



Report to: Audit & Governance Committee Meeting –  
19 February 2025

Director or Business Manager Lead: Deborah Johnson, Director Customer Services and  
Organisational Development

Lead Officer: Carl Burns, Transformation and Service Improvement  
Manager

Report Summary	
<b>Report Title</b>	Member Survey
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	To report back on the outcomes of the member survey.
<b>Recommendations</b>	Members are recommended to a.) Note the report, and b.) Approve officers to undertake work to develop an action plan
<b>Reason for Recommendation</b>	To ensure members of Audit and Governance Committee have appropriate sight of the outcomes of the member survey prior to any action plan being developed.

### 1.0 **Background**

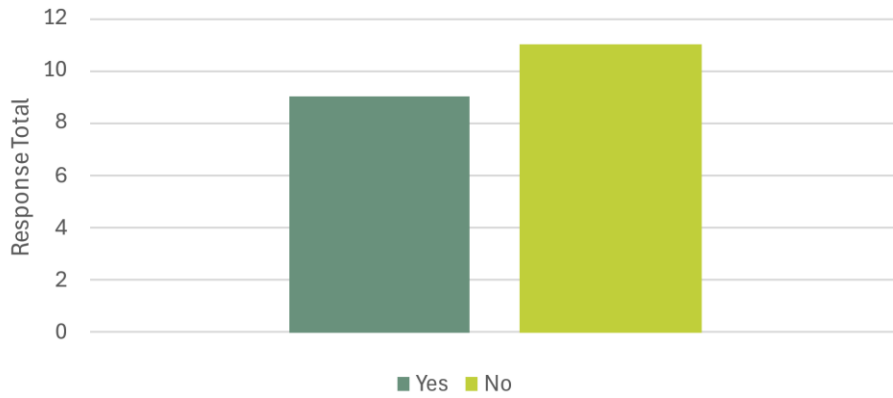
At the Committee meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024 members had the opportunity to consider a set of questions in relation to a member survey. This survey had been at the suggestion of the Leader of the Council, Cllr Paul Peacock. Audit and Governance kindly considered this item and were supportive, with the caveat that all comments remained anonymous.

### 2.0 **Outcome of Survey – data analysis**

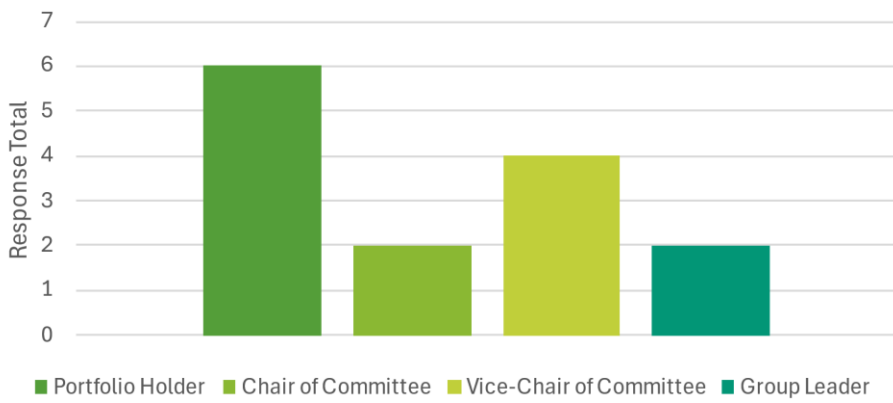
The survey was completed by 20 members out of 39 which is just over a 50% completion rate. Of those completing the survey 9 of the members were new members joining the council in May 2023 and 11 were existing members.

Not all respondents decided to answer every question which is why not all the questions total to 20. Below are the summaries of the answers for each of the questions.

