

# Council Assembly

Wednesday 25 February 2026

7.00 pm

Council Offices, 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

## Tabled Items

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### Contact

Virginia Wynn-Jones on 020 7525 7055 or 020 7525 7222 or email: [virginia.wynn-jones@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:virginia.wynn-jones@southwark.gov.uk); [andrew.weir@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.weir@southwark.gov.uk); [constitutional.team@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:constitutional.team@southwark.gov.uk)  
Webpage: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk>

Date: 25 February 2026

## SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

## COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

## (COUNCIL TAX SETTING MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2026

## PROGRAMME MOTION

That the meeting be conducted as follows:

Time	Business
7.00pm – 7.10pm	<b>1. Preliminary business and announcements</b>
7.10pm – 10.00pm	<p><b>Item 2.1. Policy and Resources Strategy: 2026-27 Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consideration of this item is not time limited but the meeting is subject to the guillotine.</li> <li>2. Debate to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 questions on the report (20 minute time limit)</li> <li>• Councillor Stephanie Cryan to present recommendations (10 minutes)</li> <li>• Councillor David Watson to reply on behalf of majority opposition (5 minutes)</li> <li>• Two amendments to be moved and seconded (3 minutes each)</li> <li>• Report and amendments to be debated as a single debate (all speakers 3 minutes each)</li> <li>• Reply to the debate from Councillor Stephanie Cryan (3 minutes)</li> <li>• Separate vote on each amendment</li> <li>• Recorded vote on substantive motion.</li> </ul> </li> </ol> <p>Members can only speak once, except for Councillor Stephanie Cryan, who will reply to the single debate.</p> <p>This report has a legal requirement to take a recorded vote on the substantive motion.</p>
	<p><b>Item 2.2. Setting the Council Tax 2026-27</b></p> <p>There is no debate on this item.</p> <p>This report has a legal requirement to take a recorded vote on the substantive motion.</p>
	<p><b>Item 2.3. Treasury Management Strategy and Capital Strategy 2026-27</b></p> <p>To be considered as normal.</p>
	<p><b>Item 2.4 Proportionality and allocation of seats on committees</b></p> <p>To be considered as normal.</p>

**Item 2 Reports for decision**

Each report to have a single debate, subject to the guillotine.

## **SOUTHWARK COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL ASSEMBLY**

#### **(BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING MEETING)**

**WEDNESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2026**

#### **PUBLIC QUESTION WITH RESPONSE**

**1. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR SAM DALTON**

How does this budget support residents who find themselves living in temporary accommodation?

#### **RESPONSE**

The housing crisis continues to push people across the country into homelessness, with temporary accommodation no longer temporary for far too many people. In Southwark, around 4,200 households are currently living in temporary accommodation. This budget is dedicating an additional £2.6 million to strengthen our temporary accommodation services and provide better support for residents. At the same time, we are cutting our use of emergency nightly paid accommodation and increasing the number of households we help move into secure private accommodation.

**2. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR SABINA EMMANUEL**

What investment is this council making in stopping and preventing antisocial behaviour on our streets and estates?

#### **RESPONSE**

Since 2023/24 we have invested £3 million to upgrade and enhance town centre CCTV camera capacities, supported by a 20% increase in operators to strengthen real-time response. This year we are funding a new Night-Time Uniformed Patrol Service, providing 450 hours per week of visible patrols to tackle antisocial behaviour and improve safety at night. In addition, we are investing £2 million over four years to enhance the Community Warden service, including by creating a dedicated town centre team to tackle antisocial behaviour and enhancing enforcement powers to better support communities.

**3. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR MARTIN SEATON**

How does this budget help our local residents find work?

## **RESPONSE**

Since 2022, Southwark Council has helped more than 3,000 residents facing significant barriers to employment take steps towards work. We have invested over £9 million to support local people into jobs and apprenticeships. For every £1 we have invested through our general fund, an additional £3 has been secured from external partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions' Connect to Work programme. In January, we officially opened our new Southwark Works hub in Peckham. Together with our existing Walworth hub, it will deliver dedicated employment support to residents across the borough.

### **4. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR BETHAN ROBERTS**

What is the council doing to ensure we can protect our vital library services while other councils are forced to close them?

## **RESPONSE**

In Southwark we recognise the vital role libraries play as inclusive places of learning, social spaces, and access to essential resources to some of our most disadvantaged residents. While other local authorities have closed libraries, and looked to reduce their opening hours, we are taking the opposite approach - opening two new libraries and refurbishing others. This commitment to investment, not cuts, has paid dividends with over 1.6 million visits each year and consistently high satisfaction from users. Looking to the future, we intend to further expand the libraries role as a hub for local services, and make them more accessible to all residents.

