

STRATEGY AND COMMUNITIES

Overview

- A.1. The Strategy and Communities department brings together corporate functions and is responsible for the council's strategic core. The vision for the department is to work in partnership to support everyone who has a stake in our borough to deliver the Southwark 2030 Strategy and associated transformation and change. Our strategic intent is to use modern change techniques, skills and insight to provide impactful support to our organisation, our partners and our community to sustain the work and focus which will be required to deliver the 2030 vision and transformation priorities of the council.
- A.2. The purpose of Strategy and Communities is to ensure that that the council has the corporate services that effectively enable the organisation to achieve the priorities and commitments set out in the Council Delivery Plan, and more widely Southwark 2030 and the transformation priorities associated with that vision.
- A.3. The department comprises the council's strategy, communications, engagement and change functions alongside the equality, diversity and inclusion team, emergency planning, Chief Executive's and executive support and Leader's and Cabinet Office
- A.4. The departments provides strategic leadership and has responsibility for our framework for equality, diversity and inclusion ensuring this is at the heart of our transformation agenda of people power, thriving neighbourhoods and closing the gap in all we do.
- A.5. The department includes the emergency planning team, leading on the council's overall emergency plan and ensuring the Council is best able to respond to emergency incidents and build community resilience.
- A.6. The department has identified savings for the forthcoming 2024-27 period amounting to £234,000. This will be achieved through effective prioritisation of business activity to release savings whilst focusing how corporate services best support the organisation to deliver cross-council projects and programmes.
- A.7. The department has a commitment of £7,500 in 2024-25 to support enhancement of emergency planning and resilience support bringing this in line with resilience standards for London.

Equalities Analysis

- A.8. As specific proposals are brought forward the impacts on residents and staff will be assessed for equalities impact, although an initial assessment has not highlighted any areas of concern. Any proposals affecting staff will be assessed in accordance with the council's reorganisation, redeployment and redundancy procedures.

GOVERNANCE AND ASSURANCE

Overview

- A.9. Governance and Assurance comprises of the Constitutional Team and Member services, Legal Services. Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Development, Corporate Facilities Management, Electoral Services, Scrutiny, and information Governance
- A.10. HR and Organisational Development includes the council's key enabling functions to support service delivery council wide alongside leadership of workforce strategy and planning.
- A.11. Legal services is a trading service offering legal support to all parts of the council. It covers the whole range of local authority legal work including corporate advice; advice in relation to governance matters, contract formation and advice, litigation and advice departmental specialisms; and general litigation including debt collection.
- A.12. Constitutional and Member Services - support member level decision making at council meetings and in individual decision making. The team provides Constitutional advice and support to the Mayor/Civic Office, councillors, officers and the general public ensuring the decision making process is efficient, open and accountable to local people. The constitution is maintained by the team and this provides the framework for the council's decision making processes.
- A.13. Scrutiny - The scrutiny team provides advice, research and meeting support to the members of the overview and scrutiny committee and its commissions to enable the effective undertaking of the council's scrutiny function, working towards driving improvement in public services.
- A.14. Information Governance are responsible for advising and supporting all staff on data protection, data breaches, data sharing, data rights, information requests and records management matters
- A.15. Electoral Services team are responsible for electoral registration, all electoral events and polling district boundary reviews. The team provide support to the Electoral Registration Officer and to the Returning Officer, both statutory roles with personal responsibility for delivery.
- A.16. Corporate Facilities Management oversee the management, repair, maintenance, compliance and provision of facilities management and workplace related services to the council's operational and non-housing estate. CFM manage a broad range of essential corporate support contracts (printing services, archiving and storage, couriers, taxis, furniture, stationary, postage etc.). Human Resources and Organisational Development - includes the council's key enabling functions to support service delivery council wide alongside leadership of workforce strategy and planning:-

A.17.The department has identified savings for the forthcoming 2024-27 period amounting to £3.3m. This will be achieved through reorganisation of staffing structures and review of processes to achieve efficiencies, rationalisation of council staff accommodation and disposal of buildings as well as innovative ideas for income generation. The department has a small budget commitment of £0.150m.

