

## Submission to Boundary Commission

Sheffield moved to a modern committee system and has spent the last two years struggling with the consequences of this. As a major city and a unitary authority it is important that the electoral representational arrangements sit well within the governance arrangements and allow members the time to challenge, scrutinise, but also represent their communities and engage. It hasn't helped that there is no overall control, having four groups and an independent on the council at this point and for the medium term.

The committee system has proved time consuming and difficult for members to manage. For scrutiny to take place as a part of the decision-making process there needs to be time allocated to briefings and discussion for all groups. This questioning and discussion cannot take place in the committee meeting itself, agendas are too full, and I have had said to me ((not suggesting that SCC group subscribe to this view) that members cannot challenge officers in public, it would damage the reputation of the council, so there are time and cultural barriers to this. Therefore, one committee meeting may be backed up by three or four other sessions to allow briefing, discussion and challenge. I accept that this is a political point and that there may also be political devices in operation here, officers deciding to stack agendas so that too much challenge cannot take place, but there are real consequences on the effectiveness of the ability of elected members to represent their wards and scrutinise.

In addition; Not all members of a committee are invited to every session. Not all invitees are able to free up time to attend the sessions they are invited to.

Councils have a crucial role in reducing inequalities and enhancing inclusion and cohesion within their communities. To do this effectively people from all backgrounds and experiences should be actively encouraged to serve and reflect the communities they serve within the Council. The LGA and council officers provide support to disabled candidates and councillors to encourage greater representation and accelerating development of skills, as is right and proper, but this support doesn't extend to more general inclusivity and diversity. Generally the barriers to becoming and remaining an elected member are becoming greater and less accessible. The role of a councillor is becoming more time consuming and there are implications for future financial security in sacrificing income, earnings and pension contributions to allow for an ongoing commitment as a local councillor and the opportunity to develop and grow in effectiveness and experience. This effectively restricts who can afford to serve as a local councillor.

This subject formed the substance of a motion to February Full Council, which was passed unanimously. A link is attached here and the text may be found at draft minutes, motion number 3 on pages 4 & 5: [Agenda for Council on Wednesday 5 February 2025, 2.00 pm | Sheffield City Council](#). It was acted on by the leader and the response is attached in the accompanying email.

These two paragraphs inform the SCC proposal. Given that we are at the upper end of the quartile of ten neighbouring authorities this may seem counterintuitive, but for a modern committee system to work, which is what the people of Sheffield voted for, then we need to take a modern approach.

Developing agenda: Future Sheffield is working on proposals for the use of AI to manage enquiries, questions and communication. Investing in a switch to AI will save money and see an

efficient, effective and accessible route to the council open up. The more citizens become accustomed to using this and the better the responses become, the less case work will be generated for members.

Barriers to participation: The members allowance is low, members do not have access to a local govt pension and the time commitment is such that in effect you need to have another source of income to support you as a councillor or even to be able to consider serving. This leads to a certain demographic. The lack of group spokesperson responsibility allowances also dissuades members from looking to develop into local leaders. We see single term service as a pattern as the barriers to participation dawn on newly elected members.

Our suggestion: at a time when even the job review is seeking to come in within the existing budget we cannot expect members allowances to rise out of all proportion, but we can look to move to a four year cycle of all out elections in order to save money on the process. This then provides an opportunity to professionalise the role of the member. Increased allowances, pension contributions, paid responsibility allowance support across the board allow members to stay, grow their skills to hold officers to account and represent their communities effectively. In doing this we would also move to two members per ward. Assuming, given the modernisation agenda, there will be lower demand for case work and problem solving and create the additional capacity within fewer resources for engagement and representation.

Sheffield Community Councillors Group