

# SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

## Housing Policy Committee

### Meeting held 19 September 2024

**PRESENT:** Councillors Douglas Johnson (Chair), Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), Alison Norris (Group Spokesperson), Mike Chaplin, Mark Jones, Gail Smith, Paul Turpin, Alan Woodcock and Karen McGowan (Substitute Member)

#### **16. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

16.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mia Drazaic. Councillor Karen McGowan attended the meeting as her substitute.

#### **17. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

17.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public.

#### **18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

18.1 No declarations of interest were received.

#### **19. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

19.1 The minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 were approved as a correct record.

#### **20. PUBLIC PETITIONS, QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS**

A petition had been received from the Hanover Tenants Association. Mr Andrew Woodhead attended the meeting and presented the petition:

The Committee of the Hanover Tenants Association are of the opinion that the current level of the Tenants' Levy which has remained unchanged for over 15 years is not sufficient to sustain any TARA and if the Council really wish to support grass roots community groups we ask that consideration is given to raising the levy level from 10 pence per week to 20 pence per week. No other organisation in the City has been expected to operate on the same budget for 15 years. We would ask that this be given serious consideration.

The Chair thanked the petitioner for attending and explained that all members of the Committee recognise the valuable work that Tenant and Residents Associations do in supporting their communities and the value they add to the people living in their neighbourhoods.

The Tenant Levy is a unique arrangement offering tenants in the city an opportunity to contribute to their local Tenant and Residents Association. I am not

aware of any other housing provider in the country who operates a levy system to fund their TARAs. Most organisations provide an annual revenue grant of between £200 and £500 to cover the TARA running costs and then support tenant associations to access other third-party grant funding. With that type of arrangement, the amount of grant funding would be something under the control of the Council.

The levy is more complex. It's a membership payment from the individual tenant to their TARA which is collected by the Council on behalf of all TARAs. Therefore, the decision on the amount of that levy is one that really rests with the tenants.

On that basis, with Committee approval, I would request that Officers undertake a wide-ranging consultation with tenants to consider whether there should be any changes to the current levy amount and collection arrangements. As part of that consultation, we will ask tenants their views on increasing the levy to 20p per week as you suggest. The Council does also incur a range of costs in collecting and administering the levy so I will also ask Officers to consider proposals for saving Housing Revenue Account funds by implementing more efficient processes.

I will request that Officers to bring back the results of this consultation exercise and review of the Tenant Levy to our January meeting and a report will be added to the Committee's Forward Plan for that date.

20.2 The following questions were submitted by Jamie Hicks. Mr Hicks did not attend the meeting.

1. **\*\*Training and Awareness:\*\***

- What training do Sheffield City Council staff receive on handling tenants with mental health issues?
- Are there specific protocols for cases involving tenants with mental health conditions?

2. **\*\*Eviction Procedures:\*\***

- What are the procedures for evicting tenants, especially those with diagnosed mental health conditions?
- How does the council ensure that evictions are conducted legally and ethically?

3. **\*\*Benefit Transition and Support:\*\***

- What is the process for transitioning individuals from ESA old-style support group to Universal Credit, according to the Universal Credit Transitional Amendments Provision Regulation 2022?
- Why was I required to claim Universal Credit without receiving a transitional letter from the DWP?

4. **\*\*Housing Benefit Issues:\*\***

- Why was I refused housing benefit despite being eligible and paying rent from an income of £130 per week?
- What steps can be taken to rectify this refusal and provide proper assistance?

5. **\*\*Communication and Support:\*\***

- What are the standard response times for inquiries and complaints made to Sheffield City Council, particularly in urgent cases involving vulnerable individuals?
- How does the council ensure timely and effective communication?

6. **\*\*Mental Health and Social Care Coordination:\*\***

- How does the council coordinate with mental health services and social care to support tenants with mental health issues?
- What steps are taken to ensure continuity of care and support during housing instability?

Response:

1. As part of the mandatory training for new starters, each officer will complete a Safeguarding Awareness training module, which covers issues including mental health.

