

Annex I: Surrey County Council Budget 2023/24 – Equality Impact Assessment

1. This report sets out the potential equality impacts on residents and Surrey County Council staff with protected characteristics arising from setting a budget for the financial year 2023/24 that is intended to improve services for residents and secure better 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 (EIAs) 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. This paper must therefore be read in conjunction with the 2023/24 Final Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28 (MTFS) and the Cabinet report of 31 January 2023.
4. The information in this report is intended to ensure that Members are able to pay due regard to the equality implications of the proposed budget for 2023/24.

Summary

5. In December 2020, Council adopted a refreshed Organisation Strategy 2021-2026 that set out a single guiding principle for everything we do – tackling inequality to focus on ensuring no-one is left behind. The Organisation Strategy has been refreshed, with a report to Cabinet on 31 January 2023 (Organisation Strategy 2023 – 2028) that will reaffirm our commitment to this principle. With regard to our budget, this means every pound spent by the council needs to be used as efficiently as possible, so we can concentrate our resources on supporting some of Surrey’s most vulnerable residents.
6. Given the scale and complexity of change required to deliver better outcomes while balancing our budget, the council’s efficiency proposals for 2023/24 have been analysed to understand positive and negative impacts on both residents and staff with protected characteristics, particularly where they may be impacted by multiple efficiency proposals. The following groups have been identified:
 - Disabled adults, including those who have learning disabilities, and their carers
 - Children and young people, including those with additional needs and disabilities, and their families
 - Older adults and their carers

7. Certain efficiency proposals will lead to more positive outcomes for some of Surrey's residents by either reducing discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics or furthering good relations with other members of the community. For example, improved practice to support looked after children will support them and their families to live better lives, as well as improving the efficiency of services. Whilst not a protected characteristic, looked after children will also benefit by increased capacity of some services. Care leavers may also benefit from greater levels of choice over care and freedom for those who are more able to live independently. It is believed that the changes in practice in Adult Social Care will potentially lead to better outcomes, such as reshaping our learning disability services and encouraging more community-based care options, helping to support people to move from residential to supported independent living.
8. Some efficiency proposals are in a formative stage, and as proposals are finalised, the specific equality impacts will be considered by the relevant Cabinet Member and Executive Director before any final decisions around implementation are made.

Our Duties

9. This analysis ensures Cabinet complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which requires them to have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
10. Members are also required to comply with Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, which places a duty on the council to ensure service functions, and those contracted out to others, are discharged having regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
11. Members of the Cabinet must read each individual EIA (listed in paragraph 15) in full and take their findings into consideration when determining whether to approve the 2023/24 budget, based on the impacts of the efficiency proposals outlined in this report and corresponding EIAs. Having 'due regard' requires Members to understand the consequences of the decision 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 take into account evidence from consultation and engagement activity and other data sources where appropriate.

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;
- b. the ambitions the council has for Surrey, which are set out in the [Community Vision for Surrey in 2030](#) and the Organisation Strategy 2021-2026¹;
- 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.

Surrey County Council Efficiency Proposals 2023/24 – Individual Equality Impact Assessments

13. Officers have reviewed all efficiencies proposed for 2023/24 to determine which proposals require EIAs 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 EIAs have been made available for review. Other proposals not included in this report where the potential for equalities impact is identified, will require the completion of an EIA and the necessary approval before formal decisions are taken by the relevant Cabinet Member and Executive Director.

14. This year completed EIAs from Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL), Customer and Communities (C&C), Adult Social Care (ASC), and the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Directorates have been published. The Environment, Transport and Infrastructure (ETI) Directorate and lead officers for cross-cutting efficiencies have identified that some efficiencies will potentially require EIAs in future and outlined initial thinking about what the potential impacts might be. The Resources, Public Service Reform (PSR), Partnerships, Prosperity and Growth (PPG), and the Communications and Engagement Directorates have not identified any efficiencies that require an EIA.

