

FULL COUNCIL 2 FEBRUARY 2015

MOTIONS ON NOTICE –motions from Liberal Democrat, Green, Labour groups in turn.

(1) Devolution for Councils (Proposed by Councillor Fooks, seconded by Councillor Gant)

Liberal Democrat member motion.

Council notes:

- a) The strong and enthusiastic participation shown by the people of Scotland in a remarkable democratic process leading to the Referendum on 18 September;
- b) The resulting increased discussion on the devolution of powers from central government in Westminster and Whitehall.

Council believes:

- I. That power should be devolved to the people in all parts of the United Kingdom;
- II. That England is currently ruled by an over-centralised state that fails to reflect localities and regions;
- III. That concentrating more power to English MPs in Westminster is not the answer for English devolution and that passing power down to local areas of England is essential.

Council therefore calls for the leaders of the three political groups on Oxford City Council to ask Oxford's MPs to join them in lobbying Government to plan for urgent major devolution of power, including tax raising and spending, from central government to the regions, counties, boroughs & districts and cities of England.

and that such lobbying should emphasise:

- that the devolution of powers and finance to English councils be carried out in ways that enhance and strengthen local democratic bodies. This must include agreement that it shall be for local people and communities to decide their form of democratic leadership without having a specific model imposed (for example directly elected Mayors) in return for more powers;
- a recognition that English devolution must include both large cities and county areas, as the many councils not within city regions must also gain greater powers and finance in order to build successful and prosperous futures.

Council further asks that this devolution should include consideration of the role that could be played by local elected bodies such as area committees or parish councils within the current district structure.

Amendment proposed by Councillor Turner

Amend III to add before "local areas of England" the words "city regions and local areas of England".

Delete (in the paragraph beginning "Council therefore calls...") the words "tax raising and spending", and instead add at the end of the paragraph: "Council believes local government needs more fiscal autonomy – for instance, the ability to levy modest taxes on tourism – but that there should not be an erosion of national solidarity, such

that areas with lower tax bases are placed in an even worse economic situation, on the back of the disproportionate cuts they have suffered under the Coalition government.

Delete the final paragraph and amend to read: "Council further believes that democratic transparency would be enhanced by introducing single-tier local government to Oxfordshire based upon several district councils becoming unitary, and that such councils should make the greatest possible effort to involve all sections of their communities in decision-making."

Motion as amended reads:

Council notes:

- a) The strong and enthusiastic participation shown by the people of Scotland in a remarkable democratic process leading to the Referendum on 18 September;
- b) The resulting increased discussion on the devolution of powers from central government in Westminster and Whitehall.

Council believes:

- I. That power should be devolved to the people in all parts of the United Kingdom;
- II. That England is currently ruled by an over-centralised state that fails to reflect localities and regions;
- III. That concentrating more power to English MPs in Westminster is not the answer for English devolution and that passing power down to *city regions* and local areas of England is essential.

Council therefore calls for the leaders of the three political groups on Oxford City Council to ask Oxford's MPs to join them in lobbying Government to plan for urgent major devolution of power, including ~~tax-raising and spending~~, from central government to the regions, counties, boroughs & districts and cities of England. *Council believes local government needs more fiscal autonomy – for instance, the ability to levy modest taxes on tourism – but that there should not be an erosion of national solidarity, such that areas with lower tax bases are placed in an even worse economic situation, on the back of the disproportionate cuts they have suffered under the Coalition government.*

and that such lobbying should emphasise:

- that the devolution of powers and finance to English councils be carried out in ways that enhance and strengthen local democratic bodies. This must include agreement that it shall be for local people and communities to decide their form of democratic leadership without having a specific model imposed (for example directly elected Mayors) in return for more powers;
- a recognition that English devolution must include both large cities and county areas, as the many councils not within city regions must also gain greater powers and finance in order to build successful and prosperous futures.

