

Briefing for Sheffield City Council Governance Committee

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My research at the University of Sheffield contributes to the debate about a transition to a modern committee system in Sheffield City Council. The key point is that the council needs to move from thinking it's possible to **depoliticise** the debate, to ensuring the new committees have **credible accountability and transparency processes informed by good evidence**.

1. Policy makers should consider less delegation and more inclusion

My book [Hyper-active Governance](#) shows that policy makers too often go back and forth trying to delegate policy decisions (i.e. **depoliticise** them), then trying to control them from a distance, and then trying to avoid blame for any negative outcomes.

This dynamic of delegation, control and blame avoidance is a vicious cycle with debilitating effects. It suppresses the real issues at stake. Instead, I provide evidence for an **inclusive** approach to policy making that encourages collaborative working between political parties and stakeholders, incorporating diverse forms of expertise and clarifying lines of responsibility.

Proposal: My advice is that new committees should set up processes so they are explicitly and directly involved in collecting and considering evidence with stakeholders to make policy decisions.

2. Collaboration means politics works differently

Budget reductions over the past decade have left Council resources depleted. Written evidence submitted to Parliament by SCC [states](#): "the result of these significant funding reductions has equated to Sheffield having to deal with a cut of £36% in spending power in the period 2010/11 to 2017/18, far above the national average". My [research shows](#) austerity measures significantly constrain what local councils can achieve, despite the English devolution agenda claiming to empower them.

In this context, my research shows [collaboration](#) is crucial to implement policy. The Council already recognises this need for culture change. But it also means political parties must think about the role of manifestos differently, and be willing to deliberate. They must recognise the legitimacy of non-party political groups (e.g. VCS) in policy making processes.

Proposal: My advice is for members on new committees to explicitly commit to deliberating over how to reconcile their conflicting policies, perhaps by signing a formal declaration of intent for collaboration.

3. Credible accountability

My research [shows that](#) where there is **better accountability**, public policy is more **credible**.

[Data I have collected](#) show that governance relationships feel more accountable to those involved when government officials are perceived to be **transparent in how they assess information**, and have **systematic data and evidence to hold decision makers to account**.

My [recent research](#) suggests how **public hearings** can make this happen. I suggest that public hearings ought to be carried out with: **1) diverse forms of evidence, 2) symbolically meaningful and carefully arranged physical space, and 3) an inclusive and positive ethic from committee chairs and members.**

Proposal: My advice is for the new committees to form a 'policy lab' to develop their capacity for collecting a variety of evidence, and to hold regular public hearings to consider this evidence in a clear and transparent manner.