

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Meeting held 18 December 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Mick Rooney (Chair), Ian Auckland, Steve Ayriss, Denise Fox, Julie Grocutt, Tim Huggan, Douglas Johnson, Mike Levery, Cate McDonald, Sioned-Mair Richards and Jim Steinke

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Ben Curran.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

4.1 Members of the public raised questions as follows:-

4.2 Woll Newall

4.2.1 Mr. Newall referred to the evidence gathering sessions, at which the Committee had heard evidence from a number of groups and organisations, as well as the numerous responses to the online survey, with many views being expressed about the importance of communities having a proper say and role in the decision making system. He questioned why giving real power to communities, in the heart of the decision-making system, was not one of the fundamental principles in the report.

4.2.2 The Chair stated that it was not, and never had been, within the Committee's gift to design a system in terms of how the Council would interact with the public. He pointed out that there was a reference in the report to the effect that the Council needed to engage differently and more effectively with local communities, and stressed that further work would be undertaken in this regard. The nature of the discussions would be dependent on the outcome of the referendum and the municipal elections to be held in May 2020. It had not been in the Committee's remit to make any specific suggestions or ideas in connection with locality working. Councillor Rooney concluded by stating that the Council welcomed as much community involvement as possible, as part of any final agreed committee system.

4.3 Ruth Hubbard

- 4.3.1 (a) By law, the Council must not use its resources to prefer one governance model over another. The report, at Item 6, claims advantages and disadvantages of both governance systems, but does not state these. However, threaded through the report, statements clearly steer in favour of the status quo strong leader model and away from a modern committee system. For example, by definition, the strong leader model leaves decision-making power in the gift of the strong leader. Will the Committee acknowledge that this is problematic (and likely a deal-breaker for Sheffields)?
- (b) The biggest gap in the report – despite the evidence – is the continuing marginalisation of Sheffield communities and the public, the failure to commit to devolving any decision-making power or real participation. In fact, the report appears to reiterate top-down power and “silo” communities away from decision-making, only as informants or to be consulted. However, on another matter, it is unsurprising that a Committee made up mostly of scrutiny chairs seeks to strengthen scrutiny, particularly via pre-scrutiny, to support and recommend decisions after a close look of issues by a number of different voices. Despite calling it “scrutiny”, it is not, in fact, exactly a key basis of how a modern system works?

4.3.2 The Chair indicated that he would respond to Ms. Hubberd in writing.

5. PRINCIPLES FOR GOVERNANCE AT SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

- 5.1 The Committee received a report, introduced by the Policy and Improvement Officer, setting out draft principles for governance at Sheffield City Council.
- 5.2 Also in attendance for this item was Councillor Terry Fox (Cabinet Member for Finance, Resources and Governance).
- 5.3 As part of the process of developing referendum options, this Committee had been asked by Full Council to work with the Deputy Leader to establish a set of principles that should underpin both the options that were to be put to the referendum, and present these to Full Council on 8th January, 2020. The Committee’s draft report identified governance ambitions and principles, as well as ways of working that should shape future governance options.
- 5.4 Councillor Ian Auckland stated that the report comprised a basis for consensus, and accurately reflected the discussions held at the previous three special meetings of the Committee. He did, however, express an element of concern in terms of the lack of any detailed reference to the receipt of the petition, which had given rise to the recent work of the Committee. He also hoped that an emphasis on a preferred system would become clear following the subsequent discussions to be held by the different political groups, and that there was a need for such discussions to be influenced by the evidence heard at the previous three special meetings of the Committee. Councillor Auckland also believed that there should be a more detailed reference to locality working in the report.

- 5.5 Councillor Douglas Johnson stated that he was happy with the contents of the report and that, whilst he was aware that it wasn't within the remit of this Committee, queried whether Members would receive information in terms of how any future committee system would be resourced. The Chair, in response, stated that the Committee's remit was to establish a set of principles, which would be referred for consideration by the Council, at its meeting to be held on 8th January, 2020.
- 5.6 Councillor Terry Fox stated that the results of the consultation held as part of the Big City Conversation would be reported to the Council, at its meeting on 8th January, 2020, together with the report submitted to this meeting, which should provide the Council with the opportunity of recommending a detailed proposal to the Cabinet, at its meeting to be held on 12th March, 2020. The Cabinet, at this meeting, would then devise the question to be used as part of the referendum. Councillor Fox stressed that the views of local communities, which were continuing to be sought, could change following the outcome of the referendum and the municipal elections to be held in May, 2020.
- 5.7 Councillor Julie Grocutt referred to the public question raised at this meeting, which she believed highlighted a lack of detail/guidance in terms of the Council's statutory duties/obligations. She stressed that there was a need, either in this report or elsewhere, to include a reference to this to enable the public to have an understanding in terms of what the Council can and cannot change with regard to its governance systems.
- 5.8 Councillor Cate McDonald stated that she would like to extend her thanks to all officers involved in the process and that, in her opinion, she considered that the Committee had undertaken exactly what had been asked of it. She considered that there was plenty of scope for further deliberation in terms of the details going forward.
- 5.9 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-
- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised;
 - (b) approves the recommendations set out in the report, subject to the following amendments:-
 - (i) the substitution of the following words for those set out in the fourth bullet point in paragraph 5.2 – “ensuring that a commitment to meaningful community engagement, involvement and consultation runs through the organisation”; and
 - (ii) details of the Council's statutory duties/obligations in terms of its governance systems be attached as an appendix to the report; and
 - (c) expresses its thanks and appreciation to all officers involved in connection with supporting the Committee in the work in establishing a set of principles for governance at Sheffield City Council.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 6.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, 6th February, 2020, at 1.30 p.m., in the Town Hall.