

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (OSC) – 24 JANUARY 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET ON POLICY AND RESOURCES STRATEGY

OSC recommendations	Officer response
Budget Setting Process	
<p>OSC endorses the intended review of the budget setting process by the Strategic Director of Finance, and the Cabinet Member for Communities, Democracy and Finance.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 1)</i></p>	<p>Noted and agreed.</p>
<p>OSC requests that the committee is provided with more information on the policy aspect of the departmental budget lines in the coming year in order to determine whether information on budget lines need to be presented differently or just clarified as appropriate on particular budget lines.</p> <p>Note: this recommendation arose from a discussion on how sexual health provision was described in the budget lines, and how the provision was funded and commissioned compared to how it was described, and the need for clarity around this.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 3).</i></p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>These issues will be considered as part of the review of the procedure and format as set out above.</p>
Council Tax Collection	
<p>OSC notes that in respect of Council Tax collection, cabinet consider an appropriate timescale to get back to pre-pandemic collection rates. A suggested target over the next three years – a collection rate target that is around the average of other inner London boroughs.</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>The cost of living crisis continues to significantly impact our residents within Southwark. However over time as the impact of the</p>

<p><i>(Recommendation 2)</i></p>	<p>crisis starts to recede we would expect to see council tax collection levels recover in future years. Our council tax collection was average for inner London before the pandemic and while it has fallen during the pandemic and cost of living crisis, it remains average for inner London.</p> <p>The council was at the forefront of improvements to data-sharing for CTAX collection in recent years. The full impacts of those improvements are still to be seen and we are confident that they will support future improvements to our overall CTAX collection. The council will continue to support wider efforts by the sector to secure further improvements in data-sharing - especially with other government agencies.</p> <p>It should be noted that Southwark has characteristics that make council tax collection particularly challenging even compared with some of our inner London neighbours. Leading predictors of lower council tax collection for any council are having relatively few owner-occupied homes, high levels of population transience, and a housing stock that includes a high proportion of social rented homes.</p> <p>According to official statistics (ONS), Southwark has the second lowest proportion of owner-occupiers of all local authority areas in England. Southwark is in the top 1% of local authorities in England by the proportion of its housing stock made up of social rented homes. Finally, in the most recent year for which statistics are available (2019/20), Southwark had one of the most transient populations in the whole of the country, with more than ten percent of its population moving in and a similar proportion moving out, in a single year.</p>
<p>SEND</p>	
<p>That cabinet be recommended to review the impact of the SEND restructure.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 7)</i></p>	<p>Noted. There is a plan to invest in SEND services to support the SEND Strategy (2024-25) agreed by Cabinet in September 2022. This is not a restructure but planned and targeted development to</p>

	improve provision and response as part of the Safety Valve agreement with DfE.
Climate and Sustainability	
<p>With a particular focus on climate and sustainability related grants, Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that it is to receive reports of government grants the council has applied for, successful or otherwise, to ensure that all opportunities are taken full advantage of.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 5)</i></p>	<p>We agree that OSC should have greater financial information to enable them to effectively scrutinise whether the council is maximising funding opportunities. However, the proposal as drafted will provide a very narrow perspective on the grant and funding situation.</p> <p>We propose, instead, that as part of the annual climate report, the council produce a financial statement to accompany the report which considers grants alongside other funding. We invite OSC to conduct pre-scrutiny as part of the annual climate report process.</p>
Recommendations relating to budget proposals	
Climate Emergency, Clean Air and Street	
<p>Line 142 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomes the commitment from the Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Clean Air and Streets, that there will be no reduction in waste and cleaning, but recommends that it receives monitoring reports at regular and appropriate intervals to ensure that cleaning rotas, collection rates, and so on are maintained or improved on.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 4)</i></p>	<p>The standards are already monitored through the council delivery plan and the existing council performance framework. The waste contract is delivered on a tonnage basis and collection rates don't affect the end cost, thus there is no incentive to reduce such.</p>
<p>Line 220 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes with concern that despite improvements, too many commercial properties owned by the council remain vacant, and urgent work should be done to ensure that all potential income streams are realised. (recommendation 6)</p>	<p>The council currently has, as part of its retained investment portfolio, eight commercial properties available to let across its commercial estate. Void rates have remained low and properties may seem void or empty when in fact there is a lease in place and a tenant is paying rent.</p>

