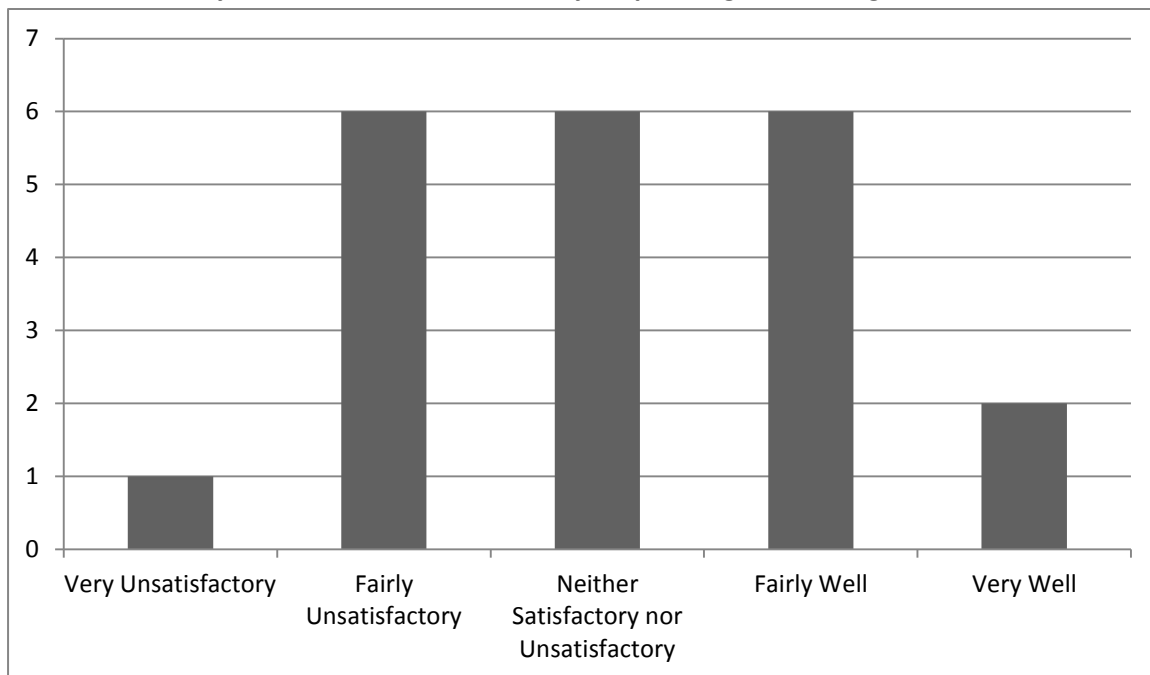




London Borough of Havering – Overview & Scrutiny Survey

Total number of responses: 23 (2 of which were provided in the form of general comments rather than via the survey).

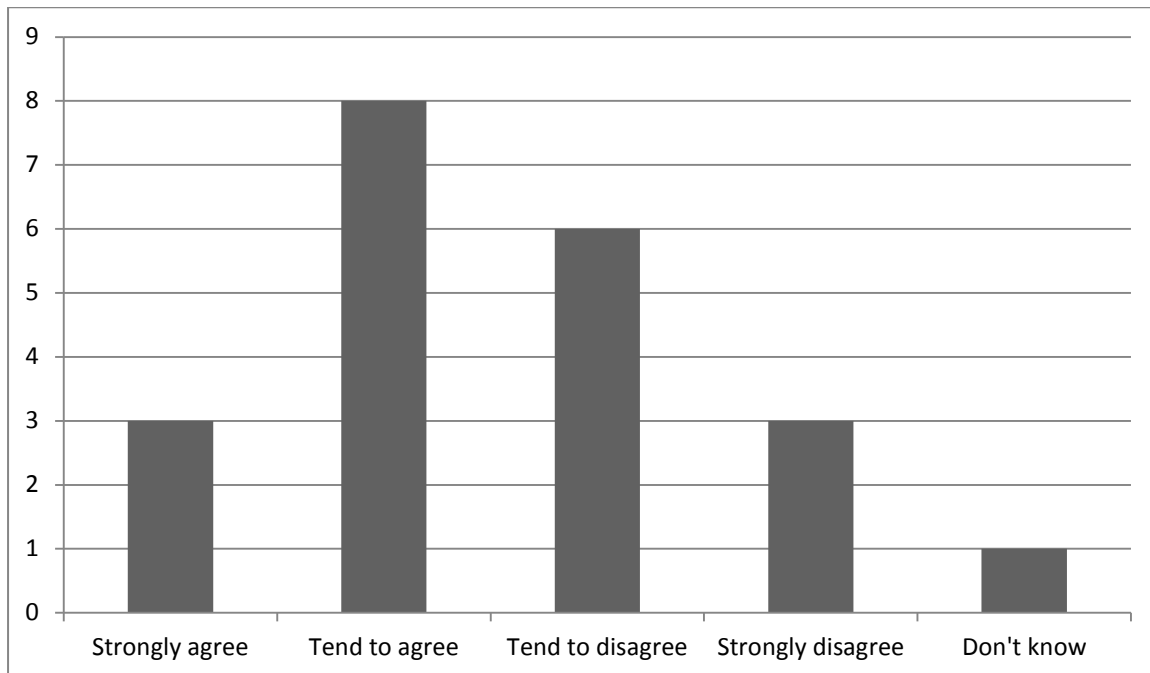
1. How well do you think Overview & Scrutiny is operating in Havering?



