

RESPONSE TO SCC'S DRAFT GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

Introductory note:

This response document to the draft governance principles updates our initial response (sent 22nd October) following consultation across our networks.

The response draws on the extensive citizen-to-citizen work carried out across Sheffield by *It's Our City!*, (and via public meetings, and through community/vcs networks). It supplements (but does not replace) the evidence *It's Our City!* provided at the 2019 Governance Review <https://itsoursheffield.co.uk/2215-2/>

What we know about the 26,500 Sheffield People's Petition signatories is that they came from all wards, with circa. 40% of signatories from those designated poorer city wards (as reported by Cllr. Dore in full council) and this balance would have been reflected in the approximate 20,000 citizen conversations about local governance. We also made dedicated efforts on other aspects of diversity/inequality, to ensure we included and engaged a full range of citizens and communities. (Further details on approach and methodology are in the evidence paper submitted to Governance Review.)

In line with the work of *It's Our City!* our response comes from a citizen and community perspective - and the overall call for, and claim to, meaningful change to more democratic local governance under a modern committee system. However, it is also informed by our understanding of practice elsewhere, research evidence, and national good practice guidance e.g. the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) work on local governance.

There is a 2 side summary that identifies the critical omissions and summarises recommended changes to the 2019 governance principles that the Governance Committee is now consulting on to support governance change. This is followed by the supporting commentary and rationale.

20.11.21

SUMMARY OF CRITICAL OMISSIONS AND RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Critical omissions

- 1. Commitment to democracy and good democratic practices/procedures**
ADD CRITICAL AMBITION: *"Sheffield City Council is committed to local democracy; good democratic principles and practices demonstrably underpin our city governance."*
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE: *"Appropriate democratic checks and balances are in place in the exercise of power, and pluralism and collaboration is valued in our partnership working, decision-making and constitutional arrangements (and consensus sought where possible) - to support the best possible democratic decision-making in a diverse city."*
- 2. Inequalities and governance arrangements**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE: *"Inequalities and discrimination can play a significant role in capacities and abilities to participate, to be heard, and to exercise influence. Our governance procedures and practices will actively seek to mitigate the impacts of inequality and for inclusive governance and decision-making."*
- 3. Stakeholder voices integrated into committees**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE (OR INTEGRATE INTO ANOTHER ONE): *"Decision-making committees in our MCS will integrate the views of stakeholders into their work, discussions and decision-making (and who will also be able to act as a conduit between their wider networks and the council, so improving connections between council and city networks/groups/communities)."*
- 4. Policy development and the basis of decisions**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE (OR INTEGRATE/AMEND PRINCIPLE 2 OR 3 OR WAYS OF WORKING 16 OR 23): *"Policy development will follow recognised good practice and the basis (e.g. research, evidence, information, expertise, stakeholder views, political priorities etc) on which significant decisions are made will be clear and documented/publicly available."*
- 5. A strong and independent voluntary and community sector (VCS)**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE: *"SCC welcomes, supports and enables a strong, independent, diverse and cohesive voluntary and community sector (VCS) in working alongside SCC, acting as a critical friend, having influence and impact on policy and decisions, and playing an important role holding the council to account. SCC treats VCS organisations fairly without favouritism."*
- 6. Citizens rights**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE: *"New governance arrangements, and as laid down in the constitution, will uphold, and look to enhance, citizens rights, and will regularly check these are working well in review."*
- 7. Relationship between councillors and communities**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE: *"We want to increase the connections and safeguard positive and reliable relationships between local councillors and their local communities, citizens, VCS stakeholders, and local businesses through our governance arrangements and procedures."*
- 8. Resources and bureaucracy**
ADD GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLE: *"New governance arrangements as a result of the referendum will not increase council bureaucracy (e.g. the average councillor will go to around the same number of meetings) or increase costs (following the example of councils that have already changed to a Modern Committee system)"*

General recommendations

- The principles should be updated for changed contexts (since 2019) and to include citizen and community perspectives.
- The over-emphasis on “structures” in the Governance Principles section should be changed
- More clarity is needed. Do critical ambitions relate to outcomes? Should principles be expressed as aims? Are ways of working the start of objectives? Organising as aims, objectives and outcomes would help clarify the distinctions and help with design, development, alignment, manageability and evaluation (and will begin to meet the intention expressed in ways of working 14)
- Notwithstanding the critical omissions above, the existing principles should be reduced in number (there is quite a lot of overlap/repetition, indicated in the commentary), and to help in manageability
- Recommend opening statement: “Our governance principles [will] inform, and be clearly operationalised in the governance arrangements (structures, processes and procedures) laid down in a new council constitution, and evident in the governance culture of SCC.”