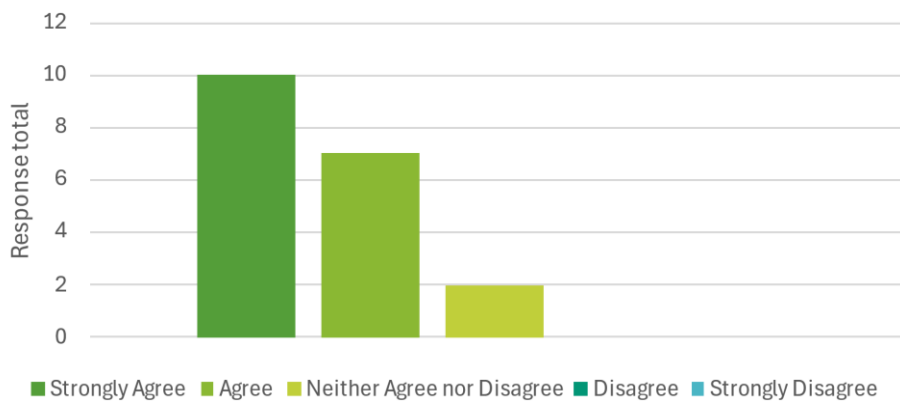
### 1. Were you a new member elected for the first time in May 2023



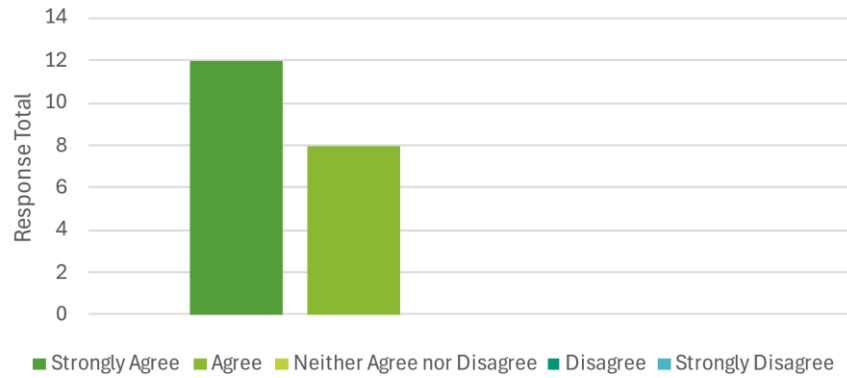
### 2. Do you have any special responsibilities at the Council?



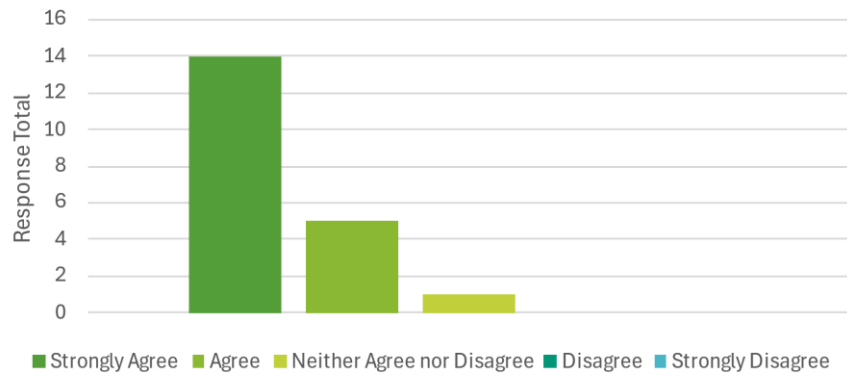
### 3. I have a clear understanding of the services provided by the Council

