

Rethinking governance

Practical steps for councils
considering changes to their
governance arrangements

Herefordshire Council Rethinking Governance

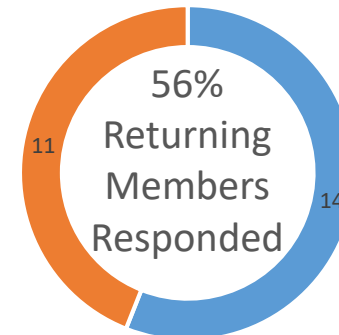
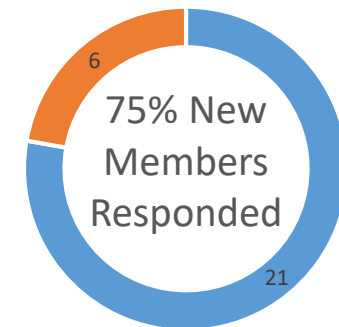
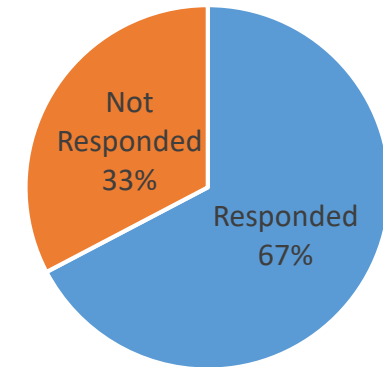
All Members' Questionnaire Summary

July 2020

Rethinking Governance & Questionnaire

- Full Council in 11 October 2019 approved a Notice of Motion to Review Governance Models at Herefordshire Council
- The Re-thinking Governance review is following guidance from the Local Government Association and from the Centre for Public Scrutiny guidance - Rethinking Governance: Practical steps for councils considering changes to their governance arrangement
- The purpose of the questionnaire was to formally gather views and experiences of members on the current governance model at Herefordshire Council in an anonymous way
- It was completed between 4-26 June 2020
- With a 67% response rate, it was considered that the results can inform the future decisions by the working group
- Taking into account the Covid-19 environment, majority of members wanted the review to continue with a full comparison between the committee and cabinet system

Member Response Rate to Questionnaire



Summary – Objectives of Good Governance

Members were asked to rank 11 objectives of good governance from most to least important.

Most Important Objectives:

1. Clear leadership & accountability
2. Open & Clear Communication
3. Robust & Independent challenge/scrutiny of decisions/performance
4. Fosters an inclusive system of decision making

There was wide ranging views on Herefordshire Council's performance against the 11 objectives. Four objectives receiving very low to very high rankings. Only 4 objectives had very low rankings whilst all 11 objectives had very high rankings. Generally, returning members thought the council was performing better when compared to new members.

Best Performing Objectives

1. Clear leadership & accountability
2. Competent, fair & knowledge-based decision-making & law abiding behaviour
3. Has a system that meets the needs and makes best use of available resources
4. Everybody being clear about what their roles are

Worst Performing Objectives

- All the below objectives had an average Low ranking:
1. Fosters an inclusive system of decision making
 2. Enables meaningful engagement which is equitable and inclusive
 3. Promotes collaboration & Consensus

Summary – Barriers to Good Governance

Below is a summary of barriers as identified by the results and members free text options of the questionnaire:

Time

- Complexity of the operating model and time to understand / ask questions
- Balance of council work with outside employment responsibilities impacted all areas of involvement

Culture & Communication

- Insufficient communication with the public, engagement and promotion of current issues
- Proportionality sometimes does not make the best use of members skills & experience
- Process for input into forthcoming decisions could be improved and could be more informative
- Difficult to find officers on the phone and sometimes they are slow to respond to emails
- One member indicated that senior officer leadership could be improved in relation to speaking to officers and decision-makers or policy consultations
- lack of a cross party think tank or policy development panel/committee
- Lack of collaborative culture
- Use of jargon
- Too heavily reliant on email
- Feeling uninformed

