



## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda**

**Wyre Borough Council**  
**Date of Publication: 07 October 2022**  
**Please ask for : Marianne Unwin**  
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**Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Monday, 17 October 2022  
at 6.00 pm in the Committee Room 2 - Civic Centre**

**1. Apologies for absence**

**2. Declarations of interest**

To receive any declarations of interest from any councillor on any item on this agenda.

**3. Confirmation of minutes**

(Pages 3 - 10)

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Monday 5 September 2022.

**4. Update from the NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB)**

Hilary Fordham, the Integrated Place Leader for Lancashire North, will present an update on the current Integrated Care Board structure and answer questions from members.

Papers to follow.

**5. Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23 – update report**

(Pages 11 - 42)

The Corporate Director Resources, Clare James, has submitted a report updating the committee about the delivery of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23. Marianne Unwin, Democratic Services Officer, will introduce the report and respond to questions and comments from councillors.

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## Overview and Scrutiny Committee Minutes

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of Wyre Borough Council held on Monday, 5 September 2022 at the Committee Room 2 - Civic Centre.

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**Overview and Scrutiny Committee members present:**

Councillors I Amos, Sir R Atkins, Cartridge, E Ellison, Fail, Ibison, Kay, Le Marinel, Longton, Matthew Vincent and Webster

**Apologies for absence:**

Councillors Ballard, Minto and O'Neill

**Other councillors present:**

Councillor Berry

**Officers present:**

Marianne Unwin, Democratic Services Officer  
Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities  
Carl Green, Head of Engineering

No members of the public or press attended the meeting.

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**15        Declarations of interest**

None.

**16        Confirmation of minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Monday 18 July were confirmed as a correct record.

**17        Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group - one year on**

The Corporate Director Communities, Marianne Hesketh, and the Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Lancashire West, Diane Gradwell, attended the meeting and provided an update on the implementations of the recommendations of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group and the general performance of the service.

The Chairman introduced Marianne and Diane and read out the

recommendations that were originally agreed by Cabinet, which were:

1. The Cabinet wholeheartedly support the continuation of Wyre Council working with Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW).
2. That the council explore the feasibility of a trial into the Digital Service Hub proposed by CALW. The group recommends that this be included in any negotiations with CALW to advise on the best location for such a service.

Marianne updated members that following the task group's report, Cabinet agreed to enter into a three-year service level agreement with Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW) for the provision of welfare advice services in the borough until 31 May 2024 at a cost of £30,000 per annum. She also explained that Cabinet agreed to participate in a trial of digital service kiosks at a number of locations in Wyre at a cost of £8,000, however, added that there had been a delay in the implementation of the trial.

Diane Gradwell addressed the committee. She explained that Citizens Advice Lancashire West covered five local authority areas Blackburn, Chorley, South Ribble, West Lancashire and Wyre. The service continued to function throughout the course of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and enabled staff and volunteers to work remotely. She updated that the service was back to offering face-to-face appointments at the Fleetwood office which was based in Fleetwood Market. There was also the use of the telephone and web chat advice line, which was open 24 hours a day 7 days a week to ensure, no client was missed. Diane updated the committee that owing to funding from a national contract, there had been an increase in full time debt caseworkers from six to 20. It was explained that one of the biggest problems facing the organisation was the falling number of volunteers and that work was ongoing to recruit new volunteers.

Diane provided members with a summary of the key figures relevant to Wyre from the last 12 months, these were:

- Through the household support fund, the CALW distributed £89,000 to 423 residents
- Distributed £14,500 worth of food vouchers
- Helped 193 residents with disability benefits claim over £648,000
- Managed £3,544,351 worth of debt
- Minimum donation of volunteer time was £40,000
- Received over 25,000 calls to the advice line
- 564 clients received face-to-face support
- 50,000 Wyre residents accessed the advice pages on the CALW website

She added that, following the meeting, she would share with the committee national cost of living data relevant to Wyre and that this data could be provided to the committee on an ongoing basis.

She highlighted the importance of the development of the service such as recruitment of volunteers and outreach opportunities to other areas across Wyre.

In response to a question, Diane updated members that the CALW had one office in Wyre located in Fleetwood Market, which employed one supervisor, one debt caseworker and volunteers. She added that local authorities and the Money Advice and Pension Service (MAPS) funded the organisation.

In response to a question regarding the levels of volunteers and the impact on face-to-face services, Diane highlighted the recent hurdles to providing face-to-face support due to the move to more online services.

The Chairman asked about the issues with the digital kiosk implementation. Diane explained the work was halted due to the sudden death of the Services Manager, Guy Simpson, who was leading the project and other staff illness. She also explained the pressure on the in house IT team in order to manage the online service; however, the trial was still something they wished to develop.

Following a question, Diane clarified that the help to claim service for Lancashire was led by Burnley Citizens Advice.

Diane highlighted that debt was the main issue they provided residents with advice and casework. She explained that they were currently investigating gambling addiction and the future possibility of bidding for funds to support the work.

Following a question, Marianne Hesketh explained that Wyre Council contributed £30,000 per annum, which was equivalent to one employed post. Diane added that out of the five authority areas, Wyre provided the lowest monetary contribution, but Wyre did benefit owing to economies of scale.

Members **agreed** that it would be beneficial to their residents for the CAWL to have greater outreach across Wyre, specifically the rural areas of the borough.

Diane highlighted the importance of offering face-to-face interviews and provided members with an example of a face-to-face interview with a client where additional issues were noticed that may have been missed if the interaction took place online or over the phone.

Councillor Longton asked a question regarding the demand for the CALW service owing to the cost of living crisis. Diane explained that the service was currently extremely busy.

In response to questions about training volunteers, Diane explained that training time was dependent on the role and can be between six to 10 months. This was a vigorous training programme. She added that volunteering could involve a lot of pressure on the individual, but there was support in place from paid members of staff. She added the majority of staff were volunteers.

Diane shared with members the result of the CALW Leadership Self-Assessment audit. The service scored five across all areas.

Following a question, Diane explained that they did offer a service where solicitors and accountants provided pro bono work.

Following discussions about resources, Diane stressed the need for volunteers. The committee suggested that there should be some communications, regarding the recruitment of volunteers, created for councillors to share on their personal social media pages. Councillors also suggested for this to be shared on the council's social media pages and website.

Councillor Andrea Kay and the Chairman suggested that the libraries and parish and town councils across Wyre might be good avenues for outreach.

The Chairman concluded by thanking Diane Gradwell for her attendance and contributions.

**The meeting was adjourned for a couple of minutes whilst the Democratic Services Officer showed Diane Gradwell out of the Civic Centre.**

## **18 Hillhouse Enterprise Zone**

The Planning Policy and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, Councillor Alice Collinson, and the Corporate Director Communities, Marianne Hesketh, submitted a report to review the work of Hillhouse Enterprise Zone and its future work and priorities against its role and remit.

