

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL.

COUNTY COUNCIL
Date 9th December 2021

REPORT AUTHOR: Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer

REPORT TITLE: Arrangements for the development, submission, and consideration of alternative budget proposals

REPORT FOR: Decision

1. Purpose

1.1 To set out for approval the arrangements and timetable for the development, submission, and consideration of alternative budget proposals.

2. Background

2.1 Members or political groups have the opportunity to submit an alternative budget proposal for consideration.

2.2 To assist in this process the Section 151 Officer will allocate an officer from the Finance service to work with Members or political groups to develop their proposal. This work is undertaken on a confidential basis.

2.3 In order for an alternative budget to be submitted to Council for consideration it must first be approved by the Section 151 Officer who is required to assess the proposal and to confirm that is legal, robust, deliverable and maintains a balanced budget position. Only on this basis can it be submitted to Council.

2.4 The Local Government Act 2003 requires an authority's Section 151 officer to give a formal opinion on any budget proposal as to the robustness of the budget estimates and the level of reserves held by the Council. Under Section 26 of the 2003 Act it is also required that an appropriate person (in this case, the Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer) determines the appropriate level for the balance of the Council's General Fund Reserves.

2.5 The process for developing, submitting, and considering alternative budgets in previous years has not been well defined and the process and timetable proposed in this report looks to strengthen this.

3. **Advice**

- 3.1 The development of the budget proposal submitted by Cabinet takes place over many months and as information becomes known and the details of the budget are worked up, the Section 151 officer keeps Cabinet updated regularly and offers advice as the proposal develops.
- 3.2 Council more generally are updated through Budget Seminars and with engagement through the Finance Panel.
- 3.3 It is felt that regular updates by the Section 151 Officer with Group Leaders should also be undertaken to keep them abreast of changes in proposed funding projections and the financial pressures that are being identified. This will also provide the opportunity to offer more general advice on all aspects of the budget including the level of reserves held and Council Tax calculations. This will ensure that advice to opposition groups is consistent with the advice being offered to Cabinet as they develop their budget proposal.
- 3.4 Costing of proposals can be developed in confidence with the officer assigned to support the group at an earlier point in the process, at this point no information is shared or discussed outside the group arena. Where necessary Heads of Service will be required to be involved in the development and costing of proposals and this is also undertaken on a confidential basis.
- 3.5 A timetable will be put in place each year setting out the dates to be met for the submission of budget proposals.
- 3.6 The timeline for submitting and considering alternative budgets is in part dictated by the date on which the Council is advised by Welsh Government of its forthcoming funding settlement. This has been delayed in the past few years with announcements made in late December rather than October as was previously the case.
- 3.7 This has impacted on the availability of time from receiving the settlement to when Council must approve the Budget for the forthcoming year. The process builds in time for the preparation of Impact Assessments and for the scrutiny of all budgets being proposed.
- 3.8 For the setting of the 2022/23 budget the following timetable is proposed.

	<u>From</u>	<u>Final date</u>
Cabinet / EMT approval of budget	06/01/22	12/01/22
Publish Cabinet agenda		12/01/22
Cabinet approve Budget		18/01/22
Scrutiny of Cabinet Proposals	19/01/22	02/02/22

Preparation of Alternative Budget & discussions with Heads of Services re Impact assessments	19/01/22	02/02/22
Discussion of alternative Budget with S 151 officer		04/02/22
Last date for submission of alternative budget with Final Impact assessments		07/02/22
Issue Scrutiny Agenda for Alternative Budget (papers to follow)		07/02/22
Informal Cabinet to consider Scrutiny Comments on Cabinet Budget		08/02/22
Last date for Alternative budgets to be approved by s151 officer		09/02/22
Send Alternative Budget papers to Scrutiny if approved by S151 officer		09/02/22
Scrutiny Of Alternative Budgets	11/02/22	14/02/22
Prepare Scrutiny Report for alternative budget	14/02/22	15/02/22
Cabinet consider Alternative Budget		15/02/22
Publish Agenda for Council meeting to consider approval of Cabinet and/ or alternative Budgets - No amendments to the Cabinet Budget or alternative budgets can be made after this date (NB Constitution will require amendment to achieve this). Minor amendments arising from the Council debate would be considered.		18/02/22
Full Council Set Budget		24/02/22
Council set council tax		03/03/22
Last date by which Council must set Council Tax		11/03/22

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 Support for the development of alternative budget proposals can generally be accommodated within the existing resources of the Finance Service. Should the work involved exceed the capacity that is normally required, discussion will take place with the members requesting the support. Early discussion of any significant work being considered is essential.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) has commented as follows: “ The recommendations can be accepted from a legal point of view and proposals to amend the Constitution to prevent amendments to the Cabinet Budget or alternative budgets being proposed after publication of the Council Agenda for setting the budget will be considered later in the meeting”

6. Data Protection

N/A

7. Comment from local member(s)

N/A

8. Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Impact Assessments will be required for all budget proposals submitted for consideration.

9. Recommendation

That Council approve the process and timetable as set out in this report for the development, submission and consideration of alternative budgets.

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