

Governance Arrangements – 2nd Members Survey

Final results

The governance structure of the Council changed in May 2013, with an ‘early indication’ survey undertaken in October 2013.

This second survey was open from the 3 February to the 14 February, with a response rate of 68.5% (37 of 54 members have responded).

Context

- 70% of respondents had completed the earlier survey, with 72% not having changed their opinion since the last survey;
- Of those responding 86.5% said that they had formed an opinion on how the new governance arrangements were working;
- 54% of respondents had no special responsibility; and
- A majority of respondents (56%) were backbenchers.

Advisory Committees

- A majority (60%) did not think that Portfolio Holders should Chair Advisory Committees;
- 68% said there should be more meetings of the Advisory Committees, with 65% agreeing that 6 Advisory Committee meetings would be about right;
- 27% of respondents agreed that the Council would work better with 3 Advisory Committees with more frequent meetings;
- 57% of respondents would prefer if Councillors were allowed to sit on 2 Advisory Committees, with 70% of all respondents saying that they think they would have a wider understanding of the work of the Council if they were able to sit on more than one Advisory Committee.

Working Groups

- 60% of respondents believe that working groups work effectively.

Cabinet & Portfolio Holders

- 51% of respondents think there should be more Portfolio Holders (43% disagree);
- 51% believe responsibility for matters would be clearer with smaller Portfolio Briefs and more Portfolio Holders (43% disagree); and
- 51% think there should be fewer Deputy Portfolio Holders (41% disagree).

Scrutiny Committee

- 46% of respondents would prefer Scrutiny to change to a fixed membership rather than the current 'Pool' system (32% disagree, with 22% saying that they do not know).

Effectiveness

- 56% of respondents believe that the new working arrangements do not improve accessibility of Portfolios and reduce remoteness;
- 62% do not feel more engaged in decision making or more able to influence decisions made;
- 60% do not feel that training and councillor development has improved;
- 58% do not believe that succession planning for Cabinet has improved;
- When asked whether the new system has led to an improvement on the previous working arrangements 43% said yes, 43% said no, with the remaining 14% saying that they do not know.

Comments

Respondents were provided with an opportunity to record any comments they had in relation to the questions in the survey. Set out below is a summary of the issues raised in the 19 comments provided.

Advisory Committees

- They are there to advise the Portfolio and it is therefore right that the Portfolio Holder is able to chair the meeting
- Advisory Groups should be able to choose their own Chairman but not adverse to this being the Portfolio Holder if so selected
- Preference that they are independently chaired to improve backbencher involvement
- Concern that 4 meetings is insufficient
- Preference for sitting on more than one Advisory Committee

Working Groups

- Are really helpful in reducing feelings of remoteness and add value to the Council at no additional financial cost
- Are a way in which member involvement can increase
- Are a way of keeping down the number of Advisory Committee meetings as work can be carried out between meetings
- Suggested that all Advisory Committee Members should be involved in working groups
- Not all working groups have been effective
- Working group subjects could be more substantial

- Could be seen as a demotion of the role of Councillors

Cabinet & Portfolio Holders

- Leader should decide on Cabinet and Portfolios
- Cabinet is not big enough
- Size of Cabinet limits opportunities for advancement of backbenchers
- Less Deputy Cabinet Members
- Cabinet positions should be rotated and changed every 4 years
- Number of Portfolio Holders is about right
- Portfolio of services could be more equal in size to prevent some being overloaded

Scrutiny Committee

- Gives backbenchers a chance to hold Cabinet Members to account

Other comments

- Member involvement in decision making seems to have declined
- Councillors seem more remote from council business
- Unclear why the original decision to not remunerate Vice Chairman has been reversed
- Training and development for Councillors is an area that needs to be addressed
- Survey questions did not all appear to be neutral
- The new system has more roles for Councillors so everyone should be more involved