Recommendations on existing principles

- Critical ambition 2: *“Sheffield City Council ensures that all councillors are involved in and able to influence decision-making [ADD] and that citizens can see the contributions their local councillors make to decision-making processes.”*
- Critical ambition 3: *“Sheffield City Council engages, involves and listens to citizens, communities, [ADD] stakeholders and partners with the belief and expectation that this will be influential, and improve our decisions and decision-making.”*
- Critical ambition 4: [REPLACE] “modern” with “forward-thinking” “strategic” or “outward-facing”. Also consider removing altogether.
- Critical ambition 5: [CHANGE/ADD] *“Sheffield City Council is a reflective council that is committed to continuously improving governance, including citizen and stakeholder debate, and attention to best practice and innovation elsewhere.”*
- Governance principle 1 and 6: reconsider/consider removing (a repeat).
- Governance principle 7: remove/combine.
- Governance principle 8: [CHANGE] *“Council officers play an important role in decision-making via delegated authority and, more generally in our local democracy, as public servants. Accountability, however, lies with elected councillors so, in a new governance system, our decision-making arrangements need to reflect this and not inappropriately increase delegations to officers.”*
- Governance principle 9: [ADD] *“Governance under a new MCS will not increase bureaucracy”*
- Governance principle 10: replace first sentence with *“People in Sheffield care about what happens in their local communities”* And remove/combine with 7 (do not mention things that could become too dated e.g. BCC).
- Governance principle 13: [REPLACE] “decision-making structure” with “governance arrangements”.
- Governance principle 14: we welcome more clarity and measurability but question the necessity for this as a principle/covered elsewhere.
- Ways of Working 18: update to reflect changed context/new cllr roles under a MCS.

- Ways of Working 21: [ADD] *“The influence/impact of engagement with stakeholders, or consultation, will be made clear and documented (e.g. in minutes) for all significant new policy, decisions and review.”*
- Ways of Working 22,23,24 – repeats and overlaps

SUPPORTING COMMENTARY AND RATIONALE

1. General comments

1.1 The draft principles are essentially the same as those articulated in 2019 from the Governance Review (GR). However, we think the GR report was largely based on the assumption of a continuing strong leader model.

1.2 Hence, for example, a Governance Review primary concern was formal scrutiny. However, scrutiny was specifically ‘invented’ to work as part of, and alongside, strong leadership - intended to check the power of that strong leader governance. Under a modern committee system the artificial separation between ‘decisions’ and later ‘scrutiny’ becomes somewhat redundant. New thinking about (what is) good policy and decision-making is required (notwithstanding a statutory requirement for retention of a formal/designated scrutiny role in a couple of specific areas).

1.3 Perhaps the assumption of continuing strong leadership is also, in part, why some national expert, local stakeholder, and the detailed evidence *It’s Our City!* presented to the GR on 20,000 citizen conversations, did not appear to have any impact on the GR commentary or principles at that time. This included the ‘community principles for modern committee governance’ collated from citizen and community conversations and presented as part of our detailed evidence paper.

1.4 The citizen and community-led campaign and referendum result significantly changes the landscape of council governance going forward compared to the approach and focus of the Governance Review in 2019. (In some respects we think the ‘old’ principles hamper the work of the Governance Committee now.)

1.5 Further, the concentration in the GR was largely on decision-making (alongside scrutiny) rather than on overall governance approach and functions (as expressed in the council constitution). Governance, however, does not only cover decision-making but also incorporates related aspects that are embedded in the constitution, and that are contextually and operationally very important to that decision-making, and for citizens and communities. For example, council constitutions lay out citizens rights, describe, shape and regulate relationships with external partners and stakeholders such as the VCS, incorporate code of conduct, and embed participatory approaches and mechanisms. Some council constitutions also include details of place-based contexts and/or identify particular place-based values within which to situate specific governance emphases and procedures.

