

Member Survey 2021

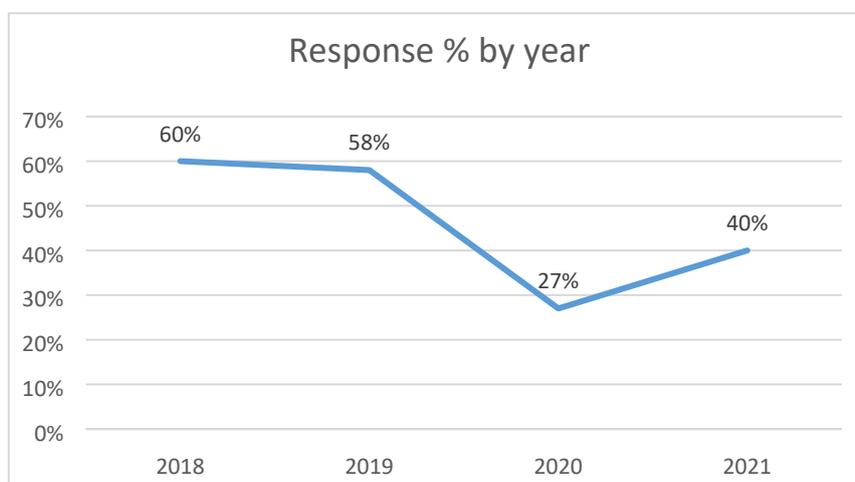
Survey respondents

The 2021 member survey was sent out to sixty councillors and two co-opted members giving a survey cohort totalling 62 members.

Response rate

The survey was completed by 24 councillors and 1 co-opted member, giving an overall response rate of 40%. The response rate continues to fluctuate yearly.

Diagram 1: Member survey response rate



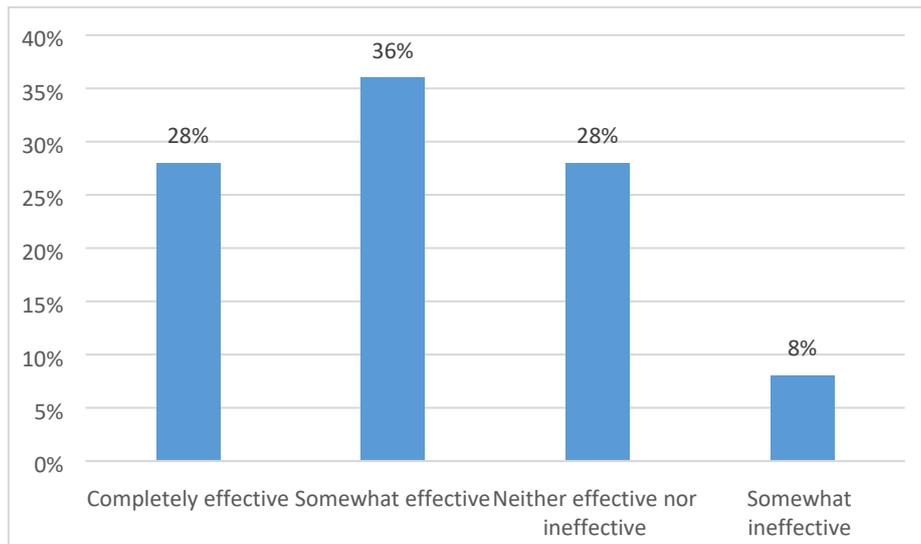
The majority of this year's respondents have been actively involved in the scrutiny process over the past year:

- 48% of respondents are a member of the scrutiny commission or panels
- 36% are other non-executive members'
- 46% have attended a scrutiny meeting as a visiting member to observe/make a contribution

