

Press Statement: For immediate release

County Councillors caught between a rock and hard place

The decision today by Oxfordshire County Council to effectively defer decisions on major cuts to voluntary sector and other services appears to be a victory for common sense.

We acknowledge that deferment is a positive achievement by Councillors and we welcome the strenuous effort to discuss and negotiate a way forward. We have been calling for the Council to slow down and create some breathing space. In particular, this will give time to look at complex issues like structural change.

However, despite the sustained combined efforts of politicians from the three major parties, there are no winners after today's decision. The compromise means essential services are still in the firing line pending delay and review, owing to national government policy. The delay fails to give long-term reassurance and will impact on imminent decisions on the future of vital services.

The deferment should include a sustained period of engagement with senior Oxfordshire leaders across local government, coupled with leading voluntary sector organisations, and including deep consultation with service users. It should include the plans for devolution and closer partnership working with the NHS.

The Enough is Enough Alliance representing all conditions and all settings through over 100 voluntary sector and registered care providers, says:

- Oxfordshire County Council has been forced into an impossible position by national government policy.
- In agreeing this compromise amendment, politicians are postponing the impending tidal wave of cuts. Delaying decisions for a year will not make them go away.
- Decisions this year, or next year, will socially isolate thousands of our County's vulnerable and elderly people.
- The increasing pressure on the Council will impact hugely on the ability and capacity of Oxfordshire County Council to deliver on its statutory duties.
- Oxfordshire's leaders, including at District and City level and in the NHS, must urgently work together to better protect vulnerable people.

Enough Is Enough will be considering further action to ensure that vulnerable and elderly people continue to have their voices heard and ensure much needed services are in place for them.

Eddy McDowall, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers said, "Whilst a compromise looks like everyone's a winner, in fact no-one is. The

hard-won compromise is merely a smoke-screen and a chance to re-set the clock pending review and certain cuts next year.”

Jamie Miller, Chief Executive Officer, Headway Oxfordshire and Chair, Oxfordshire Neurological Alliance said, “We are happy that some consideration has been given by Councillors to the need to slow down the cuts process and allow individuals and the voluntary sector some breathing space. However, these cuts remain immoral, undemocratic and unachievable.”

Paul Cann, Chief Executive, AgeUK Oxfordshire and Action for Carers Oxfordshire said, “Whitehall has given the County an impossible mountain to climb and we welcome the sincere efforts made today to start that climb. We now need genuine partnership between the statutory and voluntary sectors to design together the future of community services.”

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