15. Fourteen EIAs have been made available to assist Cabinet and Council to give due regard to the proposals outlined in the budget. Some of these have

¹ Cabinet is considering a report at the meeting on 31 January that appends the refreshed Organisation Strategy 2023 - 2028

been reviewed by Cabinet to inform decision-making previously. EIAs available for review which can be found [online](#) are:

- Adult Social Care Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 (approved by Cabinet Member for Adults and Health 25 November 2022)
- Customer Services: Cease mediation of routine highways reports by the contact centre (Approved by Cabinet Member 1 December 2022)
- Proposed reduction to the Library Book Budget (Approved by Cabinet Member 1 December 2022)
- Proposed transfer of financial responsibility to the Community Partnered Libraries (Approved by Cabinet Member 1 December 2022)
- SFRS Overtime Reduction – Centralised Crewing (Approved by Cabinet Member 24 November 2022)
- LAC Capital Programme (Approved by Cabinet Member 16 January 2023)
- Looked After Children Demand/inflation - Reunification Project (Approved by Cabinet Member 16 January 2023)
- Short breaks contract (Approved by Cabinet Member 16 January 2023)
- Block booking of bed spaces (Approved by Cabinet Member 16 January 2023)
- Houses of Multiple occupancy (Approved by Cabinet Member 16 January 2022)
- [Single View of a Child Programme – replacement of existing case management infrastructure EIA](#) (approved by Programme Board 29 November 2021)
- [Home to School Transport](#) (approved by Cabinet Member 11 April 2022)
- Stopping SFRS Cadets programme (Approved by Cabinet Member 24 November 2022)
- SFRS Training School restructure (Approved by Cabinet Member 24 November 2022)
- Annual procurement plan savings (Approved by Cabinet Member 16 January 2023)

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

17. The following section assesses the proposed efficiencies for 2023/24 in a cross-cutting way and considers the cumulative impact of some of these changes on people with protected characteristics. As part of the EIA process, we also take impacts on non-statutory issues (such as socio-economic status) into consideration, to ensure we take a more comprehensive approach to equality.

Surrey County Council Efficiency Proposals 2023/24 – Cumulative Impact

18. Analysis of the EIAs, as well as potential impacts identified by officers as efficiencies are in development, shows that the groups with the potential to be affected by multiple changes by efficiencies in the 2023/24 budget are:
- Older adults and their carers
 - Disabled adults of all ages, including adults with learning disabilities and their carers
 - Children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families

Older adults and their carers, and adults of all ages with physical, mental and learning disabilities and their carers

Adult Social Care

19. There will be many positive equality impacts for people who use services and their carers arising from the on-going transformational changes being implemented across ASC to drive through the efficiencies in the 2023/24 MTFS. We will build upon people's strengths and help them stay connected to their community; review and adapt our therapy-led reablement offer; and continue to reshape our learning disability services to be more creative, vocational and community-based.
20. We will continue to improve mental health services and embed technology enabled care (including the 'telehealth' and 'telecare') to enable people to remain independent at home with the reassurance they and their family need. There will also be positive impacts as we redesign our front door to provide a seamless and consistent offer and embed a strengths-based hospital discharge-to-assess model so people receive targeted support following their discharge to reduce their long-term care needs etc.
21. However, with the need to save a further £19.8m in 2023/24, it is acknowledged that whilst actions are in place to mitigate and minimise negative impacts it will be difficult to do so in all cases. Potential negative impacts will affect people with age, disability, race and carers protected characteristics.

