

**The Review of the Council's
Governance System and
Alternative Options
Consultation Findings Report**

**December 2013
Governance Service
Assurance Group**

Section 1

Change of Governance System Consultation

Background

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – CONSULTATION FINDINGS REPORT

Introduction

Barnet is 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 politically proportioned 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 within the borough and those that the council works in partnership with.

This report sets out the detailed findings from Phase I and Phase II of the consultation process.

Section 2

Change of Governance System Consultation

Consultation Process and Summary of Key Findings

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – CONSULTATION FINDINGS REPORT

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 Citizens Panel were also sent the survey.
- Phase II – two events took place as follows:
 - Elected Member Consultation Meeting – 28 October 2013; and
 - Public Consultation Meeting – 20 November 2013

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

Key findings from phase I of the consultation process were reported to the Constitution, Ethics and Probity Committee on 21 October 2013 details of which can be accessed via the following link:

<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=589&MId=7355&Ver=4>

Below is a summary of the key findings from phase I and phase II of the consultation process. The results will be reported 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.

This 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).

The Change of Governance System Phase II consultation comprised an Elected Member Consultation Meeting on 28 October 2013 and Public Consultation Meeting on

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20 November 2013. These meetings sought views on the committee structures, terms of reference, other practical issues and public participation / engagement.

This report details the collated findings from both phases of the consultation process.

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 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 Citizens' 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.

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➤ **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.

2.3 Summary of key findings – Elected Member Consultation Meeting

➤ **General Comments**

Members considered that the cycle of meetings, frequency and work programming needed to be carefully considered

➤ **Committee Structure and Terms of Reference**

Members requested that a number of practical issues relating to the full Council and the terms of reference and functions of thematic committees be considered in detail.

2.4 Summary of key findings – Public Consultation Meeting

➤ **Committee Functions / Operation**

Participants questioned how the committees would inter-relate with one another and what the composition of committees would be

➤ **Rationale**

Participants considered that the rationale behind the change in governance system should be articulated, including via promotional material

➤ **Communications**

Suggestions were made about the promotion of council meetings such as e-mail notifications and press advertisements.

➤ **Accessibility**

Participants made recommendations about the presentation of information considered by council committees and wanted to see an increased use of Plain English

➤ **Engagement**

Residents wanted to be assured that their participation in meetings and consultation made any difference to the decisions taken.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that Constitution, Ethics and Probity Committee consider the information set out in this Consultation Findings Report to inform the structure and operation of the new committee system form of governance.

Section 3

Change of Governance System Consultation

Detailed Findings

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – CONSULTATION FINDINGS REPORT

1.1. CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – SURVEY – DETAILED FINDINGS

1.1.1 Method

In summary, the survey was administered as follows:

- The consultation was published on the consultation space on the council's website 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;

¹ The core panel is made up of 1,704 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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- 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
- 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.

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.

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

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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)

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:

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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

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. Resident's 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)

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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. Resident's 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)

The results were broadly similar for both survey respondents and Citizen's 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, grandstanding, treating 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 resident's 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)

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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.

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 issues 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:

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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.

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.

