

The Review of the Council's Governance System and Alternative Options

Report on Survey Findings

October 2013
Governance Service
Assurance Group

Section 1

Change of Governance System Consultation

Background

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM - SURVEY FINDINGS

Introduction

Barnet are currently operating an Executive system of governance. Under this system, the majority of decisions in the council are taken by the single-party Executive (or Cabinet) either in the Cabinet meeting or by individual Cabinet Members. The Executive are held to account for their policies and decisions by cross-party Overview & Scrutiny Committees. This system was imposed on the vast majority of councils with the introduction of the Local Government Act 2000.

New legislation (The Localism Act 2011) means local authorities can now choose which governance system they operate from the following options:

- a) Executive Arrangements (such as an elected mayor and Cabinet or a Leader and Cabinet);
- b) A Committee System; or
- c) Alternative Arrangements (as prescribed by the Secretary of State)

In January 2013, the council passed a resolution to call upon the Constitution, Ethics and Probity Committee to devise alterations to the Constitution of the Council and, along with officers, to bring forward proposals to enable early approval of such change to commence operationally from the Council's Annual meeting in June 2014.

A Committee System would result in the abolition of the Executive (Cabinet) and Overview & Scrutiny Committees. Decisions would instead be taken in thematic cross-party politically proportioned committees.

In designing the Committee System, the council are undertaking a two phase consultation process to consider feedback from residents, community and voluntary groups, businesses, other organisations in the borough and those that the council works in partnership with.

This report sets out the detailed findings of the phase I of the consultation process. A further phase of consultation will take place in October and November 2013.

Section 2

Change of Governance System Consultation

Consultation Process and Summary of Key Findings

1. Summary of approach to the consultation

The Change of Governance System consultation consists of two phases:

- Phase I – survey to ascertain views from residents, community and voluntary groups, businesses, other organisations in the borough and those that the council works in partnership with on their experiences of the current governance system and the principles behind new governance arrangements. To ensure that views collated in the phase I consultation were representative of Barnet's population, the Citizen's Panel were also sent the survey.
- Phase II – two events will take place as follows:
 - Elected Member Consultation Meeting – 28 October 2013; and
 - Public Consultation Meeting – 20 November 2013

The purpose of these events is to present findings from the phase I consultation and to test the proposed structure option with the public and elected Members.

Below is a summary of the key findings from phase I of the consultation process. The results will be reported to an elected Member Working Group (who are developing detailed committee structure options) and to the Constitution, Ethics and Probity Committee (who are responsible for agreeing the preferred committee structure option and recommending this to Full Council for adoption).

A detailed Consultation Findings report will be produced in November 2013 which will include the collated findings from phase I and phase II of the consultation process. The Consultation Findings report will be published on the 'engage space' section of the Council website and in the papers for the Constitution Ethics and Probity Committee on 19 December 2013.

2. Overall Summary of Key Findings

2.1 Change of Governance System Consultation Findings

The Change of Governance System phase I consultation comprised an online and paper copy survey. Residents views were sought on their experience of participating in the democratic process, barriers to participation, satisfaction with current democratic arrangements, contact with ward councillors, understanding of the current governance system, views on governance system design principles and practical issues (as identified in the Consultation Document).

2.2 Summary of key findings –Survey

- The survey took place between 23 August and 22 September 2013. In total 71 surveys were completed. **Due to the small sample size, views expressed should be treated with caution in the context of this survey.**
- In addition to the Survey, members of the Citizens' Panel were sent a copy of the Survey and Consultation Document. This took place between 30 August and 30

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM - SURVEY FINDINGS

September 2013 to create the control sample. In total 504 returns were received by the Citizens' Panel.