Comments:

1. Members need to be more involved.
2. Not active enough.
3. Some are better than others.
4. Never seem to learn of the end result.
5. Needs improving.
6. No-one is publishing it's success
7. I feel that in my individual committee, we are very diligent in our approach to our investigations.
8. Unable to gauge either way and difficult to establish and confirm whether decisions or recommendations made by members are acted upon.
9. O&S in Havering needs a fundamental overhaul to ensure that the objectives of the LGA 2000 are achieved.
10. There are attempts to hold the Administration to scrutiny but little focus on improving services.
11. Doesn't function in the interest of members.

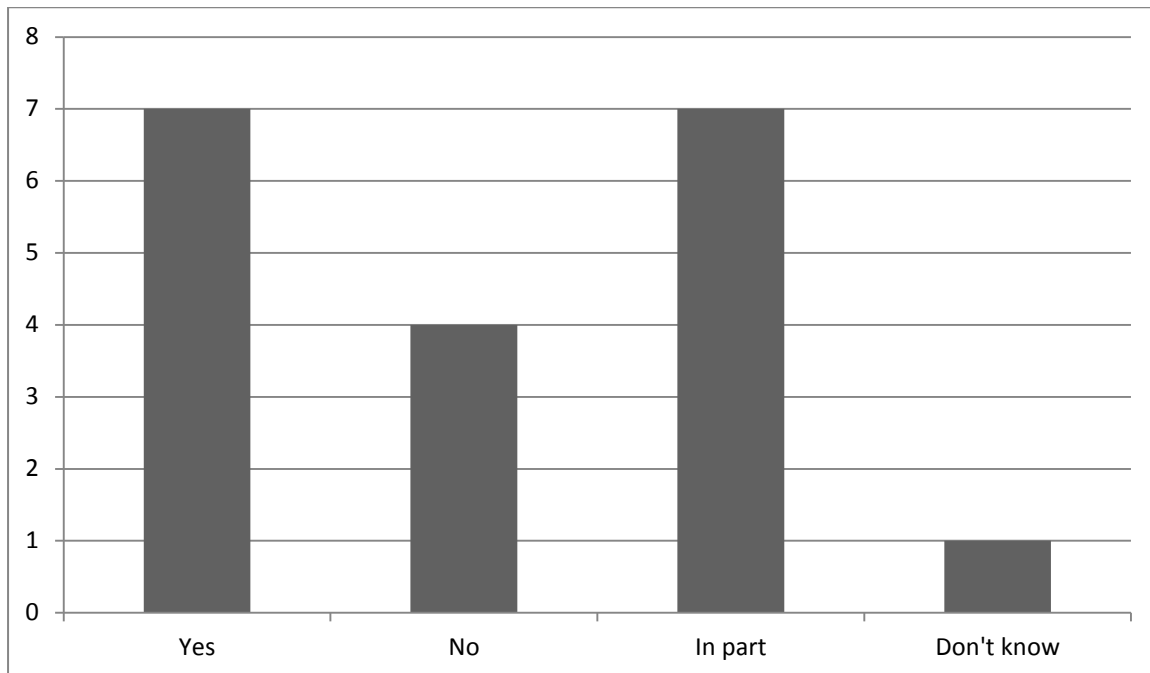
2. Do you think that Overview and Scrutiny in Havering is Member - led?



