

ANNEX A- SURVEY RESULTS

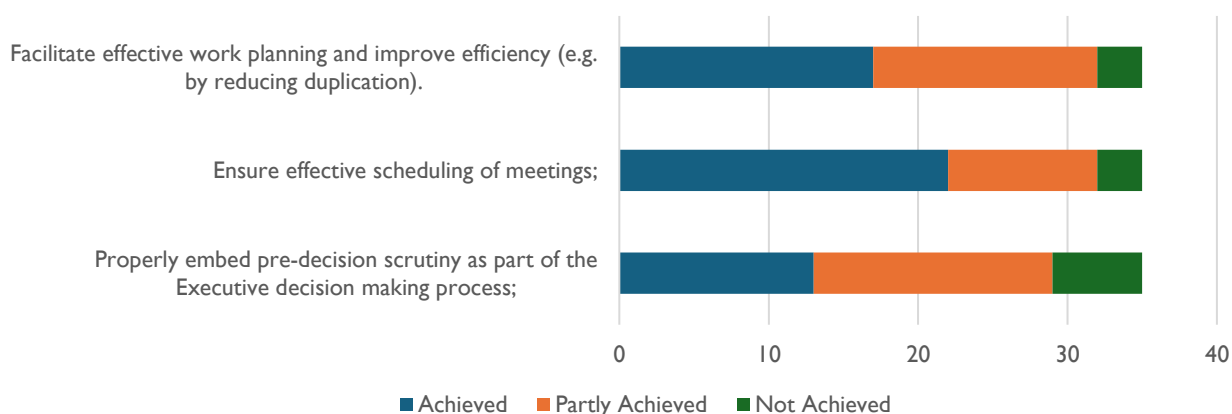
1. Please select which of the following best applies to you

	Number of respondents
Officer	12
Councillor – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member	14
Councillor – Executive Member	5
Councillor – Not a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Executive	4

2. To what extent do you feel that the move to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee has achieved each of the following aims?

	Achieved	Partly Achieved	Not Achieved
Properly embed pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Executive decision-making process;	13	16	6
Ensure effective scheduling of meetings;	22	10	3
Facilitate effective work planning and improve efficiency (e.g. by reducing duplication).	17	15	3

To what extent do you feel the following aims have been achieved?



3. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee currently has 24 Members. In your view what would be the optimum size for the Committee?

Committee Size Preference - Councillors

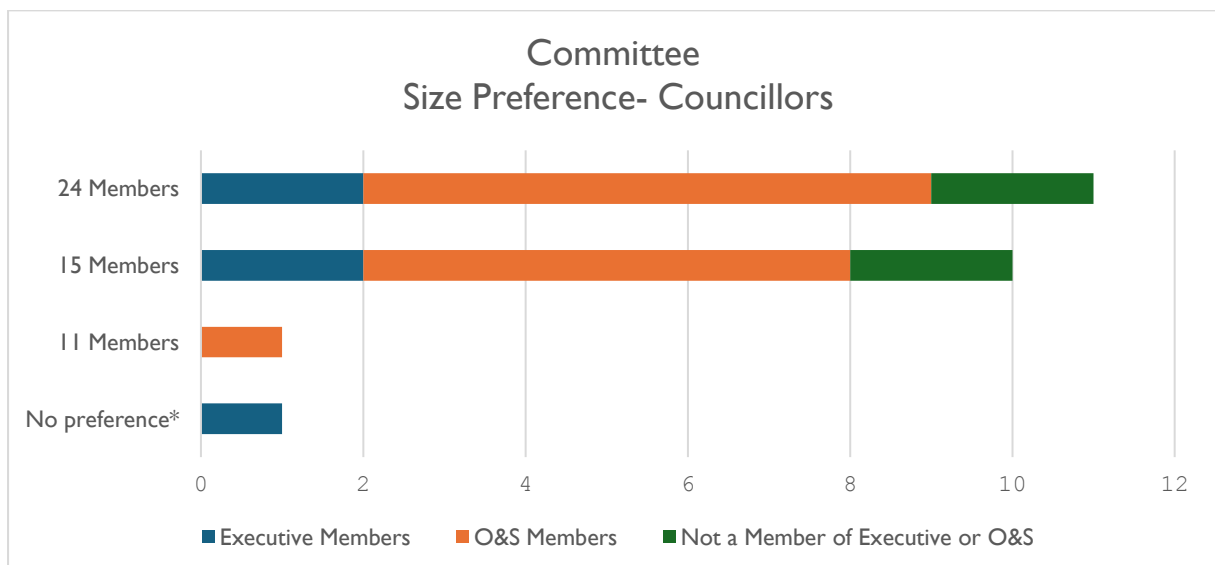
	No preference*	11 Members	15 Members	24 Members
Executive Members	1	0	2	2
O&S Members	0	1	6	7
Not a Member of Executive or O&S	0	0	2	2
All Councillors (total)	1	1	10	11
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>48%</i>

