

CONTINUING THE SHAMEFUL STORY OF GOVERNMENT PLANS TO TRASH LOCAL DEMOCRACY (AND THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE OF SHEFFIELD), AND THE ATTEMPTS TO GET THEM TO SEE SENSE

UPDATE FROM IT'S OUR CITY! 22ND OCTOBER 2025

Tomorrow (Thursday 23rd October) in the Public Bill Committee for the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, the cross-party committee members will finally come to an examination of Clause 57 of the Bill.

Clause 57 of the Bill is the one that, if enacted, will directly:

- *Overturn* the democratic will of the people of Sheffield in our city-wide local governance referendum of May 2021 – a referendum won by citizens and communities in Sheffield exercising community rights in the Localism Act 2011.
- *Force our council* to adopt the exact same 'strong leader' model that we as Sheffielders resoundingly rejected in a democratic vote
- *Break the legal promises* given to us, as well as the legal right and power that was won by Sheffield citizens and communities, to decide how our council works

Not only this, but Clause 57 will abolish the committee system for *all councils* in England. It will remove the rights of all local councils, as well as the rights of local people, to choose the way they work, including for the more democratic alternative that the committee system offers.

More information about Clause 57 is in our FAQs at: <https://itsoursheffield.co.uk/trashing-referendum-faqs/>

But let's be clear. Clause 57 is quite the opposite - a reversal - of anything that might be called 'English Devolution' or 'Community Empowerment'. It's a government nonsense.

During August *It's Our City!* ran a short campaign to (inform and) ask people to write to our local Sheffield MPs; we also produced detailed FAQs about Clause 57 proposals: <https://itsoursheffield.co.uk/> The short campaign included street stalls across all Sheffield constituencies and we thank everyone who spoke to us and for the overwhelmingly positive response. Of our local MPs in Sheffield it was Olivia Blake and Abtisam Mohamed who responded actively and positively to public concerns – and both spoke up for Sheffield in the House of Commons second reading debate on the Bill on 2nd September 2025. We also acknowledge the work of all the main political groupings within our council – Labour, LibDems and the Greens – to speak out against Clause 57 and the damaging impact it will have in Sheffield, and all of whom met with us over the summer.

People might think that some of us actually have better things to do with our time than organising (again) to defend something that has already been settled by clear and resounding democratic mandate. Indeed we do, and it's exhausting. Despite this, there have been significant efforts by a whole range of people and groups to get the government to wake up (see more detail below). At *It's Our City!* we are grateful to all those who have taken action on Clause 57, from writing to their MPs to submitting evidence to the Public Bill Committee.

There is still time, of course, for the whole sorry saga to change but, for the moment, the Clause 57 trashing of local democracy and democratic rights by this government - is watchable! This will be online from 0925 tomorrow at: <https://www.parliamentlive.tv/Committees> Some of us in Sheffield will, indeed, be watching.

The following commentary provides more detail on where we are, and what is happening, in relation to Clause 57.....

More detail....

What's happening with the Bill and Clause 57 right now?

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill is proceeding through the various detailed steps involved towards full adoption and enactment in legislation.

The Bill is currently at what is known as 'committee stage' in the House of Commons and this follows directly on from the second reading of the Bill in Parliament on 2nd September.

The committee stage involves a selected cross-Party 'Public Bill Committee' examining the Bill, line-by-line, for the first time. The committee can make changes (amendments) to the Bill at this stage and before it reports back ('the report stage') to Parliament for the third reading of the Bill. At 'report stage' the government can make further amendments. Likewise, at third reading in the House of Commons, amendments can also be tabled. After third reading, the Bill goes to the House of Lords for further examination.

In line with normal practice, a public call for written evidence was issued by the Public Bill Committee on 5th September: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2025/sept-2025/english-devolution-and-community-empowerment-bill-call-for-evidence/>

Anyone can submit evidence to the committee (and this is worth remembering for any proposed legislation because over the summer we have come across lots of people and groups who had no idea it was possible to have a direct voice in this way).

So far the Public Bill Committee has met on four days in morning and afternoon sessions. All proceedings so far can be watched (or listened to) on Parliament TV. Apart from tomorrow (23rd October) four further dates are scheduled if needed – the latest the committee is due to complete its examination of the Bill is 12th November.

The consideration of Clause 57 by the Public Bill Committee so far – what's been said?

Precisely nothing.

