

In summary: Q.1 How effective are the current arrangements...

Current model benefits from speed of decision-making, which is appropriate to a major public organisation. Scrutiny has a pivotal role to play but perhaps not achieving full enough impact.

Downside is the perceived exclusion of the majority of councillors from decision making; and the perceived non-accessibility and non-listening, with insufficiently robust scrutiny. Leading to keen sense of lack of influence.

Q. How effective is the current model?	
<i>Effective</i>	<i>Not effective</i>
Scrutiny function is key to well-functioning council	Backbenchers don't scrutinize properly
Better than cumbersome committee system	Ineffective open discussion of proposals
Effective, efficient and fast	Favours two party model – other opposition parties no right to speak at Cabinet
Prompt decisions	Doesn't benefit from the views and experience of non-executive councillors
Scrutiny offers valuable review of decision making and implementation	Implements what officers are suggesting on the basis of instructions of the governing councillors
It's the most effective form of decision making	Most councillors excluded from decision making
Allows for faster decision making	No evidence that representations to Cabinet have effect
Scrutiny benefits from Opposition chairmanship	Unsure scrutiny really changes things

It's a business – not community – based model concerned with the most efficient outcomes	Most decisions made by Cabinet informed by senior officers
Probably most effective model, given the need to run multi-million £ business	Sometimes decisions taken outside the framework (e.g. LEP) and told about it afterwards
Allows those with time and commitment to take priorities from all members	Too much closeness between Cabinet and council officers
Celerity	Little input to scrutiny agendas
Good at delivering progress	Only effective in pushing through what the ruling party want – very inadequate in scrutinising decisions
Performance Scrutiny Committee's wide remit means it can hold Cabinet to account across all areas	Decision-making takes little account of non-cabinet views
Cabinet system gives best method of delivering joined up and corporate decision making	Decisions rubber-stamped without involving other parties in consultation
	Checks and balances are weak
	Bullfinch, Carillion contract, Highway lighting contract – all high level concerns but limited political debate
	Especially poor for parties who are not the executive or official Opposition
	Many councillors have full-time employment and only have limited time for committees etc.

	Current scrutiny relies on foresight and experience of committees' chairmen.
	Less democratic/representative than other models
	Less good at engaging backbenchers
	Not enough opportunities to influence decision making
	Disproportionate amount of power in hands of small group of councillors who it's hard to access and influence
	In practice decisions taken in private pre-meeting of Cabinet
	Addresses from public and opposition have no bearing on the outcome of the meeting
	Quality of decision making dependent on the calibre of Cabinet members

In summary: Q.2 what are the most effective elements

Speed and accountability of Cabinet decision-making, with consequential lower cost and alignment to Council policies and big picture.

Most effective elements	But...
Speed of decision making and less cost in support by officers	Delegated decisions (Cabinet) not effective as they are huge decisions which lone person shouldn't take
Scrutiny – if done well.	Fewer Locality Meetings
Small number of decision makers leads to speedier decision making	
Cabinet members can develop deeper understanding than a committee could	
Flexible – whole Cabinet <i>or</i> Delegated	
Scrutiny particularly useful in budget planning	
Full Council – where public can see/hear issues; and councillors can question cabinet	
Clear who is responsible for what (Cabinet)	
Decision making through Cabinet clearly aligns to Policies of Council	
Ability for all members to attend and speak to Cabinet	
Cabinet model enables focus on big picture	

In summary: Q.3 how could the current arrangements be improved

Enhanced communication and consultation from the Cabinet so that decisions can be informed by the views of all councillors.

Strengthened scrutiny arrangements. Potential adoption of a committee system.

