

Transitional Committees Briefing

What are Transitional Committees (and what are they not)?

Transitional Committees (TCs) are being introduced to provide an early opportunity for Members to work on a cross-party basis in advance of decisions being made. This is the way decisions will be taken once Sheffield's Committee system is introduced (May 2022).

The TCs are somewhat different to the committees within a Committee system as they are purely advisory, not decision-making. This is not an organisational choice, it's the way the law works. Whilst we are operating within a Strong Leader model of governance, decisions can only be taken by the Executive Members and they can total no more than 10.

Transitional Committees are

- advisory
- temporary
- not a shadow committee
- a space to improve how cross-party engagement works in decision-making
- a conduit for consideration of local issues arising via Local Area Committees (LACs)
- a space to pilot new ways of working

Some councils going through this transition convene their future decision-making committees ahead of the formal change of governance but call them 'shadow' committees. They typically continue their work with similar membership once the new arrangements come into place. *Sheffield's TCs are not shadow committees.* They serve a particular and temporary purpose, as above (from September 2021 to May 2022).

New ways of working

The TCs can decide how they will work together, and how they work with partners and communities. They may therefore end up working in quite different ways to each other. Testing or piloting new ways of working will have to be fast and focused. Each TC only has time to meet about half a dozen times before they are disbanded.

Some of the sorts of ideas which could be tested include

- Co-opting non-councillors onto committees
- Applying best practice for policy development from Scrutiny practitioners eg single-day multi-stakeholder workshops, Task and Finish groups, commissioning research, site visits, public calls for evidence.
- Deliberative participation techniques e.g. short-term or long-term advisory groups of stakeholders, or citizens assemblies.

These ways of working will provide valuable evidence and feedback, particularly regarding ways of working, to help the Governance Committee decide on the final model. Recommendations will be made to Full Council prior to the transition to the Committee system of governance in May 2022.

The Scrutiny team have been working with the Executive Members and the chairs and deputy chairs of the TCs to finalise their work plans (based on the Council's One Year Plan). This has been happening in advance of the first public meetings, taking place towards the end of September.

Transitional Committees and the public

TCs provide an opportunity to demonstrate to the people and communities of Sheffield that we are committed to trialling new ways of working to inform the design of the new Committee model. They will be of particular interest to our informed and engaged stakeholders who will be keen to see how they work in practice, what opportunities they create for public involvement and how the learning will inform the next steps.

A commitment to openness and transparency will therefore be vitally important, particularly in how the TCs work will with the Co-operative Members individually and collectively.

Transitional Committees and the Co-operative Executive

The relationship between TCs and individual members of the Co-operative Executive will be key. As the TCs are advisory, they should operate hand-in-hand with the Co-operative Executive and expect them to be present at most meetings.

In order to add value to real decisions, the TCs work plans will need to be largely aligned with the Co-operative Executive's forward plan, along with items arising from LACs for example (see below). However TCs remain autonomous and can decide how to prioritise their time between these various issues and how to approach each one.

Transitional Committees and Local Area Committees

The new LACs are decision-making committees, where each Elected Member of a LAC has a say in the decisions it makes. Powers have been devolved to the LACs, and officers assigned to support them, to ensure that they can begin to operate with some autonomy from September 2021.

The LACs will have a relationship with the TCs as they can refer matters that they consider to be more of a city-wide issue to the relevant TC. As the TCs are advisory, they will not be able to take a decision on the issue, but they may decide to commission work to consider whether this is a city-wide issue or if they receive enough referrals they may just move directly to advising the Co-operative Executive of the issue arising.

Transitional Committees and Scrutiny Committees

Scrutiny is a required part of the executive model of governance and therefore Scrutiny Committees will continue during this year. However, there will only be three Scrutiny Committees this year as opposed to the five that we have had in previous years.

These will be focused on scrutinising the performance and delivery of council services and undertaking statutory responsibilities on topics such as health service changes and community safety. They will not generally undertake policy development activity as they would have in previous years – this space is expected to be occupied by the TCs. To use the relevant jargon: Scrutiny committees will undertake 'scrutiny' or 'post-decision' work but TCs will primarily cover the 'overview' or 'pre-decision' work.

Scrutiny is not a required part of the future Committee system, but it can be included. The Governance Committee will make recommendations to Full Council about whether or how scrutiny and call-in functions should be part of our new Committee system.

It is likely that TCs will find themselves wanting to do work which feels like scrutiny activity. In order for TCs to stay focused, this type of thing should probably be referred to the relevant Scrutiny Committee. This ought to be considered on a case-by-case basis in case there is value in piloting the work in a different setting.

Each of the Scrutiny Committees will also continue to have the ability to call-in decisions made by the Co-operative Executive, Individual Executive Members or LACs

Senior officers and Transitional Committees

It is expected that there will be a formalised and strong relationship between specific senior officers and each TC. Work is underway to define which senior officer or officers should be the lead contacts for each TC and on what basis to align them with TCs.

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