

Press Statement: For immediate release

County Councillors to vote for social isolation of vulnerable people

On Tuesday 16 February, at Full Council, Oxfordshire County Council will vote for a balanced budget.

The Enough is Enough Alliance representing all conditions and all settings through over 100 voluntary sector and registered care providers, is sending four key messages directly to our Elected Members:

- We urge you to vote against the cuts, which are inhuman, damaging to our County's vulnerable people and short-sighted.
- In agreeing this budget, you are turning your back on Oxfordshire people in need of all ages and in all parts of the County.
- If you pass the budget, you are voting to socially isolate thousands of our County's vulnerable and elderly people.
- Oxfordshire's leaders must urgently work together better to protect vulnerable people. This includes District and City Council leaders who have been noticeably quiet, despite holding substantial fiscal reserves.

The imminent decision by Oxfordshire County Council, to agree wide-ranging and damaging cuts to social care and voluntary sector budgets, will tear a hole in our democracy. Local government is bending to national government whip and is meekly colluding to completely demolish valuable voluntary sector resources, a decision which will also deepen the crisis in social care, the NHS and our prison services.

The long-term cost to the public purse will be immense; the short-term damage to lives will be horrendous.

Local government is hiding behind the legal requirement to agree a balanced budget. We are told that the implications of not agreeing a budget are that the Council may be removed and local government controlled from Westminster. We ask, what is the difference? Oxfordshire County Council is already controlled by national government. Never has this been truer than the recent pay-off of £9m to stave off closure of a handful of children's centres, whilst ignoring the rest of the local pain and misery.

We believe that by making a stand and forcing a rejection of the proposed budget, Oxfordshire's position as a high-profile local Council will force national government to re-think its public services policy.

We ask Councillors to take a stand on Tuesday, for the people they represent.

We urge them to vote to reject the cuts and work with social care and voluntary sector services to reshape the financial package, in time to set the balanced budget required in law.

Enough is enough.

Eddy McDowall, Chief Executive of Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers said, “This is a point of no return for Oxfordshire County Council. Agreement to bow before national government and make these drastic cuts, means we have lost any sense of local government. We ask Councillors to stand and be counted as being for their local communities and against Westminster bureaucrats who are destroying our services. These cuts are short-term measures that will cost the tax payer many millions more in the medium and longer term and will sink our health and prison services”.

Jamie Miller, Chief Executive Officer at Headway Oxfordshire and Chair, Oxfordshire Neurological Alliance said, “The continued pursuit of brutal short-term cuts will cost our NHS many millions annually. These cuts will be catastrophic for voluntary sector community prevention services, such as Headway Oxfordshire, causing misery to vulnerable people and adding costs to our more expensive health services”.

Paul Cann, Chief Executive, AgeUK Oxfordshire and Action for Carers Oxfordshire said, “Councillors are about to vote:

“for over 1,000 of our most vulnerable older people to lose the lifeline of a day centre,

“for 3,000 people with dementia to lose a vital helping hand, as they receive their diagnosis, and,

“for a further 800 struggling families to lose advice and guidance through the maze of care and support.

“If our elected Members have any regard for our most disadvantaged, they will find another way”.

The Enough is Enough Campaign informs and enables people to tell local Councillors and local MPs of the impact of the cuts on them.

More details of the campaign are at www.oacp.org.uk/enoughisenough .

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The campaign involves the following organisations:

- Action for Carers Oxfordshire
 - AgeUK Oxfordshire
 - Alzheimer's Society
 - Citizens Advice Oxfordshire
 - Day-break Oxford
 - Deaf Direct
 - Elmore Community Services
 - Guideposts Trust
 - Headway Oxfordshire
 - Healthwatch Oxfordshire
 - October Club, Wantage
 - Oxford Homeless Pathways
 - Oxfordshire Association for the Blind
 - Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers
 - Oxfordshire Family Support Network
 - Oxfordshire District Mencap
 - Oxfordshire Mind
 - South & Vale Carers Centre
 - Unlimited Oxfordshire
- And 88 OACP members

BACKGROUND NOTES

Enough is Enough believes in providing good care and support for people in need, both for those who are publicly funded and for self-funders. However, over the last 10 years, care providers and voluntary sector organisations have been squeezed to the point of no return by endless efficiencies and cuts. It is harder and harder to meet regulatory obligations.