Comments:

1. Perhaps this is one of the weaknesses. It leads to the small band of committed councillors who get involved undertaking much of the work.
2. It should be member led!
3. Topic groups – one meeting then forgotten.
4. It's led by administration chairs who guide and decide outcomes.
5. Yes but not in all cases.
6. Chair for C&L works up a work programme with officers, agreed by committee, members are asked for agenda items.
7. It seems that the officers choose the subject matter.
8. Members are not always committee.
9. I imagine a weak chair could be officer led.
10. We aim to ensure that every committee member has the opportunity to contribute to our discussions on every subject matter.
11. Members may select topics but the research and direction is often directed by officers.
12. To a certain extent yes but sometimes it appears to be driven by officers.
13. There are a number of challenges facing Havering which will not be addressed until the culture of O&S in the borough has changed. Recognition by officers and members that O&S is as important as the administration/executive. From the day after the local election a change of culture will be a priority. This will mean an enhanced induction process for members, new and re-elected, to ensure that we take advantage of what appears to be a consensus for change.
14. Limited number of members actively involved.

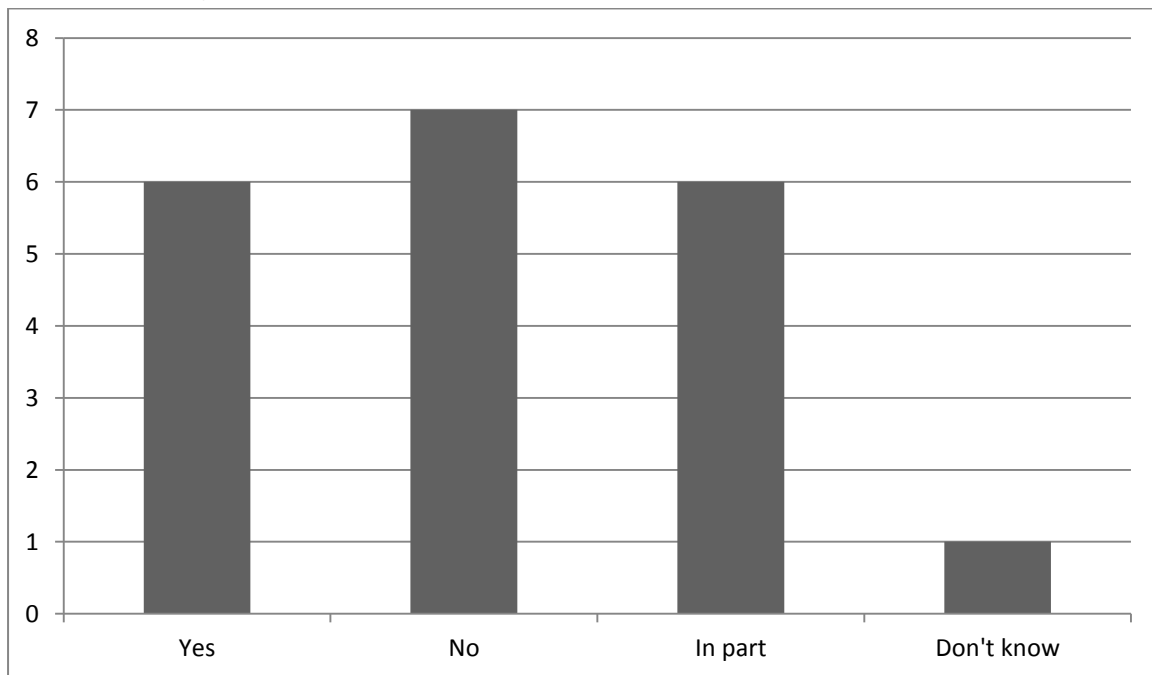
3. Do you contribute to the management of the committee work plan and agenda setting?



