

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	Cabinet
DATE	22 February 2023
REPORT TITLE:	Report of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee: Budget Scrutiny 2023-24
LEAD OFFICER:	Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense Director of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer Adrian May Interim Head of Democratic Services
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Rowenna Davis Chair of Overview and Scrutiny
ORIGIN OF ITEM:	<p>As part of the consideration of the Council Tax and Budget Report, the Cabinet is required to consider feedback from the Scrutiny & Overview Committee.</p> <p>In accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee scrutinises the entirety of the budget proposals and reports its findings to Cabinet as part of the budget setting process. The findings of the Committee, together with the response of the Administration will be presented at the Budget Council meeting.</p>
KEY DECISION?	No
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	Public
WARDS AFFECTED:	All

1. THE BUDGET SCRUTINY REPORT

- 1.1. The Scrutiny & Overview Committee is required in the procedure rules set out in the Council's Constitution to report to the Cabinet the findings from its scrutiny of the budget setting process. This report is being provided to Cabinet alongside the Budget

papers to respond to the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. Both this report and the response of the Cabinet will be included in the budget papers to be considered by Council on 1 March 2023.

- 1.2. The level of scrutiny given to the process for setting 2023-24 budget has been in line with the expanded scope conducted for the 2022-23 budget, as it was found that this approach allowed the members of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee to have a greater understanding of the potential risks to the delivery of the budget. A summary of the budget process is set out in section 2 of this report.
- 1.3. The Scrutiny & Overview Committee had a final opportunity to review the budget proposals at its meeting on 16 February 2023. It was at this meeting that the Committee, taking account of its work over the preceding months, reached its conclusions on the budget. These conclusions are set out for the consideration of the Cabinet in section 3 of this report. It should be noted that the Committee did not make any specific recommendation on the proposed budget.

2. BUDGET SCRUTINY PROCESS 2023-24

- 2.1. Although the Scrutiny & Overview Committee first considered a report on the setting of the 2023-24 budget at its meeting on 6 December 2023, the Committee had prioritised monitoring the delivery of 2022-23 budget earlier in the year. The Financial Monitoring Reports prepared for Cabinet have also been considered at meetings of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee, in addition to a report on the 'Opening the Books' process commissioned by Mayor Perry. This has allowed the Committee to identify key areas of risk it wanted to scrutinise in greater detail and provided reassurance that the Council was effectively managing its in-year budget.
- 2.2. In advance of the first budget scrutiny meeting on 6 December 2022, members of the Committee received two training sessions on best practice for budget scrutiny, delivered by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and the Local Government Association respectively. The Committee also received a briefing from the Council's Section 151 Officer on the key budget principles and the approach to setting the budget prior to the meeting on 29 November 2022.
- 2.3. At the Scrutiny & Overview Committee on 6 December 2022, consideration was given to the 2023-24 Budget and the Three Year Medium Term Financial Strategy report. From its discussion of the information provided, the Committee identified a number of areas for further investigation, including reviewing the support provided by the Council to the voluntary & community sector and a deep dive on transformation projects to provide reassurance that a robust framework was in place for these projects and that they were properly resourced.
- 2.4. The Scrutiny & Overview Committee met again on 30 January 2023, to receive these reports on Transformation Project Deep Dives, and Voluntary Community & Faith Sector Support. The Committee welcomed confirmation from both the Council and Croydon Voluntary Action of their commitment to building a deeper relationship

between the Council and the voluntary, community, and faith sector in the borough. However, serious concern was raised about whether new ways of working would be in place in time to support organisations with the transition away from the Community Fund when it ended in March 2023. In conclusion, the Committee stressed that tangible support plans needed to be a priority and treated with urgency to prevent the risk to services and activities being lost.

