SCOTTISH POLICE AUTHORITY
ÙGHDARRAS POILIS NA H-ALBA

Agenda Item 4.8

Meeting	Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee
Date	21 May 2025
Location	Online
Title of Paper	Committee Effectiveness
Presented By	Vanessa Ewing-Blair, Head of Strategic Business Management
Recommendation to Members	For Discussion
Appendix Attached	No

PURPOSE

This report provides the Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee with an overview of findings from the 2024-25 Committee Effectiveness process.

The report is for Members' consideration and seeks to provide assurance on the effectiveness of their contribution to the Authority's governance arrangements and subsequent assurance reporting as part of the annual report and accounting process.

The paper is presented in line with the Authority's Corporate Governance Framework and committee Terms of Reference.

1.   Background

1.1   The Scottish Police Authority is committed to continuous improvement in the discharge of its responsibilities and its oversight and support for policing in Scotland. The Authority's Corporate Governance Framework is subject to regular review with the most recent reviews reported to and approved by the Authority in November 2024. In addition, the Authority conducts an annual self-assessment of the effectiveness of Committees.

1.2   The Authority enhanced the 2024/25 committee effectiveness process by inviting key stakeholders to offer their assessment and views on the effectiveness of each of the Authority's committees. Several stakeholders, listed below, were invited to complete a survey and offer comments. All stakeholders consulted have contributed to and/or attended a committee in the last year:

- Police Scotland
- Forensic Services
- PIRC
- COSLA
- Crown Office
- Scottish Government
- HMICS
- Biometrics Commissioner

- National Crime Agency
- Internal/External Audit
- SCPOSA
- ASPS
- SPF
- Unison
- Unite

1.3   To encourage open and frank responses, Members and stakeholders were invited to complete the survey anonymously.

1.4   To support accountability and transparency, the Authority reported the survey findings in the public session of each respective committee meeting.

2.   Further detail in relation to the report

2.1   There are no specific requirements or direction on how public bodies should undertake effectiveness reviews. The Authority considers a range of relevant documents including 'On Board' guidance, the Scottish Government Audit and Assurance Committee Handbook and the CIPFA Good Governance Standard for Public Services.

2.2   The committee effectiveness survey for 2024/25 sought feedback in four key areas:

- Reporting to committees
- Committee priorities and progress

- Members' capability and overall operation of the committee
- Delivery against the Terms of Reference

2.3   Eleven of twelve Members who were in post in January 2025 completed the survey. Three responses were submitted by stakeholders.

3.   Members survey findings

3.1   The graphs in section 3 shown in this report show how Members responded to each question, in terms of percentage breakdown, across all Committees. Most Members sit on multiple committees, hence the number of overall responses is greater than the number of Members assigned to Committee work.

3.2   Reports for individual committees can be accessed below:

Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee
Complaints and Conduct Committee
Forensics Services Committee
Legal Committee
Policing Performance Committee
People Committee
Resources Committee

3.3   **Reporting to committee**

There is a high level of agreement among Members regarding the overall quality, clarity, and content of papers being submitted to committees. Members strongly agree that papers are clear in terms of what the ask is of them. There is agreement, albeit less strong, that papers adequately reflect equalities, human rights and community impacts.
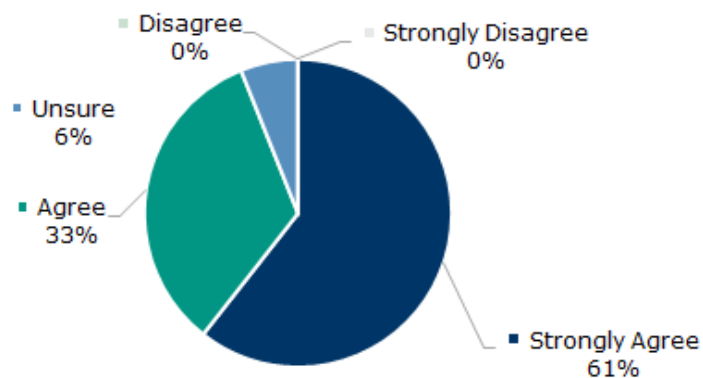
The quality of committee papers allows Members to perform their roles effectively


- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 9%
- Strongly Agree 28%
- Agree 63%
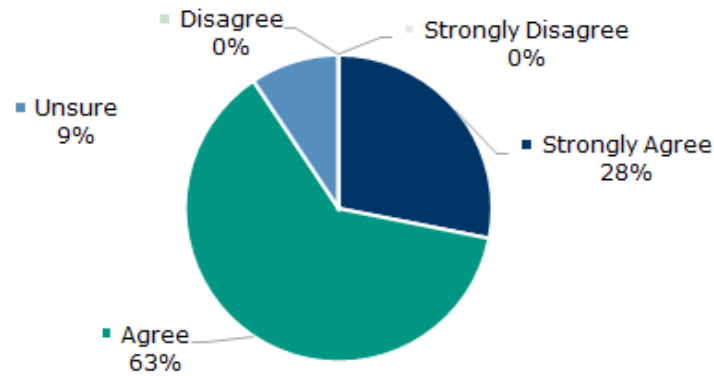
Overall, reports are clear and easy to understand, and suitable for a non-executive audience

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 6%
- Strongly Agree 36%
- Agree 58%
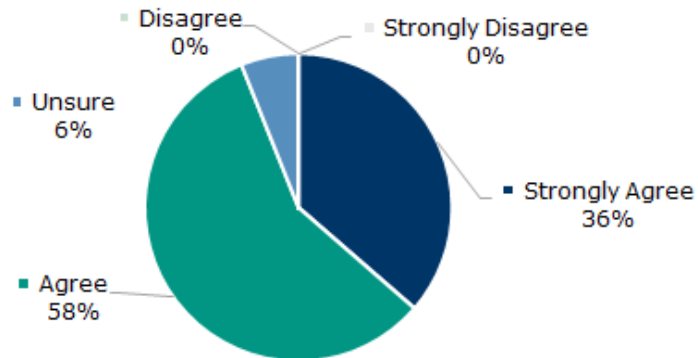
Papers make clear what the committee is being asked to do

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 6%
- Agree 33%
- Strongly Agree 61%

Equality, human rights or community impacts are increasingly reflected in reports to the committee

- Disagree 6%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 17%
- Strongly Agree 12%
- Agree 65%
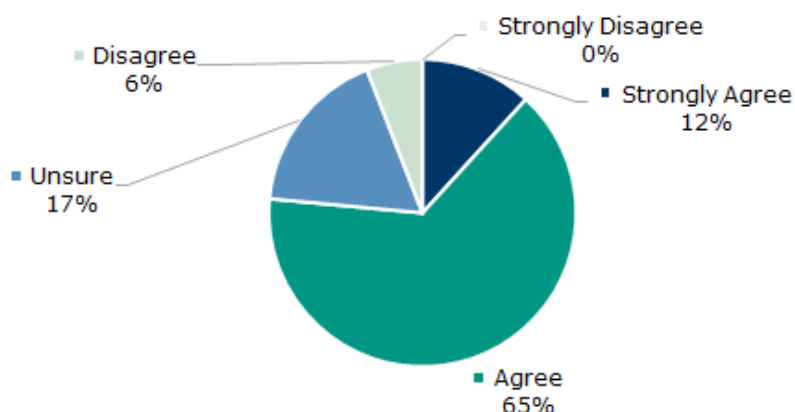
Overall, the quality of committee papers is improving

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 9%
- Strongly Agree 20%
- Agree 71%
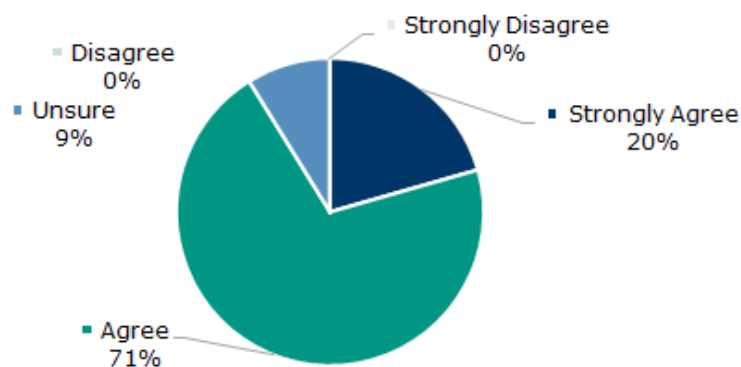
3.4 Free text responses from Members regarding the quality of reports to committees highlighted the following areas of strength, and areas where future improvement activity could be focussed:

