

Governance Review 2014 Summary of member survey responses

Overview

The survey of councillors showed an overall satisfaction with the governance arrangements and that the changes are considered to have been beneficial in engaging members further and achieving a closer focus on the business of the Council. There is a consensus that the arrangements should be allowed to bed down and that no major changes are necessary. Key points:

- Locality Meetings: the big success of the new governance arrangements, Locality Meetings are perceived to be working very well; the challenge now being to ensure that they achieve greater level of engagement with service and policy development
- Cabinet Advisory Groups (CAGs): CAGs are regarded as a useful aspect of the Council's governance; the challenge now being to raise their profile among members and ensure they are contributing effectively and visibly
- Keeping members informed: an encouraging outcome has been that members feel they are generally being kept informed about issues affecting their area
- Cabinet: overall satisfaction; the challenge now being how to action the Leader's willingness to engage members more fully
- Scrutiny: overall satisfaction with arrangements and an aspiration to achieve a more targeted focus on key issues and performance
- Council: the challenge is to improve the efficiency of Council business (e.g. through clarification of the procedure rules)

Member Survey - responses

Response rate:

64% of councillors responded (40 out of 63 responses).

Includes:

- 9 cabinet members
- 12 participants in CAGs
- 23 scrutiny members
- 40 locality meeting comments

Overview

Members were presented with several 'ratings questions' and then were invited to comment. More councillors responded to the 'ratings' than gave comments.

Therefore, what follows indicates the overall response. Responses to the ratings questions have been shown as % of councillors responding to the question.

Comments, being more subjective, have been given simply as 'the numbers of councillors making the point'. They serve as illustration only. In some cases, given the low numbers making the point, the issue cannot reliably be seen as representative of a particular issue or concern.

Locality Meetings

36 respondents answered the ratings questions.

- 32 agreed or strongly agreed that the Locality Meetings are a useful addition to the governance arrangements
- 1 disagreed or strongly disagreed that Locality Meetings were a useful addition
- 3 had no view as to their usefulness

- 31 agreed or strongly agreed that the Locality Meetings provided a useful way of hearing and sharing views about issues of importance to their constituency
- 4 disagreed or strongly disagreed that they are useful in hearing/sharing constituency views
- 1 had no view

Comments summary

- Useful addition and a good forum for sharing views and hearing about the locality (7 members)
- Perhaps need to be more frequent and/or a little longer (8 members)
- Early days as to whether the locality meetings tie in to the wider governance arrangements (6 members)
- Chairmanship crucial to keep meetings useful and prevent them from being a talking shop/sidelining some divisions (2 members)

Council

31 respondents answered the ratings questions.

- 8 agreed that Council is an effective means of debating/delivering Council business
- 13 disagreed or strongly disagreed that Council is effective means of debating/delivering Council business

- 10 were neutral as to the effectiveness of Council
- 27 agreed or strongly agreed that changes should be made to improve debate and decision-making
- 1 disagreed that changes should be made
- 4 were neutral as to whether changes should be made

Comments summary

- Too many motions (5 members)
- Too many cabinet-related questions that should remain in cabinet (3 members)
- Potentially limit the number of motions per councillor (2 members)
- Council should finish later than 3.30 (i.e. at 4 or 5 pm) – particularly mentioned by Lib Dems (and Green) (5 members)
- Not enough time for debate (linked to previous point) (2 members)
- Too much use of 'move to vote' by the Administration, curtailing debate (2 members)
- Meetings should be webcast (2 members)

Cabinet

29 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 6 agreed that Cabinet engages effectively with wider member views and opinion
- 17 disagreed or strongly disagreed that Cabinet engages effectively with member views/opinion
- 6 were neutral that it engaged effectively with member views/opinion

Comments summary

- Sense that Cabinet does not seek or listen to other councillor views (2 members)
- Debate insufficient:
 - Other groups, not just Opposition, should have opportunity to speak (particularly mentioned by Lib Dems) (6 members)
 - Done deal – no real debate (4 members)
 - Little input from other members (4 members)
 - Councillors don't take opportunity to raise questions (4 members)
 - Scrutiny should have greater pre-consideration (2 members)

Cabinet Advisory Groups

23 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 13 agreed or strongly agreed that CAGs had been a useful addition to governance arrangements
- 5 disagreed or strongly disagreed that CAGs had been a useful addition
- 5 had no view whether CAGs had been a useful addition
- 8 agreed or strongly agreed that CAGs had addressed the right issues

- 4 disagreed or strongly disagreed that CAGs had addressed the right issues
- 10 had no view on whether CAGs had addressed the right issues