- Data from the Survey and data from the Citizens' Panel will be presented separately in section 3 (Detailed Findings)
- **Headline findings on Participation**
- *The majority of both samples had not recently attended a Council meeting. In the case of the Citizens Panel not knowing where and when they were held was a major barrier. Barnet Online was the most common form of communication used by both samples.*
- **Headline findings on Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction**
- *The Citizens Panel control sample showed higher satisfaction levels than the Survey sample. The former were most concerned about action not being taken as a result of their participation; the latter were more concerned about the perceived 'political' elements of the system.*
- **Headline findings on Key Issues**
- *Across both samples, the most common issues that people expected to see determined through a new system were finance and budgeting, planning, education, safety, housing and environmental issues*
- **Headline findings on Understanding the Current System**
- *In relation to understanding the existing governance arrangements, 32% of the Citizens Panel respondents and 81% of the Survey respondents understood the current arrangements fully or partly. 80% of survey respondents and 32% of Citizens Panel replies knew who their Ward members were. Email was the most popular method of communication followed by face to face contact.*
- *When questioned what would make the decision making process easier to understand, Survey respondents suggested that the biggest areas that needed addressing were to make processes clearer to the public and removing barriers to participation. The Citizen Panel respondents had a strong emphasis on better communication to inform and explain to residents.*
- **Headline findings on Principles**
- *All respondents ranked the principles highly, with transparency and accountability featuring as the most important principles.*
- **Headline findings on Practical Issues**
- *The majority of respondents did not have comments to make on the practical issues. For Survey respondents that did comment, their main themes were facilitating public participation / engagement and retaining elements of scrutiny For Citizens Panel respondents, the top practical issues were engaging with the electorate and retaining some elements of scrutiny.*

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that findings from the phase 1 consultation process be reported to the Elected Member Working Group and Constitution, Ethics and Probity Committee and that they use the data to inform the development of detailed structure proposals to be put forward in phase 2 of the consultation.

Section 3

Change of Governance System Consultation

Detailed Findings

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM - SURVEY FINDINGS

1.1. CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – ONLINE AND PAPER SURVEY DETAILED FINDINGS

1.1.1 Method

In summary, the survey was administered as follows:

- The consultation was published on the council's internet under "engage space" with a link to a Consultation Document which outlined the background to the proposed change in governance system, the design principles to guide the new system and proposed structure features (practical issues)
- Respondents views were fed back via a link to an online survey incorporated on the engage space
- Paper copies of survey were circulated in:
 - Council offices at North London Business Park, Barnet House, Burnt Oak, Hendon Town Hall; and at the Arts Depot; and
 - Barnet libraries (including community libraries)
- The survey was promoted via the council's social media channels and was supported by a press release to the local media, who gave the project press coverage. In addition, the survey was circulated to local groups (via CommUNITY Barnet) and to key partners (Barnet Clinical Commissioning Group, Barnet and Southgate College, Middlesex University, Brent Cross Shopping Centre, Barnet Group, Metropolitan Police Barnet, Capita and Job Centre Plus)
- The survey was also sent to the Citizens' Panel¹ to create a control sample. To ensure impartiality, the Citizens' Panel data was collated and analysed by Quality Fieldwork, an independent market research company.

1.1.2 Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed to help understand how frequently residents attend council meetings, barriers to attendance, how people find out about council meetings, what type of meetings are attended, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with meeting(s) attended, what council issues people are most interested in, engagement with Ward Councillors, views on the current governance arrangements, suggestions to improve the new governance system, views on the principles behind the new governance system and opinions on the practical issues identified in the Consultation Document.

In order to conduct in-depth segmentation analysis on the results, respondents were also asked:

- to give reasons why they were dissatisfied with opportunities for public participation
- what issues they were interested in or they considered would be most important to address through a dedicated committee
- for views on what would make a new system easier to understand

¹ The core panel is made up of 1,600 Barnet residents, selected to be representative of the adult population of the borough in terms of ward, age, gender, ethnicity, housing tenure, faith and disability

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- for views on how the new system could be made more relevant to residents
- to provide comments on the practical considerations behind a change of governance system
- questions about their demographic profile²

1.1.3 Response to the survey

In total 71 surveys were completed by members of the public and 504 were completed by the Citizens' Panel.

1.1.4 Calculating and reporting on results

The results are based on "valid responses" only (i.e. all those providing an answer which may or may not be the same as the total sample) unless otherwise specified. The base size may therefore vary from question to question depending on the extent of non-response.

