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An Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Impact of the Executive Management Committee of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality

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Abstract

All municipalities (257) in South Africa have Executive Management Committees that are called different names and the main objective and authority of these committees is to support the municipal manager in discharging his or her fiduciary duties as per applicable legislation in local government administration and management. These committees are meant to discuss and take decisions on strategic issues of the municipality which span across all functions of the municipality. They are therefore expected to focus on transversal coordinated functioning of the municipality as a whole rather than just focusing on the functions of different departments. More often than not is the fact that some Executive Management Committees become a platform where executives defend their departments' or directorates' performance and relay their departmental frustrations to the municipal manager to the detriment of the strategic focus which will help improve performance of the municipality to deliver services better. More often than not different executives are blamed for silo mentalities and this is an existential reality in many municipalities. There is also a concern whether these executives really have time to digest and process issues properly in these meetings given the limited times they have in general since their schedules are always extremely tight. This then talks directly to the quality of decisions taken in these meetings and whether or not they do help municipalities to deliver services better to their communities. It is for these reasons that there must be periodical reviews and assessments of the effectiveness of these management committees. The study therefore evaluated the effectiveness and impact of the Executive Management Committee of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

Keywords: *Evaluation; Effectiveness; Impact; Executive Management Committee; Executives; Decision-making; Performance; Monitoring; Service Delivery*

INTRODUCTION

By their very nature Executive Management Committees are supposed to be strategic engines of modern organizations, however many of these committees do not operate as true leadership teams. Modern organizations place enormous pressure on their directors or executive directors. Expectations for corporate directors have never been higher (Knippen, et. al., 2019; Tuggle et. al., 2022; Zattoni and Pugliese, 2021). Directors for modern organizations need to be agile and equal to the dynamics of social, environmental and technological challenges. Organizations have responded to such heightened expectations by appointing directors with unprecedentedly diverse skills and broader experience (Adams, et.al., 2018), but concern persists about whether directors can devote sufficient care and commitment to successfully fulfil their responsibilities (Brandes, et. a., 2022; Ferris, et. al., 2020; Harris and Shimizu, 2004; Kress, 2018; Mans-Kemp, et. al. 2020).

The primacy of the expert group or committee for decision-making in public life can be seen across all sectors and disciplines, from local authority planning decisions to national positions on scientific issues and the development of legislation. There are multiple challenges prevalent to decision-making for policy and practice in the 21st century. The first challenge is, given the strong policy support for evidence informed decision-making, the requirement for group members is to engage with highly technical information for decisions to be highly quality researched.

The second challenge that affects decision-making by directors is their diverse backgrounds that affect their understanding of the policy support needed for diverse stakeholders, users of public services and these directors bring with them different knowledge, expertise and beliefs which make them process information differently. The third challenge is exacerbated by the fact that in the era of financial constraints, committees or directors must achieve the high quality, evidence-based decisions with minimum wasted on resources, especially financial resources.

The other challenge is increased emphasis on transparency of decision-making, especially from government institutions. Many organizations find themselves in a dilemma of what to be transparent on or not to their stakeholders and the public.

These challenges are not only applicable to the private and major public sector institutions but are also prevalent to municipalities that are at the coalface of service delivery. It then becomes important to evaluate the effectiveness of executive management committees in municipalities, especially to establish how they (executive management committees) effectively and efficiently take decisions in the interest of the public they serve.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the Executive Management Committee of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Review literature on the effectiveness of management committees or corporate directors of organizations.
- Critically analyze effectiveness of the Executive Management Committee of eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in terms of governance, strategic leadership, decision-making, meeting management, oversight and monitoring, risk and audit compliance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Governance

Corporate governance is generally defined as the set of policies and processes that steer the direction of the organization, how management takes decisions and be accountable for decisions taken and how the organization complies with the applicable policies and legislation. Over time, contemporary research has reinforced the notion put forth by Monks and Minow (2011) that the core principles of corporate governance are aimed at fostering transparency, accountability, fairness and responsibility within organizational decision-making realms.

