

# SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

## Governance Committee

### Meeting held 12 October 2023

**PRESENT:** Councillors Fran Belbin (Chair), Sue Alston (Deputy Chair), Simon Clement-Jones, Mike Levery, Alison Norris, Joe Otten, Minesh Parekh, Sioned-Mair Richards and Paul Turpin

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 No apologies for absence were received from members of the Committee.

#### **2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the press and public.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

#### **4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 July 2023, were agreed as an accurate record subject to the correction of a typographical error at paragraph 7.5 and the replacement of the word 'not' with the word 'into'.

#### **5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS**

5.1 The Committee received a public question from Ruth Hubbard concerning the Committee's ongoing work relating to public questions. Ruth Hubbard had shared an interim paper from Sheffield Oversight and Scrutiny (SOS) and asked three related questions, as follows:

"Please will the appointed Task and Finish Group and Governance Committee:

- (1) Carefully consider issues and findings in the SOS (interim) paper, for the purposes of the current council review of PQs [public questions] and petitions;
- (2) Include it in the minutes of this meeting (to note); and
- (3) Report back at the appropriate time on how the paper has any influence (or not) in the process and for thinking in the ongoing review, and in any proposals for improvements the committee might consider coming out of its review."

5.2 The Chair (Councillor Fran Belbin) confirmed that the issues and findings would be considered as part of the Committee's work concerning public questions and petitions and she thanked the citizens who had contributed to the SOS paper. The Committee noted that the SOS paper was interim and that its contents would be published only when the final version of the paper was provided by SOS to the Council. The Chair confirmed that feedback on the contents of the SOS paper would be provided when the matter of public questions was considered by the Working Group and the Committee.

## **6. INTERIM REPORT OF REVIEW OF COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement. The Head of Policy and Partnerships presented the interim report, which set out what the Committee had heard from citizen engagement so far and the next steps. Surveys had been conducted on public questions and petitions and a public workshop was held on 14 September. The findings to date included that:

- Many respondents said they didn't know they could ask a question.
- People wanted the opportunity to be anonymous, to not attend but to still have questions read and answered, and publicly logged.
- People wanted to see how what they asked had influenced change in the decision or the way we operate.
- People commented that being able to ask questions is democracy, and the process, response, influence should reflect this.
- The opportunity to ask, participate should be accessible to all.
- The main complaint was that our response or action to a petition is not easy to find, and that sometimes it felt petitions were simply ignored.

People asked questions for a number of reasons, including because they provided a political and democratic platform; and enabled people to escalate issues and complaints.

6.2 The paper submitted by the SOS as referred to in the public question, would, when finalised, help add to the rich picture which was being produced in relation to the findings of the Committee in relation to public questions and petitions.

6.3 Another meeting of the task and finish group would be arranged, and a further report would be submitted to the Committee.

6.4 Members of the Committee asked questions, and made comments and

observations, as summarised below:

- 6.4.1 Whilst officers might help people to navigate the more appropriate place in which to ask a question, it was a choice for the citizen themselves where they asked a question. This might be where improvements could be made to make it clearer as to their options and the remits of council committees.
- 6.4.2 Some people might find it intimidating to ask a question and consideration should be given to allowing a question to be read out on their behalf, if appropriate.
- 6.4.3 The facility for people to ask questions remotely should be an option through hybrid meetings.
- 6.4.4 People sometimes wished to give background to their question, and it would be beneficial to talk with them about how that could be done in a way that was succinct.
- 6.4.5 It might also be beneficial to ask community groups about the Council's approach public questions.
- 6.4.6 It would be useful to introduce a tracker for public questions, to record what was happening with a question and what was being done in response to it.
- 6.4.7 Local Area Committees enabled more elected members to be involved in answering public questions and providing insight. Some issues which were the subject of public questions at Local Area Committees would have been more appropriately asked at the relevant Policy Committee. There therefore needed to be something produced to explain the journey and steps involved in the process for public questions.
- 6.4.8 Solutions might be difficult, and it would be important to keep the process for public questions under review.
- 6.4.9 Sometimes, people asked questions because there had not been the required engagement on a particular issue, and it was important to ensure that people were involved in issues which might affect them at an earlier stage.
- 6.4.10 Local councillors were a first point of contact and could help people find the appropriate place at which to ask a public question.
- 6.4.11 Other formats might be considered in addition to written questions, including questions asked orally.
- 6.4.12 Work might be done with the voluntary sector to help signpost people to ask a question
- 6.4.13 A question was asked regarding the demographics of those people who responded to the surveys concerning public questions and petitions.
- 6.4.14 Sometimes, people wanted a conversation with the Council and there might be

other ways to make that happen, other than by asking public questions.

- 6.5 The Chair outlined the next steps following members' feedback at this meeting, including evaluation of surveys and learning from the recent public workshop. A further meeting of the task and finish group would be arranged to consider proposals and to test those proposals with citizens and staff before recommendations were submitted to the Governance Committee.
- 6.6 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee (a) notes the progress of the review of the Council's approach to public questions and petitions and the comments made by members of the Committee at this meeting; and (b) agrees the next steps as outlined in paragraph 2 of the report submitted.

