



Mayor and Cabinet

Scrutiny committee comments on the budget reductions report

Date: 07 December 2022.

Key decision: No.

Class: Part 1.

Wards affected: All.

Contributor: Public Accounts Select Committee

Outline and recommendations

This report informs Mayor and Cabinet (M&C) of the comments and views of the Healthier Communities; Safer Stronger Communities; Children and Young People; Sustainable Development and Public Accounts select committees, arising from discussions about proposals for budget reductions.

Mayor and Cabinet is asked to consider the views of the select committees as part of its overall consideration of the budget reductions.

Timeline of engagement and decision-making

2 March 2022 – Budget report to Council

6 July 2022 – 2022/23 financial monitoring report to Mayor and Cabinet

6 July 2022 – Medium Term Financial Strategy to Mayor and Cabinet

5 October 2022 – 2022/23 financial monitoring report to Mayor and Cabinet

Budget reduction proposals report to scrutiny committees:

- 1 November 2022 – Healthier Communities Select Committee
- 3 November 2022 – Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee
- 17 November 2022 – Housing Select Committee
- 24 November 2022 – Children and Young People Select Committee
- 30 November 2022 – Sustainable Development Select Committee

1 December 2022 – budget reduction proposals to Public Accounts Select Committee

7 December 2022 – budget reduction proposals to Mayor and Cabinet

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

1. Summary

- 1.1. On Thursday 1 December 2022, the Public Accounts Select Committee considered a report from officers on budget reductions proposals ([Public Accounts Select Committee agenda 1 December 2022](#)). The Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Strategy and the Chief Executive before receiving a summary of the budget reductions report from the Executive Director for Corporate Resources. It also received written comments from the Healthier Communities; Safer Stronger Communities; Children and Young People and Sustainable Development select committees following from those committees' consideration of the same report. The chairs or vice-chairs of the select committees were also in attendance at the meeting.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Mayor and Cabinet is asked to consider the committees' comments as part of the decision making process.

3. Select committee comments on the cuts proposals

Healthier Communities Select Committee comments

- 3.1. The Committee requested that the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select Committee:
- **Reducing hours at Lewisham Libraries (COM_SAV_08).** The Committee felt that in light of the policy on "Warm Welcomes" it was essential that the impact of the cut to library hours did not contradict the Warm Welcome Policy and that those groups particularly affected should be carefully considered before any hours were reduced.
 - **Sexual and reproductive health services in Primary Care (COM_SAV_10).** The Committee felt that having a £30,000 underspend did not show that the money was not needed and that the outcomes for the service such as Lewisham exceeding the London and national average in use of Emergency Hormonal Contraception and in abortion rates including very high repeat termination rates showed that there was already high levels of unmet need.
 - **ASC Empowering Lewisham (COM_SAV_04).** The Committee wanted reassurance that the savings listed were genuinely new savings and not double counting savings that had already been promised in previous budget reduction rounds. The Committee requested a report back on the delivery of the work from the Newton Europe Review.
 - **Reassessment of Care Plans (COM_SAV_03).** The Committee felt the proposal highlighted the importance of the DFG Grant and ensuring it was easy for residents to understand and to apply for grants. The Committee wanted to stress the importance of maximising the spend on the DFG as it was an annual capital grant from central Government and in the past had been underspent. The Committee felt it would be useful to know the previous spends and current spend on the DFG.
 - The Committee also highlighted that it was concerned with the implications of the economic context in which the cuts were being taken. The additional pressures faced on residents and the Council from the cost of living crisis combined with uncertainties around the overall budget and financial settlement to local authorities, the Government's Fair Cost of Care initiative, and the Adult Social Care pre-cept coming through to the Council's general fund budget, meant that it was challenging to fully understand all the affects the combination of these and the savings proposals would have on vulnerable residents and to key services.

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee comments

- 3.2. The Committee requested that the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select Committee on proposal **COM_SAV_08: Reduction in opening hours at Lewisham Libraries**.
- 3.3. The Committee was concerned with the saving on reducing hours at Lewisham Libraries. The Committee felt that in light of the policy on “Warm Welcomes” and due to the hugely important role libraries play in supporting vulnerable residents such as through social prescribing, supporting digital inclusion and being a place of welcome to all residents, that it was essential that the impact of the cut was very carefully examined before any decision was made. Library usage by demographic use at different dates and times should be carefully examined to minimise any impact and consultation should take place with partners at community libraries. It was important to fully examine whether a cut in hours could have unintended consequences for the most vulnerable and cause additional costs to other services by residents’ needs having to be met in other and possibly more costly ways.

Children and Young People Select Committee comments

- 3.4. The Committee requested that the following comments be referred to the Public Accounts Select Committee:
 - **CYP_SAV_01 – Review of Children Centres Budgets**. The Committee was concerned about the associated risk of the move to the pilot hub model advocated by government only coming with funding committed for three years and the potential long-term impact of the cut on children and young people and their families. The Committee was concerned that the cut could reduce preventative support and result in more significant pressures on other budgets should peoples’ needs then escalate.
 - **CYP_SAV_04 – Youth Services Budget Review**. The Committee was concerned about the impact of the cut on levels of provision for children and young people in the borough and also for the staff providing these services. The Committee was particularly concerned that the shift to focus Council support on more targeted provision, with a necessary reduction in support for universal provision, and the mitigations outlined in the proposal would make the recruitment of staff harder for providers.
 - **COM_SAV_08 – Reduction in Opening Hours at Lewisham Libraries**. The Committee was concerned regarding any reduction in opening hours at Lewisham libraries considering the important role libraries played on a range of services and in particular in their part in the response to the cost of living crisis and the Council’s strategy on ‘warm welcomes’.

