

Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA)

Front Sheet:

Directorate and Service Area:

Social and Community Services, Joint Commissioning Service

What is being assessed:

The option to remove £381,136 of the £431,136 Support Fund budget from 2016/17

Responsible owner / senior officer:

Kate Terroni, Deputy Director Joint Commissioning

Date of assessment:

August 2015

Summary of judgement:

The option being considered is to stop the Oxfordshire Support Fund from April 2016. This is not a statutory function; however most local authorities currently opt to run assistance schemes.

The Support Fund is a local welfare assistance scheme to provide financial support to people in crisis. It includes support for utility payments, rent advances, new white goods and other household items such as furniture. In Oxfordshire the Support Fund also provides every child leaving care (currently 200 per year) with a grant of up to £2000 to help them to set up their new home.

The impact of this proposal will primarily be on vulnerable people (including those with a protected characteristic) who may not be able to cope in an emergency/establish their independence. The greatest impact will be on carer leavers who will have reduced funding to set up home independently.

Mitigating actions:

Locality teams will continue to be required to implement support to vulnerable people (including those with a protected characteristic) in the event of the person being unable to cope in an emergency or maintain / establish their independence.

The remaining £50,000 would be used to provide additional capacity in Information and Advice Services, so that people can be signposted to where alternative sources of funding and support are available.

Detail of Assessment:

Purpose of assessment:

This assessment is being made in relation to a proposal to remove the Oxfordshire Support Fund, as one of a number of measures to make savings in line with cuts to local government spending.

This assessment fulfils the Council's requirements under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 as set out below.

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act") imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions. This proposal is such a function. The three needs are:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.

Complying with section 149 may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but only to the extent that that does not amount to conduct which is otherwise unlawful under the new Act.

The need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages which are connected to a relevant protected characteristic and which are suffered by persons who share that characteristic,
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs other people, and
- encourage those who share a relevant characteristic to take part in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.
- take steps to meet the needs of disabled people which are different from the needs of people who are not disabled and include steps to take account of a person's disabilities.

The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

These protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership

Social Value

Under the Public Services (Social Value Act) 2012 the Council also has an obligation to consider how the procurement of services contracts with a life value of more than £173,934¹ might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the area affected by the proposed contract, and how it might act to secure this improvement. However, it is best practice to consider social value for all types of contracts, service delivery decisions and new/updated policies. In this context, 'policy' is a general term that could include a strategy, project or contract.

Context / Background:

The Oxfordshire Support Fund was established in April 2013 to replace Care awards and Crisis Loans which used to be provided by central government (the Department of Work and Pensions) through the Social Fund.

In 2013/14, the Council received £943,867 from central government to “give flexible help to those in genuine need,” with the definition of "need" being at the discretion of the Local Authority. Oxfordshire made the decision to outsource the function of administering the grants to a provider (under a one year contract plus one year extension).

The year ended with a significant underspend to the Support Fund budget. The strategic decision was made to reduce the available Support Fund budget to £430,136 in 2014/15. Simultaneously, the decision was made not to extend the contract with the external provider and to delegate the management of this budget to individual operational teams. The criteria for individuals to receive support, was also amended to only include specific vulnerable groups – where the council is statutorily responsible – with care leavers named in particular.

For the financial year 2015/16, it was agreed the Fund would remain at £430,136 with a review of spending to take place at the end of the financial year.

¹¹ [EC Procurement Threshold for Services](#)

Proposals:

This assessment is being made in relation to the option to remove £381,136 of the existing £430,136 budget from the Oxfordshire Support Fund. The remaining £50,000 would be used to provide additional capacity in Information and Advice Services, so that people can be signposted to where alternative sources of funding and support are available.

Evidence / Intelligence:

Age: People who are frail and elderly are a priority group to receive assistance from the Support Fund. During 2014/15, locality adult teams, whose role it is to support the elderly in the community, accessed approximately £9K of the fund. Given the teams have been distributing this fund under the "Adults at Risk" criteria; it would suggest a proportion of the fund has been utilised to support the frail and elderly in Oxfordshire. This is a group that is expanding rapidly with the number of people aged over 65 forecast to rise by 29% between 2012 and 2021, and the over 85's forecast to rise by 45.9% in this period. There are currently 111,200 people in Oxfordshire over 65. The 2011 census reported that 21.6% (current estimate of 24,000) had their activities of daily living limited a lot and a further 24.7% (current estimate of 27,500) limited a little. The County Council's strategic approach to this group is to enable them to stay in their own homes in the community rather than go into a care home.

