

Nottinghamshire County Council Budget 2023/24 – Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

1. This report sets out the potential equality impacts on residents and County Council staff arising from setting a sustainable budget for the financial year 2023/24, that is intended to improve services for residents and secure greater value for money through greater efficiency. It also includes actions proposed to maximise any positive impacts of budget decisions and minimise any adverse ones.
2. Where a decision to change or reduce a specific service or part thereof has been made or is proposed to be made, the relevant Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) have been or, where detailed proposals are still being formulated, will be produced, and made available for either individual lead Cabinet Members, Cabinet collectively and/or Council to review.
3. The information in this report is intended to ensure that Members can pay due regard to the equality implications of the proposed budget for 2023/24.

Our Duties

4. When setting the budget, the Council must be mindful of the potential impact on service users and staff. The Equality Act 2010 imposes an obligation on Members to have due regard to protecting and promoting the welfare and interests of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (age; disability; gender re-assignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation).
5. At its meeting on 19th January 2023, Full Council resolved that the Council would treat care leaver status as if it were a protected characteristic under the Equality Act. This EIA has been updated to reflect this resolution.
6. The Budget Report 2023/24 sets out the financial challenges facing the County Council. In tackling a budget deficit whilst ensuring continued value for money as the Council delivers its priorities, the Council has set out a number of service efficiencies. These efficiency proposals for 2023/24 have been analysed to understand positive and negative impacts on residents and staff from protected groups, particularly where they may be impacted by multiple proposals.
7. Some efficiency proposals are in a formative stage and will require further consultation before implementation. As proposals are finalised, the specific equality impacts will be considered in more detail by the relevant Cabinet Member and Corporate Director before any final decisions are made.
8. Members should understand the consequences of decisions for those with relevant protected characteristics and consider these alongside other relevant factors when making decisions. In addition, consideration of equality is an

ongoing process and needs to consider evidence from consultation and engagement activity and other data sources where appropriate and available.

9. 'Due regard' also means that consideration given to equality matters should be appropriate in the context of the decision being taken. This means Members should weigh up equality implications against any other relevant factors in the decision-making process. In this case the most significant other matters are:
 - a) the statutory requirement to set a balanced budget
 - b) the ambitions the council has for Nottinghamshire, which are set out in the ten-year Nottinghamshire Plan: Healthy, Prosperous, Green
 - c) the demographic pressures facing the council's services including a rising population with projected increases in the number of older residents and children and young people. Increases in these age groups are placing, and will continue to place, additional demands and pressures on adult and children's social care services and local schools.

Nottinghamshire County Council Saving/Efficiency Proposals 2023/24

10. Officers have reviewed savings and efficiencies proposed for 2023/24 to determine which proposals require EIA and which do not. For those changes where residents are most likely to see differences in the way services are delivered, and where the equality implications are well defined at the time of setting the budget, individual EIA have been assessed. Other proposals, where it is later realised there are equalities impacts, will require the completion of an EIA and the necessary approval before formal decisions are taken by the relevant Cabinet Member and Corporate Director.
11. The following has been assessed to assist Cabinet and Council to give due regard to the proposals outlined in the budget:

11.1 Adult Social Care Residential Services

Review of the County Council provision of registered residential care for people with learning disabilities to ensure that the care and support provided is strength based, maintains, or increases their independence and that people are supported in an environment that best meets their needs.

Potential negative equality impacts are:

People receiving care by the affected services and their families are likely to find the change difficult which may cause distress, particularly for those who have been at the same service for many years and developed relationships with other residents and staff.

Mitigations of potential impacts planned are:

We will work with affected people, both individually and as a group, to ensure that they are informed and engaged throughout to minimise the risk of effects. Residential staff have established relationships with people living in the service and their families and will support them through any change affecting them.

An initial individual EIA has been undertaken for this proposal.

11.2 Children and families services

For budget efficiencies and pressure mitigations requiring specific decision making and/or consultation, EIA will be developed and undertaken as appropriate in relation to potential impacts on services to children and families. Any potential impact on care leavers will be considered as if care leaver status were a protected characteristic in line with Full Council's resolution.