The Corporate Director Communities, Marianne Hesketh, attended the meeting to present the report and responded to questions from committee members.

Marianne explained to members that Wyre Council acted as the accountable body for the Hillhouse Enterprise Zone resulting in business rate growth on the site from 1 April 2016 the council kept and was reinvested back into the Enterprise Zone. The role of the council was to develop growth and infrastructure. Marianne added that NPL were the landowners.

Marianne highlighted to members that currently Hillhouse Enterprise Zone was successful as there were several local and international businesses on the site.

Committee members asked questions regarding:

- The effect of the rise in energy prices on businesses situated on Hillhouse
- The expected target of business rate growth
- The vacant property on the site
- The number of jobs on the site
- Filling new business units

- Travel access to the site and the requirement for a bridge over the track of the proposed Fleetwood to Poulton Rail line
- The facilitation of the Hydrogen Stirring Group at the Civic Centre

Following a question regarding the target number of jobs on the site by 2035, Marianne Hesketh explained that work was undergoing to review the original Hillhouse Enterprise Zone masterplan. She added that many of the businesses on the site were technology based rather than labour intensive. There was difficulty in finding suitable candidates for job vacancies for all the businesses on the Hillhouse site, which Wyre Council supported finding a solution.

Following future discussions, the committee endorsed the update report.

**19 Business Plan 2022/23, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 1: April - June)**

It was moved to change the order of business on the agenda. The committee resolved that item seven of the agenda be heard before item six of the agenda.

The Corporate Director Communities submitted a report on the First Quarter Performance Statement 2022/23 (April – June 2022). Marianne Hesketh attended the meeting and answered questions from elected members.

Councillor Peter Le Marinel asked a question relating to the amber status of the number of memberships at Wyre’s leisure centres and the effect it may have on people who pay yearly for a membership. Marianne explained that the impact of the cost of living crisis could reflect the number of memberships to Wyre’s leisure centres and that this was under constant monitoring.

It was also asked about the potential increase in energy costs and the risk of opening hours at Wyre’s leisure centres owing to the cost of living crisis. Marianne reassured members that YMCA was undergoing some work to identify energy efficiency measures.

The Chairman highlighted to members that government intervention regarding energy prices was yet to be confirmed.

Members discussed that there were no public electric charging points installed in quarter one. Members were reassured that the order had been placed and the installation was due to start in the early autumn.

The Chairman thanked Marianne Hesketh for her contributions.

**The meeting was adjourned for a couple of minutes whilst the Democratic Services Officer brought in invited guests from the waiting room.**

**20            Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Residents Parking Permit Scheme Task Group**

Councillor Berry, Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder and Carl Green, Head of Engineer, attended the meeting to provide the committee with a verbal update about the implementations of the recommendations of the Residents Parking Permit Scheme Task Group, which reported to Cabinet on 25 March 2020.

Before discussing this item, members asked a question about the Wyre Beach Management Scheme and the recent increase in costs for the compound works and the impact this may have on the restoration of the Jubilee Gardens Park. Carl reassured members that the increase in costs should not affect the work and there was £500,000 set aside for restoration works after the completion of the scheme.

Councillor Berry handed out to members a paper copy of a report, which addressed off-street parking issues in the borough of Wyre, including parking charges, permitting and enforcement. He highlighted to members that the resident parking scheme had been up and running for over two years. The permit cost £30.00 and was valid for two years. The permit was for use of parking at Wyre Council's car parks once per day up to a maximum of three hours; holders were not allowed to move from car park to car park. Councillor Berry added that there were approximately 2000 permits sold since its introduction.

Committee members asked questions regarding:

- Car park enforcement wardens
- Cashless payments on the council's car parks
- Electric charging point use and enforcement
- The overnight parking for motorhome/camper vans on the Central Car Park, Fleetwood
- Disabled car parking at Central Car Park, Fleetwood
- Private registrations

The Chairman thanked Councillor Berry and Carl Green for their attendance and contributions.

**21            Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23 – update report**

The Corporate Director Resources, Clare James, submitted a report to update the committee about the delivery of the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23.

The Democratic Services Officer, Marianne Unwin, introduced the report to the committee. She explained, as agreed at their last meeting, that the questions members raised were attached at appendix 2. Members **agreed** to the wording of the questions and for them to be circulated to the Lancashire



and South Cumbria Integrated Care System invited guests before the 17 October 2022 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

She also brought members' attention to the single item agenda to review Wyre Council's business plan. The Chairman suggested that this should be a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee members where they review a draft version of the business plan and other related documents. The comments and findings arising from members would then be shared with the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet members and then added to the January meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee where the Leader and Chief Executive would be invited to provide comments. To which members **agreed**.

Councillor Matthew Vincent questioned the potential of the committee commissioning a task group to address Wyre's response to the cost of living crisis.

The report was noted.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and finished at 7.27 pm.

**Date of Publication:** 20 September 2022.

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Report of:	Meeting	Date
Clare James, Corporate Director Resources	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	17 October 2022

<b>Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/2023 – update report</b>
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## 1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2022/23.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee considers their desired focus/areas of work for the remainder of the 2022/23 period.
- 2.2 That the report be noted.

## 3. Current and completed work

### 3.1 Tackling Youth Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Wyre Task Group

Due to the announcement of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the sixth meeting of the Tackling Youth Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) task group was postponed. The meeting was re-scheduled for Monday 3 October commencing at 5 pm.

At this meeting, the group had discussions with Brian Wood and Matthew Pilling from the Family and Wellbeing Service at Lancashire County Council. They provided the group with an update of the service offer and answered questions from members. The group also invited Nicola Patrick to explain her work with Preesall Youthy.

The group agreed their next steps would be to invite Councillor Berry, Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder, and Neil Greenwood, Head of Environmental Health & Community Safety, to their final meeting to discuss their emerging recommendations. The date for this meeting is to be confirmed.

### **3.2 Leisure Activity Provision Task Group**

Members will be informed once the draft KKP leisure review strategies are available to be viewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The next steps can then be decided.

The Wyre Moving More Strategy will also be added to the Work Programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to view once available. An update will be communicated to members accordingly.

### **3.3 Business Plan spotlight review**

The Corporate Management Team suggest that, due to existing workloads and timings, the timescales indicated by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Business Plan draft review in December cannot be met and so the Business Plan will be taken to the meeting in January for full and detailed discussions.

## **4. Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Annual Survey Results 2021 – 2022**

- 4.1** Each year the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) asks senior scrutiny officers, elected members and other officers working in local authorities in England and Wales about their attitudes, experiences and thoughts around the effectiveness and impact of Overview and Scrutiny in order to gain in-depth insights into this area.