### **5. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID PARTON**

What investment is being made to improve the service our residents get when interacting with the council?

## **RESPONSE**

Southwark Council has always been committed to providing an open, responsive and efficient service for our residents. In September 2025, we agreed our Resident Experience Plan 2025-2030, which sets out how we will continue improving the way people interact with the council. While we know that investing in digital technology is essential, we are equally focused on making our existing services more efficient and easier to use. For example, we are currently trialling new face-to-face services for residents at Canada Water and Kingswood libraries. At the same time, we are building our recent digital improvements of our services, starting with the online access to service charge bills delivered in September. This establishes more convenient and modern ways for residents to engage with us.

**6. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR VICTOR CHAMBERLAIN**

What is the impact of the government's fair funding review on the council's finances in this report and the medium term financial strategy going forward?

**RESPONSE**

In 2026/27 grant funding will increase by £11.2m. Budget proposals for 2026/27 were approved in principle in February 2025 and there are no new proposals now. We expect to see decreases in the grant in 2027/28 and 2028/29 and an £80m gap to be bridged when we publish our next medium term financial strategy from April 2027. Our plans to bridge that gap will be set out in due course.

**7. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR RACHEL BENTLEY**

The fair funding review's impacting on this and future budgets is clear - what representations have been made to Southwark Labour MPs and the Labour Government to ensure they understand the devastating impact this will have?

**RESPONSE**

We support the principle of fair and equitable distribution of resources across local authorities. We have actively engaged with ministers and national government officials to ensure the needed reform of local government funding accurately addresses the pressures acutely felt by inner London boroughs like Southwark. This includes coordinated efforts with London Councils, Central London Forward and our neighbouring borough Lambeth. We submitted a formal response to the consultation, signed joint letters and lobbied Parliament with Lambeth Council. As a result of our combined efforts, the funding formula has been updated to reflect housing costs more accurately and Southwark has seen an increase in funding from the provisional to the final settlement.

**8. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR IRINA VON WIESE**

What financial risks does the government's Fair Funding Review pose to the council's future funding, and how are these risks reflected in this report and the medium term financial strategy?

**RESPONSE**

The council has been clear that over the next three years there will be a funding gap that we will need to mitigate in the next Medium Term Financial Strategy due in April 2027. However, we are already mitigating this through the contribution of £5 million from reserves in 2026-27 and then a further £7.5 million of specific risk reserves we have set aside for this purpose. These measures will help to reduce the impact in the short-term pressures.

**9. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR EMILY TESTER**

What is the impact on services to residents of the government's cuts to grant funding resulting from the fair funding review?

**RESPONSE**

As per the answer to Q6, in 2026/27 grant funding will increase by £11.2m. Budget proposals for 2026/27 were approved in principle in February 2025, before the Government's Fair Funding Review was announced. As part of that process we have maintained one of the most generous Council Tax Reduction Schemes in London and continuing targeted grant funding and hardship support for those most in need. Each identified saving for 2026/27 underwent a full Equality Needs and Impact Assessment (ENIA) to understand any potential impact on residents. There are no new proposals for 2026/27.

We will set out future spending plans in due course and protecting those residents who need us the most will remain our key guiding principle.

**10. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR GRAHAM NEALE**

From July 2024 to June 2025, the council received 8,000 Stage 1 complaints from residents. Residents regularly tell us that they struggle to speak with someone at the council, and a cabinet report this month stated that a disgraceful 45% of calls to the existing repairs line go unanswered. Given this, will the cabinet member commit to establishing a fund to set up 'One Stop Shops' in every neighbourhood, so that residents can have face to face access to their council in their own area?

**RESPONSE**

Our repairs call centre manages an exceptionally high volume of calls, with over 231,000 received last year. While our general customer service lines now consistently meet performance targets - with the average wait time reduced to 3 minutes and 8 seconds - we recognise that our dedicated repairs lines need to improve, and it is a key priority in our Better Repairs Plan. Alongside this as part of the new Resident Experience Plan we have already set up one stop shops in Canada Water Library and Kingswood Library offering advice and support to residents who need face-to-face help. Learning from these pilots across our library network will shape how we broaden and improve future routes for residents to get the support they need in a way that works for them.

**11. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON**

Does the Cabinet member agree that as well as the cuts imposed from the so-called Fair Funding review, the wider approach from this Labour government to

local authority funding has been actively harmful to council's ability to deliver adequate services?