Equalities Assessment Summary

A.18.Equalities analyses of the impact of the proposed savings and commitments over the 3 year period are assessed as low.

CHILDREN'S AND ADULTS' SERVICES

Overview

- A.19. Children's and Adults' Services represents approximately half of the council's general fund budget. The department provides a wide range of services, including social care, education and public health, to all sections of the population in Southwark.
- A.20. The budget proposals for 2024-25 are made up of a combination of efficiencies that are a continuation of tried and tested approaches as well as proposals that relate to change in the way services are delivered to achieve better value for money. The proposals aim to ensure minimal impact on statutory and front line services and some of them focus on redesigning the back office functions as well as maximising income generation. In the current economic climate, the cost of living crisis and higher than 'normal' inflation increases, these are difficult financial decisions to make, but are consistent with the council's vision of a fairer future for all.
- A.21. For several years now, the council, in partnership with the NHS, voluntary sector colleagues, and independent sector providers, have provided a safe social care service with good outcomes and within budget. The sector continues to struggle with the combined effects of austerity, demand pressures, workforce challenges, continued funding uncertainty, as well as taking on significant burdens as a result of the cost of living crisis.
- A.22. The department is also proposing a commitment in order to address the increasing pressure on the home to school transport. The increase in demand for special education needs support as well as the inflationary increases led to significant cost pressures for the service. While the service is working on mitigating actions such as implementation of the independent travel training, promoting direct payments and further review of the 16-25 transport it is expected that some investment in the service will be necessary over the next few years to get it onto a sustainable position.
- A.23. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is forecasting a small favourable variance which is broadly in line with the Safety Valve commitments and DSG Management Plan agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). As per the Safety Valve agreement the DfE agreed to provide additional funding to support the writing off of the accumulated DSG deficit balance if the council achieves the agreed targets. Currently the council is on track to meet these targets to achieve an in-year balanced position by 2024-25.

Equalities Analysis

- A.24. The equalities analysis is completed and contributing to the overall equalities and climate assessments. The impact is mitigated by alternative offers of services, support or personal budgets, as per service user choice, in line with the Care Act eligibility and national legislative thresholds and government guidance.

A.25. In line with our Public Sector Equality Duty, any changes to services arising from these proposals will be implemented in such a way so as to not impact disproportionately on any specific section or group in our community. The equality analysis looks for any cumulative impacts. In line with the process across the council, information on equality analysis will be shared with decision-makers for consideration before any decisions are taken.

A.26. The vision set out in the council's delivery plan are reflected in the proposals set forth as is a shift upstream to prevention and early help, recognising the evidence base and the outcomes that can be achieved by offering our residents good universal services.

HOUSING

Overview

A.27. The department comprises a diverse range of services funded from both the general fund and the ring-fenced housing revenue account (HRA) for landlord services. The department aims to maximise investment in its housing stock, build new council homes at council rents, deliver consistently high quality services and continue to support the most vulnerable residents, particularly those in need of temporary housing. These ambitions have to be affordable and the council must ensure long term financial sustainability.

A.28. A high proportion of the housing general fund budget is either demand driven or of a fixed contractual nature, for example, temporary accommodation and the customer contact centre, which leaves relatively little scope to make any meaningful savings towards meeting the budget gap without having a detrimental impact on services.

Asset Management

A.29. General fund services comprise aids and adaptations, handypersons, empty homes and private sector housing renewal and building safety.

Resident Services - Temporary Accommodation (TA) and Housing Solutions

A.30. Southwark is a leading authority on homeless prevention recognised nationally. However the cost of TA remains unremitting, driven by the growing national homelessness crisis, unaffordable private sector rented accommodation and government restrictions on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates meaning welfare benefits no longer cover the cost of private rented accommodation. These factors along with the unprecedented fallout of the pandemic has had a very significant impact on the council's TA budget. Furthermore, the Housing Solutions service is under similar budgetary pressure with the need for additional staff resources to cope with the demand and the rising cost of upfront incentives payable to landlords to support homeless households into private sector leased accommodation.

