

# Cabinet

## Supplementary Information



**Date:** Wednesday, 3 February 2021

**Time:** 2.00 pm

**Venue:** City Hall, College Green, Bristol, BS1 9NE

### 2. Public Forum

(Pages 3 - 16)

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**Date:** Tuesday, 02 February 2021



**CABINET – 3 February 2021**

**PUBLIC FORUM ITEMS**

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**Statements and questions have been received as follows (full details are attached):**

**Agenda item 5 - Housing Revenue Budget Proposals 2021-2022**

**Statements:**

PS05.01	Ollie Fortune	Attending
PS05.02	David Redgewell	Attending
PS05.03	Kerry Bailes	
PS05.04	Sarah	
PS05.05	Aileen McLoughlin	Attending
CS05.01	Councillor Jo Sergeant	
CS05.02	Councillor Eleanor Combley	

**Questions:**

PQ05.01&02	Ollie Fortune	Attending
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**Statement: PS05.01**

**Cabinet – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals**

**Statement submitted by: Ollie Fortune**

In the agenda item report a recurring theme of risk and exercising financial prudence pervades.

There is a housing crisis but you wouldn't think so judging by this report.

We have record numbers of rough sleepers and homeless people in our city which is mirrored in other cities too.

Frankly the language in this report does not reflect the severity of the housing crisis and does not do the rough sleepers in our city and those in limbo in our city waiting to be housed justice. This is not some vanity project or scheme. Housing should be treated as a human right and building more council housing would generate income for the council as well as create jobs. 4 years on I am still saying the same thing and seeing no evidence of it happening. I am disappointed.

**Statement: PS05.02**

**Cabinet – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals**

**Statement submitted by: David Redgewell**

We would like to support the provision of new social housing within Lockleaze and Cheswick, Lawrence Weston, Southmead Ashton Vale, Brislington, Hartcliffe Hengrove areas of the city region but it is very important to plan these housing developments with public bus services and the case of Bedminster around the railway station and buses and metro bus provided by WECA mayoral transport authority.

Many new people who get a new social home or council home are in need of access to employment training and in the case of South Bristol, access to shopping centres facilities in Bedminster.

We do need shopping centre high street regeneration.

When we build new Council housing we need to regenerate communities with facilities in south Bristol and lockleaze and cheswick need more shops, schools and better bus access and also a new local railway station at Ashley down .

We hope that in planning need for social homes that public transport and community facilities will be addressed and mixed housing development work in East and North Bristol in south Gloucestershire council area with rented housing part buy part rent and market housing.

Greater Bristol needs more social housing and part buy part rent as the west country location is very attractive to people coming to the city region from London and south east plus the Midlands.

We also second homes within Bristol Harbour.

Even the areas like the land around Newfoundland Road and St Paul's are part of Gentrification.

So it is very important that Bristol City Council and the surrounding unitary authorities in South Gloucestershire, B&NES and North Somerset provide more rented housing with Bristol in the city region

David Redgewell south west transport network and Railfuture Severnside

**Statement: PS05.03**

**Cabinet – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals**

**Statement submitted by: Kerry Bailes**

I am writing to you in deepest dismay regarding a previous agreement you made to raise council rents by a nominal amount, it now transpires that you have taken a complete U-turn on this important decision.

I understand the dichotomy you are facing and that you assume that not raising council rents now will help the poorest and most vulnerable in the city recover financially from COVID-19 related financial circumstances that council tenants may be living with.

This is a false economy, not raising council rents will cost tenants more in the long run through heating homes with inadequate insulation, heating systems, windows, and doors. Far too many council homes fail to meet the governments decent homes standard:

[A decent home: definition and guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

a policy brought about by the last labour government to ensure that tenants were living in warm homes with decent and modern facilities such as kitchens, bathrooms, homes which provide a “reasonable degree of thermal comfort”. I have been a council tenant for 20 years; I grew up in council housing, I have never lived in anything else, I realise that has meant that although my many obstacles in life I have managed to keep my head above water. Despite that, as a council tenant I have also been a victim of lack of investment in council housing, with many of the council’s legal requirements to repair my home falling solely on my head, costing me money I do not have, not to mention paying ever-rising heating bills to keep myself and my children warm. No other landlord would get away with passing the buck literally onto the tenant. Waiting any longer might mean that in future, we are back in the same position we are in now, 30 years from now future generations will still be fighting for their right to a decent affordable home. Do not let this happen, raise the rents now, invest in our lives by investing in our homes.

