

## Slough Borough Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Standards Committee
<b>Date:</b>	20 March 2025
<b>Subject:</b>	Members' Survey
<b>Chief Officer:</b>	Sukdave Ghuman, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Colin J Sweeney, Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny (colin.sweeney@slough.gov.uk)
<b>Ward(s):</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Appendices:</b>	Appendix A – survey responses detail 2025 Appendix B – previous years survey responses

### 1. Summary and Recommendations

#### 1.1 This report:

- a) Details the results of the third-ever survey of SBC councillors, which concluded in January 2025.
- b) Compares those results to the previous survey, which took place in January 2024.
- c) Invites members' reflections on actions which should arise from these survey results.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. That the results of the previous Member Survey, and plans for the use of these by officers to inform future action, be noted;**
- 2. That the committee provides feedback to officers on potential actions to be taken in response to the survey;**
- 3. That the committee provide feedback on improvements to the process of gathering members' feedback in future years.**

#### **Reason:**

The Standards Committee's terms of reference include to 'monitor the operation of the Council's ethical framework including the code of conduct' and to advise the Council based on its findings. The member survey provides an important source of information about members' perceptions and opinions, including about the conduct of members and other aspects of the Committee's terms of reference.

## **Commissioners' Comments**

This report is being reviewed by Commissioners and any specific comments will be reported to the meeting.

### **Introduction**

- 1.2 A report on this topic was most recently received by this committee in March 2024.
- 2.3 At the request of the Secretary of State, in the form of directions issued to Slough Borough Council, a series of 'improvement plans' have been created and published. Progress against these plans is being monitored by government-appointed commissioners, and the Council has additionally identified a number of other areas for improvement.
- 2.4 All the Council's plans will benefit from data about councillors' skills, attitudes, motivations and concerns. These include the Democratic Governance Action Plan and Scrutiny Action Plan, as well as a Culture Change Plan.
- 2.5 It is in any event good practice for local authorities to survey their councillors periodically and to use the results to ensure that services and support for councillors are designed to meet their specific needs. At a national level, the Local Government Association carries out a 'census' of councillors for similar reasons.
- 2.6 An action to complete such a survey was included in the Democratic Governance Action Plan. A further action to embed this as annual practice is also included. By carrying out the survey for a third time, this action is being fulfilled.

### **Method**

- 2.7 An online survey was launched to councillors using Microsoft Forms during November-December 2024. Group leaders agreed the content and furthermore agreed to encourage their membership to complete the survey. It was:
  - Sent to each councillor individually on Microsoft Teams.
  - Sent to each councillor individually by email.
  - Sent to all councillors in the Member Newsletter
- 2.8 Results were recorded anonymously.
- 2.9 The survey was designed to include several questions from the National Councillor Census conducted by the Local Government Association, allowing a degree of national benchmarking. Additionally, questions were kept as similar as possible to the previous two surveys in order to assist with comparison.

### **Response**

- 2.10 Twenty one out of 42 councillors responded, a response rate of 50%, which is 24% down on responses received to the 2024 survey. The drop in response rate is disappointing and members may wish to consider the reasons for this and any action that can be taken to encourage members to complete future surveys.

- 2.11 The results of the questions, including a full account of the free text responses - and comparisons, where available, with the LGA councillor survey and the previous survey - are presented at Appendix A.
- 2.12 Any potentially identifying personal comments have been redacted, otherwise the free text comments are presented in their original and full form. The only information not presented is the free-text comments from the former survey, which can be reviewed in the appendix to the March 2024 Standards Committee.
- 2.13 Of the three annual surveys, the 2024 survey is the only one where all current members could have taken part. In May 2023, twenty-two new councillors joined the council (out of forty-two) and the political administration changed. It is impossible to know how many of the 20 councillors who remained from the previous cohort were amongst the 24 who responded to the first survey, and it is unknown how many of those were amongst the 31 respondents to the second survey.
- 2.14 Therefore, the comparability of the results between surveys in Appendix A cannot be assumed. However, the exercise of comparing these survey results is not pointless as long as it is done carefully in this informed context. Some subjects covered by the survey – such as councillors’ perceptions of the quality of the member support offer and of officers’ behaviours – may be easier to meaningfully compare than others.

Answers with highest percentage listed		
Question	2025 Survey	2024 Survey
1. Main reasons for becoming a Councillor?	86% of 21 responses said to serve the community.	94% of 31 responses said to serve the community.
2. Most important things Councillors do?	62% of 21 responses said to listen to the views of local people and to represent local residents’ views to the Council	65% of 31 responses said to represent local resident’s views to the Council.
3. How much influence to change things?	48% of 21 responses said they felt they had less influence to change things than they expected before being elected.	39% of 31 responses said they felt they had about as much influence to change things as they expected.
4. How effective in role of Councillor?	48% of 21 responses said they were very effective in their role as a Councillor.	45% of 31 responses said they were very effective in their role as a Councillor.
5. How effective were most SBC Councillors in their roles as Councillor?	33% of 21 responses said somewhat effective.  33% also said somewhat ineffective.	35% of 31 responses said somewhat effective.  23% also said somewhat ineffective
6. Would Councillors recommend becoming an	62% of 21 responses said yes.	77% of 31 responses said yes.