1.6 Inevitably, then, we believe there are major gaps, some reorientations, and some amendments, to be made to the ‘old’ principles, and for their operationalisation.

1.7 In addition, the council has since introduced its Community Empowerment Policy (LACs). Whilst this represents a further changed context since 2019, the introduction of the LACs is not a result of governance model change, nor a substitute for the arrangements that need to be put in place in a new modern committee system. Our comments therefore mostly concentrate on the core governance change required by the referendum and the views of local citizens for these arrangements, rather than on the LACs. However, in general terms, we recommend the LACs be

seen as part and parcel of SCC's commitment to embedding principles of good democratic governance; in this instance about (enhancing) ongoing participatory elements of its governance overall, and the devolution of powers where possible and appropriate.

1.8 Along with articulating the critical omissions, we have made specific comments, and suggested changes and additions on the 2019 principles. Overall, in writing this feedback, we have worked *very hard* to try to 'build bridges' between what we heard from so many citizens across Sheffield, and the draft principles as currently presented. This is quite difficult because the gaps in some areas remain quite large and there are significant omissions, as explained.

1.9 Two further general comments:

1. In the section on 'Governance Principles' there are 10 mentions of 'governance structures' or 'decision-making structures' and we question whether *structure* is the emphasis that the council wants going forward (CfGS strongly and consistently advises that, if anything, *culture* is, actually, the broadly crucial element). We, at least, think both structures and cultures are important, and also interact.

We recommend that reconsideration be given to what looks like an over-emphasis on simply 'governance structures' or 'decision-making structures'. Potential replacements include: 'governance arrangements', 'decision-making structures and processes', 'governance structure and culture'.

Related to this, the section 'How we do Business (Ways of Working)' seems to involve an arbitrary separation e.g. many of the Governance Principles are clearly also about Ways of Working but not in the relevant WoW section. We recommend the two sections be combined as the distinction seems arbitrary and confusing. Alternatively, the WoW section can be seen as the start of a list of objectives ie the *how*, related to aims (though the principles are not written strictly as aims). And are the critical ambitions meant to be related to outcomes? Greater clarity is needed in relation to aims, objectives and outcomes (not least so that ongoing review and evaluation can be effective).

We also think there is quite a lot of overlap overall and that there could be some reductions and combining that will help for manageability.

2. Principles are fine, but words are quite difficult. An overwhelming set of comments from Sheffielders was about the hollowness of some council claims, and the gap between rhetoric and reality. For example, the claim that Sheffield is 'open', 'transparent' and 'accountability is clear' is very far indeed from what citizens and communities told us (and has also been evidenced extensively by many others over recent years, besides ongoing concerns such as those relating to FOIs). The governance principles need to be seen to be meaningful and to build confidence.

We recommend that an opening statement be included that reads something like: "Our governance principles [will] inform, and be clearly operationalised in the governance arrangements (structures, processes and procedures) laid down in a new council constitution and evident in the governance culture of SCC."

We also recommend that new constitutional drafts (or sections) be evaluated in an ongoing way against whatever the final principles look like, to help with active alignment and so that change might be more meaningful (and we would likely welcome opportunity to comment on constitutional developments in this way, and as they emerge).

2. Critical omissions

2.1 Perhaps the biggest omission in council discussions on governance change relates to the overall (and overwhelming) call by citizens and communities for more democratic governance under a modern committee system. This is related to the perception of significant democratic deficit, and widespread loss of overall confidence and trust in the way the council works. From the citizen and community-led work undertaken across Sheffield, the need is to create governance arrangements underpinned by democratic commitments, a visibly more democratic constitutional framework and associated practices and, as part of this, to help build overall council legitimacy. Critical omissions 1-7 presented in this response speak directly to this broad and critical footprint.