- The volume of reports at Committee meetings is regarded as being high
- Late paper submission causes difficulties and is quite common
- Some papers are written in a style more suited to executive rather than non-executive audiences

3.5 Comments from Members specific to committees are summarised below:

Complaints and Conduct Committee

- There is greater transparency and data disaggregation in papers to some Committees, supporting accountability

Legal Committee

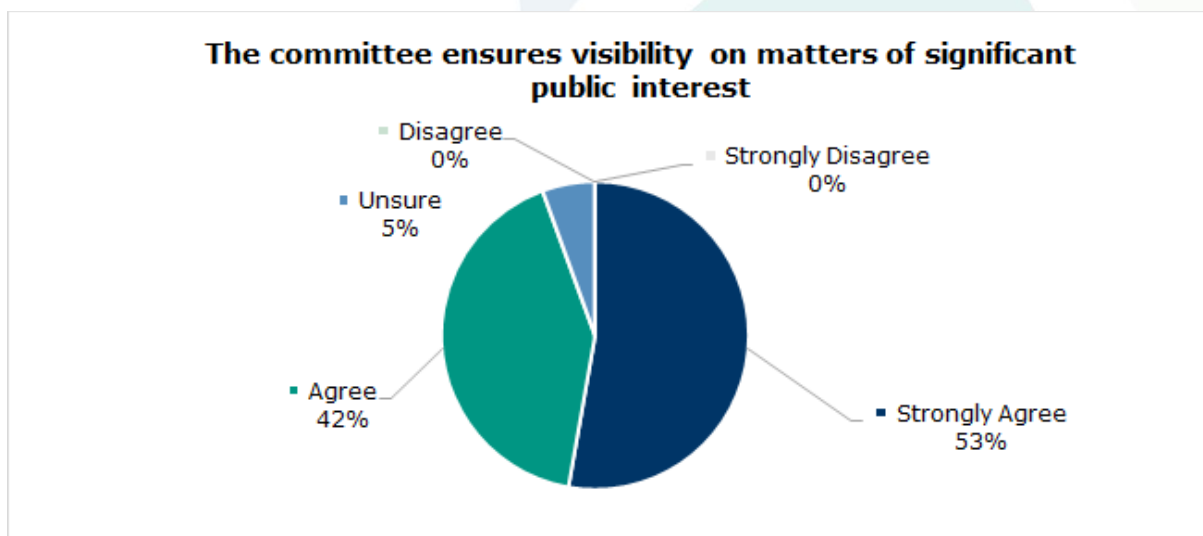- More information about how lessons learned from settlements could be provided

Resources Committee

- Business cases are often too lengthy, detailed and repetitive
- Benefits tracking reports require simplification, with more focus on illustrating benefit realisation from IBC to delivery
- Change requests should come to Committee earlier
- Optimism-bias is present in papers, especially where supplier delivery times, skilled staff availability and procurement capacity is concerned
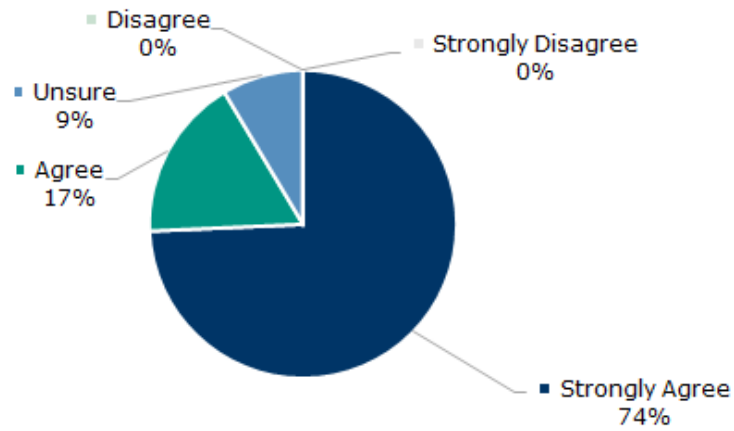
Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee

