

## Questionnaire on the Review of the Constitution for Wiltshire Council – Analysis of Members’ Responses

Theme	Topic Raised (Numbers in brackets indicate number of responses. No number = only 1 respondent)	Comments
<b>General</b>		
Overall: Most respondents were happy with the Constitution. Suggestions for improvement are included below.		
<b>Usability</b>		
	It is difficult to find the appropriate section (3)	Consideration will be given to better index the constitution or providing a glossary of terms. Once review completed, on-line document will be made more interactive hyperlinking document throughout.
	Suggest an index or online search tool (2)	
	Suggest an on-going method for collecting Constitution change requests so don't have to repeat this process	
<b>Public Participation</b>		
Overall: Most respondents felt that the Constitution made adequate provision for public participation. However, meetings and publicity could be managed better to actually encourage it.		
	The ability of the public to contribute to meetings should be more widely publicised (6).	The whole issue of public participation and public engagement scheduled in future work programme for consideration at a subsequent meeting of the Focus Group
	Meetings should be videoed / broadcast on the internet. (3)	
	The public should be able to contribute to meetings throughout, not just for an allocated item (2).	
	Meetings should be made more inviting for the public. e.g. Through 'meet and greet', better information about parking, meeting locations and refreshments.	
	Reports and presentations should be in much plainer English (3).	Could consider use of plain English champions to vet reports although

		this would delay reports being finalised.
	Councillors should always identify themselves and face the public when speaking.	The whole issue of public participation and public engagement scheduled in future work programme for consideration at a subsequent meeting of the Focus Group
	Day time meetings exclude many members of the public.	
	The Council website is very poor.	
	A plain English record of the decisions taken at a meeting should be produced.	
	Suggests protocol whereby Councillor can request work from officer if doesn't jeopardise work plan	
	More meetings should be held outside of County Hall.	Cabinet meetings are rotated around the County, Area Boards and Area Planning Committees held in respective areas, Strategic Planning held off campus when required. Licensing hearings and appeal hearings held in the locality of premises/appellant.
	Meeting rooms should always be big enough for public attendance.	Anticipated public attendance taken into account when booking venues.
<b>Area Boards</b>		
	Area Board meeting should be more widely publicised (3)	The outcome of the Area Board Review and comments raised by the Focus Group previously on Area Boards to be considered by the Focus Group at a subsequent meeting.
	All Area Board members should have the opportunity to brief Cabinet Members and officers on issues of concern to their area (2)	
	More clarity is required regarding the voting rights of dual-hatted members. (2)	
	Area Board agendas should include the same formal provision for public questions as other meetings.	
	Area Board agendas should be kept for local issues.	

	Area Board meeting should begin earlier.	
	Devolve more power and finances to Area Boards	
	Parish councillors should be able to vote on more matters.	
	Area Boards need more officer support.	
	Area Boards section– para 10.2 – replace word ‘will’ with ‘may’ [comprise]...	
<b>Management of meetings</b>		
Overall: Most respondents felt that the current arrangements promote efficient, effective and transparent decision-making.		
	The current system allows a motion to be amended beyond recognition and this needs changing (4)	Issues raised to be considered by the Focus Group in its consideration of Part 4 – Council Rules of Procedure at a subsequent meeting of the Focus Group.
	There should be a maximum time allowance for each item (particularly for Full Council) (2)	
	There should be a limit to the number of questions asked by each Councillor.	
	Councillors should have to state the purpose of their question before asking it.	
	Day time meetings exclude those Councillors who need to work full time.	
<b>Supporting Councillors in their role</b>		
Overall: Most respondents were satisfied with the support available for performing their role.		
	A better contacts directory with senior officers’ roles is required (3)	An enhanced contacts directory combining data from the three existing contacts sources (SAP, Contact Directory and Outlook) is currently under development and will be more ‘searchable’ with key words bringing up the relevant officer depending on the service required.

		A diagram showing the corporate structure from Chief Exec down to Heads of Service is also being developed.
	Officer response times are not satisfactory (particularly senior officers) (2)	<p>The Member Support in the Locality Task Group is aware of slow response times within certain departments, and has suggested that the relevant Directors are informed.</p> <p>They will also be requesting a stipulation on Cabinet Member response times, which are seen as a bigger concern.</p>
	Officers should be more responsive to request for information (particularly senior officers)	A recent survey conducted by the Task Group did not highlight this as a significant issue.
	An independent review of the role of Councillor is required. The current system excludes those who need to work full time.	This would require a national policy change
	The Constitution should be available in hard copy to all Councillors.	All members of the council were given the opportunity of either having a hard copy or using the on-line version. Those requesting a hard copy were given one. On completion of the review, an updated constitution would be available and the same offer would be made.
	Better allowances are required	An independent review of allowances was conducted and approved in November 2009

		following review by an Independent Remuneration Panel and the scheme will last for 4 years.
	Better IT support is required	The Member Support in the Locality Task Group received an update on Councillors' IT provision at its previous meeting and was satisfied with progress made. A task group is currently being set-up to look at the bringing in-house of IT in general, and its remit will encompass Councillors' IT.
	Council should pay for Councillor newsletters except in the period preceding a local election. This would help to politicise the Comms between councillors and residents	Councillors can use the Council's resources (which includes the printing of newsletters) to communicate with their constituents as long as the information contained is not of a political nature.
	Suggests protocol whereby Councillor can request work from officer if doesn't jeopardise work plan	Not covered by Councillor/Officer relations protocol. Requests from Councillors managed at Director level to ensure management of resources.
<b>Cabinet Members</b>		
Overall: Most respondents were satisfied with the current arrangements.		
	Area Board members should have the opportunity to discuss local issues with the relevant Cabinet Member (2).	To be considered in the context of the outcome of the Area Board review
	Cabinet Members should be more receptive to questions re their decisions and the policies behind them.	These comments will be brought to the attention of the Leader. Leader has previously made clear that
	A minority of Cabinet Members should work better with	