Disability: People who have a disability are a priority group. The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as individuals who have a physical or mental impairment. Up to January 2015, the total spend within adult teams, who support individuals who meet this definition is £38,470. Within adult teams who specialise in supporting individuals with disabilities an approximate total of £18,000 has been awarded from the Support Fund. At the time of the last census (2011), 5.8% of the Oxfordshire population (c. 38,000) had their day to day activities limited by a long standing health problem or disability. In the same year around 19,500 (3.0%) of people in Oxfordshire claimed disability living allowance. In common with frail elderly people, the Council's approach is to help people with disabilities to live independently.

Sex: Single men are a group that historically had high usage of the Support Fund. The Fund is no longer available to the majority of this vulnerable group, as the individuals concerned do not have needs which are identifiable as requiring statutory support. Reports from homeless charities in Oxford suggest a notable increase in numbers of individuals presenting in crisis, after all other avenues of support have been exhausted since no longer qualifying for the Support Fund. Typically, this group is comprised of men who may be resettling in the community after a period in institutional care such as prison, inpatient mental health wards, or they may be homeless / sleeping rough.

Pregnancy and Maternity: People who are pregnant are a priority group. Within Oxfordshire's groups of vulnerable individuals where the local authority has a statutory responsibility, pregnant mothers may be identifiable as a care leaver, part of a family without recourse to public funds or an adult who qualifies for support from adult services. Due to the methods used to capture data, a clear indication of this priority group's needs, in terms of utilising the Support Fund, cannot be established. However, in 2012 there were 8,217 births in Oxfordshire. The birth rate is relatively stable but is growing fastest in urban areas of the county, and among non-UK born mothers. Within this priority group, the Support Fund would likely support pregnant women on low incomes to meet their basic needs and those of their baby, which helps to protect their health and wellbeing.

Rural communities: 33.4% of the county's population live in rural areas, meaning 220,000 people live in rural areas. Oxfordshire has the third highest proportion of people living in rural areas compared to other counties in the South East Region. In many rural areas, there are proportionately more older people than in towns or cities. The particular problems for people living in rural areas include social isolation, lack of services, poor public transport. Living in a rural area is not currently one of the criteria for the Support Fund. However it could add to the problems that people in priority groups experience such as frail elderly.

Areas of deprivation: Living in an area of deprivation is not one of the criteria for the Support Fund. However, to qualify for an award, the applicant must be under exceptional financial pressure which is itself an indicator of deprivation

Who received help from the scheme in 2014/15?

- In 2014/15, the overall budget made available under the Support Fund criteria was £430,136.
- The findings from a review undertaken in January 2015 demonstrate Children's Services had spent £222,762 (73.2%) for the first 10 months of the year, further suggesting they were on track to allocating their full Support Fund budget of £302,247.
- The majority of funding issued during this period had been used to deliver funding to children who have a leaving care status. With a total of £125,139 being awarded to care leavers to set up and remain in stable accommodation. Providing rent in advance, furniture, white goods and other household items such as curtains, carpets and bedding.
- Families with no recourse to public funds were awarded £49,649 to assist with rent advances. This is the second largest total spend, to meet an individual need, under the Support Fund criteria.
- Adult Services were assigned £93,253 in 2014/15. Findings from January 2015 show an overall spend of £38,470 (41.2%) and suggest relatively low uptake in the new arrangement of Support Fund within some parts of Adult Services.

Alternatives considered / rejected:

Maintaining the Fund at its current level may prove to be unsustainable, given the scale of savings required; alongside the low spend in Adults Services in 2014/15 and the fact that this function is not a statutory responsibility for the local authority. An alternative would be to retain a reduced proportion of the Fund based on the 2014/15 spend, to recognise that we have a responsibility to provide assistance to certain groups of vulnerable people in Oxfordshire, (care leavers in particular) and that a small award can help to prevent problems from escalating and enable people to manage independently. This may also help to reduce the consequential impacts on other Council services.

However, given the scale of financial savings the Council is now required to make it would only be possible to retain part of the Support Fund if further savings were identified from statutory services. This is not considered appropriate.

