S H E F F I E L D   C I T Y   C O U N C I L

Governance Committee

Meeting held 20 July 2023

PRESENT: Councillors Fran Belbin (Chair), Sue Alston (Deputy Chair),
Simon Clement-Jones, Craig Gamble Pugh, Mike Levery, Alison Norris,
Joe Otten, Minesh Parekh, Sioned-Mair Richards, Paul Turpin and
Ruth Milsom (Substitute Member)

1.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1   An apology for absence were received from Councillor Nighat Basharat.

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 6 April 2023 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.

5.2   Ruth Hubbard

1. What input, if any, has this committee had into the preparation of the Annual
Governance Statement?

> The Chair (Councillor Fran Belbin) explained that each committees remit is
> specifically defined by the Council's constitution. The Annual Governance
> Statement was part of the Council's statutory audit regime so the
> responsibility for approving it quite properly sits with its Audit and Standards
> Committee.

2. What general and specific issues arising from Lowcock has the committee

identified (or had referred to it) that it needs to take forward as part of its work. I'm quite surprised to see no Report about this for the Cttee and its work given the stated commitment to learning the lessons and the essential governance narrative of Lowcock (despite the weakness of the recommendations in this respect).

> The Chair stated that as agreed at their meeting on 19 June 2023, primary responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the actions agreed in response to the Lowcock report sits with the Strategy and Resources Committee. As that paper sets out: "the Council also has commitments from the LGA peer challenge report, Committee system review and other reports to monitor. Monitoring arrangements will look at these alongside the Inquiry recommendations to ensure actions focused on similar themes are considered together. To do this, progress will be monitored by the [Council's internal] Performance and Delivery Board and Claire Taylor, Chief Operating Officer. Further accountability will be ensured through monitoring by the Council's internal audit function. As included in the EGM motion on 10 May, 'Strategy and Resources Policy Committee; Audit and Standards Committee, Governance Committee and other committees as appropriate will be used as vehicles to drive this process in an open and transparent way'. Strategy and Resources Committee will receive a report against progress on these actions, and those for other recent reports, during winter 2023 and summer 2024."

> As part of this process, it may be appropriate for specific issues to be considered by the Governance Committee during the course of the year. The committee's work programme is an evolving document and can be altered or added to during the course of the year, as required.

3. I've mentioned this before but i'd like to make sure it's placed on public record that the Governance Review entirely ignored the resolution by full council that the Review should focus on assessing its working against the governance principles (such as they are). No one seems concerned by this at all. There was some very early work done on this in June '22 but that then came to a hard stop. The failure of the Review in this respect (as well as in other respects such as any meaningful public engagement) means that the committee has continued on a path where its focus is insular and technical (and I assume also plays to some party political purposes). The limited focus of the work so far was acknowledged recently in the Report at Strategy & Resources Policy Committee. There are lots of implications to this avoidance of discussion, focus and operationalisation (in the constitution) of anything that might be meaningful. There is a large gap between stated governance principles and their embedding and demonstration in the constitution. This is your regular reminder that the reason governance changed has come about is solely because of the sustained work of citizens and communities. But it also means the council is also way out of step with CiPFA/SOLACE framework and approach, which does have statutory force. Again, no one seems particularly bothered.

In respect of this meeting...

a) the necessarily very limited Governance Review implementation Plan is

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unlinked to any clear aims, objectives and outcomes (nor any way of measuring these). In this respect it's not really an action plan, just activity.
b) I'm slightly alarmed that in the workplan it appears draft performance measures are to be brought forward for August's meeting. However, as none of the groundwork for this has been done - the committee has spent two years making a technical change but avoiding (and I think refusing) any discussion of meaning in its work and what you are trying to do (including in relation to principles) that I fail to see how this timescale is in any way workable given that developing meaningful performance measures requires a huge amount of thinking about focus, purpose and objectives.

Would the committee like to comment?

> The Chair explained that the aim of the Six Month Review of Governance was to undertake an 'early look' at how the committee system is working, picking up and addressing issues before they become more entrenched. It was not meant to be a wholesale assessment of the system but sought to draw on initial experiences and learn from good practice. The Governance Review Implementation Plan (GRIP) sets out some of the improvements we need to make. It isn't strategic and is activity-based but will help to deliver the issues identified in the Six Month Review.

