

Governance Committee

Meeting held 22 November 2023

PRESENT: Councillors Fran Belbin (Chair), Sue Alston (Deputy Chair), Simon Clement-Jones, Mike Levery, Minesh Parekh, Sioned-Mair Richards, Laura Moynahan, Paul Turpin and Dianne Hurst (Substitute Member)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Garry Weatherall. Councillor Dianne Hurst attended as his substitute.

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 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 October 2023, were agreed as an accurate record.

4.2 The Chair (Councillor Fran Belbin) referred to the minutes in which it was previously agreed that the Council would publish the interim paper from Sheffield Oversight and Scrutiny once a finalised version was received. The Chair confirmed that this paper had now been received therefore it would be published following the meeting.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 The Committee received four public questions from Ruth Hubbard prior to the meeting. Due to the questioner not being present at the meeting, the Chair read the questions and gave responses as follows.

5.2 **Ruth Hubbard**

In its meeting on July 20th this Committee committed to writing to those involved in the original roundtable discussions held by Involve with an update and

apology for the near two-year delay in feeding anything back to them (and given the commitment made to circulate the final draft report for comments prior to publication). No such letter appears to have gone out (and nor has the final draft been circulated as promised). This is despite the report itself emphasising the importance of feedback loops several times. I'm sure almost all of those who attended the roundtables will not realise the report is even finally out. Why didn't the letter go out that this committee committed to in July and what will be done to rectify this and the broken commitment to circulate the final draft for comment?

The Chair explained that the Committee did agree to do this and apologised that this has not happened. It was not intentional, and we recognised that in building trust and involving communities, we have to do the things that we say we are going to do, especially where citizens have given their time to contribute to important work like this. As we have found through the work on Public Questions, we need a better approach in place for tracking both the responses to questions and any actions agreed. We wanted to get the draft version of the report into the public domain given the amount of time that has passed so that it can provide a platform to set the direction that we need to take as a council. If the Committee supported the recommendations in the report, the final draft of the report will go to a future S&R (Strategy & Resources Policy Committee) meeting. Ahead of that, we will write to participants and contributors (includes citizens, stakeholders and SCC staff), inviting comments and thoughts which will then form part of the S&R report.

The original amount budgeted for the Involve work was in the region of £80k and presumably all, or a fair bit of this, was spent. Given the in-Sheffield expertise and knowledge in this area and across a whole range of groups and organisations I regret that considerable monies have been spent that could have benefitted Sheffield groups or organisations and that would have resulted in similar or, I believe, better and more tailored, work. But what the use of an outside organisation also contributes to is a longstanding situation where citizens and stakeholders continue to get nowhere near helping shape key governance strategies and approaches that affect them - this is simply blocked or deflected and the council and this committee continues to do its own thing. Does this all change now in light of what this report says about how things should proceed - both in terms of vision and strategy development, and in terms of ensuring that participation must be demonstrated to have impact and influence in decision-making (and that some of us have been saying for many years)?

The Chair explained that the draft report and the insight that Involve and contributors have provided has been important in starting to shape the direction that we need to take as an organisation. The recommendations are authoritative, resonate with other independent reviews (eg. LGA Peer Challenge; Lowcock Report) but provide practical steps which we have already started using the content with staff on the development of our Future Sheffield programme. There is a real opportunity to use the weight of insight and expertise in the report to shape the work we need to do

with citizens and stakeholders to transform our approach. As we have seen from the work that the Sheffield Oversight and Scrutiny group have undertaken to complement the work of Governance Committee on public questions, we have some real expertise within Sheffield which can make a positive contribution to improving local democracy and citizen participation. Pending the support of this Committee, the next phases of this work will be led by S&R. While that might need the commissioning of external support, we are open to that support coming from within the city and I am personally very open to involving external partners in both the commissioning and the design of the next phase of work.

There's a clear steer in the Involve report that external partners don't just want to contribute to the Council's agenda, but to influence and set agendas and if we want to become a community-powered Council we should welcome that.

