

Appendix B

Cumulative equality impact assessment: Wokingham Borough Council, Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-27 Revenue & Capital Budget

Introduction

Purpose

Wokingham Borough Council is committed to embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of its operations and decision-making. The purpose of this cumulative equality impact assessment is to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed budget for 2024/25 on different groups of people protected by the Equality Act 2010.

The council's approach to equality ensures that where needed, equality impact assessments (EqIAs) are undertaken to support the decision-making process. A cumulative equality impact assessment differs from this usual process as it seeks to assess the impact of all of the budget proposals in combination with each other, rather than looking at each in isolation. This helps our decision makers to consider the overall impact of the budget proposals, including any unintended consequences, and enables the council to take action to mitigate any compound negative impacts.

Public sector equality duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) is a legal requirement for public sector bodies to actively consider how their policies and practices impact different groups of people protected by the Equality Act 2010. The duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different groups.

The protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 are Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion, Sex and Sexual Orientation. As part of its commitment to [Tackling Poverty](#), Wokingham Borough Council includes consideration of socio-economic inequality in equality impact assessments undertaken to support council decisions.

The Public Sector Equality Duty supports good decision-making by ensuring that the potential impact of policies and practices on different groups is considered before they are implemented, and that actions are taken to address any negative impacts and promote equality and inclusion.

A cumulative equality impact assessment is not a statutory requirement, but it is a useful tool to support robust decision making.

Equality Plan & Strategic Priorities

The council's [Equality Plan](#) sets out our commitment to promoting equality and inclusion in everything we do as an employer, provider and commissioner of services, and as a local leader. The Equality Plan sets out three priorities: to Listen to and learn from our communities and use this to deliver services that work well for everyone; act on our commitments to equality, diversity and inclusion in the way we

plan, deliver and shape our services; and to build a diverse and engaged workforce, where everyone is respected. Delivery of our equality plan is supported by the council's annual equality action plan. This sets out how the council will continually work to improve our own processes and practices to ensure we embed inclusion across the business of the council, as well as through our work with partners. The production of a cumulative impact assessment to support the council's budget setting process forms part of this improvement activity.

Approach

Assessing the impact of our budget savings proposals on equality is an ongoing process. Currently, the analysis is general and indicative. As specific proposals are refined and put into action, they will undergo additional examination to determine whether a full equality impact assessment is needed.

For the purposes of this analysis, all savings proposals set out within the MTFP 2024-27 have been subject to an initial equality screening. This screening identifies whether each proposal is considered likely to have a disproportionate impact on protected equality groups. If the screening has identified that there is a risk of a negative impact for a savings proposal for the 2024/25 financial year, equality impact assessments have been conducted where appropriate or recommended where proposals will be developed and subject to further decisions by our elected members. Proposals for subsequent years will be subject to further scrutiny within the budget setting process for that financial year.

For proposals with staffing implications, equality impact assessments will be carried out prior to a restructure as appropriate.

Proposals for growth and investment have also been subject to an equality screening. Where these seek to sustain provision of a service or approach, necessary consideration has been given to the consequences that could arise for protected groups if not funded.

Equality Profile

Wokingham borough is a vibrant and sought-after semi-rural region located in Berkshire, with a population of 177,502. It is a borough of growing diversity as illustrated by the 2021 Census which found that:

- 17% of the adult population is aged 64 and over
- 24% of households in Wokingham reported at least one person with a disability.
- 80% of the Wokingham Borough population identifies as White, including 'White Other', 2.4% as Black African/Caribbean/British, 12.9% as Asian/Asian British (7% Indian and 3% Pakistani)
- 44.7% of the borough identifies as Christian, 37% as No Religion, 4.8% as Muslim, 4.8% as Hindu, and 1.7% as Sikh.

The Annual Population Survey of 2020 highlights that the most ethnically diverse community within Wokingham is among those aged between 20-24 years, where 31% of residents belong to ethnic minority communities.

The [Wokingham Borough Joint Strategic Needs Assessment provides](#) further information about the borough's demographics.

Investing in our services 2024/25

Costs are increasing for the council as they are for everybody else. Various factors such as inflation on contracts, heightened demand resulting from demographic shifts in the need for services, and reductions or cessation of government funding have exerted further strain on the council's budget. To alleviate these pressures, certain areas of the budget will experience growth, resulting in a net positive impact on those utilising the services, particularly among children and young people, older individuals, and individuals with disabilities.

Furthermore, the following areas of proposed investment directly support activity to address inequality and meet the diverse needs of our residents.

