

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

**22 FEBRUARY 2023**

**QUESTIONS ON REPORTS**

**ITEM 2.1: POLICY AND RESOURCES STRATEGY 2023-24: REVENUE BUDGET**

**1. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR ELLIE CUMBO**

Many of our residents are struggling with the cost of living and particularly rising fuel bills. It is vital the council provides support and advice to residents. This Budget report contains a commitment of £100, 000 for the Energy Support Savers Scheme; could the cabinet member tell us more about this scheme?

**RESPONSE**

The council has been quick to act on the cost of living crisis, ensuring that we support residents in dealing with spiralling costs and energy bills.

As part of this, the October 2022 Cabinet agreed to establish an Energy Support Savers Scheme, which was launched in November 2022.

This is delivered through a partnership with Citizens Advice Southwark service with the aim to target particular people who struggle to access energy advice, those experiencing issues with energy suppliers, private rented sector tenants and private landlords to improve energy efficiency of homes.

The service provides much needed advice and support direct to residents including;

- Face-to-face advice and a dedicated telephone line;
- Linking eligible residents to the support they are entitled to, such as energy suppliers' hardship funds and the GLA's Warmer Home Scheme; and
- Directing residents to helpful information such as the Energy Saving Trust and national Citizens Advice.

**2. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR REGINALD POPOOLA**

Could the cabinet member please let the assembly know how the increase in energy costs and inflation has affected this budget?

## **RESPONSE**

Increasing energy costs and spiralling inflation have put very acute pressures on local government budgets across the country.

The council's budget has provided for an estimated £22.5m for energy and price inflation for 2022-23 and 2023-24.

This has provided 2022-23 departmental budgets some increased allowance for unbudgeted inflationary increases and has made further provision for the impact of continuing rising prices and costs in 2023-24.

The funding settlement from central government did not provide a real term uplift in line with inflation and therefore we have had to carefully ensure we meet demanding cost pressures whilst balancing the need to fund vital services.

### **3. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR IAN WINGFIELD**

The government continue to provide only a one year settlement, how does this impact on the plans to build long-term budgets?

## **RESPONSE**

It creates significant uncertainty in budget planning.

The one year provisional settlement was announced only on 20 December 2022 and the one year final settlement was announced on 6 February 2023 (the same day as the cabinet meeting to note the budget proposals).

Best practice in local government is to cover budget planning for up to 3 years. Within these strategies, it is possible to find movement in budget plans and priorities over a number of years.

However, these strategies are somewhat dependent on having certainty around future funding provision especially from central government. This is especially the case given that central government funding represents more than half of the resources available to the council each year.

The council last prepared a 4 year medium term financial plan in 2016-17, which coincided with the multi-year settlement from government. Since that time, government have made significant changes to that original multiyear settlement which would have rendered redundant many savings options that would otherwise have had to be offered.

### **4. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR MARGY NEWENS**

What progress has the council made in allocating the Climate Emergency capital fund?

## **RESPONSE**

Combatting climate change and reducing the borough's emissions continues to be a major priority for the council, evidenced by the enormous investment we have made since declaring a climate emergency.

The council committed £25m to a Climate Emergency Capital Fund, of which £21.3m has been allocated.

This includes a wide range of projects to reduce the council's overall emissions such as:

- £3m to for works to reduce carbon from library buildings
- £1.1m for pilot work on two primary schools including removing gas boilers and installing air source heat pumps
- £2.5m to expand the cycle hanger programme for residents
- £2.18m to speed up the roll out of LED street lighting

It is also funding a range of smaller projects such as planting a new tiny forest in Peckham Rye next month and introducing the borough's first library of things later in the summer.

This investment is crucial in helping the council to reduce its emissions and meet our ambitious carbon targets.

However, the cost of becoming carbon neutral as a borough is around £3.92bn, and so major, long term government investment is essential. We will continue to make the case strongly to government for this investment and it is disappointing to note that yet again no funding provision has been made by the government in respect of tackling the climate emergency.

### **5. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR JOSEPH VAMBE**

Can you give assurances that the budget is delivering Streets for People and supports the aspiration of the Streets for People Cabinet report passed on December 6 2022?

## **RESPONSE**

Streets for People sets out to bring together residents and businesses to improve the streets of our borough for people, not cars. It seeks to make real change on the ground to support people who want to walk and cycle more, help clean up London's air, create safer streets with fewer cars and allow residents to better use more of the street space for recreation and enjoyment.

The budget as set out this year will make a huge contribution to these ambitions, from a variety of funds and delivered by teams working together from across the organisation. For example, this year:

- We will invest £910,000 in rolling out further School Streets initiatives, helping to protect even more young lungs in the borough from harmful fumes
- We will deploy £650,000 to place another 125 cycle hangars across the borough, helping to meet the significant demand we face
- We are investing more than £250,000 in more cycling infrastructure, including the next phase of the Southwark Spine
- We will support around 3,000 adults and children next year in becoming confident cyclists with a £250,000 investment in cycle training.
- We will invest around £2.5 million to work with residents to roll out new streetspace and parking initiatives, helping to reduce traffic levels across the borough

This is to say nothing of the £5 million investment we will make in renewing out streets and pavements to make them safer for all road users and encourage active travel. Nor does this include our £1.9 million Cleaner, Greener, Safer (CGS) fund or the £800,000 in the Devolved Highways Budget (DHB) which will both contribute to our cycle hangar rollout, pedestrian improvements and traffic calming measures where residents have told us they want them most.