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM SURVEY – DETAILED FINDINGS

1.1.5 Overview of views on participation

Attendance

Respondents were asked whether they had attended any council committee meetings in the last 12 months.

The majority of those who responded to the online and paper based survey (58.8% / 40 out of 68) had not attended any meetings in the last 12 months.

The vast majority of those who responded to the Citizens Panel survey (92% / 464 out of 504) had not attended any meetings in the last 12 months.

Reasons for not attending meetings

Respondents who had not attended any meetings were provided with a list of reasons for not attending and were asked indicate their reasons for not attending. The results are as follows:

Online and paper based survey:

1. Not interested (36% / 16 out of 44)
2. Issues considered not relevant to me (36% / 16 out of 44)
3. Inconvenient time (36% / 16 out of 44)
4. Lack of time (34% / 15 out of 44 responses)
5. Inconvenient location (34% / 15 out of 44 responses)

² In-line with the council's equality policy and the 2010 Equalities Act

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18% (16 out of 44) of respondents to this question cited 'other' as the most important reason for not attending a meeting. 12 of these respondents provided, if this option was selected, they were given an opportunity to state why they had not attended. The main reason cited (by 25% of respondents to this question) was that there would be no changes as a result of them attending.

Citizens Panel:

1. Did not know where the meetings were held (61% / 283 out of 464)
2. Lack of time (48% / 223 out of 464)
3. Inconvenient time (34% / 158 out of 464)
4. Inconvenient location (21% / 97 out of 464 responses)
5. Issues considered not relevant to me (19% / 88 out of 464 responses)
6. Not interested (17% / 79 out of 464 responses)
7. Have attended before but did not find them useful (10% / 46 out of 464 responses)

7% (16 out of 464) of respondents to this question cited other reasons for not attending a meeting, including 'too infirm/ ill health' (3.4%), 'do not know what items were on the agenda/do not know if relevant' (1.9%) and 'do not know if allowed/needed an invitation' (1.7%).

How those who attended found out about meetings

Respondents that had attended council committee meetings in the last 12 months were asked how they normally found out about council meetings. Detailed results are as follows.

Online and paper based survey:

The 41.2% (28 out of 68) of online and paper based survey respondents who attended meetings in the last 12 months were asked how they normally found out about council meetings. The top three results are detailed below:

1. Barnet Online (33% / 9 out of 27)
2. Other (30% / 8 out of 27) – see detailed responses below
3. Word of Mouth (15% / 4 out of 27)

A summary of the other ways in which respondents found out about council meetings are detailed below:

- Barnet Alliance for Public Services
- Local Community Organisations
- Bloggers / Citizen Journalists

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM - SURVEY FINDINGS

Citizens Panel:

8% / 40 out of 504 Citizens Panel respondents indicated they attended council committee meetings in the last 12 months. 33 of those gave details of how they normally found out about council meetings, as follows:

1. Barnet Online (23% / 8 out of 33)
2. Barnet Officer (14% / 5 out of 33)
3. From a Barnet publication (14% / 5 out of 33)
4. Leaflet (12% / 4 out of 33)
5. Letter from the Council (7% / 2 out of 33)
6. Word of mouth (7% / 2 out of 33)
7. Councillor (7% / 2 out of 33)
8. Posters (5% / 2 out of 33)
9. Library (4% / 2 out of 33)
10. Council Minutes (2% / 1 out of 33)

Types of meetings attended most often

Respondents were asked how often they had attended different types of council meetings in the last 12 months.

25 (or 18%) of online and paper based survey respondents answered this question.

The four types of meetings most frequently attended by respondents were (in rank order):

1. Full Council (64% / 16 out of 25);
2. Residents Forums / Area Environment Sub-Committees (60% / 15 out of 25);
3. Overview & Scrutiny (48% / 12 out of 25); and
4. Cabinet / Cabinet Resources Committee (40% / 10 out of 25)

Of the 40 (8% of total Citizens Panel respondents) who indicated they had previously attended a council meeting, 33 answered this question. The meetings most frequently attended were:

1. Residents Forums / Area Environment Sub-Committees (50% / 17 out of 33)
2. Full Council (17% / 5 out of 33);
3. Planning or Licensing (14% / 4 out of 33)
4. Overview & Scrutiny (11% / 3 out of 33);
5. Constitution Ethics and Probity (6% / 2 out of 33)
6. General Functions/ Remuneration Committee (5% / 2 out of 33)

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The results were broadly similar for both survey respondents and Citizens Panel respondents.

