SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Governance Committee

Meeting held 9 February 2023

PRESENT: Councillors Sue Alston (Deputy Chair), Christine Gilligan Kubo, Dianne Hurst, Mark Jones, Joe Otten, Sioned-Mair Richards (Substitute Member) and Andrew Sangar (Substitute Member)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Penny Baker, Julie Grocutt, Mary Lea, Mike Levery, Bryan Lodge and Mick Rooney.

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. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings held on 8 December 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 The Committee received questions from a member of the public, prior to the meeting. It was noted that those questions and responses provided by the Head of Policy and Partnerships would be included in the minutes.

5.2 <u>Ruth Hubbard</u>

1. In my public questions at the 6th October meeting I asked about the money spent on Involve, what appeared to have gone wrong, and where was the promised final report. I was told this would be circulated to stakeholders within 2 weeks. It's now 17 weeks later and no report?

We can only apologise for the delay on this.

As suggested at the last Governance Committee meeting, we

want to make the best use of Involve's expertise to improve SCC's capabilities and expertise but over the last year, we've not had the capacity to make full use of this and take it forward. Involve have been hugely patient and remain committed to taking the work forward with us, maximising the insights from their work with partners, stakeholders and SCC officers last year.

To move this forward and ensure that it has a key role in our improvement journey, we have asked Involve to bring together their analysis from the work that stakeholders directed them to last year – including assessing case studies of involvement activity in the city and the workshops with stakeholders – and offering some direct conclusions or recommendations for what the Council needs to do improve practise and genuinely embed citizen involvement in SCC's way of working. This is likely to add to some of the findings from the LGA's Peer Challenge, Street Trees Inquiry and aspects of the Race Equality Commission final report.

We will share the draft report for comment to the stakeholders that contributed and Governance Committee Members.

2. It has consistently been stated that the governance review would focus on assessing early practice against design principles.

This does not appear to be what is shaping the review. For example, in a 20 page report there is only one side that addresses a very small part of the design principle work, and this is also based on a 'marking your own homework' approach - for example, the vast majority of councillors and officers tell us that the council is 'democratic' - that's a surprise - though citizens beg to differ.

There are no basic or agreed performance measures, benchmarks, standards, outputs or outcomes (with the possibility of appropriate supporting data) against which any of the design principle work can be assessed. In what is here, 'beliefs' are simply asserted.

Whilst it is quite amusing to learn things like more than a third of officers and councillors don't currently BELIEVE the council is 'open and trustworthy', for example, this is all really pretty meaningless isn't it (though maybe should be ringing alarm bells)? It IS quite funny but really it's all fairly empty and meaningless twaddle. Without agreed ideas or measures against which we can think about and assess the quality of things like 'openness', 'trustworthiness', or 'democracy' etc. (for the council constitution and governance system) the council lays itself open to the accusation that it simply wants to assert its own spin, not hold itself to account in any way on its governance, and does not wish to pursue learning and improvement planning.

Before he left Alex Polak presented to the committee some early thinking on establishing benchmarks for the review against design principles. Whilst this was only a start, and very basic - I for one commented in a public question that they obviously needed a lot of work (I didn't think they were good) and was happy to contribute if anyone was interested. But this early work on basic benchmarks and performance measures has simply disappeared.

When will members and officers undertake some serious work - preferably with stakeholders having actual influence too - establishing some basic performance measures and benchmarks (and to establish baselines as appropriate) so it can assess its governance structures/constitution, culture and practices (and to track improvements), according to its own stated commitments? The current big mismatches (that have been drawn to the attention of the committee) between its design principle work and its constitution and governance practice suggest that this work might be fruitful. (Some of this work was effectively already started by a range of stakeholders very early on but the Governance Committee chucked this out the first time.)

(At the same time, random bits of 'data' are thrown in. For example we are told there have been 67 public questions but apropos what? - is there an aim, then, in relation to public questions? Is 67 more or less than previously? Are they from a small group? Is there diversity - do we want more? What is the meaning or purpose of this random 'data' thrown in? Why is it important or interesting - to what end?)

This is a very fair challenge. It is true that as part of the introduction of the Committee System in 2022, some very initial work was done on some potential metrics connected to the Design Principles which were intended to help us understand and measure the development of the new governance model. These have not been developed further as was originally intended and thus it hasn't been possible to use such metrics to gauge the impact of the system beyond some very simple output measures which don't really provide insight into the quality and depth of how the Committee System is bedding in.

