

## **2024/25 General Fund Budget Communication & Engagement Plan**

### **1. Background**

In March, Angus Council approved a three year budget that allocated spending for the 2023/2024, financial year, with preliminary plans for the subsequent two financial years.

The council faces significant budget deficits amounting to approximately £60m over this period. The council now faces an unprecedented and demanding financial situation where difficult decisions will need to be taken in every area of service provided by the Council and our partners. To be financially sustainable Council services will need to undergo a further transformation over the next three to five years, becoming an even more streamlined and agile organisation which focuses its limited resources to areas of greatest need.

In light of this, effective external communications and engagement will be key to inform, engage and involve Angus communities in the budget decisions that are required.

As stated above, the scale and severity of the Council's financial challenges (our projected budget gaps) provide very limited room for manoeuvre on savings options. This means that giving the public a choice of multiple options for how to make savings is restricted. However, we should still seek to inform, engage and, where appropriate, consult on our plans, priorities and budgets where this will help inform decision-making.

This work will also support elected members in making difficult budget decisions.

### **2. Objectives**

- To inform the Angus communities and taxpayers of the Council's budget position and to explain the funding landscape.
- To explain the reasons for changes to services, within the context of the budgetary challenges whilst seeking to deliver the Council Plan
- Where possible, highlight alternative delivery models from successful partnerships with other organisations and most importantly communities
- Work with communities around service-specific cuts to reshape delivery outcomes

### **3. Strategy**

The strategy, is to take a three-strand approach:

#### **Strand One - Communication**

For the 2024/25 Budget setting process communication will be the main focus of the plan. A series of simple videos communicating the following points will be used:

- Council Tax Breakdown
- What does the council tax fund?
- Revenue budget and funding gap
- Budget Cuts – implemented and planned

- External funding – ringfenced and specific funds
- Budgets explained- capital and revenue
- Cost of Living impact to Angus Council
- Other examples e.g. to aid changes to service delivery

These will be shared throughout the Autumn and beyond until the budget setting takes place. Content will be reviewed as plans emerge and decisions become clearer. This will provide a useful sounding board for harder decisions.

In addition, there will be ongoing communications through a variety of channels on specific budget items which will:

- Showcase the Council's work:** As part of our usual communications programme, we will continue to emphasise the significant efforts undertaken by Angus Council in various areas. Highlight achievements, projects, and initiatives demonstrating the Council's commitment to improving community well-being and quality of life.
- Recognise Best Value:** We will continue to highlight the recognition received in the Best Value report from the previous year. This underscores the Council's dedication to delivering efficient and effective services while maximizing value for the community.
- Inform on Council Tax/Rent/Funding allocations:** Inform the public about the level of Council Tax and Rent levels in Scotland, and how it is spent.
- Explain Funding Sources and Landscape Changes:** Explain the diverse sources of funding that contribute to the Council's budget. Discuss changes in the funding landscape, including challenges related to criteria for specific funds and the nature of 'ringfencing' money. This will help the public understand the complexity of funding allocations and the decision-making processes involved.
- Highlight the Prioritisation of Services/Projects:** Clarify why some services, and some projects are given priority over others, based on the specific funding sources for these. This may include explaining the nature of the funding, such as specific grants, and how it influences what the money can be used for. This transparency will foster understanding and manage public expectations.

## **Strand Two - Presentations to Community Councils and Engagement on Future Budget Engagement Plans**

Community Councils are part of local democracy. As well as representing the community to the local authority, Community Councils facilitate a wide range of activities which promote the well-being of their communities. They bring local

people together to help make things happen, and many Community Councils protect and promote the identity of their community.

An extraordinary Angus Wide Community Council meeting has been set for 21 September 2023, which will be used to both inform and engage all members in discussion around the council's budget. It is intended that the Council's Director of Finance will present the council's financial position and budget challenges to open up the dialogue and to hear from Community Council representatives in this regard. The intention is to also engage with the Community Council representatives about how we can be best engage and involve communities in budget decisions going forward. This meeting will:

- Set the context for the budget issues – current areas of spend versus savings required
- Identify and ensure key stakeholders are informed in a timely manner
- Clearly articulate services changes/reductions/increased charges within the context of the need for savings and protecting the most vulnerable

Other options to engage with other representative groups will also being explored to try to reach as wide an audience as possible over the course of the budget setting process.

### **Strand 3 – Engagement on Future Budget Decisions**

#### **Evolving our Approach to Engagement and Consultation**

A considerable effort has been invested in laying the foundations and defining the approach for all communication, engagement and consultation in Angus. The development of the [Angus Council Communication, Engagement and Consultation Policy](#), is an important part of this. It has been rolled out and training is in place for all officers wishing to engage or consult with the citizens of Angus. A set of tools has also been created. These tools aim to support, develop and empower staff, enabling them to incorporate communication, engagement, consultation and a PB approach into their service and project plans.

The ultimate goal is to ensure that the communities of Angus are actively involved right from the beginning of projects and initiatives that directly impact the areas where they work, play and visit and that all services are considered, whether it is engagement, communication or consultation and whether the PB approach fits at an early stage. This also relates to areas of service delivery that need to be re-shaped due to budget pressures and projects that have been highlighted within the change programme.

#### **Future Years Saving Plans**

Over the past five financial years the council has significantly increased the pace of change, resulting in savings of over £39m achieved through the delivery of the Change Programme projects. Our latest Change Programme as set out in our [Finance & Change Plan](#) remains ambitious and covers every area of service with clear links to our Council Plan. Improving the council's efficiency has been a large

part of the focus and will remain so, but efficiency alone will no longer be enough to bridge the funding gaps we face into the future.