Increased demand/support through Council Tax Relief Scheme

Growth is needed to meet forecasted costs of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which have increased due to demand arising from cost-of-living pressures. This scheme helps residents experiencing financial difficulties in paying their council tax and supports both working-age and pension-age households, with additional consideration to households with children. Income eligibility for the scheme allows for those disproportionately impacted by the cost-of-living pressures by disregarding as income the following: Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payments, Armed Forces Independence Payments, War Disablement Payments, Child Benefit, Child Maintenance payments, and any Carer's Allowance. Maintaining the existing scheme therefore avoids the negative consequences of any reduction of support.

Inclusion Officer

This post supports delivery of the council's Equality Programme and Tackling Poverty Programme. Both programmes support targeted work to address inequality and remove barriers to equality for residents. Maintaining this resource enables the council to continue to deliver this activity which has a positive impact across the protected characteristics and socio-economic factors.

Care & support - manage increasing demand in numbers and complexity.

A rise in the number of older people, those requiring support with their mental health, learning disability or physical disability has been modelled. Investment is required to meet statutory obligations under the Care Act 2014, ensuring local, vulnerable people are appropriately supported.

Prevention - investment in preventative services

Investment in preventative services is aimed at reducing, preventing and delaying the demand for Adult Social Care services.

Placement Growth

Investment is required to meet the rising cost of placements for Children in Care. Costs are rising, partially due to demand, and partially due to a small number of children and young people coming into our care with complex needs requiring high-cost support

Managing and Meeting demand in numbers and complexity

The recent OFSTED Inspection of Children's Social Care highlighted the need for extra resources in front line social work teams to ensure child safeguarding risk in the community is appropriately identified and acted upon.

Home to School Transport

Home to School Transport is provided to children and young people who are eligible due to the distance they live from their allocated school, or due to their particular special education and/or disability (SEND) need. There is significant increase in cost pressure due to a year-on-year increase in Children in receipt of Education Health & Care Plans (EHCP).

New Models of Support for Children with Disabilities

This proposal is to meet an Increase in costs and complexity of placements for Children with Disabilities.

Fees and Charges

A review of fees and charges for council services and facilities is undertaken annually. This covers a broad range of activity from licensing to Library fees. Any proposed increase in fees and charges for services used by residents is considered likely to disproportionately impact lower-income households. Though not considered individually prohibitive there is a risk that fee increases can add-up for some individuals or families, generating additional financial pressures or creating barriers to services. There is a further risk that due to heightened vulnerability to the causes of poverty, any such impact could disproportionately fall upon the protected characteristics of sex (a greater proportion of lone parents are women) and disability (greater likelihood of increased living costs and barriers to employment). In considering the cumulative financial burden, the frequency of use, breadth of services accessed by individuals and families, and the degree to which services might be considered essential, are important factors, alongside the proposed changes to fees and charges.

The schedule of fees and charges for 2024/25 shows an average 8% increase, and details where proposed fees differ due to specific service requirements or changes. Some services set out concessionary rates in relation to age, or other factors.

The services reflected in the schedule are optional and of these, the Libraries and Car Parks, are likely to be those most frequently accessed by individuals and families. Any adverse impact due to fee increased for these services is considered likely to be minimal. Overdue charges for libraries are avoidable and capped at a set figure, whilst increases in parking facilities at California Country Park and Dinton Pastures are unlikely to have a significant affect on those accessing the parks, relative to existing costs. It is worth noting that there is a 33.6% proposed increase in fee-payer home to school transport fees, equating to an additional £282.65 per annum. This would affect a smaller cohort of children and families who are currently able to afford the existing fee of £840 per annum. The increased figure is providing the seat 'at cost' and is a fee that payable only by those who are not eligible for free home to school transport. Whilst it is considered likely that this increase may have a moderate impact on those accessing this optional provision, the overall cumulative financial impact of the fees and charges is likely to be low.

There are also several services included within the fees and charges schedule that meet the needs of or are more likely to be utilised by particular cohorts including children and young people, and people with disabilities. Any increase in fees and charges to such services will result in a direct but individually minor adverse financial impact on those groups. However, where proposed increases are to meet cost of service provision, there is also a positive anticipated impact as the fee increase enables sustainable delivery of that service.

Tackling Poverty

The council is taking proactive action to support residents who may be struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis and is committed to long term action through its Tackling Poverty Strategy. This includes enabling opportunities for residents to access arts, cultural and leisure activities, with specific target cohorts of low-income families, carers, and young carers. As part of this, the council is mapping and raising awareness of existing no and low-cost cultural and leisure activities, whilst also providing grants to voluntary and community sector organisations to address barriers to accessing such opportunities.