(Below) is an email I sent to various Bristol politicians 3 years ago. My MP’s office called and said it would be investigated, but I never heard anything back, nothing at all from anyone else I contacted. I have brought this issue as well as other repairs and maintenance issue up at various council meetings prior and since writing the attached email only to be told that the shed roof policy is under review. The shed roof is not my responsibility, no other landlord would get away with passing the buck onto the tenant. I do not have the money or skills to do the work myself. The same could be said about kitchens, bathrooms, doors, windows, loft insulation cladding etc, by not raising rents now, you are continuing to shirk your responsibility as my landlord to repair and maintain my home, you will not save me money in the long run. Please reconsider raising the rents this year by a nominal amount, invest in existing council homes now, before it’s too late.

Dear all,

I'm writing to you all in relation to a repair I've requested to my shed at my home in Hartcliffe where I have now lived for 4 years. When first moving into the property I was very pleased with the condition and overall look of the property, however the shed was in poor condition as was the neighbour's at number [redacted].

At the time I took the tenancy the property next door, number [redacted] was being refurbished ready for the new tenant after being left empty for over a year.

As part of the refurbishment repair work was done on the neighbouring shed in the way of a new door and window. I requested the same repairs be carried out on my shed as my door and window were in a worse state of repair, I was concerned that this could attract thieves or vandals especially as the windows had been smashed at number [redacted], these repairs were carried out by the council.

A large amount of Maintenance work was also carried out in the garden of number [redacted] once tenanted. The council Contractors laid a new path which was soon removed as it was poorly laid, trees and large overgrown shrubs were dug up and removed and the ground then levelled off with several tons of soil (trees and shrubs so big that the private property at number [redacted] built their boundary wall to accommodate the overgrowth), fencing was repaired at the back of the property and a new gate fitted leading into [redacted] park where rubbish was removed along with rubbish that had accumulated in the garden. After quite some complaining maintenance work was carried out on the very large [redacted] tree in my garden as the branches had reached so far across my own garden that they were dangling into the private property at number [redacted] as well as [redacted] park.

Both shed roofs were in poor condition, rotten timbers and leaking profusely. Leaks were made worse after contractors climbed onto the roofs when clearing rubbish. I enquired at the time about having the repairs done to the shed roofs, a council surveyor came and looked at my shed roof and said that the council would remove the roof and not repair it as this was my responsibility. I explained that I was not in a financial position to do this and the work would not be covered by any home insurance as I don't own the property. My home insurance only covers the contents and not any building work needed to protect my belongings from damage. At the time the surveyor said that I would be well within my rights to take the shed roof with me if I carried out the work and then decided to move at some point in the future. I felt at the time and still think to this day that his comment was rather bizarre to say the least!

I shouldn't be put in a financial position where I either have to claim on my home contents insurance to replace the contents of my shed (which would interrupt my no claims as well as put my premiums up) or be burdened with replacing its contents from my own pocket, nor pay for building work to protect my belongings, belongings that I am unable and shouldn't be expected to keep inside my home. Throughout my working life I've never earned more than £6,000- £8,000 a year on average, at the moment I am earning less than in previous years, as a single working parent I am

just keeping my head above water therefore not in a position to take out a loan large enough to afford this work to be done either.

As you're all aware there is rather a lot of money accumulating in the housing revenue account, I see no reason why this money cannot be used to repair my shed roof. As it's a one of Cost and has had no previous maintenance work done on it I don't see this to be an unreasonable request.

The house and shed was built in the 1950's which means the shed roof is around 60 years old, the fact that it is still in place is astonishing. A replacement roof would hopefully last another 60 years or so and would cost very little money as there should be no maintenance costs if the work was done to a decent standard.

As you can see from the email attached from the council they claim not to do much of the maintenance work described above, yet the work was carried out regardless at the request of myself and the previous tenant at number  at no cost to either of us.

I'd be very grateful if you could look into this matter. Imho if I were renting privately pressure would be put on the landlord to do such repairs, I feel as a council Tennant I should also be able to apply the same rights.

