

## Results of NDC Councillors' "Review of Committee System" Survey

Please note that of 41 Councillors, there were 16 responses.

### Do you feel engaged and involved in decision making?



Comments:

- Most decisions involve all Council members.
- I say yes, but I have mixed feelings about decision making, feeling at times as if committees are effectively rubber-stamping decisions already made by officers.
- Yes but only on the committees I am on.
- I'm on S&R which helps. Also my entire ward in in ENPA and I'm appointed to the Park by NDC which is helpful - indeed the Constitution could usefully be amended to give any Cllr whose ward is fully in ENPA first refusal on appointment to it.
- Even though I don't sit on all committees, I do get to feed in either by attending or via our group representative. In the past the cabinet was only made up of the ruling group, so virtually 50% of councillors were completely excluded from the major decisions.
- Regular group meetings allow members to comment on agenda items to their representatives on committees.
- I feel heard during meetings but I don't bother to make myself listened to at Full Council because it's all political posturing. I do enjoy making my points as part of the Independent Group through Cllr Prowse as he weekly asks for our opinions of various items before he feeds back to Leader or SMT. I do know that he gets frustrated at being left out of things with the Leader (on political manoeuvres) and that should not be the case.
- I have to answer No as I feel there are issues given to us were the decision has already been made and the deadline is the next day so Councillors are given no options.

- My answer would be partly mainly due to working full-time, I know I can take part in committee meetings but it is the time I have available etc.
- Decisions are often time sensitive (for example if funding has been applied for and may drop away) and committees may be forced to make decisions that are not entirely satisfactory.
- As a member of the Strategy & Resources Committee, I feel that I am made well aware of issues and my opinions are both respected and taken into account when making final and important decisions.
- Part of a cross party committee
- Everybody gets an equal say on their opinions
- We receive and commission reports make recommendations, decide policy. Decisions are not imposed upon us by small group of Councillors without debate.
- (answered No): Because I work full time and meetings are generally held in the day,

**Have you experienced any advantages/disadvantage of the committee system?**



Comments:

- Far more democratic.
- The main advantage of the committee system is that it ensures that the committees reflect the political makeup of the council. It allows for more open debate although I am aware that there may be a party line on certain issues.
- Don't really know what is happening in committees I am not on so difficult to get an overall feel of things.
- The number and significance of the items on the S&R agenda appears to have decreased significantly when compared to the Executive. I don't understand why this has happened. I also strongly feel that Portfolio Holders should be S&R members otherwise they are disengaged from the decision making process, as now happens with at least two portfolios.
- Better debate, which I believe means better decisions.
- It is more representative of the make-up of the Council, eliminating politics being played at full Council.
- No as I haven't any experience of the system before May 2019
- The committee system ensures all councillors feel part of the decision making process. However the executive system was better for making urgent decisions. Not having to wait for a committee to meet.
- Committees should be sensitised on upcoming/ important projects/ decisions in advance of formal committee meeting so they can shape proposals more effectively.
- I think it is a fair democratic way to run the council
- However, the process can be slow, but it is inclusive.
- Unable to attend meetings due to flexibility

## Were you a North Devon Councillor prior to May 2019?



### Comments:

If yes, do you feel more or less involved in decision making with the committee system than with the previous Executive model? More involved/Less involved/Comments:

- Far more involved.
- More involved.
- Obviously the Committee system requires more members to be involved and others having the opportunity to attend. But as with any meeting it is the agenda items which will attract interest or not, from non-committee members,(an example being, whether or not the Council would allow access over Whiddon valley play area).
- I was only on the Council for a year before the last elections so it's difficult to answer with much of a comparison to the last model.
- I feel more involved using the committee structure but more work needs to be done to link lead members into the decision making process.
- I was not a member of the previous Executive model so cannot really compare. I do feel that S&R is keen to get cross party opinions and use them to formulate reasoned and rational decision making.
- Less

## Do you consider that the committee system allows for quick decision making?



### Comments:

If no, what improvements do you consider could be made to improve the speed of decision making?

- That would depend upon whether speed of decision-making is the main consideration. Coming to the right decision means making sure that the evidence and advice given is sound - some issues require more scrutiny than others. It may be worth re-visiting what types of decision are delegated to which committee.
- I only clicked no, as this allowed me to comment. Yes it slows it down a bit, but not so much that it means council does not make timely decisions. It is far better that a committee has a wide representation of members, than a leader making decisions, with little or no debate with the wider group of councillors. I have felt completely out of the decision making process under the cabinet system.
- Don't understand how to measure speed of decision making.
- Urgent delegated powers to Chairs and lead members. Would need to amend the constitution.
- Delegation of more mundane decisions to Chairman of Committees and Officers, with a report back to committee or Full Council. Better training of Councillors and Chairs so they understand their roles, and they do not introduce irrelevant points or repeat points. An explanation of format of reports, so key issues can be found.

## Do you consider that the committee system ensures quality decision making?



### Comments:

If no, please provide details / comments:

- Not always. Again, it depends on sound evidence and advice, but also on the level of scrutiny - and understanding - of members.
- The Policy Development Committee could be a very useful support to the Council. At the moment it clearly isn't.
- I don't understand how to measure the word quality?

**Are there any improvements that could be made to the current committee system?**



Comments:

If yes, please provide details / comments:

- I think systems can always be improved. It may be worthwhile involving the LGA more often in reviews. As a first term councillor having experienced the Covid hiatus in the midst of everything I still feel I have a lot to learn about how best to make things work.
- Portfolio Holders all on S&R.
- I think committee chairs giving short verbal updates to full council, would give better flavour of the work of that committee and engage wider members better.
- The current Policy and Development could do with a more meaningful role, in terms of the impact it should have on the Councils future direction of travel.
- Ward members should be involved at an early stage if there are decisions to be made in their wards.
- Committees could be linked more formally in their decisions to avoid duplication of work.
- Setting goals and priorities to help achieve our objectives.
- Putting members in the relevant committee
- More evening meetings

**We are currently preparing a member training and development programme for Councillors following the Elections in 2023. Is there any training that you would have found beneficial following the elections?**



**Comments:**

If yes, please provide details / comments:

- I certainly have not made the most of my iPad and I am not an Apple user so a bit of training on how best to use it beyond the initial training would have been useful. Also access to a shared drive for reports rather than relying on email attachments. I also think that whilst there is a place for online learning I find face to face sessions more instructive over all, as well as them providing the opportunity for further networking with other members and officers.
- The potential impact and implications of the government's requirements for photo ID to vote.
- The new public bin review/report form and mapping tool use should be delivered to members. All councillors should be aware of the (new digital) system that is in (will?) place so members can report a bin's condition-position-capacity etc. All members should be aware of the position of the public litter bins in their Ward and understand Ownership (private public land) and frequency of emptying etc. This will then give members the opportunity to decide if bins are in the right place or a different strategy needs to be employed to tackle littering. (Councillor Pearson - Paul Burton.)
- A little more on the role of all committees and the responsibilities of each tied in with our objections.
- Allowing Councillors to choose the method of delivery of information so they do not have to spend time learning to use systems. Have more training sessions in the evening. Remember most Councillors will have used a lot of their holiday to campaign, and many employers are not happy with staff taking time off during working hours no matter what the legislation says. Do not assume that all Councillors have the same level of understanding or absorb things at the same rate. Make training sessions available on line so councillors can review them at their own pace. Content of training good.