Potential negative equality impacts for older adults, adults with disabilities and their carers
Some decisions on placements for older and disabled people needing residential and nursing care that are offered at a distance may lead to concerns for their family and support network, who may struggle to reach them as easily as before. The lack of connection to family members and existing support networks may have an impact on the emotional and mental wellbeing of those in care. There may also be concern about how care provided by family, friends and community networks can be quality assured and any safeguarding issues addressed.
Honest conversations with older people, their families and carers about what ASC can do and what they need to do for themselves. These conversations

<p>may be a source of significant stress and anxiety and might have practical difficulties particularly if there are language or cultural barriers.</p>
<p>Increasing demands upon the voluntary, community and faith sector to support people in the community putting them under further pressure at a time when they are recovering from the pandemic and struggling with the demands arising from the cost-of-living crisis. The increasing pressures on the system therefore mean the most disadvantaged, particularly those from lower income backgrounds or in more isolated settings may struggle to receive the support they need.</p>
<p>Carers may be concerned about what these changes mean for them and the people they care for and their wellbeing. They may feel obligated to take on more of a caring role, which could lead to issues in work-life balance and/ or have a more detrimental impact on their health if they are an carers.</p>
<p>Risk of reduced access to information, advice and services for digitally excluded residents, such as some older people (who are disproportionately less likely to have internet access), those from lower income households and those who live in more rural and isolated locations with poorer quality internet access who do not have access to equipment or are unable to receive support remotely.</p>

Libraries

22. The Library service is proposing to make £182,733 of financial efficiencies from 2023/24. The bulk of the required efficiencies will come from the allocation of resources to the 42 libraries in the main Surrey Libraries network, with the remaining £80,554 to come from the transferring of financial responsibility to the 10 Community Partnered Libraries (CPL) over the Library Transport Budget, The Library Book Budget and the Summer Reading Challenge.
23. The changes to resourcing provision in some key areas will mean that the Library Service will be scaling back certain online resources and reducing the level of certain categories of stock, including DVDs, newspapers, adult fiction and non-fiction. The change will affect all residents and users of the service, though given the make-up of the library service users, there may be some groups more affected than others.

<p>Potential negative equality impacts for older adults, adults with disabilities and their carers</p>
<p>Limited stock across libraries may force people with mobility issues to travel further from their home to access the resources they need.</p>
<p>Older residents often have a greater reliance on written materials, which cost two-to-three-times more than digital format library resources. Physical resources therefore are more likely to be cut from the stock, making it harder for older people to access them. They also often have a harder time accessing digital materials, which may provide a further obstacle. They are also more reliant on books in other formats such as large print and audio/e-audio which</p>

on average cost 2-3 times as much as a standard format book. If the CPLs fund their own book stock they may not have the experience, skill or time to purchase stock in alternative formats, meaning Residents will struggle to access what they need.

Customer Services

24. We have been working to improve our 'front-door' services for the past couple of years, especially in the digital space. We offer a range of easy-to-use, self-serve options via our website. These are well used by customers and currently around 75% of routine transactions take place through digital channels. This includes library book renewals, birth and marriage registrations appointments, blue badge applications and highways reports.
25. We are proposing to cease offering the option to call the contact centre to report routine highways defects, and instead offer the option to do so online. This approach echoes the route taken by several other similar local authorities, including Essex and Hampshire County Councils.
26. For those who are digitally enabled, online reporting is often a preferred option. Currently 75% of routine transactions take place through digital channels. Customers who self-serve are not limited to making reports during office hours and can choose times and places that suit them. However, despite this, there may still be adverse impacts on groups who may be digitally excluded.
27. The contact centre will continue offering a discrete mediated service for those who are unable to use digital channels or need additional support to do so. Our Interactive Voice Response (IVR) messaging will advise customers who telephone and are unable to access the website that their call will be answered.

Potential negative equality impacts for older adults, adults with disabilities and their carers

In 2020, only 84% of **disabled people** in the UK were recent internet users, compared to 91% of non-disabled people, with the greatest disparity being among the more elderly populations. Further digitisation of front-door services could lead to further digital exclusion of **older people**.

Whilst some **people with hearing or speech related impairments** may find it easier to make reports through digital channels and at times and places that suit them. For others who are less familiar with digital processes or may have trouble accessing the right equipment, self-serving may be more of a challenge. This includes adults who have lower levels of computer literacy including some **older adults** and others from **lower income households**.

