

## **Nottinghamshire County Council Budget 2024/25 – Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

1. This report sets out at a high level the potential equality impacts on residents and County Council staff with protected characteristics, as identified at the time of setting the Budget, arising from setting a sustainable budget for the financial year 2024/25.
2. The Budget sets out the vision and key themes of improving services for residents, particularly for the most vulnerable groups and communities; enabling communities to be more independent and resilient to improve life for local people and reduce demand for the most acute and expensive services; securing value for money and financial sustainability in the medium to longer term through greater efficiency. It also includes actions to maximise any positive impacts of budget decisions and minimise any adverse ones.
3. 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.
4. The information in this report is intended to enable Members to consider the potential high level equality implications and any mitigations of potential negative impacts on particular groups in setting the proposed Council Budget for 2024/25.

### **Our Duties**

5. 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 under the Public Sector Equality Duty to have due regard to the need to:
  - Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation as prohibited by the Act
  - Advance Equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not
  - Foster good relationships between persons who share relevant characteristics and those who do not.
6. The duty to have due regard to protecting and promoting the welfare and interests of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic includes age; disability; gender re-assignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.
7. At its meeting in January 2023, Full Council resolved that the Council would consider care experience as if it were a protected characteristic under the Equality Act.
8. The Council must also have due regard to the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant and Armed Forces Public Duties in respect of armed forces personnel.

Other relevant statutory duties, including those under the Children Act, relate to the Council's duty to ensure that services have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

9. The Budget Report 2024/25 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 2024/25 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.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. '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 for the following year
  - 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.
  - d) In addition to increased demand for services and complexity of need, the budget needs to be set against the challenge of inflation and rising costs of service delivery and limited funding support for local government.
  - e) The broader global, national and regional context which provides both challenge and opportunity as the Council seeks to innovate and reform working across the public service landscape by drawing on collective knowledge and insight working with people, partners and communities to co-create solutions and grow the strengths and assets within our communities.

## **Nottinghamshire County Council Saving/Efficiency Proposals 2024/25**

13. Officers have reviewed savings and efficiencies proposed for 2024/25 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 implications have been assessed. Other proposals, where it is later realised there are equalities impacts or which are still under development, will require the completion of an EIA and the necessary approval before formal decisions are taken by the relevant Cabinet Member and Corporate Director.
14. The following section assesses the proposed efficiencies for 2024/5 at a high level across the Council and considers the potential cumulative impact of some of these on people with protected characteristics in order to assist Cabinet and Council to give due regard to the proposals outlined in the Budget:

### **Adult Social Care Services**

15. The Council proposes to work with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) to reduce the number of hospital admissions, including inappropriate or avoidable admissions, and ensure people spend as little time in hospital as necessary and that people are able to be discharged to the best place for their recovery and rehabilitation. This work is likely to impact particularly on older people, those with long term conditions and health needs and disabilities. Positive impacts are anticipated by improving outcomes and the journey and experience for these groups, their carers and families through the system. This includes supporting better health outcomes, greater independence, better quality of life and reduced social care costs by enabling people to remain at home for longer and reducing the requirement for more intensive and more costly support.
16. Work is also planned with the ICB to review joint funded high-cost nursing and residential care home placements; particularly for working age adults with the highest needs. This will include reviewing individual support plans to better meet specific needs and exploring different ways of commissioning support to reduce cost and maximise value for money.
17. The Adult Social Care offer already includes the use of digital technology. It is proposed to increase the deployment of a wider range and increase the use of technological solutions aimed at improving health and independence for service users whilst reducing the reliance upon high-cost placements and slowing the overall increase seen on social care costs over the MTFs. The proposed pilot will enable the Council to test out its assumptions and the potential phasing and expectations of a wider programme. This will include considering issues such as digital exclusion and accessibility to ensure particular groups are not disadvantaged and able to make best use of the technology available.
18. 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 adults and families.

## **Children and families' services**

19. Strengthening the building blocks of good health and well-being in communities is a key theme for the medium to longer term with investment of available resources focussing on support to the people and communities that will benefit most to build independence and resilience. This will involve working with local people, communities and partners to develop new approaches and assets in our communities. Potential impacts on children and families, including those with care experience, and the most disadvantaged communities will be identified and addressed through this work and an EIA developed.
20. The local authority is planning to review and remodel services provided to schools to ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory responsibilities in respect of education and towards vulnerable children whilst achieving full cost recovery on any traded services to support the Council's continued financial sustainability. This is at an early stage of consideration and will require more detailed work before impacts on specific groups can be identified and mitigated as appropriate with an EIA developed to assist this process.

## **Place-based services**

21. The most significant of the budget efficiencies are internal to the Council and will not affect the services provided into our communities. For budget efficiencies requiring specific decision making and/or consultation, an EIA will be developed and undertaken as required at the appropriate point in time in relation to specific proposals for place services.
22. Key themes are emerging for how the Council will operate and secure a sustainable and financially resilient future whilst retaining a focus on the longer-term ambitions in the Nottinghamshire Plan. This will include a plan for the future shape of the organisation and prioritising place and community based early help and prevention activity. This is likely to involve local public service reform working collaboratively with key partners such as EMCCA, ICB, District and Parish Councils, Schools, the Community and Voluntary sectors working as one system across Nottinghamshire.
23. A blueprint for the longer term is required for the period of the MTFs and beyond. As this is developed the impacts on particular groups and communities will become clearer. Engagement and co-production with these communities and groups will enable early identification of issues and enable mitigation of any disproportionate impacts.
24. Efficiencies within the 2024/25 budget which will not have any direct effect on residents or service delivery (such as budget adjustments and general efficiencies), are not considered within this report.

## **Council Tax and Adult Social Care Precept**

25. 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.

26. 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**

27. Services have developed a range of mitigating actions that seek to offset impacts of efficiency proposals on residents and staff with protected characteristics.

28. 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 through the use of 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 changes in services that might be created as a result 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 are able to assist economically vulnerable households to offset any significant financial difficulties that might arise as a result 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 drawing on our wider resources and maximising opportunities 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**

- 29. 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.
- 30. This report has summarised the main themes and potential impacts on residents arising from efficiency proposals for the 2024/25 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.