

Report To: County Council

Date of Meeting: 4th November 2014

Lead Member / Officer:

Report Author: Gary Williams Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services

Title: Budget Protocol

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The report is about an agreed process for Members to put forward amendments and alternatives to the budget proposals to be considered by Council.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.2 To seek Members' endorsement of a process by which alternative budget proposals can be put forward by Members for consideration alongside recommended budget measures at full Council.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Members endorse the process by which alternative budget proposals can be put forward for consideration at Council as set out in Appendix 1.

4. Report details.

4.1 The Council's Standing Orders provide for a Member to be able to move an amendment to a motion without notice, i.e. at the meeting, in certain circumstances. These are to add or remove words from the motion / recommendation so long as the effect is not to negate the motion.

4.2 In previous years Members have moved amendments to budget proposals that have been relatively minor changes which it has been possible to absorb within departmental budgets. The ability to absorb variations to budget proposals will no longer be possible given the current financial climate. It will therefore be necessary for any proposed amendment to be accompanied by an alternative proposal.

4.3 The Council has been through a detailed and comprehensive review of its budgets and the proposals that will be brought to Council for consideration will have been subjected to rigorous costing, debate and impact assessment. It will not be possible to conduct this level of costing and impact assessment in respect of alternatives raised at a meeting with the same level of rigour.

- 4.4 In order that a Member who wishes to put forward an alternative budget measure is able to have that proposal considered properly at a Council meeting it is necessary to put in place a process by which such measures can be subjected to the appropriate level of costing and impact assessment.
- 4.5 It is suggested that a protocol be agreed by Members in respect of the way in which proposed alternatives or amendments to the budget be put forward to Council.
- 4.6 A draft Budget Protocol has been prepared and is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.7 Clearly, for Members to be able to properly consider what amendments, if any, they would like to propose, they will need to have sufficient notice of the proposals that will come before them at Council. In the current process Members have also had the benefit of debating and scrutinising budget proposals at a series of budget workshops. At each of these workshops Members have been provided with information relating to the impact of and the amount of savings forecast to be achieved by each proposal.
- 4.8 Members will therefore have received sufficient information to understand the nature of the proposals and to identify potential alternatives that they may wish to pursue.
- 4.9 Under the proposed draft Protocol, Members who wish to have an amendment and alternative proposal considered at Council, having had the benefit of costing by finance officers and an impact assessment, should provide details of their proposal with a seconder to the Head of Finance and Assets as soon as is practicable but in any event no less than 10 working days before the Council meeting at which the Member wishes it to be considered.
- 4.10 This means that proposed amendments and alternatives will have the benefit of appearing in the published papers in order that they may be given due consideration by Members in advance of and at the meeting.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 The decision has no direct impact on Corporate Priorities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 There are no direct costs associated with this report. There may be an additional burden on finance officers if multiple alternative proposals are put forward for costing.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

- 7.1 There is no impact assessment report required with this report.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1 The draft budget Protocol has not been considered by Scrutiny. The issue was discussed at a Budget Workshop on 8th October and it was agreed that this process be put forward for endorsement by Council.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 The budget process takes a lot of time and effort to complete. Should Members wish to propose amendments they need to ensure that they give officers as much time as possible to review them. Larger proposals clearly need longer to assess. There is a risk that although officers get the time to review the proposals, that the papers are not provided in time for Members to properly consider the proposal.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1 The risk of not having an agreed process whereby proposed alternative budget measures can be fully costed and impact assessed in advance of a meeting of Council is that Members who wish to propose alternative measures are not able to have them considered by Council on the same basis as the recommended budget proposals.

11. Power to make the Decision

Section 151 Local Government Act 1972