Satisfaction levels with the meeting attended most recently

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the meeting that they attended most recently. The number of respondents who had recently attended a meeting (in the last 12 months) was not high; 41% of survey respondents, and only 8% of Citizens Panel respondents.

Online and paper based survey respondents:

24 respondents answered this question. Of those respondents, 70.8% (17) were dissatisfied; 12.5% (3) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; and 16.6% (4) were satisfied.

For respondents who had stated that they were dissatisfied, they were requested to provide detailed reasons which are summarised below:

1. Politics / Members – political point scoring, time wasting on irrelevant issues, whipping, poor chairmanship, grand standing, holding residents with contempt, ineffective scrutiny (53% / 9 out of 17)
2. Questions – cabinet members, committee chairmen or officers not responding to questions from the public or scrutiny members (29% / 5 out of 17)
3. Other – restricting issues to be discussed at residents forums, scrutiny committees not having any powers (17% / 3 out of 17)

Citizens Panel responses:

32 (or 6%) of respondents answered this question. Of those respondents 57% were fairly satisfied; 15% were very dissatisfied; 14% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 8% were fairly dissatisfied and 7% were very satisfied.

For respondents who had stated that they were dissatisfied, they were requested to provide detailed reasons which are summarised below:

1. No changes as a result/ concerns and comments were ignored (43% / 7 out of 15)
2. Don't know/ can't say (31% / 6 out of 15)
3. It was a disgrace/ farcical (13% 2 out of 15)
4. Chairperson incompetent (9% 1 out of 15)
5. Spent too long on minor points/ overly bureaucratic (9% 1 out of 15)
6. Substandard venue/ poor acoustics (8% 1 out of 15)
7. Voting was based on parties not representing constituents (5% 1 out of 15)

Issues of the most interest

Respondents were asked what council issues they were most interested in.

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Online and paper based survey respondents:

44 survey respondents (62% of total) answered this question. Responses have been themed and ranked and the findings are set out below:

1. Education / Schools
2. Environment
3. Housing
4. Social Services

Citizens Panel respondents:

All 504 of Citizen Panel respondents answered this question. A wide range of responses were received. The most popular issues are set out below:

1. Level of Council Tax / Finance / Financial Planning / Council Expenditure / Budget (19%)
2. Education/ schools (18%)
3. Planning (16%)
4. Parking by shops/ residents permits (15%)
5. Housing (14%)
6. Community Safety (Crime/ vandalism/ anti-social behaviour) (14%)
7. Road maintenance (13%)
8. Waste disposal/refuse collection (10%)
9. Care of environment / conservation (9%)
10. Hospitals/ health (9%)
11. Street cleaning/ litter (8%)

Other popular reasons included, pavement maintenance, care for the elderly, parks, policing, support of the high street and traffic.

1.1.6 Overview of views on Ward Councillors

Survey and Citizens Panel respondents were questioned whether they were aware of who their Ward Councillors were.

Online and paper based survey respondents:

54 respondents (76% of the total respondents) answered this question. Of these, 79.6% were aware of who their ward councillor was and 20.4% were not. Of those that were aware, they were questioned how frequently they had contacted their Ward Councillor:

- 31.1% had never contacted them;
- 13.3% had contacted them once;
- 15.6% had contacted them two times;
- 11.1% had contacted them three times; and
- 28.9% had contacted them more than four times.

In relation to the communication method, 50% used e-mail, 30% face to face contact, 10% telephone and 6.7% at a ward surgery.