- 2.5. On the Transformation item, the Committee concluded it would like to see further evidence of the transformation programmes being mapped out with key milestones and timelines, once available. For example, the two projects reviewed by the Committee were still in their infancy and in the process of being mapped out. This meant that any assurance on these projects would need to be reserved until further information was available. Given the urgent and important role transformation needs to play in helping turn the Council around, more work needs to be done to create concrete delivery plans behind the aspirations.
- 2.6. The Committee welcomed confirmation that the Programme Management Office was leading a project to introduce a new project management system, as it was agreed that improved reporting was essential to ensuring there was a robust system in place to monitor the various transformation projects. Members were also supportive of the decision not to include savings targets, attributed to the transformation projects in the 30 November 2022 Cabinet report, in the 2023-24 budget unless it was clear how they would be delivered in the next year.
- 2.7. The four scrutiny Sub-Committees (Children & Young People, Health & Social Care, Streets & Environment, and Homes) each met with the respective Cabinet Members and Corporate Directors for their relevant remits to identify key areas of risk to review at their meetings in January/February 2023. The areas scrutinised were:-

Meeting	Budget Challenge Items
Scrutiny & Overview Committee Link to Committee papers: Tuesday, 6th December, 2022	2023-24 Budget Update, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Savings Proposals
Children & Young People Sub-Committee Link to Sub-Committee papers: Tuesday, 17th January, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The review of care packages for children with disabilities aged 0-17 • The impact of the reduction in spend on the adolescent service • Impact of the review of the Front Door and practices
Health & Social Care Sub-Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2022/23 Period 7 (October 2022) budget and savings position.

Meeting	Budget Challenge Items
Link to Sub-Committee papers: Tuesday, 24th January, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023/24 indicative savings (as of 10 January 2023). • The Council's position in relation to the benchmarked key performance indicators.
Scrutiny & Overview Committee Link to Committee papers: Monday, 30th January, 2023	Voluntary, Community & Faith Sector Support Transformation Project Deep Dives
Streets & Environment Sub-Committee Link to Sub-Committee papers: Tuesday, 31st January, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking Services (including information on the Parking Policy review) • Planning Service (including information on the Planning Transformation programme) • Building Control (including a short update on the Building Control transformation programme)
Homes Sub-Committee Link to Sub-Committee papers: Monday, 6th February, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Revenue Account P7 outturn position. • Housing Revenue Account Business Plan key headlines. • Housing General Fund budget. • Housing General Fund P7 outturn position.

- 2.7. The Chairs of the Sub-Committees reported the findings from their respective budget challenge items to the main Committee at the meeting on 16 February 2023. From the feedback provided there was a reasonable level of assurance given the respective Cabinet Members and officers had a good understanding of their budgets and the potential risks to delivery. There was a reoccurring concern across the Sub-Committees about the capacity of the organisation to deliver the level of transformation planned in services, which was exacerbated by the challenges with recruiting and retaining staff. Reassurance was that this had been acknowledged and assurance was given that capacity restraints had been calculated into the process.
- 2.8. The Chairs of Children & Young People Sub-Committee and the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee advised that they had been reasonably reassured following their budget sessions, that that the services had a firm handle on their budgets and

would be able to deliver the proposed savings without significantly increasing the potential risk to the safety of service users.

- 2.9. The Chair of the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee provided further reassurance, highlighting that the Council has benefitted from a good working relationship with Croydon Health Service NHS Trust, which meant that many of the challenges facing other councils and local NHS hospital trusts such as bed blocking or long waits for operations were not such a threat locally. That said, threats to Croydon remain, especially workforce issues within the health and care system, with a sustainable workforce plan needed.
- 2.10. A full summary of the conclusions reached by the Scrutiny Sub-Committees, along with those from earlier budget scrutiny items considered by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee can be found attached at Appendix A.
- 2.11. As it was known that the report on the Administration's budget would not be available until 14 February 2023 (two days before the Committee meeting) a briefing was arranged for the Committee members with the Section 151 Officer on 15 February to provide an overview of the budget and answer questions arising from the Committee. The Committee appreciates the difficulty of circulating a budget before hearing from third parties about settlements, but it was emphasised that in future the chance to at least look at drafts would help the Scrutiny process do a better job.
- 2.12. On 15 February 2023 the Committee held an online Question and Answer session for members of the public, which gave residents the opportunity to question the budget proposals. The purpose of this session was to allow the Committee to learn about the main concerns of the public on the proposed budget, which could then be used to inform the questions of the Committee at its Budget Scrutiny meeting on 16 February 2023. From the session with the public the following common themes were noted: -
- Why was a 15% Council Tax increase being proposed and how had the Council been allowed to make the increase without the normal requirement for a referendum on increases above 5%?
 - Why should the residents of Croydon have to pay to rectify the mistakes of others?
 - What was being done to hold those responsible to account?
 - What support would be available for those unable to afford the increased payments, with concern about the use of enforcement.
- 2.13. The Committee would like to give its thanks to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Jason Cummings and the Corporate Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Jane West, for giving up their time to attend this meeting and answer the public's questions.

