

Strategy and Resources Policy Committee

Meeting held 30 May 2024

**PRESENT:** Councillors Tom Hunt (Chair), Fran Belbin (Deputy Chair), Angela Argenzio, Kurtis Crossland, Dawn Dale, Dianne Hurst, Douglas Johnson (Group Spokesperson), Abdul Khayum, Zahira Naz, Joe Otten, Martin Smith and Laura Moynahan (Substitute Member)

**3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

3.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ben Miskell and Shaffaq Mohammed.

**4. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

5.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**6. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

6.1 The minutes of the previous meetings held on 17 April and 15 May 2024 were approved as a correct record.

**7. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

7.1 Isabel O'leary attended to present the following questions that she had submitted:

The Strategy and Resources Policy Committee Meeting on 19 June 2023 was devoted to the Council's response to the Lowcock Report. At that meeting 10 months ago I asked about allocating funds to strengthen the SCC Ecology Unit. I noted that this would allow in-house professional ecological advice to be sought for decisions taken by the Council across many areas. This was in the light of Lowcock's recommendation to improve the management of contracts and Council Services and to consider the biodiversity and ecological impact across all decision making.

The answer of the Leader of the Council at that time said that "the Council is committed to ensuring we have the right resource in the right place at the right time" and that included the Council's Ecology Unit.

We know that part of the reason for the whole street tree debacle was that SCC Ecology Unit were shut out of the original planning for the Streets Ahead

contract. The Ecology Unit could have explained the misinterpretation of the terms “mature” and “overmature” used as a justification for felling street trees (these are terms previously used to refer to forestry crops and should not have been used about street trees with all their ecological and health benefits).

We also know that street trees are just one part of the whole ecological system within the city and this holistic view should be taken when considering the management of street trees. The SCC Ecology Unit is staffed by professionally qualified ecologists with up to date knowledge of the requirements of the Environment Act and Nature Recovery Networks. They have decades of experience of urban tree planting, working closely with the Community Forestry team.

In March this year I asked the leaders of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership why the Council Ecology Unit have not been included on the SSTP. On 2nd April I had a polite reply from the Council lead on the SSTP agreeing that the Ecology Unit would be a valuable addition to the Partnership. The reason given for not fully engaging with the Ecology Unit up to now was due to a lack of resources in the Ecology Unit team. The reply said that this resources issue has now improved so that the Ecology Unit will be brought on board shortly. This is of course welcome. My questions are:

1. How are the Council assessing the right level of resourcing for the Ecology Unit?

Answer: A new Ecology Manager post has been created and recently appointed. As part of this role, there will be a continual assessment of the required resources within the team, as is the case across all SCC teams.

In light of additional duties placed on the council as a result of the Environment Act 2021 multiple pieces of work are ongoing to inform the resourcing needs of the Council. It should be noted that central government guidance on some of these areas is still broad, and indeed changing, so we are taking a focused approach.

2. What improvement in resourcing for the Ecology Unit has been made in the past 10 months?

Answer: As above, a new Ecology Manager has been appointed.

3. Why have the Ecology Unit been routinely excluded from oversight of the Streets Ahead contract since its inception?

Answer: The Streets Ahead contract is a self-monitoring PFI contract with Amey having to provide their own ecological monitoring resource and ancillary staffing to support ecology - such as Environmental Quality monitoring etc - as is required to meet the project demands, outcomes and Performance Requirements. Any relevant metrics are checked by qualified ecologists within the Client Team.

4. What is the Ecology Unit's current stated opinion of the Sheffield Street Tree Strategy?

Answer: It is not appropriate to ask individual officers for their views on a council contract. But what I would like to say is that Sheffield has come a long way since the tree protests. To evidence that Sheffield became the first local authority in Europe to attain the PEFC Trees Outside of Forests accreditation, and has sustained Tree Cities of the World accreditation on a rolling basis for the last few years, reflecting that the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership Strategy is independently verified as working effectively. The Street Tree Partnership independently verify and publish various metrics on an annual basis showing improvement in the overall health, condition and benefits flowing from our highway tree stock. I remain incredibly grateful to all of our dedicated partners who are involved in the work of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership.

5. I understand that the previous SCC Biodiversity Officer resigned due to being refused a role in monitoring Streets Ahead. Since the start of the contract how many times have the Ecology Unit requested a role in street tree management and what are the reasons for turning them down?

Answer: It is not appropriate to comment on individual council employees. As I explained in my response to question 3, the Streets Ahead Client team within the Council have their own qualified ecologist.