Expected Directors' Effectiveness

The everchanging work dynamics and evolution of governance standards over the past two decades have necessitated enormous scrutiny on the directors' ability to properly execute their fiduciary duties. According to Gai and Yo-Jud Cheng (2026) a concern is growing that directors may lack cognitive bandwidth to deal with strategy-oriented responsibilities and even with their fundamental role of monitoring. There is an escalation of greater managerial myopia rather than a focus on strategic advisory role. Time management also affects the directors' abilities to discharge their responsibilities. Academic research has yet to offer a very clear direction as to how institutions can clearly allocate responsibilities across all directors. In municipalities the directors (executives) are expected to lead the implementation of the municipal strategy at the same time leading their respective departments or directorates ensuring that they perform optimally and this surely becomes a mammoth task.

Dynamics that Limit the Impact of Management Committees

Management Committees should by virtue of their positioning display a concentration of power, knowledge and experience. They are supposed to be a think-tank and strategic engine of any organization. Contrary though is that they seldom operate as leadership teams but are often segmented and operating in silos.

Carcel (2025) has identified the following recurring problems that impact on the performance of Management Committees:

High individual performance, but low collective performance: It is normal in municipalities that executives can be highly qualified and experienced as individuals but fail to perform as a team. According to a Harvard Business Review study of more than 1,250 executive committees, only 20% of senior management teams are considered high performers. Collective performance requires more than individual talent but requires shared vision, rules of collaboration and a sense of common purpose.

False sense of strategic alignment: In many organizations there is a danger of assuming that Management Committees are aligned because everyone knows the financial goals, the vision and strategic direction of the organization. However, the reality is that each area usually operates with its own logic, prioritizing its own departmental key performance indicators over the overall organizational input. This is a sign of the lack of a collective purpose. The study by Bain & Company indicates that most management teams spend less than 25% of their time on strategic conversations that involve the entire organization.

Absence of psychological security: In many committees, cordiality reigns, but not deep trust. Difficult conversations are avoided, mistakes are not recognized and superficial consensus is prioritized over productive fiction. The result is a formally correct team, but not very innovative and with limited learning. It is proven by literature that psychological safety of employees enhances improved performance.

Weak sense of collective leadership: Many executives just work as executive directors or directors of their areas and seldom work as leaders of business (collective leadership). There is a lack of a shared mentality of co-responsibility, which translates into silos, disconnected decisions and little transversal vision.

Limited feedback culture among peers: Although most Management Committees work on individual development, very few encourage peer feedback let alone feedback from those who report to them for they view feedback as mere criticism. This lack limits horizontal learning, continuous improvement and the possibility of real evolution of the team. A study by Folkman indicates that leaders who receive and heed frequent feedback improve their performance by 39% more than those who do not.

Modern approaches to performance improvement of Management Committees

High Performance of Management Committees cannot be achieved over night, it is an evolutionary process that will be ongoing as long as management teams exist in organizations. There are too many approaches to improve performance but for purposes of this study very few will be discussed.

Continuous, rigorous and evidence-based diagnosis of dynamics: It is important for organizations to continuously diagnose the stressors of both individual and team dynamics, and this helps in understanding the level of alignment amongst team members. This diagnosis should be research-based and should be guided by evidence which has recommendations on how team dynamics can be improved.

Continuous professional development in collective leadership: There are specific programmes that are meant to address team dynamics and help improve team performance and must be done by the executives on an ongoing basis. When doing continuous professional development for executives it is always advisable to consider the time limitations that executives have given their very hectic schedules.

Executive coaching, targeting individuals or teams: It is proven by research that executive coaching yields very positive results in organizational performance improvement. Executive coaching can be paired with mentoring for more effectiveness.