2.2 There is certainly hard evidence of significant democratic deficit (that is particular and marked in Sheffield's case) that lends support to the overall citizen claim that this needs addressing, and also as expressed in their views and experiences. Some of this evidence was presented in a series of graphs in our previous evidence paper to the 2019 GR; it was also referred to by the INLOGOV expert who gave evidence. However this did not lead to a discussion at that time about the relationship of political power to democratic governance arrangements.

2.3 The overall citizen call for more democratic local governance appears to be challenging for political parties perhaps because it is an appeal to embed visible democratic governance practices beyond (and before) party allegiances and narrower interests of party political power. However, we think any perception of direct conflict between party politics and good democratic governance is a misperception as all parties would state a commitment to democracy (and not just when it suits their own party purposes). It is a question of articulating what this means and looks like in, and for, local governance.

2.4 Nor is this a rejection of the realities of political power – though a small proportion did express a strong belief that party politics should be taken out of local councils, and there was a strong belief that decision-making powers should much more closely reflect political balance and diversity (and take into account the majority non-voters). Proportional voting or allocation to committees may be beyond immediate reach in governance change (although democratically progressive councils could choose to make representation to the Secretary of State on this matter). This means a ruling group (even with a very small electoral mandate) will always ultimately be able to impose its political will should it wish to. However, no one we spoke to took the view that the only thing that mattered in local democracy and governance was your vote (and that was an end to it). A narrow view of (merely) electoral local democracy was completely rejected (and this is in line with policy and practice-related, and academic, literature on democracy where narrow electoral democracy is regarded as significantly diminishing – or even dangerous – to democracy and good governance).

2.5 The question in Sheffield, however, is whether *any ruling group party* with, for example, a less than 10% electoral mandate (or indeed a 30% vote share) seeks governance arrangements that mean it has all decision making power, all other leadership roles (e.g. chairing of scrutiny committees), no evident influence allowed by others, nor any effective participatory mechanisms.

Citizens and communities almost unanimously rejected this across the city (and nor does it follow recognised good governance practice or concerns and recommendations of successive government Select Committees over 20 years). However, this was broadly what was in place leading up to the referendum. The question is how political power (e.g. with extreme minority electoral mandates) is exercised and managed through governance arrangements that take democracy seriously.

2.5 What this requires is an embrace of governance structures, procedures and practices (alongside cultural shifts) that, for example, build in checks and balances, pluralism/diversity, the protection of minorities, good practice, deliberation and power-sharing, stakeholder influence, participatory mechanisms, and that supports strong civil society/VCS voices and meaningful collaborative practices/partnership working with demonstrable influence.

2.6 All these themes were ever-present and multiple in the experiences, views, values, critique, ideas and insights relayed in conversation by many thousands of Sheffield citizens and across communities and from community and voluntary groups and organisations. These (see also our evidence presented at GR) included:

- ways in which governance might mitigate (multiple) inequalities
- the integration of stakeholder influence, impact and expertise in decision-making
- the importance of good practice, visible competence, and use of evidence including local and wider expertise
- the importance of (valued and influential) strong and independent civil society/vcs as critical friends working alongside the council, and better partnership working with external partners and networks
- relationship building and greater positive connections between elected representatives and communities/citizens
- working together cross-party (collaboration, deliberation and consensus-building where possible, respect and good conduct)

2.7 Ultimately, and integral to the claim for more democratic local governance, citizens wanted to see governance practices that could lead to (trusted and) *better* decisions; this was overwhelmingly linked to more inclusive/collaborative and informed/competent decision-making.

2.8 Importantly, our 'critical omissions' (as well as some recommended changes to existing principles) mention stakeholders, as these are otherwise absent – council constitutions describe, shape and regulate relationships with VCS, stakeholders, civil society and partners in some way. It is notable that Sheffield citizens believed that SCC had a particular problem engaging and working positively and collaboratively with stakeholder groups (and were more comfortable with generic and limited public 'consultations' largely under their control and sometimes carried out after decisions appeared to have been made). Citizens would like to see some rebalancing from standard/generic consultation approaches that they largely did not trust (and were sometimes seen as simply serving the council and/or a waste of resources), with greater demonstrable and meaningful inclusion of stakeholder groups who often also bring considerable expertise and experience. Many of these groups are also often dependent in some way upon the council e.g. funding, hence it is important for councils to promote the independent voices of the sector and upon which a vibrant local democracy at least partly depends. Note: there is no mention anywhere in the principles draft document of the VCS (or even of stakeholders) but lots of mention of citizens and communities, with the odd mention of 'partners' – it is not clear where the VCS fits in, nor other stakeholders e.g. local businesses and civil society groups.

