

Governance Committee

Meeting held 27 October 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Julie Grocutt (Chair), Sue Alston, Dawn Dale, Christine Gilligan, Mary Lea, Mike Levery, Mohammed Mahroof and Sioned-Mair Richards

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for Absence were received by Councillors Penny Baker, Mark Jones and Kaltum Rivers.

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 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no public questions or petitions received.

6. APPROACH TO DESIGNING A COMMITTEE SYSTEM

6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Governance concerning the approach to designing a committee system. The Assistant Director (Governance), Alexander Polak, explained the purpose of the report as per the papers.

6.2 The Assistant Director (Governance) explained that the Committee System Discussion Framework, highlighted in the report at Appendix 1, was a draft and would be likely to undergo many changes. The Committee was invited to discuss and suggest any alterations before agreeing the framework.

6.3 Members were referred to paragraph 4.7 of the report which highlighted that additional meetings of the Committee would need to be included before the end of 2021. These would appear as inquiry style workshops which would be scheduled in consultation with the

Chair and Vice Chair.

- 6.4 The Assistant Director (Governance) explained that two stakeholder engagement events had taken place since the publication of the report. It was mentioned that both events received a relatively high interest and positive feedback from the public, although some attendees felt that not enough had been done to publicise the events.
- 6.5 Members of the Committee raised questions and main points to note were-
- 6.6 A question was asked concerning whether a record had been taken of which wards members of the public were attending from and whether there was an option to change the venues of where stakeholder engagements take place. The Assistant Director (Governance) confirmed that no information had been recorded from the previous sessions and that venues would be alternated to different areas in the city.
- 6.7 A question was asked if the stakeholder events had presence from people who didn't vote for the change to a committee system. The Assistant Director (Governance) stated that a wide range of stakeholders from various groups attended, and it wasn't felt that there was a dominant group within each of the sessions.
- 6.8 A Member of the Committee suggested that some form of communication be directed to the business communities within the city, with the aim to improve engagement.
- 6.9 A Member of the Committee suggested that engagement should also be carried out with Sheffield City Partnerships.
- 6.10 A Member of the Committee raised concerns, as Appendix A in the report stated between 3-10 Committees be organised in the new model. It was mentioned that this factor of the new model could be seen as pre-determined, although it is yet to be considered. The Assistant Director (Governance) agreed to remove the numbers referred to in the framework if the Committee wished.
- 6.11 Members discussed the impact on political decision-making of operating a committee system while the Council was in 'no overall control'. It was suggested that there should be an option to call-in and scrutinise decisions even if they had been made by politically proportionate committees. It was also suggested that if a scrutiny function was to be incorporated into the new model, then Sheffield City Council decision-making processes should be made visible and understandable. The Assistant Director (Governance) explained that there was no requirement for an internal 'overview and scrutiny' function (in its specialised local government sense) although a mechanism for holding decision-makers to account would remain

important, as per the design principles previously agreed by members. The inclusion in the future model of 'overview and scrutiny' was a matter for members to decide in due course. It was added that Full Council could be a route of overturning decisions made by Committees, through a system which would need defining. The Director of Legal and Governance acknowledged the request for policies to be made available and stated that the Head of Policy and Partnerships, Laurie Brennan, was currently looking to put this together.

6.12 A Member of the Committee referred to the Statutory Responsibilities for Members section in Appendix A. It was suggested that the two statements were contradicting. The Assistant Director (Governance) explained that through a quirk of the legislation a Lead Member for Children's Services must continue to be nominated, but in the committee system that person could not lawfully have any individual decision-making authority. The Director of Legal and Governance added that this made it very important for a trust relationship to be established between the Lead Member for Children's Services and the relevant Director.

6.13 A Member of the Committee raised concerns that if the Overarching Committee's functions were too similar to the functions of a Cabinet it would not be an acceptable response to the referendum.

6.14 A Member of the Committee suggested that a mechanism on how the public could challenge a decision should be included into the system.

6.15 **RESOLVED:** That (1) the progress in the five weeks since the Committee's last meeting be noted;

(2) the framework at Appendix A be agreed, subject to the amendment highlighted at the meeting, for immediate public use to support conversations with stakeholders, the public, councillors and officers about the future model of the Council's governance;

(3) that a whole-committee inquiry be conducted between now and Christmas 2021, with the goal of recommending a draft committee governance model to Full Council for endorsement in January. The inquiry will include:

- a. Open, council-led engagement with stakeholders, the public, members and council officers as per the engagement report elsewhere on today's agenda
- b. Desktop research including review of all relevant material received in the 2019 Scrutiny exercise and since including the Big City Conversation
- c. Research into comparator authorities' experiences and recognised best practice

- d. Lessons learnt from the active experimentation taking place via the Transitional Committees, Local Area Committees and other experiences of decision-making during the 2021/22 transitional year
 - e. Whole-committee sessions on 30 November and up to three extraordinary meetings in early December, at which the committee may call expert witnesses as necessary to build on what has already been learned from the above; and
- (4) that the approach be endorsed of using the draft governance model (after, and subject to, agreement by Full Council in January):
- a. As one of the starting points for the city-wide engagement exercise taking place in 'phase three' of the project in the new year, supported by Involve
 - b. as the basis for progressing decisions about constitutional detail during January-March, subject to input from the simultaneous engagement exercise referred to at 4a, leading to a final agreement by Full Council in March 2022.