Periodic reviews of team performance and effectiveness of Management Teams: Quarterly reviews of the performance of teams are necessary to improve performance and effectiveness. A caution though is that the current Performance Management Systems, especially for government, need to be overhauled because they are currently not effective but more of a tick box exercise which does not necessarily impact positively on service delivery.

Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach by firstly reviewing literature that defines corporate governance in general; the expected effectiveness of directors and the dynamics that limit the impact of management committees. An online questionnaire was distributed to 15 executives who are members of the Executive Management Committee to respond to the questions in the following areas:

- Governance and composition
- Strategic leadership
- Decision-making and reporting
- Meetings discipline
- Performance oversight and monitoring
- Risk, audit and compliance
- Functioning of the Secretariat

Responses were then analyzed and presented through graphical representation on each of the above-mentioned functional areas.

Graphical Analysis

The graphs below provide a visual summary of Executive Management Committee functionality assessment results.

Average score by assessment dimension

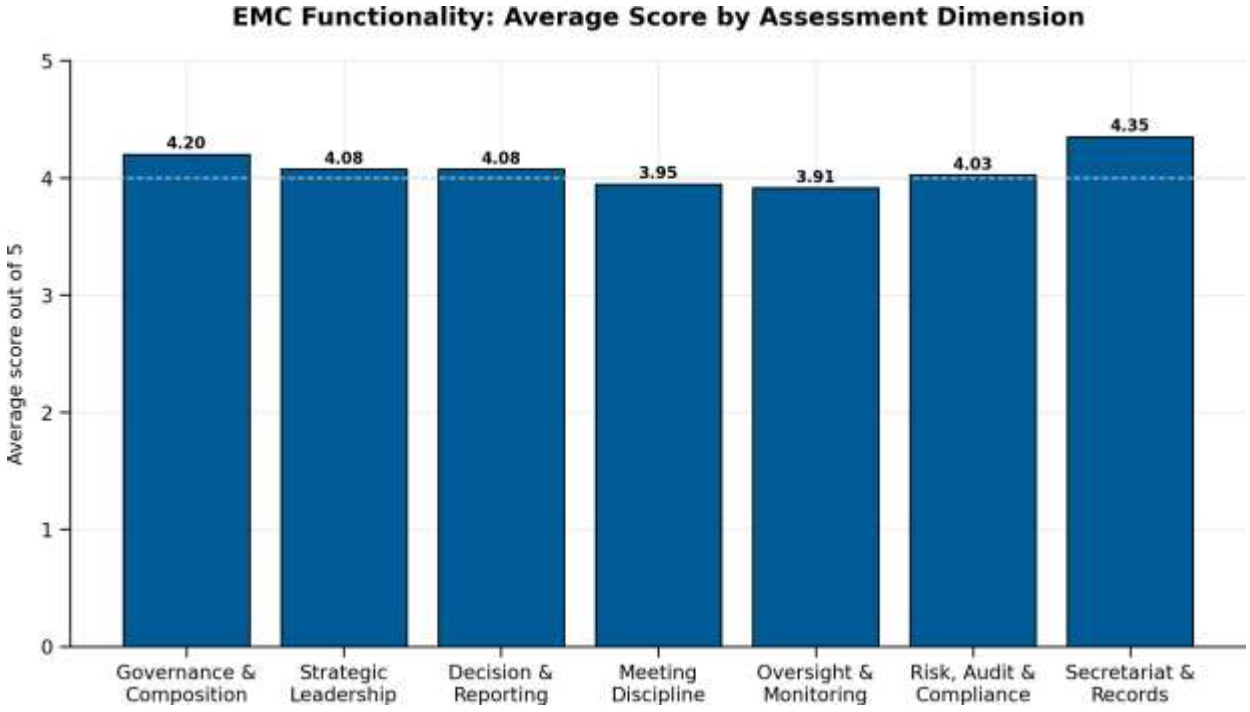


Figure 1: EMC average score by thematic assessment dimension.