- Regarding risk, clearer information is required by Members relating to what actions are being taken (and by whom) to bring risks within risk appetite levels, along with the expected time for achieving this
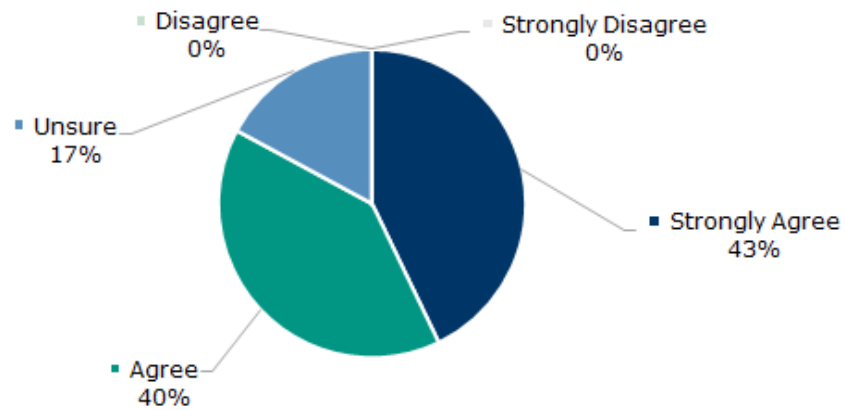
3.6 **Priorities and progress -** There is majority agreement among Members that the work of committees, and the work plans particularly, align strongly to key areas of strategic focus, namely public interest priorities, and clear regard for issues relating to organisational culture and capacity and capability. Members are also in agreement that committees have the means to track and monitor work in progress and fulfilment of actions raised, although this is an area where some Members are less sure.
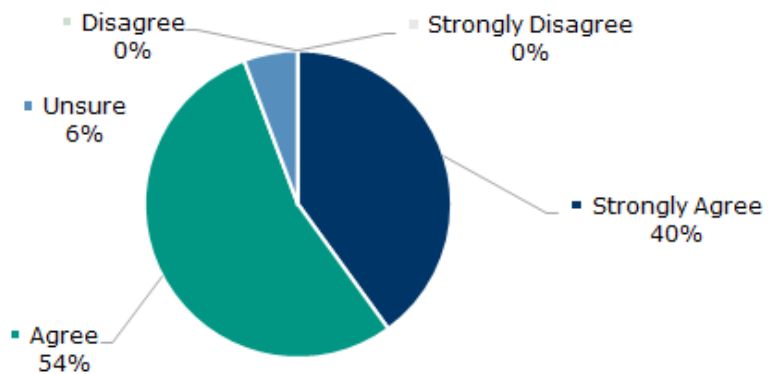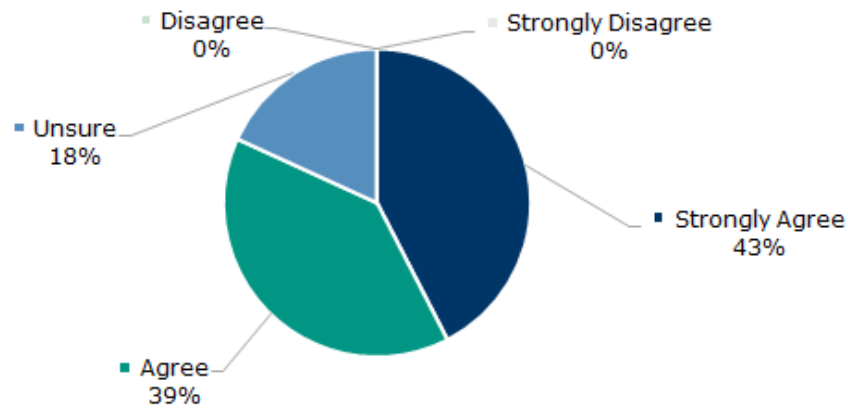

The committee ensures visibility on matters of significant public interest

Disagree 0%
Strongly Disagree 0%
Unsure 5%
Agree 42%
Strongly Agree 53%

Work plans reflect key strategic priorities

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 9%
- Agree 17%
- Strongly Agree 74%

The committee's work has reflected the focus on organisational culture

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 17%
- Strongly Agree 43%
- Agree 40%

The committee's work has reflected issues around capacity and capability

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 6%
- Strongly Agree 40%
- Agree 54%

Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee
Committee Effectiveness
21 May 2025

7

The committee has processes in place to allow members to track progress of ongoing work

- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Strongly Agree 43%
- Agree 39%
- Unsure 18%
- Disagree 0%

