

# Committee System Feedback Survey

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## Methodology

The survey was open between 4<sup>th</sup> October and 29<sup>th</sup> October 2018 and was circulated to Members and Officers by the Democratic Services Manager.

There were a total of 42 respondents to the survey. Of these 25 were from Members (45% response rate) and 17 were from Officers (14% response rate).

Some questions were posed only to Members; this is noted in the commentary.

## Findings

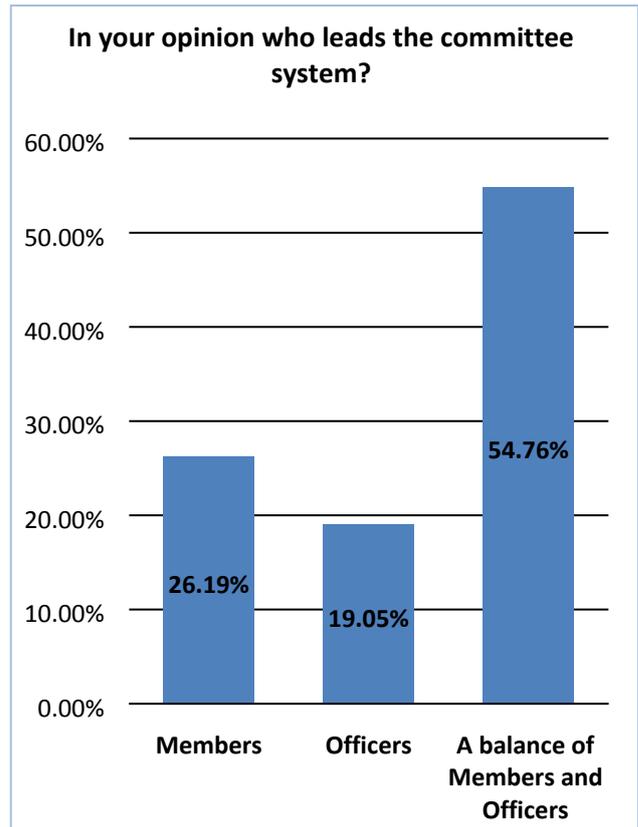
- Members understanding of how to move a motion, make an amendment to a motion and how to speak at a meeting is good. There were no questions assessing Officer's knowledge of the Committee process but one comment did mention procedure training for Officers.
- There was consensus between Members and Officers that Committee Clerks and lead Officers provide good Committee support.
- The Joint Transportation Board and the Urgency Committee are the least positively viewed Committees, particularly in terms of leadership, membership and decision making.
- There are polarised views between Members and Officers in terms of the right number and frequency of meetings with Officers more likely than Members to say that there are too many meetings and they occur too frequently.
- There is a view, shared by Members and Officers that the current Committee system does not allow for quick decision making.
- The majority of both Members and Officer believe that Committee Terms of Reference overlap.

### Committee System Leadership

All respondents were asked 'In your opinion who leads the committee system. The graph to the right shows that the majority of respondents felt that the leadership of the Committee system was balanced between Members and Officers.

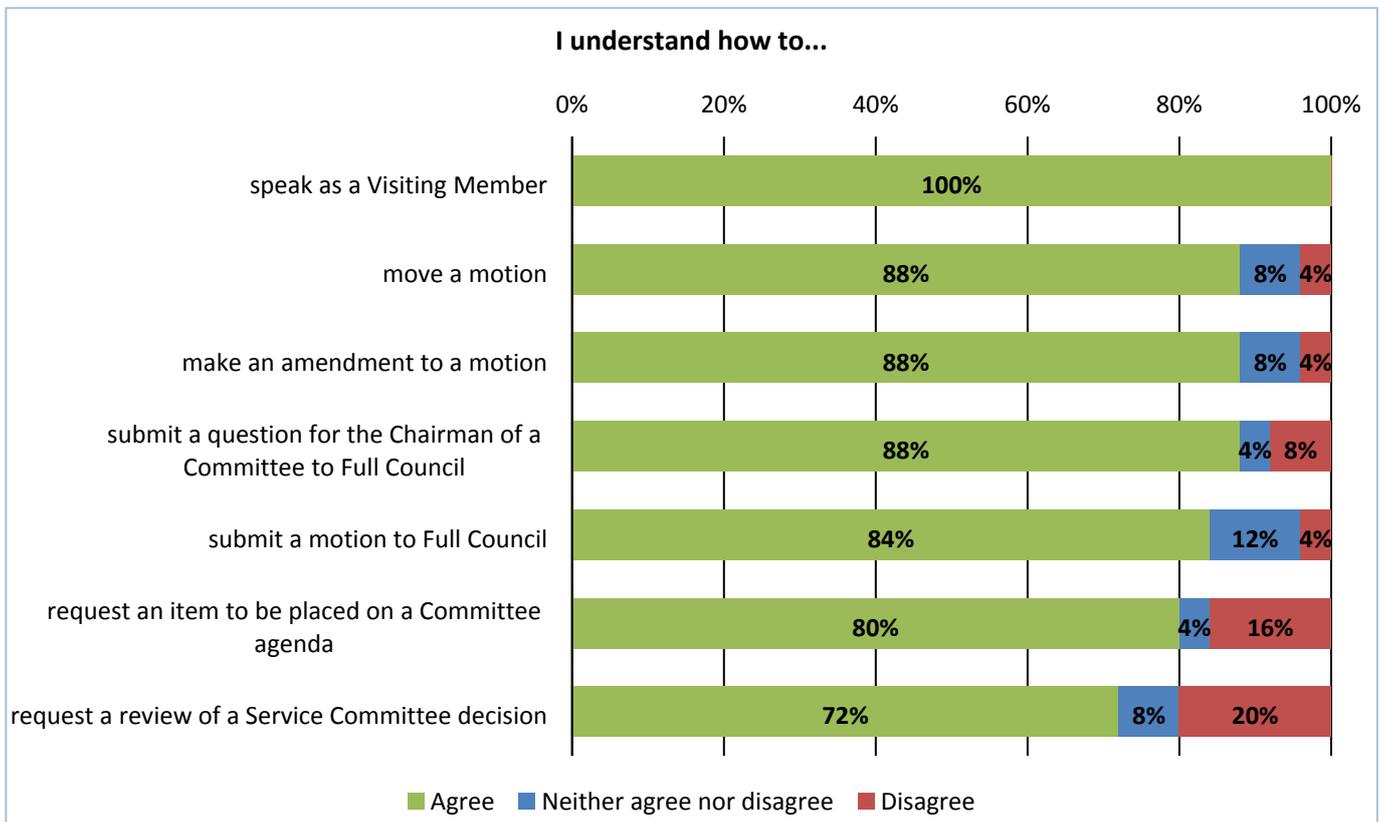
When the data is assessed by respondent type it shows that Officers were more likely to state there was a balance, with 64.7% responding this way compared to 48% of members.

There was a greater proportion of Members responding that Officers lead the Committee system with 28% compared to 6%.



### Member Understanding & Confidence

Members were asked a series of questions about their understanding of how to assert their rights as Councillors. All 25 member respondents answered all components of this question (respondent is equivalent to 4%).



### Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis

Positively, every member said they understand how to speak as visiting member and across the series of questions understanding was high. Requesting a review of a service committee decision had the lowest proportion agreeing at 72% with one in five respondents (20%) disagreeing that they understand how to go about this activity.