Member development

- Returning members expressed a wish to be more involved when compared to new members in all areas except being better informed about council policy and decisions. This could highlight areas for new member development
- Complexity of rules and lack of experience/knowledge in most areas of involvement: to ask questions, submit motions, request call ins, use of forward plan, influencing committee work programs, policy development, constitution in general
- 31% of respondents had never referenced the constitution
- Only 43% of members wanted to participate in a formal policy development panel or committee

Forward Plan

- Too short-term
- Not easy to find, navigate and understand
- Too complex

Other Suggestions

- Improve data collection, sharing and analysis
- More interactive comparisons with other councils
- Operating model considerations: Hybrid model, speed of decision making, value for money and number of decisions made by officers vs members

Summary – next steps

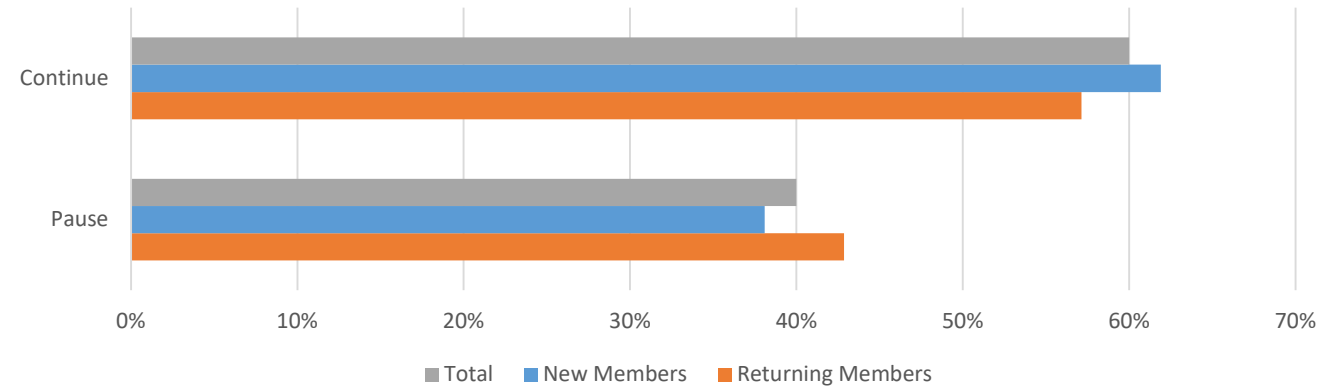
- Identify areas where changing culture and/or practice that could provide solutions
- Identify potential structural solutions
- Assess potential pros and cons (including risks) of the cultural and structural solutions to identify a preferred option (including looking at how effectively these operate in other comparator councils)

Covid-19 & Use of Constitution

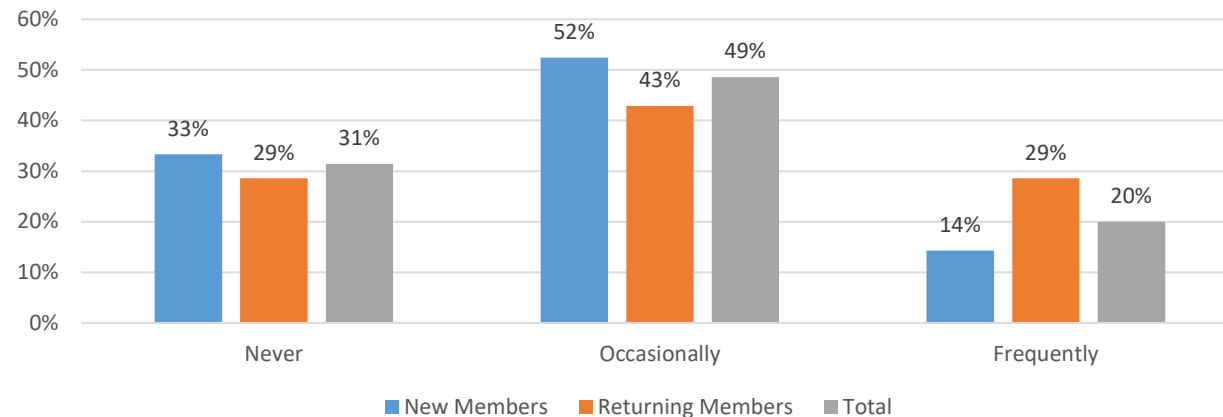
Majority of members wanted the review to continue with a full comparison between the committee and cabinet system