Committees follow up on reports to seek evidence of implementation and impact

- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Strongly Agree 47%
- Agree 50%
- Unsure 3%
- Disagree 0%
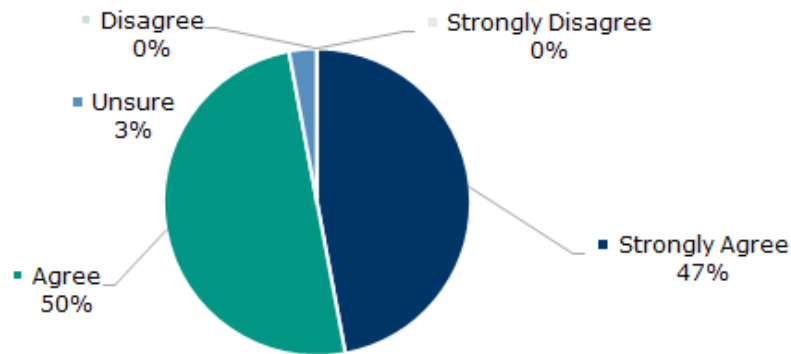
Decisions and action log actions are tracked and implemented in line with the timescale set out

- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Strongly Agree 23%
- Agree 60%
- Unsure 17%
- Disagree 0%

Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee
Committee Effectiveness
21 May 2025
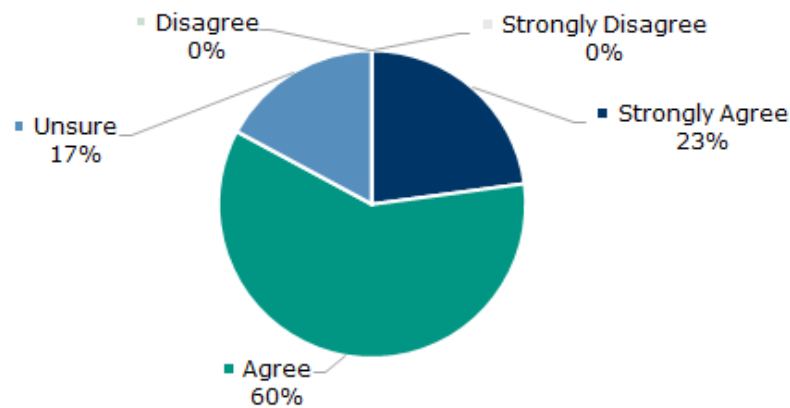
3.7   Free text responses from Members regarding committee's strategic focus, alignment to priorities, and monitoring of ongoing work and action implementation highlight the following areas of strength, and areas where future improvement activity could be focussed:

General Comments

- There can be considerable slippage in timescales for implementing actions and although explanations for delay are valid and actions are not lost, the regularity of slippage does not instil confidence when overseeing action plans with planned delivery timescales
- The work of the SPA team is invaluable in terms of following up on decisions and ensuring they are implemented
- At times I think we are too understanding of the apparent pressures on Police Scotland executives and accept a lower quality of response than we would expect
- In spite of asking about capacity and capability this has been difficult to have a coherent narrative about this
- It sometimes feels very slow... I have twice in the last year or so felt I had to be very direct about my frustration at the lack of progress

Committee-Specific Comments

Legal Committee

- not clear how much action is being taken to address issues much earlier to avoid further claims/ settlements

Resources Committee

- still too much slippage in delivery
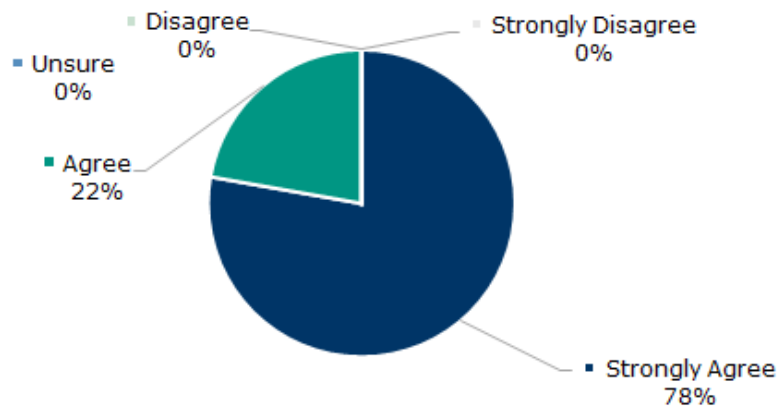
Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee

- too many actions from audit recommendations are not delivered on time

3.8   Members and overall operation – All Members agreed that they provide genuine challenge, seek assurances, and that they have the right balance of skills, knowledge and experience. The majority of Members also have confidence in relation to agreeing position on specific issues and in decision making.