The report provides an overview and summary of the key analytical points from the survey. The full report is attached at Appendix 2 for members' consideration.

## **5. Life in Wyre Survey**

- 5.1** Wyre Council is opening up the 2022 Life in Wyre survey so that residents can have their say about where they live, council services and important health, wellbeing and other community topics.

Usually carried out every two years, this is the first local Life in Wyre survey to be held in four years due to the pandemic. The survey covers a number of questions about area, services and communications. It also includes a section relating to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the cost of living.

It is encouraged for elected members to complete the survey. To find out more and to complete the survey it can be found on the Councillor Portal or follow this link <https://nwaresearch.welcomesyourfeedback.net/s/lifewyre>

Please share the page with your fellow elected members and other acquaintances who reside in the borough. Your help in promoting the survey is invaluable, as we hope to encourage as many people as possible to take part.

## 6. Work Programme

### 6.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2022/23 is attached at Appendix 1.

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#### List of appendices

Appendix 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022/2023

Appendix 2 - CfGS: Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government 2021-2022

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**Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2022/23:**

<b>Committee Meetings</b>		
<b>2022</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Agenda items</b>
Monday 6 June at 6pm	Update and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Election of Chair for the municipal year 2022/23</li> <li>• Election of Vice Chair for the municipal year 2022/23</li> <li>• An update on Covid-19 response – learning to live with the virus</li> <li>• Review of the implementation of the recommendations of the Tourism Recovery Task Group – interim update report</li> <li>• Business Plan 2021/22, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 4: January – March)</li> <li>• State of Wyre Report 2021</li> <li>• O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update and planning</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> Councillor David Henderson (Leader of the Council) and Garry Payne (Chief Executive). Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities).</p>
Monday 18 July at 6pm	Health and Wellbeing theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual update regarding the work of the Lancashire County Council Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee</li> <li>• The annual Quality Account for 2021/22 North West Ambulance Service – Information item</li> <li>• O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> Councillor Julia Robinson (Co-opted Member of the Lancashire County Council Health and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee).</p>
Monday 5 September at 6pm	Update and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group – one year on</li> <li>• Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Residents Parking Permit Scheme Task Group</li> <li>• Update report on the Hillhouse Technology Enterprise Zone</li> <li>• Business Plan 2022/23, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 1: April – June)</li> <li>• O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> </ul>

<b>Committee Meetings</b>		
		<p><b>Invited attendees:</b> Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities) and Diane Gradwell (Citizens Advice Service West Lancashire). Carl Green (Head of Engineering Services) and Councillor Roger Berry (Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder). Councillor Alice Collinson (Planning Policy and Economic Development Portfolio Holder).</p>
Monday 17 October at 6pm	Integrated Health and Care System theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual update from the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Health and Care Board</li> <li>• O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> tbc</p>
Monday 21 November at 6pm	Resources and Finance theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fees and Charges - draft</li> <li>• Business Plan 2022/23, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 2: July – September)</li> <li>• O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> Councillor Michael Vincent (Resources Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader) and Clare James (Corporate Director Resources, Section 151 Officer).</p>
<b>2023</b>		
Monday 16 January at 6pm	Corporate theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Plan 2023/24 – detailed review</li> <li>• Planned Maintenance and Investment Projects Schedule - 2023/24</li> <li>• Review of the implementations of the recommendations of the Tourism Recovery in Wyre Task Group – one year on</li> <li>• Wyre Moving More Strategy (tbc)</li> <li>• O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> Councillor David Henderson (Leader of the Council), Garry Payne (Chief Executive) and Marianne Hesketh (Corporate Director Communities). Councillor Bowen (Leisure, Health and Community Engagement Portfolio Holder).</p>
Provisional save the date: Tuesday 7 February at 2pm (tbc)	Work Programme Workshop 2023/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop to agree topics for review for the 2023/24 Municipal Year</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> The Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p>
Monday 27 February at 6pm	Police and Community Safety theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wyre Community Safety Partnership – annual scrutiny review</li> </ul>



Committee Meetings		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Business Plan 2022/23, Quarterly Performance Statement (Quarter 3: October – December)</li> <li>O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> Martin Wyatt (Wyre Neighbourhood Inspector), Neil Greenwood (Head of Environmental Health &amp; Community Safety), and Councillor Roger Berry (Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio Holder).</p>
Monday 24 April at 6pm	Work Programme planning and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>O&amp;S Work Programme 2022/23 – update</li> <li>O&amp;S Work Programme 2023/24 – planning</li> </ul> <p><b>Invited attendees:</b> none.</p>

Task Group Reviews		
<b>Current reviews:</b>		
Date	Topic	Status
March 2022	Tackling Youth Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Wyre	On-going
<b>Paused work:</b>		
Date	Topic	Status
2019	Poulton to Fleetwood Link	Paused – waiting on the outcomes of the Government funded business case to identify the preferred option and associated costs
2022	Tourism Strategy – review of the tourism corporate strategy	Paused – waiting on additional information from Marketing Lancashire
December 2022	Business Plan (single item review in committee)	Paused – Due to workload and timings, the timescales indicated by the committee cannot be met. Thus, the Business Plan will be taken to the meeting in January for full and detailed discussions.
<b>Future review focuses for 2022/23:</b>		
Proposed start date	Topic	Status
Autumn 2022	Leisure Activity Provision	Agreed at the Work Programme Workshop

<b>Task Group Reviews</b>		
		(24.02.2022) – potential single item meeting for members to look at the completed KKP Strategy (tbc)
February 2023	Climate Change Progress	Agreed at the Work Programme Workshop (24.02.2022)
<b>Looking further ahead:</b>		
Date	Topic	Status
Late 2023	Business Model of Wyre's Theatres	Agreed at the Work Programme Workshop (24.02.2022)
Late 2023	Commercialisation	Agreed at the Work Programme Workshop (24.02.2022)

Updated October 2022

# CfGS: Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government 2021-2022



# Introduction

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Each year the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) asks senior scrutiny officers, elected members and other officers working in local authorities in England and Wales about their attitudes, experiences and thoughts around the effectiveness and impact of Overview and Scrutiny in order to gain in-depth insights into this area. This report provides an overview and summary of key analytical points from the survey.

This year's Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government has been conducted as local authorities continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have continued to ask some of the same questions as in previous years – questions largely focused on developing a greater understanding of what makes scrutiny “effective”.

We are often asked whether opposition chairing makes scrutiny more effective, or whether having more committees, or fewer committees, or dedicated scrutiny officer resourcing, or larger or smaller committees, makes a difference. This is a difficult question to answer. Often, we can say there is a correlation between such factors – causation is more difficult to prove.

