

# Governance, Risk & Best Value Committee

2.00pm, Thursday, 9 October 2014

## Review of political management arrangements

Item number	7.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All

### Executive summary

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In October 2012, the Council introduced a range of changes to modernise and streamline decision-making processes. The aim of these arrangements was to provide a more strategic approach to decision-making, better engagement with and support of communities, stakeholders and partners in policy and service design, and more robust oversight and scrutiny in key areas of Council business such as performance and risk.

A review to refine these arrangements was completed in 2013, with agreement to consider the operation of the Policy Development and Review subcommittees after a further 12 months of operation.

This report provides information on the outcome of consultation with options and recommendations to make further improvements to the Council's political management arrangements.

### Links

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Coalition pledges

Council outcomes

[CO24 & CO25](#)

Single Outcome Agreement

## Review of political management arrangements

### Recommendations

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- 1.1 To consider the outcome of consultation on the review of political management arrangements and make any appropriate recommendations to Council.

### Background

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- 2.1 In October 2012, the Council introduced a range of changes to modernise and streamline decision-making and monitoring processes. The aim of these arrangements was to provide a more strategic approach to decision-making; enhance engagement with and support of communities, stakeholders and partners in policy and service design; and to ensure robust oversight and scrutiny in key areas of Council business such as audit, risk and finance.
- 2.2 A review to refine these arrangements was completed in 2013 and following this, the Council agreed to consider the operation of the Policy Development and Review subcommittees after a further 12 months of operation.
- 2.3 As part of the consultation process, Governance and Business Intelligence interviewed a cross section of ten elected members. Meetings were also held with directors from each service area and their senior managers. The feedback from these interviews and meetings provided insight into their experience of working within the political management arrangements, where they felt areas of good practice had been established and where any changes or improvements could be made.
- 2.4 In addition to the elected member interviews, all elected members were invited to participate in an online survey. The survey was managed by Governance and Business Intelligence and was conducted between 23 July and 8 August 2014. In total 13 elected members completed the survey, giving an overall response rate of 22%.

### Main report

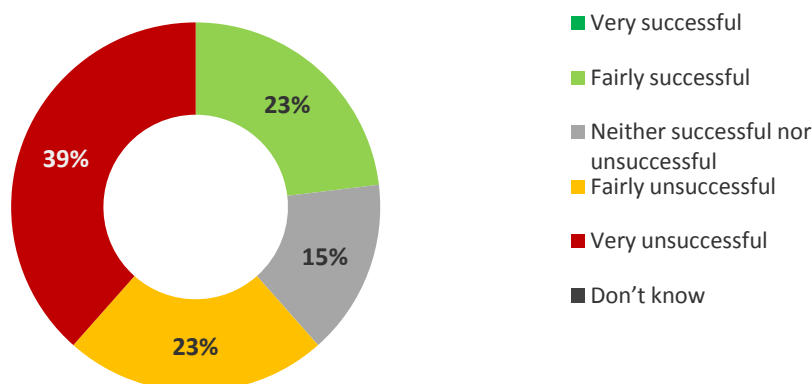
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#### Summary of Findings

- 3.1 Policy Development and Review Subcommittees
  - 3.1.1 Policy development and review (PDR) subcommittees have, in general, not been particularly successful in shaping policy. While respondents

recognised that they provide elected members with more information, and allow detailed discussion on policy matters, respondents are unconvinced that tangible actions, outcomes and policy-shaping are achieved.

***How successful or unsuccessful have the Policy Development and Review subcommittees been at focusing on shaping policy?***



3.1.2 The PDR sub-committees for Finance and Resources; Health, Social Care and Housing and Education, Children and Families were all highlighted as examples where attendees believe the process works well. For example, the Finance and Resources Budget PDR Sub-Committee has scoped, developed and agreed the Council's charging policy.

3.1.3 While some respondents and interviewees suggested that PDR sub-committees should be merged with the executive committee, there were a few other suggested ways that the PDR Sub-Committees could be improved:

- 3.1.3.1 enhance the remit of PDR sub-committees to enhance and support a more independent role in policy development, scrutiny and setting of work programmes;
- 3.1.3.2 membership of PDR sub-committees' to be limited to the vice convener and 6 elected members based on political balance;
- 3.1.3.3 re-focus the PDR sub-committees' work programme to ensure more effective development and scrutiny of policy;
- 3.1.3.4 create a rolling actions log for PDR sub-committees to track actions;
- 3.1.3.5 flexible meeting arrangements to recognise individual executive committee workload, where appropriate. For example, some PDR sub-committees may not meet every cycle dependant on business;
- 3.1.3.6 disseminate good practice from the most successful PDR sub-committees; and
- 3.1.3.7 schedule policy development and review sessions for elected members as part of the member training programme led by