In referring on to Strategy and Resources Policy Committee will the Governance Committee request that both appropriate constitutional additions or amendments, as well as suitable performance indicators towards clear outcomes, are developed at the appropriate time? This will help ensure that participation and its impact is visible and embedded in underpinning council governance arrangements and operationalised in approaches and procedures, as well as ensuring that improvements and progress can be demonstrated?

The Chair welcomed the suggested approaches and Governance Committee may want to comment and consider these as part of the recommendations to S&R Committee.

For me, the report lacks some clarity in a whole range of areas and this is perhaps indicative of a lot of things, not least that it is laying out a lot of territory. But this also suggests a fair bit of thinking and development work needs undertaking over time, albeit long overdue. When interested parties and stakeholders become aware of the report is there anything the Governance Committee thinks they might usefully look to do?

The Chair agreed that there were lots to do, some of it practical, particularly increasing the skills and capabilities of our teams, supporting the learning and development of Members, taking opportunities to trial and pilot new approaches and importantly, working with citizens to build an ambitious vision for where we want to be. Internally, we're already taking some steps – eg. creating a Community of Practice to develop and share practice expertise across our teams, learning from and using new approaches (eg. All Age Autism work, City Goals). But we need to make this part of our strategic direction as a council and that is the rationale for the recommendation to S&R Committee and as part of that, Governance Committee may wish to encourage S&R Committee to involve citizens and stakeholders in taking forward the Involve recommendations.

6. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 The Committee received a report of the Director of Policy and Democratic Engagement. The Head of Policy and Partnerships (Laurie Brennan) presented the report.
- 6.2 The Head of Policy and Partnerships thanked Ruth Hubbard for submitting the public questions and helping the Committee focus on the next steps.
- 6.3 The Head of Policy and Partnerships explained that this piece of work began during the transition to committees' period and that it was going to be a large piece of work that took place over a long period of time. The Council consulted with community groups and members of the public in regard to community participation, to understand what strengths and good practice they thought the Council already had, and to identify key areas of weakness that needed to be addressed and improved. The Head of Policy and Partnerships confirmed this piece of work had already begun and also mentioned how it was in alignment with the Lowcock report, LGA (Local Government Association) Peer Review and Race Equality Commission report.
- 6.4 The Head of Policy and Partnerships explained that the report highlighted some examples of when the Council had demonstrated good practice in relation to community engagement. He mentioned how citizens explained that their experience was inconsistent across the organisation therefore this had been incorporated into the Council's vision going forward.
- 6.5 The Head of Policy and Partnerships referred to the recommendations, in which it was recommended that Strategy & Resources Policy Committee (S&R) added citizen participation to its work programme. He explained that this was not to move work from the Governance Committee to S&R but due to S&R strategically leading the organisation's agenda, whilst working with other committees.
- 6.6 Members of the Committee asked questions, and made comments and observations, as summarised below:
- 6.7 A Member of the Committee welcomed the report and the citizen engagement approach. They mentioned how local residents were being consulted in co-designing playgrounds for their local area therefore this approach could be used for that process.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships mentioned how this was positive and that this approach should not take years to impact citizens. The Council should harness the capacity of Policy Committees, Local Area Committees and the activity that Councillors undertake in their wards. He added that there needed to be Member and Officer ambassadors that people could consult with prior to undertaking engagement so that

the approach was clear and consistent across the organisation.

