

Cabinet

Tuesday 3 December 2024

11.00 am

Rooms GO2A, B and C, Southwark Council, 160 Tooley Street, London
SE1 2QH

Supplemental Agenda No. 1

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17.	Response to the report of the housing, community safety and community engagement scrutiny commission - Homelessness and Review of Housing Allocations To consider the responses to the recommendations in respect of the scrutiny commission report.	1 - 11

Contact

Email: paula.thornton@southwark.gov.uk; constitutional.team@southwark.gov.uk
Webpage: www.southwark.gov.uk

Date: 25 November 2024

Meeting Name:	Cabinet
Date:	3 December 2024
Report title:	Response to recommendations by the Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission: Review of Homelessness, Housing Allocations and policing recommendations 1-4 and 11
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Helen Dennis, New Homes and Sustainable Development Councillor Sarah King, Cabinet member for Council Homes Councillor Natasha Ennin, Cabinet member for Community Safety
Ward(s) or groups affected:	All
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	N/a

FOREWORD – COUNCILLOR SARAH KING, CABINET MEMBER FOR COUNCIL HOMES

We are in the midst of a homelessness crisis, with numbers of those in temporary accommodation and sleeping rough across London, escalating to unprecedented levels. These families and individuals are at the sharp end of a wider housing crisis that has seen record numbers join social housing waiting lists across the country.

In that context, we are currently consulting on our draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, and we are drafting a new allocations scheme, with the objective of undertaking a public consultation exercise in the New Year prior to its implementation.

We welcome the recommendations made by the Housing, Community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission to enhance the quantitative and qualitative assessment of the new allocations scheme once it is in operation and to strengthen the incentives of our downsizing scheme.

The new scheme is being developed to ensure as a Council we respond to the current and significant levels of housing need which unfortunately many of residents suffer and which have changed over time. This is shown by the high numbers of residents on the housing waiting list and those currently living in

temporary accommodation.

It will also be updated to ensure it fully reflects new legislation including the Domestic Violence Act 2021 and the new regulatory environment for council landlords and prioritising available homes for key disadvantaged groups such as our care leavers, people escaping violence, harm or harassment, those with medical conditions, experiencing overcrowding and homelessness among others.

Alongside the new policy, work is underway to put in place the technology required to improve the bidding experience for our residents and to capture comprehensive equalities data of our residents to further strengthen the policy in the future and the support we provide our residents in housing need.

For our consultation on the draft Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy, we are keen to hear from the public, from partners and from those who have experienced our homelessness service, as we firm up our approach with a strong focus on homelessness prevention and getting the best outcomes for our residents. I want to thank the Scrutiny Commission for their engagement with the strategy and for their recommendations which arose from a challenging but very constructive session earlier this year.

As Lead Cabinet Member I am absolutely committed to working with our team to deliver an improved and accessible offer at Bournemouth Road, and ensuring that we communicate and work effectively with key partners, including in the NHS. This is an immensely challenging time, but I look forward to finalising our strategy and progressing our action plan, in line with plans emerging from the new government's Inter-Ministerial group on homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the Cabinet

1. That Cabinet note the response to the recommendations 1-4 & 11 of the Housing, community Safety and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission.

Recommendation(s) for the Leader of the Council

2. None

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3. This report sets out the council's response to the Housing Community Safety and Community Scrutiny Commission. Following a review of recommendations 1-4 & 11, the council partially agreed with recommendation 3 and agreed with recommendations 1,2,4 & 11. The council will be developing further plans to implement the recommendations.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

4. The council specifically explored the recommendations, the option to disregard the recommendations was considered but following a review of what was being asked, the council believed there would be more benefits, through actions associated with the recommendations.

POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

5. The council will actively work on the recommendations, and this will form part of the ongoing work.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. On the 22 July 2024, the Housing, Community safety and community engagement scrutiny commission provided a report relating to several aspects. This included a review of housing allocation, homelessness, heating and hot water outages, fire safety and policing in Southwark.
7. The commission report included a background to a series of meetings that had occurred between July 2023 – March 2024 that led to the development of 12 recommendations to cabinet within the report of July 2024.
8. Within this report we set out a response to recommendations 1- 4 and 11 specifically. Generally, the responses to all the recommendations would be set out in one full report, however a single report was provided to highlight areas that impact homelessness, allocations and policing. Responses to the other recommendations will be provided in a separate report.
9. The responses within this report fall under three cabinet members which has been combined in one report for conciseness. Recommendations 1 and 2 falls under the cabinet member for Council Homes, recommendation 3 and 4 fall under the remit of the cabinet member for New Homes and Sustainable Development and recommend 11 falls under the remit of the cabinet member for Community Safety. Each cabinet member has approved the responses within their respective portfolio.
10. Recommendations 1 and 2 relates to activities around the council's intention to complete a full review of the Housing Allocations scheme in 2025.
11. The recommendations relating to 3 and 4 came about because of several concerns regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of services for vulnerable individuals, particularly rough sleepers, at Bournemouth Road.
12. Southwark's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been in place since 2018 and since then Southwark has seen huge changes that

have impacted residents and services available. With the knowledge of the upcoming review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy, this formed the opportunity to provide feedback from the Commission report to feed into the review.

13. A draft of Southwark's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy has been completed which has outlined 5 key priorities:
 - Prioritise Homelessness prevention
 - Deliver High Quality Advice and Support
 - Work to End Rough Sleeping
 - Quality Outcomes Through Housing Provision
 - Tackling Systemic Housing Insecurity.
14. The draft strategy went out for consultation on the 2 September 2024 with the closing date of the 8 December 2024. The strategy will serve to support the delivery of the Council's vision towards the ambitions of Southwark 2030. The importance of this strategy cannot be overlooked and therefore Southwark is undertaking activities to get comprehensive feedback on the proposed changes. This will form the direction going forward and shape the further development of the final strategy.
15. It is acknowledged that the consultation on the strategy is still ongoing at the point of providing this report, however the council wanted to provide assurance that each point has been picked up and will be part of the feedback that is considered as part of feedback to the consultation. However within this report, activities are already underway which will be further reviewed upon the finalization of the agreed final strategy.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

16. **Recommendations and Responses:**

COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION 1 TO CABINET	
	<p><i>Recommendation 1 - That the Cabinet ensure a clear set of success criteria for the Housing Allocations scheme and lettings policy before they are finalised, with details on how these will be measured. This should include not only quantitative analysis of how the scheme is helping to meet housing need in the borough but should also include post-move tenant satisfaction surveys to ensure the council is able to monitor tenants' views and experiences. Also, that the Cabinet make a clear plan to monitor and audit this data regularly. This should happen within the municipal year 2024-2025.</i></p>
RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 1	
	<p>The Council is currently undertaking a renewal of its Allocations Scheme and will explore success criteria from its implementation. This will highlight</p>

	<p>the aims of the housing allocations within the borough.</p> <p>The policy will be measured against the total number of allocations to social tenancies (council and housing association) completed during the financial year within the constraints which the new allocations policy will be operating including the availability of homes to let, including new built homes. We will also assess the equalities impact of the operation of the scheme in far greater detail than is currently the case.</p> <p>In line with the development of the new housing allocations scheme, the council is working through a series of initiatives that will enhance housing options for residents. Using surveys, data, and other means to collate qualitative and quantitative information about the needs of our residents, we will develop plans to match those in housing need with the most suitable homes. Each initiative will have clear actions and intended measurable outcomes. We will use information from the Equalities Impact and Needs assessments to mitigate any negative impacts.</p> <p>The Council will review its post-move satisfaction surveys to ensure that the views and experiences of customers are being factored into service development and future policy. Surveys can include not only satisfaction with the property, but also the allocation process itself.</p> <p>The Council will also consider how the data sets are prepared to be able to efficiently and effectively monitor the outcomes within this area of work.</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 1: ACCEPTED

COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION 2 TO CABINET	
	<p><i>Recommendation 2- That in the review of the Housing Allocations scheme and Lettings policy, Cabinet improves incentives for residents and communication of the Rightsizing scheme, to address under-occupancy through increased uptake of the scheme, within the municipal year 2024-2025.</i></p>
RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2	
	<p>This recommendation aligns with the Council's aims to maximise the number of moves for Council and Housing Association tenants who currently under-occupy their home. The Council have achieved well in this area historically through limited resource and welcomes the commission's decision that Cabinet improve incentives for residents.</p> <p>The Council have undertaken some preliminary analysis across all London Councils understanding what makes a successful Rightsizing Scheme and believe that greater levels of moves from under-occupiers can be achieved</p>

	<p>through an improved incentive structure, which would include officer support as well as financial incentive to potential movers. Other boroughs have found success by providing enhanced personal support, with dedicated officers helping people bid, assisting with moves, arranging utilities and so on.</p> <p>This recommendation will need to be fully reviewed and costed to determine if greater resource is required to meet its aims against current budget challenges.</p>
RECOMMENDATION 2: ACCEPTED	

	COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION 3 TO CABINET
<p>Recommendation 3- <i>That the Cabinet reinstate the post of the Hospital Discharge Housing Officer (as a single point of contact); and also that the Cabinet do this immediately after the adoption of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy by the Council.</i></p>	
RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 3	
	<p>The role of Housing Hospital Discharge officer is part of the councils future working arrangements however we are not able to confirm this role will be the single point of contact; therefore we are partially agreeing this recommendation.</p> <p>The council acknowledges the need for a link with hospitals to prevent discharge delays. The Housing Hospital Discharge Officer role, active since 2017, is currently vacant and under review for recruitment in early 2025. This role will not likely be the sole contact between the council and hospitals due to various council services performing related functions. A single point of contact would delay timely assessments, such as those handled by the homelessness services' duty refer process. The council will collaborate with stakeholders to update the role based on current pressures. Once filled, the role will ensure a coordinated approach, connecting patients to housing and community services during hospital discharge. The officer will enhance communication, monitor joint protocols, and recommend improvements.</p>

	RECOMMENDATION 3: PARTIALLY ACCEPTED
COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION 4 TO CABINET	
<p>Recommendation 4- That the Cabinet in reviewing its Draft Homelessness Strategy include the recommendations below as a part of the feedback for the consultation, which includes the following points:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> An improved, less invasive drop-in process at Bournemouth Road for homeless people, with easier in-person security and access procedures to council buildings/offices when dealing with domestic abuse and sexual exploitation victims. Separate escalation process and telephone contact numbers for 	

	<p>partner agencies to book appointments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> c) Resolution of the issues faced in the joint protocol working between partner agencies and the housing options team when working with refugee and asylum cases. d) Investment in better IT infrastructure, especially with regards to flagging same-day assessments, waiting times, updating forms, documentation and processes.
RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 4	
	<p>The council welcomes feedback from all stakeholders to inform the consultation process of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and therefore this recommendation and all will be included in the consultation. However below is some of the activities that are currently in progress.</p> <p>With regards to subparagraph a.) The council is reviewing its hybrid homelessness and advice services and redesigning its customer contact centre at Bournemouth Road. With staff returning to the office from August 2024, the council is increasing same-day initial and full homeless applications and offering face-to-face appointments for all homeless approaches. Residents can always receive face-to-face support and advice at Bournemouth Road. The council is also refurbishing the reception area to enhance the customer-friendly environment. Additionally, the council is exploring opportunities to co-locate with partner services, such as libraries, DWP Job Centres, and NHS Social Prescriber Hubs, to ensure support is available at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>With regards to subparagraph b.) Housing Needs have reviewed partner agency requests due to customer access transitions and phone delays over the past year. Significant progress has been made in the last six months to reduce delays and improve service access, recognized by partners. The aim is to continue improving direct access and avoid unnecessary communication channels. The housing advice line has a separate option for new approaches and booking appointments, and an online option for partners to book appointments is being explored. Managers are available daily for escalated issues</p> <p>With regards to subparagraph c.) in the above – Housing Needs have provided significant support to residents in the Streamlined Asylum Process and Home Office Schemes. This includes a weekly housing surgery with third-sector partners, a bespoke pathway for rapid assessments, and dedicated homelessness casework to aid resettlement and access to employment and skills training.</p> <p>With regards to subparagraph d.) in the above – Housing Needs have completed a full review of all its webpages on the Council website to aid in the completion of a Council wide website refresh this year to improve customer access to information and advice. The service will also be reviewing its appointment and customer journey systems as part of its front</p>

	facing service redesign, so that the scheduling of appointments is optimized and customer waiting times are minimized. This work will be subject to ongoing review and improvement. The council will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the IT systems and explore alternatives that meet the needs of residents.
RECOMMENDATION 4: ACCEPTED	

COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION 11 TO CABINET

	Recommendation 11 - That the Cabinet member for Community Safety work with the Metropolitan Police to develop new local accountability mechanisms for policing in Southwark, and that this includes a new forum or body that allows regular, multi-ward engagement between councillors and a senior police officer for each area in the borough. The council should work with the Metropolitan Police to appoint named senior officers for each multi-ward area, to allow councillors a realistic opportunity to develop a relationship with policing at a more strategic level, and to fill the gap between ward panels and the MOPAC. This should happen within the municipal year 2024-2025.
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RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 11

	<p>The Cabinet Member has agreed to lead the development and chair an Independent Policing Oversight Board. This is due to meet, for the first time in December 2024. Recruitment of members took place during the summer and the level of interest and response was extremely positive.</p> <p>This body will not fill the gap between the existing MOPAC and MPS accountability structures but one of its first tasks will be to look at local accountability mechanism for policing in Southwark along with recommendations for improvement at both the ward and multi-ward level.</p> <p>With regard to senior officers and relationships at the local level there are currently three senior appointed police officers at Inspector level covering multi-ward area arrangements. The new board will be reviewing these arrangements with a view to supporting improved relationships between local policing, members, and the community both strategically and operationally.</p> <p>The draft Terms of Reference for the Policing Oversight Board has been reviewed as part of the pre-scrutiny process and it will provide annual progress updates.</p>
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RECOMMENDATION 11: ACCEPTED IN PART

Policy framework implications

17. The recommendations are linked to two key policy changes that the council seeks to implement within the 2025/26 financial year. This

includes the Housing allocations Scheme and the Homelessness and Rough sleeping Strategy.

18. In developing each of these policies, the council has done so in line with the Southwark 2030.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

19. The council is dedicated to promoting equality in Southwark and opposing all discrimination. We will provide opportunity to all residents to gather opinions using methods such as public consultations, customer feedback forms, collaborating with community groups and phone calls to under-represented groups to ensure an inclusive consultation process to the various policies that are created or renewed.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

20. The draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy has had a full equalities impact and needs assessment. Findings from the assessment will form part of future recommendations.

Health impact statement

21. The actions associated with the recommendations will have a positive impact on health and equalities within the borough.

Climate change implications

22. There are no climate change implications in relation to the recommendation responses.

Resource implications

23. There are no specific resources implications based on the responses to the commissions recommendations other than recommendation 2 where a full review will be required to determine if it can be implemented within existing resources.. The policies, processes and procedures detailed within the recommendations are part of changes that are already in progress.

Legal/Financial implications

24. There are no legal or financial implications relating to responses to the recommendations within this report.

Consultation

25. The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy consultation commenced on the 9 September 2024.
26. The full results of these consultations will be fully analysed and considered before the production of any final version of the policy documents.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

27. None required.

Head of Procurement

28. None

Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance

29. None

Strategic Director, Resources

30. None

Other officers

31. None

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Review of housing Allocations, Homelessness, and heating and hot water outages, fire safety and policing in Southwark. Report Housing community safety and community engagement scrutiny commission.pdf (southwark.gov.uk)	160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Councillor Helen Dennis, New Homes and Sustainable Development		
Lead Officer	Perry Singh, Interim Director of Housing Needs and Support		
Report Author	Ricky Bellot, Interim Head of Housing Needs		
Version	Final		
Dated	25 November 2024		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included	
Assistant Chief Executive, Governance and Assurance	No	No	
Strategic Director, Resources	No	No	
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes	
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	25 November 2024		

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