Comments:

1. Chairman of the Rainham and South Hornchurch working party.
2. Cabinet member.
3. Agenda already set.
4. Did work on working party for debt recovery, worked well and positive result.
5. As a vice chairman of the health committee. I am totally committed to set the agenda and work plan.
6. But it does depend on the committee.
7. As and when advised.
8. Not involved in process.
9. Absolutely, we discuss as a committee, our aims, written guidance from the officer.
10. When I was a V/C I did contribute to the agenda setting and work plan for meetings but topic groups tended to come out of things that were topical or known to be an issue, e.g. fly-tipping.
11. As chair I sat down with officers and gave them areas that we wished to look at. I also emailed other members on the committee for input on what they would like discussed.
12. Members do in part but the agenda in many ways is set by the executive. I would like to see a debate about priorities in full council which leads to a recognition of the areas of scrutiny which require examination and scrutiny. Also, there should be a mechanism for pre-decision scrutiny.
13. Contributed via the committee's discussion on setting up topic groups.

4. Do you believe the existing Overview & Scrutiny structure (over-arching Board and six sub committees) works well?



Comments:

1. Mindful of the primacy of the executive with regards decision making. When a clash of wants comes into being between the vested interests of the two entities, the outcome can so many times be determined by the strength of character of the elected member, as opposed to the merits of the intension.
2. Board is worthless.
3. It gives back benchers the opportunity to engage.
4. It makes sub committees irrelevant.
5. It isn't independent of the administration.
6. I have no reason to doubt that all the other committees are as diligent and hard working as ours are.
7. I consider that there should be less O&S sub-committees. There should be one dealing with scrutiny of outside bodies i.e. police, NHS and private contractors, and probably one or maybe two dealing with cross council issues. The sub-committees should be larger i.e. more members. The savings from this reduction need to be reinvested in the resources available to the O&S.
8. I have never fully understood the role of the overarching board. It seems that on occasion, meetings take place just to clarify details which should be done outside of formal meetings. I have not seen any evidence that it co-ordinates OVS committees but it have limited experience. I have been told it's more like a talking shop on issues which should be debated elsewhere.
9. Not to a great extent as we have had terms of reference on the other committees overlap each other and the main board along with officers should have discussed this when the new structure was revised.

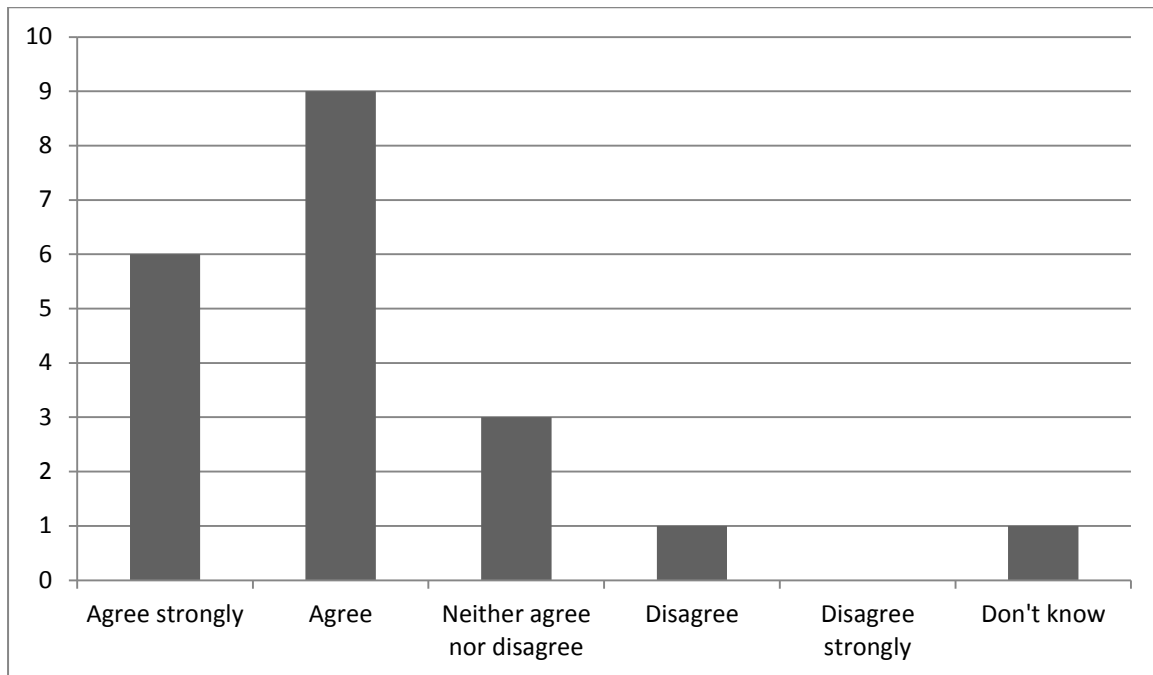
10. Essentially, sharing the committee's responsibility with sub-committees elongates the time and decision making/recommendation process. Replace the sub-committees with task and finish groups as and when (possibly retain those with statutory functions?)

