SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Governance Committee

Meeting held 8 December 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Penny Baker (Deputy Chair), Sue Alston, Dawn Dale, Peter Garbutt, Christine Gilligan, Mary Lea, Mike Levery and Mohammed Mahroof

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1.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1   Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Julie Grocutt, Mark Jones and Sioned Mair-Richards.

2.   EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

3.   DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1   There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

4.   PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

4.1   There were no public question or petitions received.

5.   TRANSITION TO A COMMITTEE SYSTEM INQUIRY SESSION 3

5.1   The Committee received verbal submissions from a range of witnesses in order to review any information which would help the Committee make decisions when developing the new Committee System.

It's Our City

5.2   Ruth Hubbard from It's Our City attended the meeting virtually and gave a verbal submission to the Committee. A written submission was also circulated to the Committee, prior to the meeting.

5.3   Key points to note from Ruth Hubbard's verbal submission were-

- Sheffield City Council had not been clear enough about the purpose for the governance transition therefore was advised to tell the story of Sheffield's governance journey.

- The relationship with the Local Area Committees needed to be clearer.

- It's Our City believed Sheffield's purpose and outcomes should;
  - Build the legitimacy of the Council.
  - Make better decisions.
  - Be more democratic.
  - Improve relationships with Stakeholders and Public.

- Encouraged the Council to deliver strong external communication on the proposed direction of Governance arrangements.

- Sheffield City Council should consider implementing politically proportionate Chairs of Committees.

- The Council should also consider having Co-Chairs of Committees.

- It was mentioned that use of the simplified Governance Principles, which were agreed at a previous Committee, could lead to potential risks.

- The Council should implement a cost-neutral Committee System.

- It was mentioned that phrases such as; 'Scrutiny', 'Call-In' 'Overarching' all referred to the old system. The Council should consider changing the language of functions like these to reflect a new modern Committee System.

- Sheffield City Council needed to engage with Stakeholders more. It was advised that Elected Members along with key stakeholders with interest/investment in this process, could be invited to form part of a Governance Watch Group.

5.4   A Members of Committee asked a question and the following response were provided by Ruth Hubbard:-

5.5   She believed there was elements within Overview and Scrutiny that formed part of good decision-making although the Council were encouraged to move on from replicating functions that existed in the old system. It was mentioned that functions such as Policy Development and Holding to Account should be retained effectively in the new system.

Dr Karen Ford

5.6   Dr Karen Ford attended the meeting and gave a verbal submission to the Committee. A written submission was also circulated to the Committee, prior to the meeting.

5.7   Key points to note from Dr Karen Ford's verbal submission were-

- It was mentioned that Committees being politically proportionate could be problematic.

- Members being different ages, ethnicities and from different geographical areas should be considered when forming the Committee memberships.

- Asked the Council to consider how Independent Members were elected to Committees.

- Asked the Council to ensure an Overarching Committee doesn't function like a Cabinet.

- Sheffield City Council could explore having a joint leadership role, which could improve cross party relationships and ways of working.

- The Lord Mayor position should remain, and that Member should act as an ambassador for the city.

- The new Committee System should be more transparent which would lead to better public engagement.

- The role of scrutiny needed to be clearer for the public.

5.8   Members of Committee asked questions and the following responses were provided by Dr Ford:-

5.9   She explained there needed to be criteria for appointing Members to a Committee which would reflect how the public voted in the local elections.

5.10   Dr Karen Ford believed that public engagement would improve if proportion representation was implemented in the new system. She thought members of the public would feel their vote meant something.

An Active Citizen

5.11   Nigel Slack attended the meeting and gave a verbal submission to the Committee. A written submission was also circulated to the Committee, prior to the meeting.

5.12   Key points to note from Nigel Slack's verbal submission were-

- Sheffield City Council needed to put aside party politics if they wished for a successful transition to a Committee System.

- Believed there was no place for the Whip System in the new

model.

- Members should represent the whole City in Policy Committees and not be allowed to not sit on at least one Committee as this is their responsibility.

- Public engagement within the new system needed to be improved. The engagement that had taken place throughout the transition had proven to be invaluable. Mr Slack hoped the work that Involve aim to carry out in 2022 would achieve this.