Members are confident in agreeing a position on specific issues and in decision making

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 3%
- Agree 31%
- Strongly Agree 66%
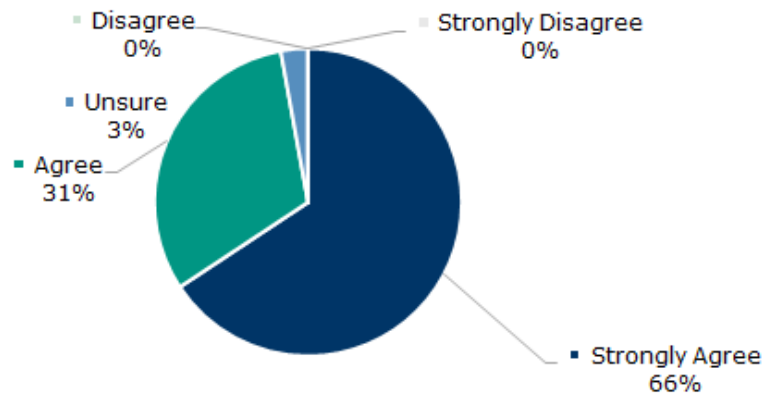
Members provide genuine challenge, as well as seek clarification and / or reassurance

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 0%
- Agree 22%
- Strongly Agree 78%

Committee members have the right balance of experience, knowledge and skill to fulfil the committee's role

