



Governance Committee Report

Report of: Director of Legal and Governance

Date: 25th January 2022

Subject: Community Engagement Update

Author of Report: Laurie Brennan, Head of Policy and Partnerships
Laurie.brennan@sheffield.gov.uk

Summary:

This paper:

- Provides a summary of the engagement activity that we have undertaken as part of the Transition to the Committee System Programme;
 - Highlights a number of key and vital messages from citizens which have been heard through the engagement activity to date;
 - Emphasises that it is critical that we listen to and respond to what citizens have told us through the engagement in this programme and elsewhere; and
 - Suggests we should reassess our proposed approach to reflect and learn from the advice that we've received from citizens and stakeholders.
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Recommendations:

That the Governance Committee:

1. Acknowledges the findings of the public engagement to date and thanks citizens, stakeholders and independent experts for the involvement and contributions to date.
2. Acknowledges the findings of the stakeholder roundtable events managed by Involve.

3. Agree that public engagement for the Transition to Committee Programme should proceed as outlined in this report to ensure meaningful findings that support the launch of the new committee system, making best use of the available budget, and aiming to build trust with Sheffielders.
 4. Endorses that the Council need to undertake further public engagement work once the Committees are established, to help test and embed our approach to public engagement with the new Committee structure.
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Category of Report: OPEN

Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

Financial Implications
YES Cleared by: Kayleigh Inman, Senior Finance Manager
Legal Implications
YES Cleared by: Sarah Bennett, Assistant Director for Legal and Governance
Equality of Opportunity Implications
YES Cleared by: Adele Robinson, Equalities and Engagement Manager
Tackling Health Inequalities Implications
NO
Human rights Implications
NO:
Environmental and Sustainability implications
NO
Economic impact
NO
Community safety implications
NO
Human resources implications
NO
Property implications
NO
Area(s) affected
NONE
Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?
NO
Press release
NO

Involving communities in the transition to committees

1. As part of the programme to support Sheffield's transition to a committee system, the Governance Committee previously agreed to make sure that citizens and stakeholders have a vital role in the programme. The Committee agreed that this would include:
 - a. Topic-by-topic engagement with internal and external stakeholders on technical questions as they arise for the Committee's consideration, including via an open public invitation for participants to contribute via a stakeholder group made up of interested parties;
 - b. A city-wide, facilitated, representative, discursive engagement exercise in the new calendar year, by which time more citizens' input could be more impactfully applied to the emerging model, and to shaping future ways of working within it; and
 - c. Continuous review of this approach, with further detail to return to this Committee in October for consideration
2. Since summer 2021, we have undertaken a number of frequent in-person and virtual conversations with citizens, talking about the developing committee system proposals, testing thinking, listening to ideas and connecting those vital contributions with the ongoing work of the Governance Committee.
3. A summary of the findings of the engagement activity can be found in the following document, previously published as part of the Governance Committee's inquiry: <https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s48724/8.%20Transition%20to%20a%20Committee%20System%20Inquiry%20Session%201%20-%20Appendix%206.pdf>
4. Through the in-person and virtual events that we have undertaken over recent months, we have listened to Sheffielders talk with us and give rich insight into how different aspects of the new Committee System could work, the principles that should underpin it and the roles of different actors and elements of the new system.
5. In addition to thoughts and ideas on specific aspects of the Committee System, our conversations with Sheffielders raised a number of issues and challenges which are fundamentally more about the cultures and behaviours in SCC that underpin whatever decision making structures we have in place. Many of these comments were about the degree to which people feel listened to by SCC; whether people feel that we act and respond when they have raised issues with us; and whether we proactively and intelligently ensure that the voice of citizens is connected to and drives decision making.
6. To summarise:

Listening and acting

Strong messages that SCC (Members and officers) need to be better at listening and then taking action. People feel they have made their views known to SCC, contributed to conversations, consultations or just contacted us but haven't had a response or been informed of anything happening as a result.



In unstructured public sessions (eg. Pop-up event in Crystal Peaks), residents raised specific service issues and casework for Members which

they felt were not being addressed but predominantly did not want to talk about the Committee System proposals.

Accountability and trust



We've got a lot of work to do to rebuild the confidence and trust of citizens in both feeling that they are listened to, that their contributions will be considered and impactful, and that the mechanisms to hold SCC to account are robust so that people can challenge.