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Citizens Panel respondents:

503 respondents (all but one) answered this question. 68% were not aware of who their ward councillor was, and 32% were aware. Of those that were aware, they were questioned how frequently they had contacted their Ward Councillor:

- 55% had never contacted them;
- 22% had contacted them once;
- 8% had contacted them two times;
- 7% had contacted them over five times;
- 5% had contacted them three times; and
- 3% had contacted them four times.

In relation to the communication method, 39.2% used e-mail, 22.8% face to face contact, 16.6% telephone, 11.9% letter and 9.5% at a ward surgery

1.1.7 Overview of views on current governance system

Respondents were asked about their understanding of the existing governance arrangements. There was a significant difference in responses, with a majority of survey respondents indicating a reasonably good level of understanding, and a majority of Citizens Panel respondents indicating a low level of understanding.

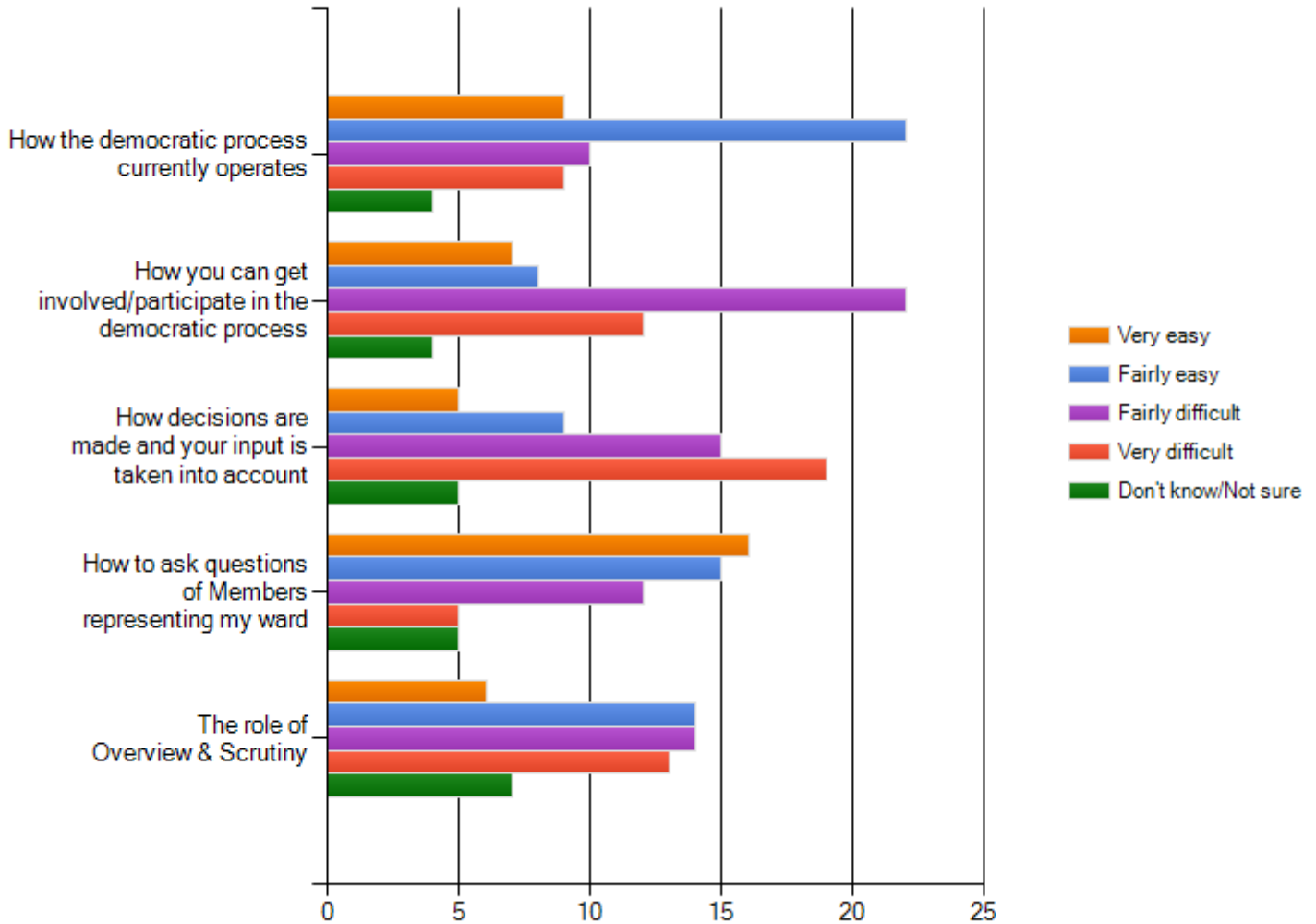
- 54 online and paper based survey respondents (76%) answered this question. Of those, 46.3% stated that they understood the current governance arrangements fully, 35.2% understood them partly and 18.5% were not aware of the current arrangements.
- 497 Citizens Panel respondents (99%) answered this question. Of those, 7% stated that they understood the current governance arrangements fully, 25% understood them partly and 68% were not aware of the current arrangements.