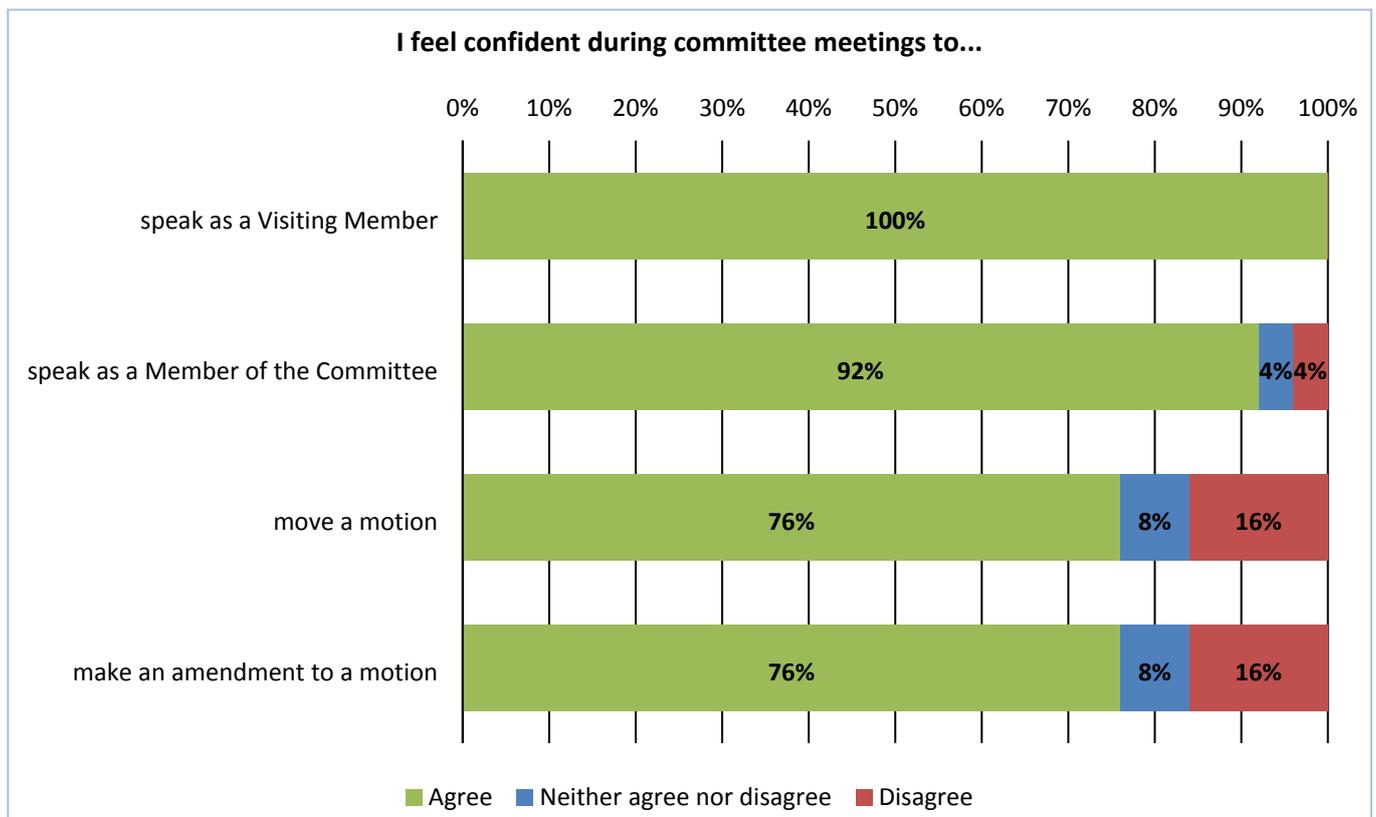
Four of five respondents said they understand how to place an item on a Committee agenda. This activity had the second greatest proportion responding disagree at 16%.

There appears to be the most uncertainty around how to submit a motion to full Council, this activity had the greatest proportion responding neither agree nor disagree at 12%.

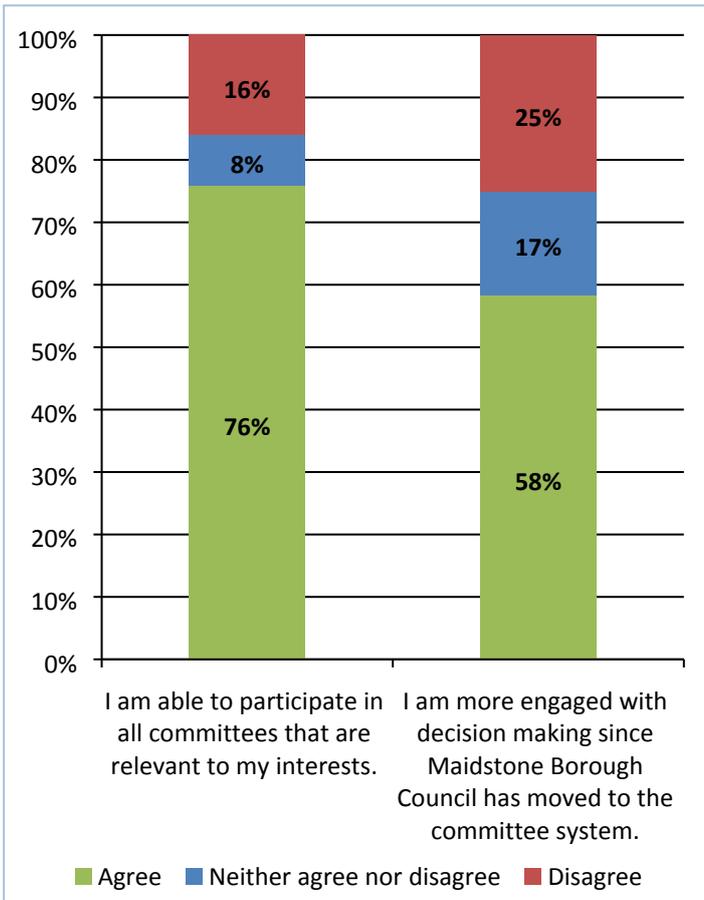
There was no question asking Councillors the length of time they have been a member therefore we cannot assess if it was mostly new members who were didn't know or were uncertain about process for the activities listed.

Members were also asked how confident they feel about undertaking certain activities in a meeting. The chart below shows confidence is high when speaking as a visiting member –aligning with understanding in the previous question.

Although a high proportion of Members said they understand how to move a motion and how to make an amendment to a motion they are slightly less confident when it comes to actually doing the activity within a meeting.



## Participation & Engagement



Members were asked if they agree or disagree with the statement 'I am able to participate in all the committees that are relevant to my interests, all 25 members respondents answered this question.

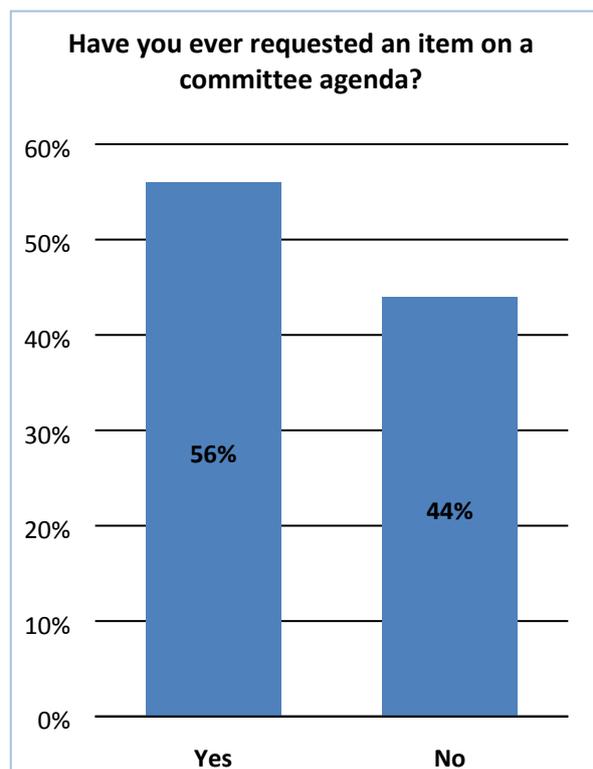
More than three out four respondents agreed that they are able to participate in committees relevant to their interests. Of the 16% that disagreed three of the four members strongly disagreed.

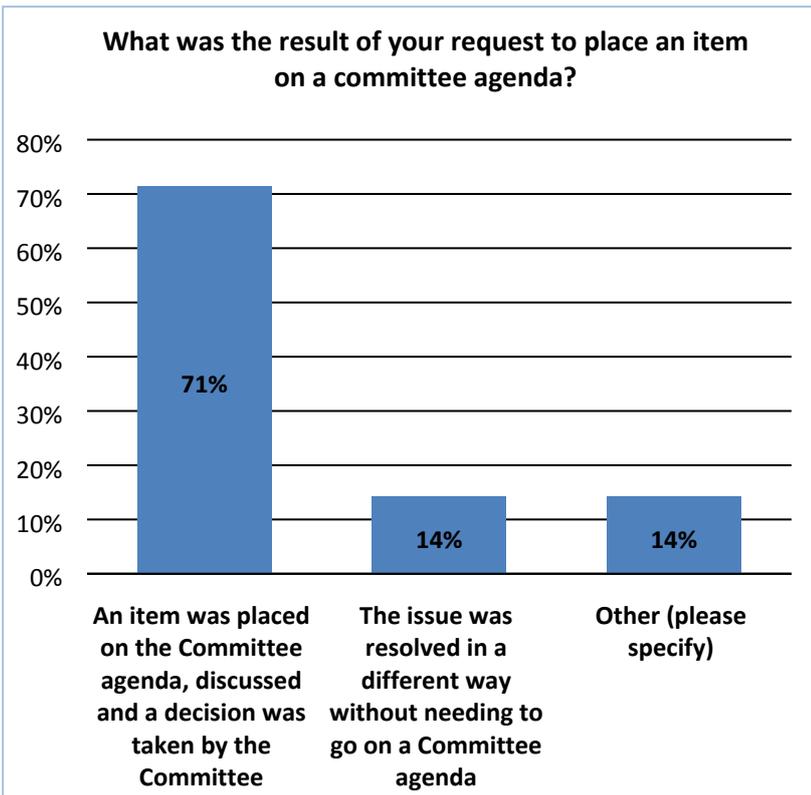
Members were also asked if they feel more engaged since the Council moved to the committee system. The majority of members were still positive but to a lesser degree with 58% agreeing. One in four respondents said they disagreed, this was evenly split between strong disagree and agree.

## Requesting Agenda Items

Members were asked if they had ever requested and item on a committee agenda: the majority of respondents (56%) said they had.

Those that responded they had, were asked supplementary questions about which item and what happened as a result of their request. Eleven of the fourteen respondents who answered yes provided the subject of items they had previously requested. Items mentioned included the Community Toilet Scheme, the Business Terrace and several transport related items.





