

Rebecca Evans MS
Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Cabinet Office

11 July 2024

Dear Rebecca,

Welsh Government Budget Timetable 2025-26

Thank you for your letter of 4 July inviting us to comment on the proposed timetable for consideration of the Draft Budget 2025-26.

I fully appreciate that the Welsh Government's budgetary position remains unclear until the UK Government confirms the date of its fiscal event. I also recognise that publishing a Draft Budget earlier, based on indicative figures only, would be problematic, and should only be done as a last resort.

Furthermore I welcome that the Draft Budget will be laid this year during term time. This is an important principle and ensures that Members of the Senedd have an opportunity to consider the Welsh Government's proposals in Plenary as soon as they are published.

However, I would like to challenge your assertion that there is "no better alternative in these current circumstances" to publishing the Draft Budget on 10 December 2024.

In particular, we believe that the proposed timetable does not sufficiently take into account the concerns raised by Committees following the scrutiny of last year's Draft Budget. These were shared

with you on 27 June 2024, and it is disappointing that you made no reference to them in your letter; the second year in a row which you have failed to do so.

In their responses, several Committees called for more time to be made available to scrutinise the Draft Budget. We agree that the shortened timescales last year made it extremely challenging for all Committees to meaningfully assess the impact the Draft Budget has on policy areas within their remit and, in particular, to incorporate views from stakeholders. We ask for further justification on why a longer scrutiny window was not considered, particularly as bringing forward the publication date of the Draft Budget to enable more evidence sessions to take place this side of the Christmas recess would be highly beneficial.

Calls were made for the Welsh Government to adhere to the two stage budget process, and we find it regrettable that you are proposing circumventing the process again this year; the sixth year in a row that this has happened. As a result, we call on you to prioritise facilitating a two stage approach this year, if there is time available after the UK Government's fiscal event takes place.

In addition, Committees requested that ministerial evidence papers should be published at the same time, or close to, the publication of the Draft Budget. Again, it is disappointing that you chose not to address this point your letter of 4 July, and we ask you to consider this when preparing the publication of the Draft Budget later in the year.

Flexible scheduling options in the Senedd was also suggested by Committees as a way to maximise scrutiny opportunities.

Whilst I understand that these are matters for the Business Committee, I would welcome your views on the following proposals relating to the scheduling of Senedd business, should the Draft Budget be laid before the Senedd on or later than 10 December:

- automatically enabling Finance Committee to hold additional meeting slots during Christmas recess, should the need arise;
- providing more meeting slots for Committees during the budget scrutiny window, including extending the business week and providing more slots for committees to take evidence from stakeholders and experts (which could be offset by cutting down on the length of Plenary meetings);
- allowing more time for the consideration of Committee reports during Plenary meetings to enable detailed policy discussions on each aspect of the Draft Budget.

I have raised similar issues in response to the Business Committee's letter consulting us on the budget timetable.

Finally, I would also like to challenge your views that “these arrangements are acceptable given the circumstances, which are driven, once again, by external factors beyond our immediate control”.

As Cabinet Secretary, you are ultimately responsible for setting the budget and the strategic management of the Welsh Government’s resources. I would also remind you that proposing the timing of the Draft Budget is within the Welsh Government’s gift.

Whilst the Committee has sympathy with the uncertainties faced by the Welsh Government in understanding its financial position, we strongly feel that this should be balanced by the need of the Senedd to scrutinise detailed proposals and that adequate time should be provided to reflect the magnitude of the tasks facing Committees. Detailed scrutiny which meets the needs and expectations of our stakeholders and the public at large cannot be achieved under the proposed timetable.

I welcome your willingness to revisit the proposed timetable once the date of the UK Government’s fiscal event is known. Given that the Chancellor has indicated her intention to announce this date before the end of this month, I ask you to provide an updated timetable as soon as possible.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the Business Committee, the Chairs of all Senedd Committees, , and the Trefnydd and Chief Whip.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peredur Owen Griffiths', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair, Finance Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.