



Report to Governance Committee

Author/Lead Officer of Report:

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Tel: 0114 2734755

Report of: Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement

Report to: Governance Committee

Date of Decision: 22nd November 2023

Subject: Citizen participation and community involvement: next steps

Has an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If YES, what EIA reference number has it been given?				
Has appropriate consultation taken place?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) been undertaken?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Purpose of Report:

This paper provides a short summary of the draft report by Involve about the steps needed to improve vision and practice in citizen participation and involvement at Sheffield City Council. The draft report, included in Appendix 1, recognises strengths and good practice that the Council can build from but identifies key challenges which need to be addressed.

The report by Involve identifies two critical challenges which inform its two main recommendations for change:

- 1) That the Council need to develop a vision for engagement/participation and a plan to embed that vision in working culture across the Council
- 2) Develop, grow and enhance existing engagement and participation practice.

This paper recommends that the responsibility for leading this change is part of remit of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee, ensuring that an ambitious and consistently high quality approach to collaboration, involvement and participation of citizens is rooted in the Council's culture and its strategic direction.

Recommendations:

That Governance Committee:

1. Note and discuss the findings and recommendations in the draft report by Involve that was developed with citizens, stakeholders and our staff.
2. Refer the draft report by Involve and any comments and perspectives from Governance Committee to the Strategy and Resources Committee, proposing that:
 - a. The development of citizen participation is included in the S&R workplan;
 - b. the S&R Committee use the draft Involve report together with the views of this Committee to lead the commissioning of activity in response to the recommendations; and
 - c. the S&R Committee work with other Policy Committees and Local Area Committees (LACs) to identify opportunities for pilots and demonstrator projects for citizen involvement and participation.
3. Agree to revise the Governance Committee’s workplan, recognising that the transformation of community involvement and citizen participation must be core to the City Council’s strategic development and is best led by the S&R Committee. This will enable Governance Committee to focus capacity on the review of Committee Remits (in line with the Six-Month Review).

Background Papers:

Six Month Review of New Governance Arrangements,

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/b27181/Item%207%20-%20Six%20Month%20Review%20of%20Governance%20Arrangements%20-%20report%20Wednesday%2017-May-2023%2011.30%20Council.pdf?T=9>

Lead Officer to complete:-					
1	<p>I have consulted the relevant departments in respect of any relevant implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist, and comments have been incorporated / additional forms completed / EIA completed, where required.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Finance: Matthew Ardern, Senior Finance Manager</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Legal: Petra Der Man, Interim Governance Solicitor</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton, Senior Equalities and Engagement Officer</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Climate: N/A</td> </tr> </table>	Finance: Matthew Ardern, Senior Finance Manager	Legal: Petra Der Man, Interim Governance Solicitor	Equalities & Consultation: Ed Sexton, Senior Equalities and Engagement Officer	Climate: N/A
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Climate: N/A					
	<p><i>Legal, financial/commercial and equalities implications must be included within the report and the name of the officer consulted must be included above.</i></p>				

2	SLB member who approved submission:	James Henderson, Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement
3	Committee Chair consulted:	Cllr. Fran Belbin, Chair of Governance Committee
4	I confirm that all necessary approval has been obtained in respect of the implications indicated on the Statutory and Council Policy Checklist and that the report has been approved for submission to the Committee by the SLB member indicated at 2. In addition, any additional forms have been completed and signed off as required at 1.	
	Lead Officer Name: Laurie Brennan	Job Title: Head of Policy and Partnerships
	Date: 13 th November 2023	

Citizen participation and community involvement: next steps

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This paper sets out a proposed approach to taking forward a transformation of how Sheffield City Council sees and values citizen participation and community involvement. This includes developing a clearer vision and ambitions for the role that citizens and communities should be able to play in setting and contributing to the Council's agenda and improving the Council's skills, practice and use of citizen insight across the whole organisation.

Transforming citizen participation and community involvement is not a discreet piece of work that is limited to governance and committee spaces – its is about everything we do and is central to our values as an organisation.