2.9 The final critical omission identified (no.8) in this response relates to council bureaucracy and costs in, and for, a new modern committee governance model. All councils who have changed governance model to a committee system (and where information is publicly available) have outlined clear parameters at the outset to ensure that new governance arrangements do not create more bureaucracy nor increase governance costs (indeed, research indicates that it is even possible to reduce bureaucracy, and our own calculations also show how it might be possible to make cost savings). These parameters help to identify, clarify and shape overall design and reflect a balancing of governance needs with other considerations such as constrained budgets. Hence, for example, all councils changing to or operating modern committee governance (including big cities like Glasgow) have a maximum of 6 service/decision-making committees.

2.10 SCC has not set these clear parameters (although these issues have long been the subject of political debate and contestation and the council was advised by the LGA pre-referendum to remove its claims that a modern committee system cost more). Recently the Governance Committee has even seemed to be going backwards in these respects. It is, of course, the council's *choice* as to whether it wishes to create more governance bureaucracy and/or significantly increase governance spending – but that *is a choice*. However, we suggest that the council cut its (governance) coat according to its cloth and, in line with all other councils, immediately put these parameters in place. We also advise there has already been some citizen concerns raised as to the amount of money that the council perceives necessary for further consultation (during the transition). People believe that this substantive work has largely already been done if only the council would listen and use this - backed up by significant actual numbers e.g. petition signers, referendum voters, citizen conversations, and previous council survey on governance.

3. Recommendations on existing principles

3.1 Critical ambitions

- **Sheffield City Council is a trusted organisation where decisions are taken in an open and transparent way, and accountability is clear**

Comment: this needs much work in consideration and operationalisation (also see general comment above).

For example, if 'open' means, simply, that documents can be found by the public, we would argue this is not very meaningful (and are councils not obliged to make documentation public anyway?). One meaning of 'open' given, and that we have seen embedded in council constitutions elsewhere (at the level of principle), is 'the process of decision-making is as important as the product'. This goes straight to the heart of governance ie the way things are run and decisions are made. It suggests that real attention will be paid in governance arrangements to a broad set of considerations (procedures, relationships, who is included/excluded etc).

Talk about 'accountability' exercised huge numbers of Sheffielders and citizens overall believe there is no accountability at SCC. So the meaning and operationalisation of this is very important and needs to be clear. Actually, people were quite sophisticated in their understanding, in discussion.... Whilst there were very clear areas (all across the city) where citizens said there should be visible action taken on harder forms of accountability (e.g. resignations, disciplinary action), notably in

relation to the street tree scandal, the emphasis was also slightly different. People know that 'mistakes' and errors happen all the time in complex, under pressure services for example – the emphasis here was not on accountability-for-everything, it was on honesty – and on swift apologies and resolutions/changing tack.

So there is much to be considered here.

- **Sheffield City Council is a council where all councillors are involved in and able to influence decision making**

Comment and suggestion: this is the direct change that the referendum has brought – in a structural sense, under a MCS. So, in some senses this is now no longer a critical ambition and might arguably not be needed – it simply is the situation that will be directly brought about with the implementation of the required governance model change. It is good to highlight this change, however (even if it could be moved to the principles section, rather than the critical ambitions section).

From a citizens point of view we suggest, if retained, an addition that also connects the work of councillors with citizens:

“Sheffield City Council ensures that all councillors are involved in and able to influence decision-making, and that citizens can see the contributions their local councillors make to decision-making processes.”

Whilst this critical ambition highlights the direct change now made by the referendum (and maybe will also be relevant to LACs), which is good. It also signals, perhaps, (more) open deliberation and decision-making for potential operationalisation in governance arrangements.

