

Agenda Annex

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – 4TH SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE MEETING

1. HELPING VULNERABLE RESIDENTS IMPACTED BY CHANGES TO WINTER FUEL PAYMENT ELIGIBILITY

RESOLVED: That:-

this Council notes:-

- (a) the announcement by the new Government to end universal Winter Fuel Payments and restrict eligibility to those in receipt of Pension Credits or other benefits;
- (b) that under the new policy, only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 per week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for Pension Credits, significantly lower than the Living Wage rate;
- (c) that only 63% of families entitled to Pension Credits claim them, meaning the 800,000 households across the country missing out on this payment will now also not receive Winter Fuel Payments;
- (d) that data from the Department of Work and Pensions indicates almost 75,000 pensioners in Sheffield will lose access to Winter Fuel Payments under the revised policy;
- (e) that the Energy Price Cap will rise by 10% in October;
- (f) that the 12-month Cost of Living In-Person Support pilot scheme in the South Local Area Committee (LAC), designed to support the most vulnerable, is projected by October 2024 to generate £93,814 in additional income and savings for residents, through helping them claim benefits they are entitled to or reductions in their bills;

this Council believes that:-

- (g) universal Winter Fuel Payments of up to £300 have been an essential support to pensioners;
- (h) the ending of universal Winter Fuel Payments combined with the increased Energy Price Cap will push thousands of pensioners into fuel poverty, including in Sheffield;

- (i) the threshold at which pensioners do not qualify has been set too low and many on lower and middle incomes will now not receive the payments;
- (j) it is important to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credits, to ensure people access the support they are entitled to;
- (k) projects like the Cost of Living In-Person Support pilot in the South LAC are demonstrable success stories in placing money in residents' pockets;
- (l) we desperately need the Government to act urgently on home insulation schemes to keep people safe, warm and out of poverty, and instead of cutting the Winter Fuel Allowance, it would make more sense to give pensioners the option to use it to help finance the installation of insulation measures and solar panels to reduce their energy bills permanently;

this Council resolves to:-

- (m) request the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider building on the success of the South LAC Cost of Living In-Person Support pilot scheme by requesting officers bring a proposal to the Committee on introducing a similar scheme that covers the whole of Sheffield;
- (n) also request the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider commissioning other relevant services to urgently commence an awareness campaign to maximise uptake of Pension Credits; and
- (o) request group leaders sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.

2. CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ON MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

RESOLVED: That this Council:-

- (a) condemns the organised racist and Islamophobic violence by far-right rioters in many towns and cities in England;
- (b) recalls that it resolved on 5 July 2023 to reaffirm our status as a City of Sanctuary;
- (c) notes that in 2023, 84,425 individuals made asylum applications in the UK;
- (d) believes the divisive rhetoric of some politicians, media, and misinformation on social media sites has fuelled the recent violence and the 'Stop the Boats' narrative has contributed to division and has helped further stigmatise migrants and asylum seekers;

- (e) notes comments by Dame Sara Khan, former independent adviser for social cohesion and resilience, that successive governments have failed the British people and left local authorities struggling to deal with consistent extremist challenges;
- (f) notes the fear of violence and intimidation terrified many people of colour, especially women, and made people feel unsafe in their home city;
- (g) acknowledges that the threat of serious violence impacted negatively on businesses in the local economy;
- (h) recognises that migrants have always contributed to our society as workers, taxpayers and citizens and that segregation of asylum-seekers into different systems for homelessness, destitution and work creates further division and lack of cohesion in society;
- (i) believes that asylum seekers should have the right to work if they have been waiting for a decision for more than three months, enabling them to support themselves economically and socially through community integration;
- (j) welcomes the scrapping of the Rwanda deportation scheme and Bibby Stockholm barge, and also thanks the police and Crown Prosecution Service for pursuing rightful convictions and for the local press for reporting on the sentences;
- (k) thanks the people of Sheffield who came out to show their support for a modern Britain, with a determination to stand against violence, intimidation and racism;
- (l) believes that the majority of people in Sheffield want an asylum system that is fair, well managed and humane; and
- (m) resolves to ask the Chief Executive to write to the Prime Minister with a copy of this motion and to ask him to consider implementing the recommendations of the Khan Review of social cohesion.

