

Summary of Evidence from 2019

Purpose of document

Both pre and post the May 2020 referendum a significant amount of consultation with the public and key stakeholders has taken place. While engagement is ongoing, both online and out in communities, we want to ensure that everything we have already heard and learnt to date is included in the design and decision-making process.

A series of key outputs have therefore been summarised into one comprehensive document, aligned to the framework for discussion paper.

Outputs included in the summary

Date	Output	Who was involved	Purpose
30th October 2019	Sheffield's Big City Conversation – Independent Governance Event Report	<p>A panel of representatives of groups, both local and national including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anne Barr (It's Our City!) - Vicky Seddon (Sheffield for Democracy) - Maddy Desforges (Voluntary Action Sheffield) - Richard Wright (Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Industry) - Mark Edgell (Local Government Association) - Ian Parry (Centre for Public Scrutiny) <p>As well as members of the public</p> <p>Authored by active citizen, Nigel Slack.</p>	An independently chaired event as part of the Big City Conversation, giving members of the public the opportunity to talk about how they want to engage with the council on issues that matter to them and contribute to the debate on how Sheffield City Council makes decisions ahead of the referendum. This was also used as part of the evidence base for producing the Governance Principles document (below).
Launched October 2019. Initial findings were presented to Full Council	Sheffield's Big City Conversation – Summary	Members of the public engaged with via a series of events in district and local centres, as well as an online survey	To engage with citizens across the city about their priorities and how they wanted to get involved in decisions and issues in their local community prior to the development of LACS. This summary reflects the key issues raised and is more LAC specific.

and Scrutiny in Jan 2020			
December 2019	Principles for Governance at Sheffield City Council	<p>Lead and authored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>A select committee approach encompassed the following:</p> <p>A series of evidence gathering sessions to hear from a range of witnesses. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experts in local governance and decision making - Local organisations with an interest in local democracy - Partners from business and the Voluntary Community and Faith sector - Youth Cabinet and Youth Advisers. - Contributions from citizens through an online call for evidence and attendance at meetings - Site visits - Conversations with other local authorities. 	<p>To support Sheffield citizens in making an informed choice at the May 2020 referendum the council had a commitment to publish proposals on how both of the referendum options could work.</p> <p>As part of the process of developing referendum options, the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee – a cross party group of Councillors – worked with the Deputy Leader at the request of Full Council, to look at what we wanted to achieve through changing our decision making structures. This included producing a set of principles that should underpin both options to be put to the referendum. This report sets out the approach that was taken and the principles that were subsequently developed.</p>

[Links to key documentation:](#)

- [Big City Conversation](#) report to Council 8 Jan 2020
- [‘Proposals for a Committee System of Governance’](#) report as agreed at Full Council and Cabinet in Feb 2020
 - [Diagram of proposed committee system of governance](#) (as at Full Council 5 Feb 2020)
 - [Minutes of the Full Council meeting at which this was agreed](#)
- [Final report from Scrutiny Management Committee 2019](#) Evidence which informed this report is linked below:
 - [26 Nov 2019 Scrutiny Management Cttee Minutes](#)
 - [Evidence Submission CfPS, item 5.](#)  PDF 37 KB
 - [Rethinking-Governance, item 5.](#)  PDF 298 KB
 - [Musical-Chairs, item 5.](#)  PDF 335 KB
 - [Evidence Submission INLOGOV, item 5.](#)  PDF 37 KB
 - [John Cade, item 5.](#)  PDF 243 KB
 - [Evidence Submission LGA, item 5.](#)  PDF 37 KB

