

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – 7TH FEBRUARY 2024

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE MEETING

1. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUSINESS PLAN AND HRA BUDGET 2024/25

RESOLVED: That:-

- (a) the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan report for 2024/25 and the HRA Business Plan priorities for 2024/25, as set out in the Financial Appendix to the report, are approved;
- (b) the HRA Revenue Budget 2024/25, as set out in the Financial Appendix to the report, is approved;
- (c) it be noted that once adopted by the City Council, monitoring the delivery of HRA Business Plan priorities will be within the remit of the Housing Policy Committee and a regular performance reporting schedule will be approved;
- (d) rents for council dwellings be increased by 7.7% from April 2024, in line with the Regulator of Social Housing's Rent Standard;
- (e) garage rents for garage plots and sites be increased by 7.7% from April 2024;
- (f) the sheltered housing charge be increased by 6.7% from April 2024;
- (g) the burglar alarm charge be increased by 6.7% from April 2024;
- (h) the furnished accommodation charge be increased by 6.7% from April 2024;
- (i) no increase be made to the community heating charge at this time; and
- (j) rents for temporary accommodation be increased by 7.7% for 2024/25.

2. EXTENDING THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND

RESOLVED: That this Council:-

- (a) notes that the Government has decided to end funding for the Household Support Fund from the end of March 2024, and further notes with concern that the Government did not use the Autumn Statement or the Local Government Finance Settlement to confirm an extension of the Fund;

- (b) notes that Sheffield received £10.4m from the Household Support Fund in 2023/24 which is used to provide financial support to low-income and vulnerable households who are struggling to afford the essentials;
- (c) notes that the Fund is used to provide Free School Meal vouchers to 32,000 households during the school holidays;
- (d) notes that the support that the Council has provided through the Household Support Fund has helped tens of thousands of households in Sheffield who have struggled to afford energy, food, and other essentials;
- (e) notes that the Household Support Fund is a key part of the Council's Cost of Living response which has brought together partners from the public sector, business, and the voluntary, community and faith sector to help those in need;
- (f) notes that the average number of Household Support Fund applications received per day in November 2023 is 112, which is a 148% increase on the same month last year, and that in 2023 there was an overall 47% increase in applications compared to 2022;
- (g) notes that the Chair of the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee has written to the Government to call for the Household Support Fund to be extended;
- (h) believes that ending the Household Support Fund will reduce vital support for people in our city who need it most;
- (i) believes that poverty has been made significantly worse by the removal of the £20 per week uplift to Universal Credit and the introduction of the two-child cap on Child Benefit;
- (j) believes that, in addition to the local flexibility offered by the Household Support Fund, an uplift to national benefits is needed to address systemic poverty;
- (k) believes that a cliff-edge in welfare provision in March 2024 must be avoided;
- (l) calls on the Government to urgently provide clarity and reassurance to households in Sheffield, to remove the two-child cap on Child Benefit, to provide a Universal Credit uplift of £40 per week, and to extend the Household Support Fund beyond March 2024; and
- (m) calls on all parties in Westminster to remove the two-child cap on Child Benefit which contributes to child poverty among many, larger families.

3. TACKLING EMPTY HOMES

RESOLVED: That:-

this Council notes:-

- (a) the national housing crisis, with the housing shortage elevating private rent costs;
- (b) housing becoming increasingly unaffordable, particularly for lower-income, vulnerable and younger households;
- (c) concern for the numerous families currently in temporary accommodation;
- (d) the Council's current policy which applies the Long-Term Empty Premium to Council Tax (LTEP) on properties left empty;
- (e) that in Sheffield, 1317 properties have been empty for 1-2 years, 973 properties are currently subject to the LTEP, and 295 properties are second homes;
- (f) the lack of incentives to renovate and retrofit empty properties;
- (g) the need for considered and sensitive policy-setting, considering complex circumstances that can leave homes empty for long periods, including: bereavement, declining or ill-health, diminished capacity, a building's listed status and delays in planning permission;
- (h) the hard work of teams across the Council working to ensure fit and proper private rental property in the city, supporting credible and responsible landlords;

this Council believes:-

- (i) the housing crisis requires urgency and a strategic approach to prevent wasted property;
- (j) this Council has a duty as a responsible local authority to increase affordable rental accommodation;
- (k) incentives and support should be developed to encourage renovating and retrofitting empty homes;
- (l) that people purchasing empty homes should not be liable for increased council tax rates predating their ownership;
- (m) that tackling empty homes is vital for tangible climate action, with the benefits of retrofitting existing properties over the pressures on land use and materials that come with new builds;