Overall rating distribution

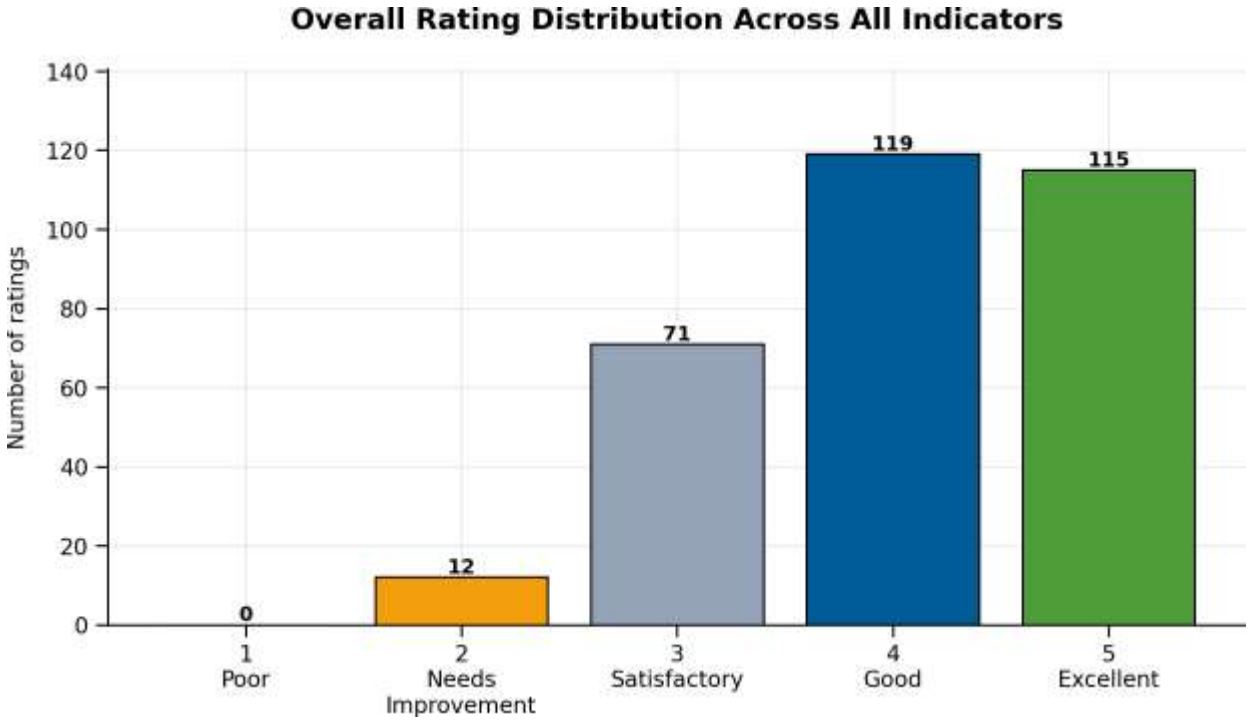


Figure 2: Distribution of all numeric ratings across all indicators.

