

Green Group Budget to Sheffield City Council 2025/26 Budget

Proposed by Cllr Angela Argenzio; seconded by Cllr Douglas Johnson

That this Council:-

1. notes that 2025 is the fourth annual budget set by a cross-party council and that the three parties in the Administration have worked collaboratively with officers to produce a core budget;
2. believes that the committee system, together with the Council being in no overall control, has played an essential role in making parties work together to agree a core budget, as well as securing sound financial management;
3. thanks staff right across the council for their part in improving the services to the Sheffield public, including the financial management of the whole organisation;
4. fully recognises the chronic underfunding of local councils, under successive central governments, in the most centralised of the six largest economies in the world, with a record number of councils facing effective bankruptcy, issuing "section 114 notices" or needing emergency intervention from government;
5. notes that this Council is not one of them;
6. conveys its immense gratitude to all this Council's direct and indirect workforce, as well as its partners in the voluntary, community, faith and commercial sectors, for their actions in making Sheffield a better place in the face of the huge financial challenges that have had an impact on everyone in the workforce and in the city;
7. recognises that the new government has helped restore a part of the funding that Sheffield has lost over the last 15 years but notes that the largest element is for one year only, still leaving this council in a financially uncertain position for the future.
8. believes that austerity is a political choice – and an ongoing one - made by the bigger political parties and that the massive government intervention to address Covid or bail out banks shows there is an alternative if the political will is there;
9. expresses disappointment that the government has chosen to increase taxes on employment through national insurance rather than tax the super-wealthy or non-doms;
10. notes the severe impact of national insurance rises on the council's supplier base in the voluntary and business sectors and, despite claims the government will meet the costs of extra national insurance for the public sector, even this council finds itself with an extra bill of £3 million a year;
11. notes this results in a shifting of the tax burden away from government grants, based on the UK's income as a whole, towards greater contributions by residents of the city through council tax – a tax that disproportionately targets the vast majority of households on lower incomes;
12. Notes that even with this substantial increase in tax on Sheffield residents, the council's spending power is still 22% less in 2025/26 than it was in 2010/11
13. in the face of all this, believes it is the duty of all elected members to take on the responsibility of running this Council in the best interests of Sheffield's residents,

prioritising the available resources to protect communities and working towards a more equitable, sustainable and resilient city to face the future;

14. welcomes the increase of the Council Tax Hardship Fund, in line with previous Green Group budget amendment proposals over successive years;
15. notes that long-term, outsourced contracts with big, private businesses still see increases in our budgets, putting further pressure on other Council services;
16. notes that the long-term costs of this finance still stretch into Sheffield's future until 2057;
17. welcomes the successes of the Council in attracting significant sums to support housing regeneration and affordable homes;
18. welcomes the work already done and continuing under the Future Sheffield project to put the council's finances on a more sustainable footing in the long-term, whilst focussing on getting the basics right;
19. believes that the success of this work demonstrates that this council could do more to address its major strategic and financial challenges in the future and
20. will prepare for this by asking the relevant Policy Committee to consider adding to its work programme the following opportunities to:
 - a. invite South Yorkshire Pensions Authority and private pension funds to invest in large-scale energy-saving, renewable heat and power-generation schemes on fixed assets such as schools, together with heat that will bring steady financial returns to both the lenders and the council;
 - b. maximise the use of roof space owned by the council to invest in solar power generation;
 - c. implement the Council's commitment to become a Pedestrian-Friendly City, leveraging in further investment in active travel and an improved street scene;
 - d. raise substantial sums for buses, trams, walking and cycling routes and the associated infrastructure through an Employers' Workplace Parking Levy;
 - e. review the approach to parking policies and zones and investing in staff in order to maximise the revenue available for funding other sustainable transport schemes, such as improving bus and tram journeys;
 - f. apply any surplus revenue from the Clean Air Zone, that is not already earmarked, to measures to improve air quality further, noting that the World Health Organisation guidelines recommend annual average concentrations of no more than 10 µg/m³ of Nitrogen Dioxide, in contrast to the current legal level of 40 µg/m³;
 - g. maximise the effect of important local authority ecology work, in view of the Nature Emergency and the Council's Biodiversity Duty in the Environment Act 2021, by creating a pipeline of projects to invest developers' contributions towards Biodiversity Net Gain, which would enhance and improve the council's neglected areas of land, whilst saving costs on maintenance;
 - h. further work on replacing street lighting with more efficient models, saving money as energy bills rise, whilst also benefiting wildlife from reduced light pollution;

- i. develop a model of community care co-operatives to reduce reliance on profit-making staffing agencies by removing the profit motive from the care sector;
 - j. press central government health services to account for their spending in democratic forums and ensure that every health service spending decision genuinely contributes towards the city's health and wellbeing;
 - k. continually improve services to residents of the city so as to realise real savings by getting decisions right first time and avoiding the cost of delay and rectification;
 - l. maximise the impact of municipal climate bonds which have successfully raised millions of pounds of investment for several councils from community sources at a lower rate of interest than the Public Works Loan Board;
 - m. review the scope of Community Infrastructure Levy charging to ensure that all new property developments make a fair contribution to the communities they affect;
 - n. Investigate the feasibility of the wide scale adoption of graphene heating for Council buildings to address energy costs and reduce carbon emissions.
21. believes that continued cross-party working will give the most benefit for the long-term stability of council finances and also offers the best chance for the residents of Sheffield to have the services they deserve;