

This report sets out the proposed alternative budget for 2024/25 and an alternative MTFS. The alternative budget focuses on protecting the most vulnerable residents, the elimination of wasteful expenditure, reversing the increase in the Green bin charge and reducing the increase in Council tax to 1%.

The administration has too many cabinet posts and is unique in the Boroughs north of the Thames in not having a cabinet member responsible for Finance who is not the Leader. The administration budget would have been much more robust with a cabinet member who has the responsibility for challenging colleagues on their expenditure plans and looking for ways to improve efficiencies. We believe that Barnet needs a much stronger and more rigorous focus on the finances of the borough.

The main points of the alternative budget are:

- Reduce increase in council tax by 2% to 0.98% against 2.98% in the administration budget
- Freeze Green Bin Charge
- Protect SEND transport budget
- Increased staff efficiencies (excluding statutory services Adults Children's Social Care, Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance, waste and Public Health)
- Close down the ineffective Town Centers team
- Reduced propaganda budgets
- Consolidate existing cabinet posts to 7 and create Cabinet member solely for finance
- Increase outside rental of Colindale office floors
- Eliminate unnecessary membership of outside organisations

The cost saving proposals in the administration budget have been taken as achievable as they have been approved by the S151 officer within a deemed prudent budget. However, a number of these proposals including those in Adults which seek to reduce the cost of care, the use of digital in HMO licensing and other areas, increased funding from the NHS continuing care and other external funding bodies, the use of CIL for normal running costs and the capitalisation of previous revenue costs are going to be extremely challenging to achieve or are significantly less prudent than in previous years.

The alternative budget improves efficiencies, protects the vulnerable and lowers the increase Council tax.

We recommend that it is adopted.