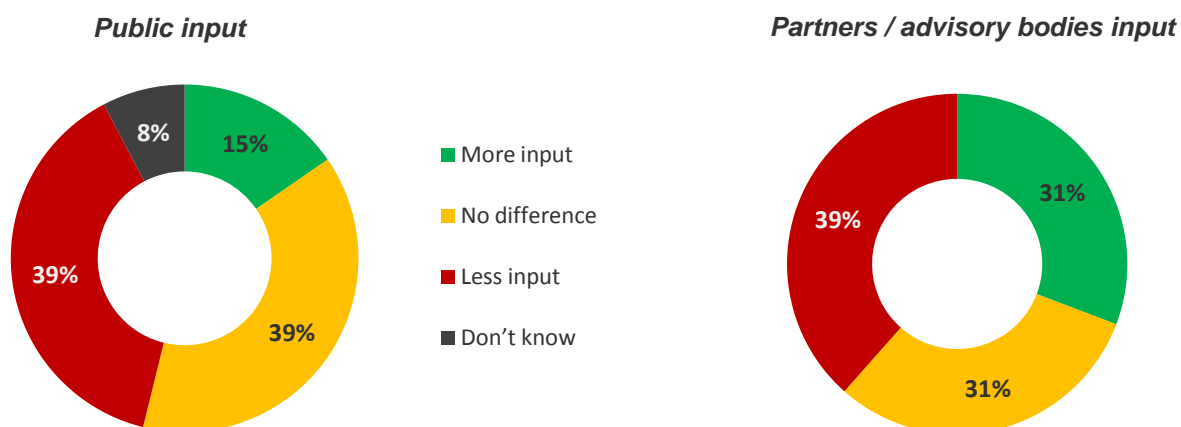
3.1.4 Based on the consultation responses the following options are proposed for consideration by Council:

3.1.4.1 Option one: retain and implement proposals to strengthen existing arrangements for PDR sub-committees, outlined in paragraph 3.1.3 above; or

3.1.4.2 Option two: return policy review and development to the executive committee remit and agenda.

### 3.2 Involving members of the public, partners and advisory bodies

3.2.1 Views on whether there is now more input from members of the public, partners and advisory bodies are mixed. In general, respondents felt that partners and advisory bodies have more of an input into the shaping of policy than members of the public.



3.2.2 It was indicated that the Council could do more to highlight positive areas of work in the City and it was suggested that both officers and elected members could continue to be more proactive in reaching out to communities and informing people about the decisions made; what information was considered before making these; and the reasons why particular decisions were taken. This will help members of the public have a better understanding of the Council's business, the overall position and how the Council works effectively to deliver services.

3.2.3 The following were suggested as ways to enhance public engagement:

- 3.2.3.1 More direct access to conveners, vice-conveners and senior management;
- 3.2.3.2 Tweeting live decisions; and
- 3.2.3.3 Improving promotion of policy consultation or management of events/issues through social media and online resources.

3.2.4 The following actions are underway to continue to open political management arrangements and council business to the public, partners and advisory bodies. This is fully aligned to the reputation work stream of the Corporate Governance service plan:

- 3.2.4.1 development and implementation of the Council's reputation tracker to augment citizen insight and engagement work;
- 3.2.4.2 launches of webcasting (16 September 2014) and e-voting (Winter 2014);
- 3.2.4.3 agenda promotion, supported by the Communications service, building on recent successes around the Scottish Independence Referendum and budget engagement; and
- 3.2.4.4 launch of the Council's consultation hub and refreshed web pages to support public engagement.

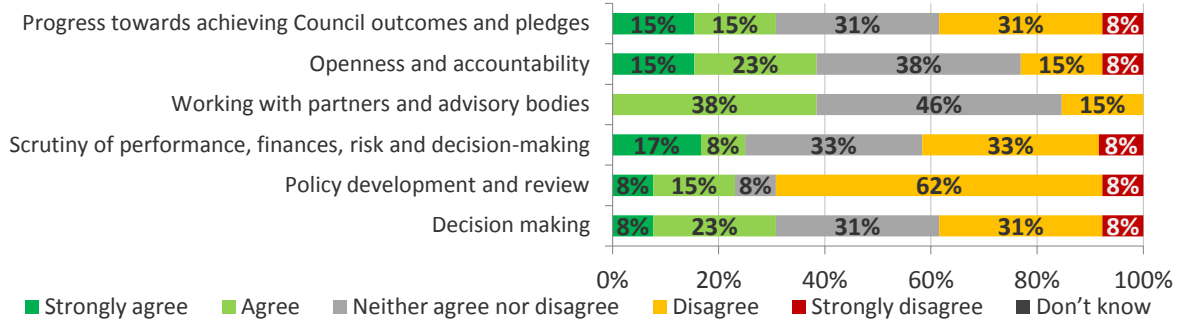
3.2.5 The findings also reflected that the criteria for the Petitions Committee could be made less restrictive to encourage petitions from a wider range of participants. In light of the significant increase in engagement during the recent independence referendum which included voters aged 16 and 17; it is proposed that ways to extend the criteria to enable young persons to submit petitions be explored, in particular through local schools. This will build on the increase in political engagement and interest in shaping decision making.