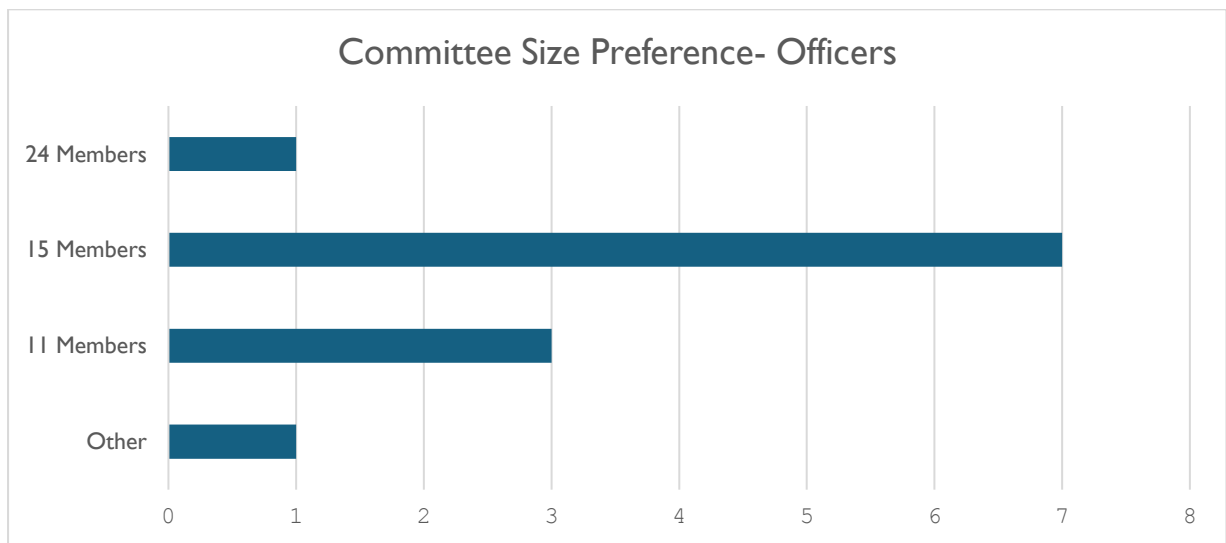
Committee Size Preference - Officers

	Other†	11 Members	15 Members	24 Members
Officers	1	3	7	1
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>8%</i>

*answered “either number can work - depending on chairing and maximum time allowances for speaking”

†answered “small and dependent on subject”





4. Please provide any further information explaining why you think the Committee's size of 24 Members is or isn't suitable.

ChatGPT Summary

Concerns About the Current Size (24 Members):

- Too large for effective discussion – A high number of members results in long meetings, repetition, and a lack of in-depth scrutiny.
- Challenging to Chair – Managing discussions and ensuring all members contribute meaningfully is difficult.
- Limited engagement from all members – Often, only a core group actively participate, suggesting a smaller committee could be more effective.
- Overlapping viewpoints and inefficiency – Too many differing opinions can prolong discussions unnecessarily, making meetings less productive.
- Overstretching councillors – Many members are already serving on multiple committees, making it difficult to attend and engage fully.

Arguments for Maintaining a Larger Committee:

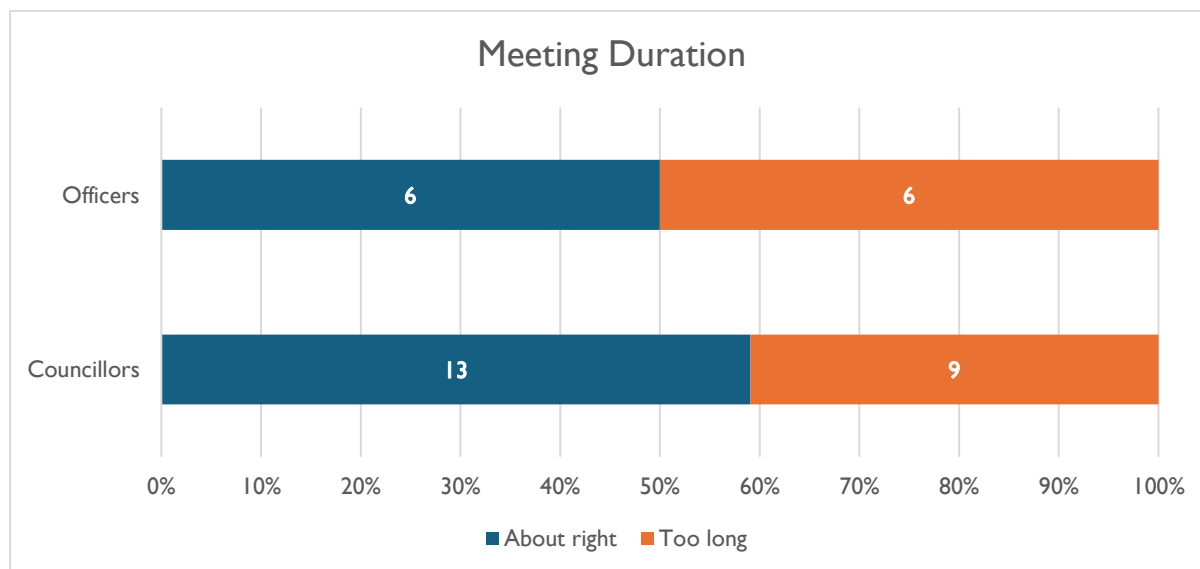
- Diverse perspectives – A broad membership ensures a range of views and expertise, which strengthens scrutiny.
- Wide scope of work – The Committee covers various subjects, requiring sufficient representation to provide meaningful oversight.
- Councillor engagement – For many members, this is their primary way to understand and contribute to Council matters.

