

## Summary of Member Survey Feedback

### 1. Background

A member survey on the Council's governance arrangements was carried out during December 2024 (5th to 31st). This paper provides a summary overview of responses. N.B. Some respondents did not answer all the questions and percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, so some figures may not sum.

### 2. Summary

- a) Less than half of members completed the survey so responses should be treated with some caution, although the profile of respondents suggests a reasonably representative sample.
- b) Overall, respondents were positive about the Council's governance arrangements and most felt that the changes introduced since 2017 had been effective. However, some members don't feel knowledgeable about all aspects of governance, with a fairly high number of "neutral" or "don't know" responses to some questions.
- c) There was strong endorsement of the member development programme and the majority of respondents were clear on the ethics and values for how members work. There were high levels of awareness of risk, decision-making processes and the lines of responsibility between members and officers.
- d) Areas where there was less consensus may need further consideration/discussion to better understand the underlying issues, given the relatively low response rate to the survey. These include:
  - Interaction with the public/communities
  - The member culture of openness and debate
  - How governance arrangements and best practice are monitored
  - The effectiveness of some key aspects of governance arrangements, including full Council meetings, Cabinet meetings and the scrutiny function.
- e) There will be a role for the Member Development Group to consider the survey feedback and to identify any issues to address, including:
  - How best to ensure members have a good general level of understanding about governance arrangements
  - Raising awareness of where to find information about governance
  - Members' ability to be well prepared for and participate effectively in meetings

### 3. Profile of respondents

- 27 members completed the survey, a response rate of 39%. There was a reasonable spread of responses from across all political groups. 13 respondents were elected in or since 2021 and 14 were elected between 1993 and 2017.

### 4. Overall views on governance

- Most respondents (70%, 19) feel they have an excellent or good understanding of the Council's governance arrangements and think the changes introduced to the Council's governance arrangements since 2017 have been very or fairly effective (63%, 17).

- The table below summarises agreement/disagreement with a number of statements about governance arrangements. The “strongly agree” and “tend to agree” responses have been combined, as have the “tend to disagree” and “strongly disagree” responses. There were very few “don’t know” responses so these are not included. Responses have been ranked with the highest areas of agreement at the top.
- The biggest “neutral” responses were to the effectiveness of member involvement in performance monitoring and the use of insight on experiences/outcomes of residents to support decision making. The biggest negative responses were to the statements that lessons are learned from complaints and that open debate is encouraged, with mutual respect that recognises political difference. Effective engagement/communication with the public had a mixed response.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly or tend to agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to or strongly disagree</b>
The member development programme provides me with the training and development opportunities I need	25 (93%)	2 (7%)	0
The Council’s position on the ethics and values for how members work is clear	24 (89%)	1 (4%)	2 (7%)
I am aware of the corporate risk register and what’s in it	23 (85%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)
The lines of responsibility between members and officers are clear	21 (78%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
I am clear on my role in decision making (whether this is taking decisions or holding to account)	21 (78%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)
The Forward Plan of key decisions is easy to fund and to understand	20 (74%)	4 (15%)	3 (11%)
External report and inspections are taken seriously and acted upon	20 (74%)	6 (22%)	0
I am kept informed of issues relevant to my role as a member	19 (70%)	3 (11%)	5 (19%)
I am familiar with the Council’s Member Officer Relations Protocol	18 (67%)	5 (19%)	2 (7%)
Members are able to be sufficiently engaged/involved in council business	17 (63%)	8 (30%)	2 (7%)
The Council’s decision-making process are clear, open and transparent	15 (56%)	8 (30%)	4 (15%)
Member involvement in performance monitoring is effective	15 (56%)	9 (33%)	2 (7%)
The views and insights of members are used well to inform decision making	14 (52%)	7 (26%)	6 (22%)
Open debate is encouraged, with mutual respect that recognises political difference	13 (48%)	7 (26%)	7 (26%)

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly or tend to agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Tend to or strongly disagree</b>
The council engages and communicates effectively with the public	13 (48%)	7 (26%)	6 (22%)
The Council uses insight on the experiences of and outcomes for local people to support decision making	10 (37%)	9 (33%)	5 (19%)
Lessons are learned from complaints	10 (37%)	9 (33%)	7 (26%)

## 5. The effectiveness of key governance arrangements

- The table below summarises views on the effectiveness of key governance arrangements at the Council. "Excellent" and "good" responses have been combined, as have "not very good" and "poor" responses. "Don't know" responses have been included as this area of questioning had the highest number of these, with most respondents being neutral or unable to comment on the effectiveness of Governance, Standards, Planning and Rights of Way and Pensions Committees. This is probably due to the fact that many members will not have direct experience of these committees. Responses have been ranked with the highest areas of agreement at the top.
- The aspect with the highest overall number of negative responses was County (full) Council. The highest "neutral" response was for scrutiny committees.

<b>Governance arrangement</b>	<b>Excellent or good</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Not very good or poor</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Scrutiny committees	17 (63%)	7 (26%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)
Scrutiny task and finish groups	17 (63%)	3 (11%)	5 (19%)	2 (7%)
Executive task and finish groups	15 (56%)	0	2 (7%)	10 (37%)
County (full) Council	14 (52%)	5 (19%)	8 (30%)	0
Governance Cttee	13 (48%)	3 (11%)	2 (7%)	9 (33%)
Cabinet	12 (44%)	5 (19%)	4 (15%)	6 (22%)
Standards Cttee	10 (37%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)	14 (52%)
Planning and Rights of Way Cttee	9 (33%)	4 (15%)	1 (4%)	12 (44%)
Pensions Committee	7 (26%)	0	0	20 (74%)

## 6. Practical arrangements – comments on Council/committee meetings, agendas, reports and membership

- Many of the comments here specifically related to County Council meetings, so these responses have been separated out from the more general comments.
  - Size and membership of committees:** four respondents were generally content with the size and membership of committees. One commented that the membership of committees sometimes feels large and that "it is important that Chairs manage these meetings well".
  - Format of reports:** three respondents commented on this, with one content with the format, one saying that reports can be repetitive and one suggesting that agendas can arrive very late and not allow enough time for preparation.