> The draft performance measures item is scheduled for next formal meeting so that Governance Committee Members can have an initial conversation about the task and hopefully, to kick off the work. This is more about managing Member and officer capacity over the year alongside the other items in the workplan as we have a busy agenda and can't do it all at once. We have not pre-formed ideas about how we develop the performance measures for the Committee System but will undoubtedly want to use the Design Principles and others such as the CIPFA/SOLACE framework as the foundations. We'll also want to apply those principles in how we develop the performance measures and would welcome ideas from stakeholders and independent expertise and also considering how to connect this to a wider performance framework. The Chair mentioned she was personally committed to much greater public engagement.

4. Where is the Involve final Report? Those stakeholders who contributed were promised a look at the final draft and opportunity to comment, in Jan 2021 initially. I and others have pursued this since then. The last time I asked about it was in October 2022 and at that point we were promised the report within two weeks as was the Committee as I recall. I'm at a loss about what to ask about this anymore - the passing of time would seem to make it less and less relevant but this was tens of thousands of public money, the freely given time of stakeholders who were promised sight of the final draft 18months ago ......

> The Chair recognised previously that the Committee did not really have capacity last year to make the most of the opportunity to work with Involve and we are very conscious in trying to make full use of the expertise they have in driving improvement in how we better involve the people of

Sheffield in the issues that matter to them and the decisions that the Council makes. It was a key part of what Members want the Council to achieve in the year ahead, is part of the Governance Committee's workplan, and we have now restarted the work with Involve which will include publishing the full report with direct recommendations to the Council.

Ruth Hubbard had asked if a courtesy letter could be sent to those stakeholders.

The Chair was happy for a courtesy letter to be sent.

6. **GOVERNANCE REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (GRIP) UPDATE**

6.1   The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement. The Governance Review Implementation Plan (GRIP) addressed issues arising from the six-month Governance Review which was presented to Full Council in May 2023 as part of the Annual General Meeting. The majority of the actions were for officers to undertake over the coming year and were predominantly practical actions to support the continuous improvement of the Council's governance. The Governance Committee will receive regular updates on progress over the coming year. This was the first update for the Committee on initial progress.

6.2   The Head of Policy and Partnerships, Laurie Brennan, mentioned that the GRIP would be appended to each formal committee meeting agenda, so that Members had sight of the progress of the actions highlighted in the plan.

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

6.4   A Member of the Committee mentioned they would be happy for the plan to remain in its current table format for the remainder of the year, as it was clear and gave Members sight of the progress against these actions.

6.5   A Member of the Committee referred to 4.1 of the GRIP, they stated that more work needed to be done on this which linked to policy committee remits which was a function to be explored further, as part of the Governance Committee's work plan. The Member believed that some work had already begun outside of this Committee on this, therefore, this should be highlighted within the plan.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships stated that this work relating to policy committee remits had began an the intention was to feed that information back into this Committee at a later stage.

6.6   A Member of the Committee believed there was a column missing on the GRIP which represented Member and public engagement.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships mentioned that officers would carry

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out actions in an open and transparent way where necessary.

6.7   A Member of the Committee mentioned timeliness of Members receiving reports before a meeting. He stated how it made better discussion in meetings when receiving reports in a timely manner. Therefore, wished that report deadlines be embedded into the GRIP.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships mentioned that officers had already began to discuss this issue. He asked if Members would welcome a report relating to 'report deadlines' at the next formal meeting of the Governance Committee.

6.8   The Chair referred to the action at 4.2 of the plan. She added that a report was to be taken to the next meeting of the Strategy and Resources Policy Committee therefore this action had already progressed.

6.9   A Member of the Committee raised her struggles as a working Member to attend all the briefings in her diary. She previously asked that online sessions to be recorded for later viewing, although the suggestion was rejected.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships stated that this topic could be explored further as part of that item in the GRIP. He also stated that he would check with the Council's legal service as to whether there were any legal implications with recording meetings.