Diversity and inequality



People are concerned that too many people 'like them' regularly have a voice and know how to use it. Citizens said they were concerned about inequality and that whatever we do in the design of the MCS and the function of the MCS, we need to work harder to connect to all Sheffielders.

Get out there and use the city's strong communities



The Council can't genuinely engage all communities alone. Our organised sessions are helpful but we need to be more fleet of foot, go to where people are, get Members involved as community leaders, ensuring we get best value out of our Local Area Committees, and enable our VCF networks to use their connections to engage more people.

Tell us what's happening



People just didn't feel we are working hard enough to tell citizens about the what is changing and how they can get involved. This is vital to help build trust so that people feel reliably informed and connected to change in their city at every step.

What's the big idea?



People engaged in the sessions and had been to LAC meetings but were scratching their heads about how this all comes together in an approach for involvement and empowerment. What are the Council's overall ambitions and outcomes from all this. This is about leadership and vision.

Mindset shift



Connected to the points on trust, extent to which we listen and are responsive and whether we are genuinely accountable, people talked more about a fundamental change in culture and behaviours than governance and process. Shifting SCC's 'mindset' so that both Members and officers are confident and capable to involve and collaborate with Sheffielders.

We've raised the bar



People were positive about what we're doing and the city's potential too. We have and should continue to raise citizen expectations but we have to demonstrate that their time and contributions are impactful.

7. We have sought to engage citizens and communities in the development of the proposals for the new Committee System in Sheffield but when the conversations were broadened to focus on how citizens wanted to engage in decision making and be involved in issues, what we heard reflected many of the issues raised in the Big City Conversation – that if we want to deliver a genuinely engaging model of decision

making in Sheffield, there are some critical factors underpinning this which will take some time to shift.

Initial work by Involve in Sheffield

8. As part of the Transition to Committees programme, we are working with the participation charity, Involve to build on the citizen engagement that we've undertaken with deeper, immersive engagement particularly focused on seldom heard people in the city and challenging SCC in our approaches to citizen empowerment.
9. Sarah Allan from Involve presented at the October 2021 Governance Committee, setting out that the initial overarching question that we are trying to answer in this part of the project is:

“How do we make decisions in a way that empowers people in Sheffield and is inclusive, accessible, representative and connected with all of the people and communities in Sheffield.”
10. As the question implies, whilst tied to the Transition to the Committee System programme, the intention of the work is to develop greater understanding of the steps that we need to take as a City Council (and perhaps as a city) to enhance involvement and empowerment in all our communities.
11. To develop this, Involve initially proposed that we look at three particular areas of work:
 - **Looking inwards:** working with Members and officers to ensure that there is a strong alignment of engagement and the new decision-making model and developing knowledge and understanding;
 - **Looking outwards:** developing and delivering a piece of public engagement work to get public input on how public engagement with the new structures should work. This piece of public engagement needs to:
 - Reach people who SCC feels it hears from less frequently or not at all;
 - Be the first step in a longer ongoing conversation, helping to develop relationships to support this longer term work;
 - **Training and mentoring:** Providing training, mentoring and guidance to ensure SCC can deliver on the public engagement plans that emerge from the other two areas of work.
12. As discussed with the Governance Committee in October 2021, Sarah Allan from Involve set out their intention to focus on the 'Looking Outwards' element from December to get going talking to and working with Sheffielders.
13. As a starting point for this, Involve ran two roundtables with local stakeholders and community representatives to discuss their proposed approaches and methodologies with local people and make sure that the engagement activity would be effective in connecting to Sheffielders.