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 3%
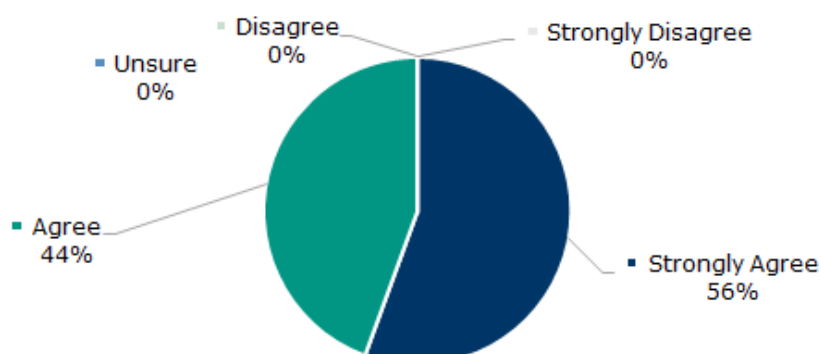- Agree 29%
- Strongly Agree 68%
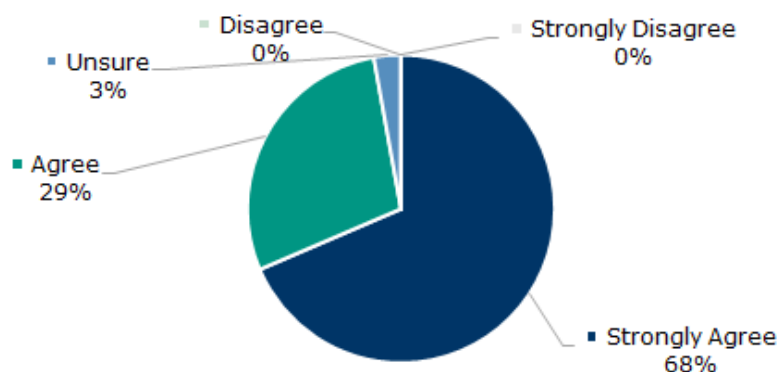
3.9   A small number of free text responses were given by Members regarding their own effectiveness in influencing committee operations:
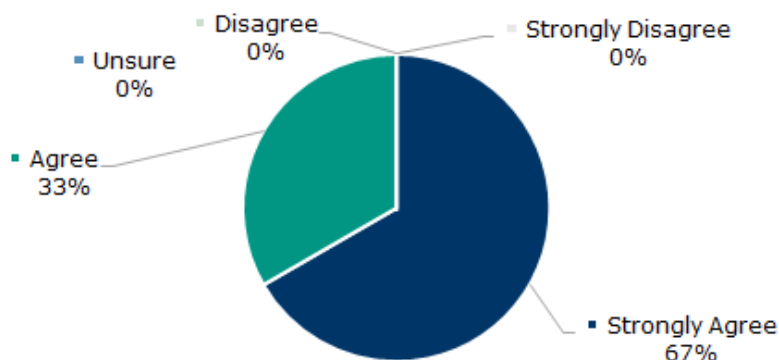
- There was a comment that the Legal Committee could do benefit from having more legal expertise on committee to be able to provide challenge.
- There was also a comment that the Resources Committee benefits from having the Chairs of the People Committee and Forensics Committee present for consideration of areas of mutual interest.
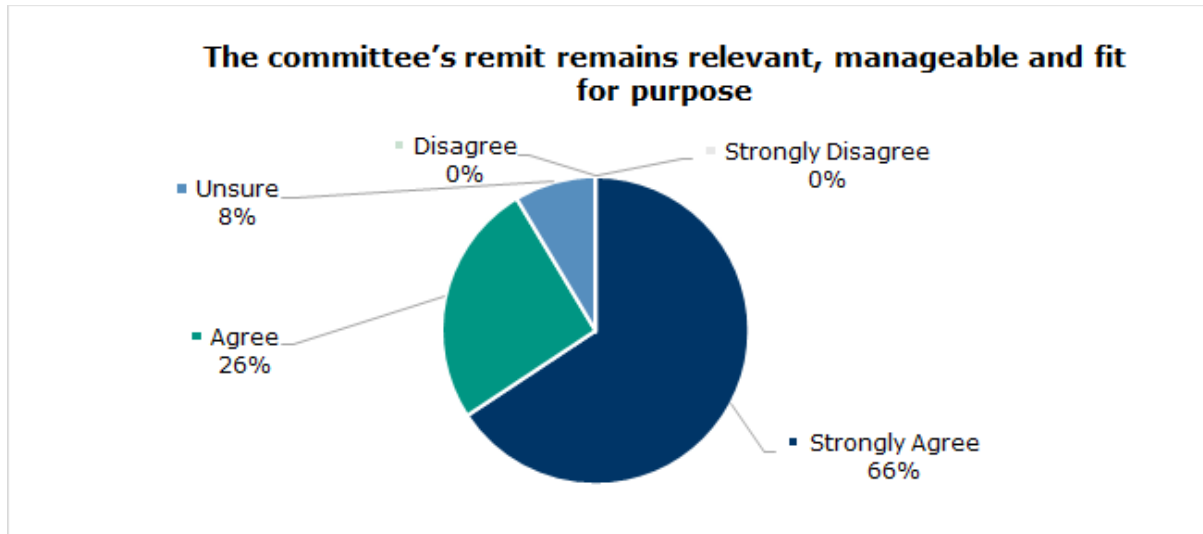
3.10 **Governance Support and Remit** - Members all agree that the committees receive appropriate advice on taking certain agenda items in private, that minutes of meetings are of a high standard, and there is a very high level of agreement that the remit of the various committees is fit for purpose.

The committee is advised and confident about when to consider items in private session

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 0%
- Agree 44%
- Strongly Agree 56%

Minutes of meetings are accurate, clear and contain an appropriate level of detail

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 0%
- Agree 33%
- Strongly Agree 67%

The committee's remit remains relevant, manageable and fit for purpose

- Disagree 0%
- Strongly Disagree 0%
- Unsure 8%
- Agree 26%
- Strongly Agree 66%

3.11 A small number of free text responses were given by Members regarding the issue of taking some items in private session. A view was expressed by more than one Member that Police Scotland and SPA officials appear to take an overly cautious approach to discussing some matters in an open/public forum.

3.12 **Terms of Reference** - All Members indicated that the Committee(s) they sit on are fully discharging their responsibilities in line with its terms of reference with the exception of one Member of the Resources Committee.

3.13 Overall, the Committee Effectiveness results across all Committees are extremely positive in terms of what Members have provided as feedback.