- 6.8 A Member of the Committee thanked everyone for their involvement on the report. They explained how good practice should not be dismissed, although stated that areas of weakness needed to be improved. They mentioned that the emphasis was on early consultation and how important the pre-decision scrutiny would be, for example, who and how can the Council consult with citizens. The Member stated that the Committee discussed at a previous workshop that the culture needed to change and still believed this was the important part to consider. They referred to the Policy Committee toolkit, which was introduced following the transition to committee system, and wondered how often that was being used. They added that it was important to consult with those who do not already actively consult with the Council. They suggested that when a decision was to be made at a Policy Committee, that roundtable discussions at Local Area Committees took place prior to that. The Member of the Committee referred to the recommendations, they explained that this piece of work should remain as part of the work of Governance Committee, rather than referring it to S&R. They did not believe that referring large or controversial decisions to S&R was in the spirit of the referendum and the transition to the committee system.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships referred to the engagement toolkit and mentioned how this was introduced to help guide Members and Officers in a new unfamiliar committee system. He stated that this could be enhanced as part of the member development work and mentioned how Officers could take advantage of the opportunities as part of pre-agenda planning and meetings to embed that early citizen engagement.

- 6.9 A Member of the Committee referred to two previous occasions in which citizens were consulted on schemes in their local areas, but were disappointed with the outcomes. Although that consultation was carried out, it did not result in the favour of those local people affected and they therefore believed there were some lessons to be learnt from those experiences. They explained that there was also a time when a survey was carried out by the Friends of Norfolk Park Community Group in which some very useful data was collected and shared with the Parks and Countryside Service therefore that was an occasion where good consultation and collaboration with citizens took place.
- 6.10 The Chair explained that she had previously spoken with the Transport department and that she was due to speak with Parks & Countryside Service regarding piloting this approach in the near future.
- 6.11 A Member of the Committee mentioned that the Governance Committee should retain this piece of work rather than referring it to S&R, even if it meant that additional resources needed to be

considered.

- 6.12 A Member of the Committee mentioned that the Committee could consider that there might be a local priority for Sheffield based consultants, to build on knowledge and expertise.

The Head of Policy and Partnerships agreed that the public question from Ruth Hubbard was right regarding the potential to commission locally based organisations and that there were real expertise and knowledge in the city with existing connections to the communities therefore the Council needed to consider how to best use this resource.

- 6.13 A Member of the Committee referred to the Governance Committee's terms of reference and therefore believed the Committee should continue to see this piece of work through. They stated that too many decisions were being referred to S&R, although they should remain at the appropriate committees.

- 6.14 A Member of the Committee also raised concerns around the recommendation to S&R. They mentioned that S&R did have a role in this work, although this should remain as part of the work carried out by the Governance Committee.

- 6.15 A Member of the Committee referred to the recent decision made regarding road safety measures being removed and how the voices of young people were not captured enough in that process.

They stated that, although discussions were being captured, in minutes, such as Local Area Committee minutes, they were not being captured in minutes of Policy Committee meetings.

They referred to the suggestion in the report around Members meeting with citizens to see how views varied, and mentioned how this was about Members taking ownership and building back trust.

- 6.16 The Chair mentioned that a greater level of involvement needed to be carried out when the Council was making decisions that affected citizens' behaviours. Citizens needed to be a part of the process so the Council could ensure the decisions were successful. The Chair agreed that Local Area Committees could play a key role in consultation at early stages of a decision.

- 6.17 The Chair moved to the recommendations in the report. There were three recommendations put forward to the Committee as follows.

That the Governance Committee:

1. note and discuss the findings and recommendations in the draft report by Involve that was developed with citizens, stakeholders

and our staff.

2. refer the draft report by Involve and any comments and perspectives from Governance Committee to the Strategy and Resources Committee, proposing that:
 - the development of citizen participation is included in the S&R workplan;
 - the S&R Committee use the draft Involve report together with the views of this Committee to lead the commissioning of activity in response to the recommendations; and
 - the S&R Committee work with other Policy Committees and Local Area Committees (LACs) to identify opportunities for pilots and demonstrator projects for citizen involvement and participation.
3. agree to revise the Governance Committee's workplan, recognising that the transformation of community involvement and citizen participation must be core to the City Council's strategic development and is best led by the S&R Committee. This will enable Governance Committee to focus capacity on the review of Committee Remits (in line with the Six-Month Review).