It is important that, as well as communication with the public and Community Councils, we look to the budget setting for 2024/25 and 2025/26. There are aspects within these budgets that are open for engagement and may be suitable for adopting a Participatory Budgeting (PB) approach.

There are five areas within the Change Programme that could usefully illustrate the depth and range of the internal savings and areas where service delivery is proposed to change to provide additional savings. These include:

- Agile 3 (£375k)
- Organisational Design/Service changes (various - over £1m)
- Vibrant Communities Targeted Approach (£650k)
- ANGUSalive (£500k p.a.)
- Transport/Travel/Roads (£210k)

Savings to be made by ANGUSalive and Tayside Contracts should be part of this process, given the Council is the commissioner of services provided by those partners.

As we plan for the future years' budget, it is vital to assess the budget areas where decisions are still required. It will be important to identify areas that will necessitate consultation to ensure that our communities are well informed about possible future budget cuts and changes to service delivery. We especially need to focus on the Change Programme and areas of particular sensitivity, including the work of partners.

#### **4. Target Audiences**

The target audiences for this communication and engagement plan are:-

- Angus citizens as customers, taxpayers and service users
- Council staff
- Elected members
- Media
- Other Stakeholders/partners

#### **5. Key Messages**

##### **External & Internal Audiences**

- The council faces the most challenging financial situation ever and this comes on top of a decade of significant savings and cuts having already been made
- Service delivery will need to be reshaped, and we would like to do this by working with the public and partners
- Angus Council is still a vital organisation with a key role to play in the lives of Angus citizens, it is important that we communicate engage with our communities to understand future needs and aspirations.

- The change in the funding landscape is providing more opportunities for Community-led projects, including community ownership
- Work is already underway to support, strengthen and build capacity with our communities to ensure they have the skills, tools and knowledge available.

**Internal Audiences – Council Staff**

- The reasons behind the budget cuts and their role in navigating through the changes. We will use the internal engagement portal to engage with staff.
- We are being creative about how we continue to deliver services, leveraging external funding and working more closely with partners to ensure continuity of support
- It will be important to keep the information factual, clear and concise with staff explaining the reasons behind certain cuts and involving staff where appropriate
- Ensuring staff understand and use external key messages, particularly regarding the reshaping of our services
- We have to acknowledge the difficulties for staff, and continue with staff engagement and support
- We will emphasise the importance of seeking external funding opportunities, especially when it replaces existing budgets and leads to cost savings. We must maintain an outward-looking approach to maximize potential funding prospects
- We will recognise and celebrate the hard work and accomplishments of employees, even in challenging times. Acknowledge their dedication and commitment

**6. Channels of Communication**

- Community group meetings
- Media Interviews & Briefing
- Media Releases
- Social Media posts
- Council Website
- Engagement portal
- Elected member briefings
- eNewsletter
- internal staff/director calls
- internal engagement portal

**7. Key Actions & Timelines**

Annex 1 sets out the key actions and timelines for the communication and engagement plan. The plan will be populated further as required and in consultation with the PBSG.

**Annex 1 - Key Actions & Timelines**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Comment</b>
August	PBSG paper/ Report to Sept. Council seeking approval of approach	PBSG	Elected Members	Information on the comms plan and community engagement and consultation for the upcoming budget process	
September	Update of Webpage	Website	Elected Members General public Media	Links to Council, Finance & Change, Workforce Plans Link to Engagement platform Link to relevant content: Videos, budget info etc.	There is not currently one webpage holding any information on Angus Council budgets. A new webpage is under construction and will be used to hold all video information and key information and links.
September / October	Budget information sharing with the public through video	Video release	General public Partners Elected members Staff groups	Various short animations are being created to explain where the council's money comes from and where it goes. Video 1 – Council Tax Breakdown Video 2 – what does the council tax fund Video 3 – Revenue budget Video 4 - Budget Cuts Video 5 – External funding Video 6 – Budgets explained Video 7 – Cost of Living Others to aid changes to service delivery	Information sharing
September/ October	Infographics & comms	engagement portal social media news releases	General public Partners Elected members Staff groups	A set of infographics will be developed to showcase the council budgets.	

<b>Date</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Comment</b>
September 14	Engagement portal and PB	Elected Member face to face brief	Elected Members	Briefing to members showcasing the engagement portal and an update from COSLA on the 1% mainstream PB	
September 21	Information sharing with Community Councils	Hybrid meeting with Community Councils	Angus wide Community Council representatives Elected Members	Director of Finance will present the Council's budget position. Will discuss how we engage communities with budget decisions going forward.	
September	Set up of cross service strategic project group set up	Face to Face Meeting	Relevant services	This group will lead on PB and wider programme for communication, engagement and consultation in line with the Council's Policy for this	This strategic group will have an oversight of large external funding, Participatory Budgeting and large-scale projects involving multi services
September/October	Training	Additional training with staff regarding engagement and consultation	Through Middle managers leadership forum		It is essential that services embed engagement and consultation into their project at the start of a project, further training and support will be offered to project managers and project leads.
October	Update on final PB plan	Briefing paper	Internal - staff and elected members		Identification of PB projects with timeline
November	Review and evaluation	Engagement portal, social media, direct feedback	Staff groups Partners General public Partners Elected members		Review of what's come back from communication and engagement work, what does it tell us, what further action might we need to take.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Comment</b>
December				Limited budget comms due to festive period	reporting back to members on the outcome of communication and engagement work to inform budget decisions in February/March
January/ February	Preparation of budget day incl budget media briefing	All channels	All audiences	Service Specific comms and general budget comms inc. projected budget gaps	
March	Budget Day	All channels	All audiences	Final budget proposals	

Internal briefings for Council staff will also take place – these are currently programmed for September and November 2023 but more will be added as necessary.