- It was suggested that urgent decisions should be dealt with remotely if a physical meeting would have caused a delay in an urgent decision been made.

- Recommended the Council hold all-out elections every 4 years to minimise the amount of disruption each year along with reducing election costs.

5.13   Following Mr Slacks verbal submission, the Committee had no further questions.

National Expert in Local Governance and Decision Making

5.14   John Cade from INGOLOV attended the meeting virtually and gave a verbal submission to the Committee.

5.15   Key points to note from John Cade's verbal submission were-

- The number of agenda items should be balanced effectively to allow sufficient discussion time in Committees.

- Important to have a good Chair managing the meeting.

- Important to have effective system of pre-meetings with the Chair and Lead Officers

- Recommended there was an Overarching Committee which did not function like a Cabinet but dealt with citywide socio-economic matters along with key strategic and budgetary decisions.

- Believed Councillors would prefer to spend time in wards therefore the number of Committees/Sub-Committees should be considered.

5.16   Members of Committee asked questions and the following responses were provided by Mr Cade:-

5.17   He believed that Chairs of Committees should also be in effect the

'Portfolio Holders' for that area if indeed there were a need for such a term in this system. This would ensure that people had a clear path to someone with understanding of that area.

5.18   John Cade had seen Councils operate where the Chairs of Committees are from the majority political party. Alternatively, he had seen Councils where the Chairs were politically proportionate. John Cade stated the important thing was to ensure the Chair could command the confidence and support of that Committee.

5.19   He believed Co-Chairs would be a positive change.

5.20   It was suggested that the total number of Policy Committees remained within single figures.

5.21   John Cade referred to Birmingham City Council, where they had Neighbourhood Committees which would frequently update a particular Policy Committee on local issues.

5.22   It was advised that their system had an arrangement which allowed the Council to reflect on the Committee System's effectiveness. It was suggested this could be done 6-8 months after the implementation of the system.

5.23   It was stated the Strategy and Resources Committee should not be a Cabinet under another name as this would be a betrayal of what the Council agreed to move away from through the referendum. Although, there needed to be an Overarching Committee which dealt with key strategic and budgetary decisions instead of these been taken to different Committees. It was suggested the Overarching Committees membership is the Chairs of each Policy Committee and consider a geographical spread of area Members to input on local issues, and that this would not necessarily constitute a 'cabinet by another name'.

5.24   John Cade had witnesses other Councils use Urgency Committees for urgent decision making. Although, it was advised that urgent decisions be delegated to an Officer in consultation with the relevant Committee Chair.

5.25   John Cade hoped that each Councillor would want to have a seat on at least one Policy Committee although was reluctant to make it a requirement. This was because he thought Councillors may wish to spend more time in wards, dealing with local issues.

An Academic, University of Sheffield

5.26   Matthew Wood from University of Sheffield attended the meeting virtually and gave a verbal submission to the Committee. A written submission was also circulated to the Committee, prior to the meeting.

5.27   Key points to note from Matthew Wood's verbal submission were-

- Stated that his research showed that when designing a new governance system, an Inclusive approach to political decision making can help achieve accountability.

- The Council should be more open and transparent through evidence-based decision making.

- Citizens had lost trust in Sheffield City Council. It was now up to the Council to earn that trust back, this could be done through innovative public hearings where Committees show they are collaborating with other organisations within the City.

- Committees should consider diverse forms of evidence.

5.28   Following Matthew Wood's verbal submission, the Committee had no further questions and thanked him for his submission.

Chief Executive, Sheffield City Council

5.29   Kate Joseph, Chief Executive at Sheffield City Council, attended the meeting and gave a verbal submission to the Committee.

5.30   Key points to note from Kate Joseph's verbal submission were-

- Officers would provide professional opinions and options. Although, the Council were committed to implement how Members decided the new system should operate.

- Pleased that the transition to a committee system process had been so open.

- There was a clear desire for the Council to;
-   Be more connected to communities.
-   Be confident and outward looking.
-   Support excellent delivery of public services.

- Important for the new system to allow effective iteration and learning, especially with the Council's challenging budgetary situation.

- Important to have teams around each Committee, so that Members felt they had adequate support. This was also important to ensure there was clear alignment with the corporate plan and budget. They should be resourced to succeed but this did not mean a blank cheque.