Cross-Cutting Efficiencies

28. Some of the cross-cutting efficiencies proposed for the 2023/24 budget will have equality implications for Surrey's residents and the council's staff. These efficiencies remain in development and full Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are being produced for each of them. We have started equality analyses which have identified that some of these changes will impact certain protected characteristics. Some disabled staff, for example, may face detrimental changes to working conditions in the event changes to working style and structure are adopted. As EIAs are completed mitigating actions for impacts such as these will be developed.
29. The Freedom to Travel programme seeks to design and deliver a low cost, integrated approach to planning, commissioning and delivery of travel assistance and transport for residents that need them most. It aims to improve approaches to the management of supply and demand for travel assistance that leads to greater resident independence, lower carbon emissions from transport and more efficient use of vehicles and other transport assets across the county.
30. It is anticipated there will be positive impacts of this change, including for adult social care clients, particularly **working age adults with learning disabilities** who are most likely to use council commissioned transport.
31. Our estate is a sizeable financial and operational asset and how and where we deliver services and strengthen our partnerships continues to evolve. The Land and Property service will continue to implement a new operating model up until the end of 2024/25, as part of our 'asset planning for the future' programme. The restructure involves an overall reduction in staffing levels and also reflects efficiencies created from IT investment.
32. The 'Efficiency and Effectiveness' project aims to support our ambitions to optimise productivity, create greater value and reduce the costs of existing activities. This will be achieved by increasing our understanding of how resources in the council are utilised and adopt an approach that maximises benefits across existing change programmes, such as the Agile Organisation Programme, Digital and Workforce of the Future.
33. The Contract Management as a Service (CMAS) initiative is an extension to the current procurement Team. CMAS Teams will be piloting a new approach to contract management. The Procurement Team will review contracts with services and deliver a structured and consistent approach to manage all our contracts proportionate to the size and value of each contract. EIAs will be developed on a case-by-case basis depending on the nature of the contract and potential impacts on residents and staff.

34. There are some efficiencies happening in the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service which may have equalities impacts on staff. These include the Training School restructure, which is aiming to increase the range of operational training that is delivered to Surrey Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) staff and longer term to improve the training resources available. Ultimately though this may mean significant changes to some staff members' current working patterns and therefore have higher levels of impacts on some groups, over others.
35. There is hope that there may be some more positive impacts in the long run though, as multiskilling staff in a greater range of areas will make roles less transient and more stable/ secure. This will ensure greater resilience of training delivery due to changing commitments/availability of Bank Trainers.
36. Another efficiency centred around overtime reduction, seeks to further reduce the service's dependency on overtime staff. This will be done via the introduction of a Centralised Crewing Team (CCT), which will consist of a pool of approx.12 operational frontline staff. This pool will enable the continued reduction in the use of overtime.

Potential negative equality impacts for older adults, adults with disabilities and their carers

SFRS staff who are currently working as trainers and Learning and Development coordinators and who are **neurodiverse** may feel an impact of a restructure more than other members of staff, due to higher support needs for learning and often having problems when their learning is disrupted for any reason than those who have more typical/ mainstream learning requirements.

The impacts on overtime and on certain work patterns may have higher impacts on those from **lower income households**, which during a cost-of-living crisis will be felt acutely. We know from research conducted throughout the council that some people who share protected characteristics are at risk of being in households with lower incomes than others.

Children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and families

Looked After Children (LAC)

37. All local authorities have a statutory duty to provide care and accommodation for children looked after in the local area (the 'sufficiency duty'). We operate nine in-house children's homes in Surrey (as of November 2022). In addition, a number of independent children's homes providers operate children's homes in the county. Overall, sufficiency of residential children's home placements remains low in Surrey with most children placed outside of the county.