When asked the result of their request the majority of respondents said that as a result of their request the item was placed on the relevant Committee agenda, discussed and a decision taken by the Committee.

There was a fourth answer option of 'The issue was not resolved and didn't make it onto a committee agenda' which positively, no-one selected.

There were two respondents that answered 'other' both of these responses are shown below. In the case of the second one, it is believed that A refers to item placed on the agenda, B refers to

resolved a different way and C refers to issue was not resolved as this is the order in which the answer options were presented.

There are times when items are not allowed to agenda by CLT. Ultimately under the ruling of the Proper Officer. This is why I say the system is ultimately Officer lead.  
 Both A and C depending on the issues. I have not had a case of B although some matters are still under discussion, including some land transfers.

Members that said they had not requested any agenda items, were asked if there was anything that had prevented them from doing so.

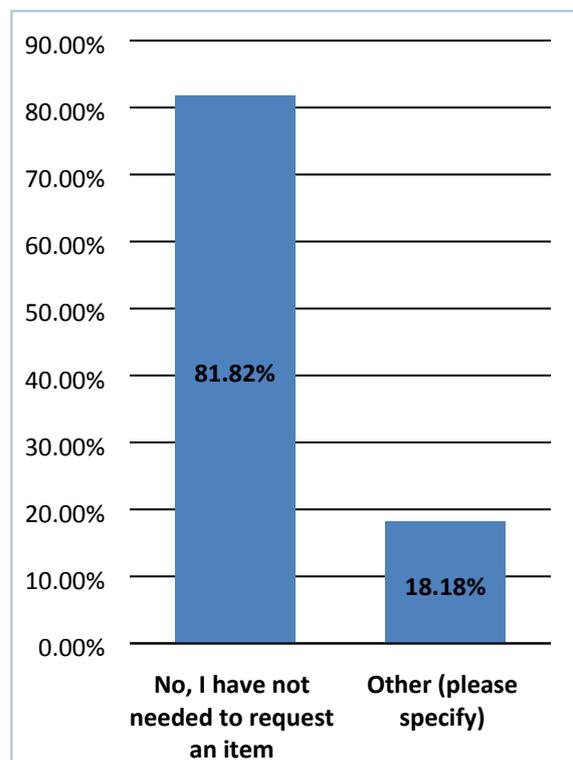
More than four out of five members said they had not needed to request an agenda item.

No members selected any of the following options:

- I was not aware of this provision in the Constitution
- I have requested items before and nothing has happened
- I do not feel confident in speaking to a Committee on an item I have requested

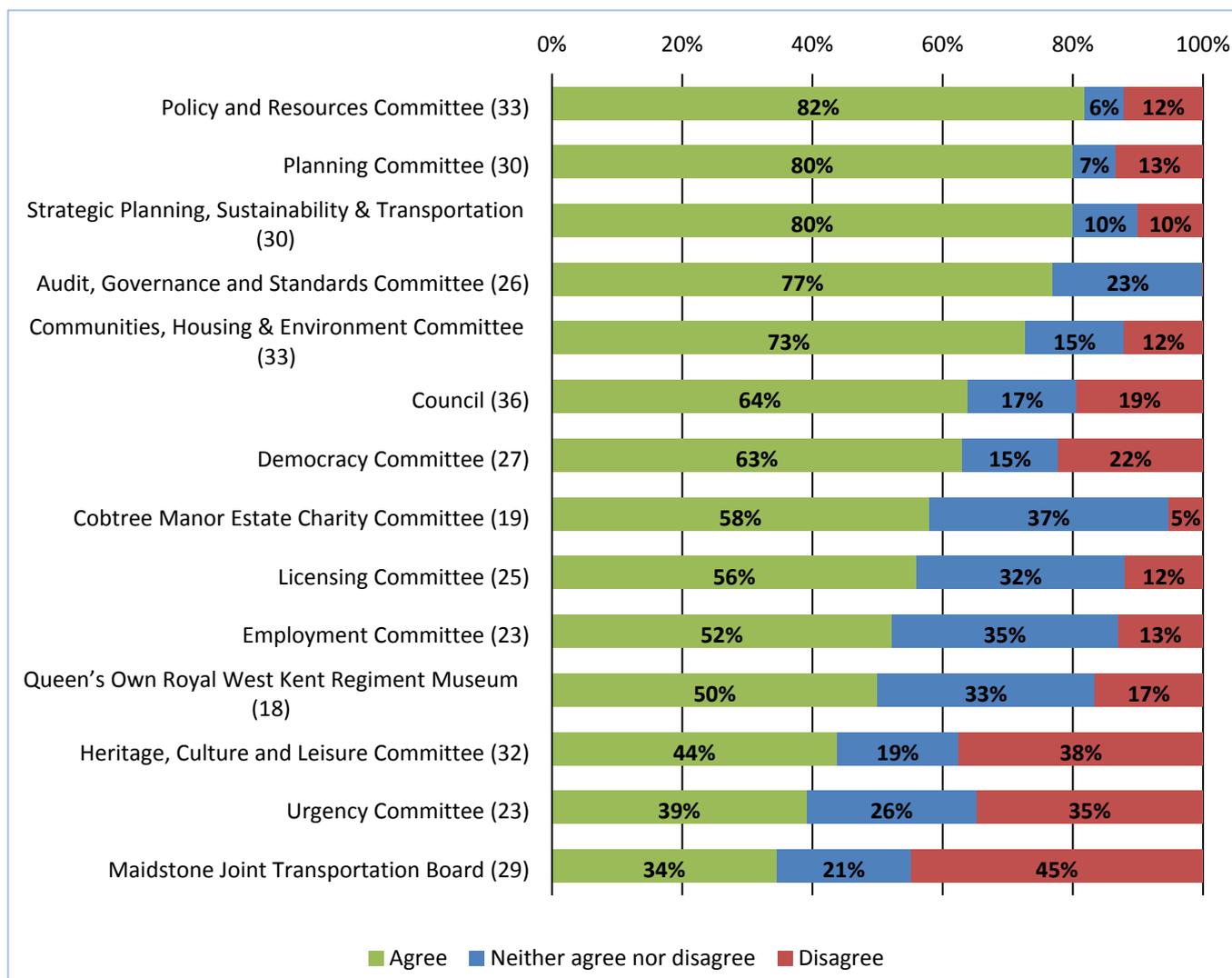
There were two are responses under other. These are shown below:

Chairs are to political  
 New member. Give me time...



## Committee Leadership

All survey respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree, that there is a good combination of experience and skills in committee membership for each of the current committees. Respondents were also given the option responding 'Don't know'. The total respondent numbers to each committee are shown in brackets.



More than three out of four respondents were positive about the leadership and skills for Policy & Resources, Planning and Strategic Planning, Sustainability and transportation committees.

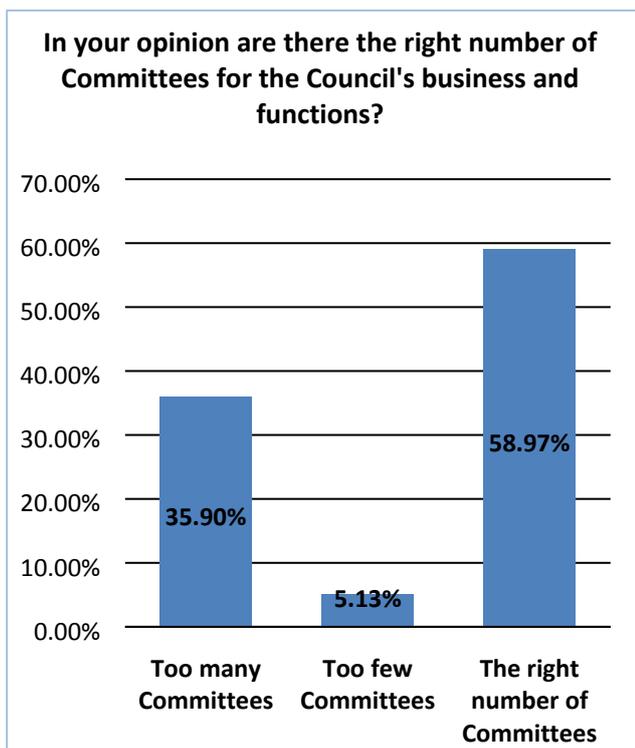
The Committee Manor Estate Charity Committee had the greatest proportion of respondents saying they were unsure at 37% but it also had the lowest number of respondents with more than half opting out of this question with a 'Don't know' response.

Just under a quarter of respondents said they were uncertain about the leadership and skills on the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee.