Savings Proposals 2024/25

Equality screenings have been undertaken for all savings proposals for 2024/25. A number of the proposed savings have positive impacts on staff, residents and communities.

The following proposals have been identified as potentially having a minor or moderate adverse impact on protected equality groups. Of these, some have been subject to formal decision by members across this year enabling savings to be generated for 2024/25 and beyond. For those proposals, equality impact assessments have been conducted and have informed the final proposal, as reflected in the summary of provided below. A few of the proposals listed will require further equality impact assessment as they are developed to ensure that any negative equality implications are considered and mitigated where possible, and that opportunities to advance inclusion are maximised.

Adult Social Care

Learning disability review

This proposal refers to the deregistration of three properties. Initial equality analysis anticipates no adverse impact on residents at these properties, who will continue to receive the same level of support. Residents will also receive secured tenancies, which is considered to be a positive impact, however, will be responsible for paying costs such as rent, bills and food. To mitigate any risk of negative impact of this transition, 24-hour care and support will continue to be provided, with residents eligible for housing and other benefits to offset costs.

Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) Changes to Charging

The minimum income guarantee (MIG) applies for people receiving local authority-arranged care and support other than in a care home. Under the Care Act 2014, charges for this care must not reduce people's income below a certain amount - this is known as the MIG. If someone is of pensionable age, this will impact their level of MIG. The MIG pension age at Wokingham Borough Council is currently 60 years old. This is out of step with the state pension age, which is at present 65 to 67 years old, dependent on date of birth. This proposal is to bring Wokingham Borough Council's MIG pension age in line with the state pension age, as with other local authorities in the surrounding area. This will adversely impact those in receipt of care who are currently aged or approaching 60 and under the ages of 65-67. 80 people have been identified as being directly affected. Mitigating actions include financial reassessments for all those affected, which will determine affordability and level of charge levied.

Childrens Services

Home to School Transport

On 24 August 2023, the Executive agreed changes to the Home to School Transport policies. This decision was informed by a formal consultation and an equality impact assessment, which identified potential adverse impacts in relation to age, disability, and socio-economic considerations. Mitigating actions included a prioritisation of seats for low-income families on any council arranged fare payer transport, a focus on independent travel options for Post-16 young people, and ongoing use of discretionary powers for individual cases. **Moderate adverse impacts are anticipated for those no longer eligible for Home to School Transport in the manner previously provided. However the mitigating actions set out support a revised strengths-based approach which helps to address these risks, whilst also enabling the council to address budgetary pressures caused by increasing demand on this service.**

Chief Executive's

Contact Centre Consolidation

This proposal is to explore the consolidation of contact centres to achieve efficiencies, including exploring channel shift for customers, and cross-skilling staff. Robust equality impact assessments will be required to inform any specific proposals for change resulting from the review as it is highly likely that there will be potential for both adverse and positive impacts across protected characteristics if re-shaping resident interaction with the council and associated staffing resource.

Place and Growth

Waste Collection Service Changes

This savings proposal relates to changing the frequency of waste collections and introducing wheeled bins for refuse. A full equality impact assessment was undertaken and two consultations held to inform this proposal, which was subsequently approved by Executive on 26th March 2023. Equality implications were identified for those with mobility issues and ongoing support options were reviewed and found to address these areas of equality-related risk.

Contract savings - Street Cleansing & Grounds Maintenance

This proposal is to reduce street cleansing and grounds maintenance services. This will see less street cleaning and a reduction in the number of grass cuts in the borough. An equality impact assessment has been undertaken and this informed the decision of the Executive taken on 26 October 2023 to approve this approach. The assessment identified potential areas of risk in relation to mobility, visual impairment, and asthma, and set out mitigating actions to address these including careful planning of the schedule of works and communication with residents.

Increase in Off Street Parking Charges

The council proposes to increase off-street parking charges in line with inflation. A report went to the Executive on 29/09/22 outlining the proposed increases in parking charges which were approved in 2023 and changes were implemented across the charging car parks which came into effect July 23. Parking charges will be increased in line with inflation and will be approved as part of the budget-setting process when considering fees and charges. The increase in parking charges could have a minor negative impact on lower income households, however, provision for disabled parking will not be affected.

Residents Parking Zones - including Parking Permits

This project relates to the introduction of controls for on-street spaces to deal with the specific high demand locations close to stations, retail centres and existing resident parking areas. This proposal will require consideration of accessibility of town centre facilities and is likely to have a low negative impact on lower income households. The Blue Badge scheme ensures that there is no adverse impact of this proposal on people with disabilities.

