



August 29th 2018

Email: info@itsoursheffield.co.uk

To: Sheffield Hallam CLP, Sheffield Central CLP,
Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough CLP,
Sheffield Heeley CLP, Sheffield South East CLP,
Sheffield Lib Dems, Sheffield Green Party,
Sheffield UKIP

Dear local political party members and activists in Sheffield

Sheffield People's Petition

We are writing to you as the political parties currently represented in Sheffield City Council.

We hope you are aware of the launch that took place this weekend - of Sheffield People's Petition.

The Petition is here:

<https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/sheffield-peoples-petition>

The Star coverage of the launch is here:

<https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/group-launches-people-s-movement-to-change-political-culture-of-sheffield-1-9320159>

The Radio Sheffield interview with our co-Chair on the morning of the launch is here (11 minutes in):

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p06gx9f6>

Sheffield People's Petition is a community initiative co-ordinated by *It's Our City!* More information about *It's Our City!* is on our website at www.itsoursheffield.co.uk You will see from our mission statement that we organise independently of party politics and that our Constitution enshrines and protects the *community* nature of our grassroots network.

Under the Localism Act 2011 if a community group presents a petition to the Council with signatures of 5% of the local electorate, this compels the Council to hold a city-wide referendum for a change of governance. The current (5%) 'verification number' published by SCC is 20,956.

Under the community rights enshrined in statute, it is ONLY communities who can compel a change of governance referendum. Communities are seeking a change from the 'strong leader and Cabinet' model, to a Committee system.

The launch (25th August) was supported by a number of community group representatives across the city, who were the first signatories of the Petition. We know from our community conversations and public events that there is very widespread support for an end to the strong leader model of governance. It is, simply, a very poor fit for the proud community and collective heritage of Sheffield.

We have been asked to clarify how political parties might support this community campaign, and we are grateful for this question.

We know there is support for a change of governance across all party affiliations in Sheffield and, indeed, some party groupings (again, across all parties) are actively seeking this change, or have passed their own motions and the like.

We hope the following pointers help, and we very much hope you are able to discuss and agree positive action to support this community campaign for a change of governance.

- 1) A referendum will cost money. Any time between now and the presentation of the petition, the current administration (effectively, the Cabinet) can choose to positively commit to change, and to work collaboratively with communities in Sheffield to co-design changed governance arrangements fit for our city. Whilst we are working hard to ensure legal timelines are met so that a referendum can be held at the same time as next year's local elections (which would minimise cost), this is all simply unnecessary. A change of governance arrangements can be achieved entirely on a cost-neutral basis (as other councils have shown) by making the move to change themselves. As citizens and voters, we are concerned about recent financial, legal and other misjudgements that have led to unnecessary costs for Council tax payers (in difficult times). We do not want our Council to make another misjudgement and to incur unnecessary further costs to our city. With the Petition currently proceeding, any costs incurred as a result of communities compelling change via a referendum will, we believe, be unfortunate and damaging - but down to our Cabinet.

It is also noteworthy that, for example, in Kent (County Council) the start of a petition under the Localism Act 2011 *did* compel a change of mind in the sitting Council that meant a referendum was not necessary to achieve change. (This came about, ultimately, via two elected members breaking the whip.)

Therefore, any support, persuasion, or pressure that can be brought to bear on the current administration - to adopt the change and work collaboratively and with communities - *before* a referendum becomes required, will obviously be very welcome.

- 2) We would request that political parties do not combine any of their canvassing with the collection of Sheffield People's Petition signatures. Whilst the data protection issues can be overcome, we are anxious to avoid a situation where residents say "I'm not supporting your party, and I'm not signing your petition!" Combined with party canvassing, we really think that the risk of muddied waters between an independent community campaign and party politics is too great for us as *It's Our City!* Whilst we only work on direct community agendas

and devise campaign strategies round these, we are already subject to regular attack and, frankly, those seeking to use what we are doing as communities for party political capital. We hope you understand this position so that party canvassing is not 'mixed up' with a party-independent *community* campaign.

- 3) Whilst we know that party financing is hardly 'flush' we are not requesting any party-linked donations. For individuals that are resource-wealthy of course we welcome donations to our crowdfunder!
- 4) However, all the above does not prevent, of course, individuals supporting Sheffield People's Petition and we know that many party voters/members do so. Nor does it stop party (or particular party groupings) websites, social media and so on stating clearly that you support a change of governance – and to link to the petition; it's worth remembering that it is ONLY a community group under the legislation that can compel a city-wide referendum. For this support and promotion of a more democratic Sheffield, we would be very grateful!
- 5) As you may be aware, we concentrate our energy on working in and with communities - and have never held a meeting with a political party as such. The same will be true for this campaign and we will not be formally meeting with political parties in Sheffield.

However, there is a rider to this. If there were a cross-party shared wish for a change of governance across at least the three main parties represented in SCC or via various party (sub)groupings, we would certainly be interested in meeting with such a cross-party group (ie together). We see there would certainly be potential to see how we might collaborate to support a successful change outcome and, crucially, to think ahead and liaise in terms of garnering ideas for shaping – in collaboration with communities - a new and revived Committee system. We are convinced that there is a broadly shared desire to changed governance arrangements, and away from the strong leader model, and this is an example where productive collaboration could be demonstrated. We are also absolutely convinced that voters in Sheffield want to see a different and more collaborative approach (amongst other things) at a local level; this is precisely what this community campaign is about so now might well present a very good opportunity.

Thank you for your interest in the *It's Our City!* community campaign for a change of governance. We do very much hope that you support the change that communities are seeking, and that (of course) you sign Sheffield People's Petition.

Regards, and yours faithfully

Ruth Hubbard and Anne Barr

Co-Chairs, *It's Our City!*