Comments summary

- Need for more info and visibility on what these are, how appointed, how they operate and outcomes (11 members)
- Usefulness/effectiveness not fully established and needs bedding down (especially in relation to impact on policy development) (3 members)
- More of a means of informing members than delivering policy development (2 members)

Transport Advisory Panel

16 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 7 agreed or strongly agreed that the TAP had been a useful addition to the governance arrangements
- 5 disagreed that the TAP had been useful
- 4 had no view as to whether the TAP was useful
- 13 thought that some changes should be made to the way TAP operates
- 2 did not think changes should be made to TAP
- 1 had no view as to whether changes should be made to TAP

Comments summary

- Need for more info and visibility on what these are, how appointed, how they operate and outcomes (7 members)

Scrutiny – Generally

32 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 10 agreed or strongly agreed that current arrangements are working well
- 15 disagreed that the arrangements were working well
- 7 had no view as to whether the arrangements were working well
- 20 thought that some changes should be made to how Scrutiny operates
- 8 did not think that changes should be made
- 3 had no view as to whether changes should be made

Comments summary

- Adult Scrutiny Committee should be reintroduced (cross party view) (8 members)
- Scrutiny seems to have reduced too much – more time and resource needed for it to be effective (3 members)
- Challenge to the executive appears diminished (2 members)

Performance Scrutiny

28 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 13 agreed or strongly agreed that the committee provided an effective means of performance management
- 10 disagreed or strongly disagreed with that the committee provided an effective means of performance management
- 5 had no view on the effectiveness of the committee

Comments summary

- Perhaps covers too much – too broad and not sufficiently holding the executive to account (5 members)
- Primacy of this committee masks importance of other subject areas worthy of scrutiny (3 members)

Education Scrutiny

26 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 16 agreed or strongly agreed that the committee provided an effective means of reviewing educational issues
- 3 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 7 had no view on this

Comments summary

- Role is evolving alongside Oxon CC's role in education (2 members)
- Purpose and efficacy not sufficiently bedded down (5 members)
- Some queries as to whether the social care side of children's services should be more prominently represented in scrutiny (2 members)

Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny

27 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 14 agreed or strongly agreed that JHOSC provided an effective means of reviewing health issues
- 5 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 8 had no view

Comments summary

- Prominence increased with return of public health function to Oxon CC (2 members)
- Maintaining the effectiveness of JHOSC is important to delivery of public health (2 members)

Health and Wellbeing Board

20 of respondents answered the ratings questions

- 7 agreed or strongly agreed that the HAWB was an effective means of promoting health and wellbeing
- 4 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 9 had no view

Comments summary

- Important area of work but still finding its feet (5 members)
- More info needed for councillors on role and effectiveness (4 members)

Audit and Governance Committee

16 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 10 agreed or strongly agreed that A&G provides an effective means of reviewing the council's governance and ethical standards
- 1 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 5 had no view

Comments summary

- Greater clarity needed between this and Performance Scrutiny (3 members)
- Generally effective (4 members)

Planning and Regulation Committee

14 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 10 agreed or strongly agreed that P&R was effective
- 2 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 2 had no view

Remuneration Committee

15 respondents answered the ratings questions

- 12 agreed or strongly agreed that the Remuneration Committee provided an effective means of managing the council's pay policy etc
- 3 had no view

Information for councillors

38 respondents answered the ratings questions.

- 29 agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication they receive about the council and its services

- 4 disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with the level of communication
- 5 had no view
- 25 agreed or strongly agreed that the format of reports (length, content, ease of reading) was about right
- 8 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 4 had no view
- 26 agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the information available about who to contact in the council
- 8 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 3 had no view
- 23 agreed or strongly agreed that they received a timely reply from officers when asked for information
- 11 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 4 had no view

Comments summary

- Reports useful but too long; perhaps introduce one-page summaries; plainer English (3 members)
- Most officers very helpful – but can take too long to get replies to queries; perhaps standard upper limit response time (5 members)
- Knowing who to contact still a challenge for some (2 members)
- Welcome Handbook well received but contacts list should be regularly/more frequently updated (2 members)

Constitution and rules/protocols

38 respondents answered the ratings questions.

- 29 agreed or strongly agreed that they understood their rights to information under the Constitution
- 3 disagreed or strongly disagreed that they understood their rights
- 6 had no view
- 33 agreed or strongly agreed that they knew how to raise issues for consideration at the Council's formal meetings
- 1 disagreed that they knew how to raise issues at formal meetings
- 4 had no view
- 20 agreed or strongly agreed that their views about issues in their constituency were listened to by the Council
- 11 disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 6 had no view

Comments summary

- No common views on the Constitutional rules

END