	Responses
Councillor	too big for a conversation with too many members
Officer	15 Members would be optimal as any further members would not provide added value.
Officer	24 is far too large for a Committee. It doesn't provide enough opportunity for all members to contribute in depth without meetings taking far too long. It is also challenging to Chair such a large Committee. A smaller size would provide for more focused scrutiny.
Councillor	If you had fewer, you would lose expertise. For many councillors, Overview & Scrutiny is their main channel both for learning about what is going on, and for inputting their ideas.
Councillor	I wasn't a councillor until last year, so I don't have anything else to compare with.
Officer	Committee size should be dependent on subject, and small so that Members can have a round table discussion with the Executive and officers.
Officer	A smaller number would facilitate the ability for all members of the committee to have the ability to contribute
Officer	In my experience, a number of Members do not raise issues or questions during meetings and it tends to be the same core of Members that do. This suggests that the number sitting on the committee could be reduced. It would also ensure the meetings remain focused.
Officer	Sometimes there are too many view points
Councillor	Too many people there not doing much
Councillor	I personally think that 24 members are to bigger group
Councillor	Allows groups to nominate specialist to consider particular subjects
Councillor	Allows a wider range of councillors to be included in the governance of the District
Councillor	24 seems to be simply more than necessary. Councillors are somewhat stretched on other committees. I have subbed regularly for the O and S , despite being on Uplands , Licensing and Audit and Governance
Councillor	To many voices trying to politicise rather than scrutinise
Councillor	The number of members at the meeting is not a problem, it is what happens in the meeting that is a real issue.
Councillor	I am a relatively new councillor but feel that the committee achieves its objectives effectively as it is.
Councillor	Smaller number is probably easier to administer for, but larger number can also work if limits on speaking rights etc.
Councillor	It is too large to allow for effective debate and scrutiny.
Councillor	There are too many people. Some people there do not greatly contribute. A more focussed group might be more effective, although political groups will still be able to nominate people who don't do much.
Councillor	It does seem very large - half the Council. Can be difficult to get subs.. But due to the range of subjects covered it is probably useful to have quite a large committee.
Councillor	Just far too many members so items can go on for far longer than needed
Councillor	Given the range of topics presented to the Committee to review I feel it would be a stretch to cover these with say 15 members and the breadth of views and background brought to bear in discussion is appreciated. This breadth should be seen as a valuable counterbalance to the relatively

	narrow perspective of the Executive. A large Committee means lengthy discussions though. Personally I think a Committee of say 20 would be the right size.
Councillor	All 24 Cllrs trying to have an opinion on any subject matters means lot of repetition and can cause the meeting to be longer than necessary
Officer	It is too many for a discussion with so many differing opinions and objectives.
Councillor	The more members there are, the less we achieve as everyone wants to have their say and frequently repeat each other.
Councillor	I think it has a diverse number of Councillors so we get varied opinions and ensures good discussion and scrutiny on important topics.
Councillor	The committee is set-up to 'scrutinise' the Executive. If this function is NOT going to be performed by the Full Council then the O&S needs to be of a size that delivers effective scrutiny. Hence 24 members, half the size of the FC seems about right.
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5. The average length of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting has been 1 hour and 55 minutes. Do you think length this is about right, too long, or too short?