Countryside - implement peak car parking charges

This proposal is to increase charges for parking at peak hours at the borough's countryside parks, in line with similar provision elsewhere. This would result in a minor adverse impact for low-income residents using the car park to access these green spaces and leisure facilities at peak times.

Resources and Assets

Assets directorate programme

The proposal aims to review the councils property assets to understand opportunities to consolidate the estate, reduce running costs and to align services where appropriate. It is likely that any changes with regard to assets that are currently utilised by staff or accessed by members of the public could have both adverse and positive implications for equality groups across the protected characteristics. Consideration of the user profile of any assets will be needed as part of the review process and equality impact assessments will be undertaken to inform any proposals resulting from the review.

Remodel of Sports and Leisure service

This proposal includes a change in delivery model for a number of services previously directly delivered by the Sports and Leisure Service. These include services that are aimed at meeting the needs of particular cohorts, specifically the Shine Programme (over 55's) and Wokingham Active Kids children's holiday camps for which individual Equality Impact Assessments have been undertaken. The former indicated positive impacts including an expanded, more flexible, offer providing greater value for money. The latter details a like for like offer but with a partial change of location which could have an adverse impact on those unable to access the new location due to mobility or cost of transport. The equality impact assessment for this has committed to ongoing monitoring of uptake and feedback.

Summary & Cumulative impacts

There are 46 savings proposals for 2024/25. 33 proposals were deemed to have no adverse equality implications at this time, and 11 were considered likely to have a minor or moderate impact. Of these, it was considered that 5 proposals required an equality impact assessment at this stage. For a further 4 proposals, Officers will be expected to undertake new or update existing equality impact assessments as the proposals are developed and further formal decisions are required to determine implementation.

The table provided in Appendix 1 sets out a summary of the anticipated adverse impacts of the savings proposals for 2024/25. It is considered that these could result in the following cumulative impacts for our residents.

Age & Disability

There is a very small number of proposals that could result in an adverse cumulative impact for the older people and disabled people, in particular proposals relating to changes in services where accessibility and/or affordability are considerations. However, it is considered that there are sufficient mitigating actions in place to address these risks. There are further proposals that could, depending on how they are progressed result in additional negative impact for disabled people, including changes that could include channel shift for how residents access some services. However, equality impact assessments will be undertaken or updated to ensure these risks are addressed as proposals progress.

Socioeconomic inequality

There are a number of proposals that have a minor or moderate adverse impact with regard to affordability including parking charges, changes to home to school transport, and changes to pension thresholds for Minimum Income Guarantee. The cumulative impact is notable but considered minor with regard to the proposals that are included within the 2024/25 budget. Nonetheless, it is recognised that individuals and families within directly affected cohorts may experience additional financial pressures as a result of these proposals. The council is committed to tackling poverty and supporting our residents through the cost-of-living crisis and will continue to review the cumulative impact of any increases to charges to our residents.

Conclusion

In light of the above, the proposed budget saving proposals are considered reasonable and have shown due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Although initial equality screenings have been undertaken to ascertain potential impact, a number of the proposals are in their formative stages and are still to be developed and or subject to consultations. Consequently, as the proposals are developed further equality impact assessment will be undertaken to assess the relevance to the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Table 1: Adverse impact across protected characteristics

	Age	Disability	Gender Reassignment	Marriage & Civil Partnership	Pregnancy or Maternity	Race	Religion or belief	Sex	Sexual Orientation	Socio-economic inequality	Mitigation
Assets directorate programme	Minor	Medium								Minor	To be identified as proposals developed
Remodel of Sports and Leisure service	Minor									Minor	Revision and expansion of offer through revised model
Consolidation of contact centres	Minor	Minor								Minor	To be identified as proposals developed
Waste Collection Service Changes	Minor	Minor									Alternative provision for those unable to use wheely bins.
Contract savings - Street Cleansing & Grounds Maintenance	Minor	Minor									Keeping footpaths clear and reactive service to reported issues.
Countryside - implement peak car parking charges										Minor	None
Residents Parking Zones - including Parking Permits										Minor	To be identified and reviewed in relation to specific locations
Increase in Off Street Parking Charges										Minor	To be identified and reviewed in relation to specific locations
Learning disability review		Minor								Minor	Ongoing 24-hour support and care.
Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) Changes to Charging	Medium									Medium	Individual financial assessments to be undertaken.
Home to School Transport	Medium	Medium								Medium	Revised approach to focus on independent travel training and use of personal budgets.

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