Of course, the first challenge lies in gauging what “effectiveness” looks like in the first place. For some years we have gauged this by combining councils' assessments of the percentage of scrutiny's recommendations which have been accepted and implemented, with the perceptions of members and officers from the same councils as to whether scrutiny is treated equally, and is valued, by the council's leadership. This is an inexact science but gives us enough to be able to provoke discussion and debate on what combination or factors are likely to make scrutiny “work”.

We have also, of course, continued to ask questions around resourcing – recognising that the extent to which the scrutiny function is resourced and supported is one of the things that we have always been able to confidently point to as indicative of effectiveness.

As Councils emerge from and learn to work in the post-pandemic environment, collecting responses to this year's survey has been somewhat of a challenge, with 141 responses overall. Readers should bear this in mind when drawing conclusions. This can also make longitudinal study of responses more challenging, as differing figures year-by-year may be accounted for in part by the simple matter of the survey being filled out by a different “spread” of councils.

Report Authors

Ed Hammond  
Annette Aiken

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## Methodology

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This year we extended the survey closing date because of the low numbers of responses initially received, with the survey being open for responses for the first four months of 2022.

Of those who responded just over 50% (52%) were officers directly involved in supporting the scrutiny function. The rest were made up of other junior officers (5%), scrutiny chairs (11%), councillor involved in scrutiny, other than as a chair (25%) and other councillors (6%). We have distilled some of the responses to those who are directly involved in the support of scrutiny function to obtain a more accurate picture of day-to-day overview and scrutiny in councils.

### Of the councils providing a full response

- 85 % were leader cabinet councils
- 12% were mayoral councils
- 3% were Committee system councils

19% of councils told us that they operated “hybrid” governance arrangements. The most common of these are leader-cabinet councils which have some characteristics of the committee system, such as passing decisions through scrutiny committees before cabinet “ratifies” them. This kind of practice has an impact on how scrutiny is carried out in those authorities.

18% of those responding said that their council was “contestable”, down from a figure of 24% in 2021. Contestable councils are those which change control frequently. Contestability is a common feature in councils that elect by thirds. Contestability, on its own, does not have a significant impact on scrutiny’s effectiveness, although there may be by-products of contestability (having councillors move from Cabinet to scrutiny committees frequently, for example).

# Executive Summary

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## What makes for effective scrutiny?

- Dedicated officer resourcing (this is the factor for which we have the strongest evidence).
- Member training (which is of a high quality and integrated into councillors' ongoing work).
- A positive relationship between scrutiny and the executive – driven by a clear understanding of scrutiny's role and responsibilities.
- Timely access to proportionate, high-quality information.
- Cross-party chairing (or, failing that, good cross-party relationships between scrutiny members).

If this seems familiar, it should. These are components that we know individually and collectively contribute to more effective scrutiny in local authorities, and that we can demonstrate having done so since we started using our current methodology to conduct this survey in 2012.

## What, then, are the current strengths and weaknesses for scrutiny?

- Scrutiny continues to struggle with meaningful public engagement.
- Scrutiny in financial matters (and commercial matters) is seen as an area of weakness, possibly because the intersection between the audit and scrutiny roles is poorly understood.
- Scrutiny councillors' understanding of corporate and service risks could be better.
- Many respondents do not feel especially positive about the future of scrutiny.

### But...

- Approaches to work programming, and to the access of and use of information, are improving.
- Relationships with council executives, while not fantastic overall, are improving, and relationships between scrutiny and senior council officers appear to be strengthening particularly well.
- Attitudes towards member training and development, and support, are positive, even if the officer resourcing position for scrutiny remains fragile.
- There is a clearer understanding in many councils of \*what\* improvement looks like, and the kind of steps necessary to deliver it.

This could all be seen as painting a fairly gloomy picture of scrutiny, its strengths, weaknesses and prospects for improvement. It may do, but for many councils' improvement is a matter of minor reform – not wholesale transformation. Most councils are no longer able to employ a phalanx of scrutiny officers, but even so there are practical changes that can be made to work programming, access to information and the development of recommendations – amongst other things – that we know would have a material impact.

**You can read more advice on the components of effective scrutiny in “The good scrutiny guide” (CfGS, 2019)**

## First, a word on remote meetings...

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We have gathered evidence since the start of the pandemic suggesting that the ability to convene meetings remotely resulted in improvements to member engagements, and improvements in the quality of scrutiny overall.

There is strong consensus in responses to the survey – although it should be noted that this is not unanimous – that having the power to convene meetings in this way again would make scrutiny more flexible and responsive.



## Resourcing and support

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### Key Highlights:

- There appears to be a continued downwards trend regarding officer resourcing, with numbers slowly declining over the past four years, although this may be levelling off.
- This position is complicated by the fact that democratic services officers (DSOs) are increasingly providing a wider range of advice to councillors, which may mitigate the lack of dedicated policy support for scrutiny committees.
- People would find it helpful to have more national guidance, publications, and toolkits, to rely on in their support of scrutiny and scrutiny members.
- More and better training options for members – national and local – would also be useful – only 50% had training and development plans in place for scrutiny councillors.
- The majority of respondents agree that Scrutiny has an impact on the work of councils.
- Half of respondents agreed that Scrutiny has an impact on the work of councils' partners.
- Most respondents (80%) said Yes, they thought that there are opportunities for the public to influence scrutiny's work programme.

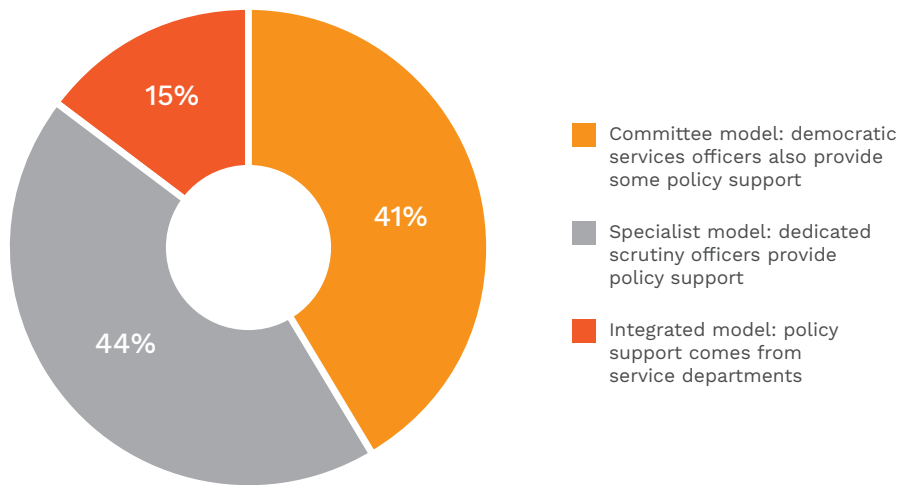
### Officer Resourcing:

The resource an authority allocates to the scrutiny function plays a pivotal role in determining how successful that function is and therefore the value it can add to the work of the authority. We have, for many years, identified three models of officer scrutiny support in councils – specialist, committee and integrated. Each model has different characteristics:

- Specialist model: councils have a dedicated scrutiny support team or officer(s). This model is (technically) structurally independent from those areas it scrutinises.
- Committee model: scrutiny support is principally provided by democratic services officers.
- Integrated model: scrutiny support comes mainly from policy officers in service departments. This model may facilitate closer and earlier scrutiny involvement in policy formation and alignment of corporate work programmes.