Sustainable Development Select Committee comments

- 3.5. In relation to the Housing Regeneration and Public Realm savings proposals for income generation (for bulky waste, fridge/freezer collection, and mattresses) Committee members were concerned about the potential impact of the increased charges on household budgets, particularly given the recent increases in the cost of living. The Committee recommended that, if feasible, work should take place to review the effect of the changes on household budgets over time.
- 3.6. The Committee was also concerned about potential increases in littering and fly-tipping. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that additional emphasis, and (where feasible) increased publicity, should be placed on the Council’s enforcement processes and the options for the legal disposal of waste.
- 3.7. The Committee is concerned about the proposed reduction in opening hours at libraries

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

(COM_SAV_08) particularly in relation to the Council's offer of 'warm welcomes' to households and vulnerable individuals experiencing fuel poverty.

- 3.8. The Committee recommends that careful consideration should be given to any future proposals for income generation in the borough's parks and open spaces.

Public Accounts Select Committee views

- 3.9. At its meeting on Thursday 1 December 2022, the Public Accounts Select Committee received the report on proposed budget reductions and asked questions of officers. It also received the views of the other select committees before agreeing to refer its views to Mayor and Cabinet as follows:
- 3.10. The Committee welcomes the careful consideration given to the budget reduction proposals by the Healthier Communities; Safer Stronger; Children and Young People and Sustainable Development select committees. It is also grateful for the attendance of select committee chairs and vice-chairs as well as senior officers at the Public Accounts Select Committee meeting to share member views and officer responses on the proposals.
- 3.11. The Committee notes that the setting of a balanced budget for 2023/23 is essential to ensuring the ongoing financial viability of the Council and it recognises that there are sustained budget pressures and unfunded costs in a number of areas. Therefore, it is with reluctance that the Public Accounts Select Committee endorses these budget reduction proposals. Members believe that it would be irresponsible to recommend that these proposals should be dropped or delayed.
- 3.12. In relation to comments and questions on the proposal to reduce opening hours at libraries **(COM_SAV_08)** the Committee notes and welcomes the comments from members of the other select committees. Public Accounts Select Committee recommends that officers be tasked with a strategic overview of the operation of the service – which should include consideration of the best means of making this saving whilst minimising the impact on residents. The Committee believes that this should include consideration of the hours of operation, footfall and usage levels across the service as well as careful consultation with library users.
- 3.13. The Committee also wishes to place on record its appreciation and thanks for the work of Council officers. Members are concerned about considerable budgetary and operational pressures - as well as levels of vacancies across the organisation. Commenting on proposals to manage pay inflation and to restructure senior management **(All_SAV_01 and ALL_SAV_02)** the Committee emphasised its worry that the amalgamation of responsibilities would have a further detrimental impact on staff wellbeing and welfare.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. However, there may be implications arising from them implementation of the committees' recommendations.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1. The Constitution provides for select committees to refer reports to the Mayor and Cabinet, who are obliged to consider the report and the proposed response from the relevant Executive Director; and report back to the Committee within two months (not including recess).

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1. Equality Act 2010 brought together all previous equality legislation in England, Scotland

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>

and Wales. The Act included a new public sector equality duty, replacing the separate duties relating to race, disability and gender equality. The duty came into force on 6 April 2011. It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 6.2. The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 6.3. There may be equalities implications arising from the implementation of the committees' recommendations.

7. Climate change and environmental implications

- 7.1. There are no direct climate change or environmental implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. There may be climate change and environmental implications arising from the implementation of the committees' recommendations.

8. Crime and disorder implications

- 8.1. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. There may be implications arising from the implementation of the committees' recommendations.

9. Health and wellbeing implications

- 9.1. There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the implementation of the recommendations in this report. There may be implications arising from the implementation of the committees' recommendations – these will need to be considered in the response.

10. Background documents

- 10.1. [Agenda for the meeting of the Healthier Communities Select Committee on 1 November](#)
- 10.2. [Agenda for the meeting of the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee on 3 November](#)
- 10.3. [Agenda for the meeting of the Children and Young People Select Committee on 24 November](#)
- 10.4. [Agenda for the meeting of the Sustainable Development Select Committee on 30 November](#)
- 10.5. [Agenda for the meeting of the Public Accounts Select Committee on 1 December](#)

Report author and contact

If you have any questions about this report then please contact: Scrutiny Manager, Timothy Andrew on 020 8314 7916 or timothy.andrew@lewisham.gov.uk

Is this report easy to understand?

Please give us feedback so we can improve.

Go to <https://lewisham.gov.uk/contact-us/send-us-feedback-on-our-reports>