3. UNITY AGAINST HATE

RESOLVED: That this Council:-

- (a) believes that our diversity is our greatest strength;
- (b) is proud that Sheffield is a welcoming city for people seeking asylum and is proud that we are a City of Sanctuary;

- (c) believes that the violence we saw across the country, and in South Yorkshire, last month was not protest, but far-right hate;
- (d) condemns those who tried to divide us by targeting asylum seekers, Muslims and minority communities and condemns everyone who engaged in criminal acts of violence and hate on the streets and online;
- (e) believes that racism and Islamophobia hurts all communities and creates fear and pain;
- (f) will not tolerate attacks on mosques or on Muslim communities;
- (g) is proud of the citywide response to the violence and records its appreciation and thanks to:-
 - (i) the people of Sheffield who came together in a spirit of unity and compassion to reject racism and hate;
 - (ii) Sheffield City Council staff for their hard work to support communities and particularly notes the work of Local Area Committee staff to coordinate the response;
 - (iii) the voluntary, community, social enterprise and faith sector for their work to protect and reassure communities;
 - (iv) South Yorkshire Police for their work to protect and support local communities, and sends its best wishes to all officers who were injured in the line of duty; and
 - (v) the criminal justice system for taking swift action against those who broke the law;
- (h) believes that community cohesion can be further achieved by allowing asylum seekers to work, and so integrate themselves into their communities and support the local economy;
- (i) believes that the Council's work to reassure and engage with communities has highlighted excellent practice and partnership working, and further believes that learning from the past month should be captured to develop the Council's community engagement and partnership work and to develop and strengthen our work on promoting community cohesion;
- (j) believes the divisive rhetoric of some mainstream politicians and media has fuelled the recent violence and the 'Stop the Boats' narrative has contributed to division;
- (k) notes comments by Dame Sara Khan, former independent adviser for social cohesion and resilience, that successive governments have failed the British people and left local authorities struggling to deal with consistent extremist challenges;

- (l) recognises that migrants have always contributed to our society and that segregation of asylum-seekers into different systems for homelessness, destitution and work creates further division;
- (m) resolves to ask the Chief Executive to write to the Prime Minister with a copy of this motion and to ask him to consider implementing the recommendations of the Khan Review;
- (n) resolves to encourage every Sheffield elected member to work to ensure that dialogue around migration is not framed negatively, instead highlighting the human and ethical aspects, and the many positive economic and cultural benefits, of migration;
- (o) believes that councillors should speak against racist/Islamophobic rhetoric and actions of affiliated party members or party leaders; and
- (p) resolves to continue to:-
 - (i) celebrate our diversity and to stand firm against all forms of racism and Islamophobia, discrimination, and violence; and
 - (ii) support our communities, promote unity and ensure that Sheffield remains a welcoming city.

4. SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S PLAY AND PLAYWORK THROUGH A JOINED-UP STRATEGY FOR ALL AGES

RESOLVED: That:-

this Council:-

- (a) notes the well-documented benefits of play, particularly outdoor play, for children's physical, mental, social, and emotional development;
- (b) believes that play is a vital component of childhood, promoting creativity, resilience, problem-solving, and social interaction;
- (c) notes that policies such as the two-child limit on benefits keep hundreds of thousands of children in poverty with significant impact on their mental and physical health;
- (d) notes that the Household Support Fund has helped tens of thousands of families in Sheffield such as through Free School Meal vouchers in the school holidays and is a vital safety net for the most vulnerable families;