6. Does SCC believe that AMEY have fulfilled their contractual obligations in regard to ecology?

Answer: As per the published minutes of the Sheffield Street Tree Partnership, Amey have not been able to provide an updated version of their Local Biodiversity Action Plan to a standard which is satisfactory to officers of the council. Amey's lack of compliance with this specific contractual obligation has been managed through the appropriate contractual management mechanisms. A specific project group has been set up to work with Amey's ecology team, the Wildlife Trust and other key stakeholders to jointly deliver a mutually agreed and updated version of this document as soon as is practicable.

7. Does AMEY currently have an in-house ecologist?

Answer: Amey are contractually required to provide their own ecological monitoring resource. It is for them to decide how to deliver this resource.

7.2 Sue Owen attended to present the following questions that she had submitted:

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court documents in article 5 the Court's jurisdiction , namely: The crime of genocide; Crimes against humanity; War crimes; The crime of aggression. It further goes on to define individual criminal responsibility in article 25 where it makes it clear that a person is responsible even if they are not directly being committed by this person but simply if, by their actions, they contribute to the crime "in the

knowledge of the intention" to commit the crime

In the light of this it is essential that all Sheffield business and citizens of Sheffield and the Council itself, mindful of the recent judgements of the ICC with respect to the Prime Minister of Israel and the Defence Minister of Israel, and the ICJ with respect to the State of Israel, conduct their business so as to avoid any complicity direct or indirect with the actions of the Israeli state and its agents.

How will the council ensure

a. Its own operations are devoid of any association with the Israeli State and its procurement of weapons; in particular how does the council now see its relationship with Barclays Bank whose investments in Israeli weapons manufacture is well documented, and with some of the South Yorkshire Pension Authority investments in companies that sell arms to Israel

Answer: Since this Committee last considered the tragic situation in Gaza there have been and continue to be many appalling developments. The scenes of devastation in Rafah over the last week have been horrifying. Last week the ICJ ruled that Israel should immediately halt its military offensive in Rafah. As previously stated, on a cross-party basis, Israel must stop and comply with the ICJ's ruling. This Council voted for an immediate ceasefire back in November and we will continue to call for an immediate ceasefire to allow aid to flow unimpeded into Gaza, the return of all hostages and for the resumption of political process for a two-state solution. With regard to contracts, all contracts that the Council enters into with third party organisations are let in accordance with the Council's ethical procurement policy. This includes the contract that the Council holds with Barclays Bank. That policy allows us to ask for and take into consideration how the contract will generate social value within the city and more broadly. We are not, however, legally allowed to take into account non-commercial matters that are prohibited by the Local Government Act 1988. This would include the set of issues that the questioner is concerned about.

A review of the council's ethical procurement policy is currently underway, and will be considered by this committee during this municipal year as part of a wider Commercial Strategy for the council. As part of this review, concerns raised by campaigners will be considered and taken into account.

With regards to pensions, the council cannot direct or influence how members of the South Yorkshire Pension Authority, an entirely separate organisation, take decisions regarding the administration and management of the pension fund. The members of that Authority have a responsibility to follow the requirements set out in legislation and independent of their position in this council. They must make their decisions based on what they feel is genuinely in the best interests of the pension fund. As a responsible investor South Yorkshire Pensions Authority aims to take into account environmental, social and governance issues when they're managing and making any investment. This includes issues relating to human rights.

b. That the citizens of Sheffield and businesses in Sheffield have adequate information to meet their obligations.

Answer: Most recently we can point towards a cross party statement of solidarity, that was issued back in March by the leaders of all of the groups on the City Council. Furthermore as chair of this committee and as Leader of the council I have made a number of public statements, including here in this chamber and we've had Full council debates about this, all of which are published. We all have a role to play as local councillors to share details of our work and disseminate information in our communities and that is a role that we will all continue to commit to.

7.3 Julie Pearn attended to present the following questions that she had submitted:

On 26th January 2024 the world's highest court, the ICJ, ruled there were plausible grounds under the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide Convention to issue binding measures to which Israel will be held to future account. Grounds for issuing these measures include a large number of deaths and injuries, massive destruction of homes, forcible displacement of the vast majority of the population, and extensive damage to civilian infrastructure; in addition, deprivation of access to water, food, fuel, electricity and other essentials of life, as well as to medical care and medical supplies. Further the ruling cited "dehumanising language" issued by ministers and even the President of Israel as well as a "sharp increase in racist hate speech and dehumanization directed at Palestinians since 7 October". International political failure to act through arms embargos and sanctions has emboldened Israel to defy the court's rulings and pursue its war on the people of Gaza uncurbed.

