

Slough Borough Council

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| Report to: | Standards Committee |
| Date: | 19 th March 2024 |
| Subject: | Member Survey |
| Chief Officer: | Stephen Taylor, Monitoring Officer |
| Contact Officer: | Alexander Polak, Head of Governance and Scrutiny |
| Ward(s): | All |
| Exempt: | No |
| Appendices: | <u>Appendix A</u> – survey responses detail |

1. Summary and Recommendations

1.1 This report:

- Reports the results of the second-ever survey of SBC councillors which concluded in December 2023
- Compares those results to the previous survey, which took place in January 2023 ie in the final quarter of the previous council; and
- 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; and**
- 2. That the committee provides feedback to officers on potential actions to be taken in response to the survey.**

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 has been reviewed by Commissioners and there are no specific comments to add.

Introduction

- 1.2 A report on this topic was most recently received by this committee in October 2023.
- 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 second time, this action is being fulfilled.

Method

- 2.7 An online survey was launched to councillors using Microsoft Forms during November-December 2023. 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 a number of 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 first survey from January 2023, in order to assist with comparison.

Response

- 2.11 31 out of 42 councillors responded, a response rate of 74%. This is considered good for a survey of this type, and is an enormous improvement over the previous survey, which had a 57%. Response rate.
- 2.12 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.
- 2.13 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. This can be reviewed in the appendix to the [October 2023 Standards Committee item](#).

- 2.17 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 remain from the previous cohort were amongst the 24 who responded to the first survey, and we don't know how many of those were amongst the 31 respondents to the second survey.
- 2.18 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.

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 (eg Members' satisfaction with Democratic Services, IT, officer responsiveness etc) and in terms of their perception of the council's performance at supporting residents (eg the figures about responsiveness to service requests and complaints). Crucially, a number of statistics provide insights into the intended improvement of the leadership culture at Slough Borough Council, especially as it relates to the relationship between senior officers and members.
- 2.16 Overall there is a general improvement 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 survey, 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 Democratic Governance and Scrutiny Action Plans.
 - The Culture Change Programme Board (an officer board chaired by the Executive Director for Strategy and Improvement which is overseeing the council-wide culture change programme) will review the data for actions to add to the culture change action plans.
 - The plan for member development and induction (found elsewhere on today's agenda) has taken into account the feedback from councillors in both surveys about their development needs, assisted by the contribution of an informal Member Development Working Group convened in April 2023 for that purpose.
 - Survey data relating to Scrutiny will be factored into the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee's annual review.
 - The survey results relating to members' use of IT and their training needs will continue to inform the IT offer for all councillors, including training.

- The full extended leadership team of the council will review the survey results and how the organisation should respond, at an 'extended CLT' meeting once this group is reconvened.
- The full set of results will again be sent to the top 4 tiers of the organisation for review at Directorate Leadership Team meetings for potential lessons to learn in each service area.

2.19 The results of some of the survey questions will provide this committee with some insights relating to part of its terms of reference, namely to 'monitor the operation of the council's ethical framework including the code of conduct' and to 'advise' the council based on its findings.

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 to be noted.

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.

5. **Appendices**

Appendix A – Survey responses