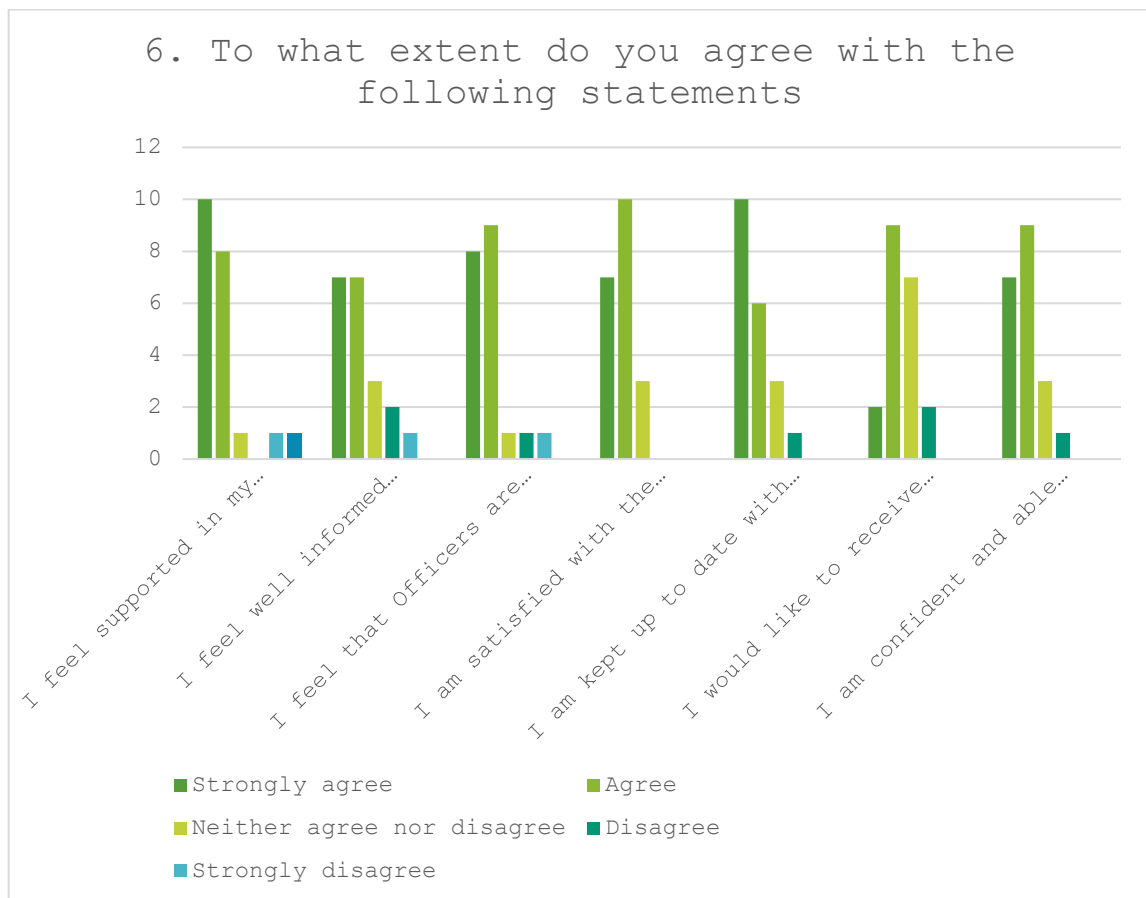
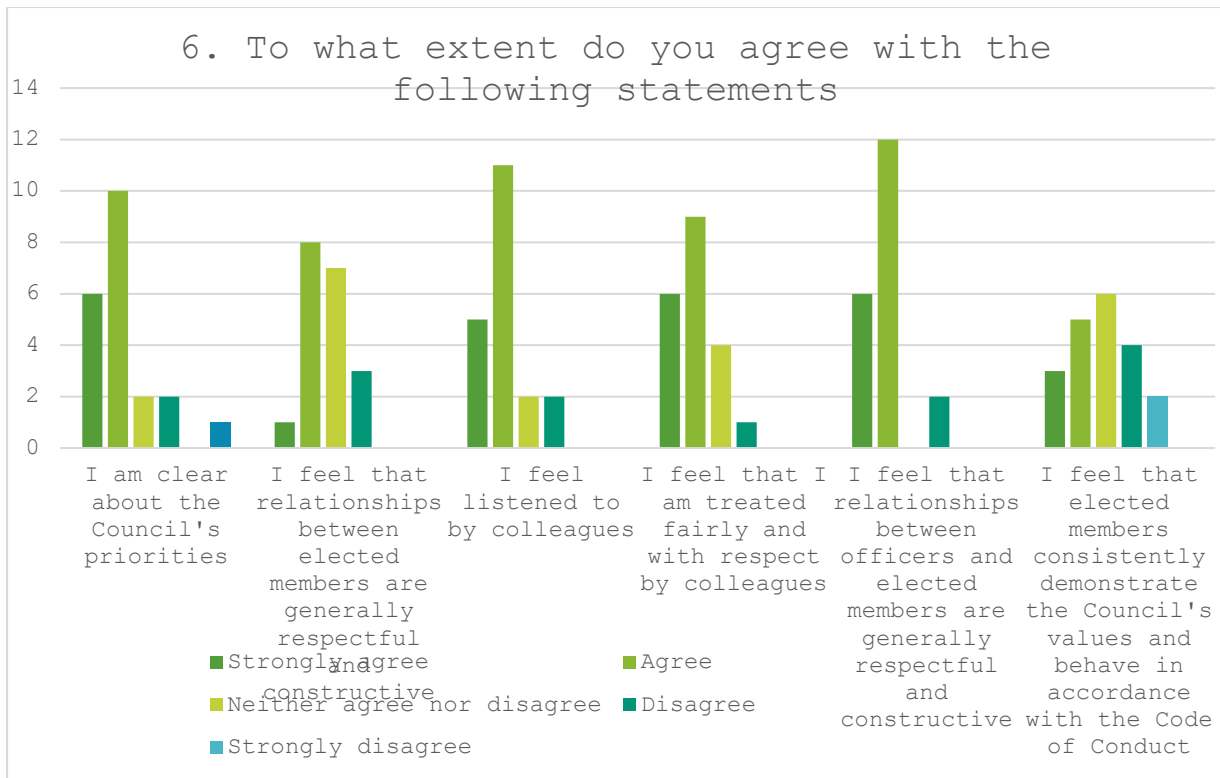