2. The council has published a Rent Arrears Recovery Policy, which is available at [Sheffield City Council Rent Arrears Recovery Policy](#)

The rent arrears recovery policy addresses the needs of vulnerable tenants as follows:

“We will make every effort to identify vulnerable tenants and highlight how this may impact on their ability to manage their money and sustain a successful rent account. We will treat vulnerable tenants sensitively, and adapt our working practices where appropriate, to ensure they do not face any additional barriers when accessing our service. We will record vulnerable tenants on our systems, and use this information to ensure we tailor our service to their needs”

Any evictions of secure tenants follow required legal processes and are a final resort taken when all other options have been exhausted. The Council has to apply to the county court for a possession order and the court will only grant this if it considers it is reasonable to do so. The court must be fully satisfied that all due processes have been followed, and the tenant has had an opportunity to engage with the Council and avoid being evicted.

3. This process is the responsibility of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), not the Council, so they would need to be contacted to provide this information.

4. It would not be appropriate to comment on individual cases publicly through this Committee, although I understand written explanations have been given directly.

5. All complaints made to the Council should be acknowledged within 5 working days of receipt of the complaint. Stage 1 investigation responses should be completed within 10 working days of the acknowledgement letter and Stage 2 review complaints, within 20 working days of the acknowledgement letter. The full policy is available on the Council's website [Complain about a council service | Sheffield City Council](#)

However, where possible, will seek early resolution of a complaint within 5 working days – though this often depends on the complexity of the complaint.

All customers, especially those with vulnerabilities, should feel supported by Council Officers when making a complaint. When making a complaint, customers may record any accessibility or additional support requirements. Staff receive training of how to deal compassionately with vulnerable customers, including the consideration of what factors may be contributing to a customer's vulnerability.

6. Each tenant has a Neighbourhood Officer who is the point of contact for both tenants and other council officers and services.

Housing Services have dedicated teams that are part of the social care structures including Team Around the Person (TAP) and Adults Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), routes for bringing professionals together to support tenants with

their needs. The Sheffield Adults Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is a local arrangement to fulfil the duties and commitments made in the South Yorkshire Safeguarding Procedures. This brings together officers from different agencies working together to protect vulnerable adults from potential harm.

Tenants are given the opportunity to discuss any mental health, care or support need as part of their annual visit from their Neighbourhood Officer. The Tenancy Enforcement and Sustainment Team within the housing service provide training to mental health staff to ensure that they understand the role of the housing service. This ensures that mental health staff have the information and understanding they need to engage with the housing service when their service user's needs require this.

Where appropriate Officers are empowered to refer into the support structures to mitigate any impact on tenants during housing instability.

## **21. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

21.1 No questions were received from members.

## **22. WORK PROGRAMME**

22.1.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement on the Committee's Work Programme detailing all known, substantive agenda items for forthcoming meetings of the Committee, to enable this committee, other committees, officers, partners, and the public to plan their work with and for the Committee.

22.1.2 The Principal Democratic Services Officer noted the referral from the meeting of Council on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2024 regarding "building homes and better managing housing stock to deal with the housing emergency and improve lives of Sheffield citizens". The response of the committee was suggested as follows;

- (k) (i) to (iv) to be included in the Q2 performance report in December
- (l) will be picked up as part of the Net Zero Roadmap.
- (m) will be included in the 25/26 Business Plan narrative in December. A statement would form part of the section on new builds.

22.1.3 Members noted that the following items requested at the meeting of the committee on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 should be included in the work programme;

- Update on the impact of temporary accommodation
- Facilitated workshop on the pathway to net zero

22.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. That the Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed, including any additions and amendments identified in Part 1;
2. That consideration be given to the further additions or adjustments to the work programme presented at Part 2 of Appendix 1;
3. That Members give consideration to any further issues to be explored by

officers for inclusion in Part 2 of Appendix 1 of the next work programme report, for potential addition to the work programme; and that the referrals from Council and Local Area Committees (petition and resolutions) detailed in Section 2 of the report be noted and the proposed responses set out be agreed.

