



FIXING SOUTHWARK

OUR ALTERNATIVE BUDGET 2025

- ✓ Making care work
- ✓ Putting money in your pocket
- ✓ Making Southwark Safer

The national context

The effects of years of Conservative government are still being felt, with inflation leaving prices sky high.

However, the new Labour government has done little during its first 7 months to relieve financial pressure, such as refusing to scrap the 2 child benefit cap.

Conservative cuts to local government have left core spending power at a fraction of what they were, resulting in services within and between councils competing for increasingly little money.

Despite winning the General Election on a platform of change, there is little sign that substantial increases in funding are forthcoming from the new Government.

The new Labour government has instead embarked on a **disastrous agenda for local government**, including reckless changes to homelessness grants, and a tax raid that will further plunge councils and small businesses into financial ruin.

The Government is also squandering an opportunity to genuinely empower communities to make their own decisions, opting instead to impose centralised, less accountable modes of regional governance across the country, with **nothing to improve local democracy and decision making in London.**

Despite committing to tackling the social care crisis in its manifesto, the Labour government has instead kicked it into the long grass with yet another “review” with a part-time chair

The push towards Integrated Neighbourhood Teams is, however, a welcome step forward, but in order to be implemented properly requires funding, and to be part of a broader package of reform the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has delayed until 2028.

There is a worrying rise of divisive politics in this country and across the globe, particularly far-right parties and candidates

This political extremism is partly fuelled by alienation and disillusionment from day-to-day decision making and politics, and a lack of trust in politicians to genuinely make people’s lives better.

There is therefore an urgent need to better ensure that **communities have a say** about what, when, and where things happen in their local area.

The local context

This Labour council has embarked on **callous cuts to frontline services**, raised charges for services like cremation and cemetery fees, all whilst **wasting millions on consultants** for self-indulgent exercises and failing to generate income from its assets.

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.

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.

As well as this, there is **systemic waste** and misplaced priorities across the council that can and should be cut to prioritise frontline services

Much of this bloat comes from Labour’s tendency towards centralisation of resources, services, and decision making

Making more **decisions from the bottom-up** therefore is a laudable aim in itself, whilst also achieving longer-term efficiencies in delivering services that local residents are genuinely satisfied with.



What needs to change

Crime and anti-social behaviour in Southwark is getting worse, with phone theft and safety at night are being of particular concerns to residents.

This Labour Council and Labour Mayor of London have **failed** to make Southwark, and London as a whole, safer for residents.

Though responsibility for crime lies primarily with the Metropolitan Police, there is plenty that the council can do.

Councils like Richmond, Kingston, and Watford have driven **community-led crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives**.

Despite Labour's spin, the number of community support officers remains a fraction of the number when they took control of the council 14 years ago.

This Labour council has also failed to tackle the blight of fly-tipping and litter, with white goods dumping continuing to be an issue across the borough.

These issues 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 18,676 fly-tipping incidents in Southwark, only 4.2% resulted in an FPN, and only 3 prosecutions.

A recent auditors' report confirmed that Southwark **will not meet its net zero climate goals by 2030**, revealing a shocking lack of urgency in acting upon its action plan

When scrutinised at OSC on the council's climate emergency activity, lack of capacity was highlighted as one of the **key barriers to progress**.



What needs to change

Service for residents in Southwark is not good enough, across every council department, but especially and most notably within housing.

The Regulator of Social Housing highlighted **“serious failings”**, which has drawn the attention of national government, and vindicates years of complaints from campaigners and residents.

Leaseholders and tenants have had to come to OSC to get answers to a system of chronic overspend, poor customer service, and lack of communication.

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge too found that communication with residents was “mixed and sometimes inconsistent”.

This comes alongside a worrying trend towards centralisation and digitalisation of frontline council staff, leaving residents feeling alienated and unable to access essential services and staff.

In contrast, previous administrations of the council operated a system of satellite council offices, whereby residents were able to access council services in a manner convenient and accessible to them.