	About right	Too long	Too short	Did not respond
Councillors	13	9	0	1
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>57%</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>4%</i>
Officers	6	6	0	0
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>



6. Please provide any comments on the length of meetings

	Responses
Councillor	no more than 2 hrs some have been longer
Officer	Length of meetings are fine, it would be great if the chairing could be firmer so only questions which are on topic are accepted.
Officer	When meetings go on beyond 2 1/2 hours the quality starts to deteriorate.
Councillor	Ideally meetings should last no longer than 90 minutes. Written comments sent in advance might help reduce the length of meetings.
Officer	Length of discussion should be dependent on subject complexity and impact of decision.
Officer	1.5 hrs is optimum
Officer	But does depend on agenda items
Councillor	We are given long presentations which are then just for noting, items given already done and approved by exec making the meeting points pointless. I am happy with a long meeting if it's effective and they haven't been
Councillor	1 hour if we reverted back to old way of doing scrutiny
Councillor	If meetings are too long, this interferes with councillors attending evening parish meetings

Councillor	Meetings need to be as long as there are things to discuss ...within reason , of course.
Councillor	Fewer members would enable robust effective scrutiny.....currently a committee full of sound bites
Councillor	<p>The length of meetings at O&S vary. I don't mind attending a meeting that has a long duration as long as the meeting is actually useful. Since this new meeting structure has been in situ, the committee has rarely scrutinised or recommended anything practical to the Executive.</p> <p>More often than not, some of the presentations by Officers are useful, but as there are not any recommendations associated with the reports, some members take use this meeting as an opportunity for questions and answers.</p> <p>A month ago, there was a useful presentation on housing. But that's all it was, a useful presentation - Overview and Scrutiny was not the right place for that to go. The same as the S106 presentation a few months ago. I would argue that most presentations that Officers give at these meetings are useful, but they should be members briefings because nothing is actually achieved in these meetings.</p>
Councillor	Depends on the size, depth and number of reports/items being scrutinised.
Officer	Long meetings are less accessible for residents and make it harder for them to engage with the democratic process
Councillor	<p>I suppose my concern over the length is that the first Wednesday of the month clashes with another meeting I ought to attend at 7.30 and that meeting is not in Witney.</p> <p>Also, if 1 hour 55 minutes is the AVERAGE length, this means some meetings are considerably longer and I think decision making gets a bit tired after two hours - or even before.</p>
Councillor	Meetings should aim to be over by 1 hour and 30 minutes
Officer	Almost 2 hours average makes for a long meeting but if the time is spend on the right issues it is worth it. It would be useful to focus time on more contentious matters and less on areas where the Committee can add little to the technical expertise of Officers (ie budget review).
Councillor	It will always depend on what's being discussed but 2hrs should be more than enough time
Officer	An hour if everyone has correctly read all the documentation and not asking questions to which the information is already in the papers.
Councillor	As above - too many members
Councillor	It seems some topics which have huge opinion and can split the room and could do with there own meeting...housing for example. However there was also a number of other topics to talk through and it became a very long and exhausting meeting.
Councillor	The meeting takes as long as it takes. The time should be dictated by the items needing to be scrutinised not by any arbitrary duration defined for whatever reason.

ChatGPT Summary

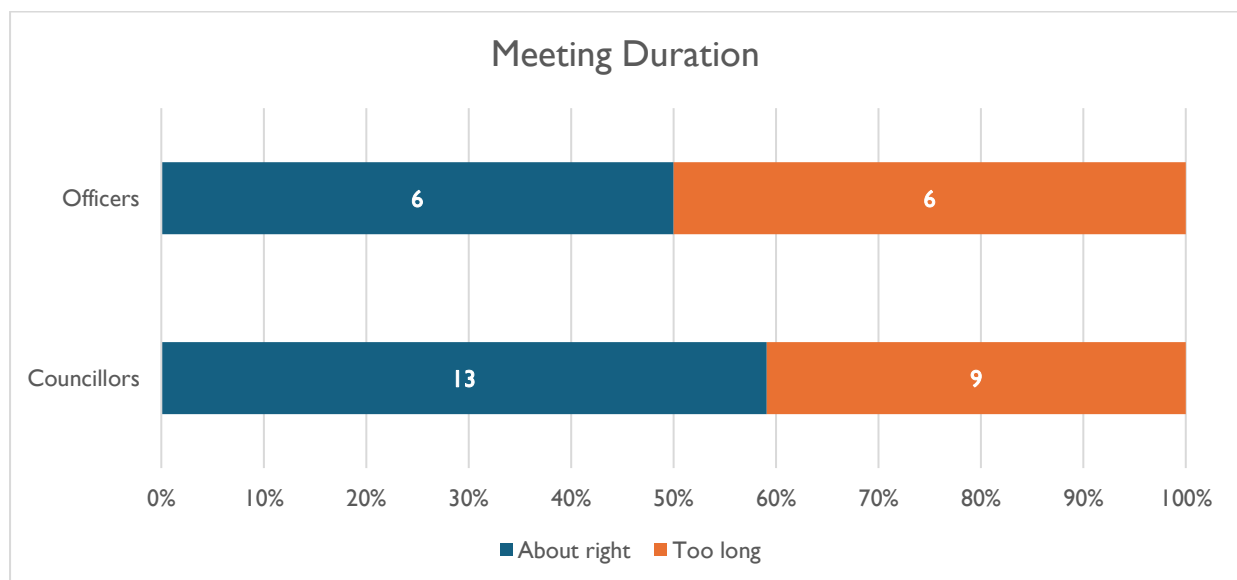
Generally Acceptable Duration: While the current average duration is reasonable, many members suggest that meetings should ideally not exceed 90 minutes to maintain focus and effectiveness. Meetings extending beyond 2 hours risk diminishing the quality of scrutiny and decision-making.

