

Formal Council Questions and Responses

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1 Question to the Leader : 2019/41 - Proposed Council Tax Raise

Councillor C Evans asked:

Dear Cabinet Member,

As you are aware, your administration announced your proposed council tax raise of 8% the day after the General Election. Just a week before Christmas, stating election rules for delaying the announcement despite many journalists disputing these rules applied to Councils.

Given it has been stated that your administration will be 'open and accountable', do you feel you have allowed enough time for an open and accountable consultation?

Many say not, with this in mind and your Party's stated intent to 'listen' will you extend the consultation period? Can you tell the people of Newport how you intend to consult on budget proposals and the council tax rise?

Looking at the council twitter feed, as of 8.36 on 17/12/2019 nothing has been posted in relation to the consultation process; will you be holding public meetings with cabinet members present to listen to feedback? If so, when?

Why weren't the dates announced at the same time as the council tax increase? Will senior officers be available for ward meetings to explain your administrations proposals?

Can you outline a clear consultation critical path please?

The Leader responded:

Public consultation commenced following Cabinet on 20th December and will run until 31st January. This is approximately six weeks and is in line with previous years. Consultation will centre on an online survey of the type that has worked well in previous years. This will be promoted through social media and press releases. The dates of the consultation period were publicised on the Council website shortly after the date of December Cabinet was confirmed.

The formal consultation follows a pre-budget phase where officers attended four public venues and distributed surveys to ascertain views on how the Cabinet uses its budget.

A date of January 22nd has been set for a budget public engagement event to be held at Newport Centre. (Cabinet Member and senior officer involvement is being decided).

In addition the proposed Council Tax rise will be subject to public consultation using bus wifi which last year received nearly 4,000 responses.

Officers will be working with the Fairness Commission to facilitate budget engagement with the 50+ Forum, and BAME groups.

Officers work with contacts in partner organisations to cascade details of the consultation to hard to reach groups e.g. through GAVO's networks.

Schools are consulted on via the School's Forum where they devote a meeting to this in January, as well as feedback from both the secondary and primary Head-teacher groups.

Internally, the budget will be reviewed by all the Scrutiny Committees and with staff/teacher unions via the Employee Partnership Forum

Senior Officers will be available to attend Ward meetings where they are scheduled / arranged to take part in the Consultation period set out above.

I hope this clearly shows that the consultation arrangements are robust and should ensure a wide range of feedback and views. As I set out in our Cabinet meeting on the 20th December, I wish to encourage as many people, partners and organisations to respond.