11.3 Place-based services

For budget efficiencies requiring specific decision making and/or consultation, EIA will be developed and undertaken as required at the appropriate point in time in relation to proposals for place services.

12. Some efficiencies within the 2023/24 budget will not have any direct effect on residents or service delivery (such as budget adjustments and general efficiencies), and therefore are not considered within this report.

Council Tax and Adult Social Care Precept

13. Any increase in tax, coupled with steep rises in the cost of living, may have a disparate impact on residents, depending on their current financial status.
14. A rise in taxes and overall increase in the cost of living will have equality implications along socio-economic lines and across some protected characteristics. Families paying high care costs, due to looking after elderly relatives or those with disabilities, will already have higher than average household expenses, so will be more severely affected by slight drops in income. In addition, due to well-known earnings gaps between certain demographics, including women and those from ethnic minority groups, there is a risk that income disparities may widen.

Mitigations

15. Services have developed a range of mitigating actions that seek to offset impacts of efficiency proposals on residents and staff with protected characteristics.
16. In general terms, the council's approach to mitigating impacts has been, or will be, as strategic principles are developed into more formative proposals, to adopt one or more of the following:
 - a) Continue to put service users and staff at the heart of service re-design, using codesign, consultation and engagement methods to produce services that are responsive and focus on supporting people that need them most. This means bringing together the right people

early in the process to understand the issues and then deciding what can be done collectively to improve outcomes.

- b) Investing in preventative activity to build resilience, maximise independence and help people to live safely at home and in their communities, help enable better outcomes earlier and avoid having to resource high-cost intensive activity that leads to greater pressures on our budget.
- c) Undertaking ongoing evaluation of the impacts of changes to services so we can build further evidence, and update our EIAs, on who is affected by them, to refine and strengthen the mitigations that are in place and to document and respond to unforeseen negative impacts.
- d) Providing tailored information to service users that are impacted negatively by efficiency proposals so they can draw on their own resources or seek further support either from the council or partner organisations.
- e) Increasing opportunities for residents to access council services in new and easier formats, such as using digital technologies. Additional support will be provided for residents who may need help to adapt to the new formats, such as some older or disabled people.
- f) Ensuring any changes to staffing levels or staff structures are undertaken in accordance with the council's human resources policies and procedures and take account of the impact these changes have on the workforce profile, including identifying potential career opportunities for staff where possible.
- g) Ensuring that staff with protected characteristics are fully supported with training and adjustments as appropriate to allow them to access the new ways of working which the transformation proposals give rise to and for all staff to be equipped to support residents to do the same.
- h) Continue to engage with the voluntary sector to help support potential gaps in services that might be created because of efficiencies. These charities and voluntary organisations have proven themselves effective in identifying where issues can arise in current service provisions as well as in their ability to deliver early intervention work.
- i) Working with district and borough councils to ensure their Council Tax Support Schemes can assist economically vulnerable households to offset any significant financial difficulties that might arise because of Council Tax increases.
- j) Undertaking work across the Council, involving members and partners as appropriate, to better understand the impact of cost-of-living increases on residents, staff and service provision and identify specific activities to mitigate these impacts.

- k) Work collaboratively across the council and with our partners to deliver coordinated and integrated transformation, develop and test new ways of working, service delivery and systems to make a positive difference for our communities and residents.

Conclusion

- 17. As part of our continued efforts to ensure the council remains financially sustainable, we are changing the way we deliver some services to residents. Some of these changes require EIA to identify any groups with protected characteristics who may be impacted by these proposals. When taking a decision to set the budget, Members must use this paper so they can discharge their duty to pay due regard to the equality implications of agreeing this package of efficiencies to balance the budget.
- 18. This report has summarised the main themes and potential impacts on residents arising from efficiency proposals for the 2023/24 year, as well as mitigating activity. The council continues to go through significant transformation, and we will continue to consider how these changes affect the most vulnerable residents and how we can support them to ensure that no-one is left behind.

February 2023