	backbenchers	portfolio holders are there to help members.
	Procedures aren't the problem – it is a lack publicity re Cabinet decisions	A weekly digest of executive decisions will be made available to members and via the website in due course.
<b>Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b>		
Overall: Most respondents understood O&S's role, felt adequately engaged, and that the current O&S arrangements were satisfactory.		
	Some examples of where O&S has made a difference should be circulated (3).	A number of these comments are best taken within the context of needing to improve awareness and communication about past successes and forthcoming activity. Clearly current arrangements in terms of publishing reports and forward programmes, monitoring outcomes and individual contact with members about engaging in activities are not "hitting the spot". A possible return to an annual report might help but it feels somewhat after the event? More effective use of "Elected Wire" might be more appropriate – even a dedicated space?
	Induction was poor (co-opted members) (2)	Induction was comprehensive (but relied on good attendance) and has been followed-up with development days by individual select committees. The new member

		development programme will also include O&S events.
	O&S is unfocussed (2)	Work programmes are a blend of holding the Executive to account, O&S priorities and individual requests. Frontline service harmonisation and business transformation are major influences. Overview (policy development) works best with early invitation from the Executive – a new protocol has been drafted covering the importance of this working relationship and will come before the Focus Group.
	Suggests more clarity regarding what each Select Committee is considering.	
	Suggests more emphasis on 'overview' and less on 'scrutiny'	
	Suggests a standard form when a service could benefit from being looked at	A what, how, when form with guidance note could be developed but O&S needs to retain flexibility and be "light on its toes" to situations as they emerge. Could be seen as bureaucratic and too process driven?
	Should not have to be member of O&S committee to be able to call-in a cabinet decision	Call-in is a last resort process and should not be used politically to frustrate Executive decision-making hence requiring the Chairman or 3 members of a select committee. This is not to be confused with the ability of individual committee members or 5 members of the Council to request an item or the

		new “councillor call for action process”.
	Suggests more information should be available when scrutiny are considering issues	Scrutiny investigations are based on evidence which is generally pretty comprehensive but is obviously concentrated on those undertaking the activity. A concluding summary report is always produced. More proactive publicity could be done – see comments above.
	Suggests more fore-warning of issues requiring scrutiny is needed	Links back to work programme (and early engagement from the Executive) although is symptomatic of having to be reactive on many occasions.
	Yes but too much talk about process and not enough about action	All accept the need to add value through action as an outcome but do sometimes need to understand the process first particularly with mixed knowledge/understanding by those involved.
<b>Decision making</b>		
	The Standards Committee is too big.	Size of committee set to meet anticipated demand for determining complaints and subject to review. Standards committee reviewing its size.
	There is currently no link between the Council and	There are a number of links



	parish councils – madness!	including strong Links by way of parish council representation and participation at Area Boards, dual hatted division members, service specific consultation and events, parish newsletter, market town clerks’ meeting, liaison with WALC, parish council representation on Standards Committee.
	Audit Committee should not be chaired by a member of the controlling group. This reduces any perception of transparency.	Best practice is that it members of Audit Committee should not also be members of the Executive.
	If a matter is discussed at a pre-meeting briefing this should be stated at the meeting itself to increase transparency.	Depends on the nature of the meeting. It is accepted that some meetings involve a briefing between officers and chairmen.
	Decision making is far too centralised.	A number of meetings and therefore decisions made are taken in the relevant locality (see above under ‘public participation’)
	There should be a return to the old Committee system.	We understand that the coalition Government intend to include legislation to enable councils to revert to the traditional committee system in the new decentralisation and localism bill to be published in the autumn
	Use of Part II items needs clarification. Their use gives a suspicious impression to public.	Explanation is given on agenda and on website and complies with rules on access to information.
	Need guidance as to what should be brought to Full Council, in particular where to bring parochial matters, so as not to waste so many people’s time.	Councillors should seek advice of officers to suggest appropriate approach/forum for items.

**Regulatory**

Overall: Most respondents felt our arrangements for handling regulatory matters were satisfactory.

	The public's understanding of Planning, i.e. how to get an application to Committee, who has this power, officer-delegated powers, needs better publicising. (3)	Comments to be considered as part of the review of Development Control report.
	Planning chairmen should have discretion to decide the number and time limit of public speakers	
	More site visits for Planning Committees – these should be regarded as the norm rather than special provision	
	More provision for Planning Committee chairmen to get clarification from the applicant during the meeting.	
	Councillors' power to call-in planning applications should remain whilst apps are undetermined as can change significantly after deadline elapses.	
	Minimum of 5 objectors should be able to call-in application, not just Wiltshire Councillors	
	Planning need harmonisation between all the hubs	
	A briefing note for members of the public should be available explaining Planning in plain English.	
	More Planning decisions should be made by Committee	
	Licensing applications should be viewable online like Planning applications	Application details have been put on our website, and members can comment as interested parties on applications. Additional training for members on this is planned for September  It is worth noting the Home Office

		has today (28/7) issued a consultation paper on the Licensing Act, an this might affect how we consult on licence applications and the role of members.