**22.3 Reasons for Decision**

22.3.1 To give the committee members an opportunity to consider the direction of the work programme, align it with their key priorities and create a manageable workload for the committee.

**22.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

22.4.1 None

**23. HOUSING POLICY COMMITTEE – 2024/25 THE YEAR AHEAD**

23.1.1 Members considered a report of the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services outlining a forward agenda for the Housing Policy Committee for the 2024/25 year, setting out the key steps this Committee needs to take to build on the progress made last year and to deliver the Council Plan. This includes the need to prioritise resources on Council Plan outcomes and become a community and customer focused organisation to deliver high quality services for the people of Sheffield and address the financial pressure facing the Council.

23.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. Notes the progress made in 2023/24, recognising the work of Elected Members, officers and partners to deliver against our objectives and support strong strategic foundations for the organisation.
2. Considered the key issues identified in section 3 of the report as part of our forward agenda for 2024/25.
3. Agrees to work across Policy Committees to ensure the opportunities and issues identified in section 3 are taken forward as part of the Council Plan in 2024/25.

**23.3 Reasons for Decision**

23.3.1 The recommendations support the continued strategic development of the organisation and will enable the delivery of our Council Plan by agreeing the key issues that this Committee needs to address in the 2024/25 year.

**23.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

23.4.1 Not to set out a forward agenda for 2024/25 – this was rejected because having agreed a new Council Plan, we need to set out for citizens the things we want to achieve in 2024/25.

**24. 2024/25 Q1 BUDGET MONITORING**

24.1.1 The Finance Manager presented a report that brought the Committee up to date

with the Council's General Fund revenue outturn position for 2024/25 as at quarter 1.

- 24.1.2 Members noted the increased housing benefit subsidy losses being incurred and suggested that the Chair write to the Minister for Housing on behalf of the committee. The letter would request an increase to the amount of money that the Council is able to recover via housing benefits in order to cover the cost of procuring supported accommodation and temporary homelessness accommodation solutions.

It was moved by Councillor Turpin and seconded by Councillor Smith that a new recommendation be added to this effect.

The amendment was put to the vote and carried.

(NOTE: The result of the vote was FOR – 9 Members; AGAINST – 0 Members; ABSTENTIONS – 0 Members)

- 24.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee: -
1. Notes the updated information on the 2024/25 Revenue Budget Outturn as described in this report including the detailed committee budget monitoring information and management actions provided.
  2. Agrees that the Chair write to the Government Minister for Housing to request that Housing Benefit payments made to residents cover the cost of providing them with Housing.

24.3 **Reasons for Decision**

- 24.3.1 To record formally changes to the Revenue Budget.

24.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

- 24.4.1 The Council is required to both set a balance budget and to ensure that in-year income and expenditure are balanced. No other alternatives were considered.

**25. 2024/25 Q1 PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

- 25.1.1 The committee considered a report of the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services providing an overview of housing and repairs performance for a range of services within its remit. The report covered the period up to quarter 1 2024/25 (April – June 2024). A detailed appendix report was included with comparative data against other landlords where available and regulatory performance. The report enabled the Committee to understand and comment on the performance delivery of housing and repairs services to both tenants and citizens.
- 25.1.2 It was requested that electrical testing data be added to the future performance reports.
- 25.1.3 Members requested that the formal thanks of the committee be recorded to all officers who had contributed to the improved performance of the service. It was

moved by Councillor Norris and seconded by Councillor Baker that this be added to the recommendations.

This was put to the vote and carried.

(NOTE: The result of the vote was FOR – 9 Members; AGAINST – 0 Members; ABSTENTIONS – 0 Members)

**25.2 RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. Notes the performance report update provided for quarter 1 2024/25 (April – June 2024)
2. Formally notes its thanks to all members of staff who have contributed to the improvements in performance across the service.

**25.3 Reasons for Decision**

25.3.1 The Housing Policy Committee has delegated authority to monitor the performance of Housing and Repairs services to ensure that:

- The service is delivering for tenants, and that tenant satisfaction is closely monitored
- Limited resources are maximised due to budgetary pressures
- The Council is delivering on corporate priorities

Performance information is shared with external organisations such as the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman for scrutiny.