Effectiveness of Scrutiny: The length of discussions should be determined by the complexity and significance of the decisions being scrutinised. However, some agenda items, such as presentations that do not lead to recommendations, may not contribute meaningfully to the committee's role. Ensuring that meetings focus on decisions requiring scrutiny rather than informational updates could improve efficiency.

Opportunities for Improvement: Providing written comments in advance may help streamline discussions, reducing the time spent on areas where there is already consensus or where information has been sufficiently covered in documentation.

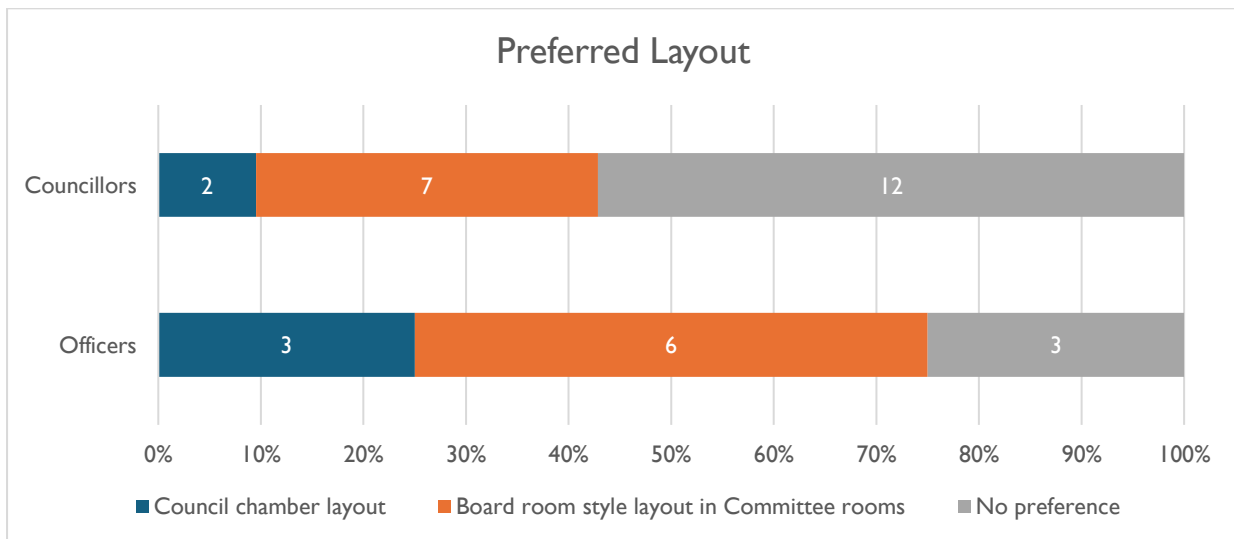
Impact on Accessibility and Participation: Longer meetings can discourage public engagement and create scheduling conflicts for councillors attending other meetings. Keeping meetings concise and purposeful would support broader participation in the scrutiny process.

Overall, while the current average meeting length is not excessive, there is scope to refine the structure of meetings to ensure they are as effective and focused as possible in fulfilling the committee's scrutiny role.