Council further believes that democratic transparency would be enhanced by introducing single-tier local government to Oxfordshire based upon several district councils becoming unitary, and that such councils should make the greatest possible effort to involve all sections of their communities in decision-making.

(2) Reversing NHS privatisation (Proposed by Councillor Hollick)

Green Group member motion

Council notes that at the start of this year the first private company to run a hospital walked away from its contract. This followed critical findings from the Care Quality Commission around inadequate standards for safety and patient care.

Council believes that this example clearly illustrates the dangers of privatisation in the NHS, and is concerned that uncertainty created by private providers could increase now that the Secretary of State's duty to provide has been abolished by the 2012 Health and Social Care Act.

Council welcomes the Private Member's Bill from Clive Efford MP ^[1] as an attempt to tackle privatisation, but notes this Bill's shortcomings - including the failure to re-establish the Secretary of State's duty to provide the NHS.

Council therefore resolves to:

(i) endorse the NHS Reinstatement Bill ^[2] which proposes to:

- reinstate in England the legal duty of the Secretary of State to provide the NHS
- abolish competition;
- abolish the purchaser-provider split;
- re-establish public bodies and public accountability; and
- restrict the role of commercial companies.

(ii) call on the city's two MPs to support the Bill to be introduced in the next parliament.

Notes:

[1] Support from the leader of the council and the Green Group for the Efford Bill was indicated under question 17 at the Council meeting on 1 December 2014

[2] More on the NHS Reinstatement Bill is available here: <http://www.nhsbill2015.org/>

Amendment proposed by Councillor Taylor:

Delete all after "Clive Efford MP" and replace with:

Council believes that the last thing that our precious National Health Service needs is another top down reorganisation.

Council recognises the tremendous strain on staff in all parts of our health service at the moment in a climate of shortages of nurses and doctors at a time of increasing numbers of patients with more complex needs.

Council believes that we must preserve the values of our National Health Service for future generations and that we should listen to those currently working in the health service about the need for integration of health and social care services as well as the importance of public health.

Motion as amended reads:

Council notes that at the start of this year the first private company to run a hospital walked away from its contract. This followed critical findings from the Care Quality Commission around inadequate standards for safety and patient care.

Council believes that this example clearly illustrates the dangers of privatisation in the NHS, and is concerned that uncertainty created by private providers could increase now that the Secretary of State's duty to provide has been abolished by the 2012 Health and Social Care Act.

Council welcomes the Private Member's Bill from Clive Efford MP.

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Council believes that we must preserve the values of our National Health Service for future generations and that we should listen to those currently working in the health service about the need for integration of health and social care services as well as the importance of public health.

(3) Voting Reform (Proposed by Councillor Hayes, seconded by Councillor Rowley)

Labour Group member motion

This Council believes:

1. 16 and 17 year olds are knowledgeable and passionate about the world in which they live and are as capable of engaging in the democratic system as any other citizen;
2. Lowering the voting age to 16, combined with strong citizenship education, empowers young people to better engage in society and influence decisions that will define their future;
3. People who can consent to medical treatment, work full-time, pay taxes, get married or enter a civil partnership and join the armed forces should also have the right to vote;
4. Individual registration is affecting the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register, with particular repercussions for young, student, BME, disabled, and disadvantaged people living in social and rented housing.

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We call on the Council to:

1. Support the recent proposals to extend the franchise in all elections to 16 and 17 year olds.
2. Ask local MPs and the government to back the policy announced by the Labour Party, in the spirit of their actions in the Scottish Referendum and extend the franchise in all elections to 16 and 17 year olds.
3. Continue working with Oxford Schools and Colleges to enhance citizenship education for all young people in Oxford.
4. Continue working with community groups, faith organisations, residential associations, and other groups and people to make the electoral register as complete as possible.