The Interim General Council (David Hollis) explained that this topic had been raised with him recently and that he was looking into this issue further. He added that there were other factors to consider, such as the Council's retention policy and whether then the recordings would be subject to Freedom of Information requests.

6.10   **RESOLVED:** That the Committee notes the progress against actions in the Governance Review Implementation Plan.

7.   MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

7.1   The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement. The Head of Democratic and Member Services, Jason Dietsch presented the report to the Committee. He explained that the report was divided into 4 sections and Committee were being asked the following: -

1. Provide any comments on the existing Member Development Strategy 2021-25 and particularly any changes of emphasis or priority in the light of the implementation of the committee system and recent pieces of work, including the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review, the Race Equality Commission and the Street Tree Inquiry report.

2. Formally re-establish the Member Development Working Group, noting the proposed membership of the Group and to consider the draft terms of reference for the group and to request that the Group works on a programme of learning and

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development for Members, for the forthcoming year and reports back to Governance Committee.

3. Discuss and suggest any priorities for the 2023/24 Member Development Programme and areas which might be categorised as mandatory learning and development for elected members to complete.

4. Ask the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement to produce new role profiles and to work with the Member Development Working Group on the profiles which will then be submitted to the Governance Committee for its consideration.

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

7.3   A Member of the Committee mentioned there was an officer previously that had responsibility, along with a budget to sorely oversee Member development. She wondered whether all the information gathered by this officer was retained and if it would be useful to get their views on this rather than starting again. She raised the importance that Member development be Member-led and also suggested that there be officer training parallel to Member development, focussing on the working relationships between Members and officers. The Member also wished to see 'conflict resolution' included in the strategy as Members often had challenging interactions with members of the public in meetings outside of the Town Hall.

> The Head of Democratic and Member Services confirmed there was previously an officer that had oversight of Member development and that the information was retained within the Council. With the re-structure to Democratic Services, to support the new Committee System, provision had been put in place for an officer to again oversee Member development although he appreciated it was not to the capacity of the previous officer mentioned. He agreed that it was important for Member development to be Member-led and believed this would come through the working group. He mentioned there was officer training recently due to the transition to the new Committee System but agreed with the point relating to more training needed to be done around Member and officer working relationships.

7.4   A Member of the Committee referred to the programme for 2023/24 which set out the most recent and planned activity in the member development programme. She referred to the 'Communications Team Workings' for Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Spokespersons, and stated that as a Member currently in one of those roles she welcomed that training be provided earlier in the year. The Member also mentioned that a policy library would be useful for Members, especially new Members and members of the public being able to see what policies each portfolios were working towards.

> The Head of Democratic and Member Services noted the point made regarding 'Communication Team Workings' and stated he would take away the point relating to a policy library.

> The Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement explained that the

‘Communication Team Workings’ was part of his remit and agreed to look at bringing this session forward.

7.5   A Member of the Committee referred to the mention of the Race Equality Commission in the report. He believed that following the commission, the Council had agreed to be anti-racist, as recommended by the commission although was unaware of how this was progressing. He stated that he had been informed that conversations were happening at an officer level but had not received anything as a Member. Therefore, as part of the Member Development working group, this needed to be captured and ensure the Council was delivering as it agreed.

The Head of Democratic and Member Services stated that he would work with Equalities officers within the Council on this piece of work and ensure it was fed not the working group.

The Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement mentioned there was a report to be taken to Strategy & Resources Policy Committee which would set out the progress made, since the Council's initial response to the Race Equality Commission report. He added that Member development and Member roles was a key part of that and confirmed that would be included In the report going to Strategy & Resources Policy Committee.

7.6   A Member of the Committee mentioned how he recently asked how many Members had undertaken Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training at a Full Council meeting, as recommend by the Race Equality Commission. He explained that the data was unable to be provided, and then when asked the same question again at a future meeting, data showed that half of members had completed it. He raised the importance of Members embracing their position on being anti-racist.

7.7   A Member of the Committee referred to recent Member training session. She stated that the sessions were useful although raised the difficulty in attending due to work commitments. She added that if she had been given the programme of training earlier then it would have been easier to make arrangements with work so she could attend more sessions.