2. Taking forward our ambitions for citizen participation and community involvement

- 2.1 Citizen involvement and participation is essential to local democracy and thriving communities, helping to make better decisions and the policy we develop, increasing confidence and trust in the decisions, connecting knowledge and lived experience of people to create better solutions to city's opportunities and challenges, and building greater collaboration with communities and across communities.
- 2.2 As part of the transition to the committee system, we emphasised the importance of transforming citizen involvement in our decision making as part of the change that our organisation needed to undertake. As part of this, we started working with the national participation charity, Involve, to support our thinking and development as an organisation and to connect to citizens.
- 2.3 As part to the initial work, Involve spoke to citizens and stakeholders about community involvement in the developing committees and decision making. In the initial phases of the work, participants gave very clear messages that the council needs to be much more effective at responding to and taking action based on the insight from citizens through engagement activity; that the council needs to build on the strengths and assets that the city has; and that the council should be more effective at collaborating and working with communities, meaningful listening and enabling citizens to set rather than just respond to SCC-defined agendas. Further, citizens and stakeholders want to work with SCC to build a longer-term ambition for citizen involvement and participation.
- 2.3 Citizens were clear that what is needed is a more comprehensive approach to build a longer-term change in vision, behaviours and practice in SCC, building on some recognised strengths and good practice. As a result of the direction

and from citizens and stakeholders, Involve undertook two pieces of work during 2022 to reflect on citizen involvement in Sheffield:

- a short review of good practice in the Sheffield to identify learning and assets that SCC can build from; and
- a review of findings from previous engagement work that collected views from the people of Sheffield, community organisations and others about SCC's practices around public participation in decision-making in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of SCC's current approach

2.4 The draft report from Involve included in the appendix draws together all the material that Involve have developed into one place, covering both the review of our practice and conversations with citizens and stakeholders. Across the first 18 pages, the report summarises the independent perspective from Involve about the Council's key challenges and makes two broad recommendations about the steps that we need to take to achieve a step-change in our ambitions and approach to citizen involvement.

2.5 The appended report recognises that SCC has some areas of real strength and good practice, particularly where SCC has sought to collaborate and work with communities at an early stage, used creative approaches to connect to different communities, and sufficiently resourced projects with funding, capacity and time to make sure that community insight is genuinely valued and is impactful. The report also offers some useful and practical guidance on getting the basics of community involvement right (see section 5.2 on lessons from case studies).

2.6 But, in their analysis, Involve suggest that there are two significant areas of critique which undermine SCC's approach to public involvement which have come through strongly from their conversations with citizens and their review of practice.

- There is a **lack an ambitious and coherent vision for public participation** in SCC which ensures that we struggle to articulate why we see it as valuable, or clearly understand our role in supporting involvement in the city.
- While good practice is acknowledged, **SCC's engagement and involvement practice is not consistently seen as a high standard across the organisation** which means that citizens have an inconsistent experience of connecting with the council and the organisation misses opportunities to fully connect valuable citizen insight in policy and decision making.

2.7 These two areas of critique are interconnected as our approach to improving and enhancing involvement and participation practice across the organisation

should be fundamentally shaped by our vision for the role that involvement and participation plays in how we do business.

2.8 In addition, Involve highlight crosscutting areas which SCC needs to consider as part of its future approach to involvement and participation:

- The role of LACs – recognising that LACs are still developing but they are relatively traditional local area council meetings but could be stronger assets by increase how and when citizens can engage and enabling citizens to shape LAC agendas rather than participate in agendas set by SCC. By building on LACs and changing how LACs connect to communities, there is an opportunity to increase and diversify the numbers of people who participate
- Inviting participation – consider how we offer citizens a greater role in decision making; involving, collaborating, and enabling citizens to lead/decide rather than simply informing or consulting.
- Relationship between policy committees and LACs – providing greater clarity on the responsibilities and relationships between LACs and city-level committees, thus helping citizens better understand what is possible at each level and managing expectations.

2.9 Involve's report suggests that fundamentally, SCC needs to change its culture with clear leadership with the ambition to embed participation across the organisation. This will need medium-term change with the resource and capacity to deliver.

2.10 The report suggests that there are two key recommendations that SCC need to address to improve its approach to public participation:

1. Develop a vision for engagement/participation and a plan to embed that vision in working culture across the Council

This is about SCC having a single, shared ambition for public participation with communities, why it matters and is valuable to the organisation and the city. This was a clear ask from citizens and stakeholders, should be developed in collaboration with citizens and should become a driver for change across the whole council, setting new ambitions and share expectations.