**25.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

25.4.1 The Housing Policy Committee has delegated responsibility for the regular monitoring of data including performance and financial information, and the performance monitoring of Housing (public sector, private sector, and related functions) services. Therefore, no alternative options to the production of this report have been considered.

**26. CONTRACT PROCUREMENT – SECURITY SHUTTERING AND CLEAN & CLEAR**

26.1.1 Members considered a report of the Executive Director, Neighbourhood Services seeking approval to commission a contract with an external provider for Security Shuttering and Clean & Clearance Services of vacant properties for the Council.

26.1.2 During the discussion of the above item the Committee agreed, in accordance with Council Procedure Rules, that as the meeting was approaching the two hours and 30 minutes time limit, the meeting should be extended by a period of 30 minutes.

**26.2 RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. Approve the commissioning of Security Shuttering Services and Clean & Clearance services to vacant properties for a period of 4 years with an estimated value of up to £4,150,000, as set out in this report.

2. Notes the impact of the proposal set out in this report on the 2025/2026 business plan and future years, as set out in paragraph 7.2. This will need to be mitigated or included in future business planning.

### 26.3 **Reasons for Decision**

- 26.3.1 Preferred option – to commission the appropriate contract in the manner described in section 1 of this report. This will help enable the Council to continue to provide this key service. The commission of the contract will ensure the Council is operating in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and achieving best value in its procurement of the services.

### 26.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

- 26.4.1 Alternative Option 1: Do nothing - This is not an option as the Council has the ongoing requirement for shuttering and clean & clearance services and public procurement regulations dictate that we procure a compliant contract for the delivery of these services.
- 26.4.2 Alternative Option 2: Self-Deliver - this is not an option; the service has neither the capacity or expertise to deliver these goods and services without the assistance of an external service provider
- 26.4.3 Alternative Option 3: Further extend existing contract – this is not an option as all available contract extensions have been utilised. As ever, Council must adhere to the Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR) thus further variations (value and duration) are not deemed easily reconcilable with the provisions set out within PCR.

## 27. **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPING ACTION PLAN**

- 27.1 Members considered a report of the Interim Director of Housing updating the Housing Policy Committee on the delivery and progress of the Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan which underpins the Homeless Prevention and Rough Sleepers Strategy, 2023 – 2028. The Strategy and Action Plan is now in the second year of delivery. The report provides an overview of the delivery thus far, seeks endorsement of continued delivery, and approval of the 12 new actions identified and deletion of 1 action.

### 27.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. Continues endorsement of the delivery of the Strategy and Action Plan.
2. Approves 12 new actions and the deletion of 1 action as set out in the report.

### 27.3 **Reasons for Decision**

- 27.3.1 Homelessness continues to be a key challenge in Sheffield, with consistently high number of Homeless Presentations to the Council. This impacts the use of TA, provision and subsequently increases financial pressures to the Council. In addition, the impact of Homelessness of the person is significant, and in some cases can have long lasting effects, resulting in reduced opportunities.
- 27.3.2 Although improvement is being made in preventing Homelessness, with good progression on the delivery of the Homeless Prevention



Strategy, it is essential we continue to deliver the existing and new actions to further advance prevention of Homelessness.

**27.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

**27.4.1 Alternative Option 1: Not making amendments to the current action Plan.**

Not making amendments to the current action plan, would result in not responding appropriately to ongoing and evolving Homelessness challenges and pressures. This would potentially increase risk and impact on the financial pressures associated with Homelessness, the Council's ability to meet statutory duties and responsibilities and reputational impact with partners, by not responding to feedback, consultation and emerging challenges.

**28. RESPONSE TO REGULATOR OF SOCIAL HOUSING REGULATORY JUDGEMENT OF SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL**

28.1.1 In July 2024 Sheffield City Council (the Council) received a regulatory judgement from the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) confirming a consumer grading of C3 indicating serious failings in the landlord. The Regulator found that Sheffield City Council was not delivering the required outcomes of the Safety and Quality Consumer Standard.