Due to a significant number of officers answering don't know to this question, there are only three Committees where the response levels between members and officers can be analysed (where there

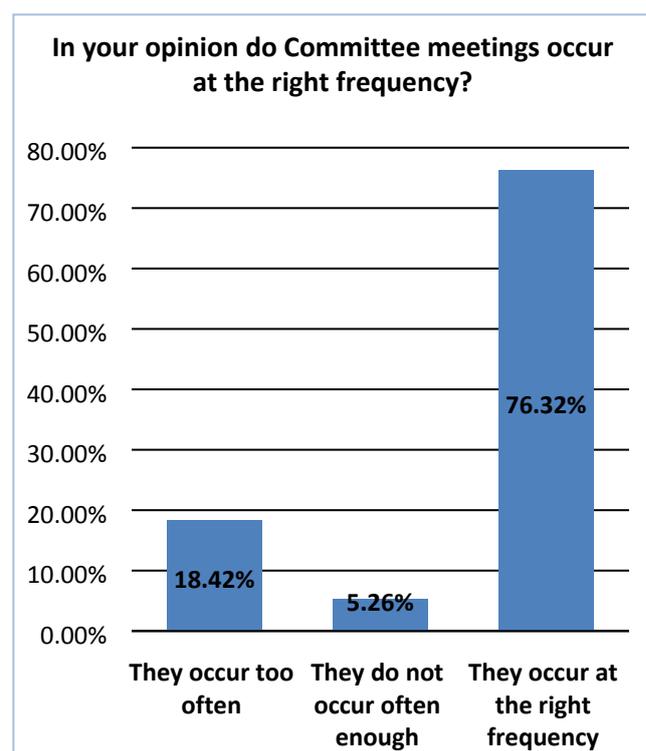
are ten or more respondents to a question). These were Council, Communities, Housing and Environment Committee and Policy and Resources Committee. There were no significant differences in responses level between members and officers for Council or Communities, Housing and Environment Committee. For the Policy and Resources Committee the data shows that Officers were more likely to agree that leadership and skills for this committee are good with 90% agreeing compared to 78% of members responding the same way.

### Committee Logistics



the current number of committees was correct in order for the Council to carry out its functions and if they felt the current frequency of meetings was right.

All survey respondents were asked if they thought



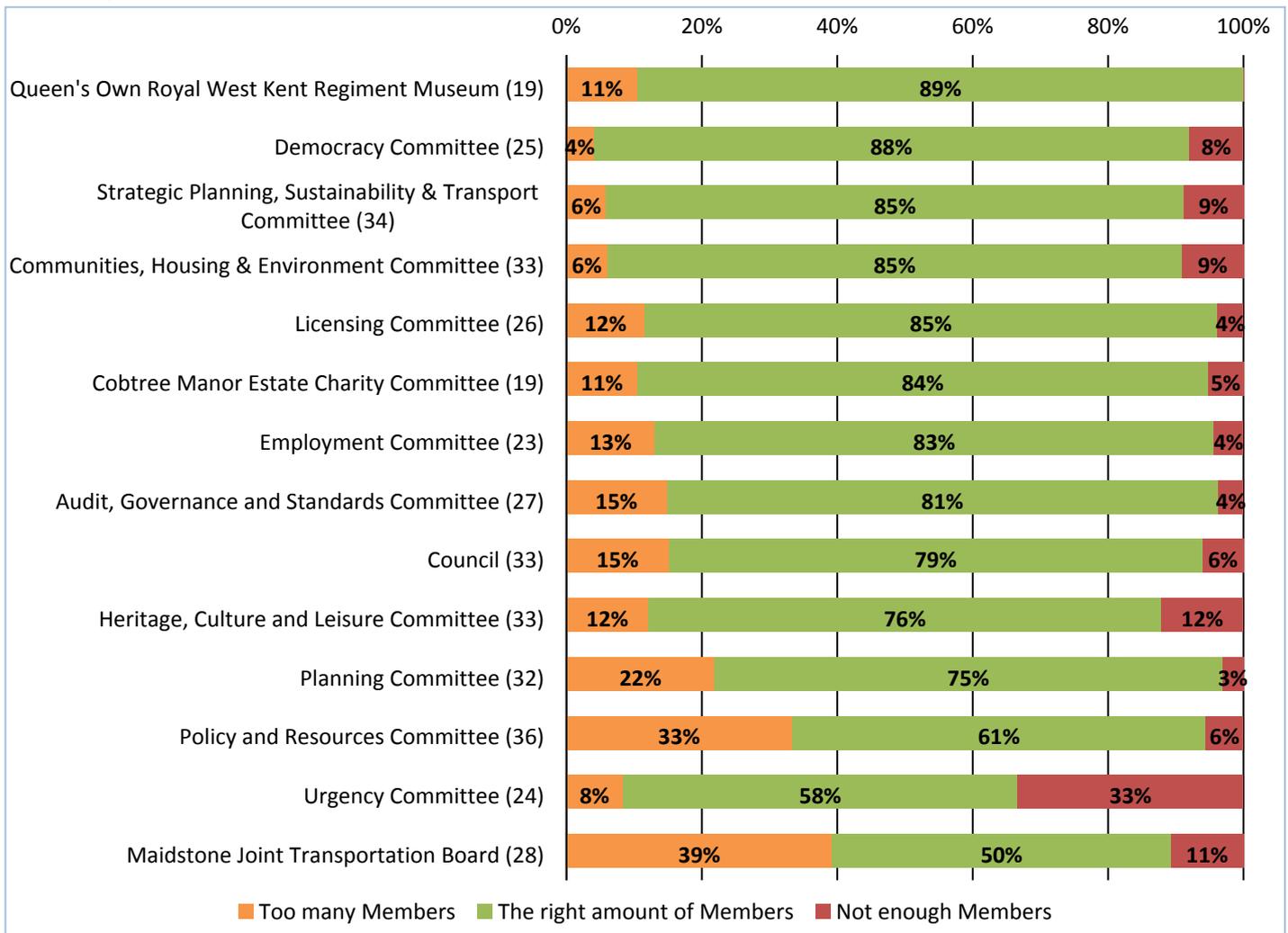
While the majority of respondents said currently there is the right number of committees and that meeting occur at the right frequency, more than a third of respondents said there are too many committees and almost one in five said meetings occur too often.

However, when the data is assessed by respondent type it shows polarising views with majority of officers (57.1%) said there were too many while the majority of members (68.0%) said that the current number of committees was right. While the majority of both groups said that meetings occur at the right frequency officers were more likely to say meeting are too often than members with 35% answering this way compared to 8.3% of members. There were no officer respondents that said there were not enough committees or that meeting do not occur often enough.

### Committee Membership

### Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis

All survey respondents were asked if they thought there was the right number of members on each of the current committees. Respondents were also given the option responding 'Don't know', total respondent numbers to each committee are shown in brackets.



For more than half of the Committees, more than four in five respondents said they thought the number of members on the Committee was about right.

The Committees that were in the bottom three for leadership all also have less than four in five responding stating that the Committee has the right amount of members.

The Queen's Own Royal West Committee had the greatest proportion of respondents saying this committee had the right amount of members at 89% but it also had one of the lowest number of respondents with just over half opting out of this question with a 'Don't know' response. However, there were no respondents that said this Committee did not have enough members.

The Joint Transportation Board had the lowest proportion saying that the amount of members is right at 50% and the greatest proportion saying that this committee has too many members at 39%. This committee also had the greatest proportion disagreeing that this committee has good leadership and skills.

## Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis

The Urgency Committee had the greatest proportion of respondents with a third saying there are not enough members on this committee.

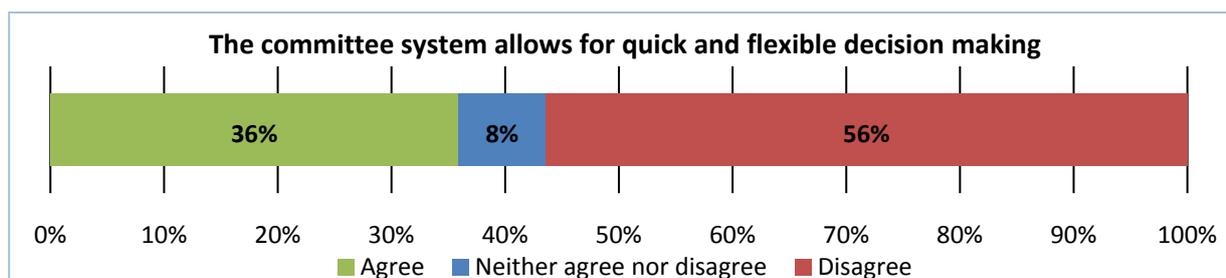
Due to a significant 'don't know' response from Officers there are just three Committees where the response levels between Members and Officers can be analysed (where there are ten or more respondents to a question), Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, Heritage, Leisure and Culture Committee and Planning Committee.

For both the Communities, Housing and the Environment and the Policy and Resources Committees there were no responses from Officers saying there are too few members on these Committees, compared to levels of 13% and 8.3%, respectively for members.

A majority of officers (58.3%) said there were too many members in the Policy & Resources Committee while the majority of members (71%) said there was the right amount of members.

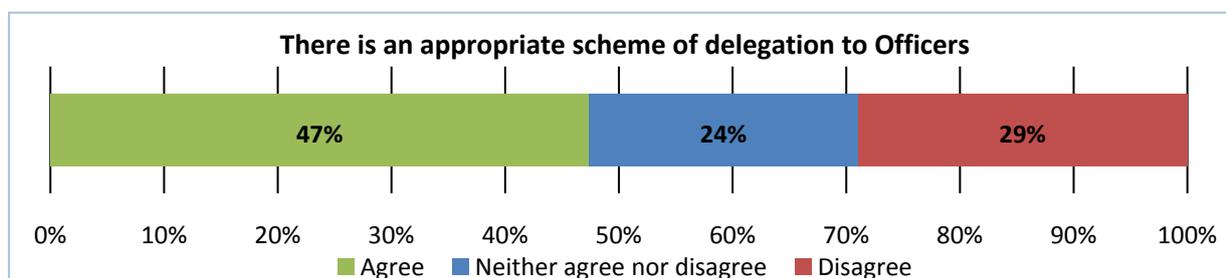
### Committee Administration

All respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with a series of statements about elements of the Committee System.