Length of service did not significantly impact the results

Percentage of Members wanting to Pause or Continue as a result of Covid-19



Percentage of members referencing the constitution



Majority of members have referenced the constitution during their service

Returning Members were twice as likely to frequently reference the constitution compared to new members

Objectives of Good Governance

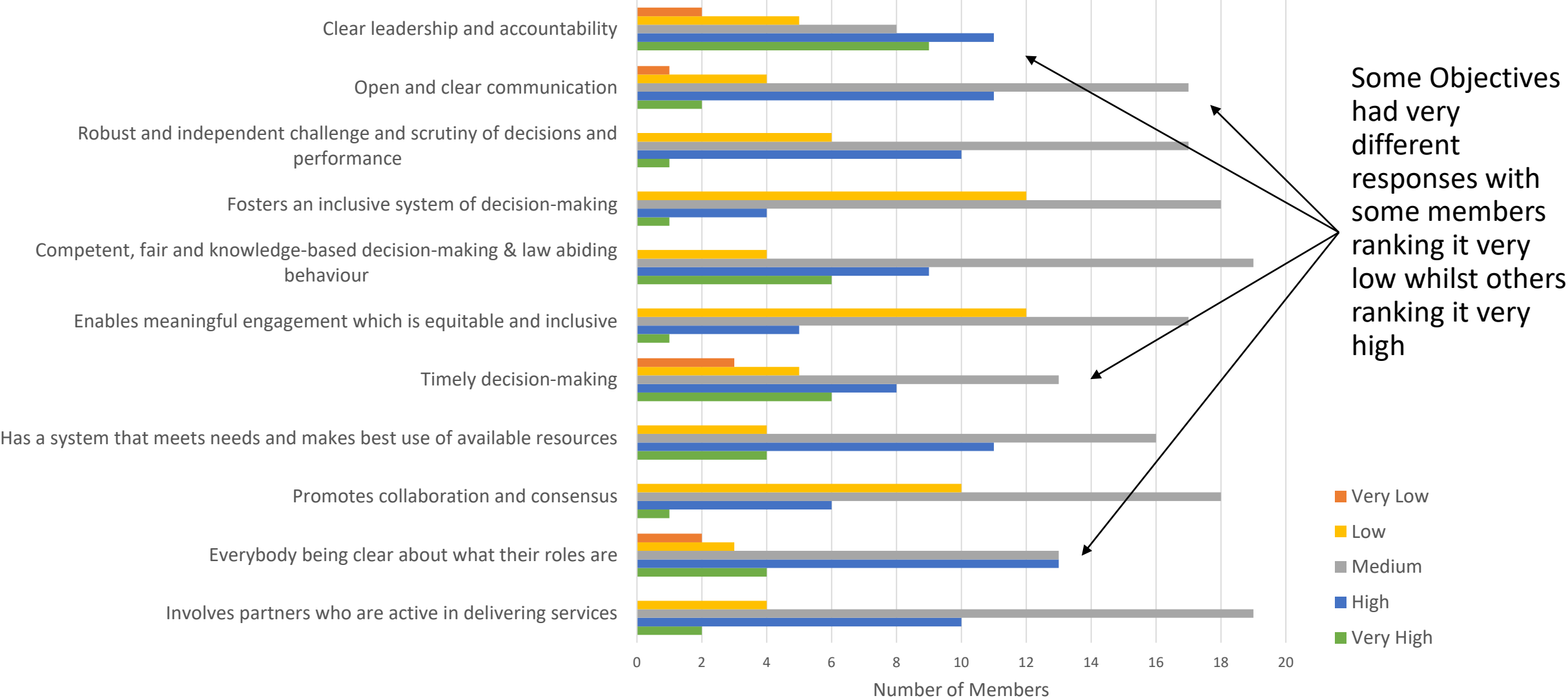


Members ranked the objectives with 1 being most important and 11 being least important