Equalities Assessment Summary

A.31. The department undertakes equality analysis/screening on its budget proposals ahead of final decisions being taken. This helps to understand the potential effects that the budget proposals may have on different groups and whether there may be unintended consequences and how such issues can be mitigated. Analysis is also undertaken to consider any cross-cutting and organisation-wide impacts and continues through the cycle of planning and implementation of these proposals

A.32. In line with our Public Sector Equality Duty, any changes to services arising from the proposals in Appendices B-E will be implemented in such a way so as to not impact disproportionately on any specific section or group in our community. Where necessary, consultation will be undertaken alongside mitigating actions where necessary. In line with the process across the council, information on the equality analysis will be shared with the relevant cabinet members so it can be considered when decisions are taken.

ENVIRONMENT, NEIGHBOURHOODS AND GROWTH

Overview

A.33. The Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth department delivers services that make a real difference to the everyday lives of all residents and visitors. The department is focused on providing high quality services to the borough's residents and shaping those services to support the wellbeing of our residents and support the objectives of other parts of the council.

A.34. The department aims to make Southwark's neighbourhoods great places to live, places that are clean, safe and vibrant and where activities and opportunities are accessible to all. As well as our front-line environmental services we are proud to work with partners to improve health and wellbeing for all our residents through a rich leisure and cultural programme.

A.35. Many of the operational activities of the department are frontline services for the benefit of all residents: they physically improve the environment; they provide opportunities for health and enjoyment, support knowledge and learning or help improve safety and confidence. The department has six directorates, Environment, Leisure, Planning and Growth, Local Economy Team, Climate Change, Stronger neighbourhoods.

2024-25 Savings

A.36. For the forthcoming year, 2024-25, the department has identified a number of savings options and these are reflected in the detailed budget schedules for the department. Savings, efficiencies and additional income of £15m are proposed for the period 2024-25 through to 2026-27.

A.37. The department has a commitment of £1.7m in 2024-25 to support the recently insourcing leisure services pay harmonisation requirements, as well as the cost of supporting households with "No recourse to public funds".

Fees and Charges

A.38. The 2024-25 fees and charges for the department are proposed to be increased in line with inflation or benchmarked against other London Boroughs where appropriate and details are reflected in the Fees and Charges schedules for the department.

Equality Analysis

A.39. As specific proposals are brought forward the impacts on residents will be assessed for equalities impact, although an initial equalities impact assessment has not highlighted any significant concern. Any proposals affecting staff will be assessed in accordance with the council's reorganisation, redeployment and redundancy procedures.

FINANCE AND CORPORATE

Overview

A.40. The Finance Department provides strategic financial leadership for the department and Section 151 responsibilities. The department has five divisions, professional financial services, exchequer services, pensions services, the procurement advice team and technology and digital services.

A.41. In supporting the council delivery plan, the department's vision is to "make a positive difference everywhere we engage" and to be "efficient and effective in all that we do". Specifically, finance endeavours to help the council to "manage every penny as carefully as local families look after their own household budgets".

A.42. The Corporate budgets include technical accounting budgets such as Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), treasury income and costs, pension related costs and budgets which impact across the wider council. The £4m contingency budget also sits within corporate to support the wider budget risks.

Efficiencies, Income generation and other savings

A.43. Over 70% of the departments expenditure budget is staffing costs and we are continuously reviewing services to ensure they are operating efficiently and are adapting to changing demands and caseloads so as to ensure they are fit for the future. Savings of £5.2m are proposed for the period 2024-25 through to 2026-27.

Commitments

A.44. The department is proposing a £0.3m commitment to cover the additional costs arising from the IT and licensing costs resulting from insourcing the council's leisure service.

Equality Analysis

A.45. As specific proposals are brought forward, and at each stage of implementation thereafter, the impacts on different categories of staff will be assessed in accordance with the council's reorganisation, redeployment and redundancy procedures.