7. ENGAGING AND INVOLVING SHEFFIELDERS IN TRANSFORMING THE CITY'S GOVERNANCE

- 7.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Governance concerning engaging and involving Sheffielders in transforming the city's governance. The Head of Policy and Partnerships, Laurie Brennan, highlighted that the report provided an overview of the proposed approach to ensure that Sheffielders had a strong and active role in the development of the city's new modern Committee System.
- 7.2 It was mentioned that the report highlighted an engagement approach, including upcoming activities that would interconnect citizens, communities and city partners between October and December 2021. The report also outlined that Sheffield City Council had brought in an independent charity with engagement expertise (Involve) to help the Council define its future ways of working with regard to the engagement of residents in the formulation of policy and decisions.
- 7.3 The Head of Policy and Partnerships asked the Committee to review the draft principles set out at section 10 of the report, which would be integrated with the draft Design Principles going forward.
- 7.4 Sarah Allan, The Director of Capacity Building and Standards at Involve, attended the meeting to give an overview of some work Involve had been part of and to answer any questions the Committee had.

- 7.5 Sarah Allan explained that Involve had worked with the UK Government, UK Parliament, Local Governments, Private Organisations and Community Groups on improving how they engage with members of the public. Sarah explained that a variety of engagement methods were used to ensure the public can contribute to decisions that impact their lives.
- 7.6 Sarah Allan assured the Committee that Involve would work with Sheffield City Council to meet its needs and engage with the people the Council sought to reach.
- 7.7 She gave an insight on how three workstreams would improve engagement with stakeholders. These were-
1. Looking Inwards – working with Sheffield City Council to ensure a strong alignment is formed between engagement and the new model.
 2. Looking Outwards – working with Sheffield City Council to develop and deliver public engagement activities.
 3. Training, Mentoring and Support – to pass on skills and knowledge to Sheffield City Council for future engagement.
- 7.8 Members of the Committee asked questions and the key points to note were-
- 7.9 Reference was made to the Training, Mentoring and Support workstream and that training needed to be carried out and accessible to both Councillors and Officers.
- 7.10 A question was asked if an example could be given of how Involve intend to reach out to community groups that do not usually engage. Sarah Allan informed the Committee that all of Involve's projects aim to reach out to groups that Sheffield City Council do not usually engage with.
- 7.11 It was asked whether It's Our City had shared insight on how they engaged and carried out so many conversations with the public. The Head of Policy and Partnerships stated that It's Our City had not yet shared their methods with Sheffield City Council however a key aspect of their approach was to carry out a transfer of knowledge to the Council. It was stated that It's Our City were very interested in working with the Council on how they can improve public engagement.
- 7.12 **RESOLVED:** that the Committee
- (1) endorses the proposed approach to engaging communities over the coming months, including the proposed underpinning principles which will become part of our design principles; and

(2) endorses the proposed innovative activity with Involve to engage citizens in how we make decisions that are inclusive, accessible and representative in Sheffield.

8. TRANSITIONAL COMMITTEES UPDATE

8.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Governance concerning an update on Transitional Committees. The Chair, Councillor Julie Grocutt, explained the purpose of the report was to provide an opportunity to share information about the Transitional Committees early composite work plans. Each Transitional Committee Chair also had the opportunity to give initial feedback on their first Transitional Committee meetings.

8.2 A Member of the Committee believed the Our Council Transitional Committee first meeting went well. It was mentioned that working groups would be set up to target specific issues within the work programme, although these still needed to be set up in advance of the next Committee meeting.

8.3 A Member informed the Committee that the Communities and Neighbourhoods Transitional Committee had looked at Housing Repairs System at their first meeting. They also discussed setting up working groups which tenants would be able to attend. The Communities and Neighbourhoods Transitional Committee agreed to have an item on each agenda which would allow the Committee to review issues that had been referred to them from a Local Area Committee.

8.4 It was stated the Education, Health and Care Transitional Committee had been rescheduled due to technical issues therefore this Committee had not met yet.

8.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:

(1) notes the Transitional Committee work programmes and verbal feed-back; and

(2) requests that a written update from the Transitional Committee Chairs be brought to the November meeting of the Governance Committee, on cross-party engagement so that a broad view and range of ideas can be considered; in accordance with their terms of reference, and any proposals they have for pilot ways of working that can inform the work of the Governance Committee in its consideration of a future committee model.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 9.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be on 30 November 2021 at 3.00 p.m.

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