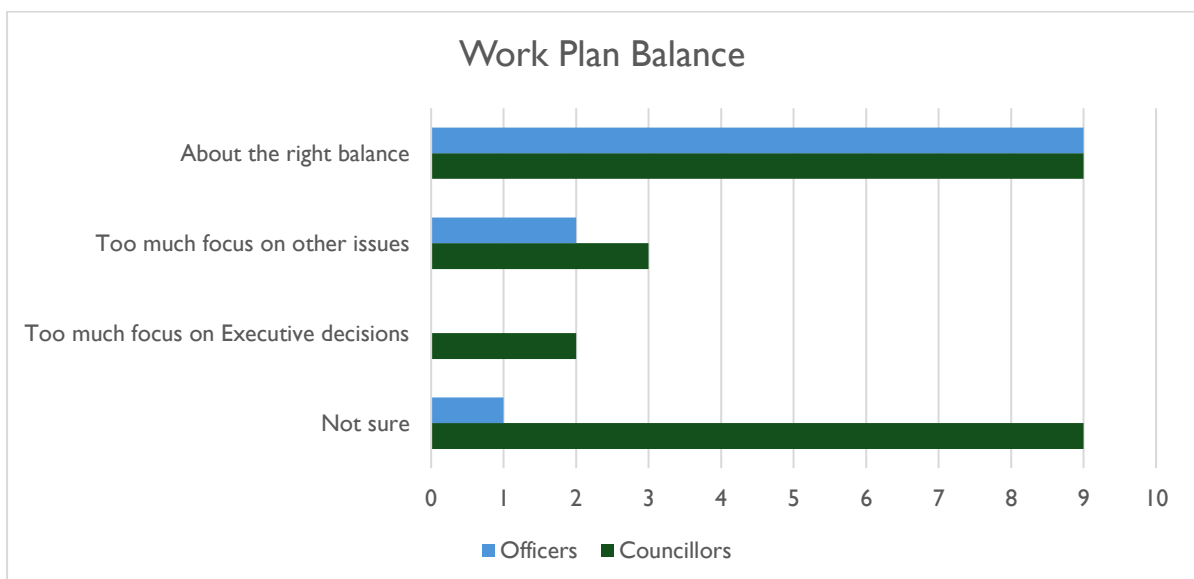


7. For Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings which layout do you think works best?

	Council chamber layout	Board room style layout in Committee rooms	No preference
Councillors	2	7	12
<i>as percentage</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>30%</i>	<i>52%</i>
Officers	3	6	3
<i>as percentage</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>25%</i>



8. Do you agree that the Committee's work plan achieves the right balance between focusing on Executive decisions (pre-decision scrutiny) and other issues that are important to Members and the District?



	Not sure	Too much focus on Executive decisions	Too much focus on other issues	About the right balance
Councillors	9	2	3	9
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>39%</i>
Officers	1	0	2	9
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>75%</i>