This year's results reveal that forty two percent of respondents stated that their authority operated a Committee Model, where democratic services officers also provide some policy support to scrutiny committees. This is a slight increase on last year's results of 38.8%. Forty Four percent of respondents stated that their authority operated a Specialist Model where dedicated scrutiny officers provide policy support. This year's results indicate a slight decrease in numbers from last year's figure of 49%.

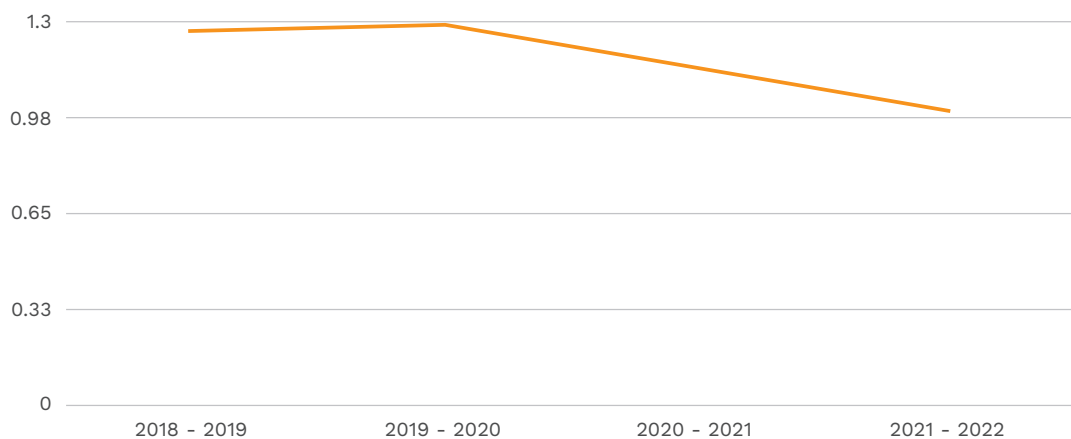
## Q20 What form of scrutiny support does your authority operate?



The graph below shows our results outlining the average full time equivalent (FTE) officer resource from 2018 through to 2022. This figure relates to the amount of FTE resource available to provide policy support to councillors, as opposed to committee administration support provided by democratic services officers. However, we have also noted from our results that DSOs will often provide ad hoc advice on policy and related matters to members – and that often DSOs fill something of the space of a policy-focused scrutiny officer, where such an officer might not otherwise be present. Our view has always been that while the skillsets of DSOs and scrutiny officers are closely related and complementary, they are also distinct, and it is difficult to find individuals equally skilled in both.

The results indicate that despite a slight increase in officer resource in 2019-2020, the figure has since continued to decrease. Of course, this figure hides significant variances – many councils have no dedicated resourcing at all, and some councils employ multiple officers. The seemingly relatively static figure also hides a surprising amount of volatility – some councils have recently made investments in scrutiny by employing new dedicated scrutiny officers (some for the first time in many years), while some councils have cut further. There is no obvious trend for this; we had hypothesised that more contestable councils might resource scrutiny better because the function provides an outlet for political debate, but this appears not to be the case.

### Average FTE Officer Resource by year 2018 - 2022

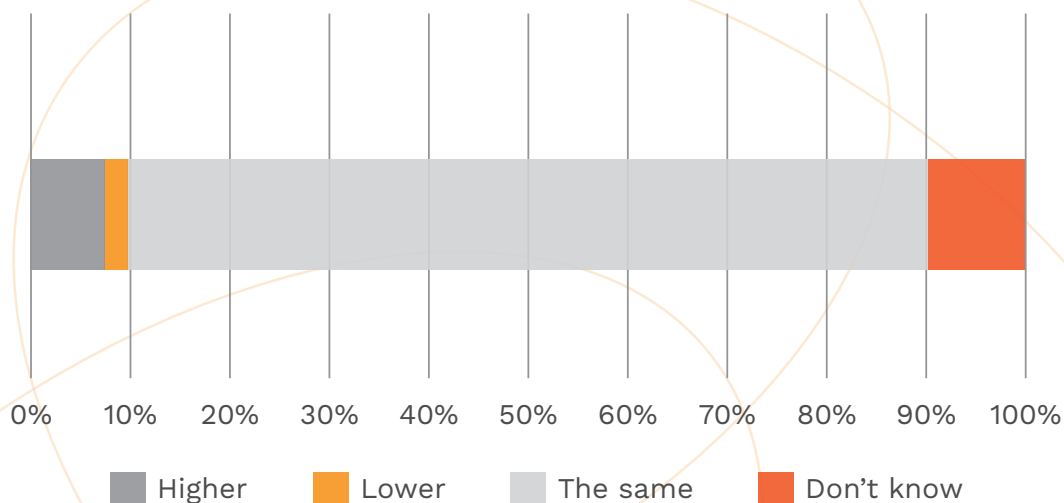


When asked at what level respondents with day-to-day responsibility for Overview and Scrutiny expected the full time equivalent (FTE) to be this year into next year, most respondents stated (80% of respondents) expect that the FTE will remain the same for the next year.

Certain English councils are obliged by law to designate a “statutory” scrutiny officer – an individual with formal responsibility for promoting and supporting the scrutiny function. Only English County and unitary authorities are required to designate such an officer – although around a third of the shire districts responding to the survey had also chosen to do so. Usually, the role is occupied by the most senior person in the organisation with a day-to-day responsibility for scrutiny.

There is no clear evidence that the presence of such a designated officer (on its own) makes scrutiny more effective. We plan to produce material later this year which will further explore the designation of a statutory officer and how such an officer can work to support scrutiny members and the scrutiny function overall.

**Q19 Do you expect that the FTE figure for 2022/23 will be:**



## Training and development

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Results from last year's survey have highlighted that training and development opportunities for councillors were limited during the pandemic. Furthermore, in recent years member development has suffered from cuts.

Councils with comprehensive and resourced plans for training and development for scrutiny members tend to be those with more effective scrutiny; councils with agreed "role profiles" for scrutiny chairs (which make the identification of development needs easier) also tend to be more effective at scrutiny. It seems reasonable to assume that targeted and well-designed training will increase member confidence and capability. However, in both cases the correlation is quite weak.