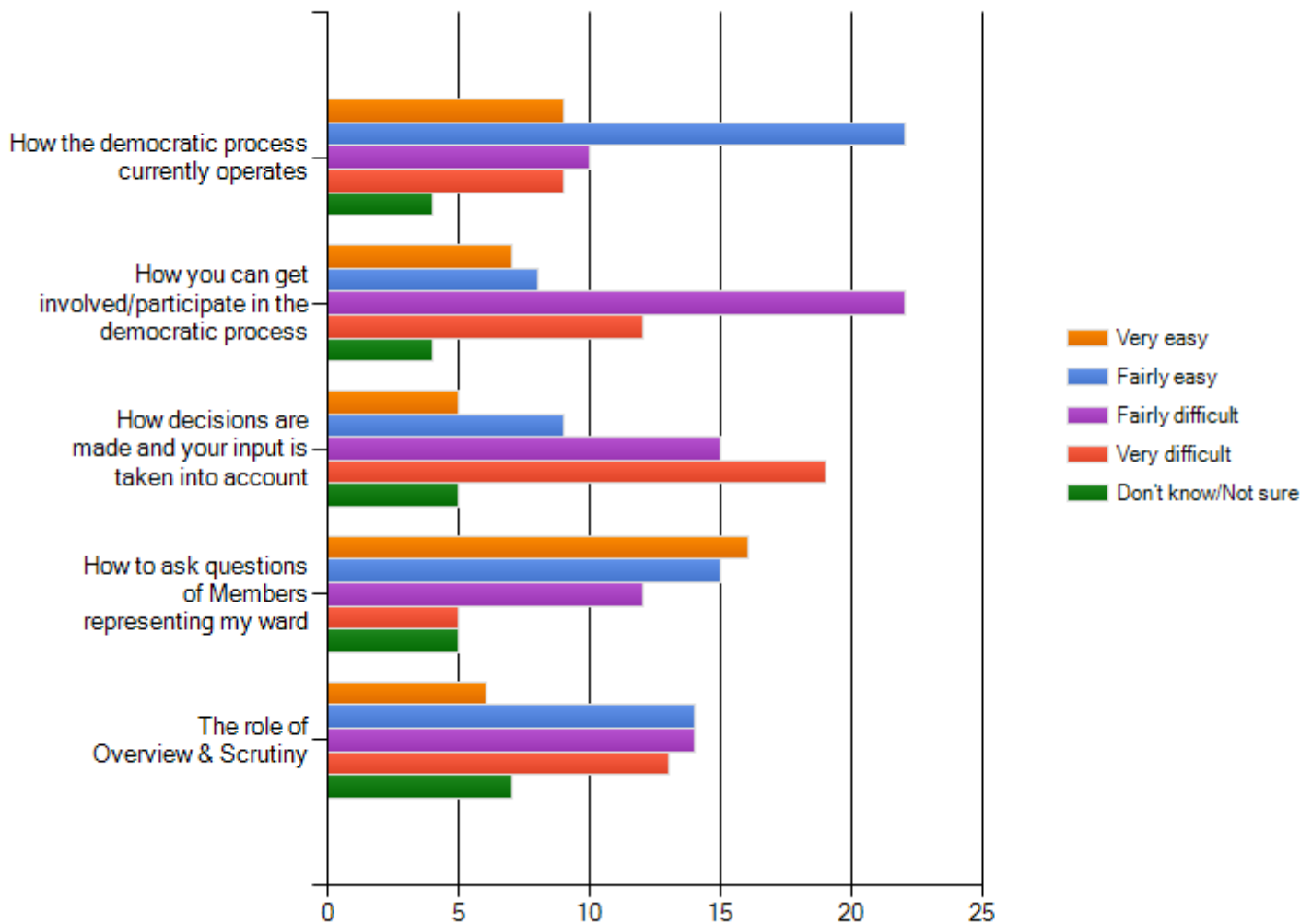
- 54 online and paper based survey respondents (76%) answered this question. Of those, 46.3% stated that they understood the current governance arrangements fully, 35.2% understood them partly and 18.5% were not aware of the current arrangements.