Effectiveness of the scrutiny function

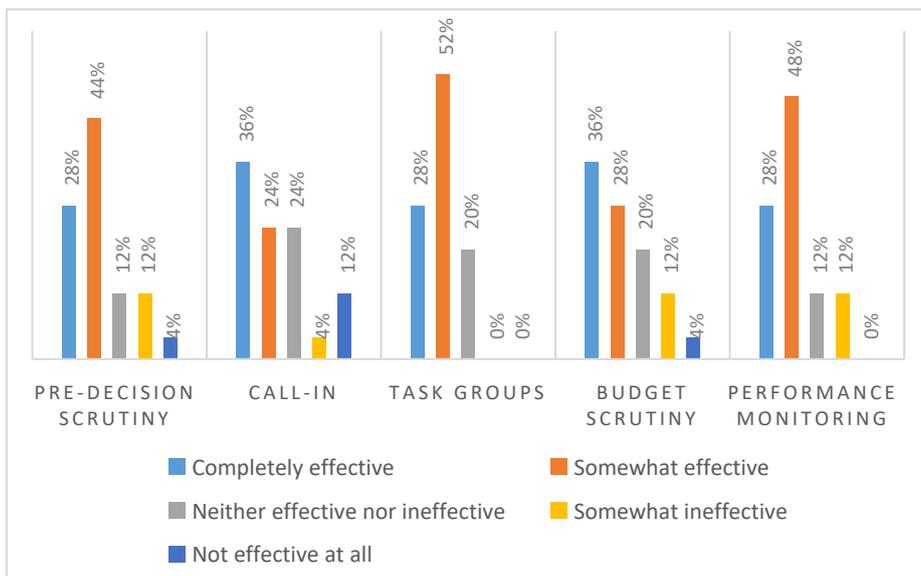
The survey asked respondents to consider the overall effectiveness of scrutiny. A comparison with last year shows that the proportion of respondents who consider scrutiny to be effective overall has remained the same at 64%.

Diagram 2: The overall effectiveness of scrutiny



There has been a decline in those rating scrutiny as completely ineffective which is now at 0%.

Diagram 3: The effectiveness of the different aspects of scrutiny in 2020/21



Pre-decision scrutiny 72% rated the effectiveness of pre-decision scrutiny as completely or somewhat effective in 2020/21.

Call-ins

Call-in continues to be an area with the lowest rates of satisfaction. It is the most political element of scrutiny and does not usually result in a request to Cabinet to review its decision. There were three call-ins in the last municipal year.

Task groups

Task group work was once again rated the most effective element of scrutiny with 80% rating it as completely or somewhat effective. This indicates that members continue to find task groups a productive and effective way to contribute to policy development and have a tangible impact on decision making.

Budget scrutiny

The effectiveness of budget scrutiny continues its downward trend with 16% of respondents finding it somewhat ineffective or not effective at all. As with previous years, this may reflect the realities of tight budgets giving scrutiny little opportunity for influence.

Performance monitoring

The effectiveness of performance monitoring has increased slightly on last year at 76%. One member cited "*performance monitoring*" and the "*improved scrutiny of contractors*" as an example of where scrutiny has a demonstrable impact on decision making by Cabinet.

Development of the Commission/Panel Work Programmes

This year 76% of respondents agreed they have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Commission/Panel work programmes.

Scrutiny Agendas/Workload

Only 64% of respondents agreed that Commission/Panel agendas are the correct length. This requires further investigation as to how to improve this score.

- 28% of respondents indicated that there should be more meetings to accommodate all the items
- 36% suggested the Commission/Panels be more selective when setting agendas

The topic suggestion process and subsequent workshops to prioritise selection of agenda items are intended to help members to select those items that are of importance to the public, related to underperforming service areas or issues on which scrutiny can have an impact.

Scrutiny impact on decision making by the Cabinet

This year councillors feel decision-making by the Cabinet has been influenced to some extent by comments from the Commission and Panels; 44% (with 28% strongly) for the Commission and 52% (with 28% strongly) for the Panels.

As with previous years, there is a belief that scrutiny could be improved through greater sharing of scrutiny chairs across the four political groups.

“At the moment the chairs of the panels and the chair of the OSC is in the gift of the administration (or at best, the administration group). This does not make for effective scrutiny of administration decisions, and it means that in most instances only the pre-agreed/approved recommendations have a chance of passing”.

Better organisation

The survey provided a list of actions that could be taken to improve the organisation of scrutiny business and respondents were asked to tick all the items that they supported:

Diagram 4: In what ways do you think scrutiny business might be better organised?

Commission/Panels to be more selective when setting agendas	36%
More use of external experts to provide context and challenge	32%
Background policy guidance provided	32%
More meetings to accommodate all the items	28%
Guidance provided on possible questions to be asked at meetings	20%
Councillors supported to conduct their own individual reviews	20%
Cross-party pre-meetings to agree lines of questioning for some agenda items	8%

36% of respondents agreed that they would like the Panels to be more selective when setting agendas though it is clear some respondents felt holding more meetings would instead help to accommodate all the items.

There is also a wish from respondents for more thought to be given to lines of questioning on some agenda items in advance of meetings wither through guidance provided by scrutiny officers or questions being discussed at the previous meeting (as the Commission does for the Borough Commander).

