

Responses to survey on Governance Arrangements

11 responses received in total (of 42) 26%

Of these respondents, 5 were Councillors prior to May 2019, 6 were not.

Were you a North Devon District Councillor prior to May 2019?	Yes 45%	No 55%
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Do you feel engaged and involved in decision making?	Yes 73%	No 27%
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*(*Existing Councillors: 80% felt involved, New Councillors: 67%)*

Comments:

- Have put No as at times I feel there is a tendency for SMT to see projects through financial eyes only without considering community's values and long term gain.
- Directly involved in decisions made by the committee I am a member of, more remotely from the full council position. We have to trust that other committees have made a good judgement when coming to their recommendations for full council to adopt. I do wonder whether many members have to time to read and fully comprehend the large volume of paperwork presented at each meeting. If this is the case then it brings into question the level of governance being applied to those decisions.
- While I've said yes to whether I feel engaged in decision making I feel less engaged that I would have been if there had been no governance changes.
- As a member of the Policy Development Committee and the Licensing and Community Safety Committee, I do feel that I have been engaged and involved in the decision making process. Agendas are small and manageable and allow for good relations to exist between members and officers. Decisions appear to be working their way through to full council effectively.
- Somewhat. Within the committee I sit on I can contribute to decisions, therefore I have to trust this is going on in all the other committee meetings.
- Council is too slow moving. It is hard for councillor who work full time to be heavily involved. Officers are sometimes hard to access.
- Prior to May 2019 I felt marginalised as I wasn't on the executive. It was difficult to feel involved in the council.
- At present I feel included to a small degree, this is mainly via reports available on Modern.Gov which I can comment on. Regarding the housing lead role, occasionally I receive reports to comment on. It would be more beneficial I feel for both NDC and myself if I were included to a higher degree, however also realise the challenges of this when working full-time as I do.
- Although I had no previous experience of local government at District level or higher it always seemed to me that an executive model leads to two classes of councillor: those who are involved in making decisions and those who have no input other than to scrutinise or challenge decisions made by others. I think the committee system respects the political make-up of the council and allows members to contribute to the discussions before decisions are made.

Have you experienced any advantages / disadvantages of the new system? Yes 55% No 45%

Comments:

- More all party party involvement.
- Not having been involved in the previous system my comments are only based upon my own thoughts. I believe that using a committee system is more equitable and socially acceptable to the voters. I come to this conclusion as the system is more open and transparent than one where a small body of councillors make the decisions.
- I feel there has been a tighter grip on the reins of power by offices. While the big decisions remain with councillors (eg budget setting) the rest of the agenda is more overtly controlled by officers than in the past. This is as much due to the weak political leadership of the largest group as to officers' desire to get things done.
- The committee model allows more councillors to get involved and engaged. The committee sizes seem ideal in that they are not too big to affect decision-making. However, there is a small risk of meetings becoming inquorate. As a new member, I have found myself elected as the vice chair of a committee, an opportunity I doubt I would have seen under the executive model. The number of committees seems fairly small and allows for all members to take part and lighten the load for senior members.
- By the time it comes to Full Council there is less to comment on or challenge. There is however an informal joining of the Lim Dems with the Greens and this was not formally discussed or approved of - it just seems to be happening and we must be careful that this alliance does not threaten the cross-party objectives.
- It has enabled me to become much more involved in decision making.
- I cannot comment on Q4 as have no knowledge of the previous system.
- It seems to me that the system as implemented encourages members to get involved in their areas of interest.

Have you any suggestions / recommendations for a future review? Yes 36% No 64%

Comments:

- A little more prior consultation with ward members before any reports are taken to various bodies within NDC.
- For full council meetings, it would be very useful if an executive summary from the officers, on an unbiased basis, giving the details of each item with pros and cons for the decisions reached. Members can then decide whether to look at the supporting documentation for more information.
- More councillor involvement in key areas of council life. I don't see how a Lead Member for an area can be a councillor who isn't on the S&R Committee. The P&D Committee hasn't achieved anything and should actually do something rather than just meet because the timetable demands it. This is an example of weak chairmanship.
- The working party of the Climate change is a waste of time as there is nothing the WP can do as decisions and direction is coming from the Libs and Dems in a small sub-committee anyway.
- I am very happy with new arrangements.

We then asked those who were Councillors prior to May 2019 to answer the following questions (*please note one respondent (who was not a Councillor prior to May 2019) answered these. Their answers are not included below).

What do you think of the new governance arrangements introduced in May 2019?

- Much better.
- Still early days to form a strong opinion
- The Governance Committee seems to work as anticipated with the vast majority of its agenda dominated by what would have been Audit Committee items. I've given my opinion of S&R and P&D Committees above.
- Good. There is less slanging and aggression at full council. Long may it continue.
- Much, much better than the executive model.

Do you feel that this has improved the speed of decision-making? Do you think it is now....

Quicker 40%, Slower 0%, No different 60%.

Comments:

- While decision making isn't faster to slower it seems more infrequent.
- I can't comment on this as I think this is one for officers to answer.
- Committees now have the power to make decisions which means that the system is quicker and more slick.

Do you feel that this has improved the quality of decision-making?

Yes 40%, No 20%, No different 40%.

Comments:

- Could possibly be Yes but as of this moment haven't had any major decisions which affects me personally.
- Again, not for me to decide
- Yes because more members are involved and feel valued.

Do you feel the change has affected the decision-making of any Committees of which you are a member?

Yes 20%, No 80%.

Comments:

- I say this as a Harbour Board member.
- The Planning committee remains the same. Suggest that members are seated away from their parties.
- Delegated decision making is an improvement.