- 497 Citizens Panel respondents (99%) answered this question. 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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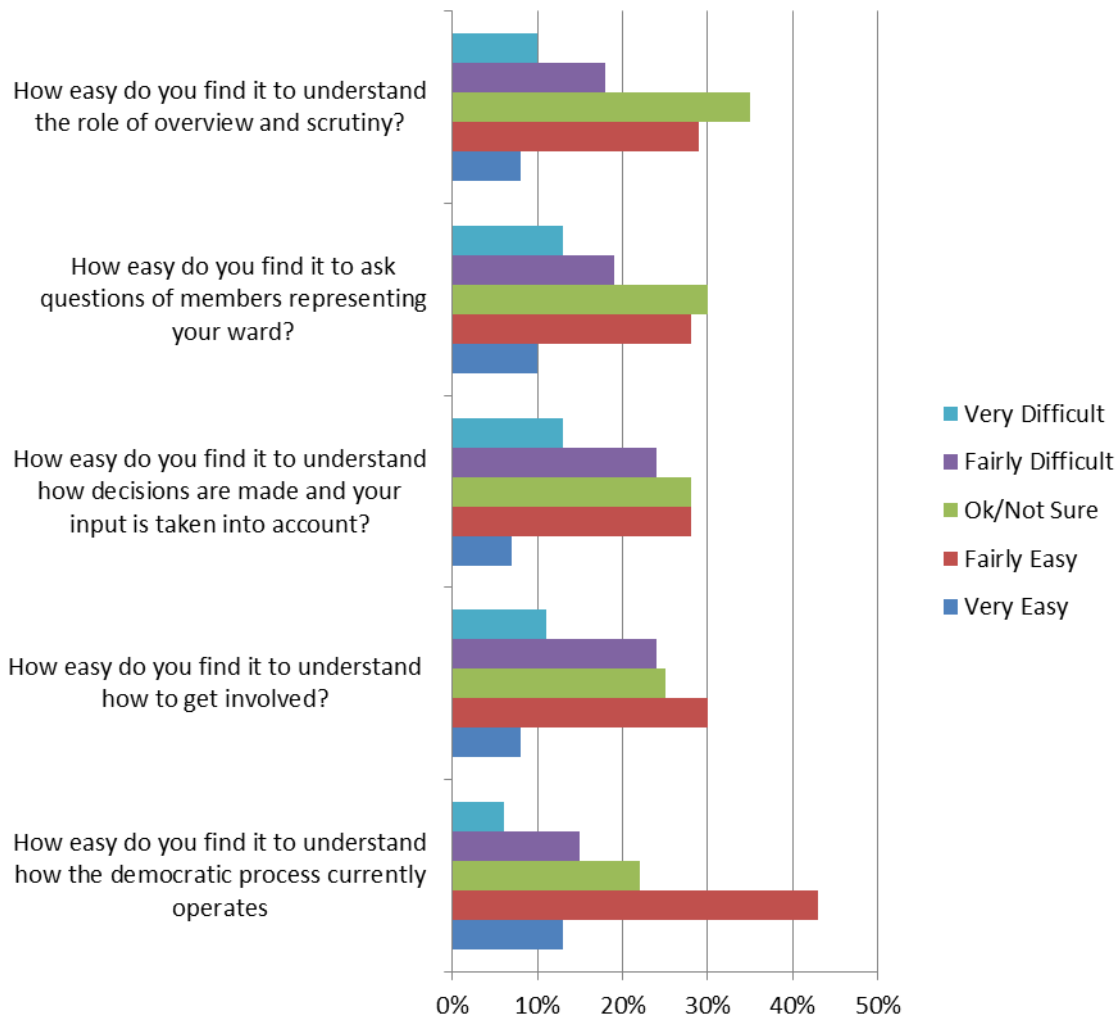
Chart 1 – Survey Respondents

