

Liberal Democrat Budget Amendment: Let's Fix Southwark

Proposed by: Cllr Victor Chamberlain

Seconded by: Cllr Rachel Bentley

1) Council Assembly notes the national context of setting this budget:

- a) That despite promises of change, this Labour government has continued the Tory legacy of austerity – with real terms cuts under this Labour government that will harm local services more than any period prior.
- b) The Government's so-called "Fair Funding" review has resulted in grant cuts totalling almost £20 million, and leaving an overall funding gap over the next three years of around £80 million.
- c) The Labour government has made further changes in relation to local government funding – namely reckless changes to the homelessness grant, and NIC changes that are plunging councils and small businesses into financial ruin.
- d) The Labour Government has also failed to make bold changes needed with funding arrangements for HRAs and similar housing grants – meaning that housing associations and councils are still struggling to deliver desperately needed social housing
- e) Similarly, the Labour Mayor of London has conspired with Government and big developers to undermine affordable housing delivery in London – resulting in even more pressure put on temporary accommodation costs on one hand, and continuing the housing-driven cost of living crisis on the other.
- f) The Labour Government has failed to tackle the cost of living crisis – with rents, water bills, energy bills, and the price of food still climbing to levels that are forcing local families to often choose between heating and eating.
- g) That council tax remains a regressive tax, which the Resolution Foundation has compared to Thatcher's Poll Tax, citing disproportionate impact on the poorest households.

2) Council Assembly recognises the local context of setting this budget

- a) Over the three-year period of the MTFs, the council has engaged in a series of callous cuts and fee increases that are damaging local services and hitting

residents in the pocket

- b) That in a time of strained finances, the priority should be spending money on supporting financially struggling residents and frontline services, not on a bloated cabinet and so-called “community champion” sinecure posts.
- c) That there remains money the council is leaving on the table from its vast capital estate and position as a top tourist destination in a global city.
- d) There is systemic waste and misplaced priorities across the council that can and should be cut to prioritise frontline services.
- e) This waste includes ludicrous spend on consultants and agency staff, internal naval gazing projects, and absurd spending on takeaways and food.

3) **Council Assembly further recognises**

- a) That crime and anti-social behaviour in Southwark is getting worse: the borough has the 4th highest number of crimes, and a crime rate 32% higher than the national crime rate.
- b) Phone theft and safety at night are of particular concerns to residents, with theft from the person being almost 10 times higher than the national average in Southwark.
- c) That this Labour Council and Labour Mayor of London have failed to make Southwark, and London as a whole, safer for residents.
- d) Under a Labour Mayor, police front counters across Southwark have been closed, with the final 24/7 front counter now to close its doors at night when residents are most at risk.
- e) The promised new police hub in Rotherhithe has also been abandoned after the old hub was closed in March last year.
- f) The number of directly employed community safety wardens is a fraction of the number when they took control of the council 16 years ago
- g) That this Labour council has failed to tackle the blight of fly-tipping and litter across the borough, with white goods dumping continuing to be an issue across

Southwark. .

- h) Tackling fly-tipping requires both “carrot” and “stick” approaches, the council is currently doing neither – there is no incentive to responsibly dispose of waste and fines for fly-tipping continue to be appallingly low – out of all 22,912 fly-tipping incidents in Southwark, only 1.8% resulted in an FPN, and zero prosecutions.
- i) Almost a third of fly tipping is not being removed within the council’s target time, and monthly fly tipping reports are also up by a third.
- j) The bulky waste collection charge continues to dis-incentivise responsible disposal of large waste.

4) **Council Assembly further recognises:**

- a) The Regulator of Social Housing’s findings of “serious failings”, awarding the council with the second worst rating available.
- b) The litany of housing scandals that have plagued this administration – including major works that had no oversight from Labour cabinet members which resulted in a combined overspend of more than £7 million .
- c) Had residents had better communication channels to and from the council, these overspends could have been averted.
- d) Both the Labour Chancellor Rachel Reeves and a Labour Cabinet Member of Council Homes failed to secure the correct landlord licenses for their properties in Southwark – forcing the latter to resign and resulting in the eighth Cabinet Member for Council Homes to be appointed in seven years.
- e) These scandals both exposed gaps in the council’s approach to regulating private landlords through its licensing policies.
- f) Communication and accessibility of the council has consistently been raised as an issue across these major works scandals – issues which have not been rectified still on estates like Chilton Grove.
- g) Repairs are delayed or ignored – including unacceptable repeated outages to heating and hot water on multiple estates.