Respondents were asked how easy they found it to understand the current governance system. **Charts 1 and 2** below details responses to these questions:

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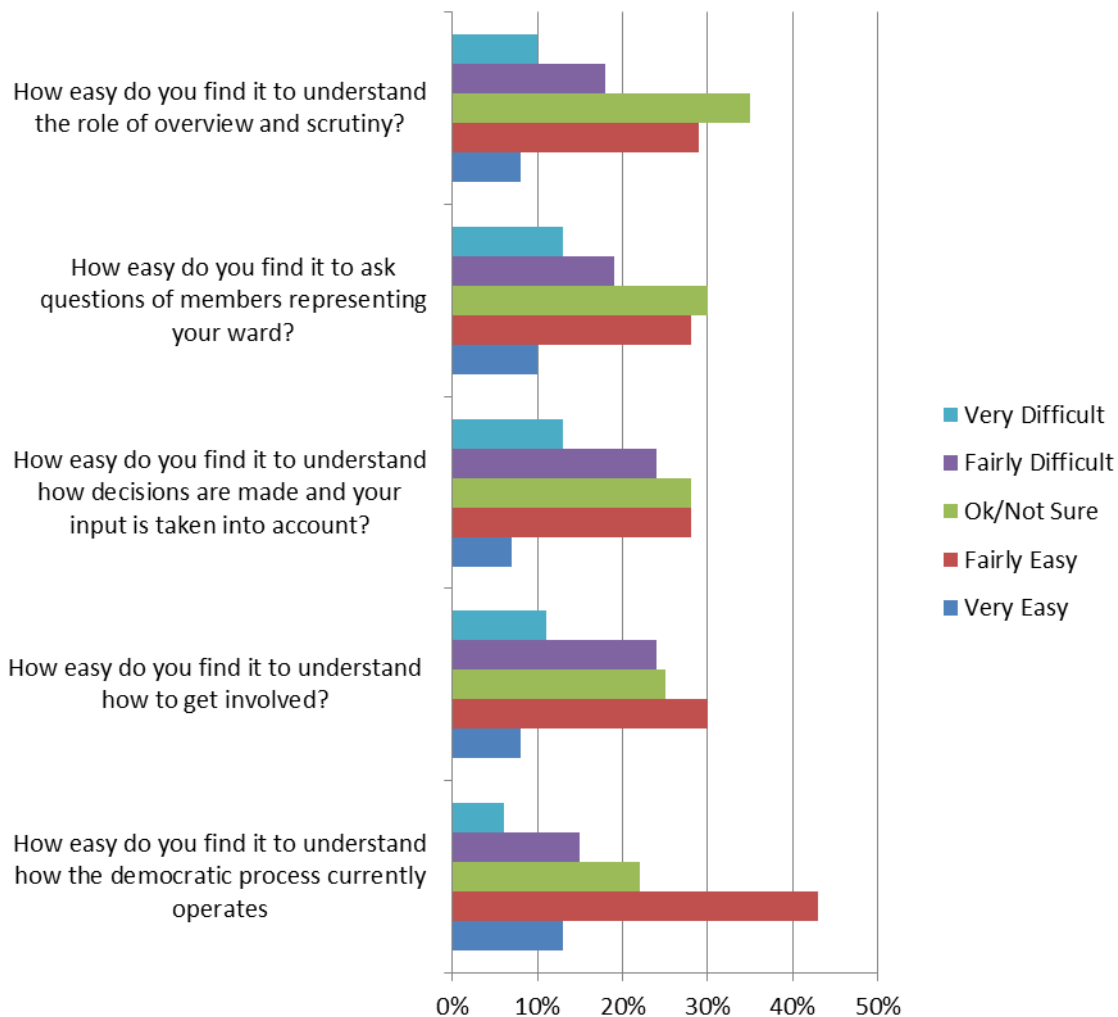
Chart 1 – Survey Respondents