28.1.2 Members considered a report of the Executive Director Neighbourhood Services provide reassurance to the Committee that our programme of improvement activity will help us to meet the Regulator's Safety and Quality Consumer Standard.

28.1.3 During the discussion of this item, Councillor Smith left the meeting.

28.1.4 Members requested that the formal thanks of the committee be recorded to Peter Brown who was leaving the Council after 19 years service. It was moved by Councillor Baker and seconded by Councillor Norris that this be added to the recommendations.

This was put to the vote and carried.

(NOTE: The result of the vote was FOR – 9 Members; AGAINST – 0 Members; ABSTENTIONS – 0 Members)

**28.2 RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. Notes the Council's response to the Regulatory Judgement issued on 9th July 2024
2. Requests that progress in meeting the requirements of the Consumer Standards is reported to this Committee through the routine quarterly performance reports.
3. Formally records its thanks to Peter Brown for his long service with the Council, his diligent work with the committee and for improving the lives of tenants in Sheffield.

**28.3 Reasons for Decision**

28.3.1 To acknowledge the programme of improvement activity that will help the Council to meet the Regulator's Safety and Quality Consumer Standard and address the concerns raised by the Regulator in their regulatory notice and subsequent judgement.

**28.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

28.4.1 It is a regulatory requirement for the Council to engage with the RSH in response to a Regulatory Judgement, so on this occasion, no alternative options were considered.

**29. OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR HOUSING FIRE SAFETY RESPONSIVE REPAIRS**

29.1.1 Changes to Regulations and inspection regimes has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of fire safety responsive repairs being identified and remedial works required.

29.1.2 Sheffield City Council's internal Repairs and Maintenance Service currently do not have the capacity to deliver the large number of fire related responsive repairs and there is a significant risk of repairs not being closed within defined timescales. This could put residents and visitors at risk.

29.1.3 Members considered a report of the Interim Housing Director recommending that the Council procure and commission a competent contractor to deliver fire safety remedial works on behalf of Sheffield City Council Repairs and Maintenance service managed by the Housing Fire Safety Team to effectively manage the repairs.

29.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the Housing Policy Committee:-

1. Agrees the proposal for the operational arrangements for managing responsive Housing fire safety remedial works
2. Gives approval to procure and commission a competent third-party fire safety contractor to undertake responsive repairs related to fire safety. Moving from an in-house model to an external solution to allow SCC to discharge its duties.

**29.3 Reasons for Decision**

29.3.1 The decision to utilise the already approved Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding to commission a competent third-party Fire Safety Contractor for responsive fire safety repairs is essential to ensure compliance with regulatory standards and to mitigate significant risks to residents and visitors.

29.3.2 The internal Repairs and Maintenance Service currently lacks the capacity to manage the volume of fire safety repairs, posing a serious risk of non-compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's requirements. Without timely action, the number of overdue fire safety repairs is likely to increase, jeopardizing the Council's ability to meet its statutory obligations as a landlord.

29.3.3 Moving to an external partner solution rather than an in-house model will allow SCC to discharge its duties. By commissioning an external contractor, the Council can effectively address the current capacity shortfall, maintain compliance with regulatory requirements, and fulfil its duty to provide safe and decent housing for its tenants.

29.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

29.4.1 Alternative Option 1:

Do nothing – Not an option

The Council must be able to discharge its duties. Do nothing is not a viable option and not only puts the council at risk of financial penalties but could put residents at unnecessary risk and in some case could pose a significant threat to life if repairs are not completed in a timely manner.

29.4.2 Alternative Option 2:

Increase Repairs and Maintenance Resource – Not an Option

Our internal Repairs and Maintenance Service currently do not have the capacity to deliver the large number of fire related responsive repairs and there is a significant risk of jobs not being closed within defined timescales. The Service explored increasing the resource however the time taken to recruit and train operative to the required standard will further increase the backlog of repairs.