## **RESPONSE**

Local Government has faced sustained financial pressure since the Conservative / Liberal Democrat coalition took office in 2010 and councils across the country are managing the consequences of reduced grant funding alongside rising demand for services. In essence, the UK Government is allocating funding where deprivation is highest. Southwark's relative deprivation has reduced over time, in part due to the long-term investment in local services since Labour took control of the council in 2010. As a result, the revised national formula redirects some funding towards areas whose relative need has increased more sharply.

As part of its prudent medium term financial planning, the council has set aside earmarked reserves to help smooth the impact of these changes and maintain service stability during the transition to the new funding arrangements.

### **12. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR HAMISH MCCALLUM**

Can the cabinet member provide her assessment of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and its long term viability?

## **RESPONSE**

The HRA is entering its fourth year of its recovery plan, and while delivery remains challenging, it is likely the HRA will deliver a balanced outturn in 2025-26.

While recent announcements on rent convergence does not yet provide a full pathway to long-term sustainability, we recognise the intent to address pressures in the sector. We will continue to make the case for further support through our successful Securing the Future of Council Housing campaign, which has already helped elevate national understanding of the financial pressures facing council housing.

### **13. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID WATSON**

Given the timings of this budget close to the election, and due to the cuts from the Labour Government, some residents will be concerned that further decisions may be revisited after May but before the next budget council assembly next year. Will the cabinet member confirm that there will be no supplemental or "emergency" budget between now and next February to fill the gaps left by the Labour government?

## **RESPONSE**

As per previous answers, budget proposals for 2026/27 were approved in February 2025, before the Government's Fair Funding Review was announced and its results known. All savings required for 2026–27 were identified and approved as part of that budget-setting process. Long-term, prudent financial planning and management is a key feature of how we have run this council and we intend to continue that work.

**14. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR NICK JOHNSON**

KPMG recently announced that they were negotiating with their own auditor - Grant Thornton - to reduce their auditing fees due to their use of AI reducing labour-hours. Given KPMG is the council's auditor, has the council made similar approaches to reduce its auditing fees?

**RESPONSE**

Southwark Council does not appoint its own auditors. The Public Sector Audit Appointments, an external body, appoints Southwark Council's auditors and sets the fees. The majority of councils across the country operate in this manner.

**15. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR MARIA LINFORTH-HALL**

What avenues, if any, has the cabinet member explored to reduce the burden of increasing council tax for our poorest residents? For example expanding eligibility for the council tax reduction scheme, or freezing the rate of council tax for those already in receipt of council tax support.

**RESPONSE**

Throughout this administration, we have done our best to shield our residents from the financial difficulties facing local government. Southwark residents have some of the lowest council tax in London and, unlike other taxing authorities, we have continued to maintain our Council Tax Reduction scheme rather than cutting it. This year, despite significant budget pressures, we are once again choosing to protect residents by keeping the scheme at its current level. This demonstrates our ongoing commitment to supporting those with the least and ensuring that council tax remains affordable for households across Southwark.

**16. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR EQUALITIES, DEMOCRACY AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR ADAM HOOD**

Many of the council's fees and charges have gone up by twice the rate of inflation, with some increasing by three or four times this. This is despite the council's own Equalities Impact Assessment concluding that this would have a negative effect on marginalised communities with no significant mitigation. Could the council look at mitigation by freezing certain fees or by freezing council tax increases for the poorest in our community?

**RESPONSE**

The council has sought to freeze discretionary fees and charges wherever possible and where we are not bound by statutory charges, including on certain waste services and library services. We continue to provide discounted access for residents on benefits, ensuring that those with the least are still able to use our services.

Freezing council tax would require an extra £7.7m in savings next year, which would place significant pressure on already stretched services. Support remains available through the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for those who have a low income, on benefits, or need support.

**Item 2.1: Policy and resources strategy report: 2026-27 budget and medium term financial strategy**

Nominations

Council tax setting sub-committee

10am Friday 27 February 2026

	<b>Labour (4)</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat (2)</b>	<b>Green (1)</b>
1.	Cllr Stephanie Cryan	Cllr David Watson	Cllr Kath Whittam
2.	Cllr Ellie Cumbo		
3.	Cllr Richard Leeming		
4.	Cllr Bethan Roberts		
<b>Reserves</b>			
	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	<b>Green</b>
1.			
2.			
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<b>Contact officer – Virginia Wynn-Jones 020 7525 7055</b>			