(4) General Election TV debates (Proposed by Councillor Wolff)

Green Group member motion

Council notes that in an ICM opinion poll conducted between 12 and 16 December 79% of those polled thought that "the leader of the Green Party should be invited to join the leaders debate" in the run-up to the General Election, and that this strong support was reflected across the political spectrum.

Council believes that the criteria used by Ofcom to determine 'major parties', which are based entirely on historic performance at the polls, does not accurately reflect the present volatile state of political opinion in the UK, indicated by the 300% surge in Green Party membership during the past year, making it the third largest party in England & Wales in terms of membership.

Council notes that whilst Ofcom's policies determine the allocation of Party Election Broadcast time "Ofcom has no role in determining the structure, format and style of any broadcast General Election debates that might take place in future" (para 2.6 of their consultation document Review of Ofcom list of major political parties for elections taking place on 7 May 2015). The TV broadcast companies are therefore not constrained by Ofcom guidelines with regard to their televised election debates.

Council agrees that in at least one of the debates a fuller range of political issues should be explored than those which constitute the policy differences between the three centre parties and one right-wing party of protest.

Council therefore instructs the Chief Executive to write on Council's behalf to the chief executives of the BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and Sky asking that, as a minimum, the Green Party leadership be represented in the forthcoming TV election debates.

(5) Support Social Housing Under Threat campaign and the ‘Yes to Homes’ campaign (Proposed by Councillor Seamons, seconded by Councillor Fooks)

Labour Group member motion

This Council supports both the SHOUT (Social Housing Under Threat) campaign and the ‘Yes to Homes’ campaign. The UK’s housing crisis is particularly acute in Oxford as evidenced by the well documented fact that the ratio of house prices to average incomes is higher here than anywhere else in the country. Additionally, there are well over 2000 households inadequately housed or without a home at all on the housing register, and this is likely to be an underestimate for the demand in Oxford for social housing. The unaffordability of owner occupation and lack of social housing has led to unprecedented demand on the private rented sector. Sharp rent rises there have taken rents well above LHA rates pricing many out.

The solution to the nation’s (and Oxford’s) housing crisis is simple – more homes need to be built. Further the council believes that a new generation of social housing should (and could) play a large role in this increased supply, meeting needs that otherwise the market cannot. Council notes that while this form of housing tenure has been facing multiple threats from government policy, demand continues to vastly outweigh supply. Council calls on the government to change its policy stance and to do more to support the building of social housing.

Council does not accept that the government’s ‘affordable rent’ policy can meet the requirements for social housing since rents at 80% of market level would be unaffordable for most people seeking social housing. In the council’s planning policies there is a requirement for 40% of any new residential development (or a financial contribution to be made) to be social housing. The council has only accepted letting new council housing at affordable rather than social rent levels when that has been a condition of grant. In Barton Park, the city’s largest housing development for a generation, the council will be delivering over 350 homes for rent at social levels.

In recent years social housing and social housing tenants have faced considerable challenges from government policy, including a renewed ‘right to buy’, welfare cuts and the introduction of affordable rents and fixed tenancies. The latest government prospectus for bidders for a renewed ‘Affordable Homes Programme’ states that “social rent provision will only be supported in very limited circumstances.” This is an unhelpful prejudice against social housing, which the council has identified as critical to meeting the housing demands in our city.

This Council resolves:

1. To ask the Chief Executive to write to local Oxford MPs: Andrew Smith and Nicola Blackwood, with the contents of this motion, and ask them for their support in lobbying the Minister for Communities and Local Government to ensure that submissions for grant under any future ‘Affordable Homes Programme’ that provide social rented housing rather than housing at affordable rents, are not prejudiced against.

2. To further consider how the City Deal can support house building, particularly social housing.
3. To support the Yes to Homes campaign and reaffirm a commitment to deliver affordable housing in Oxford.
4. To actively engage with organisations and local groups campaigning or making the case for new homes.
5. To support the SHOUT campaign and take a lead in affirming the positive value and purpose of social rented housing.

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