Priority improvement indicators

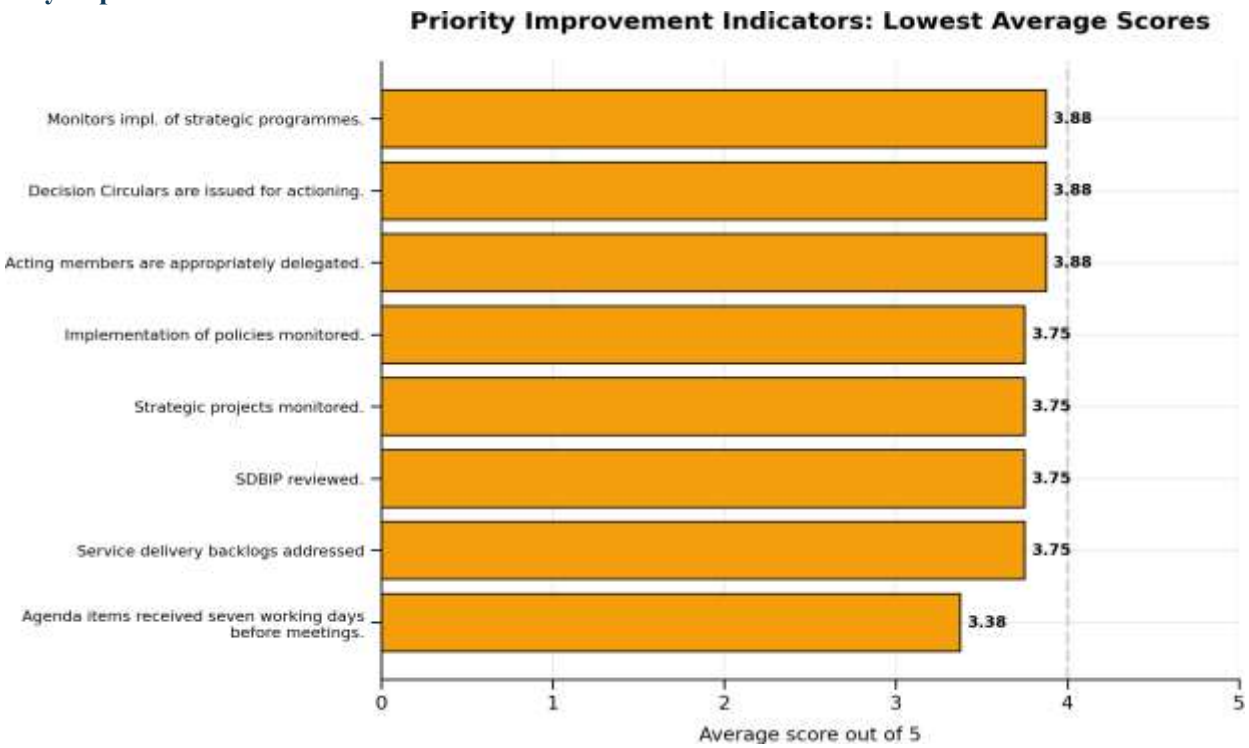


Figure 3: Lowest-rated indicators highlighting practical areas for improvement.