6.18 On being put to the vote, Recommendation 1 was carried.

6.19 The Chair proposed an additional recommendation that the Committee sent the Involve report to the citizens involved in the workshops and to thank them for their contributions and to encourage them to feed their views back on the report so that it can be fed into this work as it goes forward and with the aim to continuously involve them from this point on.

This recommendation was carried.

6.20 The General Counsel (David Hollis) explained that the Governance Committee was not a Policy Committee and remit was not to implement policies like Policy Committees could. He stated that the Committee's role was advisory and it could advise on constitutional changes to Full Council. He mentioned that the engagement work discussed at this meeting would go beyond constitution and governance as it operationally needed to be embedded across the organisation. Therefore, the recommendation was to S&R as the appropriate body for approving this. He added that S&R approved its work programme with each Member of S&R having a vote.

6.21 A Member of the Committee said that they did not believe that

Members of S&R, would not have the capacity to undertake this piece of work.

6.22 The Chair mentioned that as this was about changing culture and engaging widely with citizens, which was a cross council issue, and that it should be referred to S&R. She added that as part of the recommendation, S&R would be commissioning a body to lead on this and therefore believed they would have the capacity to carry out this work.

6.23 A Member of the Committee mentioned that they would be supporting the recommendation to refer citizen participation to S&R as they believed that Committee would have the most influence on other committees taking ownership of engagement.

6.24 Councillor Sue Alston proposed a recommendation that this Committee “moved to set up a schedule of workshops to start the discussions and work on this report, and engages widely with outside communities and brings regular updates to this Committee and reports the outcomes of its discussions to Full Council or S&R.”

Councillor Paul Turpin proposed an amendment to the proposal to include ‘and to make recommendations including the commissioning of activity to S&R or Full Council as appropriate.’

On being put to the vote, the Committee agreed the amendment and then further agreed the recommendation as amended. The effect of the changes were that the original recommendations 2 and 3 as outlined in the report were lost.

6.25 RESOLVED: That the Governance Committee:

1. notes and discuss the findings and recommendations in the draft report by Involve that was developed with citizens, stakeholders and our staff;
2. sends the Involve report to the citizens involved in the workshops and to thank them for their contributions and to encourage them to feed their views back on the report so that it can be fed into this work as it goes forward and with the aim to continuously involve them from this point on; and
3. moves to set up a schedule of workshops to start the discussions and work on this report, and engages widely with outside communities and brings regular updates to this Committee and reports the outcomes of its discussions to Full Council or S&R and makes recommendations including the commissioning of activity to S&R or Full Council as appropriate.

7. WORK PLAN

7.1 The Committee considered a report of the Head of Policy and Partnerships concerning its work programme.

7.2 The Policy and Improvement Officer (Alice Nicholson) gave an update on the programme and highlighted the key areas for Members attention. She referred to upcoming items on the programme and explained when these would likely be presented at Committee.

7.3 Members of the Committee made comments and suggestions relating to the work programme, as follows:

7.4 A Member of the Committee asked what the process was for including additional items to the programme, in between meetings.

The Policy and Improvement Officer explained that no additional items had been included on the programme since the Governance Committee last met.

7.5 The Head of Policy and Partnerships suggested that the item on the programme relating to Committee Remits be brought to the December Committee.

7.6 A Member of the Committee proposed an item to be included on the programme, to look at amending the constitution to allow Co-Leaders and Co-Deputy Leaders.

Members of the Committee mentioned how there was already large amounts of work to be carried out on the programme and therefore was not against discussing the proposed item but believed there were more urgent items to consider.

On being put to the vote, this proposal was lost.

7.7 **RESOLVED:** That:

- (a) the Committee's work programme, as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed, including any additions and amendments identified in Part 1;
- (b) the comments and suggestions by Members of the Committee be noted and taken into account and adjustments made to the work programme as appropriate; and
- (c) the additional indications of items which are likely to need more intensive work (e.g. citizen involvement, task and

finish groups, policy review and development work) be noted together with the implications for prioritisation of Governance Committee's forward workplan.

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 8.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on 14 December 2023.