Feedback from the Stakeholder Roundtable Events

14. Two stakeholder roundtable sessions were held on the 3rd December 2021. These were attended by range of individuals representing community organisations from across the city and also academics and citizens and stakeholders who have given their time and participated in the committee system engagement activity to date.
15. The participants engaged constructively with the content of the sessions, giving detailed consideration to options for how public engagement could work. Involve is currently in the process of producing a full write-up of the roundtables that it will feedback to roundtable attendees and subsequently share with SCC.
16. Feedback from both groups involved in the roundtable sessions was consistent in terms of the main themes raised, with attendees offering constructive and useful feedback on our plans. Key themes included:
 - **Don't do anything more before you've learned from what you've already heard** - attendees felt that quite a lot of public engagement has already been done around how public engagement with SCC could work better. They suggested that we start by looking at the outcomes of previous public engagements to allow any new public engagement on this topic to be carefully targeted to address any gaps in the issues covered or people reached;
 - **Be honest and realistic** - attendees noted that any public engagement needs to take place within the broad parameters of what is and isn't possible for SCC, and what is and isn't open to change. This is critical to ensuring the public's input is useful to SCC, and relatedly that SCC can take the input into account therefore helping to build trust;
 - **Collaborate and help us engage** - attendees were keen for any public engagement not to be solely about extracting information from the public. For example, they suggested that the engagement could also explain the new structures to people and how to engage with them (with the aim of empowering people to engage);
 - **Talk about the things that matter** - some attendees felt it would work better to engage the public on an issue that is more immediately important to people (for example, health, housing etc) rather than the more abstract question of how to engage them. Within the new committee structure this would allow action learning by focusing on specific thematic issues and engaging specifically on them.
 - **Listen, learn and build community power with us** - attendees felt that it was both possible and desirable to use public input to date to further develop thinking on the long-term vision for how public engagement with, and public participation in, SCC's new structures could work. They felt that this should happen before SCC does further public engagement on this topic, for example to ensure best use of funds and build trust that previous engagement has been heard. Attendees expressed their desire for this long-term vision to:
 - **Build on existing infrastructure and good practice** in the city. The health champions work was cited several times as an example of good practice;
 - Do **public participation** in a way that helps to resource work around **voice, influence and community building**. They would like SCC to see resourcing the community in this way as a positive end in itself;

- Make **public engagement** and **participation** part of SCC's **business as usual** (i.e. its mainstream activity).
17. Attendees also made a number of other more detailed points in this area. Involve will include these in the roundtable write-up.
 18. In addition to the above, roundtable attendees raised a number of wider issues that are largely out of scope for our work with Involve. However, it is worth considering how the public's wider experience of SCC will influence their willingness and appetite to engage with us. These were:
 - **Trust** in SCC
 - Wider **culture** of SCC
 - Public **experience** when they engage with SCC for something they need (for example, eg. through SCC's website).

Listening, learning and empowering communities through the transition to committees programme and beyond

19. The engagement approaches described above demonstrate that we have successfully engaged a range of interested citizens and stakeholders in the development of the committee system proposals.
20. However, citizens and community partners have repeatedly challenged SCC's overall approach to listening, community empowerment and engagement which reinforces messages that we have heard through other engagement activities including the Big City Conversation, Race Equality Commission and LAC engagement. Citizens have questioned whether attempting to undertake the proposed work with Involve as part of the Transition to the Committee System programme is the right thing to do at this moment whether it is a good investment of scarce resources.
21. Working with Involve and harnessing their experience, expertise and knowledge of empowering communities and putting people at the heart of decision making is a significant opportunity for Sheffield. But we must ensure that that we make full use of Involve's independent expertise in a way that delivers real impact for Sheffielders.
22. In the One Year Plan, we set out that we want to build "deeper connection to the people and communities of the city, to genuinely listen to people's views and involve them in decision making in their communities, and to meet the rightly high expectations that people have for their Council".¹
23. With the continuing development of Local Area Committees and the approach we have taken to working openly and flexibly in the Transition to Committees Programme, we have taken some steps towards the ambitions in the One Year Plan but there is clearly much more to do. Becoming a Council that is genuinely in and of its communities will be vital to ensure that citizens have power and influence in the decisions that are made through our new Committee System.

¹ Sheffield City Council (2021) *One Year Plan*, p2
<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/your-city-council/our-plans,-policies-and-performance/one-year-plan.pdf>

24. This will mean utilising Involve’s expertise to build capacity amongst Members and officers so that we increase our knowledge and capabilities to involve and engage citizens in the decisions that SCC makes. But there is an opportunity to directly own and respond to the challenges that citizens have emphasised above to support the ambitions in the One Year Plan.
25. By bringing together the citizen voice and insight we have accessed through recent engagement activities, it is suggested that we work with Involve to co-design a longer-term community empowerment approach for Sheffield with citizens and community organisations in the city. This should then start to tell a clearer, coherent story of what community empowerment means in Sheffield, bring together existing strengths and assets (eg. networks, VCF, LACs etc), consider roles and responsibilities and establish expectations all of which should underpin our policy and decision making in the city.