2. Develop, grow and enhance existing engagement and participation practice

This focuses on two elements:

- a) building on the existing good practice in SCC and enhancing skills, capacity and resources across council to improve quality and consistency of engagement and participation activities.

b) the development of an engagement framework with communities and VCFS partners, learning and drawing on existing expertise in the city and

2.11 The report provides a wealth of insight and tools for SCC to use in its strategic development and makes clear recommendations on the steps we need to take in order to transform our approach to involvement and participation. The report has taken far too long to be presented in this complete form¹ to the Committee, particularly given the contributions made by citizens and stakeholders and the work by the team at Involve. The delay has been predominantly due to the scale of demand and capacity limits in the Council at a time of significant change. We now need to take the insight and direction from citizens and Involve and use it to deliver real impact on our approach to involvement and participation.

3. **We need to be ambitious - prioritising citizen involvement and participation as a critical part of SCC's strategic mission and change as an organisation**

3.1 Over the last year, three major reports have highlighted the need for the Council to improve its approach to engagement with Sheffield and its residents: the Lowcock Report, the LGA Peer Challenge, and the final report of the Race Equality Commission. In addition, work done by the Health & Wellbeing Board to look at work done during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on vaccine uptake, also highlighted the importance of engagement, for building relationships with excluded communities and in turn building trust in public services, and in developing critical intelligence to help plan and deliver the right services.

The report from Involve adds further detail on the areas where we can drive change.

3.2 We have signalled our commitment to engaging, empowering and enabling communities through LACs and a strong approach to engagement is central to delivering on each of the Values² developed by our staff over the last year. Citizen involvement is also central to the approach we have taken to developing the City Goals and the commitments we are making in how we will work with the whole city to achieve them. We expect citizen empowerment to be an important part of our new Council Plan and of our improvement journey.

3.3 We do have some strong examples of good practice in relation to engagement, including the work we have undertaken with partners and communities on the development of the City Goals (Collaborative

¹ interim findings were used and published to support the final committee system decision at Full Council, the six month review of committees, and have been used to scope relevant parts of the Future Sheffield programme.

² The Council Values are: People are at the heart of what we do; Openness and honesty are important to us; Together we get things done.

Conversations), recent work on the All Age Autism Strategy, and the Community Champions begun during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.4 We also recognise the challenges that we have, as emphasised in the report by Involve, and these are consistent with the messages from other independent reports and from the discussions we have had with our staff. These include:

- Limited skills or knowledge of good engagement practice and the extent that the skills that do exist are fully used by the organisation;
- Not engaging early enough in response to challenges, or not engaging communities in developing the solution;
- Limited ability to share intelligence across the organisation, contributing to consultation fatigue;
- Inconsistent use of tools or approaches;
- Dependence on external consultancy

3.5 We have started to make progress in response to the recommendations from the independent reports, working with partners and drawing on the passion and engagement expertise of our staff alongside support from Involve. For example:

- Drawing on and connecting staff expertise – created a Community of Practice for SCC staff with engagement expertise to take practical improvement steps, share learning and make full use of citizen insight across the whole organisation
- Future Sheffield – community involvement and participation a key foundation to the Council’s change programme
- Governance Committee – looking at specific areas to improve practice in democratic participation, including review of public questions
- Member Development Working Group – considering skills councillors need to fulfil their roles
- Charities Sub Committee – partnership working around charitable parks
- City Goals – not led by the Council but demonstrated a collaborative approach to co-design that we can learn from and build upon in our future approaches.

3.6 However, it is clear that citizen engagement is not a discrete area of activity but rather something that cuts across all our work, across our Directorates and teams, across the responsibilities of all our Policy Committees. It gets to the heart of what sort of Council we want to be and is critical to achieving our strategic outcomes and the city’s longer-term goals.