- h) 67% of cases raised with the housing ombudsman resulted in findings of maladministration, and over 8,000 stage 1 complaints have been raised with the council.
- i) The anonymity, inaccessibility, and remoteness of the council lies at the heart of many of these problems – with a return to the system of “one stop shops” last seen under the previous Liberal Democrat administration being a key solution.

5) Council Assembly therefore resolves to tackle the cost of living crisis and make life easier for people by:

- a) Extending support to those in receipt of council tax reductions to provide increased respite from the continued cost of living crisis. This will be achieved through a one-off fund worth £2.3m which will provide all working age residents in receipt of council tax reductions a further reduction of £150, enough to protect them from the 4.99% rise in council tax and provide additional financial support.
- b) Add an extra £1 million to the council’s cost of living fund to enable a greater level of financial support for those most struggling.
- c) Exempt those who are terminally ill and their households from council tax, in line with Marie Curie’s campaign and has already begun to be rolled out in other local authorities.

6) Council Assembly resolves to make Southwark cleaner, greener, and safer by:

- a) Doubling the current number of community safety wardens to 60, returning to the numbers seen under the previous Liberal Democrat administration.
- b) Launch a new community infrastructure fund to increase CCTV provision, awareness campaigns, “safe space gazebos”, and related initiatives.
- c) Roll out “community skips” in five trial areas across Southwark to make it easier for residents to responsibly dispose of large waste.
- d) Abolish the bulky waste collection charge which provides the wrong incentives for those disposing of large goods.

- e) Providing opportunities for our young people by exploring and identify where new youth facilities could be opened across Southwark.
- f) Exploring and identifying where brand new green spaces and parks could be opened across the borough.

Develop plans to roll out electric vehicle charging points using in-house teams, which would in the longer term provide extra revenue to the council which is currently going to private providers, and may result in a service other authorities could procure from Southwark.

7) Council Assembly further resolves to improve public services, tackle poor quality housing, and back our communities by:

- a) Piloting a return to a system of “one stop shop” satellite offices, where residents are able to talk to council officers about whatever issue they require, face to face, and get advice and support in real time.
- b) Utilising existing council offices, housing offices, libraries, leisure centres and other council buildings to provide this service in all communities across the borough.
- c) Commissioning an exercise to explore how more decision making can be further devolved down to the community level, so that those most at stake can have a genuine say in what happens, where, and when.
- d) Providing a more comprehensive offer of council services, along the lines of “Community Hubs” in boroughs such as Tower Hamlets and Westminster.
- e) Where this would require maintaining or extending opening hours of libraries, to fund this by opening limited space for appropriate commercial activity, such as coffee shops as is successfully working at John Harvard Library.
- f) Reallocating existing staff to one stop shops, and creating additional and bespoke frontline staff to deliver this service, where required.
- g) Drawing £1 million from Service Improvement reserves to create a one-off resident service development fund, to be used to facilitate the creation of the “one stop shop” pilot, including adaptations, signage, staff time, and so on. Minor ongoing costs thereafter to be drawn from income and savings generated from this amendment.

- h) Increasing resource to the private rental sector enforcement team, and reviewing HMO license and selective licensing policies to be more proactive in identifying problematic properties and raising standards across the private housing sector.
- i) Funding feasibility studies on upgrading every train station in Southwark to have step-free access.

8) Council Assembly resolves to pay for these initiatives where not already identified by:

- a) Embarking on ambitious income generating initiatives such as:
 - i. Increasing filming permit fees to match demand from big film and television companies to use Southwark's iconic landmarks in their productions.
 - ii. Increasing income from HMO and selective licenses by implementing a more proactive scheme, supported by the additional resources allocated elsewhere in this budget amendment.
 - iii. Maximising value for communities impacted by events held in Southwark by generating more revenue from commercial event fees.
 - iv. Increasing fees for Temporary Traffic Notices and Orders by 10%
 - v. Taking full advantage of the millions of tourists who visit Southwark every year, and the forthcoming arrival of a statutory Tourist Tax (long campaigned for by the Liberal Democrats), and rolling out an interim voluntary scheme modelled on Manchester and Liverpool until such time as the new visitor levy comes into force.
 - vi. Bringing forward plans to intensify the occupation of Tooley St, in turn freeing up other council buildings for revenue generation and savings.

vii. Fully utilising the council’s vast commercial estate and opportunities.

b) Doing away with superfluous Labour waste and indulgences such as:

- i. Abolishing Southwark Life
- ii. Trimming the photocopying, printing, and stationery budget
- iii. Making savings in the communications and strategy budget
- iv. Scrapping SRAs for neighbourhood champions
- v. Cutting 5 cabinet members and scrapping deputy cabinet members
- vi. Identifying 10% efficiencies in the use of leased vehicles
- vii. Cutting catering spend
- viii. Sweeping away oversized spend on consultants, and reducing reliance on agency staff

c) Releasing reserves and strategic community infrastructure levy (CIL) as appropriate and detailed in the technical amendments below.

d) Utilising the difference between the provisional and final Local Government Financial Settlement to cover any potential shortfall.