- [LGA paper November 2019, item 5.](#)  PDF 142 KB
- [Evidence Submission SCC decision making, item 5.](#)  PDF 37 KB
- [Decision making data for OSMC, item 5.](#)  PDF 177 KB
- [Appendix to OSMC report, item 5.](#)  PDF 371 KB
- [Decision making in Sheffield – , item 5.](#)  PDF 400 KB
- [28 Nov 2019 Scrutiny Management Cttee Minutes](#)
 - [Online Call for Evidence – Appendix 1, item 5.](#)  PDF 1 MB
 - [It's Our City – Evidence and community principles for a modern committee system, item 5.](#)  PDF 788 KB
 - [Nigel Slack Independent Governance Event Report 17.11.19, item 5.](#)  PDF 444 KB
 - [Nigel Slack Transforming SCC Gov, item 5.](#)  PDF 6 MB
 - [S4Ds proposals re local democracy Final, item 5.](#)  PDF 164 KB
 - [VAS Evidence, item 5.](#)  PDF 184 KB
 - [Sheffield Futures – Evidence, item 5.](#)  PDF 461 KB
 - [Evidence Submission Karen Ford, item 5.](#)  PDF 151 KB
 - [Evidence Submission Kevin Poppelwell, item 5.](#)  PDF 92 KB
 - [Robin Hughes Joined UP Heritage Sheffield Evidence, item 5.](#)  PDF 14 KB
 - [Sheffield Green Party Submission, item 5.](#)  PDF 163 KB
- [3 Dec 2019 Scrutiny Management Committee Minutes](#)
 - [Governance Evidence Session 3 – Cover Sheet, item 5.](#)  PDF 143 KB
 - [Visits feedback, item 5.](#)  PDF 398 KB
 - [OSMC Interim Big City Conversation headlines, item 5.](#)  PDF 2 MB
 - [Reading Decision Making, item 5.](#)  PDF 293 KB

SUMMARY

1. Leadership (encompasses the role of Full Council, the Leader's Role and the Lord Mayor's Role).

Input on these matters in the documents reviewed was tended to be on the topic of 'Leadership' in general rather than comments being specifically aligned to leader role, lord mayor's role etc.

1.1 Relevant Ambitions, Governance Principles and Ways of working identified in Principles for Governance document:

Ambition for Sheffield:

- Sheffield is a council where all councillors are involved in and able to influence decision making
- A council that has a modern and responsive approach to governance which reflects the increasingly complex policy making environment
- Sheffield City Council is a reflective council that is committed to continuously improving governance

Governance Principles:

- We need to be **clear about what we are trying to achieve through our governance arrangements**, and build in measures to assess whether it is working
- We need to **identify a forum that enables us to reflect, on an ongoing basis, on whether our governance systems are working as anticipated, and if changes need to be made.**

Ways of Working

- **Role of Full Council** – should be reviewed in the light of changes following the referendum – consider how we could make it a more meaningful forum.

A key theme echoed across the documents was that culture and ways of working was more important than structure. This included the need to create a culture of co-operation between all political parties, stakeholders & the public. It could therefore be assumed that the role of leaders within any new model should be to embody and drive this culture change.ⁱ

1.2 Key points from the Big City Conversation

Beyond the new model it was suggested the Council should consider moving to four-yearly elections as a way to bring longer-term focus and stronger culture of accountability. **(Sheffield for Democracy as part of Big City Conversation)**

1.3 Key points from the Principles of Governance document

"The Committee considered the role of Full Council meetings, with many Councillors feeling that the current approach does not provide a meaningful forum for debate, and that this process provides us with an opportunity to reconsider how our Full Council meeting is used." **Governance Principles doc**

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2. Committees (encompasses Themed Committees, Overarching Committees and Other Committees – Statutory functions and LACs have been addressed separately).

2.1. *Relevant Ambitions, Governance Principles and Ways of working identified in Principles for Governance document:*

Ambition for Sheffield outlined in Governance Principles 2019 doc:

- Sheffield is a council where all councillors are involved in and able to influence decision making
- A council that has a modern and responsive approach to governance which reflects the increasingly complex policy making environment

Governance Principles

- A commitment to **openness and transparency** must run through our decision making structure. This needs to start with **comprehensive forward planning** of decisions – being clear about what decisions we are planning to take, when they will be taken, who will be taking them. It needs to continue through the decision making process, with **clear reports** from officers that set out the relevant information in an accessible way, and are clear about the reasons for a decision being made. –
- Our decision making structure should be designed in a way that creates **channels for all 84 Councillors to be involved in, and influence decision making.**
- Our decision making structure needs to reflect the practical demands on councillors’ time. Need to find a balance between **time spent in formal decision making meetings in the Town Hall against working with and in communities.** Time demands shouldn’t prohibit people with working/caring commitments from being a Councillor.
- Our decision making structure must avoid silo working both within and outside of the City Council, and **enable a joined up approach to tackling issues which need the involvement of a number of organisations in the city**
- Our decision making structure needs to have a **mechanism for making urgent decisions** openly, transparently and effectively engaging elected councillors.
- Our decision making structure needs to **strengthen our ability to work with our partners in a complex local, sub-regional and national policy environment, and enable us to take a lead on key issues facing the city and the citizens of Sheffield.**

Ways of Working

- We need to **improve the information we provide about how decision making happens across the City as a whole** and how partnerships and structures interconnect.