- 3.7 Community involvement and participation goes far beyond our governance and the function of the committee system; it is critical to building trust with communities, to improving our understanding of the challenges the city is facing, to spotting opportunities, and actively listening to and involving different voices and perspectives in developing stronger and better solutions than we can on our own.
- 3.8 It is therefore proposed that the responsibility for driving the change needed in citizen involvement should sit with the Strategy and Resources Committee rather than Governance Committee. This will enable S&R to set a clear strategic direction in line with the developing Council Plan, co-ordinate and challenge the organisation to deliver (eg. through commissioned work and Future Sheffield), identify appropriate resource and investment needed, and via Chairs, ensure that all Policy Committees are involved in delivering action (eg. pilots, showcasing good practice etc).
- 3.9 It is recommended that Governance Committee refer the Involve report to the next appropriate S&R Committee, encouraging S&R to consider commissioning immediate activity in line with the recommendations set out in the Involve report while ensuring that citizens and stakeholders have key role in leading and shaping the activity.
- 3.10 In addition, Governance Committee will then be able to focus Member and officer capacity and resource on other critical aspects of its workplan, in particular, the review of Policy Committee remits.

4. HOW DOES THIS DECISION CONTRIBUTE?

- 4.1 The paper summarises the key issues and recommendations from Involve's work to date with citizens, stakeholders and the Council to inform a transformation in the Council's approach to citizen involvement and participation. The report recognises areas of good practice but suggests that the Council needs to set out a coherent vision for citizen involvement, articulating why citizen involvement matters to the organisation. This should then support and drive a consistent and continuous improvement in engagement standards and practice across the organisation.
- 4.2 The decision will encourage S&R Committee to take responsibility for driving whole council change in engagement and participation, firmly aligning the work with the developing Council Plan and Future Sheffield programme.

5. HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONSULTATION?

- 5.1 The work undertaken to date has involved reviewing existing engagement, particularly assessing recent engagement and participation activity in Sheffield and talking with stakeholders and community groups in the city.

6. RISK ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Equality Implications

- 6.1.1 Under the Equalities Act 2010, s149, the authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- (1) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is connected to protected characteristics and prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (2) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not;
 - (3) foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

6.1.2 The way the authority promotes, supports and enables citizen participation and community involvement influences the way the above Duty is met. For example, some considerations in relation to the need to advance equality of opportunity are:

- **Who is participating and being involved** – to what extent does the authority reach and encourage engagement with so-called ‘seldom heard’ groups? How representative and diverse is this currently? Are appropriate mechanisms consistently used to encourage diverse participation and involvement, (e.g. adjustments, financial, etc)?
- **How participation and involvement take place** – what engagement mechanisms are we encouraging? How accessible, available and appealing are these mechanisms to geographical communities and communities of interest? Are these enabling engagement that is community-led as well as authority-led?
- **When participation and involvement take place** – are we enabling early engagement that might empower communities to help identify issues and solutions? Are we giving people enough time to meaningfully participate and be involved? Are we over-relying on informing people of our plans or consulting on our own ideas rather than jointly developing proposals with communities?

Equality, diversity and inclusion is one of the primary drivers for the approach that is proposed above – ie. to ensure that people from all backgrounds in Sheffield can participate and get involved in the opportunities and issues that matter to them. There is clear evidence in the Race Equality Commission report that we have to do more to make sure that all communities in Sheffield can participate, contribute and play an active role in the city.

6.1.3 There are EDI implications from this report. As the review undertaken by Involve demonstrates, the development of a participation vision for the city must involve people from all communities in Sheffield. The resulting change in ambition and practice must enable and support greater participation from different communities in the city.

6.1.4 We are developing a full EIA to inform any activity by S&R.

6.2 Financial and Commercial Implications

6.2.1 The work undertaken by Involve was resourced as part of the Transition to Committees programme however S&R will need to consider how to best use the resource in line with the recommendations made by Involve and the wider Future Sheffield programme.

6.3 Legal Implications

6.3.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report. The Council's duties in relation to consultation will need to be taken into account within the work undertaken for and by the Strategy and Resources Committee on the Council's approach to public participation and this will be reflected in future reports.

6.3.2 The Strategy and Resources Committee has in its terms of reference 'responsibility for any issue identified as being of significant strategic importance or financial risk to the Council (which is considered to be by its nature cross-cutting)' and '...any policy matter not otherwise allocated to a Committee'.

6.4 Climate Implications

N/A

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