

MEMBER SEMINAR – CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides a breakdown and analysis of the feedback received from Elected Members on proposals around the Council's constitution, scrutiny arrangements and constituency committees. The feedback was gathered at a seminar held on April 4th 2013 and an associated questionnaire distributed to all Members.
- 1.2 Notes and views gathered at the seminar are presented within this report, alongside feedback gathered from the questionnaire.

2.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

- 2.1 38 Elected Members responded to the questionnaire, and 32 Members attended the seminar. The political make up of questionnaire responses is shown as follows:

| Party | No of Seats | % of Council | No of Responses | % of Response |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Labour | 37 | 56% | 26 | 68% |
| Conservative | 22 | 33% | 6 | 16% |
| Liberal | 7 | 11% | 6 | 16% |
| | 66 | | 38 | |

- 2.2 The table above demonstrates that, while 58% of Members completed a questionnaire, 68% of those members were Labour Members (56% of total Members are Labour Members), therefore the responses are underrepresented in terms of the views of Conservative Members and slightly over represented in terms of Liberal Democrat Members.
- 2.3 The questionnaire further asked Members to identify the ward which they represent, which are shown below based on the Parliamentary Constituency they form part of. These results demonstrate that Members from Birkenhead and Wallasey constituencies provided the highest level of response to the questionnaire.

| Constituency | No of Responses |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Birkenhead | 13 |
| Wallasey | 11 |
| West Wirral | 8 |
| South Wirral | 6 |

3.0 WORKSHOP ONE: THE FUTURE OF SCRUTINY

- 3.1 The first set of questions, and workshop at the seminar, focussed on the role of Scrutiny within the Council. Members were supplied with a report outlining suggested changes, focussing on the implementation of 'policy and performance' committees which would replace the current set of OSC arrangements.

A number of Members submitted their views during the opening of the seminar that they believed that a return to the Committee System would be most appropriate the Council moving forward.

3.2 Question One:

What key difference would you like the new arrangements to make?

This question was included in both the questionnaire and as a key topic for discussion for the workshops at the Members seminar.

Feedback received from both the questionnaire and the workshop sessions were broadly similar, in that it covered the following topics:

- Opportunities to review and scrutinise policy prior to decision making and hold the executive to account
- Cabinet Members to attend to hear the views of the Committee on the pre-scrutiny of policies
- Ensure the quality of Council services through mystery shopping and exploring best practice elsewhere
- Opportunities for focussed in depth reviews and task and finish work
- Clear and consistent approach to work programmes and scrutiny reviews – work programme to be determined by Committee members
- Align the Committees work programme with the Cabinet forward plan
- Change of culture to trust Officers to deliver and effectively hold them to account
- Enjoy and benefit from the scrutiny experience
- Focus on the core business of the Council
- Clarity of Councillor's roles in the Policy & Performance Committees and Councillor ownership of the review work
- Communicate committees role to Council employees and support Councillors with the right information
- Committees to be less political and to facilitate scrutiny reviews which breakdown party lines
- Focus more on local issues that local people feel strongly about
- Process to be led by Councillors and not officers
- Effective scrutiny of partner organisations on their performance
- Committees should be proactive rather than reactive
- Members should respect the work of the Committees and their recommendations
- Facilitate timely discussions on local and national policy and effectively communicate the impact to local residents
- Enable the work of the committees to support Cabinet to make better decisions

3.3 Question Two:

The new model proposes 12 Members per committee. Is this?

Feedback from the Questionnaire:

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Too many? | 16.0% | 4 |
| Too few? | 0.0% | 0 |
| About right? | 84.0% | 21 |

The chart above demonstrates that 83.3% of Members answering this question believe that 12 Members per committee is 'about right', and no Members believe it is too few. A number of Members also made comments about this question, with the following points emerging as the main themes:

- The membership of committees should be based on interests, abilities and experience of Members, and not be based on 'making up the numbers'
- All Members not part of Cabinet should have a role in 'scrutiny'
- Members should be allowed more freedom to concentrate on Ward issues and become 'Community Champions'
- Members not on main committees should be allocated to 'task and finish' groups on specific tasks or areas of policy