Of course, to be fair, the Committee hasn't got to Clause 57 yet in its line by line examination of the Bill. However, the Committee has spent one full day (its first day on 16th September) hearing oral evidence from witnesses it selected. The Committee heard evidence from 22 witnesses on that day. It is disturbing and concerning to report that in a whole day of oral evidence that ranged widely across the Bill, not one mention was made of Clause 57 - by the chosen witnesses, nor by Committee members.

This is in addition to the fact that the major and controversial proposals at Clause 57 were never part of the White Paper (nor, then, the government consultation that went with this) and that preceded the introduction of the Bill. Clause 57 came as a shock to pretty much everyone when the Bill was announced and landed.

Our impression is that witnesses selected to give oral evidence on the Bill on 16th September are those who might already be regarded as ‘close to government’ and/or already have privileged access to government Ministers or government Departmental officials. The lack of any visible discussion about Clause 57 to date – on what is a significant and controversial proposal – should, frankly, be worrying to everyone concerned with local democracy and governance.

It all adds to the impression that Clause 57 was, at best, a *particularly thoughtless* add-on to the Bill somewhere along the line, and that someone, somewhere in government wants to slip it through without any proper or appropriate scrutiny at all. After all, we already know that government assertions about its Clause 57 proposals are, simply, evidence-free.

Written evidence submitted to the Public Bill Committee

At the time of writing, 45 submissions of written evidence have been published on the relevant Parliament website: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4002/publications>

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill is a big Bill – it has lots of big proposals in it (that many clearly regard as far bigger than Clause 57). Despite this, seven of the written evidence submissions directly focus on, or mention, Clause 57. None of the seven endorse Clause 57. Indeed, six of the seven call for removal of Clause 57 and/or retention of the committee system (the seventh takes a slightly different tack but is only neutral in relation to the specifics of the forced governance changes planned).

At *It's Our City!* we are very pleased that there is such a breadth of written evidence about Clause 57 that has been submitted (and by a whole range of different stakeholders) to the Public Bill Committee. For those interested the submissions are worth reading, of high quality and fully evidenced – strikingly unlike the government proposal at Clause 57 itself. They can all be read here: <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4002/publications> but a basic AI operation identifies and summarises them as follows:

Submission ID	Organisation	Stance on Clause 57	Summary
EDCEB11	It's Our City!	Against – recommends deletion	Opposes removal of committee system; calls for Clause 57 to be deleted.
EDCEB16	Centre for Governance & Scrutiny (CfGS)	Against – recommends amendment/removal	Critiques loss of governance choice; recommends amending or removing Clause 57.
EDCEB24	Citizen Network	Against – recommends deletion	Warns Clause 57 weakens community power; calls for deletion.
EDCEB27	Elect Her	Neutral/proposes additions	References Clause 57 as opportunity for additional inclusion measures (unrelated to governance model)

EDCEB29	Prof. Robin Hambleton	Against – recommends deletion	Strongly opposes Clause 57; urges full removal.
EDCEB31	Local Government Association (LGA)	Against – recommends amendment	Argues councils should retain choice of governance model; opposes compulsory leader/cabinet system.
EDCEB36	Green Party Councillors (Sheffield)	Against – recommends withdrawal	Cites local referendum for committee system; calls for Clause 57 withdrawal.

The Public Bill Committee sessions tomorrow (October 23rd)

Discussions in the Public Bill Committee from 9.25am tomorrow will continue the detailed and technical consideration of the Bill by the Committee. As part of this, various amendments (proposed and/or supported by different members of the Committee) will be considered by the Committee in debate.

Two MPs who sit on the Committee – Sian Berry and Vikki Slade – have tabled a number of specific and welcome amendments about the highly problematic Clause 57, and the Committee will discuss and debate these when they get to Clause 57 in their deliberations. Sian and Vikki are MPs for the Greens and Lib Dems respectively.

It is Miatta Fahnbulleh MP who is the *government lead* in the Public Bill Committee – Miatta is a government Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, so it will be particularly important to see the attitude she and her Party colleagues adopt towards the discussion and to the amendments tabled in Committee.

Finally, behind the scenes....

It is important to say that, whilst the formal Parliamentary processes on the Bill continue, we believe – and hope - that, behind the scenes, other discussions are going on, to ensure that Clause 57 never becomes actual law. Of course, all these things should be transparent and open but the reality is that government has to back track on Clause 57 (although, frankly, should never have got to this position either). We know this means that behind the scenes, ‘informal’ and ‘private’ discussions are somewhat inevitable. All we’d say is that these, too, must bear (public) fruit – we are watching this space, the sooner the better.

Ruth Hubbard, For *It's Our City!* 22nd October 2025.