Response pattern by dimension

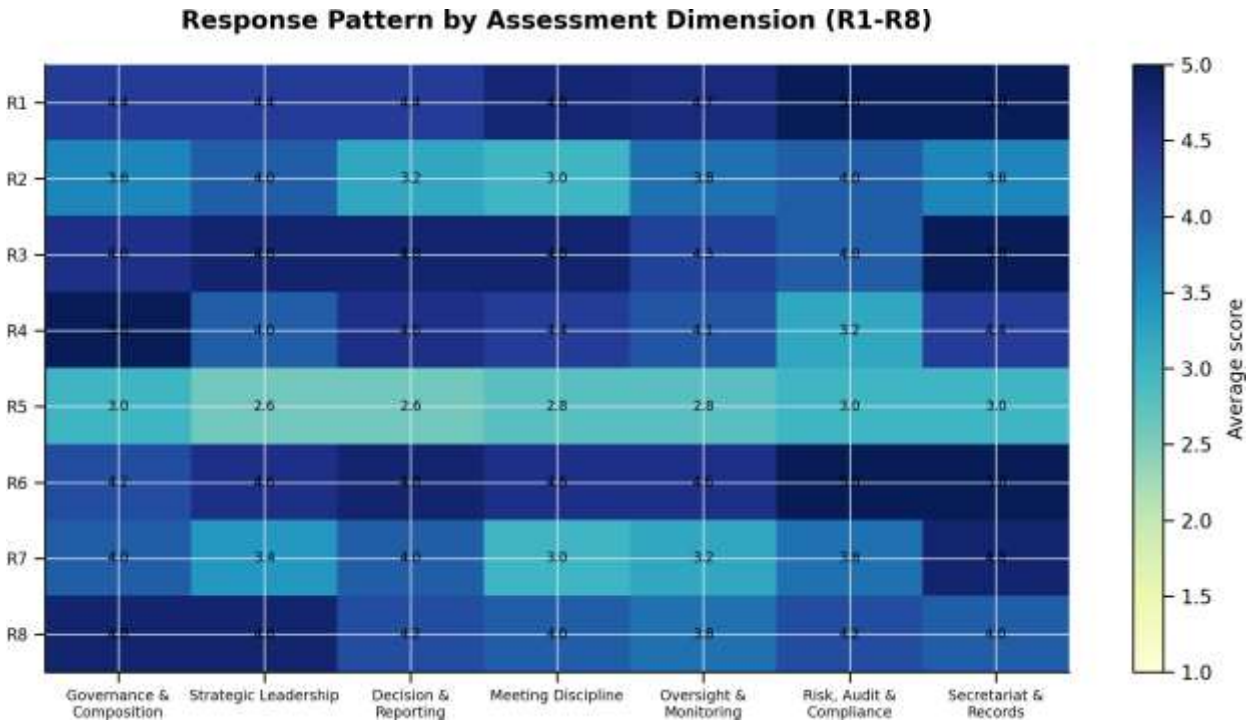


Figure 4: Response pattern across assessment dimensions. R1-R8 represent assessment responses, not performance ranking of individuals.

Performance by Assessment Dimension

Assessment dimension	Average score	Indicative performance
Governance & Composition	4.20	Good
Strategic Leadership	4.08	Good
Decision & Reporting	4.08	Good
Meeting Discipline	3.95	Good
Oversight & Monitoring	3.91	Good
Risk, Audit & Compliance	4.03	Good
Secretariat & Records	4.35	Good

Key Strengths

High-performing indicator	Average score
Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood by members.	4.50
Records securely maintained.	4.50
Committee composition complies with the Terms of Reference.	4.38
Agenda prepared on time	4.38
Action register maintained.	4.38
Meetings held twice monthly as planned.	4.29
Committee provides strategic leadership to the administration.	4.25
Provides strategic direction for Municipal administration	4.25

Areas Requiring Improvement

Improvement indicator	Average score
Agenda items received seven working days before meetings.	3.38
Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan reviewed.	3.75
Strategic projects monitored.	3.75
Service delivery backlogs addressed	3.75
Implementation of policies monitored.	3.75
Acting members are appropriately delegated.	3.88
Monitors implementation of strategic programmes.	3.88
Decision Circulars are issued for actioning.	3.88

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Strategic leadership and governance

Executive Management Committee is viewed as a strategic governance platform, with strong ratings for role clarity, strategic direction, Integrated Development Plan (IDP) alignment, budget monitoring and Council resolution oversight.

Decision-making and reporting

Ratings indicate that operational decisions are generally taken timeously and that evidence-based reports support decision-making. Outstanding matters should continue to be managed actively until completion.

Performance, service delivery and implementation oversight

The committee demonstrates solid oversight over strategic programmes, Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) performance and strategic projects. More variable scores around service delivery backlogs suggest a need for stronger implementation dashboards.

Risk, audit and compliance

The assessment reflects positive perceptions of Executive Management Committee oversight in risk management, audit findings, legal compliance, internal controls and consequence management.

Meeting administration and discipline

Secretariat support is assessed positively. The key administration-related improvement areas are punctual start times, timely agenda submission and timely agenda circulation.