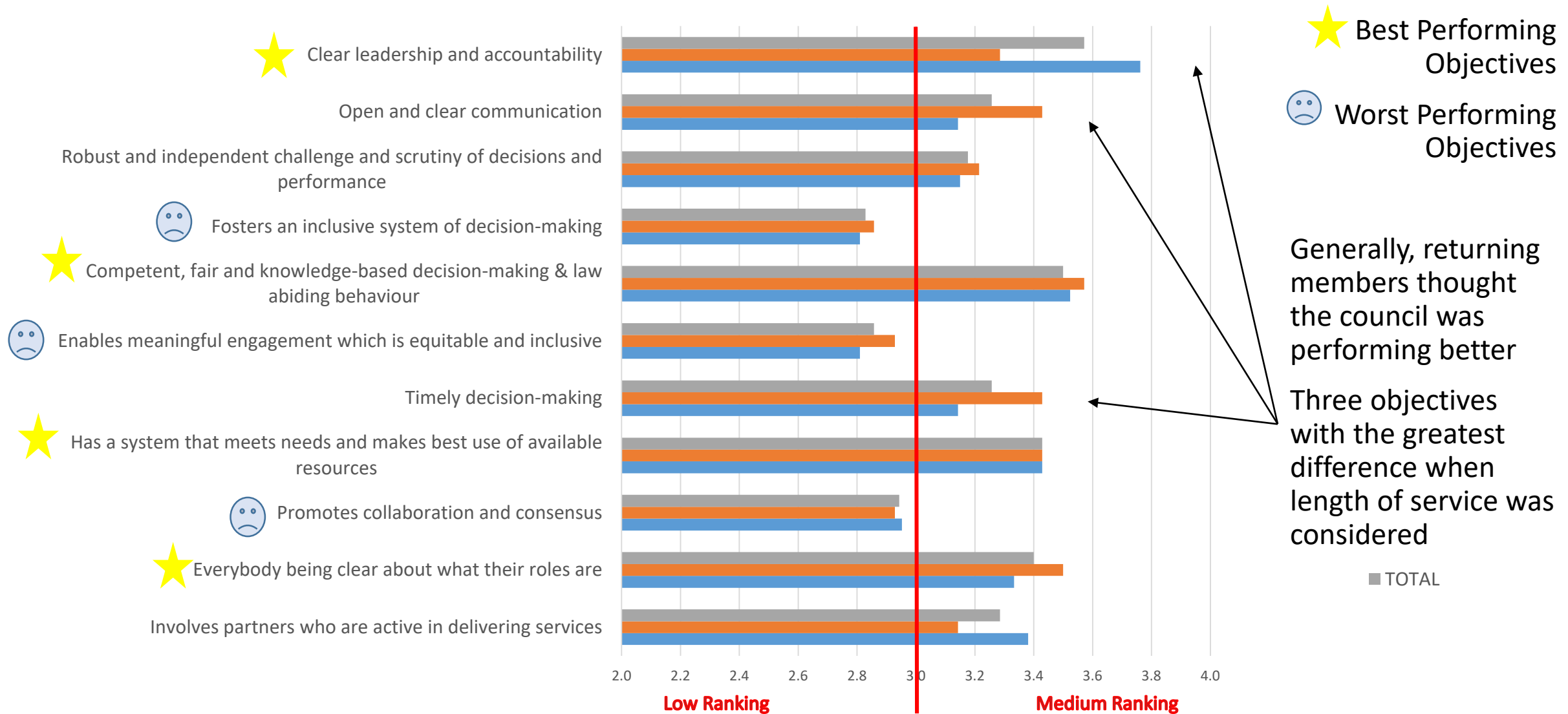
Average results demonstrate clear leadership and accountability as the most important objective

There was no significant difference in rankings when length of service was considered

