

Some Principles for a Modern Committee System

& examples of specific proposals derived from these principles

1. Fair and meaningful representation

Less than 10% of the electorate voted for the current ruling group, but the 'strong leader' system gives them overwhelming power. This system, where 74 out of 84 elected councillors play almost no role in council decision-making makes representation meaningless (and undermines legitimacy)

- All councillors should have a meaningful voice & equal power to represent their communities
- It must be clear that all councillors play a role in shaping and taking council decisions
- The political membership of committees should be proportional to vote share
- Committees should be chaired by councillors not from the majority party
- Ban anti-democratic party-whipping (councillors forced to vote in a particular way by their party) that overrides a councillor's duty to represent their local community
- Local councillors should have full access to information, and be part of all specific ward-based decisions (eg selling off heritage assets, new developments)
- More consensus building and cross-party working – a constitutional commitment to structures and procedures that support *power-sharing*

2. Increased participation and impact

Representative democratic systems are limited, and need additional mechanisms and processes to enhance decision-making (and as part of checks and balances), and especially where most people do not vote in local elections.

- Stakeholders, experts & communities must be part of committee governance, not separate from it, eg committee places/roles, open community sub-committees and working groups
- Decision-making needs to be more open and deliberative (reduce the need for ineffective 'scrutiny'/'consultation' after decisions are made)
- Council 'consultations' must be meaningful and make a difference (the Gunning Principles)
- Formalised and active support for communities wanting to contribute to decisions
- Council 'consultations' must be meaningful & make a difference (eg the Gunning Principles)
- Provide a framework that is creative & responsive to innovations, particularly to counter the impact of inequalities and differential social capital e.g. incentivise community input
- The impact of participation *must* be evident in council decision-making

3. Cultural change hand in hand with new system structures and processes

- Make co-operative, cross-party, evidence-based working the norm – to reduce inefficient and divisive party-politics
- Focus on a local agenda for Sheffield, not national party agendas & wasteful political tribalism
- Actively and explicitly put into practice, and police, the Nolan Principles in all council structures, systems and procedures
- Motions at council meetings should not be 'deleted-and-replaced' by an opposing party
- An outward-looking willingness to seek and welcome outside help, and to respect others
- Remove the need for the expense and inefficiency of the current scrutiny process and the need for communities to fight the council after decisions have been made

4. Setting clear standards and improvements

- A modern committee system should aim to be cost-neutral (in common with other councils)
- and should not seek to increase bureaucracy (in common with other councils)
- A clear set of governance standards for modern committee governance, and commitment to ongoing evaluation and public debate about the way the council works
- All councillors need to engage in training (by outside experts) to get the most from their new roles and responsibilities in a new governance system very different to the current system
- A new, more democratic governance system is a failure if communities/stakeholders do not see and feel changes for the better