- **Sheffield City Council engages, involves and listens to citizens, communities and partners**

Comment and suggestion: From a citizens point of view this is a very controversial one as it is not believed this happens meaningfully. We think there is a crucial change to be made here, that we believe could really help going forward and for governance arrangements:

Suggest: “Sheffield City Council engages, involves and listens to citizens, communities, stakeholders and partners with the belief and expectation that this will be influential, and improve our decisions and decision-making.”

This is also clearly related to CfGS advice (their 'risk and resilience' framework for local governance, p.12) that describes positive behaviour in this area as: “The council invites challenge on its plans – by engaging in dialogue on those plans in a way that feels meaningful and relevant.....This often results in a significant change in approach.” They describe negative behaviour as “....mainly about broadcasting the council's 'line' on an issue, with no real interest in changing the council's approach other than on minor operational points...”

Clearly a commitment to engagement, listening etc is not the crucial point, then, it is about the influence/impact this has. (And engagement/listening with no influence or impact can obviously be damaging and turn people off.)

This 'ambition' also has obvious relevance in relation to LACs – is further amendment/addition needed in light of these?

- **Sheffield City Council has a modern and responsive approach to governance which reflects the increasingly complex policy making environment**

Comment and suggestion: We are unsure what the word 'modern' adds here – in fact it seems, ironically, rather old-fashioned! It also might confuse in relation to a modern committee system that will now be implemented. A minor suggestion then: replace modern with 'forward-thinking' or even 'strategic' or 'outward-facing' (or combinations). Again, 'responsive' has lots of potential meanings – this would be good to explore, and for operationalisation purposes. Overall, we are unsure what the council intends by this ambition and also think it could be removed altogether.

• **Sheffield City Council is a reflective council that is committed to continuously improving governance**

Comment and suggestion: This is welcome in light of the many years SCC did not examine and review its governance (that is recommended by advisory bodies to be a regular/built in occurrence) and so we welcome its operationalisation in new constitutional arrangements, including what is understood by reflection and how this is made meaningful.

We suggest an addition: "Sheffield City Council is a reflective council that is committed to continuously improving governance, including citizen and stakeholder debate, and attention to best practice and innovation elsewhere."

We have added this because it was a strong belief amongst Sheffield citizens that SCC is insular ("in its own bubble", "closed off" etc) and a bit old-fashioned ("in the dark ages").

3.2 Governance Principles

1. A commitment to openness and transparency must run through our decision making structure.

Comment: operationalisation/what this means – needs to be clear, and is vital (see general comment 2). Largely a repeat of a critical ambition, reconsider/consider removing.

Comment: is this only about "structure"? – we think not, it's very much about ways of working too (see general comment 1)

2. Comprehensive forward planning of decisions – being clear about what decisions we are planning to take, when they will be taken, who will be taking them.

Comment: this relates to an important critical omission (4).

3. Clear reports from officers that set out the relevant information in an accessible way, and are clear about the reasons for a decision being made.

Comment: this relates to an important critical omission (4).

4. Mechanisms for holding decision-makers and other parts of the wider partnership landscape to account should be strengthened in any future decision-making structure – we must be held accountable for the decisions that we take, and embrace challenge to ensure we're getting the best outcomes for Sheffield.

Comment: see comment on 'critical principle 1' above in relation to citizen views about 'accountability'.

5. Our governance should be underpinned by a commitment to the highest ethical standards as set out in the Nolan Standards on Public Life.

Comment: there were extensive and wide-ranging comments from Sheffielders that were very negative about how ethical standards/Nolan Principles were abused, and calling for these to be put

into practice in meaningful ways. So this is important.. The issue of trust in this is also underlying. Also note comments under 'critical principle 1' about the importance of 'honesty' (integrity).

Again, surely this principle is about Ways of Working too, and we note that a new Code of Conduct (underpinned by the Nolan Principles) has recently been adopted/is already in place.

6. Our decision-making structure should be designed in a way that creates channels for all 84 Councillors to be involved in, and influence decision making.

This is almost a direct repeat of 'critical ambition 2' and see our comments on this, above. Is this direct repeat needed? Should it be one or the other? Or we suggest the critical ambition and the principle should be made different. Reconsider/remove.

7. Our decision-making structure should be underpinned by effective ways of working with local communities, including through development of the role and use of Local Area Committees, informed by the Big City Conversation and other, ongoing engagement with Sheffieldsers.