**c) Frequency and length of meetings:** nine respondents made general comments on this with four saying that the frequency and length of meetings is appropriate; four that they are too long; and three specifically referring to CHESC meetings being too long. Two suggested that the potential to hold additional meetings should be considered where necessary “to ensure adequate opportunity to question and consider everything”, and another that meetings could sometimes be longer to deal with necessary business.

**d) Length/content of agendas and how these are settled:** Of those commenting (seven), five had concerns about agendas: that there is too much on the agenda to cover in enough depth within the time allowed, that there isn’t enough time for members to read the papers before meetings and that the size of agendas should be reviewed. One commented that although agendas can be long, there’s a lot to cover “so it’s fine” and another felt that agenda papers are well laid out.

**e) County Council meetings:** 15 respondents focused specifically on County Council meeting arrangements, with several saying it is too long. Suggestions made include shortening Cabinet Member question time; having a time limit on speeches; having a public question time; reviewing the process for agreeing notices of motion; ensuring there is balanced debate. Others commented on the nature of the debate at these meetings, including that the motions for debate are not matters of substance and that County Council is not useful for making or challenging policy.

## 7. The effectiveness of key processes

- Members were asked to rank the effectiveness of a number of specific governance processes (on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very effective and 5 not at all effective). Responses are summarised in the table below. Responses are shown in order of ranking, with the highest “effective” response at the top.
- “Don’t knows” have not been included as overall these were very low, apart from relating to RAAC (37%), Governance Committee (37%) and the input from minority group leaders at Cabinet (30%) – suggesting that these are aspects of governance that some members don’t have knowledge of. The aspects given the lowest ranking were notices of motion and collective Cabinet decision making in public. The highest number of “neutral” responses related to the challenge provided by scrutiny and the engagement of scrutiny members in business planning.

<b>Governance process</b>	<b>Effective (ranked 1 or 2)</b>	<b>Neutral (ranked 3)</b>	<b>Ineffective (ranked 4 or 5)</b>
Written questions at County Council	18 (67%)	6 (22%)	3 (11%)
Scrutiny business planning groups	17 (63%)	5 (19%)	2 (7%)
Cabinet Member Question Time	15 (56%)	6 (22%)	6 (22%)
The challenge provided by scrutiny	15(56%)	10 (37%)	1 (4%)
Regulation, Audit and Accounts Committee’s oversight of the systems of control, audit and risk management	15 (56%)	2 (7%)	0
The influence of scrutiny on policy development	14 (52%)	6 (22%)	5 (19%)
Notice of motion for debate at County Council	13 (48%)	3 (11%)	11 (41%)

<b>Governance process</b>	<b>Effective (ranked 1 or 2)</b>	<b>Neutral (ranked 3)</b>	<b>Ineffective (ranked 4 or 5)</b>
Government Committee's oversight on governance arrangements	13 (48%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)
Input from minority group leaders at Cabinet	12 (44%)	7 (26%)	0
Input from scrutiny committee chairs at Cabinet	12 (44%)	6 (22%)	4 (15%)
The engagement of all scrutiny committee members in work programme planning	12 (44%)	10 (37%)	4 (15%)
Collective Cabinet decision making in public	8 (30%)	7 (26%)	8 (30%)

## 8. Outside Bodies

- 11 (44%) of respondents are appointed by the Council to an Outside Body (which represents 28% of the total 39 members appointed to one or more Outside Body). Most commented positively about their roles, with nine saying they understand their role. One minority party member not appointed to an Outside Body commented that "there are some where I could have had a useful contribution to make".

## 9. General comments

- 29 additional, general comments were made, across a range of issues relating to governance and are summarised below:
  - a) **General:** many reiterated the responses given to questions in the survey, with three commenting positively on their experience as councillors and the support they receive and one suggesting a need for greater awareness raising amongst members on the importance of governance. Other comments included that there should be a review of how members feel about the culture at the council; all meetings should be virtual in order "to have a fully inclusive and diverse council"; minority party members aren't always as involved as they could be; decisions taken at public Cabinet feel like they have been agreed in advance; KPIs aren't clear and so it can be difficult for members to focus on key issues. One felt that it's hard to understand how decisions are made and how to influence them and another commented that "one of the biggest challenges is providing a meaningful role to backbench and opposition members under the cabinet and scrutiny system which deliberately centralises decision-making". One suggested that there should be a refresh of communication/engagement with residents on key issues.
  - b) **County Council:** four raised concerns regarding County Council including the levels of non-attendance; that some business is uncontentious and could be dealt with in another way; that there should be a clear and balanced approach to how questions are allocated to members; that there should be a public question time; that notices of motion are "mostly pointless and sterile debates".
  - c) **Scrutiny:** eight comments specifically related to scrutiny, with two expressing concern at the lack of any minority party chairs or vice chairs and two others suggesting that scrutiny outcomes aren't always clear. One commented that "some scrutiny committee members under-contribute to the debate".