### 3.3 **Openness and Accountability**

3.3.1 Overall the view is that executive committees have helped improve scrutiny by involving more elected members before decisions are taken and that the current structure is a "healthy one."

3.3.2 The tracking of actions has improved transparency as it means that fewer items fall off agendas or get lost amongst the detail and it was felt that there is now more information available to elected members to help inform decisions.

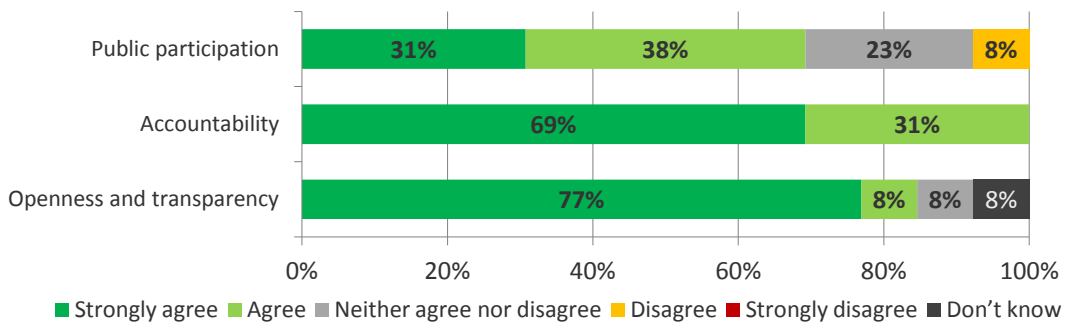
***The committee structure has helped improve...***



**3.4 Webcasting**

3.4.1 The introduction of webcasting has also been extremely popular, with respondents welcoming it and recognising its role in creating a more open Council, which can be held accountable for decisions made.

***The introduction of webcasting Council meetings has improved...***



3.4.2 The expansion of Webcasting to a wider range of committees held in the Dean of Guild Court Room has now taken place. This further improves accessibility of Council business as the public can watch key decisions that affect them such as changes to sporting facilities, health initiatives and issues affecting parks and libraries.

3.4.3 The Communities and Neighbourhoods Committee and the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee have already been webcast and this will be followed by the Transport and Environment Committee in late October and the remaining executive committees and Planning Committee throughout the winter period.

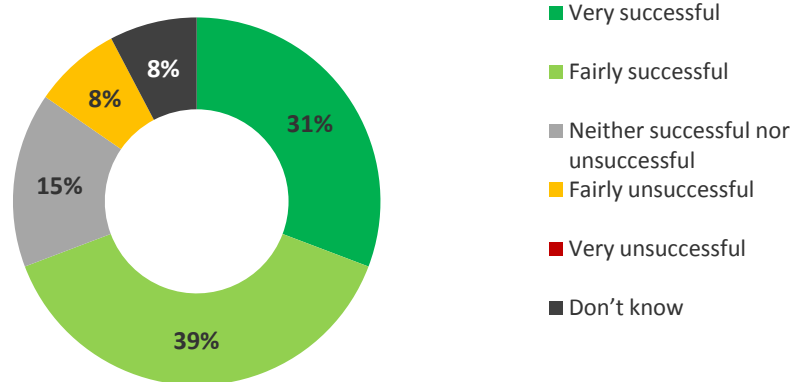
**3.5 E-voting**

3.5.1 The introduction of e-voting is welcomed by most respondents and interviewees as they believe it will be good for public scrutiny, and help keep track of decisions made by elected members.

### 3.6 Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

3.6.1 Views on the role of Governance, Risk and Best Value (GRBV) at scrutinising Council business were generally positive, with respondents recognising its contribution to scrutiny and enhancing the Council's openness and transparency.