The Governance Committee and officers recognise this and acknowledge that it is something we should have looked to develop, particularly to provide a baseline from which to measure progress. Therefore, recommendation 14 of the Governance Committee's Review states that the development of a performance framework for the Committee System will be a priority for the coming year. The Committee will want to consider approaches to doing this using the Design Principles as the overall framework. Involvement and ideas from stakeholders and communities will undoubtedly be welcomed to ensure that the measures are grounded in citizens' expectations

and ambitions of how our governance system should work for the city whilst being measurable and collectable.

3. As it is, the report (and review as a whole) is largely taken up with the internal, insular, operational, procedural and technocratic framing and concerns of officers and elected members.

(Again, however, it is not clear what key objectives, ends or purpose much of this serves - which design principles might all this relate to or could some things be dealt with outside Committee perhaps?)

This priority framing is partly to be expected because, of course, this is the approach to the 'change' mandate that the council has pretty much adopted throughout, because this kind of approach DOES reflect the priorities of the officer-elected member machine, because there is undoubtedly a lot of this kind of work that has been necessary, and because the committee has obviously found it very difficult to demonstrate it understands and can actually meaningfully respond to and include and prioritise citizen, community and stakeholder governance concerns (including repeatedly rejecting requests to approach the governance review as a joint exercise). What are the current prospects and timescale for paying proper attention to, and operationalising in the council constitution and in its practices the widespread citizen, community, and stakeholder governance concerns from the biggest exercise anywhere of citizens rights to change the way our council works?

> We knew and stated as part of the transition to the Committee System in 2022 that the model that was implemented in May 2022 would effectively be a starting point for the City Council. There has been a huge amount of learning for Members and officers in adapting to a very different model of decision making within a challenging financial context for SCC.
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> We undoubtedly haven't got everything right and the 6 Month Review was opportunity to resolve and address the more immediate challenges that Members, officers and citizens have experienced in the first phase of operating the system. The Review was explicitly not about a wholesale reform of a system which is still in its infancy and indeed, we want to embed and grow our Committee System over the coming years, refining and instilling it as part of SCC's culture and ways of working.
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> The Review has therefore identified a number of technical, operational and procedural improvements that could be made (should Governance Committee in April agree to recommend them to Full Council). But, the broader message from the Review (recognised in the work Governance Committee want to lead next year and in the Governance Review Implementation Plan) is that there is much to do to move beyond structural and

technical improvements and into more fundamental elements such as community involvement, policy development and review, developing Member and officer skills to really embed the new governance in SCC and the city.

4. Can you confirm that the 'citizens' graph on p.25 collates (just) 50 citizen survey responses? I partly ask because I was someone who actually spent a couple of hours on the survey but did not finish it as I ran out of time, and I do not recall answering these questions directly. I think this whole page should, anyway, be taken out of the report, for the reasons stated previously but also, at least in the citizens graph case, because with these vanishingly tiny numbers it cannot tell anyone anything at all and should not be presented as potentially doing so. (Though I do note in all the five very broad categories not once do a majority of respondent citizens agree the principle is being demonstrated.)

> Yes, the data in the report is accurate and we received 50 citizen responses and it is difficult to make any reliable quantitative conclusions from such small numbers. However, the qualitative content of the survey responses has been valuable and informed the Review work that the Governance Committee have undertaken.

> At such an early stage, the actual number of Sheffielders that have had direct interactions and experience of the new Committee System is relatively small (and something we need to improve on) but this probably means that it is harder for many people to express an informed view about the system itself.

> There is much to do to better connect citizens to the Committee System and any future reviews and perhaps we need to develop an effective way for citizens that do interact with the Committee System (eg. Public questions, attending a meeting, engaging through a Committee's policy work) to provide feedback and insight into their experience so that we can continuously improve how we operate.

> We also need a much stronger focus on how we involve people as while surveys have value, there should be a greater emphasis on conversations and connecting through the city's wealth of stakeholders and community networks in future.

5. Why does the committee/officers think it has failed so badly to engage any decent number of citizens, communities and stakeholders for its governance review? For myself, after many hundreds of hours (indeed, thousands of hours if one includes prior to the referendum) trying to make substantial contributions (and most often trying to present views, experiences and ideas from many thousands of people) but to no discernible effect at all, I see little point, usefulness or value in

continuing to devote so much thought, energy, voluntary time and expertise to the council.

I could not endorse the review and survey or encourage people and groups to engage or fill it in whilst it is such a pointless waste of time. But at the same time I am constantly contacted by, and in touch with, individuals, groups and stakeholders who want to talk about these issues. And I am working on a national research project with a special focus on Glasgow and Sheffield on 'democratising local governance'. So I have been talking to 16 community and campaigning groups in Sheffield on local governance issues. Why is it possible for me as an individual to have engaged with 16 grassroots groups on local governance but it seems to have been impossible for our council to create the kinds of relationships and networks for input into its governance review so that, in the report for this committee, there is pretty much - effectively - no input. Why has the Governance Committee not even used its own 'toolkit' that it says all policy committees should be using (even though none are). Is it not at least incumbent to be setting a good example? What should happen now given, effectively, there is an absence of meaningful citizen/stakeholder review input at this stage? On the other hand is it fair to request anyone's time for this if a willingness to make any real shifts cannot be demonstrated? Again, why does the council think it is failing so badly in this?