Training and development for officers is far less a feature. CfGS has long noted the need for training for officers (on the executive side) to support the development of political acuity and to support member support skills.

## Key highlights:

- There continues to be a perception that scrutiny makes an impact on councils, their partners, and the lives of local people – but a degree of frustration that demonstrating that impact can be difficult.
- Most respondents agreed that Scrutiny has an impact on the lives of local people. However, for councillors only just over half agreed, while for officers the figure was three quarters.
- Aside from dedicated resourcing, which we highlighted above, we have identified four determinants for effective scrutiny which are backed by the strongest evidence – the ability to put forward decent recommendations, access to timely and high-quality information, strong work programming and effective executive-side commitment.
- During the pandemic, the ability to convene meetings remotely led to an increase in scrutiny’s effectiveness, and better member engagement in scrutiny business more generally.
- Councils are better at monitoring the acceptance and implementation of scrutiny recommendations, although many have some way to go on this.
- It remains the case that recommendations, when they are made, by and large, derive from task and finish working, and that councils without such modes of working make far fewer recommendations.
- Some feel able to demonstrate impact through means other than recommendations – through robust questioning, for example, which may lead the executive to change its view – but this can be difficult to follow through.
- As ever, wider follow through on the impact of scrutiny’s work – pointing to a specific recommendation and saying that its implementation has resulted in a specific, measurable impact on local people’s lives – remains challenging. But this is a challenge faced by scrutiny in other places – for example in Parliament and the devolved administrations.
- Councils where scrutiny benefits from strong support and backing from the executive tend to have more effective scrutiny functions.
- Scrutiny needs access to timely and high-quality information in order to be effective but attempts to do this have in some cases been hamstrung by poor data quality and a lack of executive commitment.

This section focuses on four key determinants of effective scrutiny – not an exhaustive list but those factors for which the strongest evidence exists in the survey.

### **1. Making good recommendations, and other ways of demonstrating impact**

The formal recommendation remains the primary mechanism by which scrutiny can effect change. Scrutiny functions are getting better at agreeing recommendations which are focused and specific enough for their implementation to be monitored.

Generally, recommendations come up through task and finish groups, which inevitably means that councils which do not operate these groups are less able to demonstrate impact through these means. However, there are other ways for scrutiny to make a difference (either in committee or in other spaces):

- Through questioning and debate generally, which may lead to a shift in opinion on the way forward. There is not enough data to support the contention robustly, but it may be the case that decision-making in contestable councils, or those under “no overall control”, is influenced by the way that questioning and decision-making in scrutiny committees is managed. Anecdotally impact appears to be better when scrutiny is exploring an emerging policy, rather than conducting scrutiny immediately prior to decision-making, or carrying out a call-in. This is as we would expect from previous years’ data.
- Through bringing in evidence from different sources. Scrutiny can gather evidence from the public and from external partners. What they tell members in formal committees can lead to shifts in approach.

In both instances, clearly demonstrating scrutiny’s impact is a challenge. Policymaking is often opaque and claiming that a particular decision is being made because of an earlier intervention from scrutiny is easy to deny. The academic literature, reviewing the operation of Parliamentary select committees, has however positively identified this phenomenon – known as “delayed drop” – in the context of those committees. We think it likely that scrutiny’s work in some areas causes an impact even where that impact is not formally acknowledged. This is a hypothesis we propose to test through further work.

## **2. Access to Information**

It remains the case that access to timely, high quality information is the lynchpin of an effective scrutiny function. There is a strong correlation between those authorities where information access is managed well, and those where scrutiny is more effective.

Information access – or the lack of it – is one of the issues most complained about by councillors, and often the cause of worries that important issues are being missed. Increasingly in recent years, councillors in some parts have developed a suspicion that information is being kept from them deliberately – no doubt influenced by high profile recent examples of local authority failure where this has indeed happened.

### **Information access methods vary widely. They include:**

- Weekly newsletters or information bulletins, prepared by staff working in member services or democratic services. These tend to provide updates on formal council business, the forward plan and so on. These are becoming less common as there is a squeeze on resources.
- Reports submitted on formal agendas – often “for information”. This is a practice that CfGS has previously criticised.
- Through member enquiry systems, which are often used for casework as well as for information access.
- Through member briefings, or the circulation of reports organised by service departments, or through presentations given by officers at political Group meetings (practice on this varies significantly).
- Informal face-to-face briefings (which tend to be more common in smaller authorities and which are now less common given the pandemic).
- Through the circulation of information in the form of information digests, or similar. Rather than

weekly, these may be produced monthly or quarterly and may focus on council performance and financial management. More councils are seeking to adopt this form of working after it was highlighted by CfGS as a way to act on the Government’s statutory scrutiny guidance – although councils’ attempts here have also been beset by poor data quality.

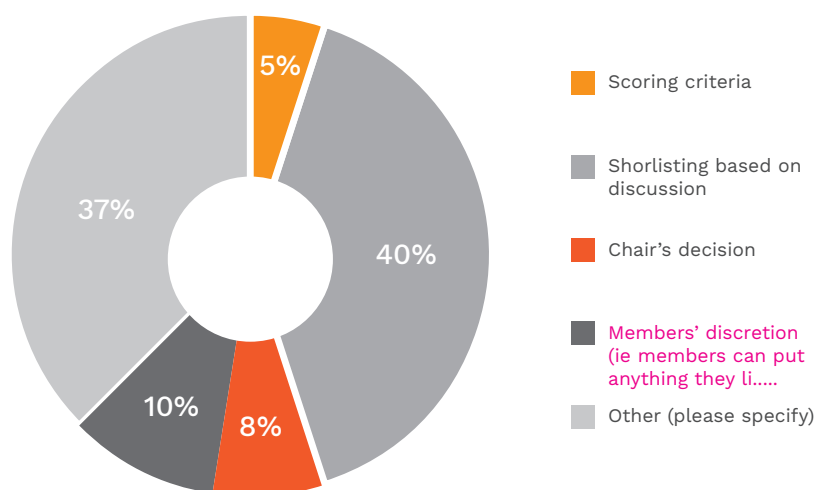
These examples demonstrate the wide variety and methods, including using technology, that authorities use to communicate with their councillors on matters related to scrutiny. Despite information sharing being positive as a matter of general principle, it is unclear whether this influences effectiveness and impact, as it is uncertain whether members are explicitly supported to enable them to understand this information.

### 3. Work programming

Good work programming makes for good scrutiny; councils with a clear sense of scrutiny’s role, which follows through to the way that items are selected for investigation in the work programme, tend to be those that are more effective.