Proposed next steps

Step 1

26. Through the engagement activity to date, citizens and stakeholders have made valuable and detailed contributions to the design of the new Committee System and how this should operate in Sheffield - as set out in the link in para 3 and the proposals set out in Item 7 on the Governance Committee’s agenda. This activity, co-ordinated by SCC and Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, has been vital to supporting the Governance Committee’s developing thinking.
27. Recognising the clear messages from communities that we need to listen and learn from all recent engagement activity before we undertake new conversations with citizens, it is proposed that we work with Involve to bring together and overview recent activity for the Committee, building an independent and comprehensive picture of citizens’ views. This should act as a critical platform for a more comprehensive approach to empowering communities in Sheffield and an important intelligence for the new committees in May 2022.
28. This should include recommendations worked up with the support of Involve for what systems or practices might be built into the committee system itself in order to increase engagement and participation of residents and stakeholders in Sheffield’s democratic environment. Recognising that this could only ever be a small part of the wider solution to the issues raised by residents.

Step 2

29. It is then suggested that we listen to the advice that citizens and stakeholders have given us and look to develop a longer term, harnessing existing assets and good practice to make community empowerment central to SCC in all that we do.
30. Therefore, it is proposed that Involve work with SCC, citizens and community organisations in Sheffield to co-design a longer term approach to community empowerment² for the City Council/city which builds on the knowledge and evidence to date to create clear approaches, shared expectations and acts as a catalyst for capacity development in SCC.

² New Local have undertaken detailed research into ‘community power’ which in summary argues that “communities have knowledge, skills and assets which mean they themselves are well placed to identify and respond to any challenges that they face, and to thrive”.
<https://www.newlocal.org.uk/research/community-power/>

31. For example, this could include how we ensure that community empowerment is consistently part of all that we do across the whole of SCC, that we are creative and collaborative in our engagement with communities, that we build skills and capacity in communities and SCC to better connect citizens with decision making.

Step 3

32. Linked to the above, there is a need to invest in the engagement skills and capabilities of Members and officers to ensure that we are creative and proactive at ensuring public engagement and insight is fundamental to work that the council and the new committees undertake for the city. We have some good existing engagement expertise and practice across SCC but must recognise the areas of weakness in order to ensure that these improved methods are designed-in to our ways of working and decision making, building an open and collaborative culture.

Recommendations

That the Governance Committee:

1. Acknowledges the findings of the public engagement to date and thanks citizens, stakeholders and independent experts for the involvement and contributions to date.
2. Acknowledges the findings of the stakeholder roundtable events managed by Involve.
3. Agree that public engagement for the Transition to Committee Programme should proceed as outlined in this report to ensure meaningful findings that support the launch of the new committee system, making best use of the available budget, and aiming to build trust with Sheffielders.
4. Endorses that the Council need to undertake further public engagement work once the Committees are established, to help test and embed our approach to public engagement with the new Committee structure.

Implications

Legal implications

33. There is no specific consultation duty in respect of the design of a new committee system of governance. However, the Local Government Act 1999 does impose a duty on a local authority “to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness” which includes a general duty to consult for the purpose of deciding how to fulfil that duty.
34. A Duty to consult can also be implied, for example where a promise to consult has created a legitimate expectation that there will be consultation. Where we do consult we must act fairly in all of the circumstances and the consultation must be taken into account when a decision is made. The proposals in this report are compliant with these requirements.

Equalities implications

35. The engagement of all communities in Sheffield will be a fundamental part of the engagement programme to ensure that citizens from all backgrounds and parts of

the city have can shape the development of our new governance arrangements. We will work with VCF sector organisations and the Sheffield Equality Partnership network to ensure we enable Sheffields with protected characteristics to have a meaningful role in the development of the new governance arrangements. Further, we will ensure that there are dedicated for key communities to engage, maximising accessibility to events and engagement sessions.

36. Governance Committee Members gave a clear steer that we need to ensure that we engage people and communities that are seldom heard in the development of our new decision making. Working with Involve, we will ensure that there is a significant focus on connecting to those communities, creating conversations and spaces where people feel safe to participate in a way that works for them.
37. In line with the approach set about in the above report, we will listen and learn as the work develops over the coming months. If at any point, people and communities feel they haven't had the opportunity to get involved, we will proactively seek to involve them in whatever ways work best for them to ensure that their ideas, views and aspirations are heard in the transition to committees work.

| Financial implications

38. The engagement and communications budget allocation approved by Co-Operative Executive on 21st July was £300k. The estimated spend to engage Involve is up to £100k and so is within the funding envelope approved for the Transition to Committee Programme.

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