> As in Q5 and earlier questions, we know there is a lot we need to do – through the committee system but also through the whole council - to be much better engaging and involving communities in everything the Council does with the city and our communities.

> All citizen contributions to the Review were valued by the Committee but we have much to do to increase citizen awareness and involvement to our committee system and make stronger connection to stakeholder and community networks in order to have conversations with Sheffielders about our decision making and democracy.

> What is clear from Members and views expressed in the Review is that we have not made significant strides towards greater citizen involvement with and through committees themselves since May 2022. However, citizen involvement happens through a whole range of formal and informal channels across the council and the city, not just directly through the work of Policy Committees. We certainly need to be better about emphasising and evidencing where such involvement is taking / has taken place. However, Governance Committee are certainly committed to increasing involvement of citizens in our Committees and are recommending that they give dedicated focus to this issue in the coming year.

6. I endorse the view that there appears to have been improvement in the last year or so in the 'tone' of discussion at council meetings and that - in combination with No Overall Control - cross-party dialogue is publicly visible. Again, it would be best, however, if there were a couple or a few agreed measures to properly document/record this progress and for identifying gaps or further improvements.

Much big stuff remains entirely unaddressed. For example
a) SCC has created the largest and most unwieldy committee system in the country (despite govt guidance and despite what has happened in the Wirral, let alone us repeatedly flagging it) yet this major issue seems to be pretty much nowhere for review purposes (and though it clearly relates to design principles as well as things 'going a bit wrong' e.g. issues falling between stools/parks is a good example). There have also been an unbelievable number of emergency/extra meetings - when pretty much NONE should be happening - why is this?
b) Not all councillors are on policy committees, this is not clearly or properly recorded (fundamental to design principles and the vote for change), and is geographically skewed. And the one Conservative councillor is excluded yet just about 1 in 5 who voted - across the whole city - voted Tory when he was elected. design principles are relevant here too and it looks like a 'democratic' scandal.
c) There is no attempt, either, to review LACs against design principles - they always were, and remain, top-down/very much "council-owned" and not particularly forward thinking (everyone knows this but it is not just me saying this, it is also said by the Director of the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny for example). Public questions are also going wrong at some LACs and in some ways mirror problems at council/committee meetings (that I have written some detail on previously and that I hope the review has picked up though it's not obvious this has been)
But LACs also deserve a review of their own though in current circumstances I don't think it should be the council doing it.
d) Early on there was quite a bit of talk about the need for culture change by the Gov committee. What's the specific agenda here, how is this being driven and/or tracked / measured etc?

> Its positive to hear that there are visible developments in the ways of working through the Committee System, particularly at such an early stage. As the Governance Committee's review emphasises, we are keen to see continuous improvement to our governance and the Committee are keen to sustain their role in supporting the further development of the Committee System in the year ahead.
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> The Governance Committee agreed that LACs were out of scope for 6 Month Review, apart from considering the relationship between LACs and Policy Committees. As the feedback in the Review suggests, there is work to do to increase

understanding of the distinctions and respective responsibilities of LACs and Policy Committees. Further, Governance Committee will consider a recommendation that Full Council looks at the potential for further empowering LACs, specifically around devolving decision-making on some transport and highways schemes.

6.   GOVERNANCE REVIEW - ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

6.1   The Committee received a presentation from the Interim Director of Legal and Governance, David Hollis. The report updated Members on the progress of the 6-month review of governance arrangements. It sets out the activity carried out during the 'Engagement' Phase of the review, detailed the findings from the Engagement, identified key areas for action in the next, 'Action Planning' Phase of the review.

6.2   The Policy and Improvement Officer, Emily Standbrook-Shaw explained that appendix 1 of the report listed many areas of the system which may require change. The Committee were asked if that list targeted the right areas of the system and to identify any further areas for review.

6.3   The Policy and Improvement Officer mentioned that they had received good levels of engagement from Officers and Members through the drop-in sessions. She added that the level of citizen engagement was lower than anticipated.

6.4   The Chair of the meeting (Councillor Sue Alston) read out the recommendations from the report, for the Committee to reflect on whilst asking questions and making comments.

6.5   Members of the Committee asked questions and made comments and the key points to note were: -

6.6   A Member of the Committee raised concerns around the timetable and how close to the AGM (Annual Meeting of the Council) they were before having to put forward recommendations.