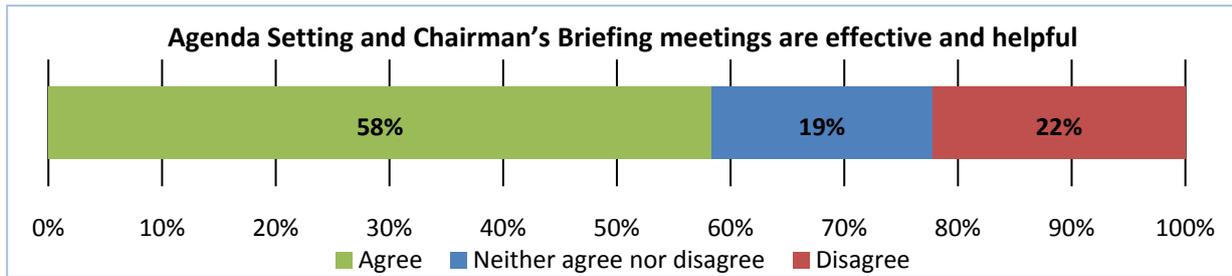
More than half of respondents disagreed that the Committee System allows for quick and flexible decision making. A total of 39 people answered this question.

Looking at the respondent type there are significant differences with Officers more likely to disagree with 86% answering this way compared to 40% of Members. Just 7% of officers agreed that the current committee system allows for quick and flexible decision making compared to 52% of members. Reasons for these polarised views is an area for potential investigation.

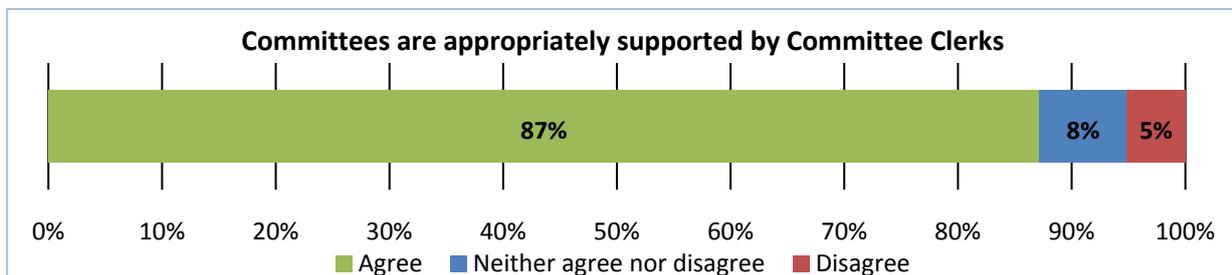


Less than half of respondents agreed that the current scheme of delegation to officers was appropriate. A total of 38 people answered this question. There were no significant difference in the response levels between officers and members.

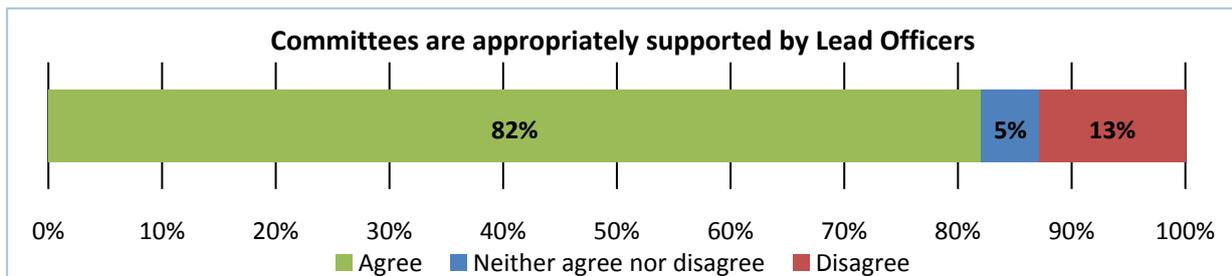
### Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis



More than half of respondents agreed that agenda setting and Chairman's briefing meetings are effective and helpful. A total of 36 people answered this question. Members were slightly more likely to agree at 61% compared to 54% of Officers. Just under a third (31%) of officers disagreed compared to 13% of members. Further investigation could show if there are issues with any committees in particular.

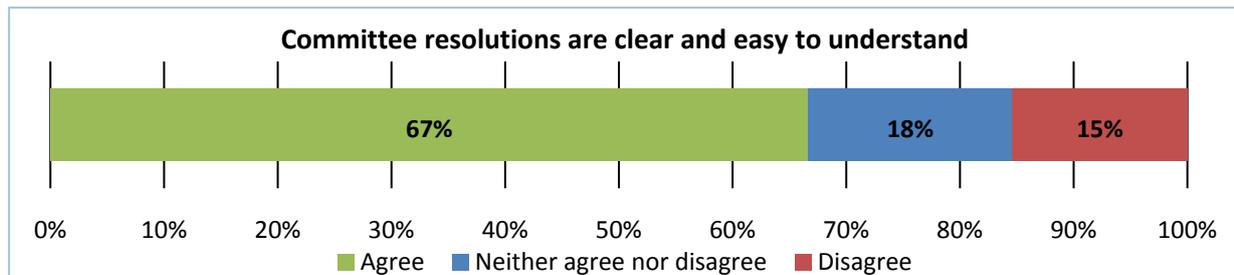


More than four out of five respondents agreed that Committees are appropriately supported by Committee clerks. A total of 39 people responded to this question. Agreement was higher amongst Member respondents than Officer respondents at 92% compared to 79%. No Members responded disagree to this question.



More than four out of five respondents agreed that Committees are appropriately supported by lead officers, this matches the result for both Members and Officers. A total of 39 people responded to this question.

The response to this and the previous questions suggests both Members and Officers are generally satisfied with the committee support provided by committee clerks and lead officers



Two thirds of respondents agreed that Committee resolutions are clear and easy to understand. A total of 39 respondents answered this question. Officers were slightly more likely to respond neither agree nor disagree with 21% responding this way compared to 16% of Members however this difference is not thought to be significant with the proportion agreeing with this statement from each group broadly the same.

All respondents were given the opportunity to provide further comment about Committee membership and management, 16 respondent made comment.

There were two comments that were positive about the current committee system saying that it is effective and that reports have improved over the last year and one respondent was positive with the support given by Committee Clerks.

There were six comments that have been classed as negative. The issues cited were; that it doesn't allow quick and effective decision making, that it can be a barrier to partnership working and that there are too many attendees (both Cllrs and Officers). One commenter said that senior officers see committees as 'rubber stamping' for their ideas, and one person said that they would have given a different answer when asked about committee frequency if they had been asked the same question for each individual committee.

There were four general comments that were neither positive nor negative about the current system. One respondent said there was a difference in quality of legal advice between committees and some committees operate well and other not so believing this to be due to member experience. Two people made comment about committee membership with one stating larger numbers would allow smaller groups to be better represented and the other saying committees should not have even numbers and that the rule about Licensing and Planning Committee membership overlapping was not rational. Respondents also commented that HCL has a small workload, that there is not an obvious committee that was the home for economic business and that there is confusion when services fall across two or more committee remits.

There were five comments classified as containing a suggestion. These included limiting committee membership to nine members and power of delegation for chairs and vice chairs for decision making on issues that do not come to committee, with this respondent stating that delegated officers were often unwilling to use theirs. There was also a conflicting suggestion that some committees get involved in too much detail and a lack of pragmatism for cross-committee working. Delegation of powers was an area in an earlier question where no consensus exists between members and officers.