Quality of evidence presented to overview and scrutiny

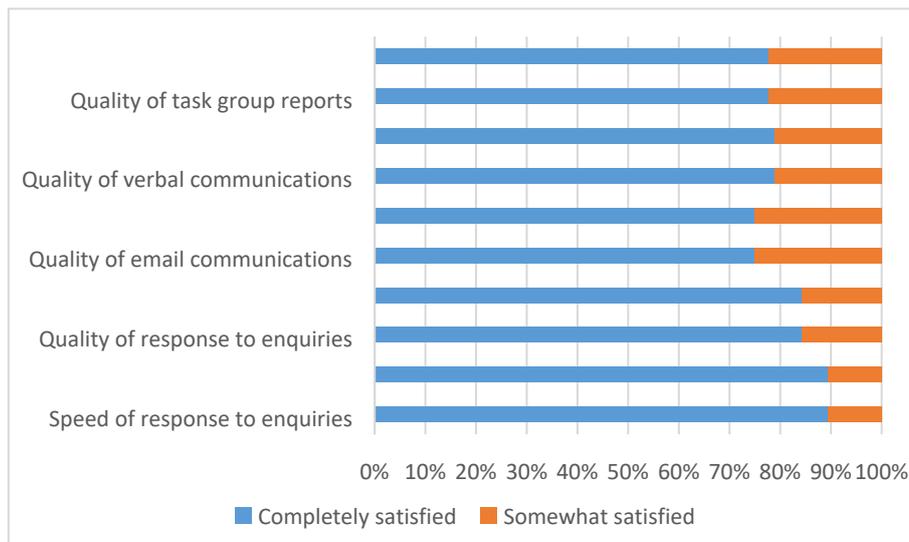
36% of respondents said that the evidence presented to overview and scrutiny has been good and meets the needs of the session. This seems rather low and it would be helpful to know if respondents had specific instances in mind and if they have any suggestions for how this could be improved.

“Reports need to improve; poorly presented, often late, lack suitable information, objectives and data”.

Support from the Scrutiny Team

Satisfaction levels remain high, with 60% rating the support provided by the scrutiny team as excellent and 40% as good. Members were also invited to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the scrutiny team’s work:

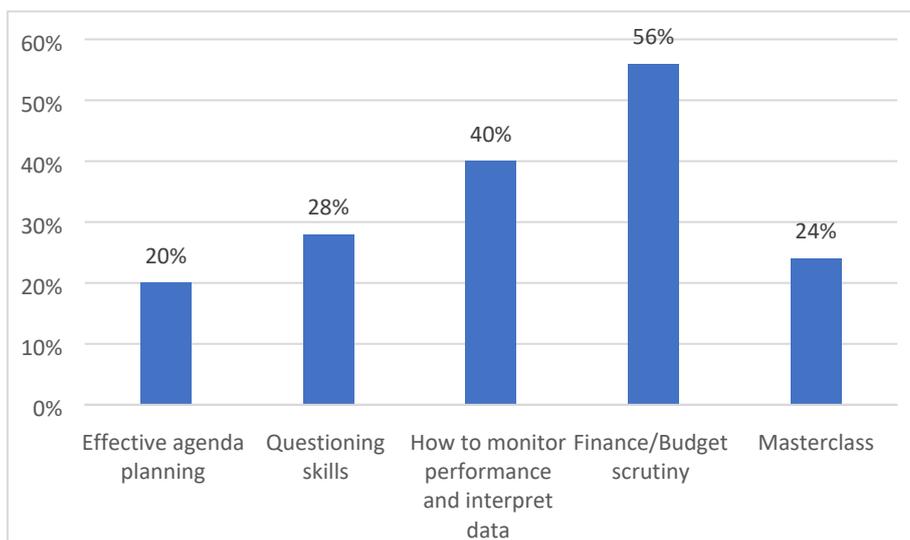
Diagram 5: Satisfaction with scrutiny team



Members’ training and development needs

The skills and knowledge, which members bring to the overview and scrutiny process, are crucial to its effectiveness, so the survey asked what scrutiny related training and development opportunities they would like to have provided in the coming year:

Diagram 6: Demand for Member training



One respondent suggested training from a Parliament select committee clerk may be useful.

Scrutiny's response to the pandemic?

When asked what best practice we could sustain from our pandemic experience and response, there was a general consensus that the option for virtual meetings should remain in place.

Respondents felt that the use of remote meetings has improved public involvement in scrutiny and *“the use of video technology and remote meetings enables attendance when people cannot be physically present in the Civic Centre”*.

A mixture of in-person and virtual meetings and tasks groups could lend itself to greater flexible working opportunities for Members and officers, as well as encourage wider participation from residents.