- 2.14. The final meeting in the budget scrutiny cycle was held on 16 February 2023. At this meeting, the Committee considered the budget report presented before Cabinet to finalise its conclusions on what was proposed. The conclusions of the Committee are set out in the next section of this report.

3. CONCLUSIONS OF THE SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET 2023-24 PROPOSALS

- 3.1. At the meeting on 16 February 2023, the Committee had the opportunity to question Croydon's Mayor, Jason Perry, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Jason Cummings, the Chief Executive, the Corporate Director for Resources and other Members of the Corporate Management Team on the Mayor's budget proposals. The questioning of the Committee focused on five key themes, which were the Council Tax increase, Debt, Risks, Savings & Safety and Transformation. From its questioning, the Committee was looking to reach a conclusion on the following areas:
1. Are the savings deliverable, sustainable and an acceptable level of risk?
 2. Is the impact on service users and the wider community understood?
 3. Have all reasonable alternative options been explored and do no better options exist?
- 3.2. From its consideration of the budget there was a consensus that in the short term, the proposed budget for next year had been based on prudent assumptions, that it was conservative with a small "c" and from the information provided, it was reasonable to conclude that it was deliverable. It was agreed that it could be taken as a positive example of the changing culture of the Council, that its development had been based upon a worst case scenario approach, rather than being planned with an optimism bias of delivery. The Committee noted that there are still outstanding issues that might present a significant risk to the delivery of the budget for next year, particularly the three years of outstanding accounts.
- 3.3. The Committee was reasonably reassured that the budget proposed was safe and that there were sufficient controls within the Adult and Children's services to mitigate as far as possible any potential risk to service users. It was accepted that there would always be a certain level of risk within these services that required active monitoring and management on an ongoing basis.
- 3.4. The biggest risk to 2023-24 budget at the time of the meeting was that the Government had not given any indication on whether it would be granting the Council's request for capitalisation. Given the Council has a statutory deadline of 11 March 2023 by which it must have agreed its budget, it was far from ideal that there had not been any indication received from Government on the outcome, particularly as this would determine the Council's ability to set a balanced budget for 2023-24. It was appreciated that further assurance on this could not be provided by those present and this was the reason why the Committee had extended an invite for a representative from the Department of Levelling-up, Homes and Communities to attend the meeting, which had disappointingly not been taken up.

- 3.5. Although it was concluded that the proposed budget was built on coherent and sensible assumptions that built in contingencies for risks over the next year, concerns were acknowledged about the Council's long term debt problem and its sustainability as a local authority, which could not be solved by this budget or by the Council alone. Key to this was the Government's response to the request to write-off part of the Council's debt, as without this being agreed the cost of servicing the debt placed an unsustainable burden on the general fund revenue budget. The reassurance given by the Mayor that both the political and officer leadership of the Council were actively engaging with Government on this issue was welcomed. However, given it was acknowledged that there was currently no legal framework for writing off local authority debt and no indication had been given that it would be permitted, the debt would remain a serious risk to the long-term health of the Council and its ability to become financially sustainable.
- 3.6. One of the main areas of discussion for the Committee was the proposed 15% Council Tax increase. Half the members of the Committee, including the Chair, had outstanding concerns about whether increasing Council tax by the full 15% was the only option, especially when other local authorities given permission to exceed the Council Tax cap would not be setting rates this high. It was accepted that some increase in Council Tax may well be needed to help the Council balance its budget, but some members of the Committee did not feel that the report presented sufficient justification as to why it had to be 15%.
- 3.7. The other half of the members of the Committee felt that they had been presented with reasonable justification for the proposed increase and that given the circumstances facing the Council there were no other viable alternatives.
- 3.8. Given the Council had only received confirmation from the Government that it would be allowed to make a 15% increase to Council Tax on 6 February 2023, it was accepted that there had been little time to engage with residents on the increase. However, it needed to be acknowledged that the proposed increase would have significant financial consequences for Croydon residents already struggling in a cost of living crisis and that they may feel unfairly punished for past mistakes that were not theirs.
- 3.9. As there had only been a short period of time to analyse the impact from the proposed 15% Council Tax increase, the Committee concluded that further analysis was urgently needed to understand the potential scale of this impact. It was also suggested that some mention of an increase in Council Tax could have been mentioned in the Council's formal survey given it was one of the options being considered. Residents from Scrutiny's public Q&A repeatedly stressed that they felt their views had not been taken into account.
- 3.10. As the criteria for the £2m Hardship Fund, that was being introduced to mitigate against the potential impact of the Council Tax rise, was in development, the Committee welcomed confirmation that there would be an opportunity for it to review the proposed scheme before it is launched to gain reassurance that it would be able to reach the residents who needed it the most. Confirmation from the Cabinet