It is still the case that many councils adopt quite loose arrangements for work programming – but in most councils it is not a free for all, and the number of authorities adopting a more business-like reflective attitude to this important task is increasing. Only 10% of councils responding said that members have complete freedom to select whatever items they like for the work programme – for most, more structured discussion yields topics (40%), or even more formal tools like selection criteria are used (5%). In many councils committee chairs have a say, or there is some other mechanism. In some, scrutiny’s independence may be at risk – there are a worrying number of councils where the senior leadership team or Cabinet members seem to have an active input (it is of course important to ensure that these people are consulted on the work programme but giving them a direct say may be a step too far).

Q39 How do councillors decide what are, and are not, priorities to put on the work programme? Tick all that apply.



#### 4. Executive commitment, and positive organisational culture

If the executive is closed off to scrutiny – because of a sense that it is ineffective, a waste of time, or for some other reason – it is inevitably that scrutiny’s ability to effect change will suffer.

Having a positive organisational culture around scrutiny is therefore extremely important – as the statutory guidance for councils noted. Councils with this kind of culture tend to be “better” at scrutiny.

##### Some relevant figures:

- 2% agreed that councillor engagement with scrutiny was good (ie that scrutiny councillors themselves were engaged productively). There is a read across from this into councils’ overall organisational commitment – scrutiny members’ own commitment dissipates when the organisation is ambivalent, or hostile, towards scrutiny.
- 65% felt that senior officers were supportive of scrutiny – offering room for improvement.
- 47% felt that Cabinet was supportive of scrutiny – worryingly low but reflecting similar evidence from previous years.

More councils are attempting to put in place “executive-scrutiny protocols” to improve relationships – which is suggested by the statutory guidance. 47.5% said they had such a protocol in place with a further 25% planning too – numbers not too dissimilar from when we asked this question in 2021. Interestingly, the 47.5% with a protocol in place were not exactly the same people as felt that Cabinet was supportive of scrutiny – so the presence of a protocol is not a guarantee of success here. We note that a number of executive-scrutiny protocols appear generic and may not be the result of meaningful dialogue, instead being transposed from other authorities. If so, this is a concern.



# Councillors, Representation, Engagement with the Public and Politics

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## Key highlights:

- Two thirds of chairing positions are occupied by men.
- There is a little movement in the way council assign committee chairships. In 37.5% of councils all chairing positions are in the hands of the majority party. In 17.5% all chairing positions are in the hands of the opposition; in 15% of councils, positions are politically balanced. In some councils a lack of political balance amongst chairs is made up for by differences in vice-chair appointments.

## Councillors and Chairing

The Chair plays a leadership role on a scrutiny committee as they are largely responsible for establishing its profile, influence, and ways of working.

The number of chair and vice chair positions available for members to fill on scrutiny committees varied. The highest number was 14 and the lowest number was 2 (presumably accounting for those councils with a single scrutiny committee with one chair and one vice-chair). Councils with more chair/vice chair positions may find political balance easier.

Of these positions, around two thirds are occupied by men. This is about the same as last year's results, and also reflects wider councillor gender balance.

Political balance in chair and vice chair positions has shifted since last year, with fewer councils appointing all such positions from members of the majority party.

This year's survey revealed that seventeen and a half percent of respondents said that chairing positions are in the hands of the opposition. This is a slight increase compared to last year, where the percentage was 14%. Results indicate that fifteen percent of respondents stated that councils are politically balanced in terms of chairing. This is a decrease since last year, where 20% of councils were chaired in a politically balanced way. There is no legal requirement for chairships to be politically balanced.

While scrutiny in councils where opposition councillors hold some chairing positions tends overall to be more effective, this is a weak correlation. CfGS does, however, recommend that in the interests of cross-party working, councils seriously consider political balance as an issue in the appointment of chairs.

## Public Engagement

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There are a range of ways that councils' scrutiny functions can involve members of the public in scrutiny work. It is, however, an area that previous surveys have identified as a weakness – and that trend continues this year.

45% of respondents were ambivalent as to whether scrutiny works hard to involve and engage the public – although there was a strong sense that there are avenues the public can use to bring issues to scrutiny's attention (80% felt that there were opportunities for the public to influence scrutiny's work programme).

There are a number of reasons why respondents think this is the case (as expressed in this year's survey, and previous surveys):

- A lack of corporate support for scrutiny having a public profile. There is no question that where the executive resists scrutiny being visible, opportunities for public input are minimal. We know of examples where attempts to engage the public have needed to be managed by corporate communications teams, which is understandable in a strategic sense, but also causes frustration.
- A lack of resourcing. Formal public engagement can be seen as expensive, requiring scrutiny to buy in specialist skills.
- A lack of confidence. There is seen to be a risk that scrutiny will not be able to “manage” engagement effectively – those attempts will be counterproductive or too risky. This may as much be about member caution as officer caution. In particular, there may be worry that the public will simply be uninterested in feeding into a scrutiny process.

# Finance, Commercial Activity, and Risk

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## Key highlights:

- 40% of councils scrutinise the budget by way of “set piece” meetings in December/January.
- 25% of councils held several committee meetings over the course of the autumn and winter.
- 54% of respondents were “somewhat confident” that scrutiny can adequately oversee matters relating to council finances.
- Only 35% of respondents thought that scrutiny had an understanding about the council’s overall exposure to risk. For example, on finances, on commercial activity, on demographic pressures etc. With 47% stating that they somewhat agreed with this statement.
- Suggestions which might improve scrutiny within financial and commercial matters include having a clearer role for scrutiny (25% of respondents), having better links with audit (19% of respondents), undertaking consistent activity throughout the year (16%), having better access to information in a more timely manner (14%), better commitment from the executive (12%), more resources (7%) and better commitment from senior officers (6%).

## Financial scrutiny generally

CfGS continues to focus on the quality of financial scrutiny, given the ongoing, pressing challenges relating to public finances. As in previous years, survey responses in respect of financial scrutiny are a cause for concern.

As in the past, scrutiny has struggled to make an impact on financial scrutiny. Scrutiny still gets involved in budget development too late, and then only in the margins. The alignment between scrutiny and audit is, in some places, poorly understood.

By far the most common approach to scrutiny of the budget continues to be a “set piece” very late in the budget development process, often in December, or early in the New Year. This tends to follow the form of a draft budget, or paperwork forming part of a draft budget, being submitted as a report, with members often asking scattergun questions. This form of scrutiny – despite the fact that it is generally understood to be unproductively – is stubbornly persistent. That said, it is noticeable that over the years fewer councils have been undertaking budget scrutiny in this way.

It is increasingly common for scrutiny committees to convene in October or November to consider particular components of the budget in more detail – usually draft savings and growth proposals. This tends to be a more targeted exercise, although of course does bring with it political risk.