Much of the feedback was focussed on decision making as an overarching subject rather than how this should be aligned to structure. How decisions are made and how people can influence and understand them was repeatedly stated as being of chief concern over structure.

2.2 Key points from the Big City Conversation:

- Any structures should be open & transparent around decision making. The question of 'How are decisions made?' should be understood by all and supported across the political divides. Clarity in where policies or issues for decisions arise, who is involved in the decision (and why?) and what oversight can be relied upon?
- Involving the public in the decision-making process, and the importance of letting people know what decisions are planned over the medium/long term so that organisations and individuals can seek to engage with decisions that affect them.
- Ensuring a range of voices are heard
- That experts with the right skills and experience (internal or external) are consulted.
- That decisions are taken at the most appropriate level e.g. with and closer to citizens through neighbourhood level structures (see LAC summary)

The **LGA** and **CfGS** made more structure specific statements as part of the Big City Conversation to say that any new model should:

- Assess different governance models apolitically to ensure the system which is put in place works for the city and is sustainable.
- It's more important to examine what does and doesn't work in the current structure than to just select an alternative structure
- The choice isn't binary and there are different designs and models to consider.
- Needs to consider the barriers which cannot be overcome, for example the legal requirements (eg. where councillors are the only ones able to make decisions and spend money)
- Conversation and engagement should be used to define attributes as opposed to defining a system.

A key area of consensus was that any new structure should enable all members to have a meaningful role in decision making.

2.3 Key points from the Principles for Governance document:

"Through our evidence gathering sessions, it quickly became clear that 'governance' – the technical process by which we make decisions – is only one part of the picture. We heard that how Sheffield City Council does its business, our processes, our behaviours, our culture; how we as Councillors work with each other, with our communities and with our officers has an equally significant impact on the quality, and experience, of decision making in the city. **There is no 'perfect' governance structure – there are advantages and disadvantages to all models – it is how we operate within those structures that will ultimately determine how successful they are.**" **Governance Principles doc**

"We heard from experts in local governance that culture and processes are more significant than structure here. Through these conversations we have seen how committee systems can serve to

marginalise opposition councillors if they operate with a de facto ‘cabinet’ in the form of a powerful policy committee. Conversely, our conversations with Rotherham MBC have shown us that a significant strengthening of pre-decision scrutiny has given all councillors an opportunity to have their say on policy before decisions are made, and opposition councillors feel that they can have a real impact. We recognise that ultimately, in any decision making structure we implement, the majority party has a mandate to govern – but we need to ensure that our structures and processes enable all councillors to be involved and have influence.” **Governance Principles doc**

“We recognise that some of the most important issues we need to tackle as a council – climate change, inequality, inclusive growth - do not fit neatly into any one policy area, and require a joined up approach from a range of Council services and indeed, partners. Voluntary Action Sheffield shared their concern that a decision making structure must not lose critical interrelationships between issues such as the economy and the climate crisis. This was echoed in the evidence from local governance experts who talked to us about the importance of being able to deal with complex ‘wicked’ issues.” **Governance Principles doc**

“The Chamber of Commerce told us that they want to see a decision making structure that doesn’t procrastinate and put off decisions. Timely, and on occasion, quick, decision making is important to avoid missing out on opportunities – particularly around inward investment. We want to make the most of all of the opportunities that come Sheffield’s way, and to be able to respond appropriately to urgent issues as they arise across all policy areas. We recognise that the quality of decision making should not come at the price of speed, but any future system needs to have a **mechanism for making urgent decisions** openly, transparently and involving elected councillors.” **Governance Principles doc**