## 7. NHS GOVERNANCE PROPOSAL

- 7.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Public Health concerning a proposal for the Governance Committee to sponsor a Task and Finish Group to consider appropriate membership of the forum that considers joint City Council and NHS commissioning and planning through a pooled budget under Section 75 of the NHS Act 2006.
- 7.2 Joe Horobin, the Director of Integrated Commissioning, presented the report to the Committee. She confirmed that any proposed forum, would have a broad and cross cutting remit.
- 7.3 The Task and Finish group would be tasked with looking at the recognition of the new forum within the Council's governance arrangements; membership of the forum; and arrangements to ensure the forum supported effective democratic decision making. Based on those deliberations, the Task and Finish Group would develop a proposal for full Council to consider.
- 7.4 Members of the Committee commented upon the proposals in the report of the Director of Public Health, as follows:
- 7.4.1 A forum should recognise cross party interaction with the NHS.
- 7.4.2 A forum should help to bring community voice into services beyond the remit of one Policy Committee.
- 7.4.3 The Terms of Reference and activity of the Task and Finish Group might also embed priorities for locality spending and environmental and sustainability considerations.
- 7.5 In response, the Director of Integrated Commissioning said that part of the discussions concerned planning at a place and neighbourhood level and clarified that the work of the task and finish group might result in a forum which was not a committee but an appropriate body which supported the Council's ongoing relationship with the NHS.

7.6 The Chair (Councillor Fran Belbin) suggested that the Terms of Reference, as set out in paragraph 3 of the report, be agreed as submitted; and that the importance of locality and climate and nature emergency considerations, as highlighted by the Committee, be included in future discussions of the Task and Finish group.

7.7 **RESOLVED:** That having considered the matter, the Committee:

- (a) agrees the proposed scope, and Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Group to review governance arrangements to support partnership working with NHS Sheffield;
- (b) agrees Elected Member representation for that Task and Finish Group from across the three political groups, as follows: Councillors Sue Alston, Angela Argenzio, Penny Baker, Fran Belbin, Ruth Milsom and Paul Turpin; and
- (c) agrees to receive a proposal for consideration from the Task and Finish Group at its meeting in February 2024.

## **8. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

8.1 The Committee received an update from the Head of Democratic Services, following the first meeting of the Member Development Working Group, which was re-established by the Governance Committee at its meeting in July.

8.2 The Working Group had its first meeting on 13 September 2023 and looked at the several issues, including the Group's terms of reference, a skills audit for councillors, member role profiles, a review of the current programme of learning and development; and new learning opportunities.

8.3 The Working Group looked at its terms of reference to make sure these were fit for purpose. Following discussion at the Council's Corporate Members' Group, the Working Group agreed to include in its terms of reference issues concerning elected members' wellbeing, welfare and safety and to progress practical work on the LGA (Local Government Association) 'debate not hate' campaign, which aimed to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in their communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the responses and support for local politicians facing abuse and intimidation.

8.4 A skills survey was being developed to gain an insight of what training and development members would benefit from and how it was best delivered and to identify existing skills, which councillors had and the extent to which we could have member champions for certain areas of knowledge and skills.

8.5 Draft role profiles had been produced for four councillor roles, City Councillor, Chair of a Policy Committee, Deputy Chair of a Policy Committee and Group Spokesperson, which, when completed, would be brought to the Governance Committee for consideration.

8.6 The group reviewed the current and future programme of learning and

development and agreed that one of the main issues to review was the induction programme for new councillors.

8.7 Finally, it was agreed by the Working Group to pilot self-directed, informal learning offered by Bookboon, including podcasts, eBooks and live virtual classrooms for personal and professional development.

8.8 A member of the Committee asked for a comprehensive schedule of all of the forthcoming learning and development sessions to enable members to plan their attendance and access learning and that consideration was given to learning and development to help elected members understand and work in the committee system

8.9 **RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

## **9. GOVERNANCE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (GRIP) UPDATE**

9.1 The Committee considered a report of the Director of Policy and Engagement which provided a summary of the key achievements from the Governance Committee Implementation Plan (GRIP) and as detailed in the appendix to the report.

9.2 The Head of Policy and Partnerships presented the report. Members commented on the report, as follows:

9.2.1 Report guidance had been developed for officers authoring reports to the Audit and Standards Committee and this might be a model for similar guidance in respect of reports for other committees.

9.2.2 Presentation skills for officers engaging with committees would be beneficial and would help officers to prepare for working with committee members. This might also include skills related to working in a political environment.

9.2.3 Officers were asked to look at issues related to Members' access to the Council's intranet, including SharePoint, to ensure that they had access to content and resources.

9.2.4 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee notes the progress against actions in the Governance Review Implementation Plan and the points raised by members of the Committee for further consideration.

## **10. WORKPLAN**

10.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Policy and Partnerships concerning its work programme.

10.2 Members of the Committee made comments and suggestions relating to the work

programme, as follows:

- 10.3 There were some areas of overlap, such as in relation to Local Area Committees, participation and citizen involvement and traffic regulation orders, which might be grouped and moved to the new calendar year.
- 10.4 The work on the Charity Sub Committee might need to begin earlier to make sure it was completed for the Annual Meeting in May 2024 and Terms of Reference would be scheduled for the February meeting of the Governance Committee.
- 10.5 Working Groups related to LACs, devolution and committee remits would need to be set up before the end of December 2023 and the membership of those Working Groups could be drawn from a wider group of members
- 10.6 It was suggested that the various items on the Work Programme be mapped out, so the Committee was able to see the timing and volume of work and resources necessary.
- 10.7 **RESOLVED:** That:
- (a) the Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed, including any additions and amendments identified in Part 1;
  - (b) the comments and suggestions by Members of the Committee be noted and taken into account and adjustments made to the work programme as appropriate; and
  - (c) the additional indications of items which are likely to need more intensive work (e.g. citizen involvement, task and finish groups, policy review and development work) be noted together with the implications for prioritisation of Governance Committee's forward workplan.

## **11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 11.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on 22 November 2023.