Impact Assessment:

We assess the impact of decisions on any relevant community, but with particular emphasis on:

- Groups that share the nine protected characteristics
 - age
 - disability
 - gender reassignment
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
 - religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
 - sex
 - sexual orientation
 - marriage and civil partnership
- Rural communities
- Areas of deprivation

We also assess the impact on:

- Staff
- Other council services
- Other providers of council services
- Any other element which is relevant to the policy or proposed service change
- How it might improve the economic, social, and environmental of the area affected by the contract **if** the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies

Impact on Individuals and Communities:

Key Risks for individuals and communities with the following protected characteristics: Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, Sex & for those living in rural communities

Risks	Mitigations
<p>Families under pressure / in crisis who do not have the resources to meet their own and their children's most basic needs e.g. for food, heating or accommodation.</p>	<p>We will continue to provide support to anyone who meets our eligibility criteria for Children's Social Care, and adult social care / support for carers as appropriate.</p> <p>We will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>
<p>The majority single men will continue to have no access to the support they need resettling in the community after a period in institutional care e.g. prison, in patient mental health ward, or where they are homeless /sleeping rough</p>	<p>We will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>
<p>Frail elderly or disabled people struggling to cope in the community. Especially in light of significant changes to welfare benefits (introduction of Universal Credit) which in turn may lead to a higher prevalence of individuals with statutory needs presenting in crisis.</p>	<p>We will continue to provide support to anyone who meets our eligibility criteria for Adult Social Care.</p> <p>We will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>
<p>Young people leaving foster/residential care and setting up home independently. The risks are that people in these situations will not be able to cope, their needs will escalate and there will be an increase in demand for high cost social and healthcare interventions for example more young people being involved in crisis or safeguarding situations.</p>	<p>Care Leavers will have access to the Young Person's Pathway to help meet accommodation needs and we will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>
<p>There may be increased pressure on local support agencies in the voluntary sector such as homeless charities and food banks</p>	<p>Review the impact on local support agencies in the voluntary sector on an on-going basis.</p>
<p>Pregnant mothers may be identifiable as a care leaver, part of a family without recourse to public funds or an adult who</p>	<p>We will continue to provide support to anyone who meets our eligibility criteria for Adult Social Care.</p>

<p>qualifies for support from adult services. Within this priority group, the Support Fund would likely support pregnant women on low incomes to meet their basic needs and those of their baby, which helps to protect their health and wellbeing. A reduction in the Support Fund may limit the support available for pregnant women.</p>	<p>We will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>
<p>The particular problems for people living in rural areas include social isolation, lack of services, poor public transport. Living in a rural area is not currently one of the criteria for the Support Fund. However, rurality could add to the problems that people in priority groups experience and limit their access to support.</p>	<p>We will continue to provide support to anyone who meets our eligibility criteria for Adult Social Care.</p> <p>We will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>

It is not felt that removing the support fund would have a disproportionate impact on any of the other protected characteristics.

Impact on Staff:

Risks	Mitigations
<p>A reduction in total value available under the Support Fund may impact on the channels available to practitioners to manage urgent safeguarding matters. The consequence of teams not being able to swiftly manage these matters may add further burdens on teams already facing significant workload pressures.</p>	<p>Reductions in this area have been considered as part of wider budget savings options, with statutory functions protected as much as possible to ensure they have capacity to meet demand.</p> <p>We will continue to signpost to other sources of support, including investment in information and advice.</p>

Impact on other Council services:

Risks	Mitigations
<p>There could be an increase in complaints against the Council, brought forward by individuals and advocacy groups, if the Council is not able to meet its statutory responsibilities.</p>	<p>Existing practices will be maintained and locality teams will be required to implement a support review in the event of an individual being unable to meet their own needs.</p>

Impact on providers:

No risks involved. No provider is commissioned to undertake this work

Social Value

If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area.

How might the proposal improve the economic well-being of the relevant area?

N/A

How might the proposal improve the environmental well-being of the relevant area?

N/A

Action plan:

Action	By When	Person responsible
Decision on whether this option will be taken forward	February 2016	Council Members
Review and update the SCIA and communication of new arrangements	February 2016	Commissioning lead

Monitoring and review:

This Service and Community Impact Assessment will be reviewed in February 2016 after the budget has been agreed.

Person responsible for assessment: Commissioning lead

Version	Date	Notes (eg Initial draft, amended following consultation)
Version 1	October 2015	Initial draft
Version 2	January 2016	Revised draft