Comment and suggestion: this principle overlaps significantly with principle 10 and we suggest the two are combined (see comment on principle 10) – remove/combine. Also do not mention BCC and LACs as could become dated.

8. We are a member-led authority, where accountability lies with elected councillors. Our decision-making structure must reflect this, and not inappropriately increase delegations to officers.

Comment and suggestion: this could be put more positively and recognise the important role of council officers e.g. "Council officers play an important role in decision-making via delegated authority and, more generally in our local democracy, as public servants. Accountability, however, lies with elected councillors so, in a new governance system, our decision-making arrangements need to reflect this and not inappropriately increase delegations to officers."

9. Our decision-making structure needs to reflect the practical demands on councillors' time. Need to find a balance between time spent in formal decision-making meetings in the Town Hall against working with and in communities. Time demands shouldn't prohibit people with working/caring commitments from being a Councillor.

Comment and suggestion: all councils changing to a MCS stipulate at the outset that the new structure will not be more bureaucratic, and successfully implement this. We are unsure why SCC has not yet clearly outlined this parameter (see accompanying slides). It would also draw attention to creative ways of working and engagement that we have learnt a lot about during covid. We recommend a stipulation of 'no more bureaucratic' be added to this principle, to aid design and implementation.

10. The issues people care about are often local in nature. Our decision-making structure needs to include channels through which people, communities and partners can work with local councillors about what is important to them. We need to strengthen locality arrangements based on the findings of the Big City Conversation and ensure that these arrangements work effectively alongside, and feed into, citywide decision-making processes.

Comment and suggestion: If you ask questions that have closed lists of possible choices, and if you ask people about their local area, it is not quite right to then interpret this as people being mostly concerned about 'local' issues as this first sentence of this principle might suggest. Of course, people do have 'local concerns' and do care deeply about their local (geographical) community – we found this too across the city. However, we also found huge interest (and expertise/experience) in

lots of (political and other) issues (even when people did not generally vote in local elections) e.g. public transport, climate change, housing, heritage, poverty, SEN, the city centre, and all kinds of inequalities. Whilst these interests might well have local relevance, they were definitely not confined to the 'local' by any means - involvement was often cross-city or even beyond. In addition, people facing inequality and discrimination often had very important 'communities' and networks beyond the local e.g. BAME, disabled people, lgbt+

So, we do not think the assertion "The issues people care about are often local in nature" is accurate and it should not be elevated to point of principle – it also suggests people might mostly or only want to contribute (or be mostly only permitted to contribute) input on local issues and this is not the case.

We think this sentence should be replaced with "People in Sheffield care about what happens in their local communities"

We also think this principle overlaps very significantly with principle 7 and suggest they be combined, and that reference to things that could become dated (and are controversial) are removed i.e. BCC.

11. Our decision-making structure must avoid silo working both within and outside of the City Council, and enable a joined up approach to tackling issues which need the involvement of a number of organisations in the city.

12. Our decision-making structure needs to have a mechanism for making urgent decisions openly, transparently and effectively engaging elected councillors.

Comment: all those who change to a MCS express some concern about this (based on the overhang from the 'old' committee system and an assertion these were slow/bureaucratic) and all put in place a system for urgent decisions. The evidence available shows that these systems are, in reality, very rarely used, and that decision-making in a MCS can actually be quicker. (Some also make the point that decision-making in a strong leader system is not necessarily quick either.)

13. Our decision-making structure needs to strengthen our ability to work with our partners in a complex local, sub-regional and national policy environment, and enable us to take a lead on key issues facing the city and the citizens of Sheffield.

Comment and suggestion: we think 'decision-making structure' should be replaced with 'governance arrangements' here.

From our citizen conversations we think the ability to 'take a lead' is very much linked to everyone's confidence in governance arrangements and perceptions of the overall 'legitimacy' of SCC. One of the main reasons councils can 'take a lead' with partners in a broad policy environment is because they have (unique) 'democratic' legitimacy and hold the widespread confidence of citizens, stakeholders and partners that is supportive of positive relationship building, collaborative working, and in exercising influence. The problem is that citizens almost unanimously told us they had little confidence, and that SCC was undemocratic (in a whole variety of ways).