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;

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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 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

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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:

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

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- 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)
 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 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)

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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)

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)

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2.2 CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – ELECTED MEMBER CONSULTATION MEETING – DETAILED FINDINGS

2.2.1 Method

All Members were invited to attend an Elected Member Consultation Meeting on 28 October 2013 to discuss the proposed committee system model of governance.

2.2.2 Event Design

In advance of the event, all Members were sent an Executive Summary of the progress made in relation to the Change of Governance System Project and a copy of the options paper that was considered by Constitution Ethics and Probity Committee on 21 October 2013 and endorsed by that Committee as a basis for further consultation.

The Elected Member Consultation Meeting was chaired by the Mayor. The Head of Governance delivered a presentation which outlined:

- Current governance system (executive/scrutiny)
- Proposed committee system structure and terms of reference
- Role of full council
- Relationships between committees
- Scrutiny committees and task & finish group work
- Delegated decision making and urgency provision
- General purpose committees
- Partnership boards
- Public participation and engagement
- Role of chairmen
- Members Allowances
- Next steps

A total of 24 Councillors from all of the party groups attended the meeting.

2.2.3 Detailed Findings

General Comments

1. Determine whether thematic committees meet within each full council meeting cycle; committee decisions would be required to link with the full council meeting cycle. Frequency of meetings needed to be carefully considered to avoid committees meeting which had insufficient business.
2. Site visits to other local authorities that adopted a committee system highlighted that forward planning and a strong timetabling framework would be essential to the effective operation of a committee system structure.

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Committee Structure and Terms of Reference

Education and Libraries

3. Determine whether Education and Libraries would be responsible for school places planning
4. Determine whether Adoption and Looked after Children would come under Education and Libraries.
5. Co-opted Members for Education Matters (statutory provision) would continue for Education and Libraries

Assets, Regeneration and Growth

6. Determine whether Assets, Regeneration and Growth would include Museums
7. Consider including Culture in the remit of Assets, Regeneration and Growth
8. The Asset Management Strategy (sale or retention of property and assets) was considered to be a core function of Assets, Regeneration and Growth

Housing

9. Determine whether Environmental Health should come within the remit of the Housing Committee due to the relationship with housing standards

Performance & Contract Management

10. Determine whether Barnet Homes should report to Performance & Contract Management or Housing Committee
11. Members considered that Performance & Contract Management would be crucial in administrating external and internal commissioning arrangements. Scheduling of this committee needed to be carefully considered.

Social Care & Safeguarding

12. Consider the interrelationship between the Health & Well-Being Board and the Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
13. Determine whether the Public Health element of Social Care & Safeguarding should sit within the remit of the Health Overview & Scrutiny or the Health & Well-Being Board. There was concern that the current Safeguarding Overview & Scrutiny Committee had very wide terms of reference and it was questioned whether the Social Care & Safeguarding Committee had the capacity to give due attention to all matters within its remit.

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14. Determine whether the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel should become a sub-committee of a thematic committee
15. Determine whether Safeguarding should be within the remit of the Policy & Resources Committee given corporate importance across authority

Community Leadership

16. Consider the relationship of Community Leadership Committee to the Policy & Resources Committee given the strategic importance of issues within its remit (relationship with other councils, central government and the community).
17. Consider linkages between the Community Leadership Committee and the Barnet Partnership Board.
18. Determine relationship between Community Leadership Committee and structures/bodies representing the council's strategic interests at a central, regional and sub-regional level
19. Determine whether all pooled budgets would be in the remit of the Community Leadership Committee (e.g. Section 75 Agreements for Health and Social Care services)

Environment

20. Consider whether Parks should be moved from the remit of the Environment Committee due to its wide remit
21. Determine whether sub-committees or area committees should deal with small public works matters

Area Sub-Committees

22. Members supported Area Sub-Committees having allocated budgets. The detailed procedure for using allocated budgets would need to be clearly defined to ensure clarity and a fair and considered distribution of resources. In addition, the lines of accountability between Residents Forums, Area Sub-Committees and other committees would need to be clearly defined.
23. Consideration should be given to the accessibility (times and venues) and number of Resident Forums and Area Sub-Committees

Full Council

Council Questions

24. Consider whether a mechanism is required to refer a committee decision up to full Council with the following mechanisms to be explored:

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- a. Contentious decisions should always made by the full Council.
 - b. Proposed a provision for four members (in a committee of 10) or the committee chairman to refer an item up to full Council
 - c. Proposed that only minority reports could be referred up to Council
 - d. Members must have all papers relating to items referred up to Council even if they weren't on original committee
25. Determine the arrangements for 'Question to the Leader and Committee Chairmen' at the full Council meeting. Detailed consideration to include:
- a. Ensuring a balance of allowing and preserving Members' rights to question decisions, particularly where decisions made by one committee may have wide ramifications, while avoiding the potential for having time for other essential Council business curtailed
 - b. A reduced requirement of Council questions under a committee system (20 minutes of questions proposed)
 - c. Reviewed full Council questions procedure after one year

Relationships with Committees

26. Thematic committees will respond to full Council in accordance with the limitations of their delegated powers
27. Determine whether there would be joint committee meetings for cross-cutting issues or whether the Policy & Resources Committee would take a coordinating role to decide where an item should go. Consider whether another solution might be to give an identified group of Members the authority to make cross-cutting decisions.