50% of care homes are now at risk of going out of business. It is widely predicted that a major national provider will go under this year.

Home care businesses all over the country, including in Oxfordshire, are continuing to withdraw from the public sector funded social care market, due to downward pressure on contract fees.

Council language has changed from protecting vulnerable people to the most vulnerable. This nuance ignores the fact that 'vulnerable' people will become 'most vulnerable' without valuable and cost-effective support from the voluntary sector, putting greater pressure on already over-stretched registered social care, NHS and prison services. Most likely people will become the A&E admissions, or homeless, of tomorrow adding to the existing need. The cuts are short-term and will have a major long-term cost to our health and social care services in our County and country.

We already see wide-ranging concerns in care services used by people most in need:

- Care homes where whole floors are closed, because we do not have enough staff, yet expensive hospital beds are full to bursting. The Council's Care Home budget was overspent by £3.5 million at December 2015.
- Care providers are short of capacity (workers), because there is not enough money in the system to increase wages enough for people to afford to live in the County and work at that pay level. There is a chronic lack of affordable housing, both for those in need and for care workers.
- Adults with learning disabilities receiving care, are being asked to shop online for their food, because it is cheaper than paying for support workers to accompany them to the shops to do their shopping, as you or I do.
- Support workers are restricted to 4½ hours per year to support people with learning disabilities and complex health issues to attend medical appointments.
- Home care agencies have arrangements with supermarkets to distribute unsold food to clients, because clients cannot afford to feed themselves.

The cuts to be agreed on Tuesday 16 February will have far-reaching further impact.

- 3,000 sight-impaired people and carers (and many have children) may lose valuable information and advice.
- Well over 600 people attend tier 3 day services, proving respite and support often for elderly carers. It is estimated that only 30% have assessed needs and would therefore be eligible for services going forward. Of those that attend, 49% have carers at home who need the respite the services provide.
- 'About to be homeless' people will not be able to access the essential advice services they need to avoid being evicted. The devastating impact of being made homeless means the state often has to step in – either through local authority funded temporary accommodation, possibly including costly child protection, to an estimated cost of £24,000 - £30,000 per person. A new homelessness pathway about to start in Oxfordshire will have 38% less money than previous contracts. Further cuts proposed by the County Council, will mean a 78% cut in funding for Housing Related Support services over a short period of time. Services, used by over 800 people at any one time, will close leaving unmet needs of complex mental health, physical health, drug

and alcohol problems. These people will end up in NHS and prison services costing the state millions of pounds more. And there are still around 40 people in Oxfordshire at any one time, waiting for services and still sleeping rough.

- Services to homeless people are being cut at the same time; both the prevention and the safety net will be lost.
- The savings produced by advice and information services are well-documented. The CAB alone saves the national economy £20 for every £1 invested; a total of nearly £5billion.
- For people with acquired brain injury, there are problems with assessment for and set up of personal budgets. Some 70% of existing service users will no longer be eligible following the budget cuts. Those that are assessed as being eligible are already having real problems getting their budgets released due to delays in release of their personal funds – an indicator of the huge strain the internal mechanisms of the Council are under.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, says, 'Britain's carers are quite simply the backbone to our society'. In Oxfordshire, this backbone is snapping.

The pressure of caring often has an adverse effect on a carer's own physical and mental health, and also a significant financial impact, as many carers have to reduce working hours or give up work altogether.

- Oxfordshire has 62,000 carers; they save the County's economy £1.18billion a year. With cuts such as the closure of tier 3 day centres, the reduced advice and guidance service, reduced rural transport, will put unpaid carers at risk of breakdown, increasing the call on social services and NHS budgets.
- If 30% of carers were affected by the cuts to the extent of needing either or both social service or NHS support then that cost to the public purse would be an additional £400,000 a year. It is likely more than 30% will be affected.

Oxfordshire is fast becoming an area of social isolation for large proportions of its vulnerable and elderly people, a shocking state of affairs in a wealthy county in the 21st century.