**Statement: PS05.04**

**Cabinet – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals**

**Statement submitted by: Sarah**

I was delighted to hear previously that you were going to put my council rent up this year but are now considering a rent freeze. As a survivor of Domestic and Sexual abuse over a significant period of my life I can honestly say that you have let me down massively as a tenant. I have spoken publicly about my trauma and the impact that has had on my council tenancy. For 6 years I was raped and abused daily in our council home by one out of the three perpetrators I have lived with in my life, he abused me in every way thinkable, I have scars all over my body and mind from this abuse and the abuse I imposed on myself because of his constant molestation, rape, coercive control, and oppression of my life, denying me even the right to sleep or wear clothes on many occasions whilst home alone with him. After fleeing over a decade ago and obtaining at the time a none-molestation order (injunction) I was given a lifeline by the council, what should have been a warm, safe home but did not meet the decent home standard. After much complaining I eventually got some of the repairs and maintenance done to my home, I am very articulate and able to confidently write endless amounts of emails to council officers and politicians to get the work done, however, far too many victims and survivors cannot and therefore continue to suffer in silence. So, I write to you for them and myself. After successfully writing and getting repairs done in my previous home, I now live in a relatively nice council home, with little needing doing to it cosmetically, although some safety elements leave a lot to be desired and are need of replacing, for example, my windows are double glazed but are coming to the end of their life cycle, some of the handles and mechanisms are failing and often break unexpectedly whilst out or at home asleep. As well as my windows being unsafe, I also have fire safety concerns in my home, exacerbated my most violent perpetrators history of arson, no door on my kitchen for example, meaning a fire would quickly spread upstairs and engulf my home. Can you imagine coming home or waking up finding your window wide open because the mechanism has failed! Knowing that your most violent perpetrator is no longer in prison, knowing that he is getting closer and closer to finding out where you live, knowing that you see him regularly near your street, knowing he could do what he promised to do a decade ago! Will you raise my rent if he gets into my home? Will you raise the rent if he gets in and smashes up my home like he did for 6 years whilst in a relationship with him? Will you raise the rent if he rapes me again or worse! Strangles me again? Pushes me down the stairs again? Carries out the threat to kill me? Buries me in the local vicinity for no one to find my bludgeoned, burnt, and mutilated body! Will you invest in my home as an afterthought, only when not if he gets in? I and so many other victims and survivors already know the answers to my questions, the answer is NO! you have not and will not invest in the safety of our homes and for many it is already too late, too many victims fall foul to their perpetrators, some of which could and should have been protected by their homes. I have worked hard on my home, I have made long lasting friendships with my neighbours and community so moving yet again to another inadequate council home

is simply not an option for me and many others, we should not have to keep running away or fight or barter for repairs to get done on our homes to be made safe.

RAISE THE RENT!

## **Statement: PS05.05**

**Cabinet – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals**

**Statement submitted by: Aileen McLoughlin**

In Feb 2020 Full Council agreed to a modest Rent Rise in line with Rent Policy Guidance. It was a hard decision but based on the need to maximise the present and future budget for social housing repairs and maintenance and protecting the Bristol social home building program.

No-one wants to increase rents but when the consequences of not doing so are a reduction in borrowing capacity and eating into reserves needed for long overdue social housing essential repairs or improvements there is no real choice. We need to recognise that a rent freeze would be an irresponsible decision achieving short term gain with long term damage.

Appendix A1 states the potential impact of a 0% rent increase as “Delivering the existing level of service may require additional borrowing in future years” The suggested mitigation is “Service efficiencies; review of HRA and creation of a new 30-year business plan”. This worries me greatly.

In last year’s budget we agreed that “in order to respond to inflationary pressures, deal with regulatory issues and to ensure we have the borrowing capacity for 900 new council homes this council approves an inflationary rent increase in line with the Government rent policy for the HRA of CPI+1%, namely 2.7%”. These requirements have not changed.

Average rent would increase by small sums in the context of Council rents being around 34% of market rents in Bristol. For around half of tenants the increase will be met by additional Housing Benefit and universal credit subsidy, if anything the pandemic is likely to have increased this proportion. Those on the waiting list or in temporary accommodation will not thank us for risking the build of future social homes for small reductions in rent for those who have council homes. Tenants whose bills are high when they wait for window repairs will save on rent but not on bills.

The impact of a rent increase is compounded, it does not just affect this year – last year’s estimate was that it would generate an additional £141m over the life of the business plan. The additional income would also increase the borrowing potential of the HRA and increase the 5 year capital programme. It would enable the Council to accelerate the programme of improvement works on the HRA stock and Carbon neutrality. It would enable more new homes to be built over the next 5 years, bringing in additional rental income, which can then be used to maintain and develop stock including zero carbon retrofitting. The loss of borrowing capacity of not putting the rent up will be tens of millions - under last year’s rules and costs this would deliver up to 1,000 homes.