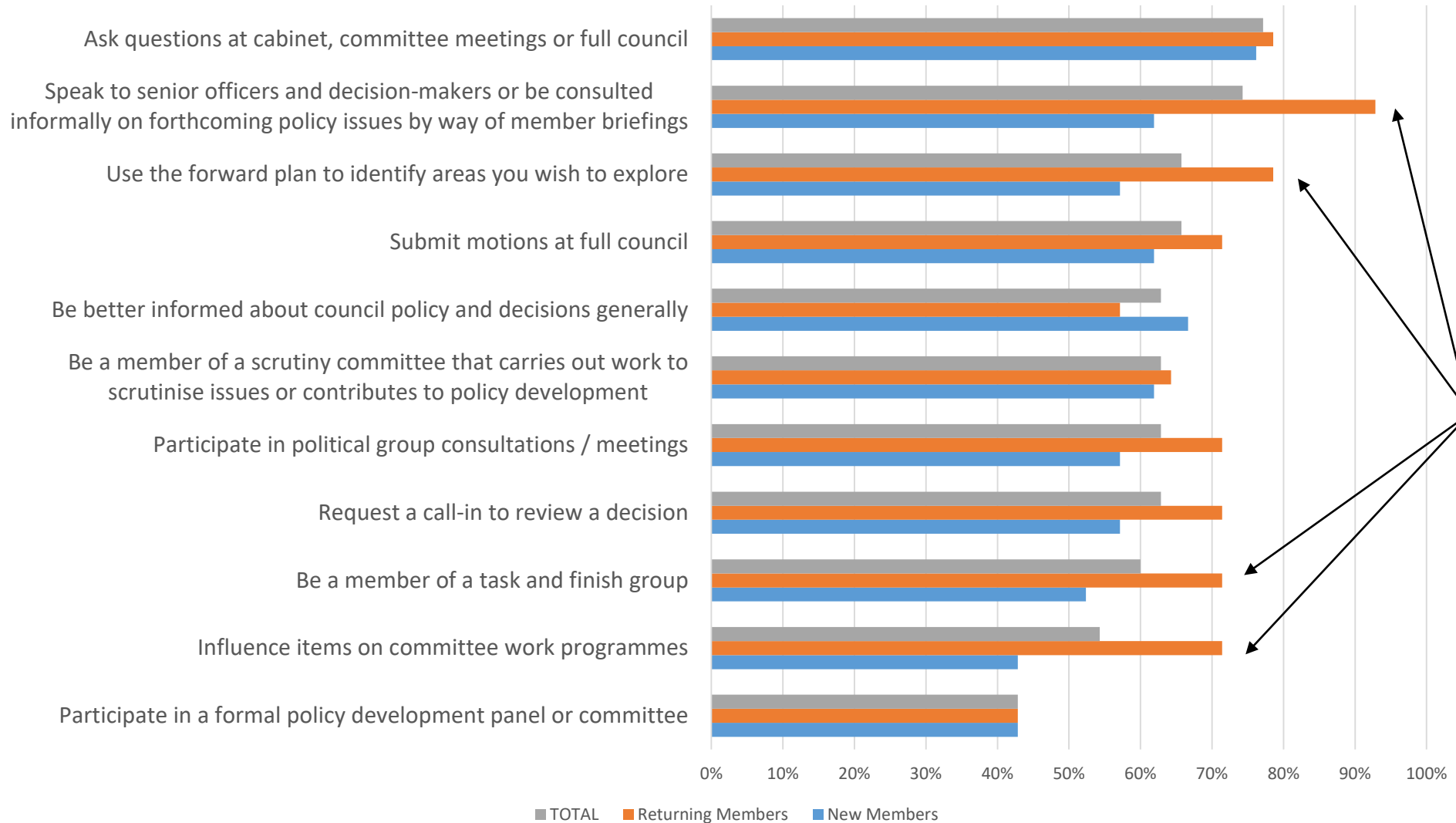
How the Council is Meeting the Objectives



Meeting Objectives – Average & Service



Involvement of Members



Returning members wanted to be more involved compared to new members across all areas except for being better informed

There was a significant difference in 4 areas when length of service was considered

Only 43% of members wanted to participate in a formal policy development panel or committee