Member for Finance that the scheme would continue to be closely monitored and reviewed to ensure it was targeted correctly was welcomed.

- 3.11. It was highlighted that some of the residents who would most need to access the Hardship Fund could also be the hardest to reach. As such careful consideration needed to be given as to how the availability of the fund was communicated to residents and the routes to access the fund needed to be made as straightforward as possible, with a preference towards automatic entitlement rather than the need to go through applications.
- 3.12. In reaching the above conclusions on the proposed budget, the Committee would like to highlight that their views have been based upon the assumptions set out in the Cabinet report, including that there would be a positive outcome to the Council's request for capitalisation from the Government. The Committee would ask for the opportunity to revisit its recommendations should the Government's response significantly vary from the assumptions made in the budget report.

4 APPENDICES

- 4.1. Appendix A: Conclusions from Previous Budget Scrutiny items considered by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee & Sub-Committees

5 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 5.1. None

Appendix A

Scrutiny & Overview Committee

16th February 2023

Budget Scrutiny 2023-24: Conclusions from Previous Budget Scrutiny items considered by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee & Sub-Committees

Scrutiny & Overview Committee – 6 December 2022

2023-24 Budget Update, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Savings Proposals

1. The Committee was highly concerned that the Council had the potential to become stuck in a 'debt trap' and agreed that it endorsed the efforts of the political and administrative leadership in focussing on reducing the Council's debt with support from national government, as without support in this area it was difficult to envision how the Council could become a sustainable authority in the long term.
2. The Committee was concerned that this year's budget was being drafted on a series of Microsoft Word and Excel documents, and strongly welcomed the Council's intention to move towards a more professional system of budget recording next year, which it believes is imperative.
3. The Committee noted that work continued towards the integration of the full range of functionality within the Fusion finance system, to ensure it was delivering the maximum benefit for the Council.
4. The Committee wanted to see more detail about the transformation projects proposed, as the projects listed often felt more like 'salami slicing' rather than true transformation. The Committee also wanted more reassurance that the Council would be able to meet the scale of transformation needed to achieve financial sustainability with the capacity constraints that it currently has.
5. The Committee agreed that it would look in further detail at one or two of transformation projects proposed in the Cabinet report, at its January meeting to provide reassurance that a robust framework was in place for these projects including ensure they were properly resourced and at their conclusion could provide a definitive evaluation of their success.
6. Although the Committee accepted the rationale for and the explanation of the timeline leading up to the Section 151 Officer issuing the Section 114 notice for 2023-24 budget year, some Members of the Committee felt there could have been additional emphasis placed on highlighting the potential risk of the Council needing to issue another Section 114 earlier in the year as contributory risks materialised.
7. The Committee welcomed confirmation that the Council would be engaging with the Audit Reporting and Governance Authority to provide reassurance that the Council was taking a best practice approach to its financial processes.

8. The Committee also welcomed confirmation that the Council had started to engage with London Councils on using London-wide data to inform modelling of future parking income.