this Council:-

- (n) notes that a decision on implementing applying the LTEP at 100% to properties empty and unfurnished over 12 months and on second homes, will be taken by the Finance Committee on 19th February 2024, with the Council only gaining the power to do so given recent changes to national legislation, and so further notes that this matter does not need to be referred to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee;
- (o) notes the strain placed upon local authority planning departments following 14 years of government cuts, but highlights the considerable success of the Council's Planning Service, with applications reaching a successful outcome higher than the national average and metropolitan area averages;

this Council therefore resolves to:-

- (p) support responsible and credible landlords;
- (q) support the principle of making use of new powers to maximise the charge of council tax on empty properties and second homes;
- (r) endorse the response of the Local Government Association to the Government's consultation on social housing allocations, in particular with regard to the call for reform of the Right to Buy system which has destroyed a large part of the country's social housing;
- (s) write to the Government to:-
 - (i) advocate for reform to end discounts for empty and derelict properties;
 - (ii) seek support for the policy of restricting the sale of newbuilds as second homes; and
 - (ii) request support for local authorities to ensure they have the skills and resources to maximise economic benefits from tackling empty homes;
- (t) request the Chair of the Housing Policy Committee to write to the Local Government Association to express this Council's support for its call for reform of the Right to Buy system; and
- (u) support investment in further action on empty homes, including expanding the Council's housing acquisitions to help alleviate the homelessness crisis.

4. FIVE YEARS SINCE DECLARING A CLIMATE EMERGENCY

RESOLVED: That:-

this Council notes:-

- (a) Sheffield City Council (SCC) has declared a Climate Emergency and a Nature Emergency and has an ambition to become a zero-carbon city by 2030;
- (b) in 2019, The Tyndall Centre produced a report stating that Sheffield City Council must reduce its carbon emissions by 14% each year to achieve zero carbon by 2030;
- (c) the latest 2022 CO₂e emissions data indicates that Sheffield City Council has reduced emissions by 3% since 2019, and needs to reduce emissions by a further 77% by 2030 to be in line with the Sheffield-wide 80% reduction on 2019 emissions that the Pathways to Decarbonisation Report suggested could be achievable by 2030;
- (d) that public transport has a crucial role to play in addressing the climate emergency and welcomes plans to bring buses and trams under public ownership, and measures the Council is taking to encourage active travel;
- (e) that Olivia Blake MP has brought the Climate and Ecology Bill to Parliament with cross-party support; the Bill is drafted by many of the UK's leading climate and ecology scientists and is the only piece of proposed or existing legislation that would tackle the intertwined climate and nature crises together;

this Council believes:-

- (f) Green involvement in the Council Administration has been central to the climate action the Council has taken: from introducing Climate Impact Assessments, to the creation of the Ten Point Plan for Climate Action, to ensuring major schemes like Connecting Sheffield and the Clean Air Zone progress in the face of political opposition;
- (g) that unrelenting action to tackle the climate emergency is the only way to achieve zero carbon by 2030, and the Council should be working at all Policy Committees on urgently reducing emissions;
- (h) that, despite cross party support for net zero, progress has been slow due to the lack of the very substantial investment required to make significant carbon savings, the slow pace of transformation of industries, particularly energy, transport and land use and a dearth of compelling offset opportunities;
- (i) the substantial cash investment required alongside other demands on public funds mean that strong economic growth is required in Sheffield and elsewhere, alongside technological innovation to reduce carbon emissions in better ways;

- (j) the failure of Labour and Green councillors to vote for a food waste recycling service represents an unfortunate missed opportunity to reduce carbon emissions;
- (k) South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority foot dragging over bus franchising and failed bus partnerships have delivered an inferior bus service to the people of Sheffield and kept people in their cars;
- (l) that the Government has utterly failed to provide the necessary funds to tackle the climate emergency;
- (m) that Sheffield's progress is comparable with other core cities and there has been notable successes including cross-party support for climate action the Council has taken: from introducing Climate Impact Assessments, to the creation of the Ten Point Plan for Climate Action, to ensuring major schemes like Connecting Sheffield and the Clean Air Zone progress, and notes the work currently underway to futureproof our city's workforce, including the Council-funded upskilling of plumbers and heating engineers in air source heat pump technologies;
- (n) that to reach net zero, the Council should undertake more cross-cutting work, and that requiring Policy Committees to set targets in isolation risks creating siloed working;