3.4 Question Three:

Policy and Performance Committees can improve the quality of decision making by:

| Answer Options | Agree | Disagree | Don't know | Response Count |
|--|-------|----------|------------|----------------|
| Holding the Executive to account | 25 | 0 | 2 | 27 |
| Holding Partners to account | 23 | 0 | 2 | 25 |
| Horizon-scanning scrutiny | 20 | 1 | 2 | 23 |
| Policy Development and Review | 25 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| Pre-decision scrutiny | 25 | 0 | 0 | 25 |
| Post-decision scrutiny | 17 | 3 | 1 | 21 |
| In-depth reviews | 22 | 0 | 4 | 26 |
| Performance management and improvement | 19 | 0 | 2 | 21 |

The chart demonstrates that most Members believe all of the options provided could be improved through policy and performance committees. A number of Members made further comments to this question, the main themes emerging were:

- Members must not be overloaded, and time must be used effectively.
- Pre-decision scrutiny is important, to ensure the system is pro-active and not re-active
- We must utilise the skills and abilities of Members to the highest level

3.5 Question Four:

How can Policy and Performance Committee Members time be used most effectively? Please rate 1 – 6 (1 being most important).

This question was included in both the questionnaire and as a key topic for discussion for the workshops at the Members seminar.

Feedback from Questionnaire:

| Answer Options | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average Rating |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|----|----------------|
| In-depth reviews | 7 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 3.42 |
| Mystery shopping | 4 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 6 | 3 | 3.64 |
| Committee meetings in the Town Hall | 2 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3.43 |
| Task & Finish Rapid Reviews | 6 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 3.72 |
| Meeting service users in their communities | 8 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 10 | 3.75 |
| Working with partners to maximise outcomes | 7 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 3.63 |

The table displays the average rank each option was given by Members, and demonstrates a mixed view from Members as to the best use of the committees' time, with an almost equal number of Members stating each individual option was either the best or worst use of their time within policy and performance committees. A number of Members also made comments on this question, the main themes to emerge included:

- Quality officer support is needed for the committees to be effective
- Gathering information and undertaking detailed reviews into policy and services
- Moving the meetings away from the Town Hall and getting the community and front line staff more involved in the process

Feedback from the Workshops

The following themes were discussed:

- Focussed agendas with fewer items – prioritise six to eight work reviews annually
- Cross cutting reviews, for example Adults and Children's social care
- Create task and finish groups with all party members which report to the wider committee
- Effective support from Council officers
- Provide opportunities for all Councillors to give their views on the committee
- Provide clear and transparent information including the performance of Council services
- Gather evidence as opposed to sitting in committee meetings
- Implement robust project management arrangements
- Bring in experts and evidence from outside bodies
- Engage and consult with users of Council services to understand the customer perspective
- Ability to questions Cabinet Members on projects and reports
- Training may be required to support Councillors in the new arrangements and match Councillors skills with work areas

3.6 Question Five:

What information do Policy and Performance Committee Members need to hold Cabinet to account?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Performance | 96.4% | 27 |
| Financial | 96.4% | 27 |

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Complaints | 75.0% | 21 |
| Risk | 85.7% | 24 |
| Other (please state) | 25.0% | 7 |

This chart demonstrates that there is no clear consensus on one overall priority for what is needed, but does demonstrate agreement that financial and performance related information is important. Members who commented on this question stated that:

- The Corporate Plan and departmental work plans, as well as the ability to request any information they require from departments and teams.
- Information which demonstrates value for money, along with comparative and benchmarking data
- Information on future policy requirements and clarity on the future role of Audit within the Council

3.7 Question Six:

Should Cabinet Members attend Policy and Performance Committee meetings?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Always | 48.3% | 14 |
| Never | 0.0% | 0 |
| Sometimes | 51.7% | 15 |

The chart demonstrates that while Members believe Cabinet Members should attend, there is a mixed view on whether they should attend always or only on occasion or when required. The comments made by Members in this area further support both of these views.

