider implications.

24. In this context, Members discussed whether there may be scope for a more flexible approach in certain cases, particularly where individuals are disproportionately affected. Particularly more elderly residents, including those aged 90 and over, as an example of a group who are more sensitive to changes in cost or access. The Committee does not seek to prescribe specific measures but considers it appropriate that Cabinet reflects on whether the proposed approach can be adapted to better accommodate such circumstances.

Recommendation 3: That Cabinet considers the potential disproportionate impact of the proposed telecare and transport charges on more vulnerable groups, and sets out the mitigations or safeguards available, taking into account the risk of additional administrative burden.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

25. The Committee recognises that the proposed changes to the Adult Social Care Contributions Policy represent a significant development with potential implications for service users and service delivery. It therefore intends to retain an ongoing interest in this area following implementation, including monitoring the policy's impact in practice. The Committee would expect to receive updates on progress and emerging outcomes to support continued scrutiny of the effectiveness and proportionality of the revised approach.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

26. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.'
27. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2.3 (v) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

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Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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