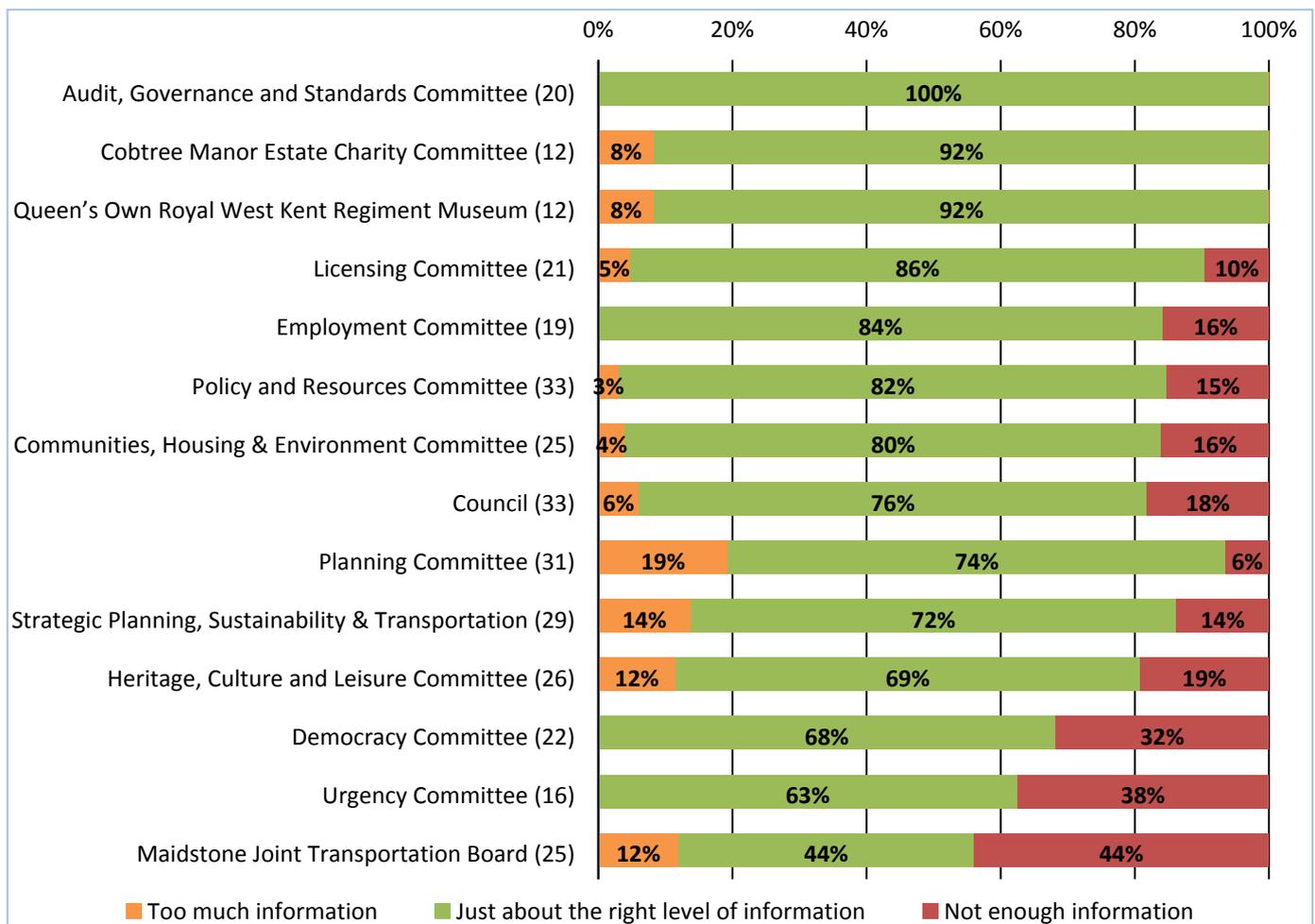
There was one respondent that suggested there should be an additional committee to look at transport infrastructure, stating that the JTB is ineffective.

## Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis

There was a respondent that said not all the relevant officers understand committee procedure and could benefit from training. While there was no question in the survey for officer about how confident they feel with committee procedure this could be an element worth exploring further with officers.

### Information for Decision Making

All respondents were asked, for each committee, if they thought report contained the right amount of advice and information to facilitate decision making. For many committees a significant proportion of respondents answered 'I don't know', the total respondents for each question component is shown in brackets in the chart below.



For half of the committees more than four in five respondents said that reports contained enough information for decision making.

The Joint Transportation Board had less than half of respondents agreeing that its report provide enough information. This committee also had the lowest proportion of respondents agreeing that this committee has a good combination of skills and experience and the lowest proportion agreeing that this committee had the correct number of members.

The Urgency Committee had the second lowest proportion of respondents saying reports contained just the right amount of information. Like the Joint Transportation Board the position of committee has not changed compared to previous questions, with the second lowest proportions agreeing that

## Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis

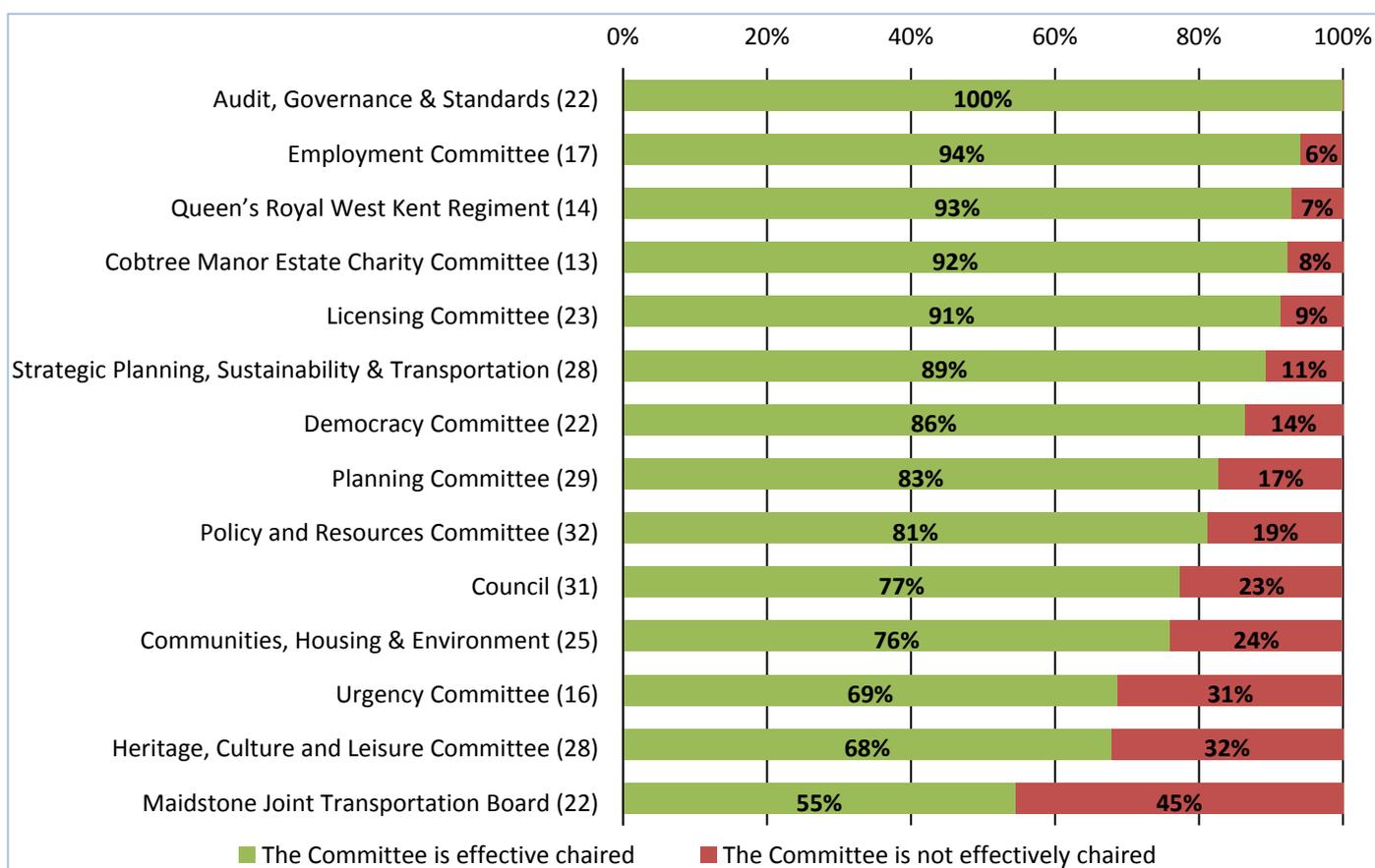
the leadership and experience on this committee is good and that this committee has the right number of councillors.

Only Policy and Resources Committee had enough officer responses to compare response levels with that of Members. Members were slightly more positive than officers with 86% saying that reports had just the right level of information compared to 73% of Officers.

Looking at the results for Members in isolation, of the committees with more than ten respondents, the Heritage, Culture and Leisure committee had the greatest proportion responding, too much information with 11% responding this way. More than four in five member respondents said there was just the right amount of information in reports for the Employment committee, Licensing Committee and the Policy and Resources Committee. At the other end of scale more than four in ten respondents that there was not enough information in reports for the Joint Transportation Committee or the Urgency Committee.

### Chairmanship

All respondents were asked, for each committee, if they considered it to be effectively chaired. For many committees a significant proportion of respondents answered 'I don't know', the total respondents for each question component is shown in brackets in the chart below.



For the majority of committees more than three out four respondents felt they were effectively chaired. The Joint Transportation board featured at the bottom of the list and the Urgency Committee remains in the bottom three, as with all previous question about specific committees.

### Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis

There was no component of this question where there were enough officer respondents to compare response levels with that of members.

Looking at the results to this question for members only the top three committees for effective chairing are the same as in the overall result. However, there are some differences in the bottom three compared to the overall result; Urgency Committee is bottom with 58% responding that this committee is effectively chaired and the joint Transportation Board is second bottom with 65% saying it is effectively chaired and Communities, Housing and the Environment is third bottom of members with 72% saying it is effectively chaired.

All respondents were given the opportunity to provide further comment about the decision making processing and committee chairing, 14 respondents gave comments.

