

Amendment by the SNP Group

The City of Edinburgh Council

22 February 2024

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Strategy 2024/2025 to 2028/2029

Since the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Administration parties voted to remove £1.3bn from the Council housebuilding programme SNP Councillors have been steadfast in the need to get the programme back on track.

This has informed every decision we have faced on housing, in the context of the city declaring a housing crisis, and it informs our decision today.

Rent increase

We acknowledge and appreciate the consultation responses from tenants in the engagement on what they were willing to support on the rent increase. We also recognise the thousands of residents in temporary accommodation, in insecure and unaffordable housing, who would not have been consulted directly but whose precarious housing situation has prompted the council to declare a housing emergency.

We also acknowledge and appreciate Council Officers' recommendation to increase rent by 8.4% for the next 5 years to restore the Council housing building programme, which is the key action the council can take to address the housing emergency.

For both reasons, we will support the recommendation to increase rent by 8.4% but will not confirm next year's increase until next year.

At 8.4%, the programme can still deliver at pace and scale and see all homes brought up to Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing 2 (EESH2) standards and 4,300 new social rented homes over the lifetime of the business plan, repairing the damage done by the previous decision.

Tenant Hardship Fund

Although around 70-80% of tenants will have their rent paid by housing benefit and will not directly be affected by a rent increase, we know there are tenants who will be. And because this year-on-year increase in rent is substantial, we request that up to £500k of

the additional revenue is ringfenced to increase the Tenant Hardship Fund. This must provide an additional safety net for affected tenants alongside work to increase referrals of tenants into income maximisation services.

The fund should be easy-access and with minimal barriers for tenants. It must be able to be utilised in a similar way to Direct Housing Payments (DHPs) where appropriate, providing a month by month top up to households that are affected by the benefits cap and those with particular vulnerabilities. A report on how this can be administered should be brought to the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work committee within one cycle of the budget meeting.

Empty Council houses

Over a thousand council homes remain empty, despite promises from the administration that this scandal will be addressed. In the Council's budget we are taking the unprecedented step of allocating £3.5m to accelerate work to bring these properties back into use. We believe it is proper to use the Council's general funds due to the high numbers of households within homelessness services, trapped in temporary accommodation, while council homes lie empty.

Council notes the following reports from the Executive Director of Place:

Council Budget Reports

- Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Strategy 2024/2025 to 2028/2029 - referral from the Finance and Resources Committee (6 February 2024)
- Glenarm Place, Western Harbour, Edinburgh – Proposed Acquisition of Completed Homes - referral from the Finance and Resources Committee (25 January 2024)

Council therefore agrees:

- A rent increase of 8.4% for year 2024/25, *although notes future rent increases will be set next year to fix a future position which can continue to deliver the programme as set out.*
- To continue the Tenant Hardship Fund in 2024/25 and increase this fund by up to £500,000 as set out in the motion;
- To purchase 118 new build flatted homes within the Western Harbour Development subject to completing due diligence and on the terms and conditions outlined in the report.

Moved by: Councillor Macinnes

Seconded by: Councillor Nols-McVey