



Subject:	Response to Department of Finance consultation on the draft 2025/26 Budget
Date:	24 th January 2025
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to make Members aware of the Department of Finance consultation on the draft 2025/26 Budget and to seek Members' approval of the Council's draft response.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to consider the draft response and approve its submission to the Department of Finance (DoF), subject to any comments or amendment provided.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Draft 2025/26 Budget sets out the proposed departmental allocations for the incoming financial year.</p> <p>The Executive is encouraging people to get involved in the Draft Budget consultation and have their say on how to prioritise the finite funding available.</p>
3.2	<p>Members should note that the closing date for responses is 13th March 2025. A copy of the draft response to the consultation is proposed in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 below. A summary of the key issues are outlined below.</p> <p>A Link to the Consultation is detailed below.</p> <p>https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-budget-2025-26-consultation</p>
3.3	<p>DoF are seeking consultees' comments on the following points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you agree with the prioritisation of funding within the 2025-26 draft budget document? 2. What services should be prioritised in the 2025-26 budget? 3. Are there any services that no longer need to be delivered or can be reduced in 2025-26? 4. Do service charges need to be considered for some services? 5. Should Public Sector pay be prioritised? 6. And have you any other views?
3.4	The information provided is at a very high level. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult to make an informed response to the questions posed. On that basis it is recommended that the Council does not respond to questions 1-5.
3.5	Within the written ministerial statement issued with the consultation documents, dated 19 th December 2024, there is reference to the Autumn budget and the increase in employers' National Insurance and the potential cost to local government.

3.6	Prior to this in a statement from government on 18 th December they have confirmed £515 million in support for local authorities in England to mitigate the additional impact of the increase in employer National Insurance Contributions. As members will be aware, this funding will then come through the block grant as a result of the Barnett Consequentials.
3.7	Members will be aware that additional funding received by the Executive via the block grant is unhypothecated and as such it is at the discretion of the executive as to how that funding is allocated. It is proposed that the Council provides a response to Q6 – Any other views – as follows:
3.8	Belfast City Council fully understands the serious financial pressures across public services and local government is committed to doing its bit in addressing those pressures. We do believe in the benefit though of a joined up and 'whole of government' approach to public services in Northern Ireland and would encourage us both to work together to protect essential local services. By doing this, we can avoid just transferring the financial pressures public services are experiencing from one part of the public sector to another part of the public sector and instead put our collective efforts into the transformation needed to put all our public services on a sustainable footing.
3.9	On that basis, it is imperative, that additional funding received through the block grant as a result of the Barnett Consequentials is passed onto Local Authorities to ensure the continued delivery of core services.
3.10	Members are asked to consider the draft response above and approve its submission to DoF.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.11	There are no implications associated with this report
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.12	There are no implications associated with this report. Members are advised that DoF have undertaken an equality Impact assessment on the draft budget and this is available on their website.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None