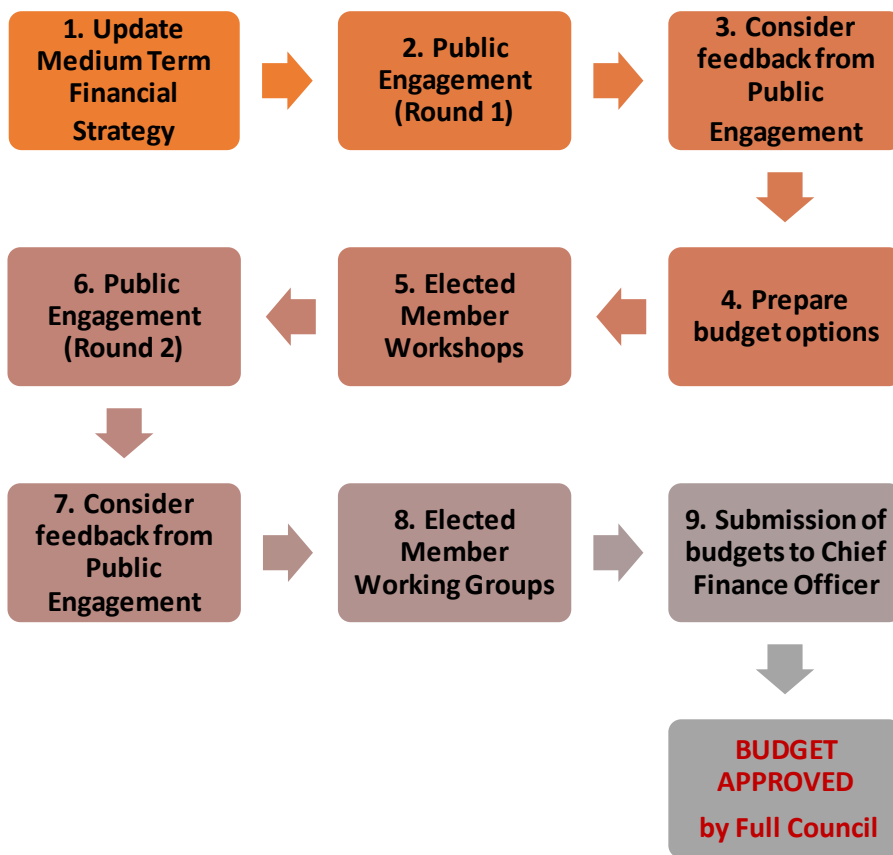


Budget Protocol

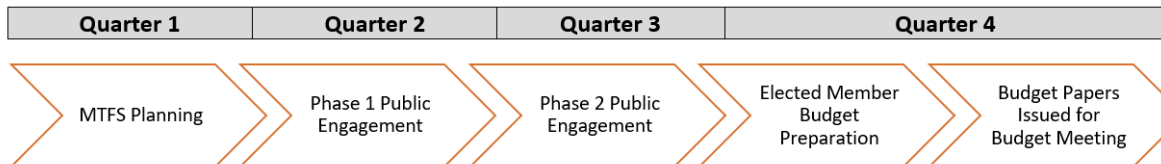
The purpose of this protocol is to:

- **identify the key stages** in the preparation of the Medium-term Financial Strategy and Annual Budget;
- commit the Council to public engagement on the budget to enable **a shared understanding** of the choices facing the Council and the impacts of budget options on those with protected characteristics and those living in socio-economic disadvantage.
- ensure that elected members are supported to comply with the Council's **statutory duties** under the Equality Act 2010 within the council's statutory budget setting meeting of council ;
- provide clarity on the roles and responsibilities of elected members, officers , ALEOS and the public, in the approval of the Council’s budget; and
- ensure that the Council will set its budgets, including the rate of Council Tax, by 10 March each year as defined by law.



Integrated Impact Assessments (IIAs) will be prepared from the start of the process by officers and ALEOs. These will be iterative assessments, taking into account feedback from public engagement, proposals by ALEOs, the further development of options by officers, and the development of proposals by elected members. They will be updated throughout the process.

Reports will be submitted to Council throughout the process, including where appropriate IIAs.



1. Update of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. This annual update will be required to reflect the current planning assumptions over the 5 year period starting in the following financial year along with the budget that has been set for the current financial year.
2. Phase 1 Public Engagement. This first round of public engagement will be to gather information on where the public see their main priorities, in terms of where the budget allocations should be made.
3. Feedback from Phase 1 of public engagement will be reported to the Council as part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to inform elected members of the outcome and allow them to begin preparation for their own budget.
4. As part of the budget process officers will work on a series of detailed budget options which will allow the balanced budget to be set annually. Feedback from Phase 1 public engagement will provide a context for that work. IIAs will be drafted or added too for each budget option.
5. A series of workshops will be set up for all elected members to inform them of the content of the budget options, ensuring they have sight of the options and the potential impacts identified by the IIAs before going into the public domain.
6. Phase 2 Public Engagement. The budget options will be the basis of the second round of public consultation. This consultation will also include key stakeholder groups including community councils and targeted consultation with specific groups with protected characteristics that may be affected by the budget options. IIAs should be updated following the outcome of the Phase 2 consultation.
7. The Council will receive a report on Phase 2 Public Engagement as well as the current estimated budget position for the following year's budget, along with the budget options and IIAs. Where possible, this will include options proposed by the public. These proposals will have been subject to an assessment, by council officers, of the legal competence and financial affordability, in addition to the relevant IIA. This will include information as to whether any proposals have been amended in light of the consultation process and whether it is possible to remove or mitigate any negative impacts and if not, why not.
8. Elected member working groups will be established for each political group (which can contain all group members or combinations of groups) and a series of workshops will be held to determine each group's budget. These will be held in January. Where a political group is electing to incorporate their own option or an option proposed by the public, each must have the appropriate legal, financial assessments and IIAs carried out by officers.
9. Each elected member group will submit their budget to the Council's Chief Officer - Finance (also referred to as the section 95 Officer) for the following financial year (plus 4 years should they determine that is their position) by mid-February each year (actual date to be confirmed once the date of the budget meeting is known).

Approval of budget

Elected members must read the report and all the papers that have been appended including the IIAs, which are all relevant to the decisions they are about to make. Elected members must have enough information in order that they can give due regard to how the decisions impact people with protected characteristics, and so that it can be recorded that they have done so and that they have considered any mitigatory measures. As a minimum each elected member/group proposing a General Fund Budget must submit:

- a. The options and proposals they plan to have implemented to balance the General Fund budget, and a copy of their proposed General Fund Capital Programme;
- b. The rate of Council Tax that will apply for the year ahead;
- c. A schedule of Fees and Charges that are to apply for the year ahead;
- d. The terms of the Non-Domestic Rates Empty Property Relief Scheme for the year ahead;
- e. Confirmation that due regard has been given to the Public Sector Equality Duty;
- f. Confirmation that consideration has been given to the Integrated Impact Assessments;
- g. Confirmation that the members of the group know the details of the proposals budget and capital programme.
- h. Options and proposals they plan to implement in respect of the Common Good.