Confidence in scrutiny’s competence and capability to conduct this kind of scrutiny, and more general “in year” financial scrutiny, could be charitably described as “variable”. Practitioners recognise shortcomings here – there have been improvements in many places but much clearly still needs to be done. Perhaps the greatest improvements have lain in councillors’ ability to get hold of in-year information in a more timely manner, which is likely to be connected to an increasing rigour in ensuring that members are sighted on local finance issues more generally.

Overwhelmingly the need for action lies at the feet of council executives, whose openness to meaningful scrutiny is crucial to the ability to conduct this kind of work in a productive way.

Scrutiny has gradually been marginalised over the years in terms of properly scrutinising the budget.

Financial matters are not regularly scrutinised alongside service issues. This leads to a bias.

Continual monitoring of the Budget is essential to be aware of sudden pressures on services.

An interesting "balancing act". I'm keen for our Committee to focus on what the needs are of the residents and how we can best serve them. That is cut across by having financial consideration taken into account.

## Commercial Activity

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Low confidence were seen when respondents were asked about how they felt about scrutiny's ability to oversee councils' commercial activity, with only 11% being very confident. Nearly half (48%) of those questioned were somewhat confident that scrutiny can adequately oversee matters relating to their council's commercial activity and 29% stating they were not so confident.

We already know that more rigour is needed in the oversight of commercial activities, and councillors are often keen to do it. But barriers exist, often around contractual arrangements and other limitations which make it difficult for councillors to meaningfully access, and hold to account, this activity. There may be an uncertainty, on the part of senior officers, about whether detailed scrutiny of commercial activity is appropriate – given that other governance arrangements may exist for such oversight.

There is, however, a more strategic role for scrutiny – in testing and understanding assumptions that underpin commercial activity. It does still feel as though elements of that role remain untapped.

## Risk

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Respondents were asked if scrutiny has an understanding about their council's overall exposure to risk. This related to issues such as finances, commercial activity and on demographic pressures.

Only 35% of respondents agreed that councillors engaged with and understood risk issues – although this is an improvement on similar evidence gathered in previous years. This appreciation was gained through regular review of the corporate risk register and other mechanisms, which might or might not be dealt with through committee. Another method that emerged to recognise threats was through informal discussion with senior officers around work programming. Although audit committees are the primary space for discussion of risk-relating issues, wider councillor awareness of risk is important, and CfGS has long considered that risk should be a salient factor in judgements about what issues should be put on work programmes.

# The Future of Scrutiny

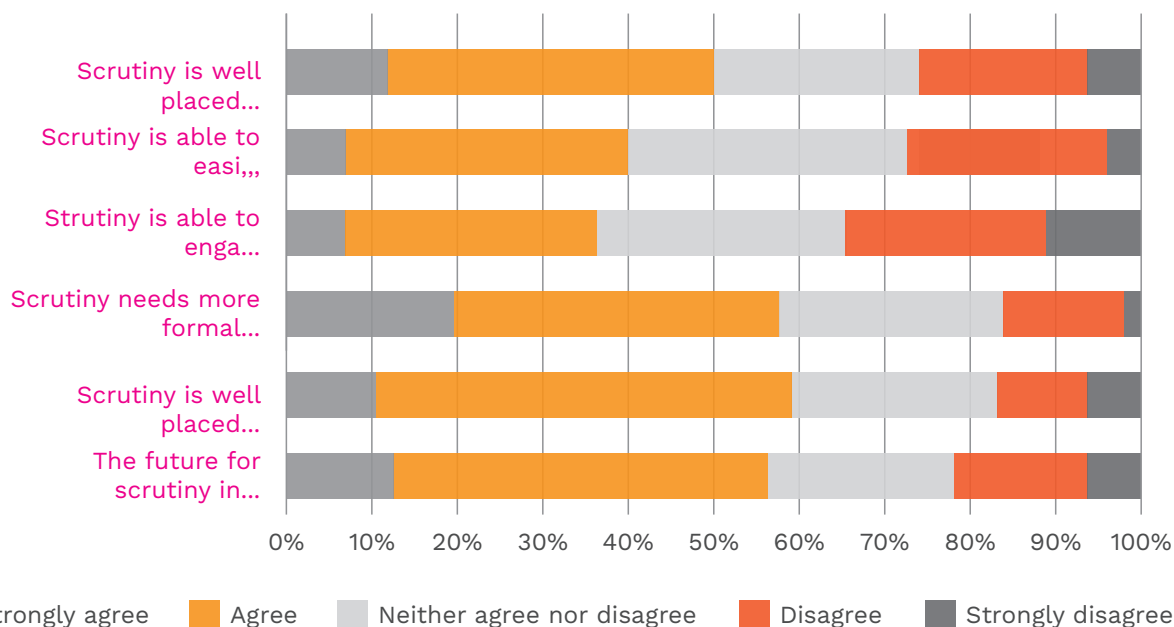
## Key Highlights:

We asked respondents to rate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with several statements about the future of scrutiny.

- 49% of respondents agreed that scrutiny is well placed to understand and act on the current and future concerns of local people.
- 44% of respondents agreed that the future for scrutiny in this area, overall, is positive.
- 39% of respondents stated that scrutiny is well placed to tackle the big challenges that this area faces.

Other results around the future of scrutiny reveal a more mixed picture. When looking at respondents' responses to the statement 'Scrutiny is able to easily follow the "council pound"' the position between 'agree' and 'neither agree nor disagree is balanced (33% vs 33%). Similarly, responses to the statement 'Scrutiny can engage well with new ways of working (the setting up of joint ventures, of alternative delivery vehicles, for example)' were more or less equal (30% vs 29%).

Considering whether Scrutiny needs more formal powers in order to look at the work of partners and other service providers in respondents' area, only 19% strongly agreed with this sentiment. Thirty eight percent agreed, 26% neither agreed nor disagreed, 14% disagreed and only 1% strongly disagreed. These overall results seem to suggest that optimism appears not to be strong.



## Optimism for the Future

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This lack of strong optimism for the future of scrutiny might be caused by issues, changes and factors linked to the pandemic. Respondents also provided qualitative comment about this.

Respondents provided insightful information regarding what helped them during this period, such as: being able to conduct meetings remotely, or in a hybrid format during the pandemic seemed to provide numerous benefits including, increase in meeting attendance, positive engagement, promoted collaboration, increased availability of specialists to attend meetings, and improvement of Scrutiny in general. Having more focused scrutiny on immediate issues during the pandemic targeted officer engagement was also cited as a positive factor.

Conversely, barriers mentioned by respondents included: Scrutiny coming to a halt during the pandemic, due to the pandemic scrutiny was limited in terms of not wanting to put additional pressures on services at a time of emergency. One respondent stated that ‘transparency over some of the emergency decisions made might have been lost.’







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