Scrutiny Committees

28. Consider whether Community Safety and Flood Risk Management could be incorporated into the terms of reference of thematic committees (e.g. Community Safety within remit of Community Leadership Committee; Flood Risk Management with remit of Environment Committee). Alternatively consider whether both functions could be included within the remit of the Policy & Resources Committee.
29. Consider whether thematic committees could establish 'Task & Finish Groups' or other working groups to enable more in depth investigation of problematic areas and issues where required.
30. Consider whether committee agendas could be split into decision and information items to enable Members could continue 'scrutiny-type' activities.

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Delegated Decision Making

31. Determine arrangements for delegated decision making and the process for urgent decisions. Options for consideration to include:
 - a. Delegated authority to a sub-group of Committee Members of members (odd number; chairman, vice-chairman and one other) to discuss/agree an item. Majority to determine decision
 - b. Officer delegations should not be any more extensive than current arrangements and there should be channels for officers to informally seek a political steer
 - c. Develop two or three defined options for the new constitution to provide multiple procedures for urgent decisions to be taken depending on the situation

Partnership Boards

32. Determine future role and membership of the Health and Well Being Board and consider relationship with other components of the council's structure. Current membership is a mixture of Members, officers and the NHS Barnet Clinical Commissioning Group. It was recommended that the Board should be approached for their views on how they might be best incorporated into the new committee structure, and that other council models should also be reviewed.
33. Ensure that the Health and Well Being Board has a key role in Public Health and Health & Social Care integration

Public Participation and Engagement

34. Determine whether public questions should be asked at the beginning of a meeting in an allocated timeslot or asked before the relevant agenda item.
35. Consider whether the public should be allowed to raise any issue relevant to the terms of reference of the committee rather than just in relation to an item on the agenda
36. Consider the length of time available for public comments (3 minutes was considered appropriate). A balance between allowing for public participation and committee businesses needed to be achieved
37. Determine whether there should be public questions at full Council
38. Consider whether there should be multiple supplementary questions
39. Consider methods for encouraging public participation at meetings from a more representative group of residents
40. Consider whether public speaking time could be segmented to ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to speak

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41. Ensure officer presentations are concise to assist in managing meetings
42. Ensure an open and transparent approach to meetings to make them accessible. Administrative efficiency is secondary.
43. Consider issue of unfinished business and 10pm cut off time.

Other Comments

44. Determine how it will be determined whether this structure will have a positive impact on residents by January 2014?
45. Consider the geographical location for Residents Forums as some may be inaccessible.

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3.1 CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM – PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING – DETAILED FINDINGS

3.1.1 Method

The Public Consultation Event was promoted as follows:

- The council issued a press release on 22 October 2013 inviting residents to attend the public consultation meeting.
- An e-mail was circulated to approximately 3,000 residents who had registered on Barnet Online and had consented for the council to contact them. This e-mail was also sent to residents on the Residents Forums e-mail distribution list. CommUNITY Barnet also promoted the event via their newsletter on 8 November 2013.
- The event was promoted via the council's social media channels (twitter and Facebook).
- Participants were sent the Phase I Consultation Findings Report and Public Participation & Engagement Rules in advance of the meeting to provide context to the items under consideration at the event.

3.1.2 Event Design

The event provided an opportunity for residents to give their views on the proposed committee structure and public participation / engagement.

The Leader of the Council and Head of Governance delivered a presentation which outlined:

- The current governance system (executive/scrutiny)
- The context behind the proposed committee system
- The outline structure of proposed committee system
- Public participation – current rules

3.1.3 Facilitated Workshops

42 residents registered to attend the public consultation meeting. A total of 22 residents and 9 Councillors attended. Participants were allocated to tables and were asked to participate in facilitated workshop discussions themed around the following four questions:

- Do you have specific comments and concerns on the proposed committee structure?
- Does it address the areas of Council responsibility that interest you?
- What are your views on how we can make the new structure accessible and easier to understand?
- How can we encourage you to participate in meetings in the new system?