Recommendations

Priority	Action	Expected improvement
1	Improve meeting discipline	Adopt strict punctuality protocols and begin meetings at the scheduled time.
2	Strengthen attendance and delegation protocols	Monitor attendance quarterly and ensure acting representatives are formally delegated.
3	Enforce agenda submission and circulation timelines	Use reminders and hard cut-off dates for agenda submissions.
4	Enhance outstanding matter tracking	Use a consolidated action register showing owner, due date, status and closure.
5	Sharpen service delivery and implementation monitoring	Introduce a monthly dashboard for service delivery backlogs and strategic projects.
6	Maintain strong risk and audit oversight	Continuing regular risk, internal audit, litigation and compliance reporting.

CONCLUSION

The Executive Management Committee functionality assessment reflects a committee that is broadly effective and well established as a strategic executive governance structure. The dominant pattern of Good and Excellent scores indicates confidence in the committee leadership, oversight, performance monitoring, risk management and administrative support functions.

The improvement agenda for 2026/27 should focus on disciplined meeting management, timelier agenda processes, consistent executive attendance, stronger action tracking, and more visible follow-through on service delivery and implementation outcomes.

Appendix A: Indicator Score Summary

Indicator	Avg	5	4	3	2	1
Committee composition complies with the Terms of Reference.	4.38	4	3	1	0	0
Required executive members attend meetings regularly.	4.00	2	4	2	0	0
Acting members are appropriately delegated.	3.88	3	2	2	1	0
Committee provides strategic leadership to the administration.	4.25	4	2	2	0	0
Roles and responsibilities are clearly understood by members.	4.50	5	2	1	0	0
Provides strategic direction for Municipal administration	4.25	3	4	1	0	0
Coordinates implementation of Council decisions.	4.00	2	5	0	1	0
Monitors implementation of strategic programmes.	3.88	1	5	2	0	0
Supports achievement of IDP objectives.	4.00	3	3	1	1	0
Monitors implementation of approved budget.	4.25	4	2	2	0	0
Operational decisions are taken timeously.	4.00	3	2	3	0	0
Decisions are evidence-based (Reports).	4.00	3	2	3	0	0
Reports are submitted to Exco and Council.	4.25	4	3	0	1	0
Outstanding matters are managed effectively until completion	4.25	4	2	2	0	0
Decision Circulars are issued for actioning.	3.88	3	2	2	1	0
Annual meeting plan approved.	4.00	4	0	2	1	0
Meetings held twice monthly as planned.	4.29	3	3	1	0	0
Quorum consistently achieved.	4.14	3	2	2	0	0
Agenda circulated three working days before meetings.	4.00	3	3	1	1	0
Agenda items received seven working days before meetings.	3.38	2	1	3	2	0
Financial dashboard reviewed.	4.00	3	2	3	0	0
SDBIP reviewed.	3.75	1	4	3	0	0
Litigation report considered.	4.00	3	2	3	0	0
Risk Management report considered	4.12	3	3	2	0	0
Internal Audit report considered	4.25	4	2	2	0	0
Council resolutions monitored	3.88	2	4	1	1	0
Strategic projects monitored.	3.75	0	6	2	0	0

Indicator	Avg	5	4	3	2	1
Service delivery backlogs addressed	3.75	1	5	1	1	0
Implementation of policies monitored.	3.75	1	5	1	1	0
Performance against SDBIP reviewed	3.88	1	5	2	0	0
Strategic risks reviewed regularly.	3.88	2	3	3	0	0
Audit findings monitored.	4.12	2	5	1	0	0
Consequence management monitored.	4.12	3	3	2	0	0
Legal compliance monitored.	4.00	2	4	2	0	0
Internal controls strengthened.	4.00	2	4	2	0	0
Agenda prepared on time	4.38	4	3	1	0	0
Minutes circulated within prescribed deadline	4.25	4	2	2	0	0
Action register maintained.	4.38	5	1	2	0	0
Meeting logistics effectively coordinated.	4.25	4	2	2	0	0
Records securely maintained.	4.50	5	2	1	0	0

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