5. What is your preference for the size and structure?

Comments:

1. Not having the opportunity to all of the other committees, the ones I have visited, I feel work well and provide a very useful purpose.
2. Truly there is not one. Small does not automatically bring into being better communication nor does larger prohibit good discourse.
3. Outcomes are what are needed.
4. It should comprise of opposition members only.
5. No bigger than it is already.
6. Current size allows for deeper dive scrutiny.
7. Committee should be smaller but I am happy with current structure as long as all the committee members are contributing and understand what is required of them.
8. Current structure works well.
9. All present is fine.
10. Mixed political and experience. Max 5 people (Cllrs)
11. Leave sub committees as it, look again at the board.
12. It would be preferable to have fewer members, but those that are on the committee are interested in the subject and contribute at meeting by playing an active role.
13. What works!
14. Works well in its current format and size.

6. Do you have the skills and knowledge to carry out your Overview & Scrutiny duties?



7. How do you think individual committee work plans should be determined?

Comments:

1. The chair has to be confident in the subject area, enabling direction of work plans. Committee recommendations and ratification by the committee offers ownership. Each agenda could have an item before urgent business. Member agenda recommendations – This needs to take into consideration existing work plan.
2. Consultation with other members rewards experience.
3. A debate involving all members and not a selected individual.
4. I, as the chairman consult with our committee, and discuss with our officer on the relevant items raised for future investigation.
5. 1) By direction of the elected chamber. 2) By agreement by members of the committee prompted by topic of interest.
6. By the committee and liaising with officers.
7. By the chairman and vice chairman
8. Work plan and agenda should be wet by the chairman and vice chairman together with the officers i.e. performance targets etc.
9. Determined by the chairman in consultation of committee.
10. Instrumental with the chairperson and liaise with committee.
11. To ensure life is not too pressured as a Cllr with long or too regular of meetings.

12. Long term councillors should help the new ones.
13. Each member should be able to raise a subject to discuss and work through each issue.
14. Try to encourage councillors that do not sit on a specific committee to attend and bring knowledge and information. To not keep looking at the same subjects year in – year out.
15. By an overarching board/committee.
16. Cabinet priorities.
17. Much as now depending on the idea floated. These could come from staff.
18. By member in conjunction with officers. Also, we need to know what key decisions have been made by officers/executive at the start of each sub-committee meetings or perhaps a summary of these to be circulated with the agenda a week before the meeting and an item made in the agenda to discuss these.
19. At present the agenda is often for too 'chair-led', the agenda should be set by the committee members.
20. Ultimately by the members themselves but it should be informed by debate and personal knowledge and independent thinking. It is important that those members taking on O&S should be well-informed on the subjects they are considering.

8. What do you believe is the aim of Overview and Scrutiny and what obstacles if any do you feel there are to this happening?

Comments:

1. To scrutinize the decisions of the relevant cabinets and to be re-assured that officers are working effectively and efficiently. The majority party ultimately makes all decisions – it's undemocratic.
2. To review what cabinet members are doing and to see if issues can be dealt with better.
3. Oversee the running of the council – lack of interests at all levels.
4. Outcome for the best using common sense not 90% on outcomes in favour of council.
5. Main aim is to scrutinise for a positive and constructive outcome.
6. Holding officers to account. However sometimes it can be political, objectives just for the sake of it.
7. To hold to account, add value, to invite outside body to improve.
8. To scrutinise the workings of council depts. with regards to wastage, finance and efficiency. To monitor how council tax payers money is spent. Don't know what 'overview' does.
9. I wholly support the 'critical friend' interpretation. However, I believe there is a place for some form of mandatory direction prompted by particular committed findings. Elected member apathy is a bar to change.
10. Our aim is to investigate any area which we feel would benefit from our recommendations and endeavour to ensure that these improvements are implemented.
11. It is to bring to account officers who fail in their duties to our residents.