SBC Councillor?		
7. Quality of member support provided by the Council overall and by Democratic Services?	<p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with the quality of support provided by the Council overall.</p> <p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed they were satisfied with the quality of support provided by Democratic Services.</p>	A majority of members agreed or strongly disagreed they were satisfied with the quality of support
8. There is a healthy culture and good ways of working overall?	<p>A number of members agreed or strongly agreed there was a healthy culture and good ways of working overall amongst Councillors and officers.</p> <p>An equal number of members disagreed or strongly disagreed.</p>	A number of members agreed or strongly agreed there was a healthy culture and good ways of working overall amongst Councillors and officers.
9. Did they have confidence in SBC Councillors and senior officers?	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.
10. Did senior officers understand Councillors and how politics works in Slough?	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.
11.	<b><i>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</i></b>	
12. When they submitted casework (via the portal), they were confident a) that it would be resolved, and b) that they would get a response within a reasonable timeframe?	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.

<p>13. When they submitted a service request (e.g. via the Council's website), they were confident a) that it would be resolved, and b) that they would get a response within a reasonable timeframe.</p>	<p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.</p>	<p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.</p>
<p>14. If they contacted a senior officer with a question or an issue, they were confident a) that it would be resolved, and b) that they would get a response within a reasonable timeframe.</p>	<p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.</p>	
<p>15.</p>	<p><b><i>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</i></b></p>	
<p>16. The Council provided Councillors with IT equipment and infrastructure, which enables them to carry out their roles effectively.</p>	<p>A significant majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.</p>	<p>A significant majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.</p>
<p>17.</p>	<p><b><i>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</i></b></p>	
<p>18. The Council's Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee?</p>	<p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed that (a) scrutiny arrangements are working well; (b) scrutiny members had the skills needed to do the role well; (c) scrutiny was an important mechanism for community</p>	<p>A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed with (a) to (f), (however a number of members disagreed or strongly disagreed with these.</p>

	engagement; (d) scrutiny has a positive impact on the outcomes for residents; (e) scrutiny works in a cross-cutting fashion and is not restricted to departmental silos; and (f) scrutiny committee was good at prioritising only the most important issues.	
19.	<b>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</b>	
20. Councillors had the training and development opportunities they required; and  If there was any additional training and development they needed, they would know how to access it.	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.  The vast majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.	A majority of members agreed or strongly agreed.
21. What did Councillors say were the main things which prevented them from attending more member development sessions?	71% of the 21 members that responded said that nothing prevented them from attending and that they attended most of these.  38% said they did not attend because these were not online.	81% of the 31 members that responded said that nothing prevented them from attending and that they attended most of these.  23% said they did not attend because these were not online.
22.	<b>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</b>	
23. Decision-making	The vast majority of members who responded said that they had a good understanding of the work of the Cabinet and felt able to have their say about issues affecting Slough, its residents and the Council.	The vast majority of members who responded said that they had a good understanding of the work of the Cabinet and felt able to have their say about issues affecting Slough, its residents and the Council.

	<p>A majority of members said that committee and council reports provided sufficient information for them to make informed decisions.</p> <p>A majority of members disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Council communicates well with residents about the big decisions it makes and that Council and committee reports are written in a way which helps councillors and the public to understand complex issues.</p>	<p>A majority of members said that committee and council reports provided sufficient information for them to make informed decisions.</p> <p>A majority of members disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Council communicates well with residents about the big decisions it makes</p>
24.	<b><i>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</i></b>	

25. Were effective arrangements in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour?	<p>A majority of members agreed there were effective measures in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour by members of the public, officers and councillors.</p>	<p>A majority of members agreed there were effective measures in place to deal with inappropriate behaviour by members of the public, officers and councillors.</p>
26 and 27. Fulfilling role as councillor and any abuse or intimidation?	<p>Over the past twelve months, a majority of members that responded said they had rarely or never felt at risk personally when fulfilling their councillor role.</p> <p>A majority of members that responded said that they had occasionally, or frequently, experienced abuse or intimidation in their role as a councillor primarily from members of the public.</p>	<p>Over the past twelve months, a majority of members that responded said they had rarely or never felt at risk personally when fulfilling their councillor role.</p>