In this context, the University of Sheffield has profound ethical issues to address, as it receives more funding from companies supporting Israel's military capability, such as BAE systems and Rolls Royce, than any other UK university, contributing millions of pounds worth of research to the development of parts for military aircraft, surveillance and drones which inflict inordinate suffering on a captive and largely civilian population.

Students have played an inspirational role in awakening the 'conscience of the world' and through direct action seeking to force change for good. Our students in Sheffield were amongst the first in the UK to establish a peaceful encampment, exemplary in its organisation and communication and determined to have a say. The students are important members of our community and the University is an 'anchor institution' in which all citizens have a vested interest. Since thousands of Sheffield citizens want to see the city break ties with the apartheid state of Israel, will representatives of the City Council visit the campus to listen to the students' demands?

Answer: I repeat my comments about the appalling situation in Gaza, which is heartbreaking to see. We in this chamber have raised our voices, lots of citizens in this city and further afield have raised their voices over the last nine months about that situation. I am aware that city councillors have already visited the campus and of course members of the council are free to do so.

7.4 Val Johnson attended to present the following questions that she had submitted:

Sheffield's Code of Conduct for Councillors applies to all Councillors when acting in an official capacity; it forbids actions which will call the integrity and reputation of the Council into question. It demands respectful speech, and of course harassment, intimidation and racism are beyond the pale and must be robustly challenged by all members of the Council.

Yet in this very committee a Councillor made remarks about the Sheffield Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid that were deeply offensive and - worse still - characterised the Palestinian Right of Return in a way which we believe to be racist.

His unprincipled tirade was met with a very mild comment from the Chair and total silence from the Committee; no Point of Order was called for, no reference to the Code of Conduct, no rebuke for insulting, inflammatory, potentially racist language. A Formal Complaint from the Coalition which cited the principles of the Code of Conduct has been dismissed with not even a single reference to the expectations which this Code places on Councillors.

No Councillor has yet responded to a letter sent on May 15th, specifically asking the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Lib Dems to reply and requesting all Councillors to raise this issue.

The decision of the Disciplinary Committee has brought this council into disrepute by showing that its Code of Conduct is irrelevant and Councillors can insult citizens and even use racist terminology with impunity.

Will the Committee order a rehearing of the Complaint using the Code of Conduct as its benchmark for testing conduct in public office?

If not, will the Council remove the Code from its policies as no longer applicable?

Does the Committee understand that the decision not to challenge but effectively to endorse insulting and arguably racist language brings the Council into disrepute?

Will the Council now permit the same freedoms of speech to members of the public in the Council chamber as it has done to one of its own?

Will the Leader of the Council, Lib Dem leader and the Chair of the Standards committee answer the letter sent to them or has it too been ignored?

Answer: Thank you for your questions. I can assure you that your letter of 15th May hasn't been ignored, I wanted to answer your questions today verbally and I will follow up with a written response setting out what I will now say which is that, as Leader of the Council and as Chair of this Committee I have no formal role in Standards, nor does this Committee. This falls within the remit of the Audit and Standards Committee. So to be clear it is not within the remit of this committee or my remit as Leader to order a re-hearing.

The investigation of complaints under the Standards regime are rightly confidential and the Council does not comment on any individual cases. The reason for the confidentiality is an important one, to provide the confidence of all parties that they can raise what might be sensitive issues without them being made public. The confidentiality is therefore maintained after the process to ensure all parties can retain confidence to participate. That confidence is lost if any one party can breach the confidentiality.

- 7.5 Hilary Smith attended to present the following questions that she had submitted:

On 1st November 2023 this Council passed a resolution which included the statement: "this Council believes that all political leaders have a responsibility to try to prevent genocide". In March 2024 this Council acted, following the presentation of a public petition, to prevent a vote on declaring Israel an apartheid state, on supporting the work of the ICJ and work towards making Sheffield an apartheid free zone.

At that meeting Tom Hunt, Leader of the Council, stated that, 'the report on the petition will be considered at the first meeting of the [Strategy and Resources] committee after the election'. The minutes of that meeting record his words. Today is that meeting, and the report on the petition is not on the agenda. The reality that Palestinians are currently facing is partly the responsibility of every political representative who has failed to take action, has failed to act to end complicity with Israeli apartheid and has failed to apply sanctions against Israel. These failures are what enables Israel to act with impunity and to believe that its actions have no consequences.