38. This is in the context of national challenges for local authorities to secure residential children's home placements. To address sufficiency and increase capacity in Surrey, we plan to develop new children's homes as part of the Looked After Children (LAC) Capital Programme. Property will be developed in-house with care to be delivered in-house and/or via strategic partnerships with trusted providers. In addition, we propose to explore block contracts with high-quality external providers of children's homes in Surrey, to secure more of the capacity that is in county for Surrey's looked after children.
39. The Reunification Project further seeks to ensure that looked after children can return to the care of their parent(s) [or other close relative] at the earliest opportunity if safe to do so and in their best interests. Changing homes is a stressful experience for any child and thus 'Reunification' allows them to return to a stable, consistent environment, with routines they know and understand.
40. One of the key positive impacts of this project is that it promotes better mental health, reduced anxiety, and happier lives for children, particularly those who are SEND or neurodivergent. Successful reunification will create long-term savings for the local authority in reduced placement costs for children.
41. The Big Fostering Partnership is another initiative that will have potential impacts on looked after children. The aim of the change is to enable more looked after children to move from residential children's homes into foster placements with families.
42. Finally, as part of our 'Block Booking Bed Spaces' programme, we are looking to make the best use of children's home provision in Surrey for the county's looked after children. This includes both capital development of new provision and strengthened contractual relationships with local providers, including block contracts.
43. We are doing this as a continued focus on quality assurance and reviewing placements is required to ensure that children and young people placed outside of Surrey are in the best placement to meet their needs and that wrap-around support services are provided where children are placed.

Potential negative equality impacts for children and young people

The main potential negative impact identified for **looked after children** across these programmes of work is that access issues and suitability of the accommodation may not meet the full needs of disabled children and young people. As supply of accommodation is limited there is a risk that properties that are acquired may not immediately fit the needs of **disabled children** and therefore may need to be adapted.

There also are likely accessibility issues for those who are from different **cultural or ethnic backgrounds** as communication, particularly for those with English as a second language, may become an issue.

Whether or not **looked after children** have suitable accommodation (for example access to single-sex spaces) may also require further attention as properties and beds are being acquired.

For changes that require people to move to a new area, **access to places of worship** may also potentially be restricted or made significantly more difficult.

Care Leavers

44. The changes around **houses of multiple occupancy** is a project that aims to create up to 24 beds for care leavers, including former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, in Surrey using SCC capital funding and commissioning a provider to deliver floating support. Floating support refers to a type of 'in and out' care, where carers provide targeted help as and when, as opposed to constant care.

45. This represents a new accommodation pathway for care leavers that supports both their ability to progress towards independence and provide homes in Surrey for care leavers. There is a financial efficiency associated with this model of delivery as well as supporting care leavers to achieve greater independence and free up capacity for more targeted interventions of those with the highest level of need for specialised care/ interventions.

Potential negative equality impacts for children and young people

There are concerns that some properties may have potential accessibility issues that might not immediately meet the needs of some **disabled young people**.

Less monitoring of how the services users are doing in their accommodation may make it harder for them to report instances of **racism or prejudicial treatment**.

As with services relating to looked after children, **cultural or language differences** may make communication and social cohesion more difficult.

Similar to some issues raised for looked after children, access to appropriate accommodation (such as **single sex spaces**) may be an issue.

Other Children and Young People

46. The introduction of Liquidlogic's Early Years Management Education System (EYES) will support a link to be made with Liquidlogic Children's Services (LCS) and Early Help Module (EHM), which will enable Children's Services to have a single view of the child. This means children, young people, and their families only have to tell their story to services once, increasing their chances of getting the right support from the right services at the right time.

47. In April 2022, Cabinet agreed to changes to the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy to enable the council to discharge its statutory and discretionary powers to provide school and college travel assistance for eligible children and young people. It also aimed to manage increasing costs and demand within resources available. The EIA that accompanied the

Cabinet report suggested there were potentially positive and negative impacts based on protected characteristics.