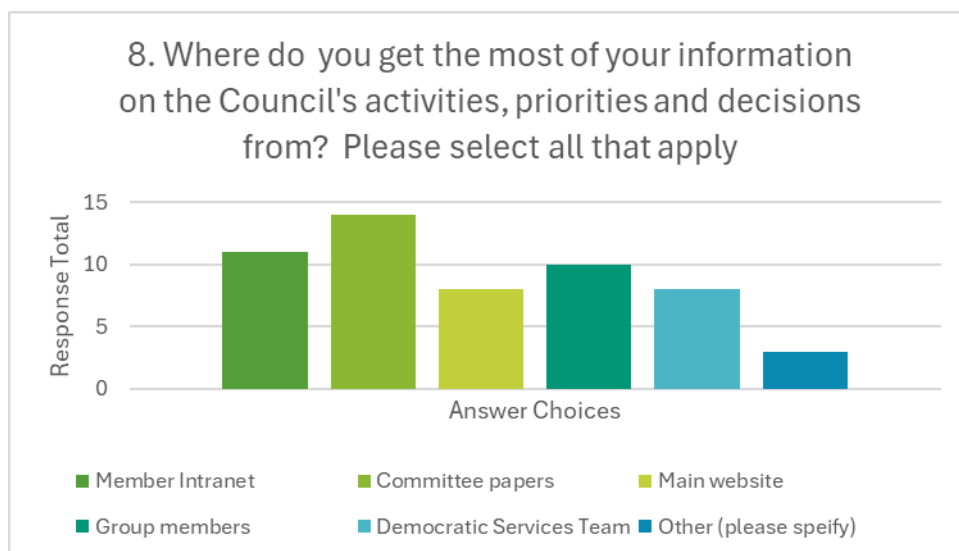
#### 4. I have a clear understanding of my role within the Governance of the Council



#### 5. I have a clear understanding of my overall role as a councillor







### 3.0 Outcome of Survey – Comments (themed)

12 members submitted 37 comments as part of the survey.

For the purpose of analysis these have been organised into 6 themes and to aid analysis have been generally designated as positive, neutral and negative comments.

Theme	Total comments
Member conduct	13
Governance	3
Informed communications	4
Learning and development	2
General comments	4
Suggestions	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>

#### 3.1 Member Conduct Comments

One member reported that they had “been treated with respect and consideration and found “management communications all very good”.

One member thought the relationships with officers were good but that sometimes officers didn’t understand the political element and having a political view was not the same as being “disrespectful”.

With 11 members making similar comments this is the most common set of views from the survey. The language was strident and powerful with views specifically about one particular member/very small minority being “disruptive”, “disrespectful”, having “behaviour that is utterly reprehensible” and that “it pollutes the whole environment”.

They also reflected that member’s bad behaviour “reflects on all members” and “is not in line with the values” or “principles of member conduct”.

**3.2 Governance Comments**

One member expressed concerns about protocols that restrict opposition members and backbenchers from fulfilling their roles, including subjects available for scrutiny.

One member expressed some concerns that a few officers are restrictive about involving members in policy development.

**3.3 Informed Communications**

One member felt they were not well informed and found information out in the local press.

One member felt there was such a lot of information it was a challenge to filter it.

One member felt the opposition members were not well informed, and

One member spoke positively about the communications, saying “links between myself and all officers are always well received”.

