

Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee

Meeting held 13 November 2023

PRESENT: Councillors Richard Williams (Chair), Janet Ridler (Deputy Chair), Marieanne Elliot (Group Spokesperson), Tony Downing, Alan Hooper, Bernard Little, Karen McGowan and Robert Reiss

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 No apologies were received.

2. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

2.1 **RESOLVED:** That the public and press be excluded from the meeting before discussion takes place on the appendix to **item 8** of the agenda on the grounds that, if the public and press were present during the transaction of such business, there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information as described in paragraphs 3 and 5 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no formal declarations of interest made at the meeting.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on **25 September 2023** were approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no public questions or petitions received.

6. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

6.1 No Members questions were received.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

7.1 The Principal Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which contained the Committee's work programme for consideration and discussion. The aim of the work programme was to show 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.

7.2 Members gave comments, suggestions and asked some questions. In regard to

areas of land to develop renewable energy and the public tool kit. Cllr Karen McGowan thanked officers for the Leisure visits.

7.3 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That:-

1. The Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed, including any additions and amendments identified in Part 1;
2. Consideration be given to the further additions or adjustments to the work programme presented at Part 2 of Appendix 1; and
3. 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.

8. ASYLUM DISPERSAL GRANT

8.1 The Head of Communities accompanied by the Strategic Lead for Asylum introduced the report which sought approval to allocate the Asylum Dispersal Grant (the Grant) in line with the recommendations below; and also sought delegated authority to the Director of Communities from November 2023 to March 31st 2026, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Commercial Services and the General Counsel and informed by, and working with the voluntary, community and faith sector regionally and nationally, to make decisions on the allocation of funds from the Grant to meet the aims and objectives outlined in the report.

8.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the **Communities, Parks and Leisure** Policy Committee:-

1. Approve the use of the Grant to fund the continuation and development of the current SCC Strategic Asylum function in Communities Service, until March 2026.
2. Approve the decision to ring fence part of the Grant from November 2023 to March 2026 for the purpose of responding flexibly to asylum and migrant community needs in Sheffield, along with the wider sanctuary cohort, to support their integration.
3. Delegate authority to the Director of Communities from November 2023 to March 2026, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Commercial Services and the General Counsel and informed by, and working with the voluntary, community and faith sector regionally and nationally, to make decisions on the allocation of funds from the Grant to meet the aims and objectives outlined in this report.
4. Approve the decision to appoint dedicated resources to work for the benefit of people seeking asylum, the migrant community in Sheffield, and the wider sanctuary cohort in accordance with Table 1.

8.3 **Reasons for Decision**

8.3.1 Increasingly, the interconnectedness and complexities of the asylum system now mean that this is no longer solely an immigration issue.

Sheffield will continue to welcome those seeking asylum, refugees and migrant groups to the city. As such, there will be increased demand over time for not only infrastructure, but also services including education, health, wellbeing, inclusion and socio-economic independence to support their integration.

At Full Council a motion was unanimously passed in July 2023 in which the Council agreed a range of measures reaffirming our commitment to being a City of Sanctuary, as well as a commitment to becoming a Local Authority of Sanctuary. The recommendations in this paper promote the ability of the city to respond effectively to national asylum policy and act meaningfully to help those seeking refuge in our city.

8.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

- 8.4.1 The alternative option to decline the Grant was considered and rejected because of the clear financial and operational need to address asylum dispersal.

Acceptance of the Grant will enable delivery and support of strategic activity to ensure that the needs of asylum seekers in the Asylum Dispersal Scheme are met. This work is essential not only for those directly affected, but also benefits the wider host community, and all who live or work in, and visit our city.

Given the ongoing, national asylum context and continued numbers of people seeking safety in the UK, significant likelihood exists that Sheffield will continue to be asked to accommodate people awaiting asylum decisions. In addition to this, the city is home to an increasing number of refugees, arriving via different routes. Given the clear benefit of this funding for the vulnerable sanctuary community, the alternative action, to decline the funding, was rejected.

9. **ALLOTMENT RENTS**

- 9.1 The Service Manager for Parks and Countryside accompanied by the Head of Parks and Countryside introduced the report which sought approval for an increase in the allotment rent and water charges for 2025/2026 of 5.96% (an increase below current inflation).
- 9.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the **Communities, Parks and Leisure** Policy Committee:-

1. Approve a 5.96% increase to allotment rents for 2025/26.

9.3 **Reasons for Decision**

- 9.3.1 The recommendation to increase the rents by 5.96% in 2025/26, whilst below inflation, protects the staffing levels within the team and maintains a small (and slightly reduced) site improvement budget. It takes in to account the results of the consultation and is in line with the proposal set out to tenants within the consultation (i.e., that we would apply the average (mean) 'suggested % increase' to the survey results).

The proposal entails increasing rent by a relatively small proportion. The survey indicates a favourable response to a rent increase within a Set of % parameters and methodology using the mathematical mean therefore we feel that the proposed

increase is reasonable.

