

Staff suggestions of issues OSC should investigate

In September 2014 an email was sent to all Southwark Council Staff asking them for suggestions for issues that Southwark's Scrutiny Committees should investigate.

The email sent to staff stated "The Committee believes that staff are the eyes and ears of the council, often the first people to spot issues when things start to go wrong. For that reason we would like to offer you the opportunity to suggest an issue which you think the committee should be investigating."

Staff were asked to fill out a short survey form. They were also informed that the committee could not guarantee investigating suggestion and cannot consider personal employment concerns or other issues for which formal Council procedures exist.

In total we received 52 responses. The Chair of overview and Scrutiny has gone through the list and made a preliminary selection of issues which might be the subject of further investigation. The list of issues below, which is in no particular order, gives a summary of these suggestions. This list is intended to inform a discussion about future scrutiny investigations at the April 27th 2015 OSC meeting.

Suggested topics from staff: (quotation marks used to quote from survey responses)

1. Conflicts of interest arising from Tenants council representatives who also worked for the council.
2. Looking into the standards of nurseries and early years settings for special needs children.
3. Council homes being left empty for long periods of time. The respondent gave a specific example of this happening.
4. A respondent asked "Why does a council, which supports cycling, still have a leased car scheme when other councils have stopped theirs? How much does it cost to run with insurance and administration? Most staff are now in Tooley Street or Queens Road anyway."
5. The use of consultants by managers particularly in areas where staff are capable of delivering directly.
6. "Overpriced contracts for equipment and use of services." It was suggested OSC look into how contracts are negotiated and put a structure/process in place for this to be negotiated with due diligence, ensuring value for money.
7. "Leaseholders are being subsidised by tenants" through interest free payments not in the lease. The respondent suggests tenants are subsidising interest free payments and free smoke and fire alarms.

8. The "... implementation of contracts for some key services such as gutter clearance in non residential premises on the Southwark estate.
9. "Overview and Scrutiny should investigate how repairs contracts are awarded and why some jobs are marked as 'complete' on Iworld yet the contractors have not even done anything or visited tenants homes. The contractors are clearly not being monitored well and in the end, our residents suffer." And "Value for money provided by Mears the Council's maintenance contractor's in the south of the borough together with whether the Council's Repair's Team currently offers an efficient and responsive service"
10. The lack of a "housing policy for care leavers."
11. Southwark's IT system was suggested for scrutiny by 14 different respondents.