- (e) welcomes the Government's decision to extend the Household Support fund for six months, and hopes this vital support will be made permanent, as it is essential to provide children with the foundations on which they can further their development through education and play;
- (f) supports the Liberal Democrat manifesto promise to put a dedicated mental health professional in every primary and secondary school, providing support for all young people;
- (g) supports the essential role of qualified playworkers with knowledge of the Playwork Principles, creating safe environments for children to engage in self-directed, spontaneous play and allowing them the freedom to take risks and learn through their own experiences;
- (h) notes the profound impact of austerity measures and the COVID-19 pandemic on play opportunities and playwork services, with the reduction in funding for community services leading to the closure of vital play spaces and limited access to qualified playworkers, resulting in a diminished play experience for many children;
- (i) believes that despite these challenges, Sheffield City Council has demonstrated its commitment to providing play settings through initiatives such as Pounds Park and ongoing improvements to parks and green spaces across the city, helping to restore much-needed play opportunities for children of all ages;
- (j) believes that free-to-use, open play spaces are genuine improvements to parks and green spaces and the Council should take every opportunity to prioritise inclusive, free and open play spaces to increase play opportunities for children;
- (k) notes the invaluable role of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCF) in supporting play and playwork across the city, with organisations such as Pitsmoor Adventure Playground, Sharrow Community Forum, and Manor After School Kids Klub (MASKK), forming part of the Sheffield Play Partnership, being instrumental in delivering play services;
- (l) believes that the successful joint working between the Play Partnership, the VCF and the Council is pivotal in promoting play and playwork across the city to help work towards sustainable play opportunities for children;

this Council resolves to:-

- (m) welcome and endorse the ongoing joint efforts between Sheffield City Council and the Sheffield Play Partnership to play and playwork for the city's children;
- (n) call on the Council's Education, Children and Families Policy Committee, and the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee to consider working together to develop a joined-up strategy for play and playwork within the Council's Belonging Framework;

- (o) ask the Chief Executive to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with a copy of this motion, calling for the abolishment of the two-child benefit cap and for a permanent provision of the Household Support Fund;

this Council commits to:-

- (p) building upon the excellent work currently taking place in family hubs, community youth services, and through the support of VCF organisations;
- (q) ensuring that there is comprehensive support for children of all ages, from 0 to 18 years (or 25 years for those with SEND), with particular attention to the gap in services for children aged 5-10, who often fall between early years and youth services provision; and
- (r) creating inclusive, high-quality play opportunities in communities and ensuring that Sheffield is a child friendly city where children can play and travel safely to and from school.

5. REQUESTING THE GOVERNMENT TO SCRAP THE TWO-CHILD BENEFIT CAP

RESOLVED: That this Council:-

- (a) notes that:-
 - (i) children who grow up in poverty are less likely to attain higher education, while more likely to experience mental health issues, and worse employment prospects later in life;
 - (ii) a recent report by the Commons Education Committee shows mental health and cost-of-living pressures on families are among the causes for increased students' absence in schools;
 - (iii) according to the Child Poverty Action Group, 250,000 children would be immediately lifted out of poverty if the policy preventing parents from receiving Universal Credit or Tax Credits for more than two children is removed;
 - (iv) the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has reported that in the next year, 250,000 more children will likely be affected by the policy, and by the end of the next Parliament, an extra 670,000 children will likely be affected;
 - (v) the upfront cost of removing the two-child limit will be approximately £3.4 billion a year in the financial year 2024/25 according to the IFS, which amounts to roughly 3% of the total working-age benefit budget;

- (vi) Muslim and Jewish communities may be disproportionately impacted by the two-child limit policy more than other faith groups; and
- (vii) not a single Labour MP from Sheffield voted to support an amendment to the recent King's Speech which would have removed the two-child benefit limit to Universal Credit;
- (b) believes that it has a moral duty to advocate for families in need, and pressure the Government to pursue welfare policies that alleviate poverty and the causes of poverty;
- (c) also believes that further research is needed into potential savings on the long-term costs of removing the two-child limit, which the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggests may reduce as overall life outcomes improve;
- (d) recognises that the two-child limit for Universal Credit and Tax Credits stops working-class families from claiming benefits for more than two children, despite the clear need in the current economic crisis;
- (e) further recognises that families affected by the cap miss out on £3,455 annually for every child affected; and that the policy has been widely regarded as a key cause of child poverty;
- (f) believes that Sheffield's Labour MPs should have voted to remove the 2-child benefit limit, against the Prime Minister's direction;
- (g) opposes the two-child limit for Universal Credit and Tax Credits; and
- (h) requests that the Chief Executive submits this Council's resolution to the Prime Minister.