“The policy making environment has become increasingly complex over recent years. There are a range of joint boards and partnerships operating across the city – for example in health alone we have a Health and Wellbeing Board, Joint Commissioning Committee, Accountable Care Partnership, Integrated Care System and Statutory Scrutiny Committee. We need to ensure that our decision making structure enables us to function effectively, and play a leadership role in this environment. We also need to be clear about how these structures interconnect, and improve the information that we provide about decision making in the City as a whole – linking back into our ambition around openness and transparency.” **Governance Principles doc**

2.1 Scrutiny

2.1.1 *Relevant Ambitions, Governance Principles and Ways of working identified in Principles for Governance document:*

Ambition for Sheffield outlined in Governance Principles 2019 doc: -

- Sheffield is a trusted organisation where decisions are taken in an open and transparent way, and accountability is clear

Governance Principles

- Scrutiny is important in any future structure – both in terms of our statutory responsibility around health and community safety scrutiny and in terms of building in checks and balances. **Scrutiny should be strengthened in any future decision making structure – we must be held accountable for the decisions that we take, and embrace challenge to ensure we’re getting the best outcomes for Sheffield.**

2.1.2 *Key points from the Big City Conversation:*

- **Member skills** – importance of supporting Councillors to have the skills to undertake robust scrutiny of decisions
- **Independence in the scrutiny process** – a keenness to have different, independent voices involved in scrutiny committees, designing-in roles for citizens, community organisations and expert voices.
- **Pre-scrutiny of decisions** – opportunity to think about when scrutiny takes place so that scrutiny are involved before decisions are made to check that the process towards a decision has been robust

2.1.3 *Key points from the Principles for Governance document:*

“Accountability was another key theme to emerge from our discussions. We recognise that one of the perceived advantages in moving to Leader/Cabinet models back in 2000 was about improved visible accountability. We have also sought to explore accountability in committee systems and raised this with experts in local governance. On the whole, their responses suggested that accountability can be less clear in a committee system, but that ultimately, in representative democracy, the majority group delivers the policy it has the mandate for and is accountable for that”

Governance Principles doc

“We heard again that culture and ways of working are important in building in accountability to *any* system, and the importance of the role of scrutiny in strengthening accountability. We heard from Rotherham Borough Council, who have significantly strengthened their scrutiny function with positive results. After discussion with our Statutory Scrutiny Officer we recognise that there are things we could do to strengthen our approach to scrutiny in Sheffield, and that we can start to do this now.” **Governance Principles doc**

2.2.1 Local Area Committees

Ambition for Sheffield outlined in Governance Principles 2019 doc: -

- A council that engages, involves and listens to citizens, communities and partners

Governance Principles

- Our decision making structure should be underpinned by **effective ways of working with local communities**, informed by the Big City Conversation.
- The issues people care about are often local in nature. Our decision making structure needs to include channels through which people, communities and partners can work with local councillors about what is important to them. We need to **strengthen locality arrangements** based on the findings of the Big City Conversation and ensure that these arrangements work effectively alongside, and feed into, citywide decision making processes.
- Our decision making structure needs to balance between **time spent in formal decision making meetings in the Town Hall against working with and in communities.**

Ways of Working

- We need to take a more creative approach to communication between residents and the Council, including about what decisions are being made and why, what they mean to residents and what they mean for the city. This needs to be supported by effective communication and information about how decision making works.

2.2.2 Key points from Big City Conversation:

- **Devolved decision making** – Developing a role for all parts of the city in how they make decisions for their own communities. Developing a shared approach to commissioning, improving local services and holding service providers from all agencies accountable for their performance, including a role in challenging decisions that affect their community
- The importance of safeguards around devolved powers was also noted, concerns around ‘messy’ complexity that has occurred in other authorities such as London Boroughs.
- **The importance of strengthening citizen voice and understanding of decision making** – clear communication and harnessing community networks to connect people with the city’s democracy
- The importance of decisions being taken at the most appropriate level – ie. with and closer to citizens or through neighbourhood level structures/committees that are more focused on the needs of specific communities and places (**see also Engagement and Communication theme below which further builds on how committees should / could be utilised**)