Will this committee now do what it has so far failed to do, to declare Israel a state practicing the crime against humanity of apartheid, and to begin the process of ending Sheffield's complicity with Israeli apartheid?'

Answer: The Leaders of the political groups represented on the Council have met to discuss the petition that your question referred to and we sought advice on the requests that are contained in the petition. Unfortunately, there wasn't sufficient time between the recent council AGM, following the council elections, and the publication of papers for this meeting for those discussions to be concluded. That is the reason why the petition isn't being considered at this meeting. A report will be prepared in time for the consideration of this committee at the July meeting. Unfortunately, as you will understand it's not possible to bring forward that report for the June meeting of this committee because of the pre-election period ahead of the general election. I can assure you that the points that are made in the petition and your questions today will be fully considered in that report when it comes back to this committee.

- 7.6 Simon Ogden attended to present the following petition that he had submitted: Petition containing 331 signatures calling on Sheffield City Council to step in as the Accountable Body for the Stocksbridge Town Deal funds and insist on full publication of the business cases or other relevant reports for all projects active and paused, followed by fresh public consultation and a

complete review of representation, governance and transparency of the Board to ensure compliance with Government guidance and City Council policy. (Further details available here: [ePetition - STOCKSBRIDGE TOWN DEAL](#))

Response: “Thank you for the petition. Thanks for coming today and to everyone who has signed the petition.

The Town Fund website includes details on the status of all projects being delivered by the Town fund together with details of the consultations undertaken by the Board on specific projects.

The City Council’s website includes agendas, papers and minutes of the Board meetings together with the scheme of governance in place for the Towns Fund Board. I note your comments on the speed of publication of minutes and will take that point away.

I understand that business cases required by (and submitted to) Government have been provided to interested parties where requested.

I would also want to highlight the wider issue which is that the funding given by government for a range of regeneration schemes was not index linked. This applies to Levelling Up funding as well as Town Deals funding.

The challenges that programmes have suffered because of the levels of inflation that we have seen across the construction industry over the last two to three years are familiar to us all. These challenges have been experienced across other schemes in the city where decisions have had to be made over prioritisation and the scope of the projects that can be delivered to meet the fit within the funding available.

The initial list of 10 projects outlined in the petition does reflect the list of projects that were identified in the initial Towns Fund Investment Plan. The Board were then charged with validating whether these suggested projects were deliverable and maximised the outcomes for the residents and businesses of Stocksbridge for the available funding.

The City Council will continue to work with the Towns Fund Board and stakeholders over the delivery of the range of projects and we will look forward to picking this up again once the general election is concluded and we know who the MP and co-chair of the Board will be and to ensure that the Board operates in accordance with the approved scheme of governance.

## **8. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

8.1 There were no Members’ questions.

## **9. RETIREMENT OF STAFF**

9.1 The Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement submitted a report on Council staff retirements.



9.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That Strategy and Resources Policy Committee:-

(a) places on record its appreciation of the valuable services rendered to the City Council by the following staff in the Directorates below:-

<u>Name</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Years' Service</u>
<b><u>Children's Services</u></b>		
Jeanette Holmes	Teaching Assistant, Arbourthorne Community Primary School	22
Susan Jowitt	Teacher, Intake Primary School	31
Diane Nimmo	Teacher, The Rowan School	22
Samantha Robinson	Teacher, Intake Primary School	31
<b><u>Neighbourhood Services</u></b>		
Julie Dewhurst	Processing Assistant	26
Karen Lewis	Community Partnerships Officer	41
Rosemary Mitchell	Senior Transport Officer - Operations Delivery and Development	24
<b><u>Strategic Support Services</u></b>		
Liz Gough	Assistant Director - Finance Business Partnering	40

(b) extend to them its best wishes for the future and a long and happy retirement; and

(c) directs that an appropriate extract of the resolution now made, under the Common Seal of the Council, be forwarded to those staff with over 20 years' service.

**10. WORK PROGRAMME**

10.1 The Committee received a report containing the Committee's Work Programme for consideration and discussion. The aim of the Work Programme is 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. It was highlighted that

this is a live document and Members input to it was invaluable.

In particular it was noted that the report contained a proposal that approval be given for the Finance Committee to consider the annual Council Tax Support Scheme item, as it did last year and recommended that the cross cutting issue Yorkshire & Humber Shared Care Record, be considered at the Adult, Health and Social Care Policy Committee for decision and the Education, Children and Families Policy Committee for briefing.