	A small number of commercial properties are being proposed as disposals or are subject to development /refurbishment prior to marketing as they are not in a lettable condition.
Adults and Childrens	
<p>Line 124 [Savings through senior management reductions] – That following the reorganisation of the Education Department within Children’s Services; together with the removal of the position of Director of Education, urgent dialogue is required with schools and associated bodies as to the new structure of Education services within Children’s Services bearing in mind the Director of Education left post at short notice in July 2023.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 8)</i></p>	<p>The Director of Children’s Services (DCS) has carried out significant engagement with schools at all levels since September including visiting schools, engagement at schools forum, meetings with Head Teachers, some Multi Academy Trusts and most recently with a large group of governors as well as other platforms. There is a planned engagement process with the leader, lead member, head teachers and DCS.</p> <p><i>(Note the Director of Education left in August)</i></p>
<p>Line 102 – Efficiencies through maximisation of extra care, night time provision and step down accommodation. Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary).</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 11)</i></p>	<p>We will continue to maximise use of existing provision whilst new schemes become available. The review of Night Owls provision will form part of current re-procurement of Flexicare and Home Care contracts.</p>
<p>Line 219 – Better Care Fund Hospital Discharge Teams</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary)</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 11)</i></p>	<p>This is an increase in established funding used to maintain services which support health. The EINA assessment showed a neutral impact.</p>
<p>Line 122 – Delivery of Education Psychology Team</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary)</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 11)</i></p>	<p>This saving is proposed to be implemented from 2025-26 dependent on reduction in demand for EHCP. Therefore, officers will continue to review potential impacts and mitigate as appropriate.</p>

<p>Line 301 – Review of the Southwark Information and Advice Services Team</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary)</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 11)</i></p>	<p>This saving is proposed to be implemented from 2025-26 following a full review. This is informed by the Council investing in increasing capacity within our SEND services to offer direct support to parents and carers of children with SEND, as well as significant capacity into upskilling education professionals across Southwark to better meet the needs of children.</p> <p>Over time we are confident that the increase in mainstream and system wide support capacity will reduce demand on the centralised SIAS team, as the offer of high-quality advice and guidance to parents will be embedded across the local system throughout the borough and within the day to day case work of the wider SEND service. A full and updated EINA will be completed prior to implementing any changes in 2025-26.</p>
<p>Line 109 – Reduction of numbers of children in care</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary)</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 11)</i></p>	<p>This proposal is about continuing to invest in our preventative services to safely reduce the number of children coming into care, to at a minimum be more in line with similar boroughs. This builds on the existing success in reducing numbers in care over recent years which has realised significant savings.</p> <p>This proposal also includes the creation of more local homes for children in care run by the local authority meaning less children need to be placed in expensive private sector run homes.</p> <p>This area does have internal and external assurance processes. Positive external assurance processes have been undertaken by Ofsted in September 2022 and December 2023. The Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/23 was received by Cabinet in January 2024.</p>
<p>Environment, Neighbourhoods and Growth</p>	
	<p>It is suggested that the Library, Leisure, Open Space and Culture strategies, which are being developed together over the next year,</p>

<p>Line 316 [Remodelling of library service] – That the future review of library services in light of remodelling, be submitted to the overview and scrutiny committee.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 9)</i></p>	<p>would be good candidates for pre-scrutiny, should the committee be minded to include this on their work plan.</p>
<p>Lines 213 and 214 – Additional income from increased fees and charges in Leisure Services</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary)</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 11)</i></p>	<p>Leisure fees (across leisure, libraries, culture and open spaces services) will be monitored in line with demand, benchmarking and wider market conditions.</p> <p>In relation to leisure centre fees & charges, these have been frozen since October 2022 and the 2024-25 uplifts are, in most cases, rising in line with inflation. In addition, the council has made significant investment in this service and the additional income will help fund some of the cost increases from pay harmonisation, as well as the capital investments required to bring the newly insourced service to current industry standards.</p>
<p>Exchequer Services</p>	
<p>Line 150 [Council Tax Reduction Scheme] – Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomes the existing Council Tax Reduction scheme, as well as the recognition that council tax, despite these measures, essentially remains regressive.</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that Southwark investigate the feasibility of further expanding the council tax reduction rates and eligibility.</p> <p><i>(Recommendation 10)</i></p>	<p>Noted and agreed.</p> <p>The council is under a statutory duty to consider whether it should make any substantial changes to its working-age CTR scheme once every year. The council will discharge that duty once again this year and the outcome from that review will appear in the <i>Council Tax Base Report</i> published later in the year. Should the review lead the council to recommend changes to its CTR scheme, those changes and alternative options must be the subject of a public consultation. If a public consultation is necessary, we expect that it will take place in the summer and early autumn. Any changes to the scheme that may be decided upon cannot be implemented until April 2025 and the start of the new tax year.</p>
<p>Line 132 – Review of corporate contact centre- Overview and Scrutiny committee recommends that cabinet look at mitigating actions (if necessary</p>	<p>The proposed savings are not due to take effect until April. We will revisit and refresh the EINA on contact centre savings addressing the specific concerns raised by the Equalities and Human Rights</p>

(Recommendation 11)

Panel and liaising directly with the panel membership via its Chair.
We will also clarify the operational rationale for changes and expect that a refreshed EINA should demonstrate that the customer experience will not be impaired even after equalities considerations are properly taken into account