4.0 CONSTITUENCY COMMITTEES

4.1 The first set of questions, and workshop at the seminar, focussed on the proposals around the implementation of Constituency Committees. Members were supplied with a report outlining suggested changes.

4.2 Question One:

Should all Councillors be Members of Constituency Committees?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 85.7% | 24 |
| No | 10.7% | 3 |
| Maybe | 3.6% | 1 |

The chart demonstrates that the majority of Members believe all Members should be on the Committee. This view is supported by comments to this question, a number of

which suggest that a potential alternative would be one Member per Ward being on the Committee, which would be rotated between Members within each Ward.

4.3 Question Two:

Should Community Representatives / Groups be Members of Constituency Committees?

This question was included in both the questionnaire and as a key topic for discussion for the workshops at the Members seminar.

Feedback from Questionnaire:

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 62.1% | 18 |
| No | 0.0% | 0 |
| Maybe | 37.9% | 11 |

The chart shows that no Members believe community representatives should not be part of the Committee. Members made a number of comments on this question, which can be summarised as follows:

- Community reps must be 'true' community reps, and represent constituted and representative groups.
- Community reps could be called on as and when necessary, rather than being a full time member of the committee.

Feedback from the Workshop

- There should be involvement / representation from the community and other public service providers
- Community representatives require a mandate from the local community and should not represent marginal or self interests
- A voting system will be required for electing community representatives
- Councillors should represent local interest effectively – Councillors are elected and accountable to local communities whereas community representatives are not
- Constituency Committees need to operate significantly differently to Area Forums
- Engage with the wider community with meetings orientated around social events to attract more local interest from all parts of Wirral's communities
- Hold the committees in different locations to ensure they are accessible to all local residents
- A range of formats will be required to advertise and communicate the meetings
- Full consideration of equality and diversity within local communities
- Learn from others – for example voluntary, community and faith groups
- Terms of reference need to clarify voting procedures for community representatives with clear legal framework and guidance
- Additional resources could be allocated to the committees from other public sector organisations and voluntary, community and faith groups

- Opportunities should be provided for smaller community group meetings to enable all parts of the community to have their say
- One community representative per ward should be a member of the committee
- Ensure effective training is provided to community representatives

4.4 Question Three:

Should community representatives / groups have voting rights as Constituency Committee Members on non-financial matters?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 48.3% | 14 |
| No | 17.2% | 5 |
| Maybe | 34.5% | 10 |

The chart shows that most members either agree or are undecided on this issue, with the comments received from the question further strengthening this view. Members stated similar views to the previous question, regarding ensuring community reps are truly representative, and other Members stating that they should be allowed to vote but careful thought needs to be given into the mechanism and protocol.

4.5 Question Four:

As well as constituency committees, what other forums should be in place for communities to discuss local issues with their Councillors?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Public Meetings | 96.6% | 28 |
| Surgeries | 93.1% | 27 |
| Email | 89.7% | 26 |
| Telephone | 86.2% | 25 |
| Online channels | 62.1% | 18 |
| Other (please state) | 17.2% | 5 |

The chart demonstrates that members agree that many of the suggested forums were beneficial to engage with communities. Comments were received stating that all possible methods for engaging with communities should be in place.

4.6 Question Five:

How should we be working with partner organisations to engage with local communities?

Members made a number of suggestions in this area, with some highlighting that in their areas this already works extremely well. The main themes from the other suggestions include:

- Scheduling regular, joint public meetings to talk with communities
- Working together with partners on specific problems and issues in local communities

- Sharing financial resources, and implementing 'match' funding to tackle joint responsibilities
- Sharing community networks and contacts to ensure the highest levels of engagement

4.7 Question Six:

£50,000 will be devolved per Committee in 2013/2014 to focus on reducing inequalities – which priorities should this budget be allocated to?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Small Grants Programme | 46.4% | 13 |
| Spent on Constituency Plan Priorities | 75.0% | 21 |
| Other (Please State) | 3.6% | 1 |

The chart shows that most Members believe funding for committees should be spent on priorities in that area. Comments in this area suggested that the funding should be flexible according to local need, as defined by the committee.