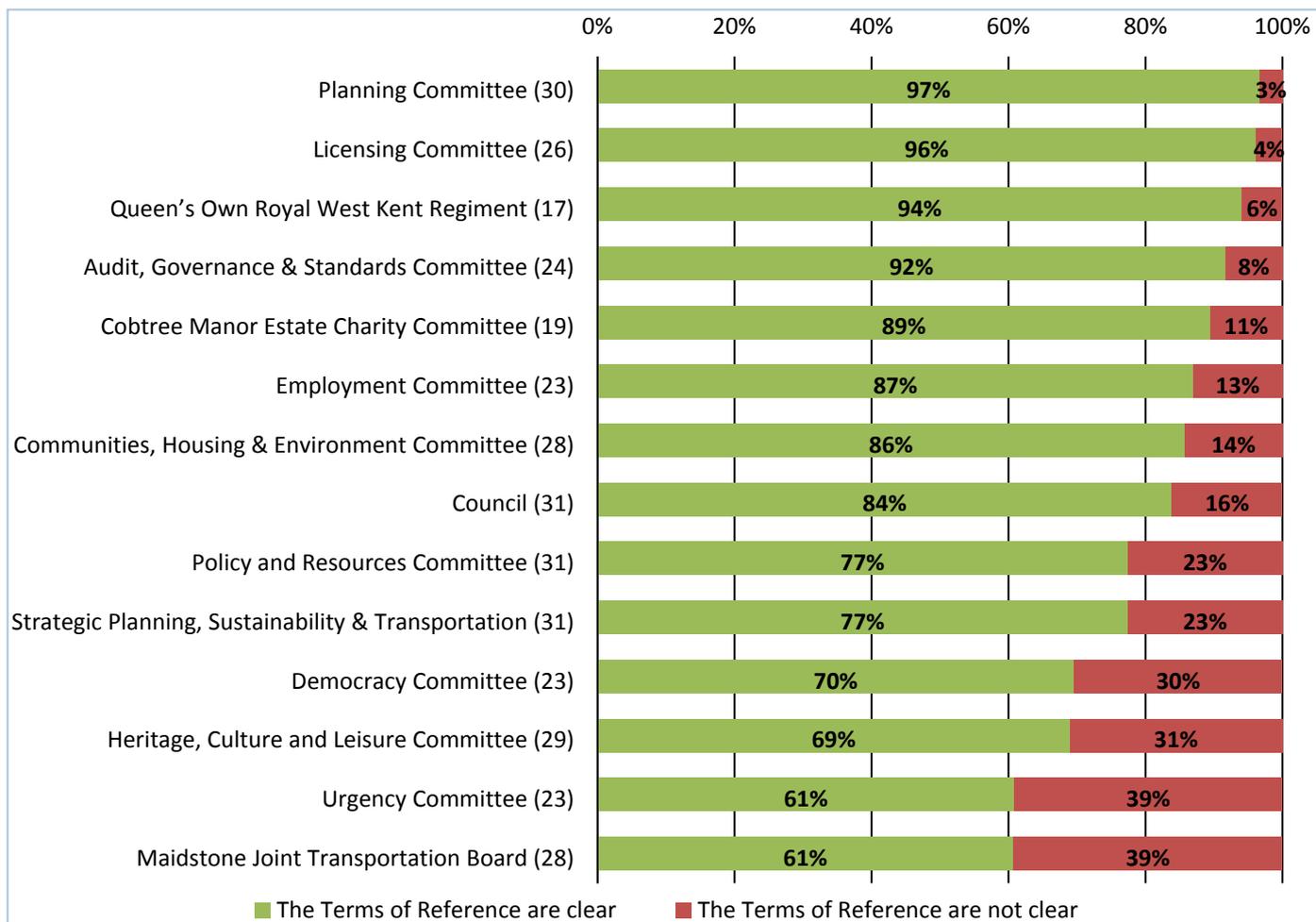
One said they had limited experience and another stated they could only answer on people they know. There were four comments that suggested that it comes down to individual personalities, with one saying it depends on their skills, another stating that it shouldn't be a political role and one that some have their own agenda. There was also one person that said, in their experience chairs could benefit from clearer procedural advice. One person said the current system of not allowing chairs and vice-chairs to be same political group make succession planning difficult.

There were two people that mentioned the process for allowing members to speak at meetings, with one stating a preference for order by indication and another said the method for indicating to the chair that you wish to speak should be consistent from committee to committee.

There was one person who comments that meetings can be repetitive which adds to the length of meetings and another said they would like more information about the risks and implications when making decisions.

## Terms of Reference

All survey respondents were asked if they thought the terms of reference, for each committee, were clear, there was a significant proportion of respondent that said 'I don't know', therefore the total number of respondents for each question component is shown in brackets in the chart below.



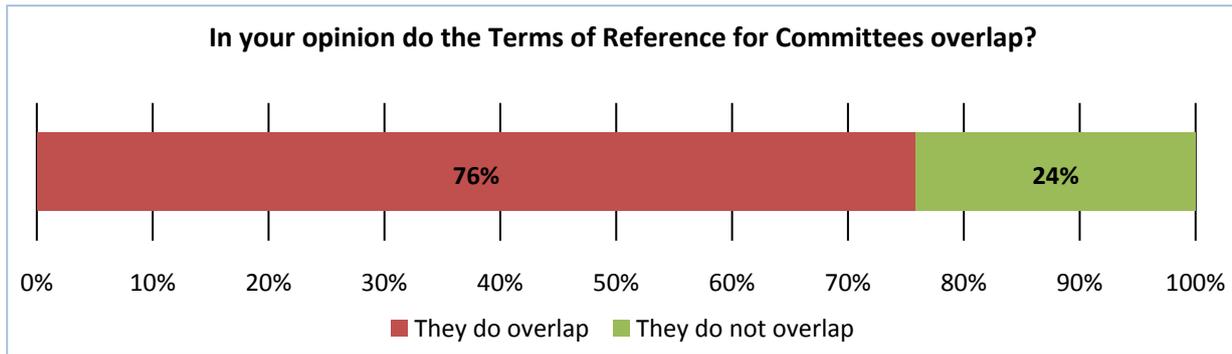
For the majority of committees more than four out five respondents said that the terms of reference was clear, with the Planning Committee coming out top with 97% of respondents stating the terms of reference for this committee are clear. As with previous question Joint Transportation Board and the Urgency Committee are bottom with almost four in ten respondents stating terms of reference are unclear.

There was no component of this question where there were enough officer respondents to compare response levels with that of members.

When assessing the responses from members in isolation, the pattern is similar for all respondents, the Urgency Committee however comes lowest at 56%, followed by the Joint Transportation Board and Heritage, Culture and Leisure which both had 68% of member's respondents agreeing that terms of reference are clear.

Respondents were also asked if they felt that the terms of reference for committee overlapped, eight people responded 'I don't know' leaving 29 respondents providing an opinion.

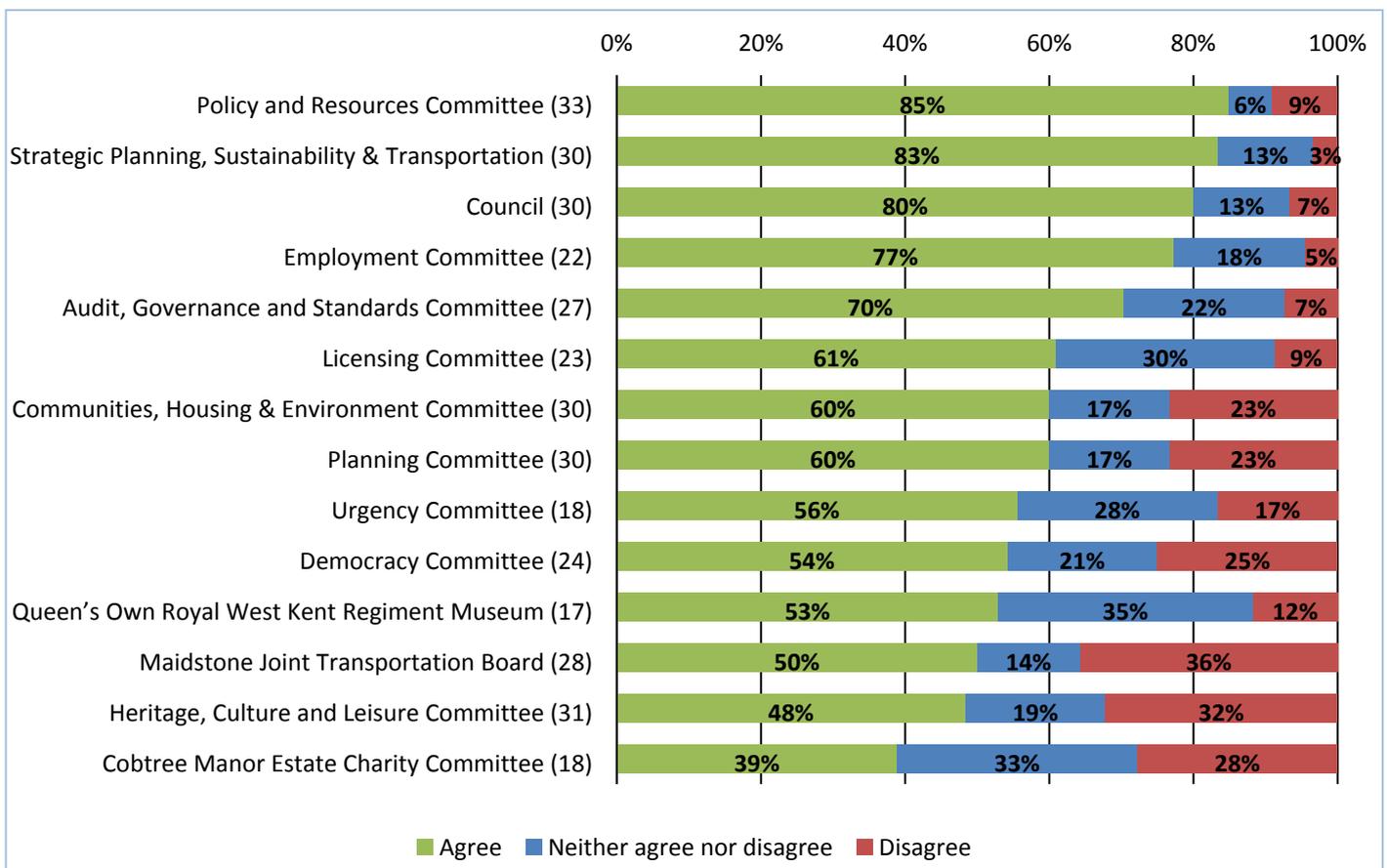
Appendix 3 - Committee Structure Review Survey Analysis