The Interim Director of Legal and Governance, David Hollis explained that the AGM was not the last phase of this review and that any aspect of the review that needed further consideration will continue after the AGM.

The Policy and Improvement Officer added that a timetable of meetings of the Governance Committee will be circulated to the Committee.

6.7   A Member of the Committee asked if the AGM was the only meeting of Full Council where changes to the constitution can be made.

The Interim Director of Legal and Governance confirmed that changes to the constitution could be carried out at any meeting of Full Council.

6.8   A Member of the Committee asked how the review of Full Council, that was tasked to the Whips, would feed back into this review of governance arrangements.

The Interim Director of Legal and Governance explained that the Governance Committee would receive a report once the Whips had recommendations from the review of the Full Council meeting.

6.9   A Member of the Committee mentioned the importance of identifying key stages of the review, so the Committee had an action plan and knew what they were working towards in time of the next meetings of Full Council.

6.10   A Member of the Committee referred to the list at appendix 1 which stated 'Consider whether current Committee remits are appropriately balanced.' The Member did not feel that this could be considered until the elections had taken place as following the results of the election, the administration may decide upon different Committees remits as to what was agreed at the AGM.

Another Member of the Committee mentioned it would still be good practice to identify Committee remits, prior to the AGM. The administration may or may not agree with what was recommended by the Committee.

6.11   A Member of the Committee stated they were disappointed with the reference to addressing the recommendations from the Involve report, as it looked like the activity around public engagement had been put to one side.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships, Laurie Brenan explained that this had been a capacity issue. He mentioned that public stakeholders were fundamental to this system and will be part of the process, therefore asked the Committee to not read that aspect as public engagement been put to one side. He added that the longer-term goal was for Policy Committees not being the only route for public participation.

6.12   The Chair of the meeting (Councillor Sue Alston) mentioned that 'public involvement' should be added to the end of point 1 of 'Committee Activity' so that the line read as follows:- 'Consider how we can create capacity in the system for Policy Committees to undertake more policy development, pre-decision scrutiny and public involvement.'

6.13   A Member of the Committee asked if the recommendations from the Involve report had been provided to the Committee.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships explained that report from involve will feature at a future meeting of the Governance Committee.

6.14   A Member of the Committee raised the importance of Committees being adequately briefed and received papers in sufficient time. There also needed to be sufficient time, prior to a meeting, to engage with members of the public.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships mentioned this was an aspect that were being looked at as part of Officer training, so that they could provide Members with adequate support in the preparation of Council meetings.

6.15   A Member of the Committee asked whether Local Area Committees (LACs) could be given greater decision-making responsibility.

The Policy and Improvement Officer stated that the reference to LACs in the report were for Members to consider how they operated going forward, although this would be a piece of work that needed to be carried out beyond the review of governance arrangements.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships mentioned that he had attended the LAC Chairs group to discuss the relationship between LACs and Policy Committees.

6.16   A Member of the Committee commented that the current process for referring issues from LACs the Policy Committees were slow, and that the 7 LAC Chairs following the AGM, needed to be aware of the importance of that role.

6.17   A Member of the Committee stated they would like to see a climate impact assessment carried out and shown on Committee reports.

The Improvement and Policy Officer mentioned that the intention was to re-name the heading 'Impact Assessments' and that climate would be part of that.

The Chair of the meeting (Councillor Sue Alton) stated that many aspects of the list reported at appendix 1 would need to be considered prior to the AGM and that this needed to be reviewed further as part of the Working Group.

6.18   A Member of the Committee referred to previous discussions by the Committee around Co-opted Independent Members and how they could be an asset to the Committee.

The Chair of the meeting (Councillor Sue Alston) mentioned that the Committee may want to invite witnesses to the Committee's workshops, dependant on the topic being discussed at the time.

6.19   RESOLVED: That the Governance Committee:

·   consider and note the findings from the Engagement Phase of the review.

·   note that findings related to Full Council have been passed to the Full Council working group for consideration as part of their work.

·   consider whether the issues identified for the Action Planning Phase of the Review are the right ones and;

- o   agree that those requiring a change to the system are taken forward to Governance Committee Action Planning Workshops

- o   agree that those requiring improvements to how we explain, communicate and support the system are actioned by officers, with progress reports back to Governance Committee at the appropriate time

- o   identify which issues can be actioned prior to the Council's AGM in May 2023, and which will be actioned in the longer term

- o   consider how issues relating to the wider system, beyond the scope of this review are taken forwards.

7.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

7.1   It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was schedule for the 2 March 2023. Although, this meeting may be cancelled as there were no current items to consideration. Therefore, the next meeting of the Committee would be 20 March 2023.

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