This budget provides a phenomenal boost to our plans to deliver streets for people.

**6. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR SUZANNE ABACHOR**

As households bill are expected to continue to rise in the coming year, what council tax support is being provided for low income families?

**RESPONSE**

The council's Council Tax Reduction scheme provides support for all working age claimants whilst government continues to provide for pensioners.

In the coming financial year, 2023-24, £22.7m has been provided to approximately 24,000 residents.

The council has consistently maintained support for residents at up to 85% of their council tax bill with 77% of working age claimants receiving the maximum level of support.

Southwark's scheme remains one of the most supportive Council Tax Reduction schemes. Additional support is provided for residents through ensuring they have access to affordable repayment plans where appropriate.

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

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has announced he will provide £130m to offer free school meals to all primary school age children for a year. As Southwark

already offers this provision and will, will the cabinet member commit to using any additional funds to expand free school meals to secondary school pupils?

## **RESPONSE**

The council has been at the forefront of offering support for Southwark school pupils with the provision of free school meals incrementally for all primary aged children since 2011. Over the last two years the council has offered additional support particularly to help families affected by the cost of living crisis through the provision of holiday free school meals for all pupils, part of the government's free school meal programme including those at secondary school.

The council is working in partnership with schools to look at how we can help deliver targeted help to those families most in need during this time including additional support for low income families with secondary school aged children. Additionally, the council's cost of living support programme continues to ensure those who require immediate support receive financial assistance through the community referral pathway, a scheme receiving referrals for residents from over 80 partner organisations in Southwark. To date 12,000 referrals have been received, providing £1.2 million in direct financial support.

I am also very pleased to say that our budget amendment (amendment D) sets out a bold and ambitious plan to go even further by investing in a major new pilot programme to ensure students at Southwark secondary schools have access to healthy nutritious food. We will work with schools, young people and families to develop a new programme to ensure secondary students from low-income families do not go hungry.

This commitment will be funded through the saving to the council that will result from the GLA paying for free primary school meals in 2023/24. I hope the councillor will welcome this approach, and I would encourage him and his colleagues to support that particular amendment.

## **8. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR RACHEL BENTLEY**

Southwark Council appears to be pursuing a strategy of using public parks for commercial gain. How much money was raised from commercial use of parks last year? What are the projected funds from the commercialisation of public parks in the borough this coming year? How much money does the events team need to generate to cover the costs of the team?

## **RESPONSE**

Commercial events across the borough generate income for the council, which we use to pay for free events for local people and to subsidise and support community events.

After more than a decade of reductions in government funding for councils, this important source of funding allows us to run a parks and events service that might otherwise have been lost.

This year our events team will support a wide range of free community events, including all those through the cultural celebration fund, the King's Coronation and the 75th Anniversary of the arrival of the Empire Windrush. Without raising revenue to support the work of this team, events like this would also become impossible to deliver.

In the previous financial year (2021-22) commercial events brought in £171,000 in revenue and the projected end of this financial year (2022-23) total revenue is £266,000. It is worth noting that previous year was impacted by the recovery from the pandemic which will account for some of the significant difference. The total budgeted costs of the events team this financial year (2022-23) was £244,000.

Commercial events also contribute to maintaining and enhancing our parks, with an additional 10% contribution on top of the revenue listed above, which goes from the organisation hiring space in our parks, to our parks team. This revenue supports the council in our key aim of keeping our parks clean, welcoming and award-winning places.

## **9. QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES, EQUALITIES AND FINANCE FROM COUNCILLOR JANE SALMON**

Southwark's estates and streets are already blighted by fly-tipping and raising the bulky waste charge to £35, as outlined in budget line 213, will potentially worsen this situation. What are you doing to improve communication to residents around how to dispose of waste responsibly? How many fines were issued for fly-tipping in the past year? And what is your strategy for increasing action against flytippers?

### **RESPONSE**

Keeping our streets clean and tidy is a key priority for the council and we know it is important to residents.

The charge per item for bulky waste collection remains lower than most other London councils, with up to 10 items collected per collection, which continues to be promoted with residents. There is no evidence to suggest a correlation between increased charging for bulky waste collections and the level of fly tipping in the borough.

Nevertheless, enforcement against those who intentionally dirty out streets continues to be crucial. Over the past year there have been 495 fixed penalty notices issued specifically for fly tipping.

There is a consistent and seasonal approach to communications around what residents can do to reduce their waste and how to dispose of or recycle their waste at different times of the year. We use Southwark Life, corporate social

media and leaflets to ensure residents are kept up to date. Through these channels we encourage residents to sign up to our garden waste scheme, and engage in the “one bag a week challenge”, for example. These are just parts of our comprehensive joint communications plan with Veolia which we update regularly.

Officers from across the council meet regularly to discuss new and emerging areas of concern for fly-tipping, this group is attended by officers across the council.

Interventions and proactive work undertaken by the partnership group includes communications from housing officers regarding estate based residential fly-tipping, with warning letters sent to those residents identified as being responsible; visible, focused patrols in the area of concern; temporary deployment of CCTV to support enforcement activity; and redesign of areas where possible.