Scrutiny & Overview Committee – 30 January 2023

Voluntary, Community & Faith Sector Support

1. The Committee welcomed confirmation from both the Council and Croydon Voluntary Action of their commitment to building a deeper relationship between the Council and the important voluntary, community and faith sector in our borough.
2. There were serious concerns flagged about the risk that the new ways of working with the voluntary, community and faith sector would be in place in time to support some of the organisations with the transition away from the funding provided by the Community Fund when it ended in March 2023. Given the risk that some community groups may not be able to adapt to the new arrangements in time, the need to implement tangible support plans needed to be a priority and treated with urgency to prevent the risk to services and activities being lost.
3. The Committee welcomed the commitment to looking at creative ways of providing support to the sector, particularly reviewing the use of social value in contract arrangements.

Transformation Project Deep Dives

1. It was accepted that the two projects reviewed by the Committee were still in their infancy and in the process of being mapped out. This meant that any assurance on these projects would need to be reserved until further information was available.
2. The Committee would like to see further evidence of the transformation programmes being mapped out with key milestones and time lines, once available. This will provide reassurance that processes are being followed and enable the Committee to hold people to account through timetabling further scrutiny at the appropriate time.
3. The Committee welcomed confirmation that work was underway to map out the Council's contracts, as this was an area of work that had previously been flagged as a concern by Scrutiny.
4. Confirmation that that the Programme Management Office was leading a project to introduce a new project management system was welcomed, as improved reporting was essential to ensuring there was a robust monitoring system in place.
5. Confirmation was welcomed that the savings targets attributed to the transformation projects in the 7 December 2022 Cabinet report had not been included the 2023-24 budget unless it was clear how it would be delivered.
6. It was agreed that a range of intended outcomes for the transformation projects, beyond purely financial savings, needed to be set out during the mapping phase of each project to ensure clarity of purpose.

Children & Young People Sub-Committee – 17th January 2023

Budget Scrutiny Challenge

1. The Sub-Committee were reassured by the answers provided by officers during the meeting.
2. The Sub-Committee welcomed the possibility of a transformation project looking at expanding the offer at Calleydown Residential Home.
3. The Sub-Committee acknowledged the demand led nature of the services provided by the Children, Young People and Education Directorate and were reassured that officers were managing this well with the information that was available.
4. The Sub-Committee were encouraged by the work being done in the three areas that had been presented but acknowledged that services were in new territory as recovery from COVID continued.
5. The Sub-Committee were hopeful that the departments succeeded in delivering the budget and intended savings for 2022/23 and 2023/24 and were encouraged that this was on track from the discussion in the meeting.

Health & Social Care Sub-Committee – 24 January 2023

Adult Social Care & Health Directorate - Budget & Performance

1. The Sub-Committee were of the view that the Adult Social Care and Health directorate were in a reasonably strong position in managing its budget.
2. The Sub-Committee were of the view that the Corporate Director for Adult Social Care and Health had a good understanding of the risks involved in delivering the 2022/23 and 2023/24 budgets.
3. The Sub-Committee were confident that the Adult Social Care department were on track to deliver the 2022/23 budget.
4. The Sub-Committee were of the view that, as discussions on other options were ongoing, they could not reach a view on whether better options for savings existed.
5. The Sub-Committee were of the view that the Cabinet Member and department understood the impact of savings proposals on service users and the wider community.
6. The Sub-Committee were of the view that proposed budget for 2023/24 appeared to be deliverable, sustainable and did not present an unacceptable risk.

Streets & Environment Sub-Committee – 30th January 2023

Budget Scrutiny Challenge

1. The Sub-Committee thanked officers for the detailed report and responses to Members questions in the meeting.
2. The Sub-Committee acknowledged that adequate staffing and resourcing in all three department areas covered in the report was vital to ensure that there was sufficient capacity to deliver transformation plans alongside statutory duties.
3. The Sub-Committee were of the view that officers and Cabinet Members had a good understanding the risks in delivering the 2023/24 budget and that sufficient mitigations and risk management was in place.
4. The Sub-Committee acknowledged that difficulty in recruiting to posts across all three service areas impacted on service delivery.
5. The Sub-Committee were of the view that they would like to scrutinise how fee income targets were calculated at a future meeting.

