

Birmingham City Council

Report to City Council

5 November 2024



Title:	MOTIONS FOR DEBATE FROM INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS
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Is this a Key Decision?	Not Applicable
If this is a Key Decision, is this decision listed on the Forward Plan?	Not Applicable
Reason(s) why not included on the Forward Plan:	Not Applicable
Is this a Late Report?	No
Reason(s) why Late:	Not Applicable
Is this decision eligible for 'call in?'	Not Applicable
If not eligible, please provide reason(s):	Not Applicable
Wards:	Not Applicable

Does this report contain exempt or confidential information?

No

Has this decision been included on the Notification of Intention to consider Matters in Private?

Not Applicable

Reasons why not included on the Notification:

Not Applicable

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To consider the following Motions of which notice has been given in accordance with Council Procedure Rules (section B4.4 G of the Constitution).

2 NOTICES OF MOTION

A. Councillors Jayne Francis and Jamie Tennant have given notice of the following Notice of Motion:-

“This Council notes that:

- The United Kingdom is navigating a national housing crisis, resulting in an over reliance on temporary accommodation to safeguard households facing homelessness across the UK.
- Temporary accommodation was never intended to exist for more than an immediate solution; Shelter reports, as of April 2024, 145,800 children are homeless and living in temporary accommodation with their families; the highest on record and up 19,460 (15%) in a year.
- Birmingham experiences a similar picture, with over 5000 households now living in temporary accommodation, 700 of these are families with dependent children in B&B for over 6 weeks. Temporary accommodation costs the Council over £2m per month, contributing to the £1.6bn national expenditure.
- Councils, including Birmingham are penalised for utilising privately provided temporary accommodation, being only able to receive 90% of the 2011 Local Housing Allowance rates as income, resulting in the need for large, general fund subsidies to enable the provision.
- Our commitment to prevention and partnership is reflected in the new Homelessness Prevention Strategy 2024-2029. A prevention success rate of over 55% is greater than the national or core cities average.
- In absolute terms, the Council’s position in relation to the use of temporary accommodation is not out of kilter with the rest of the UK. However, the city’s overreliance of B&B accommodation and a reduction in the number of affordable homes delivered has increased the number and length of time families reside in unsuitable B&B accommodation.
- The Council launched its Temporary Accommodation Strategy in June 2023, reviewed in September 2024 considering the Council’s challenging financial position. The strategy sets out an innovative plan to reduce the use of B&B accommodation, including interventions such as:
 - 10 years plus 1 day leasing scheme
 - Delivering acquisitions through the Housing Revenue Account
 - Increased use of Regulation 10

- Developing a family supported exempt model
- This strategy is coupled with the Council's intentions to increase the supply of social rented homes. The Council continue to work with partners to bring forward affordable schemes, including accelerating major regeneration projects such as Druids Heath and Ladywood.
- The Council are committed to doing everything within its power to reduce the number of families who are having to rely on long stays in temporary accommodation. However, there are several systemic challenges that are outside of the Council's control and require additional support from Government to move forward.

This Council believes that:

- The number of families building their lives in temporary accommodation across the UK and in Birmingham is unacceptable and causes major disruption to family life.
- The reduced number of affordable homes being delivered over recent years and the focus on home ownership as opposed to social rented products has significantly reduced the ability of households to move out of temporary accommodation quickly.
- The Council cannot resolve these challenges alone and require long-term and sustained investment in a variety of interventions that will mitigate the impact of homelessness.
- The rising cost of temporary accommodation puts the stability of local government finance at risk and takes vital resource away from delivering a high-quality service.
- The cross-government taskforce to reduce homelessness, announced by the Deputy Prime Minister in August, is to be welcomed, appreciating the need for a clear and strategic approach to tackling homelessness.
- By working with the Mayor of the West Midlands and the Government, we can deliver the biggest programme of social and affordable housing in 40 years, if this is backed by long-term investment.

This Council resolves to:

- Write to and continue to lobby the Deputy Prime Minister to request that the homelessness taskforce brings forward a Homelessness Strategy that:
 - Sets out the priorities for investment.
 - Commits to fair funding and investment in alternatives to temporary accommodation and particularly B&B accommodation.
 - Commits to investment in the supply of social rented homes

- Commits to increasing the level of grant funding to help local authorities and their partners to acquire properties from the open market while the supply of new social homes catches up.”

B. Councillors Deirdre Alden and Alex Yip have given notice of the following Notice of Motion:-

“Council Notes:

- The Labour Government’s recent decision to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only pensioners in receipt of means-tested benefits like Pension Credit, as announced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves.
- The estimated impact of this decision, which Age UK says will mean 2 million pensioners who badly need the money to stay warm this winter will not receive it.
- The significant role that Winter Fuel Payments play in helping older residents of Birmingham and across the UK afford heating during the coldest months, thereby preventing 'heat or eat' dilemmas and safeguarding health.
- The criticism from Age UK and other charities, highlighting the social injustice and potential health risks posed by this sudden policy change.
- The additional strain this decision will place on vulnerable pensioners, many of whom do not claim Pension Credit despite being eligible, further exacerbating their financial hardship.
- Research by Policy in Practice predicts that over 17,000 pensioners in Birmingham are eligible for pension but do not yet claim. To receive the winter fuel allowance this year under the government’s revised policy, they will need to claim pension credit before 21 December 2024.
- Even if all of these were successfully added to the list of current claimants, that would still leave around 100,000 pensioners in Birmingham facing a cut to their household income this winter.
- The cut is coming at a time when energy bills are expected to rise by 10%, despite when in Opposition, the Labour Government promising to freeze the cap.

Council believes:

- That the Winter Fuel Payment has been a lifeline for many older people across the UK and that restricting its availability solely to those on Pension Credit risks leaving many pensioners in financial hardship.
- While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter Fuel Payment may not require it, many thousands across Birmingham sit just above the cut-off for Pension Credit, have higher energy bills due to disability or live in hard-to-heat homes and will now lose their allowance.
- The decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments, especially with such short notice and without adequate compensatory measures, is deeply unfair and will disproportionately affect the health and well-being of our poorest older residents.
- The government's approach fails to consider the administrative barriers and stigma that prevent eligible pensioners from claiming Pension Credit, leaving many without the support they desperately need.
- The government's approach also fails to consider additional costs to the public purse through increased health and social care demand resulting from people struggling to heat their homes.

Council resolves to:

- Request that the Council Leader, jointly with other Group Leaders, write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging a review of the decision to means-test the Winter Fuel Payment and asking the government to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who do not claim Pension Credit, are protected from fuel poverty.
- Encourage local efforts to promote Pension Credit uptake through council services and partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all eligible pensioners in Birmingham are supported in claiming their entitlement.
- Commit the Council to signing the 'Save the Winter Fuel Payment for Struggling Pensioners' petition being run by Age UK and write to all members offering them the opportunity to sign the petition themselves."

3 IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Finance

3.1 There are none arising from this report.

Legal

3.2 There are none arising from this report.

Equalities

3.3 There are none arising from this report.

APPENDICES

None.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.