Improved...
Include some ad hoc committees
More focused scrutiny and more training for councillors on scrutiny and call-in
Earlier discussion involving all political groups and greater involvement in decision making
Opposition councillors should concentrate on making scrutiny more effective
More chance for Opposition councillors to have an input – currently too remote from governance and decision making
Cabinet to take views of all councillors into account <i>before</i> decisions are made
More opportunities for all members to influence policy/budget decisions before approved by Full Council
Adopt a committee system (14)
Scrutiny chairmen/deputies from non-ruling group
Separate social care scrutiny committee
Councillors to take own responsibility for obtaining info, attending training and ensuring they're briefed

Cabinet members to involve backbenchers earlier – answering their questions and emails

Cabinet members to maximise communication: to update and to talk to backbenchers about their Cabinet roles– e.g. through potentially at Locality Meetings

Greater use of Locality Meetings

In summary: Q.4 To what extent do you feel engaged by the current arrangements

Perceived disconnect between Cabinet and backbenchers: ineffective opportunities for influencing decision making.

Insufficient use of online media to deliver training, access to meetings and webcasting.

Limited
Officers can plough ahead without notifying members what they're doing
Only where involved in committee, scrutiny or working group
Level of engagement is down to each councillor
Induction should be done online – too much emphasis on coming in to offices
Should be webcasting
Slightly engaged through opportunity to speak at Council and Cabinet
No attempt by governing group to engage seriously with backbenchers
It's not about me – people who elected me have no representative voice in most council decisions
Not at all – Cabinet system is a 'them and us' with little trust
Personally I'm informed but have no say in decision making
As scrutiny member, feel very involved – and find Cabinet members usually happy to explain aspects of their portfolio
As relatively new councillor, meetings I've experienced haven't involved proper debating and deciding on issues. They feel decided already. My time not well used.

Recent reminder to officers to inform members of actions has improved communications and response to questions.

As a local member I work on my own without any help from the county

Little involvement in strategic decision making but expecting loyalty to see it safely through the Chamber

Council too large and unwieldy. Local knowledge that should inform policy is hardly ever used

Not well. I have spent the past 4 months trying to find my way around

Cabinet unhelpful – I can advise and critique but effectively this process is meaningless as decisions are rarely changed

In summary: Q.5 How might the arrangements better engage you?

Better communication and listening from Cabinet members.

Greater breadth of decision making at locality level; and on a cross-party basis. Potential return to committee system.

Whatever is in place members will still need to do some work for themselves
Already multiple opportunities to get involved
Better communication and listening from Cabinet members, taking account of other opinions expressed – making it a constitutional requirement for consultation with non-exec members
Great breadth of agendas and decision making at locality level <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Including power to make recommendations to Cabinet- And to track outcomes of such recommendations if accepted
How can we be said to represent communities if barely a mechanism for Cabinet to listen to us (and appear to have made up their minds)
Developed version of CAGs
Return to committee system utilising councillors' areas of expertise
More delegated decisions made by area locality committees (and including public access to them in some form)
Officers need to be more available to answer questions and advise councillors of proposed activities in their decisions [sic]
Cross party work on all areas – current arrangements can't better involve me while they remain so highly politicised (detrimentally to Oxfordshire)
Time to discuss Cabinet agenda within political groups
Realise that backbenchers have something to offer and develop the structures positively to engage with them
Review current scrutiny arrangements - e.g. Performance Scrutiny remit too wide
Return to committee system (13)

In summary: Q.6 What aspects of being a councillor are most important to you

Ranked responses. Topmost being “empowering communities to make their own decisions”.

Which is consistent with calls for enhanced locality decision making and greater listening by Cabinet to the local voice of councillors.

1. Empowering communities to make their own decisions
2. Taking part even more closely in the Council’s decision making
3. Receiving the info I need to serve the people in my division
4. Casework and achieving things for people
5. Meeting, listening and staying in touch with people
6. Representing community views

In summary: Q.7 what principles should underpin any new arrangements

Ranked responses. Topmost one (“cost efficiency”) will relate to the question the Group will need to consider about the cost of any proposed model(s).

The second ranked (“speed of decision making”) links back to one of the perceived benefits of the existing arrangements; and which would need to be equally true in any alternative arrangements, or otherwise be compensated for by other advantages, such as perceptions of greater councillor inclusion.

1. Cost efficiency
2. Speed of decision making
3. Community engagement
4. Transparency
5. Better service delivery
6. Councillor involvement