7.8   A Member of the Committee raised the importance of reducing those barriers discouraging people to becoming a Councillor. Also reducing those barriers for working Members being able to access training and development sessions. He also welcomed guidance on how the Council dealt with Members needing to be granted maternity, paternity or adoption leave. He also believed there would be an increase in completing mandatory training, if members of the public could view whether Members had completed certain training modules or not.

The Head of Democratic and Member Services explained there was a guidance document relating maternity, paternity and adoption leave which was produced with the group Whips although this may need to be reviewed again. He added that attendance statistics for Members could also be looked at again. He stated that mandating training could be something for the working group to consider as this will be part of their remit.

7.9   A Member of the Committee asked whether any specific Committee training had been carried out. She also raised the importance of advising Members how certain training would benefit them. Also, to consult with as many Members as possible, including the Conservative and Independent Members. She also stated how we needed to be careful if mandating training as there was no legal sanction, excluding training which was a legal requirement and also to take into account training that Members may have undertaken outside of the Council.

        The Head of Democratic and Member Services stated that he would look into specific Committee training for Members. He added that a role of the working group would be to provide that link between other group Members.

7.10   A Member of the Committee raised the importance of Chair and Deputy Chair training, as a Chair of a Committee this would have been welcomed before having to Chair meetings. He also mentioned the quality of training sessions and ensuring Members got what was expected from the sessions.

7.11   **RESOLVED:** That the Governance Committee;

        (1) provides any comments on the existing Member Development Strategy 2021-25 and particularly any changes of emphasis or priority in the light of the implementation of the committee system and recent pieces of work, including the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review, the Race Equality Commission and the Street Tree Inquiry report;

        (2) formally re-establish's the Member Development Working Group, noting the proposed membership of the Group and to consider the draft terms of reference for the group and to request that the Group works on a programme of learning and development for Members, for the forthcoming year and reports back to Governance Committee;

        (3) discusses and suggests any priorities for the 2023/24 Member Development Programme and areas which might be categorised as mandatory learning and development for elected members to complete; and

        (4) asks the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement to produce new role profiles and to work with the Member Development Working Group on the profiles which will then be submitted to the Governance Committee for its consideration.

8.   **PUBLIC QUESTIONS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

8.1   The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement. The Head of Policy and Partnerships explained that the report set out a proposal for Governance Committee to undertake a review of Council's approach to Public Questions, in response to Recommendation 16 of the Six-Month Review of Governance. The proposal suggested establishing a Task and Finish Group of Governance Committee Members to work with citizens, stakeholders and officers over the summer with proposals presented to

Governance Committee in October 2023.

8.2 The Head of Policy and Partnerships stated that the intention was to run a public workshop, with Members of this Committee in replace of the next formal Committee meeting. He mentioned that in advance of that workshop, officers planned to consult with members of the public who had previously asked a public question at any of the Council's Committee meetings, with the ambition to understand what worked well and how the process could be improved.

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

8.4 The Chair referred to the next formal Governance Committee meeting date being the 30 August 2023. Although appreciated that this may not be the date used to hold the workshop due to Member availability therefore would look at alternative dates in early September 2023 to hold this public workshop.

8.5 A Member of the Committee raised the importance of public participation in this piece of work and how it was crucial the listen to the public's voice at that workshop and then keep them engaged throughout the process.

8.6 A Member of the Committee welcomed the proposal and mentioned how public questions were a key part of Council meetings.

8.7 A Member of the Committee raised the importance of consulting with as many people as possible, not just members of the public who had asked questions at Council meetings previously. She suggested that people could submit written comments for the workshop in order to receive as much information as possible as well as considering the process for petitions as well as questions.

8.8 A Member of the Committee stated how receiving large amounts of public questions two days prior to a Committee meeting was not sustainable on officers time in the build up to a meeting. It was also not satisfactory for Members and those questioners receiving adequate responses in such a short period of time. She mentioned how public questions and petitions at LAC (Local Area Committee) meetings was also not fulfilling and not achieving what those LACs were set up to do, she also stated that there had been an decrease in public participation since the introduction to those LACs. The Member also referred to Policy Committees engagement toolkit and how this was not being used to its full potential. The Member asked what other routes members of the public would be able to feed into this process, other than the public workshop mentioned.