What needs to change

There is a projected overspend in the HRA, leaving reserves dangerously low. This is driven by, amongst other things, overspend in repairs despite the repairs improvement plan not yet materially impacting on finances, and the poor repairs service that residents are experiencing.

In many instances of poor service and overspend, early and better quality communication between residents and the council would have resolved issues much sooner.

In the particular cases of the recent Devon Mansions, Kirby Estate, and Canada Estate scandals, residents were pointing out issues months, if not years, before the Council took action, and felt “ignored”.

Alternatively, community and resident focussed solutions offer a cost-effective way to drastically improve service for residents.

We believe that being able to talk to someone “face to face” is often the best way for residents to feel listened to and valued and to ensure everyone is included.

Liberal Democrats recognise principles of self-determination and democracy, and affirms the maxim that power should be exercised at the lowest practicable level, which results in local governance that is good, accountable, and engageable.



Southwark can be: Fairer and more Caring



Extend support to those in receipt of council tax reductions to provide increased respite from the continued cost of living crisis. This can be achieved through a one-off fund worth £2.30m 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.

Invest **£1 million into Adult Social Care**, with the view to roll out Integrated Neighbourhood Teams with enough resources to deploy care workers across GP surgeries and A&E departments, recognising a bare minimum requirement of £500k to comply with DHSC instruction, and an additional sum to allow for initial teething issues, capacity, and otherwise ensure that resources are not stretched to capacity.

Freeze the planned rise in cremation and cemetery fees.

Contribute an additional £200k to the **Southwark Cost of Living Fund** on an ongoing basis.

We can fund this with ambitious income generating policies:

Increase our filming permit fees to match the demand from film and TV to use Southwark's iconic landmarks in their productions.

Maximise value for communities impacted by events held in Southwark by generating more revenue from commercial event fees.

Southwark can be: Fairer and more Caring

We can further offset costs by making common-sense cuts to **wasteful council spending**:

Slash spending on needless and often wasteful catering.

Reduce Southwark's **bloated cabinet**, currently at the legal maximum, to four members reflecting the key service areas of the council:

- Housing
- Environment and leisure
- Health and Social Care
- Finance and Governance

Delete the vague Deputy Cabinet posts with no clear mandate currently costing the council over £39k per year.

Scrap the SRAs for Multi-ward area Community Champions who are currently paid £6,495 a year to chair two meetings.

Cut down needless, expensive, and **politically motivated communications** like Southwark Life and Labour's seemingly endless self-congratulatory strategy exercises like Southwark 2030 that do not deliver the real change residents need and deserve.



Southwark can be: Cleaner, Greener, Safer

Invest £2 million into a Community Safety programme, including but not limited to:

- **Doubling** the number of Community Safety officers
- Investing in community safety infrastructure such as CCTV cameras, “**safe space**” gazebos at key transport hubs at night in partnership with the Metropolitan and British Transport Police

Invest £110k to contribute to **growing the climate emergency team** to ensure that the council’s decarbonisation plans are accelerated, or at least on track, specifically with the view to more rigorously ensuring that the revenue budget contributes to improving the council’s performance on its climate ambition, in addition to the capital programme.

Roll out **community skips** to promote responsible disposal of large household waste items

Abolish the controversial bulky waste charge



Southwark can be: Cleaner, Greener, Safer

We can pay for these initiatives by:

Reviewing agency and consultant spend with a view to reduce total spend by £595k, a fraction of total spend in the last financial year

Accelerating plans to lease out space in Tooley St to raise £260k

Fully utilising the council's vast commercial estate, which currently includes many high-value lots that have been left empty for years, by taking a zero-tolerance approach to un(der)-utilised property – **raising an additional £1 million.**

Suitable tenants for either of the above initiatives could include Members of Parliament in Southwark who are currently without a constituency office

Slash spending on needless and often wasteful catering

Cutting spend on Mayoral activities by £30k, with any additional required funds to be met through fundraising

Increasing fees for Temporary Traffic Notices and Orders by 10%

Taking full advantage of the millions of tourists who visit Southwark every year by introducing a **Tourist Tax** which would see an additional £1 per night charge added to hotel rooms in Southwark in order to generate revenue that can be invested back in the community. This would be modelled after other cities in the UK who have successfully piloted such schemes.