Please indicate how easy you find it to understand the following elements? (Please choose one option only for each statement)



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Chart 2 – Citizens Panel Respondents



What would help make a decision making process easier to understand?

Respondents were asked to identify what would assist them to better understand a new decision making process.

31 survey respondents (44%) answered this question. Themes emerging (ranked) are detailed below:

1. Clearer Process – including: increasing opportunities for resident involvement; development of an easy to understand structure; improve openness and transparency; and increasing Ward Councillor involvement in decision making (32% or 10 out of 31 respondents)
2. Remove Barriers to Public Participation – including: complex rules; frequent changes to the rules; questions being ruled out for not addressing the chairman; holding meaningful consultations; publicising opportunities to participate; and having less restrictive rules (25% or 8 out of 31)
3. Committee System – including taking decisions through committees where public views can be heard; giving committees and council departments clear names so the public understand their responsibilities/functions; having a clear structure diagram available on the website and on paper, with guidance on

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participation; a committee system would allow open consideration of policy involving Councillors of opposition party(s); executive model marginalises backbench members; overview and scrutiny is under resourced and limited in the amount of in-depth scrutiny it can undertake (19% or 6 out of 31)

4. Role of Councillors – including: clarity around which councillors are responsible in a committee system; broader councillor representation on committees; more inclusive decision making in a committee system (16% or 5 out of 31)
5. Plain English / Less Jargon – including: council documents and communications in plain, easy to understand language, open door policy (9% or 3 out of 31)
6. Questions - including: public participation rules frequently changing, questions to committee not being answered directly (9% or 3 out of 31)
7. Easy to Understand – including: improve explanations in public documents; better publicity through Barnet First, local venues, press, libraries, noticeboards etc. (6% or 2 out of 31)

All 504 Citizens Panel respondents answered this question. A majority (55%) cited 'don't know/ can't say in their response. A wide variety of other suggestions were given, which have been grouped into three themes as set out below:

1. Better communication – including: keeping residents informed, providing more information about the process and how to get involved, shorter and less technical explanations, illustrate with case studies, provide regular newsletters and online communications/ a web forum/ Q&A facility (54.6% / 275 out of 504)
2. Information about how the process works and improve transparency – including: who is accountable for what, how decisions are challenged and audited and how overview and scrutiny works, organisational chart showing layers of relationships, hold workshops and Q&A sessions (13.3% / 67 out of 504)
3. Make it easier to know who my member is – including: area and ward specific meetings around the borough, liaison direct with the member/face to face discussion, have a ward councillor who is approachable and contactable (11.4% 57 out of 504)

1.1.8 Overview of views on future governance arrangements

The Consultation Document set out the key design principles behind the new governance arrangements. Respondents were asked for their views on the guiding principles (i.e. how important or unimportant they felt the principles behind the new system were). Respondents of both the survey and the Citizens Panel were highly supportive of all of the principles as set out below. Each of them were viewed as very or fairly important by at least 73% of respondents.