8.9 A Member of the Committee raised the importance of involving people who would not usually submit a question or petition at a council meeting, to understand what barriers there was discouraging people form asking those questions.

8.10 The Head of Policy and Partnerships thanked and noted all the comments made from Members. He agreed that engaging with a wide range of people was crucial. He mentioned that networks such as the Equality Partnerships in Sheffield needed to be consulted. He stated that there would be various routes for people to feed

into this work such as online surveys and officers would go away and propose how to best carry out this piece of work. He conformed that the public workshop is a good starting point but would not be the only way members of the public can feed into this process.

8.11   A Member of the Committee raised the importance of the planning for this workshop. He mentioned how it would be useful to understand why members of the public chose to submit public questions rather than contacting their ward Councillors.

8.12   A Member of the Committee referred to the connection between members of the public contacting Customer Services and submitting a public question.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships mentioned that officers would consult with officers within Customer Services around their experiences with dealing with questions from members of the public.

8.13   **RESOLVED:** That the Governance Committee;

(1) considers and agree the proposed scope of the Public Questions review, in line with the Six-Month Review's recommendations;

(2) discusses and agrees the proposed terms of reference for the Public Questions review; and

(3) nominates Councillors Fran Belbin, Sue Alston, Mike Levery, Sioned-Mair Richards and Paul Turpin to lead the Task and Finish Group.

9.   GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE WORKPLAN

9.1   The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy & Democratic Engagement. The Policy and Improvement Officer, Alice Nicholson, explained that the Committee's Work Programme was attached at Appendix 1 for the Committee's consideration and discussion. This aimed to show all known, substantive agenda items for forthcoming meetings of the Committee, to enable this committee, other committees, officers, partners and the public to plan their work with and for the Committee.

9.2   The Policy and Improvement Officer referred to part 2 of the programme which highlighted any potential items which were not yet included on the programme. She mentioned two new potential items for the Committee to consider, these were:

1.   Member appointments to external bodies
2.   NHS Governance and the Council's Committee System

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

9.4   A Member of the Committee referred to a previous discussion around Policy

Committees not having sight of cross-cutting issues which went to Strategy & Resources Policy Committee although they had direct links within that work.

9.5   A Member of the Committee referred to an item on the programme relating to Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's). He mentioned that Transport, Regeneration and Climate Change Policy Committee expressed the need for decisions on TRO's to be devolved to Local Area Committees. Therefore, suggested that this be considered during that item.

        The Head of Policy and Partnerships explained that this item was listed so that the Governance Committee could look at their relationship within this topic. He added that a report on this could be brought to a future meeting of this Committee.

9.6   A Member of the Committee suggested an item be included relating to meeting timings, in order to support working Members with other commitments and also to not discourage people from wanting to become a Councillor.

9.7   A Member of the Committee referred to the 'Reviewing Committee Remits' item listed on the programme. She raised the importance of looking into this issue further as she mentioned that Committees workloads were currently unbalanced.

9.8   A Member of the Committee referred to the 'Understanding Committee Roles and Remuneration' item on the programme. He mentioned that officer roles should be looked at as well, as part of this item.

9.9   A Member of the Committee suggested that a Public Health impact assessment tool be included across all policy committees so that all decision were influenced by this priority.

9.10   A Member of the Committee suggested that this Committee looked into how cross-cutting issues were made.

9.11   The Head of Policy and Partnerships thanked and noted Members comments on the work programme. He agreed to amend the programme based on the comments made at the meeting. He also stated that the programme was currently a list of items which needed to be organised on a priority basis and that this could start to be arranged due to the discussions made during this item.

9.12   **RESOLVED:** That (1) the Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed, including any additions and amendments identified in Part 1; 2; (2) that consideration be given to the further additions or adjustments to the work programme presented at Part 2 of Appendix 1; and (3) that Members give consideration to any further issues to be explored by officers for inclusion in Part 2 of Appendix 1 of the next work programme report, for potential addition to the work programme.

10.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for the 30 August 2023, although this was subject to be replaced for a public workshop on Public Questions and Petitions. If replaced, then the next formal meeting of the Committee will be the 12 October 2023.