4.7 Question Seven:

This question was focussed on at the workshop session with Members but was not included in the Questionnaire.

What should the role of Councillors be on Constituency Committees?

The following themes were discussed:

- Act as community champions to promote community interests and address real problems
- Engage and facilitate local communities to inform and shape policy decisions through
- Promote and encourage local residents and communities to be involved
- Galvanise local residents and represent all issues not just marginal interests
- Foster good relationships with the voluntary, community and faith sector
- Listen to users of Council services and use these findings to inform plans and decisions
- Take decisions on financial matters
- A strong chairperson will be required and consider a rotation system for Councillors to be represented on the committees
- One Councillor from each ward should be represented on the Constituency Committee
- Clear terms of reference for the constituency committees with clear objectives and purpose
- Develop a constituency plan based on local priorities – annual general meeting to agree the plan and priorities
- Clear policies in place for consulting local residents
- Clear governance arrangements for decision making – all Councillors present for decisions

- Effective officer support will be required for the committees including audit arrangements
- Appropriate time will be required to establish the committees to ensure effective governance arrangements are in place and to develop a constituency plan
- Visit other local authorities to learn from their experiences
- Committees will require delegated powers to have real power and influence
- Chair and vice chair should be elected and accountable with job descriptions and clear expectations
- Chair should rotated with community representatives also provided the opportunity to chair meetings
- Concern that the size of the committees will be too big to reflect the differences within the area

5.0 COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

5.1 The final set of questions, and workshop at the seminar, focussed on developing and updating the Council's constitution. Members were provided a report outlining a series of proposals for changes to the Council meeting itself and the constitution.

5.2 Question One:

What time should Council meetings start? Currently 6.15pm or 7pm for AGM

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 2.00pm | 10.7% | 3 |
| 4.00pm | 3.6% | 1 |
| 5.00pm | 14.3% | 4 |
| 6.00pm | 42.9% | 12 |
| 6.15pm | 28.6% | 8 |
| Other (please state) | 0.0% | 0 |

The chart shows that most Members would prefer Council to start at 6pm, or to keep to the current start time of 6.15pm. Concern was expressed at the suggestion of earlier start times due to Councillors being in full time employment and the impact it would have on the ability for the public to attend the meetings.

5.3 Question Two:

How do you feel Council meetings could be made to be a more positive experience?

This question was included in both the questionnaire and as a key topic for discussion for the workshops at the Members seminar.

Feedback from Questionnaire:

Members made a number of comments in this area, which primarily focussed on two main areas:

- Improving Debate: Members believed that by reducing the number of notices of motion before Council, and amending the agenda to ensure only items within

the Council's sphere of influence were debated, would improve the debate and usefulness of the meetings.

- Tackling Behaviour: Members also stated that meetings could be more useful if the behaviour within the Chamber was improved and personal and political attacks on fellow Members were stopped.

Feedback from the Workshops:

The following themes were discussed:

- Provide an opportunity to debate and challenge real issues that affect Wirral residents in order that the Council considers how to inform and deliver services effectively
- Debate issues that the Council has power to decide on – facilitate relevant and meaningful discussions
- Less political point scoring and less personal and petty comments
- Councillors to sign up to a code of conduct and discipline Councillors for unacceptable behaviour
- Introduce new system for questioning Cabinet Members
- Provide effective officer support for Portfolio Holders to report progress
- Opportunity for questions to be responded to in writing where appropriate
- Introduce time limits for each report
- Provide live coverage of Council meetings to ensure that full meetings are shown in context
- Switch off mobile phones ban the use of twitter and facebook in Council meetings
- Reduce notices of motions which are currently the focus of the Council meeting with the majority not debated
- More time given to the seconder of notices of motion to debate

5.4 Question Three:

How do you feel that Council could become more relevant and better serve local residents?

This question was included in both the questionnaire and as a key topic for discussion for the workshops at the Members seminar.

Feedback from Questionnaire:

Comments in this area focussed on improving engagement with the community all round, and also providing more focussed (but less) training events. Members also mentioned frequently the need for making Council debates relevant to the Council and local area, and using the meetings to hold Cabinet Members to account. A number of Members also stated that public attendance should be encouraged more through more promotion of the meetings.