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Participants were provided with copies of the new committees proposed terms of reference.

The facilitated workshop discussions were hosted by Governance Service Officers and other council officers who have experience in workshop facilitation.

Under each question, participants were requested to consider the question and then write their individual responses to each question. Facilitators then requested that the group discuss their individual responses and consider the responses of other participants. The group were then encouraged to come to a consensus view regarding which two issues they felt were the most important under each question. The top issues were then reported back to the Leader of the Council and other event participants in feedback session.

The purpose of this exercise was to enable all participants to record their views under each question and for these to then be prioritised in a group context to provide 'top responses'. This process enabled all responses to be recorded and then ranked to provide a weighting.

The format above was not prescriptive and was only designed to give structure to the discussion, not to limit the discussion or debate on the proposed committee system. If participants considered that the facilitated workshop structure was too rigid, they were nonetheless encouraged to record their views for incorporation into the Findings Report.

Comments made under each question have been *recorded verbatim*, ranked and themed under different headings. Comments or questions that groups ranked as their top answers are recorded in **bold**. Comments or questions that do not directly relate to the question asked are recorded in [square brackets].

CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM PUBLIC CONSULTATION EVENT – DETAILED FINDINGS

3.1.4 Question 1 – Do you have specific comments and concerns on the proposed committee structure?

Terms of Reference / Structure / Operation

Not sure which committee deals with subject interested in (e.g. would a decision to close library be Policy & Resources or Education & Libraries)

Who is ultimately responsible for decisions?

There appears to be no clear link between the committees and local areas other than in residents' forums?

Where do members of the public fit in?

Plethora of committee groups, scope for time passing

Will this change make it simple for residents to access council facilities?

Will it cost more than the current system?

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Would want the public still to be able to ask questions and make comments as to all the committees' agenda items

Too many committees will make the council unable to engage with the public

The structure is about jobs for councillors, not about making decisions more transparent or relevant for local communities

How do we keep the cost down?

Committee structure – concerns regarding: overlapping; duplication of work carried out; and waste

If decision impacts in one area, will there be a committee to represent only that area?

I agree to a move to this sort of committee structure rather than the present cabinet structure

Is there a complaints procedure if the relevant committee is not addressing the issues properly: What are the remedies? What are the penalties?

Agree that we need to revert to the committee system but a significant degree of sub-division of those committees by local communities is a necessary pre-condition

Concerns: A committee system is better, more democratic, but less money to go around

I like the new idea, at least independent. Covers the range of parties

How many people are going to be in the committee, will smaller parties be represented?

How many people will be on the new committee?

Where is Adults in the committees?

Will assets/regeneration committee include Capita?

Rationale/ Explanation of Proposals / Supporting Information

Need Pros and Cons of the proposed change explained

An excellent development

Not enough information on proposed system, -want more free ranging conversation, -vener of information

Lack of time for consultation to be meaningful

Where is the room for any of our input in this new system building?

What is so good about the committee system? Not clear

How does this system ensure greater localism?

Where is the feedback from the Leader's Executive Forum event? Still nothing has been heard

For any change – the benefits are not clear

What is wrong with the current system? Has it all been investigated? And how is the new system going to solve the old problems specifically?

Cabinet system manipulates the opposition's ability to speak. Will the committee system be any better? Allowing all Member contributions?

Committee structure – more democratic as it has cross-party input

These are not the right questions. These documents should have been provided in advance

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Not enough information on the proposed system to determine whether or not it would be an improvement on the existing system, and insufficient time was allocated this evening to discuss this

Don't know the new committees

There has been insufficient time, explanation and discussion for us to consider these proposals and make informed comments

Committee Composition / Membership

How will councillors be selected for committees? Will having specific skills put them on committee or exclude others?