9. Please provide any further comments on the work plan

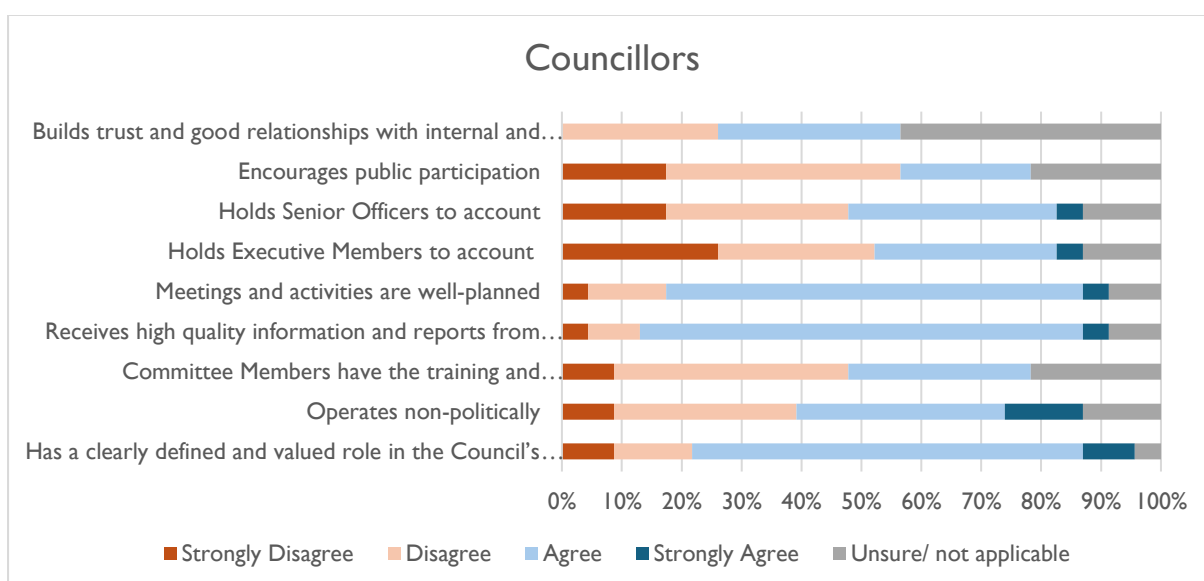
ChatGPT Summary

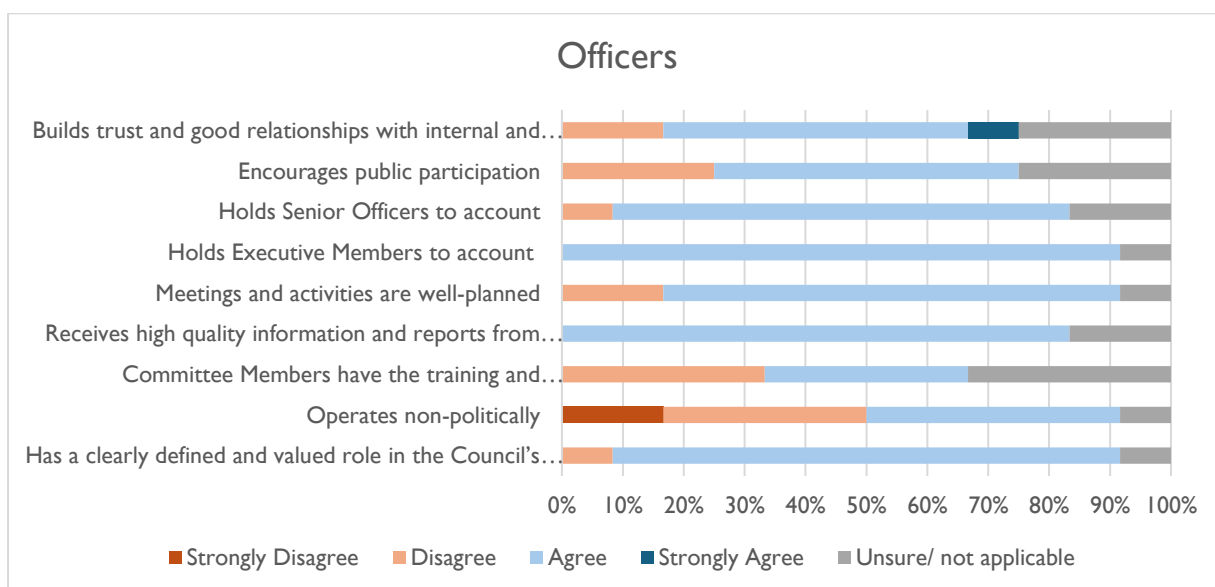
- **Focus on Policy and Decision-Making:** The work plan should prioritise issues that are policy-driven and directly linked to executive decisions. Some members feel that too many items lack relevance to pre-decision scrutiny and do not contribute meaningfully to holding the Executive to account.
- **Greater Strategic Planning:** Rather than a formulaic approach, the work plan could be structured around upcoming Executive decisions, with the committee proactively identifying key themes or issues for scrutiny. This would allow for a more strategic and targeted approach.
- **Use of Working Groups:** Expanding the use of working groups could facilitate in-depth discussions on important issues without significantly lengthening committee meetings. This would ensure a more balanced approach between pre-decision scrutiny and broader matters of interest to members and the district.
- **Improved Visibility and Understanding:** The work plan should be more visible to officers and better integrated with the Executive's forward plan. There is also a need for clearer guidance on how items are selected for scrutiny and how the committee's work aligns with Executive decision-making, particularly for new members.
- **Reducing Non-Scrutiny Items:** Some agenda items, such as presentations or guest speakers, are seen as informational rather than scrutiny-focused. Where appropriate, these could be shifted to member briefings to ensure that the committee's time is used effectively for scrutiny purposes.

Councillor	needs to take issues that are policy driven
Officer	The work plan was informed by the three Committees it replaced but with some items dealt with as member briefings instead. Then pre-decision Cabinet items have been added. I think the Committee could do with considering what issues it would be most useful to focus on going forwards, in addition to pre-decision scrutiny.
Officer	Work plan should be made more visible to officers.
Officer	There could be a greater use of working groups to allow in depth discussions on other issues important to Members and the District to ensure that meeting lengths are not dramatically increased resulting in a more equitable balance between pre-decision scrutiny and other issues.

Officer	If purpose is pre decision scrutiny, many papers that go to O&S have no link to an Executive decision.
Councillor	The items being brought before scrutiny are more often than not pointless no matter where they come from and things needing to be scrutinised have been and gone
Councillor	Revert back to previous way we did scrutiny
Councillor	Executive not being called to account !
Councillor	Overall, the Executive will do whatever they can to avoid scrutiny. It is convenient that potentially controversial topics which would originally be discussed before elections are ALWAYS moved until after an election. The slippery administration certainly won't change these committees now that they can get away with anything....
Councillor	Nil specific
Councillor	The work plan as presented is rather formulaic. I would prefer it to be presented more as what is coming up for the Executive and what we as a Committee might wish to examine outside of this in terms of themes or issues and then agree work programme priorities as a result.
Councillor	Many of the "other issues" have been power point presentations or officer/guests speakers, I understand the importance of these issues but these should be treated as all member briefings as we are not scrutinising them!
Councillor	I'd like to see more on housing and our associations as well as homelessness and our wdc estates. I don't think we're included in decisions enough and to ensure the the above topics are doing there best.
Councillor	There is not enough training about the connection between the O&S work plan and the Executive workplan. It is not clear how items are selected for scrutiny. It is also not clear what the objectives of the O&S meeting vs the Executive is. e.g. as a new Member of the O&S committee it took me at least 3 meetings to work out that there is a connection with the Exec Meeting.

10. Please state to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: at West Oxfordshire District Council, Overview and Scrutiny...