48. Extensive benchmarking with other local authorities was carried out to review other local authorities' home to school travel assistance policies and provision. This established that the majority of local authorities had either never provided for, or have withdrawn, the provision of free home to school transport for children and young people below statutory school age. Most local authorities apply an annual contributory charge to the parents of children and young people in receipt of post 16 home to school transport provision, to support the costs to the local authority for the provision of this transport. Some local authorities have reduced their discretionary offer and no longer provide travel assistance once a young person is in Year 12 (Post 16 education).
49. Surrey County Council are also working towards renegotiating with incumbent providers to reduce the overall cost of services. The Annual Procurement Forward Plan (APFP) Savings in 2024/25 would require reassessment of the need for the service to understand if there are opportunities to streamline the current scope. This includes reviewing if the service is being provided elsewhere, if the current level of service is required and if an alternative service can be procured that meets needs at lower cost. We also intend to group services together into a broader prospectus of services which aims to increase competition between providers which in theory should bring about more competitive rates. One area where this will be explored is the provision of services relating to our post-16 cohort within SEND and Education.
50. It is believed that contracts for longer durations, providing stability for providers, rather than working year-to-year which often takes time away from the actual delivery of services should broaden the potential pool and encourage more providers to bid for work. This too will give providers the time and motivation to innovate within their specialities to bring about efficiencies within their delivery. The approach will require the council to set prices which factor in inflationary uplifts at appropriate intervals to remain attractive to providers. Setting prices with clearly defined inflationary uplifts reduces the need to renegotiate contract values upwards during the term of the contract. The longer-term transparency of prices will help improve budgeting for future years. It's collectively recognised that it's a false economy to try and stifle inflationary uplifts across the contract base, and counter-intuitive if the ambition is to secure longer duration contracts in the future.
51. Surrey's need to manage the budget effectively is imperative in order to deliver services which meet the needs of all children, and young people in Surrey, whilst ensuring value for money across the commissioned services portfolio. Any reduction in budget is likely to impact the quantity of any service delivered but it is the Council's ambition to redesign services which take advantage of more cost-effective alternative delivery models.
52. The Surrey Fire and Rescue Service are undergoing a change which will require the ceasing of their SFRS Cadet Programme. The programme aims to

support young people in their education and public service life. It was designed according to national standards and pro-social modelling (where supervisors act as a positive and motivating role model). To enable SFRS to consider its impacts on both the public and SFRS, a limited trial of 10 cadets and volunteers was commissioned based at Guildford Fire Station (FS). This pilot started in September 2021 and is due to end in June 2023. The pilot is supported by five volunteers working for SFRS.

53. The removal of the Cadet Programme from Guildford Fire Service and more widely, not offering it as a service to the remainder of the county will not impact on the current young cadets. They will continue to receive their qualifications and come to a natural end on the programme. The main group likely to be impacted will be in potential cadets who were looking to join.

54. Finally, the aforementioned efficiencies involving libraries (including Community Partnership Libraries (CPLs)) will likely see some disproportionate impacts of the changes to their service by virtue of their membership base. The library service has 323,694 registered members (membership data as of March 2022). As part of the registration process the service does not collect data regarding members dates of birth so we are unable to provide exact data, however, users are placed into certain categories such as Child, Young Person, Adult, Concession and Open Ticket (our card for vulnerable users). The Library Service has over 63,000 children on the 0-11 years concession, showing a significant over representation, compared to the population at large.

Potential negative equality impacts for children and young people
Younger children , particularly those who are disabled, may face challenges with accessing their education setting and impacts on health and wellbeing from disruption to existing service provision.
Children of non-statutory school age will no longer be eligible for free transport, except in exceptional circumstances.
Changes to the way contracts are procured may result in a reduction of services for all protected characteristics however, the aim is to improve the procurement process itself and not to reduce services. Although recommissioning of services will ask check 'if that level of service is required', which may see a reduction/change in non-statutory service delivery. EIAs will be produced for each contract on a case-by-case basis.
Younger people from socio-economically disadvantaged households may be disproportionately impacted by a reduction in some services running at their current capacity, which could have secondary impacts on their wider wellbeing.