All members of all committees must be shown to be familiar with the issues and documents and actively participate

Ideally, committees should include independent representatives of the public

Will the committee of 10 councillors decide themselves, or will all councillors vote?

Scrutiny

Scrutiny committees must consider all areas and should be represented by opposition members. Scrutinise all fields, especially financial

The Cabinet system is more realistic and better for consistency of policing and decision taking. The failure of the present system is the weakness of scrutiny

Scrutiny committees should scrutinise all aspects of a decision: finance; process; impact on community; and equalities issues

Not sure that committee system will reach decisions quicker, be more efficient, than present system. Scrutiny committee should only scrutinise due process, not all subjects

3.1.5 **Question 2 – Does it address the areas of Council responsibility that interest you?**

Rationale

Simple explanation of what council does and controls. In 3 minutes, someone should be able to explain the leaders and structures

On the surface it covers areas we are interested in, but not enough information to make an informed decision

Do not know enough about the committees to make a comment

It would be useful to have a broad overview of responsibility in order to see if any areas are covered

Yes, but cannot see what is missing.

Cannot see anything missing

Not wide enough or sufficient consultations

There hasn't been enough time for consultation

Seemingly

Not sure – need to see it working to see where the gaps are

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Specific Areas of Responsibility

No planning

Contractual relationships and relationships with service committees

Planning strategy and policy, new governance proposed for links between development management and committee

How will contractor be held accountable and how will the service be managed?

Governance is independent – scrutiny of decisions

Budget – spending

How it will improve residents access to the council and other services as a whole?

Would like to see the areas of public services delineated in detail

Education/library

My concerns are on monitoring Capita and other multi-national contractors

[The fire engines are very annoying, causing traffic delays and noise]

[More parking spaces, more books in the libraries and automatic machines for maps of Barnet. Where to go and where to find a location?]

[Environment – keep streets clean. Public bins turned into recycle bins. Give College Farm Park animals protection at night.]

[Make ways for ambulances and fire services so they are not always on the roads]

3.1.6 Question 3 – What are your views on how we can make the new structure accessible and easier to understand?

Communication Methods / Plain English

Write letter to all residents inviting them to join email group for council meetings

Access to paper documents

Press ads for forthcoming council meetings

To make it more accessible, sort out the website. It is a nightmare trying to find reports

Easy English, Sign Language, Something for the blind, different languages

Asian/African/European

Better communication and more information available on these proposals

Less jargon, shorter reports, less bull...longer notices time for papers

Make it local split by constituency

The proposed structure is too complicated, multi headed to keep up with

Press – proper announcements at local meetings and places

Road trips and not relying on the website

Of the 180,000 households, how do we reach them? Perhaps a calendar or leaflet should be added to any council tax bill or any other letter/bulk mail

Web casting

Local other groups – timing of meetings

News bulletin: available locally, given to residents associations.

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Twitter / Facebook / Library / Council Buildings / GP Surgery / Hospitals, in plain English and other languages

Provide the information in detail and in plain English – publicise it (accessibility) widely, use that useless First Barnet to do this job

Barnet First, newsletters, local paper and community groups

Better communication

Wider advertising

Barnet First – explain how members of the public can attend and comment in council magazine Barnet First

Accessible – advertise on current council material (e.g. bills, electoral roll) to promote the forums for discussions.

Improve the website, write committee reports in plain English and cut the film-flam political messages; be objective

Not relying on just one method of communication (e.g. internet, website) but using multi channels – wrap around, free newspapers, road shows and libraries

Ward Councillors & surgeries getting the message out

Improve Consultations

Easy for autistic people – groups or forums, magazines

For each type of case there should be one policy, not different decisions for each case

Improve the consultations with the public

Wider and more regular consultations with the residents

3.1.7 Question 4 – How can we encourage you to participate in meetings in the new system?

Public Engagement

Actually influencing or just token participation?

Communication

Easier ready available guidance and allowing comments

People will participate if they feel it makes a blind bit of ...

Get councillors to spend more time engaging with their local ward residents

Change the culture of the council to one that embraces and welcomes participation

Value the comments

Do we (“I”) make a difference?