this Council resolves to:-

- (o) ask the Transport, Regeneration and Climate Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme, implementation of a workplace parking levy to leverage funding for active and public transport at comparable levels to Nottingham City Council, who raised around £680 million over 10 years;
- (p) request the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme, development of an advertising policy which does not support high carbon industries and products harmful to people and nature, such as promoted by Adfree Cities;
- (q) request the Economic Development and Skills Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme, the completion of the Green Jobs and Skills Strategy initiated by Greens during the Cooperative Executive;
- (r) call on the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to make more funding available for Green Skills;
- (s) ask the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme, doing further work on Climate Impact Assessment processes and methodologies so that policy options can be compared on an estimated cost per tonne of CO2 saved basis;
- (t) remind all Policy Committees to ensure the Climate Impact Assessment is used to develop all SCC decisions and actions;

- (u) ask the Transport, Regeneration and Climate Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme, an update on progress against the Renewable Energy strategy proposed by Greens in November 2022's full Council meeting;
- (v) ask the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme as a matter of urgency, investigation of the practicalities of issuing Green Bonds to raise extra funding to support climate action; and
- (w) ask the Member Development Working Group to ensure all councillors are offered training on how to understand the carbon impact of policy decisions.

5. INCREASING THE NUMBER OF COUNCIL HOMES AND THE QUALITY OF EXISTING STOCK

RESOLVED: That this Council:-

- (a) notes that decent housing is linked closely to physical and mental wellbeing and that in a cost of living crisis people depend even more on the comfort, decency and security of their home, yet increasing numbers of residents are losing their homes because their landlords can no longer afford the mortgage or they themselves can no longer afford to pay increased private rents or mortgages; and further notes that 3,020 people presented as homeless between April and December 2023, and of these, 584 were assessed as being owed a full homelessness duty;
- (b) notes that in Sheffield we need to build 3,018 net new homes a year to satisfy increasing demand and yet, through right to buy and disposals, social housing stock is decreasing each year, and further notes that regeneration is good for the local economy, it brings in business, creates jobs and generates pride in the local economy;
- (c) endorses the response of the Local Government Association to the Government's consultation on social housing allocations, in particular with regard to the call for reform of the Right to Buy system which has destroyed a large part of the country's social housing;
- (d) deplores that because of increasing building costs, our Housing Service bought homes off plan this municipal year and struggled to maintain the decency of existing stock; notes that many tenants are living in homes with damp, mould and leaking roofs and this affects their mental and physical health; and further notes that during the current municipal year disrepair claims cost the Council dearly;
- (e) notes that during a climate emergency the Council has a role to play and, as a local authority, has pledged to meet by 2030, yet is still talking about devising a route map to invest in bringing homes up to a C grade of environmental

efficiency and has a programme to retrofit just 355 homes by external cladding on the principle of worst first and this will draw to an end next financial year;

(f) therefore resolves to:-

(i) re-commit to building council homes whilst supporting partnerships to significantly increase all types of affordable homes, including housing association properties; and

(ii) invest in existing council stock to improve warmth, security and energy efficiency; and

(g) notes the renewed focus on building affordable housing in the city, including through the development of the Housing Strategy under the oversight of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee and the Council's partnership work with Homes England, and welcomes the approval of the Council's draft Local Plan which will make a huge difference in delivering affordable homes in the city.

6. REVIEW OF THE PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH STANDARDS COMPLAINTS AND COUNCILLOR CODE OF CONDUCT

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That this Council approves the changes to the Procedure for Dealing with Standards Complaints and the Councillor Code of Conduct, as outlined in sections 3.1 and 3.2 of the report and as set out in Appendices A and B.

7. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS AND CO-OPTED MEMBERS OF AUDIT AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That this Council:-

(a) approves the appointment of David Irvine and Martyn Thorpe as Independent Persons for a term of four years, to the end of the Municipal Year in 2028;

(b) approves the appointment of James Brackley as a non-voting Co-Opted Member of the Audit and Standards Committee for a term of four years, to the end of the Municipal Year in 2028; and

(c) approves the extension of the term of Alison Howard, the current non-voting Co-Opted Member of the Audit and Standards Committee, for a further four years, to the end of the Municipal Year in 2028.