# Submission in response to Inquiry into Committee System:

**From:** Dr Karen Ford & Mr Kevin Poppelwell
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There are many issues raised for us from reading the report. However, time constraints are such that we have decided to focus our response on concerns about ensuring that all committees are as representative as possible. Please note that if time permitted, we would also have provided responses to some of the specific questions, raised in the report.

**Emphasis on political party affiliation as 'representation'.**

For themed committees it is stated that *"the make up of all themed committees is proportionate to the size of each party group on Full Council".* We assume this means political party. As citizens, for council elections we vote for the person we believe will best represent our area – it doesn't matter which party they belong to. It is likely that other citizens also do this. We therefore think that political party affiliation should not be the only consideration for defining 'representation' for any given committee and especially for the proposed overarching committee.

**What about any independent councillors and the citizens that voted for them?**

How will they be assigned to committees?

**What about geographical representation?**

It is important to ensure geographical representation of the areas of Sheffield among and across committees and in particular for issues like planning. How will this be achieved?

**Improving representation**

The current first past the post voting system does not yield a truly representative council. Moving to a PR system would significantly improve this resulting in better democracy. We realise that this may be out of the scope of this enquiry, but it would ensure better representation from the outset, no matter what committee system is established.

Is there a role for lay people from LACs on committees to provide insight by giving feedback on the papers and work of the committee and inputting on behalf of their area?

**The overarching committee**

The fact that the idea of an Overarching Committee was endorsed pre-referendum does not inspire confidence nor trust. It is crucial that there is zero possibility of this having the same kind of power that the previous Cabinet had. People have voted for change and it will be important to explain how this committee and the new system is different.

**Leadership**

6.1 of the report poses the question of shared or joint leadership. For the role of council leader this is worth exploring and could be a mechanism to facilitate cooperation and collaboration to mitigate for party politics. For Lord Mayor, this needs to remain as one individual so they can develop the role as an ambassador according to their experience and strengths. It is crucial that the Lord Mayor's role is given the support needed to fulfil the role in whatever direction the individual wishes to take it. Sheffield benefited locally, nationally and internationally from Magid Magid's tenure and work. The new system needs to be such that it enables anyone appointed to this role to enact their vision unimpeded.

**Things to ensure**

We appreciate that coming up with a committee system that serves the citizens of Sheffield is a significant challenge and it is very easy to get bogged down in details and 'what ifs' and lose sight of the bigger picture and reasons why the people of Sheffield voted for change.

We would like to suggest that whatever system is created it is crucial that:

- The new system does not enable the formation of de facto 'mini cabinets' or an overarching de facto cabinet whose power/decisions/actions cannot be challenged and changed if necessary by other counsellors or the public.
- Under the new system it is must not be possible for a repeat of the circumstances, events, decisions that resulted in the contract that led to the destruction of trees, attempted prosecutions etc associated with the Tree Scandal
- The new system must enable the Lord Mayor to develop and enact their vision throughout the tenure.
- The new system is flexible enough that iterative changes can be made for pragmatic purposes as long as these do not compromise nor undermine democratic processes
- There are widely publicised mechanisms for citizen input and involvement that can impact on council decisions