Principle 1 – Transparency

Continuing to have an open and transparent decision making process:

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Continuing to make meeting papers and background material available in a way that is useful and understandable:

Principle 2 – Accountability

Ensuring that accountability is recognised as central to our approach to improvement and performance management:

Responding constructively when the council receives suggestions for change:

Ensuring that a system exists to review and keep up to date the Constitution and a process for problem solving around community issues:

Principle 3 – Inclusivity and Engagement

Continuing to engage in a meaningful discussion with service users and other stakeholders about plans, policies and decisions:

Being clear about how service users and other stakeholders can influence plans, policies and decisions in advance, through public participation and engagement:

Principle 4 – Durability and Flexibility

Ensuring that any system of governance is designed so as to aid timely decision making, being flexible to the needs of public and private sector partnership working:

Ensuring the governance system can endure any changes as government policy evolves:

Ensuring any change in the system of governance is cost efficient:

Respondents were asked if the Council should consider any other principles to guide the design of the scheme:

- Of the survey respondents 40.8% (20) said yes; 16.3% (8) said no; and 42.9% (21) said don't know/not sure. Of those that responded yes, they were asked to provide suggestions for other principles. Broad themes emerging (in rank order) are detailed below:
 1. Openness / Transparency / Independence / Scrutiny
 2. Public – information, inclusive decision-making, taking into account views
 3. Culture – changing the system will not necessarily result in more inclusive decision making
- Of the Citizens Panel respondents 48% said not sure, 33% said no, and 18% said yes. Of those that said yes (104 respondents), they were asked to provide suggestions for other principles. While 16% indicated 'don't know/ can't say', others provided suggestions with the top broad themes listed below:
 1. Engage and consult with the public and listen to the electorate (18% / 19 out of 104)
 2. Honest representation and integrity (14% / 15 out of 104)

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3. Accessibility for all (8% / 8 out of 104)
4. Retain overview and Scrutiny / Review (8% 8 out of 104)
5. Include minority views (6% / 7 out of 104)
6. Allow enough time for consultation / Be practical but timely (6% 7 out of 104)

1.1.9 Overview of views on practical issues

The Consultation Document outlined a number of practical issues that needed to be addressed in designing the new structure and sought views on the following:

- Role of the Full Council
- Committees Terms of Reference
- Committee Membership
- Size of Committees
- Role of Chairmen
- Overview & Scrutiny
- Call-in Arrangements
- Task and Finish Groups
- Delegations and Urgency Procedures

Respondents were asked if they had any views on the practical issues.

Online and paper based survey responses:

60.5% (26) survey responses stated no, with 36.5% (17) stating yes. Those that had answered yes were asked to provide comments or suggestions on the practical issues. Responses are have been themed and are summarised below:

Public Participation – council should take a balanced view – consultations may be dominated by a few; make efforts to engage all residents; develop a resident engagement strategy (4)

Scrutiny – some elements of scrutiny should be retained (in-depth review) which could be achieved by sub-committees of the main committee; task and finish groups should focus on issues of public concern; retain call-in arrangements (4)

Culture – should focus on local issues at full council; senior officers are never held to account; performance related pay for councillors (3)

Delegations – retain elements of urgent provisions providing those decisions are subject to scrutiny/review by a committee (2)

Private Companies – services being provided by private companies limits the role of the council (2)

System – committees will be politically balanced meaning the majority party can force decisions through; old style committee system is outdated (2)

Rationale – provide the rationale behind the change in governance system (1)

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Citizens Panel:

Of the 90% (456) Citizens Panel responses, 73% stated 'don't know/can't say' to the question of whether they had any views on the practical issues. 27% provided a variety of comments and suggestions, the higher rated of which are summarised below:

Listen to the electorate/truly engage (4.5% / 23/504)

Overview and Scrutiny Panel essential / Useful check (4.3% / 23/504)

Ensure it is cost effective (3.6% 19/504)

Fair and efficient looking system / going in right direction (3.2% 17/504)

Decision making must be timely/ not bogged down by bureaucracy / politics (3.1% 17/504)

An open committee system would include residents as well as councillors / actively engage the community (2.8% 14/504)

Accountability/ make the members liable for decisions (2.6% 13/504)

Transparency/ openness (2.4% 12/504)

Co-Opt experts in the field / consult with relevant parties/ specialist committees (2.1% 11/504)

Work must be policed/ there must be disclosure (2% 11/504)

Declare member interests/ no bias/ conflicts (1.7% 9/504)

Ensure committees are politically representative/cross party (1.4% 7/504)