Cost of living

55. The cost of living across the UK has been increasing since early 2021, with inflation currently at around 11% and indications that it could rise further still². This is predominantly due to rising food and energy prices and is inevitably affecting the affordability of goods and services for households and businesses. The impacts of these cost increases have been felt most acutely by lower income households who spend a greater proportion of their income on food, fuel and energy.
56. In Surrey, the effects of this are already being felt. Whilst the majority of Surrey residents are not in crisis situations at the moment, many are beginning to make cutbacks. It is also important to note that there are some residents in crisis already before the full effects of inflation and the winter months are felt.
57. As was highlighted in a November [Cabinet Report](#)³, over 500 new clients registered with Surrey Citizens Advice between April – June 2022 and support was given on over 1,600 cases, in particular around benefits, debt, housing and foodbanks.
58. Further, the demand for food support is also increasing, with some foodbanks across Surrey stating they have seen a 300% increase of demand on their services over the past two years. As a local authority, these mounting pressures may require us to act more strategically and re-direct more resourcing into crisis services.
59. As announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement in November, local authorities in England will now be able to increase council tax by 3% without need for a referendum. In addition, local authorities with social care responsibilities will be able to increase the adult social care precept by up to 2% per year. It is important to consider the impact of raising council tax on residents in the context of the cost-of-living crisis they are facing, particularly as the Government's energy support package is expected to be scaled back from April 2023.

Potential negative equality impacts

The increasing demand on services like Citizens Advice appears to be coming from particular groups within the county, with 66% of claimants identifying as disabled or having a **long-term health condition**, and two-thirds of clients identifying as female, showing that the cost-of-living crisis is potentially having a disparate impact on Surrey's residents.

There is significant evidence to suggest that in times of higher inflation and fuel costs, those most affected are **older people and disabled people and their carers**. This is due in part to the greater need for heating, higher energy use

² Trading Economics (retrieved December 2022): [United Kingdom Inflation Rate - November 2022 Data - 1989-2021 Historical \(tradingeconomics.com\)](https://tradingeconomics.com/uk/inflation-rates)

³ Cabinet Report, 29 November: <https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=8467>

and increases in care costs caused by higher costs faced by carers to carry out their roles.

There is a risk of a disproportionate impact on residents from **ethnic minority backgrounds**, due largely to their over-representation in statistics on economic disadvantage.

Furthermore, people from **ethnic minority communities** are less likely to come forward for help⁴ and are more wary of services and institutions offering help.

Mitigations

60. Services have developed a range of mitigating actions that seek to offset impacts of efficiency proposals on residents and staff with protected characteristics. Further details on specific mitigating activities linked to individual efficiencies can be read in the EIAs listed in Paragraph 15 of this report.
61. 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. Putting service users and staff at the heart of service re-design, using co-design, 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 and early-intervention measures to help enable better outcomes earlier and avoiding 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.

⁴ BMJ report: <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/11/e012337>

Additional support will be provided for residents who may need help to adapt to the new formats, such as some older or disabled people. Work is also ongoing across services to ensure that our digital services are as accessible as possible, including improving the language to the appropriate reading age and ensuring style and layout are implemented in a way that is inclusive of those with additional needs.

- f. Ensuring any changes to staffing levels or staff structures are completed in accordance with the council's human resources policies and procedures and take account of the impact these changes have on the workforce profile. In particular, there may be positive career opportunities for staff with protected characteristics as a result of this activity.
- 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 the transformation proposals give rise to and for all staff to be equipped to support residents to do the same.
- h. Engaging with the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) to help support potential gaps 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.

Conclusion

62. 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 to so they can discharge their duty to pay due regard to the equality implications of agreeing this package of efficiencies to balance the budget.

63. 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.

64. **This report must be read in conjunction with each individual EIA**, listed in paragraph 15 and found online: [Ensuring our decisions are fair - Equality Impact Assessments - Surrey County Council \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/equality-impact-assessments).

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