11. Please use the box below to provide any further feedback, reflecting on your responses to the characteristics above.

Officer	I think O&S is largely delivering against those characteristics although there is some room for improvement across the board, e.g. Executive Members could play a more prominent role at meetings, public participation is available but has been under-utilised, reports are general good although a few times officers have provided presentations instead, which doesn't lend itself to effective scrutiny (those things could be delivered as member briefings instead).
Councillor	If all our policies had measurable outcomes, it would be easier for Scrutiny to hold them to account.
Councillor	Training for new committee members should be provided.
Councillor	Not working
Councillor	There is not enough time between Executive meetings and Overview and Scrutiny for decisions to be securitised
Councillor	District and County Councils tend to be "Officer-led" therefore only a handful of people really make decisions, with the Executive walking around like pets on leads. They lap up the attention, but at the end of the day, they don't have the creative to even think about positive policy for the greater good of West Oxfordshire.
Councillor	Not quite sure how to answer some of these. We seem to be getting quite regular training sessions currently - this needs to continue. It is difficult to judge whether the committee works entirely unpolitically as I think a certain amount of pre-meeting takes place between members. Pre-meeting discussion is reasonable so members have a chance to develop a broader understanding of matters presented in the meeting provided members do not come mandated to take a particular line. I am not sure the public has yet grasped the important role of O&S and see it as giving opportunity to express their concerns etc..

Councillor	The O and S Committee is well chaired and is apolitical overall and encourages broad discussion but lacks weight as items progress to Executive and Council. A routine summary of key points raised and agreed by the Committee for each item and passed to the Executive would be helpful.
Councillor	The scrutiny committee should spend their meeting time scrutinising and not just listening to presentations we are currently not holding the exec to account
Councillor	I'd rather the meetings were not at 5.30pm. It's a difficult time for me and traffic is bad getting to the office.
Councillor	The O&S should have a clearly defined and valued role in the governance structure of the council and should be holding both the Exec and Officers to account, just not sure it is doing so at the moment.

12. What else do you think could be done to improve how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Functions?

Councillor	more issues by ward or a collection of wards
Officer	1. Smaller committee size. 2. Better/increased use of task and finish groups. 3. An annual work planning exercise with key officers present to provide advice. 4. Executive Members to introduce reports and answer questions where they can with officers playing a supporting role. 5. Potentially questioning skills training (externally provided). 6. Pre-meetings with the Chair could take place further in advance of meetings after the agenda has gone out, rather than on the day when there is very little time to react.
Councillor	Minutes don't always reflect the minutiae of debates, but that may be a good thing.
Officer	Officers have been extensively scrutinised in previous meetings that I have witnessed, as if they were on a 'hot seat'. Members, senior leadership and managers should be leading presentations and Q&A sessions, and deferring to officers for technical input. This will relieve the pressure on officers. The atmosphere is unpleasant. Committees should be a 'critical friend' and solution focused, rather than aggressively grilling officers. Perhaps Members should be consulted on projects and have a chance to feed into them earlier, if that is possible within the legislative framework.
Officer	Executive members should present their reports and be sat at the table as part of the meeting to encourage their greater participation supported by the lead officer who would be able to add any necessary technical details
Officer	More focus on decisions actually being taken at Exec and ensuring that meetings are not derailed by one agenda item - e.g Westhive. Healthy debate is good but if there is an agenda and time - then should try and stick to that.
Councillor	Go back to the old way of doing scrutiny
Councillor	Exec members should introduce topics (to indicate accountability), but leave officers to present them (who have the detail at their fingertips)
Councillor	Return to previous effectiveness and high level of accountability!

Councillor	Same as my previous comments.
Councillor	There haven't - yet - been any subcommittees or task & finish groups set up as part of the new style O&S Scrutiny Committee. My recollection is that the use of these was anticipated as part of the reduction of the number of scrutiny committees and the increase in size of the membership compared with previous committees. That is something that ought to be made more of in the future.
Councillor	When originally suggested, as I understood the plans, O&S was intended to develop working groups on particular issues. That has not happened but I have a feeling such WGs would only lead to the equivalent of a lot of committees again. and prolonged meetings as the WG report back to O&S....and O&S discuss the WG's conclusions.
Councillor	Split into 3 committees
Councillor	The O and S function is important but needs to be streamlined and more integrated with Executive and Council decision making and given more emphasis. I suggest more judicious work programming, more attention to contentious matters (social housing, climate response, outsourcing etc), and the need to have an agreed O and S sign-off statement as key items proceed forward to decision making.
Councillor	I believe the trial has failed and we should look at ways to split it up maybe under the new headings of Finance, Governance and Place
Councillor	Organise some direct training on Scrutiny and Governance and what is expected of them for members. To organise the agenda to cover a set of items that can be covered in a reasonable time. To be sure that each item is clearly defined, explained and what decision is required of the O&S committee. This decision should be "approved as is", or to define "changes required". There should be no agenda item in which the O&S committee is asked to "NOTE" the item. There could be a list of topics on which "decisions' are coming up in the Exec (or to be made by delegated authority by officers) for the O&S committee to be made aware of. Once the decision has been taken it can then come to the O&S as an agenda item to be scrutinised and approved or not!