2.2.3 Key points from the Principle for Governance document:

“We recognise that influencing decision making isn’t something that only happens in the Town Hall. People, partners and groups want to be able to work with their councillors on issues that matter in their local neighbourhoods. The need to strengthen neighbourhood arrangements below the city level was raised as an issue by many of our witnesses, and we recognise that we need to address this. The Big City Conversation is talking to people about what is important to them locally, and we

need to consider how we can use this to develop local structures and strengthen ward councillors' ability to influence outcomes in their local areas." **Governance Principles doc**

2.2.4 Key points from the Big City Conversation Summary (Aligned to LACs but with wider lessons for Decision Making, Engagement and Communication)

- Sheffielders do not feel informed about local services, particularly how they are performing and how decisions are made
- People do get involved in their local community but this ranges considerably across the city and where people do get involved, they aren't sure it really makes a difference
- **Online channels and networks matter:** Of those that get involved at local level, people predominantly use online channels or engaged with local public services and Members. Attending 'Council meetings' were not a significant route to get involved but the absence of any regular local council meetings (like area committees) probably reduces the opportunities for people to attend.
- **Time:** Of those who said that they don't get involved locally, respondents said that they have busy lives and therefore struggle to find the time or they are sceptical that they could make any real difference. But, people also said that they did get involved in other ways, such as national issues or campaigns, therefore indicating that people are motivated to engage and get involved.
- **The majority of people don't currently feel that they can influence decisions in Sheffield but people are keen to get more involved, depending on the issue** - 60% of respondents said they don't feel that they can influence decisions affecting their local area **but** people are keen to get more involved if the issue matters to them
- **Local neighbourhood meetings and online networks are key channels for people who want to get more involved in local decisions and services** - Of those that said that they'd be willing to get more involved locally, neighbourhood level meetings with public services and online networks were the most preferred routes.

3. Engagement and Communication (encompasses Public Engagement and Communications).

3.1 Relevant Ambitions, Governance Principles and Ways of working identified in Principles for Governance document:

Ambition for Sheffield outlined in Governance Principles 2019 doc:

- A council that engages, involves and listens to citizens, communities and partners

Governance Principles:

- The issues people care about are often local in nature. Our decision making structure needs to include channels through which people, communities and partners can work with local councillors about what is important to them. We need to **strengthen locality arrangements** based on the findings of the Big City Conversation and ensure that these arrangements work effectively alongside, and feed into, citywide decision making processes.

Ways of Working:

- We must ensure that a **commitment to meaningful engagement, involvement and consultation runs through the organisation**. We should renew our commitment to our Consultation Principles, and reflect on how the council's Engagement Standards which are currently in development can improve practice throughout our work
- We need to **constantly demonstrate how engagement activity is shaping decision making**, and be honest about the impact it is having, so communities and partners can understand how their views have been responded to.
- We need to make it **as easy as possible for people to engage with us** – the starting point for this should be clear, consistent, accessible communication about what the Council is doing, what decisions we are planning to take and how to get involved.
- We need to establish a process of continuous engagement so that Members, partners and citizens can give a view on how the system is working.

3.2 Key points from *The Big City Conversation*:

- **Vital that public involvement is cross-city** so that it is not just those who would regularly be involved in Council discussions.
- The need for broad, representative coverage of different demographics in the city.
- Importance of **consulting local communities and connecting with community networks** to improve transparency and reach different voices.

With an emphasis on **open information**, summarised in the following quote:

“Open information – Putting in place the means for ALL Councillors, stakeholders and the public to access information and evidence used to support decision-making from the beginning of the process and a more open and embedded place for the public in that decision making structure. Transparency of challenge is also vital, reducing criticisms or challenges to annual statistics is not a way to improve trust or confidence in the structures or culture of organisations” **Big City Conversation**

“Public consultation undertaken should be appropriate for the size of the issues being discussed. Therefore, methods such as citizens’ assemblies could be used to inform decision making and alter

the way in which decisions are made and the culture surrounding them” (**Sheffield for Democracy as part of Big City Conversation**)

“It is vital that any approach we take in Sheffield must enable communities from *every* part of the city to engage and have their voice heard” (**VCF Sector as part of Big City Conversation**)

“It is vital to see ongoing engagement and accountability from the Council to enhance collaboration between sectors and to make things as accessible as possible to the public” (**VCF Sector as part of Big City Conversation.**)