*How successful or unsuccessful has the introduction of GRBV been at enhancing scrutiny?*

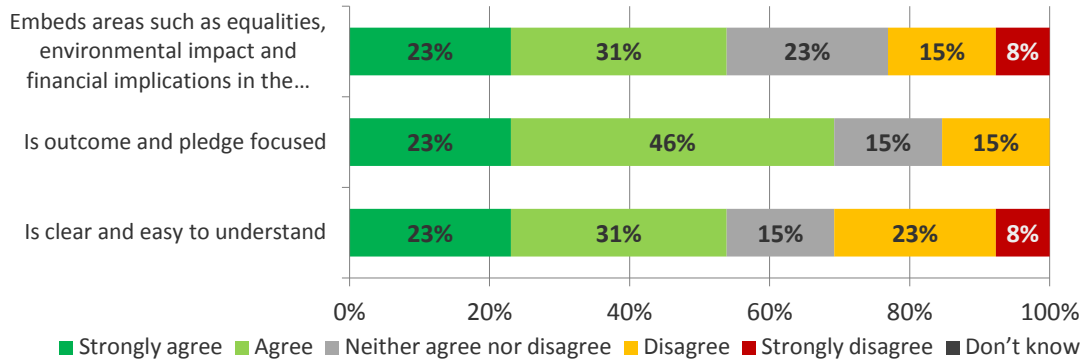


3.6.2 Overall, the feedback from interviews and the online survey regarding the role of GRBV at scrutinising Council business is positive. It is recognised that the Committee plays an important role in terms of scrutiny and that elected members are challenging but also fair when asking questions. It is recognised that committees are referring items to GRBV to ensure decisions are scrutinised in detail and the Committee overall has helped to instil confidence in the decision-making process as high profile topics are now subject to greater visibility and public exposure.

### 3.7 Business Processes

3.7.1 The rolling actions log and committee decisions weekly bulletin were both considered to be worthwhile additions to the executive committees, and are useful to help keep track of discussions, decisions and actions taken.

***The format and style of committee reports...***



3.7.2 The consultation highlighted a requirement to improve the information provided to elected members to support open and effective decision making. More guidance and training is required to help officers write succinct and informative reports that provide all key, relevant information. Guidance on what should be included in sections such as sustainability, risk, equalities and finance required enhancement.

3.7.3 An impact assessment online tool and training module have been developed to significantly strengthen existing guidance and training for officers to support effective decision making. This incorporates and builds on the checklists recently published by Audit Scotland and covers the provision of appropriate information.

3.7.4 The impact assessment is a web based tool, accessible to all staff on the Orb and designed to ensure a holistic approach to decision-making with clear information, step-by-step guidance and immediate feedback to the user to ensure all key elements of the report are completed appropriately. This will ensure mandatory areas of each report, particularly financial, service and performance impacts along with risk, compliance and governance are articulated clearly and fully. The tool also provides guidance to ensure compliance with important statutory requirements around equalities and sustainability.

3.7.5 The web tool monitors users and provides a unique reference for each report to ensure officers can provide confirmation to the appropriate director that an impact assessment for all key areas has been undertaken and included within the report. The quality of information will be monitored by Governance and Business Intelligence on an ongoing basis and adjustments will be made to the tool and training if areas of concern are highlighted.

3.7.6 Training is also being provided to senior officers throughout October and November 2014, in partnership with Organisational Development, to help



develop further skills in the presentation of information at committee. This will help ensure officers can provide effective information and answers to help committee make informed decisions.

## **Measures of success**

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- 4.1 To operate an efficient streamlined system to effectively support the decision making bodies of the Council.

## **Financial impact**

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- 5.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report. The impact assessment web tool has been developed in-house between Governance, Business Intelligence and ICT Solutions, within existing resources.

## **Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact**

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- 6.1 An effective political management system as the main decision making apparatus of the Council is a key component of its overall governance. A review of the system ensures appropriate scrutiny with an opportunity to improve and amend where necessary.

## **Equalities impact**

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- 7.1 There are no direct equalities impacts as a result of this report.

## **Sustainability impact**

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- 8.1 There is no direct sustainability impact as a result of this report.

## **Consultation and engagement**

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- 9.1 Consultation was undertaken by a series of interviews with elected members and senior officers. There was also an online survey for elected members.

## **Background reading/external references**

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[The City of Edinburgh Council 24 October 2013 - Minute](#)

[Review of political management arrangements – The City of Edinburgh Council 24 October 2013](#)

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## **Links**

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### **Coalition pledges**

#### **Council outcomes**

CO24 - The Council communicates effectively internally and externally and has an excellent reputation for customer care.

CO25 - The Council has efficient and effective services that deliver on objectives.

#### **Single Outcome Agreement Appendices**