

# Sheffield for Democracy

Campaigning for a more representative democracy



## Submission to the SCC Governance Committee System Inquiry, November 2021

Thank you for inviting us to make further comments on governance in the City, following on from our document “Improvements we seek to local democracy in Sheffield City Council”, dated 1st July 2019. **All the points we made then are still relevant.** Some we want to re-emphasise – 1 , 2, 5). Then there are additional points, reflecting the current situation ( 3,4)

1. The resources issue is as great now as it was then, if not greater: "With the huge reduction in the number of staff the council is able to employ, there has to be a careful balance between the resources for decision making and the resources for service delivery."
2. Also, the need for consensus building is even more appropriate now: "To rejuvenate local democracy, we need cross party consensus and support"
3. Community responses to COVID and especially during the early days of the pandemic, showed a great deal of resourcefulness, including in public health response. We understand that some councillors were surprised and impressed with how their communities responded.

We think the City Council needs to consider how best to capitalise on, and incorporate within its structure, that kind of local knowledge, expertise and action.

4. The new development, of introducing Local Area Committees, raises the question of how this new structure and the new committee system will interact. It raises again the resources issue: how much resource do you put into decision making and how much into service delivery - when you are already dreadfully cash-strapped? Are on-going committees the only, and best, option?

Is a system of Local Committees covering such wide areas, the best way of seeking and including community input? Are there other ways of engaging positively with communities, and supporting them? Would an annual meeting in a locality to

ascertain what has worked in SCC's interactions with community groups be a better use of resources?

Certainly, there must be built-in requirements to show active involvement of local groups and residents at a very local level: with opportunities for grassroots initiatives, sharing of aims and proposals at an initial stage, time for consideration and discussion, staff support for practicalities and costing, plus evidence of majority buy-in before adoption.

5. Whatever system is decided upon, reviews should be built in, to gauge whether the process is delivering what was intended.

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