“While there is now web-casting available for meetings to be watched by anyone at any time, comments imply that the public need to be made more aware of what it is the Council is doing and have this pushed more widely as an available resource. “ **Big City Conversation**

3.3 Key points from the Principles for Governance document:

“We need to be more open in our communication about democracy and decision making, and put accessible information on platforms people are already engaging with. People we spoke to welcomed the improvement in transparency that webcasting council meetings has brought, but we recognise that we need to make it easier for people to access information – as one of the young people we spoke to told us - you shouldn’t have to trawl through minutes to understand how the Council works.” **Governance Principles doc**

“One of the key messages to have come out of our evidence gathering sessions was about the importance of quality engagement and involvement with people, communities and partners. Young people told us that involvement shouldn’t be tokenistic, and should happen at a time when it can meaningfully influence – a youth cabinet member shared their frustration at being consulted on the ‘final draft’ of a strategy which they felt was too late to have a real impact. They were also keen to ensure that more is done to involve and engage with ‘hard to reach’ communities. This need for meaningful and timely engagement and participation also came through in the responses to our online call for evidence, as well as from ‘Its Our City’. Voluntary Action Sheffield told us that better collaboration and involvement with the VCF in decision making would deliver real benefits for the city.” **Governance Principles doc**

“We also heard examples of good, early engagement – Hallamshire Historic Buildings told us about their experience of being involved in plans for Heart of the City II at the right time – resulting in a scheme that celebrates heritage without compromising viability. We want to make sure that this becomes the norm and not the exception” **Governance Principles doc**

4. Roles and Responsibilities (encompasses Scheme of Delegations, Statutory Responsibilities for Members, Staffing, Relationships & Casework)

4.1 Relevant Ambitions, Governance Principles and Ways of working identified in Principles for Governance document:

Governance Principles

- Our decision making structure should be underpinned by **effective ways of working with local communities**, informed by the Big City Conversation.
- We are a member-led authority, where accountability lies with elected councillors. Our decision making structure must reflect this, and **not inappropriately increase delegations to officers**.
- Our governance should be underpinned by a **commitment to the highest ethical standards as set out in the Nolan Standards on Public Life**

Ways of Working

- Ensure that the **appropriate support, training and skills development** is continuously available for councillors so they can take full advantage of the opportunities under the new structure.

4.2 Key points from the Big City Conversation:

- The importance of Councillor training and development, particularly in the effective chairing of meetings (Sheffield For Democracy as part of Big City Conversation)
- For many, **the role of their Ward Councillor needs to reflect the needs of local people** and participants would like it if party politics could be removed from discussions.
- **Member behaviour and standards** – sense that citizens have expectations about the behaviour of Councillors in office (uphold Nolan principles).

“A cost-neutral change to a modern committee system.” (It’s Our City! As part of Big City Conversation)

4.3 Key points from the Principles for Governance document:

“We heard from the Centre for Public Scrutiny that effective delegation is crucial in developing an effective governance structure. In a Leader and Cabinet model, decisions can be delegated to Cabinet, to individual cabinet members, or to officers. Under a committee system decisions can only be delegated to committees or officers. We are keen to see that any future decision making structure keeps Elected Councillors at the heart of decision making, considering strategic issues where they can add value, without inappropriately increasing delegations to officers. We also need to ensure that any new decision making structure does not significantly increase the amount of time Councillors spend in Town Hall meetings, to the detriment of working in their communities – a criticism that was levelled at pre-2000 committee models.” **Governance Principles doc**

“Once elected, Councillors carry out a wide range of roles on behalf of their communities and the city. We need to ensure that we appropriately support Members with the skills and competencies they need fulfil a wide range of roles (eg. meeting chair, community leader, Cabinet Member).”

Governance Principles doc

“Finally, a message that came through our online call for evidence, and from evidence submitted by Nigel Slack, Active Citizen, Sheffield For Democracy and ‘It’s Our City’ was that there are high expectations about Councillor conduct, and that we should ensure that the Council is upholding the Nolan Principles on public life.” **Governance Principles doc**

ⁱ Principles for Governance doc, Big City Conversation doc, Big City Summary doc