3.14 General areas where improvement could take place focus on:

- Reducing the volume of papers and improving submission time punctuality
- A stronger focus on equalities, human rights and community impacts
- Overly detailed reports aimed at Executive audiences, often too lengthy and containing much repetition
- Optimism-bias at the outset of action plans in terms of delivery timescales
- Slow pace of implementing actions with high levels of slippage being common
- A tendency to be overly cautious about discussing some matters in public forum

4.   Stakeholder Feedback

4.1   Three stakeholders responded to the survey providing feedback and comment six of the Authority's committees.

4.2   Generally, stakeholders were positive about all aspects of how the committees are functioning. However, there was no overall agreement from the three stakeholders about what was specifically working well or what specifically could be improved.

4.3   As outline at paragraph 3.2 above, reports for individual committees can be accessed from the links below:

Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee
Complaints and Conduct Committee
Forensics Services Committee
Legal Committee
Policing Performance Committee
People Committee
Resources Committee

4.4   Specific feedback from each committee is set out below:

Complaints and Conduct Committee

4.5   This committee received one stakeholder response. They 'Strongly Agreed' that the Committee's **priorities and workplan** were clear. They also either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that there was clarity on the content of reports to Committee and the overall ask of the Committee, and that there was enough time for members to consider papers; that the Chair was effective in meeting management; and that the Committee is effective overall.

Legal Committee

4.6   This committee received one stakeholder response. They either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that the Committee's **priorities and workplan** were clear; that there was clarity on the content of reports to Committee and the overall ask of the Committee, and that there was enough time for members to consider papers; that the Chair was effective in **meeting management**; and that the Committee is effective overall.

Resources Committee

4.7 This committee received one stakeholder response. They 'Strongly Agreed' that the Chair was effective in meeting management. They were mostly 'Unsure' about the **overall effectiveness** of the Committee, although they agreed that the Committee's work enhances transparency and accountability in policing. They 'Agreed' about the clarity of reports being submitted to the Committee, but 'Disagreed' about there being enough time for members to consider papers. They also 'Agreed' about the clarity of the Committee's priorities, but were 'Unsure' about the clarity and alignment of the workplan to the Committee's priorities.

Audit, Risk and Assurance Committee

4.8 This committee received one stakeholder response. They 'Strongly Agreed' that the Committee's **priorities and workplan** were clear. They also 'Agreed' that there was clarity on the content of reports to Committee and the overall ask of the Committee, and that there was enough time for members to consider papers; and that the Chair was effective in meeting management. They also either 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that the Committee is effective overall.

Policing Performance Committee

4.9 This committee received three stakeholder responses. They largely 'Strongly Agreed' about the effectiveness of the Chair in managing Committee meetings. 'Priorities and Workplan' and 'Reports to Committee'. Respondents were most likely to either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' in the **Reports to Committee** and **Overall Effectiveness** categories. Respondents were also most likely to either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Disagree' in the **Priorities and Workplan** category.

People Committee

4.10 This committee received two stakeholder responses. Respondents were most likely to 'Agree' in the **Reports to Committee**, **Meeting Management**, and **Overall Effectiveness**. Respondents were most likely to 'Disagree' in the **Priorities and Workplan** category.

4.11 Overall, the Committee Effectiveness results across all Committees are positive in terms of what stakeholders have provided as feedback.

4.12 A reinforcement of committee priorities and workplans, specifically with the Policing Performance Committee and the People Committee is a potential area for improvement.

5.   Next Steps

5.1   Findings from the committee effectiveness process, and Members' and stakeholders' considerations will support continuous improvement and inform the committees workplans and priorities for the year ahead. The overall findings will inform the accountability report of the annual report and accounts and any future Governance Review process.

6.   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1   There are no financial implication arising directly from this report.

7.   PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1   There are no financial implication arising directly from this report.

8.   LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1   There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9.   REPUTATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1   There are reputational implications associated with this report. The Authority's committee effectiveness process supports the Authority to effectively discharge its core responsibilities to support, maintain and oversee policing. Effective governance enhances accountability and directly impacts on trust and confidence in policing.

10.   SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1   There are no social implications arising directly from this report.

11.   COMMUNITY IMPLICATIONS

11.1   There are no community implications arising directly from this report.

12.   EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1   There are equality implications associated with this report. This committee effectiveness review supports the Authority's efforts to improve the accessibility of its governance of policing, and mainstream equality reporting into its governance processes.

13. ENVIRONMENT IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to discuss the content of this report.