<p>28. Statements posed.</p>	<p>A majority of members felt confident that if they raised a serious issue or concern their concerns would be investigated and responded to.</p> <p>The vast majority of members understood the standards regime and how to raise a complaint about a councillor.</p> <p>A majority of members felt confident that if they lodged a complaint against a councillor, it would be dealt with effectively.</p>	<p>A majority of members felt confident that if they raised a serious issue or concern their concerns would be investigated and responded to.</p> <p>The vast majority of members understood the standards regime and how to raise a complaint about a councillor.</p> <p>A majority of members felt confident that if they lodged a complaint against a councillor, it would be dealt with effectively.</p>
<p>29.</p>	<p><b>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</b></p>	
<p>30. Positions held at the Council.</p>	<p>Of those 21 members that responded:</p> <p>8% were Cabinet Members</p> <p>25% were chair or vice-chair of committees</p> <p>17% were scrutiny members</p> <p>33% were committee members (excluding cabinet and scrutiny)</p> <p>17% were SBC representatives on other bodies.</p>	<p>Of the 31 members that responded:</p> <p>13% were Cabinet members.</p> <p>45% were chair or vice-chair of committees</p> <p>26% were scrutiny members</p> <p>52% were committee members (excluding cabinet and scrutiny)</p> <p>26% were SBC representatives on other bodies.</p>
<p>31 and 32. Average hours spent (weekly) on Council business.</p>	<p>A significant majority of those members that responded, spent between 0 and 15 hours per week. A small minority spent between 21 and 31+ hours per week (a breakdown is listed in the Appendix)</p>	<p>Similar response to 2025 results.</p> <p>A question asked specifically, the number of hours spent:</p> <p>15 spent between 0 and 15 hours</p> <p>15 between 16 and 45 hours</p>



33. What are councillors' current circumstances?	57% in full-time, paid employment. 14% are retired. 19% are self-employed or freelance. 10% are "other"	58% in full time, paid employment. 16% are retired 13% are self-employed or freelance
34. Current occupation (if in paid employment)?	Of the 21 members that responded:  1 is in administration, clerical, secretarial or sales  5 are managerial or executive  2 are manual or craft  5 are professional or technical  3 are not in paid employment  2 are "other"	
35. Any additional democratic, voluntary and unpaid positions held?	Of the 21 members that responded:  1 is a parish councillor 3 are school governors 14 held no such positions 2 are "other"	Of the 31 members that responded:  3 are parish councillors 1 is a school governor 17 held no such positions 1 is a magistrate 6 are "others"
36. Any primary carer responsibilities?	Of the 21 members that responded:  7 (children) 2 (partner) 2 (relative) 10 (none) 1 (other)	Of the 31 members that responded:  6 (children) 0 (partner) 3 (relative) 20 (none) 1 (other)
37.	<b>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</b>	
38. Any further comments	<b>Member comments on this topic are listed in Appendix A.</b>	

**For completeness, a summary of the 2023- and 2024-Members' Surveys is also attached to this report at Appendix B.**

### **Next Steps - Response to the Survey**

- 2.15 Various statistics in the original January 2023 survey were expected to provide the basis for measurement of the Council's performance in terms of support provided to members (e.g. Members' satisfaction with Democratic Services, IT, officer responsiveness etc) and in terms of their perception of the Council's performance at supporting residents (e.g. the figures about responsiveness to service requests and complaints). Crucially, a number of statistics then, provided insights into the intended improvement of the leadership culture at Slough Borough Council, especially as it related to the relationship between senior officers and members.
- 2.16 Overall there is a general reduction in the metrics across the board. Where this is not the case it is highlighted in Appendix A.
- 2.16 Members of the Standards Committee are invited to provide officers with their views on the key results and a steer as to how they would like to see the Council respond to the data. Officers intend to use the data in similar ways to the results from the first two surveys, including:
- The Corporate Governance Working Group (an officer board chaired by the Monitoring Officer which acts as the project board for the Democratic Governance Project and the Scrutiny Improvement Project) will review the data for actions to add to the Political Leadership and Governance Improvement Plans.
  - The plan for member development and induction will take into account the feedback from the survey and this committee, assisted by the contribution of an informal Member Development Working Group.
- 2.17 This committee has a role in advising, training or arranging training for Members on matters relating to the Council's Ethical Framework including the Code of Conduct. Informal feedback on the survey from group leaders has included whether the timing in the municipal year is right. In addition the survey is quite long and members may wish to consider whether the benefit of some questions outweighed the additional time it takes to complete it. Reducing the number of questions may allow more opportunity for free text comments to expand on questions such as councillor effectiveness and working relationships between councillors and officers. The committee may wish to consider whether feedback on IT or scrutiny is better collected via alternative means.
- 2.18 Officers have already taken steps in response to the survey, including reviewing the quality of reports and language used to make them more readily understandable for the public and councillors alike and ran a member officer workshop to assist members to understand roles and responsibilities and how to work effectively with officers on difficult issues, Officers are also considering what further support can be provided to councillors to ensure their wellbeing and safety when they are working in their communities, including in relation to use of social media.
- 3.1 **Financial Implications**
- 3.1.1 There are no specific financial implications.

## **3.2 Legal Implications**

3.2.1 There are no specific legal implications.

## **3.3 Risk Management Implications**

3.3.1 Failure to take proper account of the information provided could hinder the Council's improvement efforts and/or make it harder to demonstrate improvement to the government-appointed commissioners.

## **3.4 Environmental Implications**

3.4.1 There are no specific environmental implications.

## **3.5 Equality Implications**

3.5.1 This survey provides some insight into the demography and family circumstances of councillors, in addition to information about the degree to which members have experienced bullying and/or harassment. When reviewing this information, the Council must take into account its equalities duties.

## **4. Background Papers**

None.