Knowing how to participate

Where I feel it would make a difference is being listened to – how are results measured?

Inform more widely about councillors’ surgeries, times and who they are

Explain system via online content

Communication, promote participation

Not listening to public opinion

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Make a video explaining the structure and the difference between the structures- It is very complicated, most people don't understand the committee or executive structure, or how it will work

System is too complicated for ordinary citizens to understand

Meeting Logistics

Forum at 7 pm not 6.30 pm. Publish notes after meeting not talk and nothing
Allow attendants to meet on separate night (week later) to resident's forum. The forum agenda to be published in advance

Better chairing! And less political point scoring

Increase number of speakers, planning meetings to 3 and time allocated to 5 minutes

Provide local place for the meetings which will have easy access

Process- Can this be changed so informal meetings can take place on the agenda

Move them around (venues) – not all the way in Hendon where it is hard to get to

Advertising Meetings / Events

How do we communicate with residents about events:

- Libraries
- Door to door leaflet
- Colleges, universities and schools
- Surgeries and hospitals
- Leaflets at home for house bound residents

Text messages, Emails and Automated Voicemail. Certain radiobroadcast and TV news

Local web-based network to inform and update people- messaging weekly

Advertise on main webpage of library computers

Barnet House / HTH notice boards

Newspapers, ads, information

Simplification as communication page in newspapers for meetings, news issues

The website needs to be easy to manoeuvre, easy to understand, easy to search for information (e.g. leisure and activities is difficult to search)

Accessibility to smaller meetings throughout the borough in church halls

Don't just publish the meetings on the website, put notices up around the borough

Notices in newspapers weekly regarding who to contact for complaints and which council meetings

Flexibility of Participation Rules

Participation: allow proxy speakers / questions when an individual is unable to attend

Allow more time for public participation at committee meetings

Limit the number of questions individuals can make at public meetings

In a representative democracy individual participation is not essential. It is the quality of the representative that is important

Can the Council change the deadline for submitting sending questions?

Participation rules should permit a referendum (low threshold)

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Perhaps the threshold of signature members on petitions should be lowered! So Cllr Thomas denounced 8,000

Continue to be able to submit papers without access to the internet

Question procedure- only one supplementary question allowed

The higher the number of petitions, the more likely the Council is to dismiss them

Engagement with Different Demographic Groups

Make a big effort to get younger members of the public engaged

Education in schools, part of road show

Ensure appropriate support for older residents

Support older people to maintain their independence, council should support those people

Resident's Forums Suggestions

To put your views and presentation on the residents committee through email

Widen residents forums remit

Expand residents forums – encourage people along – coffee and chat meetings – keep it open and less structured

Participation would be enabled and encouraged through localisation of sub-committees to local communities, through forums and networks

3.2 CHANGE OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING –KEY THEMES

Key themes emerging are detailed below:-

1. Committee Functions / Operation:-

Participants questioned how the linkages between the committees would be managed. In particular, participants sought more information on links between the Policy & Resources Committee, thematic committees and local/area forums, and which committee would be responsible for decisions. A number of queries were raised about the appointment to committees and representation of the political parties on committees.

2. Rationale:-

Participants considered that the rationale behind the change in governance system had not been sufficiently articulated. It was suggested that some short promotional material should be developed to explain and promote the new system. In addition, participants stated that they were unable to make comments on the proposed structure as the detailed structure was only circulated at the Public Consultation Event.

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3. Communications:-

A number of comments were made about the promotion of council meetings and public participation opportunities. Participants considered there should be more active multi-channel promotion of council meetings (local press, Barnet First, local forums, council offices/notice boards, other public buildings, bills and statements etc.) and an improvement in the promotion of committee information on the website.

4. Accessibility:-

Participants considered that reports to committees should be written in more accessible language (Plain English) and that meetings should be held in different locations to encourage attendance.

5. Engagement:-

Participants questioned whether participating in meetings or public consultations actually had any influence over the decisions taken by the council.