Feedback from the Workshops:

The following themes were discussed:

- Deal with relevant issues not limited to scoring political points
- Articulate clearly the case for the local councillor with a clear role description to demonstrate to local residents the scope of the work and activity of a Councillor

- Focus on Council business rather than national issues
- Enable Policy & Performance Committees and Constituency Committees to share important findings to Council and areas of good practice
- Ensure the Council is customer focussed and the public are involved in decision making
- Create the right environment for local residents to participate and ensure everyone is able to take part
- Gain the trust and confidence of local residents

5.5 Question Four

Would you find it useful if the Council introduced an annual 'Policy Council' to debate and agree Council priorities to feed into the budget process?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 76.9% | 20 |
| No | 0.0% | 0 |
| Maybe | 23.1% | 6 |

The chart shows that no Members disagree with this proposal, and comments made by Members in the questionnaire further support this view.

5.6 Question Five:

Do Council meetings effectively hold the Council leader, Cabinet Member and Chairs to account?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 3.8% | 1 |
| No | 73.1% | 19 |
| Sometimes | 23.1% | 6 |

The chart shows that most Members do not believe Council meetings hold the Leader or Chairs to account. Comments left in the questionnaire supports this view, with many commenting that the current format of the meeting does not allow for effective questioning or scrutiny of the relevant portfolio holders, Chairs or Leader.

5.7 Question Six

Should the Leader, Cabinet Members and Chairs of Policy and Performance Committees prepare and present reports to Council to facilitate questions from Elected Members?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 92.0% | 23 |
| No | 0.0% | 0 |
| Maybe | 8.0% | 2 |

The chart shows that almost all Members believe that this proposal is appropriate. Comments received alongside this question all demonstrate strong support.

5.8 Question Seven:

Should the Mayor be given the discretion to extend time for speakers? Currently this is a decision for Council.

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 22.2% | 6 |
| No | 44.4% | 12 |
| Maybe | 33.3% | 9 |

The chart demonstrates that most Councillors either disagree or are unsure that the Mayor should be given this discretion.

5.9 Question Eight

How can Council procedures be improved for debating notices of motion?

Comments in this area focussed on reducing the number, through introducing a strict limit on the number allowed per meeting. More suggestions focussed on re-ordering the agenda to introduce Notices of Motion last, and also introducing a triage system to prioritise the order in which they are debated. A number of Members also commented that Notices of Motion should only be permitted where there is a clear link to Council business.

5.10 Question Nine

Should Council normally refer notices of motion to the responsible body before debate?

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| Yes | 55.6% | 15 |
| No | 3.7% | 1 |
| Maybe | 40.7% | 11 |

The chart shows the majority of Members in agreement with this proposal, with only one disagreeing. Comments received in relation to this proposal also show support.

6.0 PLENARY AND OVERALL COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS

6.1 At the event a discussion took place regarding the merits of the Cabinet versus Committee system and a desire expressed by some to return to the Committee system. It was acknowledged that there continue to be differing views from Councillors, however the event was intended to provide all Councillors with an opportunity to engage and inform the proposed revisions to the Council's constitution and decision making arrangements.

- 6.2 There were also comments on the positive discussions that had taken place at the event across all the workshops and how this differed from the debate at Council meetings. The event was considered to be successful due to the format and venue which provided a relaxed environment and was less confrontational than standard Council meetings.
- 6.3 It was commented that behaviour and trust are important elements of full Council and it was considered that the new structures should support improvements in behaviour at Council meetings.
- 6.4 The level of support available from officers for the new arrangements was considered to be an important element in implementing the proposals, and a commitment was given to ensure that there is effective resource in place. It was commented that the new arrangements must demonstrate and give Councillors the confidence that it serves them and local residents effectively.
- 6.5 The event concluded with comments that generally focussed on the importance of Councillors being well informed and trained to run the Council and serve local residents. It was also commented that the necessary steps must be taken to address issues and deliver improvements to the Council that local people deserve.