Why we need a rent rise in line with Rent Policy:

- We need to maximise funds in HRA to meet our commitments to housing repair/improvements
- We need to maximise fund in HRA to meet our commitments to retrofitting and carbon reduction in our housing stock
- We need to take advantage of the cumulative increase in HRA over 30 years of a small increase this year – we lose this forever not just for one year
- We need the increase in expected rental income to borrow against to protect our social housing program – just like individuals need income to gain a mortgage
- We have this chance now but it could be snatched from us by a Tory Government at any time – we cannot risk weakening our ability to improve social housing in the City
- All decisions must guarantee our long term commitment to a strong social housing programme – small rent increases are a necessary evil to achieve this

**Statement: CS05.01**

**Cabinet – 3 February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5: Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals 2021-2022**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Jo Sergeant**

(In the Budget Report considered on 26<sup>th</sup> January) Section 11.3 of the Mayor's Recommendations states:

‘Although the Rent Policy and Rent Standard allows Local Authorities to increase rents by up to CPI plus 1% for 2021/22, considering the current economic conditions, the impact of pandemic and the hardship suffered by people in need, it is proposed that the Council will freeze rents for existing tenants for the coming year, effective from April 2021. Therefore, to maintain the existing level of service this will require an accelerated use of HRA reserve and an increase in borrowing requirement from 2024/25 onwards.’

We need more information about how this accelerated use of the HRA reserve and, what could be argued as the unsustainable practice of borrowing against future budgets, will work in practice and their longer term consequences.

By not implementing this small increase in rent (that will not impact anyone who has applied for CT reduction as a result of the Pandemic), we lose the increase in funding from the housing benefit/Universal Credit that many of our tenants use to pay their rent.

I would like to see the evidence that our council house-building and maintenance programmes will not be harmed by the loss of funding, due what is effectively a cut in rental income.

I have many residents in my ward waiting to be housed/rehoused. There are 13,000 Bristol families waiting for a decent home. Those who are not currently council tenants pay more rent to private landlords and won't get the benefit of a rent freeze. I hope this is being taken into account.

Councillor Jo Sergeant  
Avonmouth & Lawrence Weston Ward  
(Includes Shirehampton, Coombe Dingle & Upper Sea Mills)

## **Statement: CS05.02**

**Cabinet – 3 February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5: Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals 2021-2022**

**Statement submitted by: Councillor Eleanor Combley**

I would like to encourage the Cabinet to consider unlocking more funding to build new council homes for those who need them, to reduce energy bills and reduce carbon emissions, and to improve maintenance for council tenants, through a 1% above inflation rent rise, which in the majority of cases would be covered by Central Government through housing benefit or universal credit. I know a rent rise is a difficult headline to spin, but doing stuff that makes easy headlines should not be our guiding light. We should try to do the right thing, and do the work to make a public case for it.

A modest increase in rents would increase the income of the Housing Revenue Account, and that in turn enables the borrowing of millions more to build more council houses, accelerate the retrofitting programme of energy efficiency and renewable generation measures, and reinvigorate the stalled repairs and refurbishments programme.

Money for building council houses will benefit those waiting for a council house, struggling with private rents that are around three times what the council charges, squeezing into accommodation that is too small to meet their needs, or camping out with family who can't really accommodate them. Building more council houses also means more rental income in the future, enabling more building – it is a virtuous circle, an upward spiral to counter the bitter national decline.

Money for retrofitting will benefit those already in a council house, whose energy bills will be reduced, making a warm, comfortable home more affordable, or who have been waiting for some time for a bathroom or kitchen that is fit for purpose. And of course, all of us who want to see our carbon impact reduced and for the city to meet its 2030 Carbon Neutrality target.

Money for repairs will benefit the many council tenants who are waiting for repairs or improvements, and who, if you actually speak to tenants, will tell you that they would willingly pay a small increase if it meant that work was done.

And of course, for around two thirds of households in council housing, the increase will be covered by Central Government because those households are in receipt of housing benefit or the housing element of universal credit.

One note of caution: a small number of households are already up against the benefits cap, and any rise in rents must be accompanied by work to protect and support them against this hideous Tory policy. Of course they will benefit from reduced energy bills from the retrofitting programme, but in addition they need interventions like targeted benefits advice to see if they are eligible to have the cap lifted because of a family member's disability, or are close to the working hours

threshold. And if necessary discretionary housing payments should be used to support these households.

With those safeguards in place this is a budget change that can bring a great deal of benefit and I ask Cabinet to consider it.

**Question: PQ05.01**

**Cabinet – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021**

**Re: Agenda item 5 – Housing Revenue Account Budget Proposals**

**Questions submitted by: Ollie Fortune**

1. In the agenda item report an objective of "fair and inclusive" housing is mentioned. Do you believe it is fair that at least 13,000 households are waiting to be housed, these are only the ones who have come forward for support, by Bristol City Council?
2. Central government has proven that money can be generated and is available during a crisis to solve a problem if the will and or need exists. So I ask you very simply: why aren't you demanding that central government allows Bristol city council to borrow as much as necessary to build council homes to house the 13,000 plus households on the waiting list rather than justifying using £11.3 million in reserves as mentioned in this report?