Further to the earlier discussions in this meeting, members discussed the need to add in additional items to the Work Programme in relation to a review of the ethical procurement policy, as part of the review of the Commercial Strategy; and a review of the governance of the Stocksbridge Towns Deal.

10.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That Strategy and Resources Policy Committee:-

(a) approves the Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1, including the additions and amendments identified in Part 1 of the report;

(b) agrees that further issues be included in the work programme in respect of:

- an ethical procurement policy, as part of a Commercial Strategy; and
- a review of the governance of the Stocksbridge Towns Deal, subject to advice from officers on the most appropriate Committee for consideration;

(c) approval be given to the consideration of cross cutting issues as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report; and

(d) approval be given for the Finance Committee to consider the annual Council Tax Support Scheme item, as it did last year.

## 11. **STRATEGY AND RESOURCES POLICY COMMITTEE - 2024/25 THE YEAR AHEAD**

11.1 The Chief Executive presented a report setting out the significant progress the Council had made in 2023/34, working with communities and partners to agree long-term City Goals for Sheffield and a four-year Council Plan aligned to our Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Our progress was recognised by the LGA in our Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review (Dec 23) and demonstrated by the delivery of real impact for citizens – from our 'good' OFSTED rating for children's services to the transformation of our city centre and creating the UK's first Investment Zone.

This paper outlines a forward agenda for the 2024/25 year, setting out the key steps we need to take to build on the progress made last year to deliver our

Council Plan. This includes the need to prioritise our resources on our 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.

11.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That Strategy and Resources Policy Committee:-

(a) notes the progress made in 2023/24, recognising the work of Members, officers and partners to establish strong strategic foundations for the organisation;

(b) notes the key issues identified in section 3 of the report as part of our forward agenda for 2024/25; and

(c) agrees to work across Policy Committees to ensure the opportunities and issues identified in section 3 are taken forward as part of Committee workplans in 2024/25.

11.3 **Reasons for Decision**

11.3.1 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 we need to address in the 2024/25 year.

11.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

11.4.1 Not 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.

**12. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY**

12.1 The Executive Director Neighbourhood Services submitted a report setting out a draft Housing Strategy for Sheffield. The report sets out five strategic housing ambitions for the next decade to achieve our vision that everyone in Sheffield has a home that supports good health and is suitable for their needs and aspirations.

Having good quality, sustainable homes that meet the needs of our growing population is a vital part of achieving the outcomes in the Council Plan, contributing to driving the prosperity of the city, our communities and ensuring that we take action to protect our environment. The draft Housing Strategy is a Tier 1 strategy for Sheffield City Council as it sets the longer-term strategic direction for housing in the city and will be underpinned by more detailed strategies and delivery plans to achieve specific commitments (eg. Housing Growth Delivery Plan).

Citizens and partners have been involved in shaping the draft Housing

Strategy vision and ambitions and it is recommended that we undertake further consultation on the draft Strategy before presenting a finalised version to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee in the autumn of 2024.

12.2 **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:** That Strategy and Resources Policy Committee:-

(a) endorse the draft Housing Strategy, as set out in Appendix 1;

(b) approves the launch of a second phase of public consultation on the draft Housing Strategy;

(c) agrees that the outcome of the consultation on the draft Housing Strategy will be presented back to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee in the autumn of 2024; and

(d) agrees that a final draft of the Housing Strategy will be presented to the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee in the autumn of 2024 for consideration and approval.

12.3 **Reasons for Decision**

12.3.1 It is not a legal or statutory requirement to have a Housing Strategy and therefore there is no legal requirement for the Council to carry out consultation. However, the Council cannot deliver the Housing Strategy on its own and, as a Council, we are committed to working with residents and partners across the city to develop strategies that effectively meet the needs of our communities and sets the Sheffield's strategic ambition for Housing.

12.3.2 Approval to launch the second phase of consultation on the draft text of the Strategy will allow for this vital engagement with residents, partners and community groups across the city, and timely completion of the project to deliver the new Strategy.

12.4 **Alternatives Considered and Rejected**

12.4.1 Do not develop a Housing Strategy: The development of a Housing Strategy is not a statutory duty. The Council is not, therefore required to produce one, and other strategies, such as Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy, are produced to consider specific issues. However, this option was rejected, on the grounds that a long-term, strategic document is seen as critical to guide planning, development/investment and policy over the next decade and this is a cornerstone strategy for the city. A Housing Strategy is produced by Local Authorities in comparable cities to set their strategic vision and ambition for Housing. The approach to not develop a Housing Strategy is therefore Not recommended.