It has been stated before that our rents are among the most expensive in the country. Direct comparisons with other authorities can be misleading, as there are many differences in how allotments are categorised and priced, the concessions available, and how the service is delivered. Our 75% discount for those on a low income or with disabilities is generous compared to other authorities: most offer lower discounts, or no discount at all. We feel that the large discount is fair, as it makes allotments more affordable for those who might struggle most otherwise. We are unusual in that all of our sites are directly managed by us, with no self-management (other than Rodney Hill's management of their own water supply). Self-management can be a way to keep rents lower since some of the management of sites is done by volunteers. Previously discussions at the Allotment Advisory Group have indicated a willingness to explore self-management models. This does not apply to all societies and the exact model is something which will be explored further with the group. However, any savings will be in the longer term.

We have sought to compare the rents to rental charges for agricultural land owned by the Council (although the two things are very different, since allotment holders receive different services and facilities). However, information for comparison was not available since charges and reviews of charges for agricultural land depend on specific agreements

9.4 Alternatives Considered and Rejected

9.4.1 Rents could remain at 2024/25 levels for an additional year. However, particularly when following a year of below-inflationary rent increases, this would represent a significant reduction to the budget for the service. This option was rejected as the proposal would significantly decrease the level of service and site improvements that can be undertaken.

9.4.2 Rents could be increased by inflation (6.7% at the time of the consultation). However, during this time of ongoing cost of living crisis it was felt that tenants should be consulted on this option. This option was rejected as it was felt that consultation was required. Following the results of the consultation it was acknowledged that this proposal was not in line with the results of the survey nor the confirmation in the survey that we would calculate rent increase by applying the average (mean) 'suggested % increase' to the survey results.

9.4.3 Rents could be increased by an amount greater than inflation. However, during this time of ongoing cost of living crisis it was felt that tenants should be consulted on this option. Following the results of the consultation it was acknowledged that this proposal was not in line with the results of the survey nor the confirmation in the survey that we would calculate rent increase by applying the average (mean) 'suggested % increase' to the survey results. Larger amount, but this would go against the outcomes of the consultation.

10. BEREAVEMENT STRATEGY

10.1 The Head of Bereavement and Coronial Services introduced the report which sought support for the development of a bereavement strategy and new cemetery

provision for the city an agreed approach for member engagement throughout the lifespan of this work.

10.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the **Communities, Parks and Leisure** Policy Committee:-

1. Endorse the proposed work on the development of a bereavement strategy and new cemetery development.
2. Approve the establishment of a task and finish group to report back to the Committee which will be:
 - a. Separated into individually focused thematic groups which examine defined areas of the strategy (eg. burial provision for people of different faiths, or the role of cemeteries as natural green spaces).
 - b. Delegate to the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services authority to appoint to themed task and finish groups following an open invitation to all members of the Council to express interest.
3. Note that the development of the strategy and work to explore new cemetery service provision will be overseen by the CPL committee by way of regular progress updates before final approval is sought for a delivery plan.

10.3 **Reasons for Decision**

10.3.1 To find a framework for member engagement which is inclusive from the outset. To deliver a strategy informed through public consultation to ensure bereavement services meet the needs of the citizens of Sheffield.

10.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

10.4.1 Do nothing. Services continue to deteriorate. Burial provision is exhausted. Work is not conducted in an inclusive and transparent way.

11. UPDATE ON WORK OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

11.1 Cllr Marieanne Elliot provided a brief re-cap on the purpose of the Task and Finish Group. Members gave comments. The Director of Parks, Leisure and Libraries suggested regularly seeking input from Members in order to continue to progress the work.

12. 2024/25 BUDGET SAVINGS FOR CPL TO SET A BALANCED BUDGET

12.1 The Head of Parks, Leisure and Libraries accompanied by Head of Communities introduced the report which set out the financial pressures facing the Communities, Parks and Leisure Policy Committee (CPL) in 2024/25, and the proposed options available to the council to offset these pressures.

12.2 The meeting went into closed session to discuss the closed appendix where members gave comments and asked questions. The meeting was re-opened to the public to agree the recommendations.

12.3 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That the **Communities, Parks and Leisure** Policy Committee:-

1. Acknowledges the recommendation approved at the Strategy and Resources Committee on 7th September 2023 that “Policy Committees will be asked to develop savings / additional income options that cover their own pressures – in effect cash standstill” and to “require Policy Committees to report at their meetings in November on how they can balance their budgets.
2. Notes, as this Committee's response to the Strategy and Resources Committee's request, the set of budget proposals set out in the closed Part B to this report.
3. Notes that Officers will now work with Members to consult with relevant stakeholders (including with partners, staff, trades unions and in respect of equalities and climate change) on the proposals in this report to inform final budget proposals.
4. Notes that Officers will work to develop any necessary detailed implementation plans for the proposals in this report so that the proposals can be implemented as planned before or during the 2024/25 financial year.
5. Notes a further report will be brought to this Committee in December 2023

12.4 **Reasons for Decision**

12.4.1 Members are asked to note the challenging budget situation Members are asked to note the unsustainable financial position highlighted by the medium-term financial analysis presented to Strategy and Resources Committee in September 2023. This report and its recommendations, sets out the scale of the challenge ahead, the limited resources available and some of the difficult decisions that will need to be taken.

12.5 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

12.5.1 The Council is required to both set a balanced budget and to ensure that in-year income and expenditure are balanced. The options presented in this paper, if accepted, will negate the need to make any staff or resource cuts to the respective services and therefore, should allow the continuation of good quality customer services.