So we think it is difficult for SCC to play the powerful and strategic role needed without addressing and securing more democratic legitimacy/confidence i.e. addressing key democratic concerns that citizens and communities identified e.g. checks and balances, a commitment to pluralism. The change of governance model should help and we should champion our city commitment to

'democracy'. This comment points to what we think is one critical omission in the principles and this is addressed below in suggestions for additional principles.

14. We need to be clear about what we are trying to achieve through our governance arrangements, and build in measures to assess whether it is working

Comment: we welcome a commitment to greater clarity and a shared articulation of aims, objectives and outcomes for new governance arrangements that can be effectively evaluated/measured, including by citizens and communities. How will this be developed? Are we at least a bit of the way there if critical ambitions are treated as outcomes, one adapts the principles to aims, and treats the ways of working points as the start of an objectives list? Is this as a principle actually needed?

We note that the 'Ways of Working' section is essentially 'objectives' (but think there is only a partial list here).

One way of articulating/aligning all this for planning and development purposes.....

Aim	Objectives	Operationalisation notes e.g. location/s in constitution	Outcomes
1.	1. 2. etc.		
2.			
3.			

15. We need to identify a forum that enables us to reflect and review, on an ongoing basis, on whether our governance systems are working as anticipated, and if changes need to be made.

Comment: this principle could be combined with 14. And, does SCC actually want to identify what sounds like a separate forum for reflection and review, or to make this in some way ongoing and integral to its governance structures/processes? (Considerations of efficiency might suggest the latter, notwithstanding that more formal governance review points will need consideration.)

3.3 How we do Business (Ways of Working) `

16. We need to take a more creative approach to communication between residents and the Council, including about what decisions are being made and why, what they mean to residents and what they mean for the city. This needs to be supported by effective communication and information about how decision-making works.

Comment: we think there is considerable overlap between this and principles 7 and 10. Is this an objective? Consider combining/clarifying. (And where are stakeholders, VCS, business, partners?)

Also relates to critical omissions (e.g. 3,5,7)

17. Role of Full Council – should be reviewed in the light of changes following the referendum – consider how we could make it a more meaningful forum.

Comment: see slide comment about typical full council meeting frequency.

18. Ensure that the appropriate support, training and skills development is continuously available for councillors so they can take full advantage of the opportunities under the new structure.

Comment: An objective. MCS governance also gives (most) councillors significant new roles as decision-makers - we think this principle could be updated to reflect the changed context following the referendum result.

19. We need to build a culture in which political disagreement is handled constructively and where members are supported to develop the listening, debating, chairing and committee-membership skills needed for this to happen.

20. We must ensure that a commitment to meaningful engagement, involvement and consultation runs through the organisation. We should renew a commitment to our Consultation Principles, and reflect on how the council's Engagement Standards which are currently in development can improve practice throughout our work.

Where are the Consultation Principles? Do the Engagement Standards now exist/where are these?

21. We need to constantly demonstrate how engagement activity is shaping decision making, and be honest about the impact it is having, so communities and partners can understand how their views have been responded to.

We suggest this is tightened in operationalisation, and in line with the comment on critical ambition 3. E.g. "The influence/impact of engagement with stakeholders, or consultation, will be made clear and documented (e.g. in minutes) for all significant new policy and decisions." This approach could be vital to building confidence/trust and to break the widespread perception that consultations are "sham" (and/or constructed to merely support council audit trails), that people are not listened to, that decisions are made before consultation, and that contributions are pointless.

22. We need to make it as easy as possible for people to engage with us – the starting point for this should be clear, consistent, accessible communication about what the Council is doing, what decisions we are planning to take and how to get involved.

23. We need to improve the information we provide about how decision making happens across the City as a whole and how partnerships and structures interconnect.

Some overlap between 22 and 23

24. We need to establish a process of continuous engagement so that Members, partners and citizens can give a view on how the system is working.

Overlap/repetitive? with principles 14 and 15 – is this actually an objective?

Ruth Hubbard and Woll Newall, *It's Our City!*
20.11.21