- Needed to make sure the Local Area Committees had clear

sight into the wider Committee System and inform Themed Committees.

- Hard to imagine how a Committee System would operate without an Overarching Committee. This would be different to a Cabinet as it would be politically proportionate, and everything would be open.

- Needed to be a single Committee that coordinated and took ownership of the budget. This could be done within the Overarching Committee.

- Delegations to Officers may increase therefore it was important that Officers have meaningful communication with Members so that Members and the public have confidence in Officer delegations.

- Needed to pay some attention to learning and development. There was already a Member Development Induction Programme ongoing although training needed to be rolled out to Members and Officers at all levels, so the Council is capable to work effectively under the new Committee System.

- In the 1-year plan, the Council had committed to a corporate 3–5-year plan.

5.31   Members of Committee asked questions and the following responses were provided by Kate Josephs: -

5.32   She believed it would be effective for each Policy Committee to have ownership of their specific budget for that area of work whilst the Overarching Committee had an overall view.

5.33   It was stated the Committee shouldn't be restrained in recommending something they felt needed to be implemented in the new system. Officers would then be able to provide potential costs of those recommendations.

5.34   Kate Joseph explained that if the Council chose to hold elections all-out every 4 years instead of the current arrangement, then it would be implemented, although this was something the Council needed to consider separately.

5.35   In was stated that it is the Officers duty to present well evidenced recommendations to Committees without favour, to allow for good discussions and considerations by Members.

5.36   The Chair thanked all the attendees for attending the inquiry session and for sharing their views on a new Committee System.

6.   CO-CHAIR PILOT REPORT

6.1   The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Governance which outlined different Councillors' experiences of Co-Chairing Committees.

6.2   A Member of the Committee asked a question and the following response were provided-

6.3   The Assistant Director (Governance) explained that the purpose of the report was for the Committee to consider whether implementing Co-Chairs into the new system should occur across all Committees, or if the option would be more flexible and decided on a committee-by-committee basis. The Director of Legal and Governance highlighted the difference between Co-Chairing and job sharing. Each Elected Member would have a full job if they were to Co-Chair a Committee. Alternatively, if there was an Elected Member job share, the Director of Legal and Governance believed both Members would be put forward together to Co-Chair a Committee doing part of the role each.

6.4   Concerns were raised around the continuity and consistency of Co-Chairs. It was mentioned that Members may wish to carry out tasks differently therefore there needed to be clear division of workload to not complicate the role.

6.5   Members of the Committee discussed the potential for having more than two Co-Chairs. Also, whether a Member could step into the Chair/Co-Chair role, if a current Chair was away from work for some time.

6.6   **RESOLVED:** That the Committee agreed to (1) Build the opportunity for job shares into the Committee's plans when it recommends a governance structure to Council;

        (2) Ensure that any job sharing arrangement is supported by a job-share protocol in or with the constitution, potentially modelled on Brighton and Hove's; and

        (3) Evaluate the effectiveness of any job shared roles within the first 12 months, alongside the evaluation of the effectiveness of the new governance model as a whole, and adjust the council's approach accordingly.

7.   TRANSITIONAL COMMITTEES LESSONS LEARNT

7.1   The Committee received a report of the Director of Legal and Governance which set out the initial learning to date from Transitional Committees, which began meeting formally in October 2021.

7.2   The Committee were asked to make comments on the progress of

Transitional Committees to date. The Committee should also use the information to inform the development of the Committee System model.

7.3   A Member of the Committee asked a question and the following response were provided-

7.4   The Head of Policy and Partnerships informed the Committee there needed to be a focus on what each Committee is responsible for, and this should be considered when deciding the total number of Policy Committees and how often they meet within the new system.

7.5   A Transitional Committee Chair informed the Committee that they were pleased with how their Transitional Committee had been operating so far. It was mentioned that 3 specific areas of work had been targeted which was appropriate to the limited time the Transitional Committees had to operate.

7.6   The Head of Policy and Partnerships thanked Members, along with Officers who had been part of the Transitional Committees functionality.

7.7   **RESOLVED:** That the Committee notes the learning from the Transitional Committees and uses it to inform the development of the Committee system model.

8.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

8.1   It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 22 December 2021.

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