Insert into Appendix A (income and savings):	Adjust the following budget lines in Appendix B (Fees and Charges):
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cease production of Southwark Life magazine - £84k ● Reduce the forecast spend on photocopying, printing, stationary and postage - £343k ● Review Southwark’s Communications and Strategy budget - £325k ● Streamline cabinet by cutting 5 Cabinet Members - £202.8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Filming permit fees to be increased - £105k ● Increase Temporary Traffic Notices and Orders fees by 10% - £62.5k

- Scrap all four deputy cabinet positions - £40.4k
- Scrap multi ward SRAs - 32k
- Find efficiencies and alternatives in order to reduce the projected 2026/27 spend on leased commercial vehicles by around 10% - £154k
- Review Agency and Consultant Spend - £812k
- Intensify occupation of Tooley St and associated revenue and savings - £300k
- Implement zero-tolerance policy on unused council-owned commercial assets and be far more ambitious in revenue generation - £900k
- Review catering spend - £100k
- Cut Mayoral budget - £30k
- Launch “tourist tax” interrim initiative with BIDs, voluntarily adding small levy to relevant activity such as hotels, attractions, etc - £218k
- Release Strategic CIL (ringfenced for appropriate spend on community safety infrastructure) - £111k
- Release £2.3 million from the cost of living reserves (ringfenced for the financial relief fund detailed below)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Release Service Improvement Reserve (ringfenced for the One Stop Shop fit out works)– £1 million ● Release Highways Parking and Capital reserves - £50k ● Release Southwark 2030 reserves - £150k 	
<p>Insert the following budget lines into Appendix A (commitments):</p>	<p>Remove from Appendix B (Fees and charges)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contribution of £1,000k to the Southwark Cost of Living Fund ● Creation of a one-off financial relief fund which will provide an additional £150 council tax reduction for all working-age recipients of council tax reductions - £2,300k ● 32 more Community Safety Officers - £1,889k ● Community safety infrastructure (CCTV, Safe Space Gazebos etc) - £111k ● Roll out community skips – initially in 4 locations across the Borough 6 times a year - £10k ● Community devolution exercise - £10k ● One Stop Shop running costs - £285k ● One Stop Shop development/fit out - £1,000k 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bulky Waste Collection Charges - £310k

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● EV charging points in-house rollout development - £50k ● £150k towards feasibility studies exploring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. More youth facilities b. Train station upgrades c. New green spaces 	
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Summary table demonstrating the amendments above are balanced:

Revenue:

Line (income/savings)	£k	Line (Commitments)	£k
Southwark Life	84	Cost of Living Fund contribution	1000
Photocopying, stationary etc	343	Community Safety Officers	1889
Communications & Strategy budget cut	325.8	Community Skips	10
Cut 5 Cabinet members	202.8	Abolish Bulky Waste Charge	310
Scrap Dep. Cab.	40.4	Devolution	10
Leased vehicles efficiencies	154	One stop shops running costs	285
Commercial events hire increase	72.9	Exempt terminally ill from Council Tax	225
Agency and Consultants cut	812	Additional PRS & leasehold resource	150
Tooley St efficiencies	300		
Sweating Commercial Assets	900		
Catering cut	100		
Mayoral	30		
Tourist tax	218		
Temporary Traffic Notices and Orders Increase Fees	62.5		
Scrap Multi Ward SRAs	33.6		
Selective license 21 days policy change (fine	100		

landlords/rent repayments for period (letting) or upping enforcement activity			
Increase filming fees	100		
TOTAL	3879		3879

One off

Line (source)	£k	Line	£k
Cost of Living Reserves	2300	Council Tax support	2300
Release Service Improvement Reserves	1000	One Stop Shop development	1000
Release SCIL	111	Community Safety Infrastructure (CCTV, mobile phone campaign, etc)	111
Highways & Parking Capital reserves	50	EV in house & com serv.	50
Release Southwark 2030 reserves	150	Feas study increase youth services in every community	50
Total	3,611		3,611

The Strategic Director of Resources, as the statutory section 151 officer, has confirmed that these proposals are lawful and implementable and overall do not impact on the total budget requirement for 2026/27 or the sufficiency of the Council's reserves. The Strategic Director notes that any shortfall due to timing delays will be met utilising the difference between the provisional and final Local Government Financial Settlement.