Southwark can: Back our communities

Pilot 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.

Utilise existing council offices, housing offices, libraries, leisure centres and other council buildings to provide this service in all communities across the borough.

Commission 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.**

Provide a more comprehensive offer of council services, along the lines of “Community Hubs” in boroughs such as Tower Hamlets and Westminster.

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.

Reallocate existing staff to one stop shops, and creating additional and bespoke frontline staff to deliver this service, where required.

Pay for this by:

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.

Taking advantage of the healthy pipeline of planning applications, and increase fees to raise £263k



Appendix:

Technical amendments

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 - £109k • Reduce the forecast spend on photocopying, printing, stationary and postage by a third - £330k • Review Southwark's Communications and Strategy budget - £313k • Streamline cabinet by cutting 5 Cabinet Members - £196k • Scrap all four deputy cabinet positions - £39k • Scrap multi ward SRAs - 32k • Find efficiencies and alternatives in order to reduce the projected 2025/26 spend on leased commercial vehicles by 10% - £170k • Review Agency and Consultant Spend - £595k • Accelerate Tooley St commercial leasing - £260k • Implement zero-tolerance policy on unused council-owned commercial assets - £1 million • Review catering spend - £100k • Cut Mayoral budget - £30k • Launch "tourist tax" initiative with BIDs, voluntarily adding small levy to relevant activity such as hotels, attractions, etc - £210k • Release Strategic CIL (ringfenced for appropriate spend on community safety infrastructure) - £175k • Release £2.3 million from the Southwark 2030 reserves (ringfenced for the financial relief fund detailed below) • Release Service Improvement Reserve (ringfenced for the One Stop Shop fit out works) - £1 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All crematorium and cemetery fees to be frozen - £132k • Filming permit fees to be increased - £105k • Increase Temporary Traffic Notices and Orders fees by 10% - £210k • Planning Administration Fees - 263k

Appendix:

Technical amendments

Insert the following budget lines into Appendix A (commitments):	Remove from Appendix B (Fees and charges)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinvest £1 million into Adult Social Care to full fund the deploying Integrated Neighbourhood Teams • Contribution of £200k 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 - £2.3m • 32 more Community Safety Officers - £1.825 million • Community safety infrastructure (CCTV, Safe Space Gazebos etc) - £175k • Roll out community skips – initially in 4 locations across the Borough 6 times a year - £10k • Resource to recruit additional climate emergency officers - £110k • Community devolution exercise - £10k • One Stop Shop running costs - £285k • One Stop Shop development/fit out - £1 million 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulky Waste Collection Charges - £310k

Appendix:

Costings summary

Revenue (recurring commitments/savings)			
Line (income/savings)	£k	Line (Commitments)	£k
Southwark Life	109	Reinvest into Integrated Neighbourhood Teams	1000
Photocopying, stationary etc	330	Freeze Crem Fees	132
Communications & Strategy budget cut	313	Cost of Living Fund contribution	200
Cut 5 Cabinet members	196	Community Safety Officers	1825
Scrap Dep. Cab.	39	Climate change officers	110
Increase Filming Fees	105	Community Skips	10
Leased vehicles	170	Abolish Bulky Waste Charge	310
Commercial events hire	70	Devolution	10
Agency and Consultants cut	595	One stop shop running costs	285
Tooley St	260		
Sweating Commercial Assets	1000		
Catering cut	100		
Mayoral	30		
Tourist tax	210		
Temporary Traffic Notices and Orders	60		
Scrap Multi Ward SRAs	32		
Planning admin fees increase	263		
TOTAL	3882		3882

Appendix:

Costings summary

One off			
Line (source)	£k	Line	£k
Southwark 2030	2300	Council Tax support	2300
Release SCIL	175	Community Safety Infrastructure (CCTV, mobile phone campaign, etc)	175
Release Service Improvement Reserve	1000	One Stop Shop development	1000
TOTAL	2300		2300