12. To improve services and delivery. Outvoted by the administration generally.
13. Scrutiny is there as a checks and balances system of policy and strategy. However, areas such as children's services, including listening to the voice of the child. The 'story' from residents on services can be heard through the scrutiny process.
14. Hold administration to account. Improve efficiency and performance. Not enough member commitment.
15. I feel that generally OVS goes through the motions rather than truly scrutinises. Some of the problem is that officer support is minimal given the reduction in staff which means that the research is not undertaken in a timely manner making the process very drawn out. Topic groups take far too long, again through lack of officer support.
16. Improve council services without costing more.
17. To review and scrutinise decisions made by the executive and senior council management.
18. To scrutinise executive decisions and review council processes. Obstacles: lack of member interest and training. Too much focus on scrutiny with limited success or motivation. No incentive to focus on review of processes and topic groups are often seen as educational rather than tools for change/improvement.
19. To provide constructive challenge to the administration's policy decision and strategy. A continuing ignorance among members as to what exactly is expected of them in an O&S role.
20. The aim should be to ensure that the residents we serve get good value and we as a council provide efficient public services which meet local requirements. We need to do that not in opposition to the administration but as a critical friend. The obstacles to this happening include a lack of positive recognition for what O&S can and should do; a lack of commitment by members; probably a lack of resource which includes at least an officer who should be solely a champion for scrutiny; and the recognition that O&S is not in opposition to the executive but that its role is important to ensure the right balance between the two wings.

9. If you could make two changes to Overview and Scrutiny, what would they be?

Comments:

1. 1) 1 additional scrutiny sub-committee meeting per year, Children and learning have 12 corporate panel meeting per year, in addition to scrutiny sub-committee meeting. It may therefore not be necessary to increase meeting in this sub-committee. 2) Members allocated to a sub-committee for at least two years. The re-visiting of bringing members up to speed on a particular scrutiny area, can delay effective scrutiny time.
2. 1) An independent chair. 2) Acknowledgement from members and officers that scrutiny is or should be a positive contribution not a negative.
3. 1) Not to be undermined by O&S board
4. 1) I feel that we need more committee time to conduct more and deeper investigations and interview more people. 2) Feel that our committee should go from 4 to 6 meeting each year.

5. 1) Much of local government work is conducted by well-meaning volunteers (formed governments view of elected members). 2) Councillor should be paid a wage commensurate with their responsibilities.
6. 1) That meeting should not clash. 2) Mobiles/PCs should be banned – which with the latter has been made difficult as we are ‘expected’ to not receive hard copies of minutes.
7. 1) Ask the members if they want to be on O&S committee and if they understand they have to contribute to make the committee work. 2) Members training – very important.
8. 1) Concentrate on Overview. 2) Continue improving resources available to members.
9. Works well in current form.
10. 1) Mixture of political parties and of chairs. 1 from each party who reside at chair every 5 weeks.
11. 1) Bring call in back to sub-committee. 2) Scrap performance reviews – too much on quantity and none on quality.
12. 1) Make all members of committees put forward comments and raise questions.
13. 1) The make-up of the O&S committees should be changed to include only members that are interested in the subject and not there to provide political balance. 2) Members training in relevant O&S subject.
14. Make the overall structure smaller and more focussed. Allowance based upon what individuals do. Task and finish groups only.
15. No idea.
16. Decision sheets/forms implemented that captures the recommendation/comments made to officers on a specific matter/topic and that there is an audit trail of these with actions clearly documented. These could be signed by the chair once officers can provide feedback as to whether they can/will implement. Early notification of proposals on officers ideas on what new processes, policies or procedures may be implemented as a result of forthcoming budgets.
17. Incentivise and upgrade task and finish groups. If the latter be composed of willing members and thus not taking account of political balance it will help de-politicise the committee work.
18. Training of new members in effective scrutiny and challenge and member-led agenda setting.
19. The chair of O&S and any sub-committees should be from opposition members. At least one officer of the council is solely dedicated to O&S.

10. Do you have any other general comments regarding Overview and Scrutiny or anything in relation to the above questions that you would like to add?

Comments:

1. Educate members, especially newly elected ones, on the subject of the specific O&S and the function of the committees.
2. Board needs overview. It's not working.
3. I basically feel that I have to scrutinise from behind a closed door. Does it not make more sense for the overarching board to be attached by chairman and/or vice chairman?
4. We need to get rid of proportional representation which is administration led. Nothing gets done.