



Report to Governance Committee

12th October 2023

Report of: Head of Policy and Partnerships

Subject: Interim report of review of Council's approach to public questions

Author of Report: Alice Nicholson, Policy & Improvement Officer

Summary:

The Governance Committee in July this year agreed to undertake a review of the Council's approach to public questions.

The purpose of the review to ensure the process for citizens to ask public questions is clear, that public questions are triaged in a way that directs them to the most appropriate forum and that those forums are easy to access; consider processes for responding to public questions and the interplay between timescales and quality of responses so that we can best achieve a consistent approach that is fit for purpose in the Committee System.

To undertake the review creatively with citizens and stakeholders, developing proposals which learn from the experiences of those involved within resource and capacity constraints.

This interim report sets out what the Committee have heard from citizen engagement so far, and next steps.

Recommendations:

1. That the Committee consider and discuss the insight from citizens on public questions and petitions
2. Discuss and agree next steps to develop proposals which will improve our approach to public questions in response to the feedback from citizens.

Background Papers: None

Reviewing Sheffield City Council's approach to public questions

Interim reporting

- 1.1 This is an interim paper for the Committee, it focuses on the findings of the citizen engagement to date and does not present solutions at this stage. The intention is to do further work with Members, citizens and officers to develop options to improve our approach to public questions and petitions and it is expected that a draft report with proposals will be presented to November's Governance Committee.
- 1.2 Our engagement to date includes survey on Have Your Say Sheffield site which was complemented by an in-person workshop with citizens on 14th September. Both the survey and invite to sign up to the workshop were promoted through SCC email bulletins and on social media channels. We also contacted people who have submitted a public question or petition in the last 12 months to ask for feedback on their experience.
- 1.3 The attached slidepack includes an interim summary of the headline findings for the Committee to consider.

Next steps

- 2.1 Immediate next step is Member feedback in Committee today.
- 2.2 We will continue evaluation of surveys and learning from workshop, and have already identified further engagement, for example gathering insight from staff who manage and are involved in the process of public questions, both those in governance and responding, and we welcome receiving insight from a citizen engagement session that is being led by an emerging community and citizen-led network.
- 2.3 After this will be developing solutions, testing these, all with the aim to report back to November's Governance Committee.
- 2.4 The Task and Finish group will meet over next 6 weeks to discuss:
 - Proposals based on findings
 - Test / iterate solutions with staff – governance and responding
 - Test solutions with citizens
 - Draft report of recommendations for Governance Committee