Homes Sub-Committee – 6 February 2023

Update on the Housing Revenue Account and Housing General Fund Budget

The conclusions of the Homes Sub-Committee were reported to the Scrutiny & Overview Committee during the meeting on 16 February 2023.

Homes Sub-Committee meeting on 6 February 2023

1. The Sub-Committee concluded that there was insufficient budgetary detail provided in the report to enable it to reach a decision on whether it was reassured on the deliverability of the budget.
2. As such, it was agreed that a briefing would be arranged for the Sub-Committee to seek further assurance on the budget. The outcome from this session would be reported to the Scrutiny & Overview Committee on 16 February 2023, to inform its consideration of the wider Council budget.

Briefing – 14 February 2023

3. Although it was noted that there was a current overspend of £4.6m the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) revenue budget, the Sub-Committee agreed that the Service had a good understanding of the reasons for this, which included rising utility costs, increased in legal disrepair costs and void rents.
4. Due to the work on the HRA recharging issue the revenue budget was likely to be balanced at the year end. However, without the recharge correction, it was reasonable to assume that reserves would have been used to cover the overspend. As the current level of reserves held for the HRA are healthy, this could have been managed as a one-off.
5. The Sub-Committee was reassured that most of the above causes of the overspend had been incorporated within the HRA revenue budget over the three year period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, but there was a concern about the possibly optimistic assumption made for inflation on expenditure from April 2023 being set at 8% and at 3% from April 2024, given current levels of inflation exceeded 10%.
6. The Sub-Committee recognised that a significant amount of work had been invested in understanding the full scale of the issues related to the historic recharging to the HRA and the Sub-Committee understood the reasons for the readjustment included rightsizing corporate costs. However, further work was required to ensure that costs had been properly recharged from individual services' service level agreements, with a further update requested by the Sub-Committee on this work.
7. The Sub-Committee accepted that the future budgets presented to them adequately accounted for the future needs of the service, including the planned transformation work. However, there remained a concern about whether there was sufficient capacity within the Service to deliver the scale of transformation planned.

8. The Sub-Committee accepted that while not ideal, the current HRA Business Plan including its capital programme was based on a 5% sample of housing stock as an initial starting point and focussed on clear priorities such as buildings at the end of life, large panel systems and large scale disrepair. Confirmation was welcomed that going forward the Business Plan would be informed by an ongoing programme of stock condition surveys.
9. The Sub-Committee welcomed the approach not to pursue further borrowing over the next couple of years, considering the healthy reserve balance. It was also reassured that the future capital programme included a healthy budget to manage the upcoming legislative building safety changes.
10. The Sub-Committee questioned whether, considering the rising cost of utilities, further resources could have been allocated to the Net Zero workstream beyond the £1m allocated in the capital budget.
11. The Sub-Committee recognised that Housing General Fund activities, mainly homelessness and temporary accommodation services faced significant challenges with demand outweighing supply.
12. The Sub-Committee noted that the Council had been facing a significant reduction in its Homelessness Prevention Grant, but following lobbying from London Councils, this decision had been reversed and an additional winter pressures grant provided, which had helped to minimise the overspend for these services.
13. The Homelessness Prevention Grant was below the needs of the Council and as the Winter Pressures Grant was a one-off, it was agreed that the Council should continue to lobby Government for additional support to manage the homelessness pressures in the borough.
14. The Sub-Committee recognised the placement by other boroughs of people in to temporary accommodation in Croydon created a significant cost pressure for the Council and welcomed confirmation that the Council was actively engaging with these authorities to manage this issue.
15. The Sub-Committee welcomed the strand of the Transformation Programme which aimed to refocus the Service towards homelessness prevention, as this would help to reduce expenditure on temporary accommodation. However, due to the wider issue of poor quality data in the service, which was being addressed, it was recognised that some of the assumptions could not be more robust.
16. The Sub-Committee welcomed confirmation of one-off Public Health funding to allow the service to take a more holistic approach to alcohol and substance abuse issues. Confirmation of a Government grant to support the Council to meet its statutory duties towards domestic abuse victims was also welcomed, particularly as Croydon had one of the highest levels of domestic abuse in London.