The majority of respondents felt that there is overlap in the terms of reference between committees. There were not enough responses from officers to compare differences in opinion between members and officers but the results for both members and officers were in line with the overall result.

### Strategic Value

All survey respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that each committee focuses on the strategic direction of the organisation and does not become involved in operational business, there was a significant proportion of respondents that said 'I don't know', therefore the total number of respondents for each question component is shown in brackets in the chart below.



There were three committees where more than four out of five respondents said the committee does not become involved in operational business; The Policy & resources, Strategic Planning & Transportation and Planning Committees.

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The Queen's Own Royal Regiment Trust Museum Committee had the greatest proportion of respondents who do not provide an opinion either way with over a third of respondents answering this way. However, more than half of respondents (19) responded 'I don't know' giving this committee the lowest number of respondents.

Although the Joint Transportation Board had the greatest proportion disagreeing that the committee focuses on the strategic direction of the organisation at 36%, the Heritage, Culture & Leisure Committee and the Urgency Committee had greater proportions responding 'neither agree nor disagree' and lower proportions agreeing.

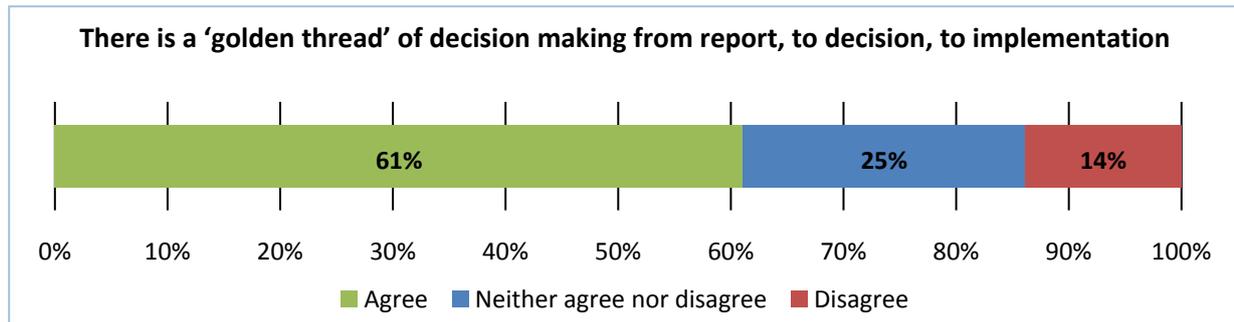
There was no committee where there were enough officer respondents to compare response levels with that of members. Members results in isolation show the Strategic Planning & Transportation Committee having the greatest proportion agreeing at 91%, the Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee had the greatest proportion of members responding 'neither agree nor disagree' at 38% (they also had the lowest proportion agreeing at 38%) and the Joint Transportation Board had the greatest proportion of members responding disagree at 27%.

All survey respondents were given the opportunity to provide further comment about terms of reference and the strategic direction of committees. Nine respondents made comment, these are set out in full below:

Responses
I would like to see all as much notice through the work programs of items coming to the committee. At SPST the Sept Article 4 item was not on the work program leading up to the meeting and therefore I feel an important decision was made by 9 members having 1 weeks notice through papers
Councillor's need more input into agenda setting
some committees eg employment do have a type of operational involvement eg senior recruitment. Overlap of TOR can cause difficulties and I do not think we currently have suitable protocols to deal with this. A solution is perhaps joint sub committees but I think this fails the objective of being cost neutral as set out above.
I do find that there is a tendency to ping pong some issues between committees. For example, the playing fields strategy. There is also a tendency to ask for briefings for a wider group of councillors when sometimes the committee ought to simply carry out its delegated function.
I am concerned that the email accompanying this survey says members should have greater role in decision making when they already have a greater role in operational matters that is strictly in their remit. Strategic decisions are already made by them but they seem to view officer advice as interference even though officers are experienced professionals
Some committees are much less strategic in the reports they receive and the questions put forward by those who sit on them
All and every committee needs looking at for big changes needed
By definition the West Kent and Cobtree Committees are required to discuss operational matters. Likewise the regulatory committees have to do so. The question should probably be put differently for these bodies. Secondly I suspect members views of what is operational are not the same as those of the Senior Officers, and the writer of this question.
It is not always the committee that gets too involved in operational issues but individual Members.

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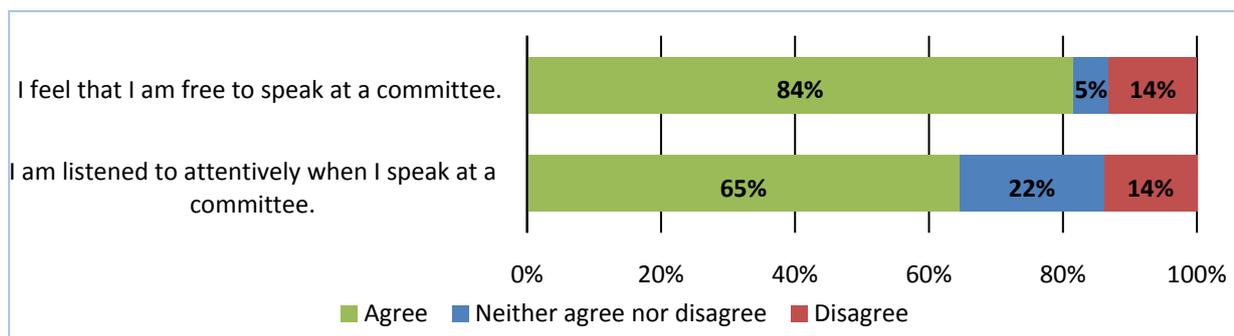
All respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree that 'There is a 'golden thread' of decision making from report, to decision', a total of 36 people responded.



Overall, just over six in ten respondents agreed there is a 'golden thread', while a quarter gave no strong opinion either way. When comparing the response levels between officers and members the data shows that officers were less likely to disagree (with no officers responding this way) and more likely to have no strong opinion with a third of officers answering this way compared to a fifth of members.

### Speaking & Listening At Meetings

Both Members and Officers were asked about how they felt about speaking in committee and if they feel they are listened to, a total of 37 respondents answered.



More than four out of five respondents said they feel like they can speak freely at committee. A slightly greater proportion of members agreed compared to officers at 88% compared to 75%.

Overall, 65% of respondents said they are listened to when speaking at committee. There were no real difference in the response levels between members and officers however there was one member respondent that strongly disagreed with the statement and there were no officers responding this way. One in five respondents gave no strong opinion either way; this could indicate that they don't regularly attend committee or speakers that are less 'heard' than others.

### Improving the Committee System

All respondents were given the opportunity to provide comments about how they feel the committee system could be improved, 17 comments were received.

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There were two comments that were broadly positive about the current committee system stating they are a good forum for member views and that there has been increased involvement from members and that it has proved to be a fairer system.

There were five comments that were negative about the current system stating that it should be abolished, that we should go back to the cabinet model and that it over represents minority parties.

Three comments have been classed as general with respondents stating they tend to get their voice heard, querying if people listen when others speak and stating more focus on strategic decisions.

Seven comments have been identified as containing a suggestion these are listed in full below.

Responses
Less committees, or reduced frequency of meetings.
bring the tables closer together to encourage participation. I can't always see who's talking because they are in a straight line There's too big a gap between the two sides
Substitutes and visiting members should be made to read reports in advance. So much time is wasted answering questions or bringing people up to date when one member can't attend.
Shorter officer introductions to reports - members should have read them in advance and therefore do not need to rely on a full recap of the contents.
Rethink agendas
Democracy Committee is probably superfluous and could have its role re-allocated. The JTB is pointless and probably should be abolished. The prohibition on SPST's Plans Sub-Committee being formed needs re-considering.
Get more Members to attend briefing sessions on key projects and try to keep some continuation with committee members year on year so they can build knowledge.