**3.4 Learning and Development**

We received two comments on learning and development. One member commented “There is an awful lot of CPD on offer. More than I could ever have time for”.

One member expressed a concern that, “while we got plenty of information in the training, I still have really no sense of how to get things done, how to effect change, how to influence policy especially when representing an area outside Newark”.

**3.5 General Comments**

One member reflected that “It is hard to balance working life and being a councillor sometimes”.

One member would like the opposition to work closer with the administration.

One member reported “officers are consistently helpful and professional. As a member of the opposition, I am treated just as courteously by the leadership”.

One member stated, “it’s been a privilege to work with the majority of members elected in 2023 and all of the officers, employees and executive of the council”.

**3.6 Suggestions**

It is important to look where members have made specific suggestions. These are listed below.

	<b>Member Suggestion:</b>	<b>Suggested Action:</b>
<b>Information</b>	Every new member of staff should get a who’s who when it comes to elected councillors and who are the portfolio holders. The same as elected members when we’re elected with who’s who at the Council?	There is potential to cover in induction and for an annual update, officers will explore this.

	As soon as you go onto the Internet page for NSDC, the first thing you should see is who are your elected councillors and what positions each one holds.	This is easy to locate. The website is designed for the customer with the most frequently requested items are on the front page.
	Maybe some sort of priority system that flags "must read" documents and information would help.	Officers to consider
<b>Member Resources</b>	There should be an allocated members area like we used to have at Kelham Hall with TV and coffee facilities just for elected members.	Having members interact with staff is essential for a good relationship. The pilot program of allocating the training room was not utilised.
	Each group should have their own desk area and allocated space to meet up during the day if they wish to do so.	Councillors can book a room anytime via democratic services or use a hot desk when needed.
	Controlling group should have their own staffing resources with their own researchers.	Not a typical district or borough resource, as it would necessitate reallocating the budget from other essential services.
	There needs to be more of an overlap between members and officers to get the best results for residents. The machine can be overwhelming and change hard to achieve unless relationships are mutually beneficial and work for everyone.	Each member has a dedicated DSO and they can facilitate any request to understand a service or meeting with relevant officers. All directors are available if a member wishes to explore the best way to interact with a particular service.
<b>Scrutiny</b>	Scrutiny committee should be non-paid roles.	The Chair and Vice Chair are entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance as are all other committee Chairs and Vice Chairs, in accordance with the Members Allowances Scheme, which is reviewed periodically by an independent panel taking into account statutory requirements and benchmarking data. Other

		Committee Members are not entitled to any additional allowance.
	You need to have more than one scrutiny as one scrutiny committee is not enough to scrutinise the entire Council. The scrutiny committee should be chaired by the opposition members with an overall scrutiny that oversees them by the controlling group.	Our constitution includes one scrutiny committee. We also conduct governance reviews through working groups and the Housing Advisory Board, which acts as a form of scrutiny.
Training	The adoption of a standard of behaviour higher than that expected by the code of conduct, particularly focusing on the use of social media.	Audit and Governance has recently reviewed the code of conduct. The Council has adopted a Social Media Protocol for Councillors, which is due for review. Further work is being undertaken on this.
	Planning training should be mandatory for ALL Councillors, not just the planning committee, but many clearly don't understand what is material and not material in planning terms. This might also help stem some of the ignorance displayed on social media about planning decisions.	Planning training was offered to all Members as part of the Councillor induction programme, in 2023 with 32 Members attending. Further training can be provided.

#### 4.0 **Implications**

*In writing this report and in putting forward recommendations, officers have considered the following implications: Data Protection; Digital & Cyber Security; Equality & Diversity; Financial; Human Resources; Human Rights; Legal; Safeguarding & Sustainability and where appropriate they have made reference to these implications and added suitable expert comment where appropriate.*

There are no specific implications from undertaking the survey. However, there is little point in asking for views if there are no actions arising from them.

The Council is required to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Councillors, but individual councillors must also take responsibility. The Council also has a duty to consider equalities in everything it does, under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This duty extends to the Code of Conduct for Councillors, and consideration of reasonable adjustments for Councillors where appropriate.

There are no financial implications at this stage however should any agreed actions have a financial implication these will be brought back for consideration.



#### 4.1 Legal Implications (LEG2425/7251)

Audit & Governance Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report by virtue of its terms of reference.

#### 5.0 **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None