

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



Introduction

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.

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Methodology

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

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...

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

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.

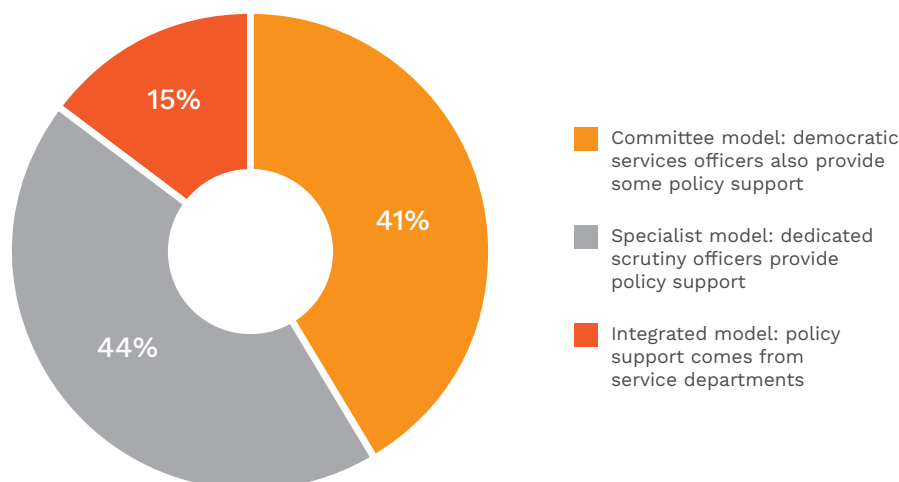
Officer Resourcing:

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%.

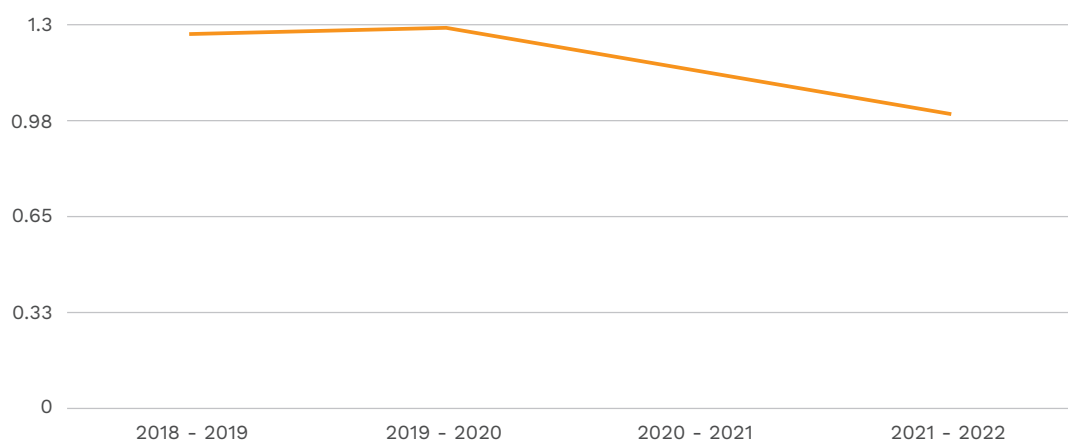
Q20 What form of scrutiny support does your authority operate?



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

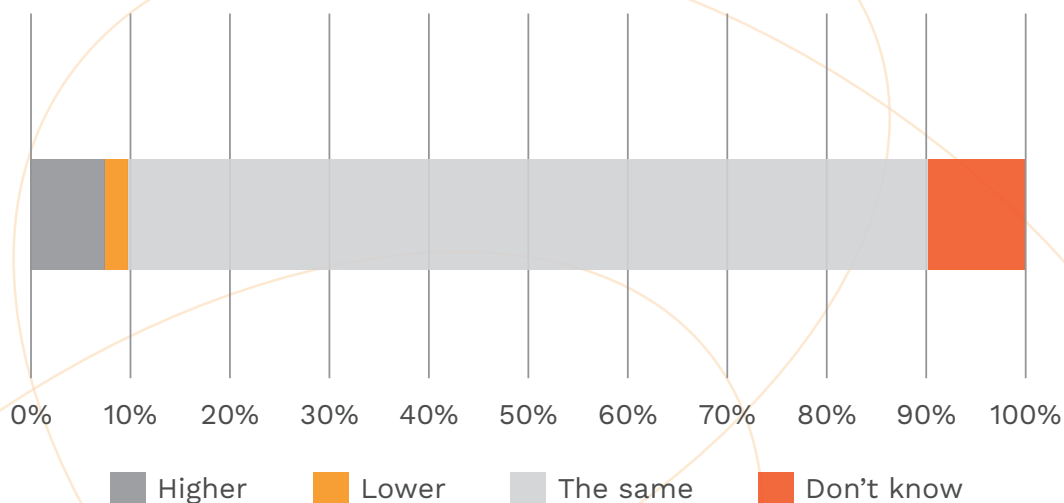


When asked at what level respondents with day-to-day responsibility for Overview and Scrutiny expected the full time equivalent (FTE) to be this year into next year, most respondents stated (80% of respondents) expect that the FTE will remain the same for the next year.

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

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.

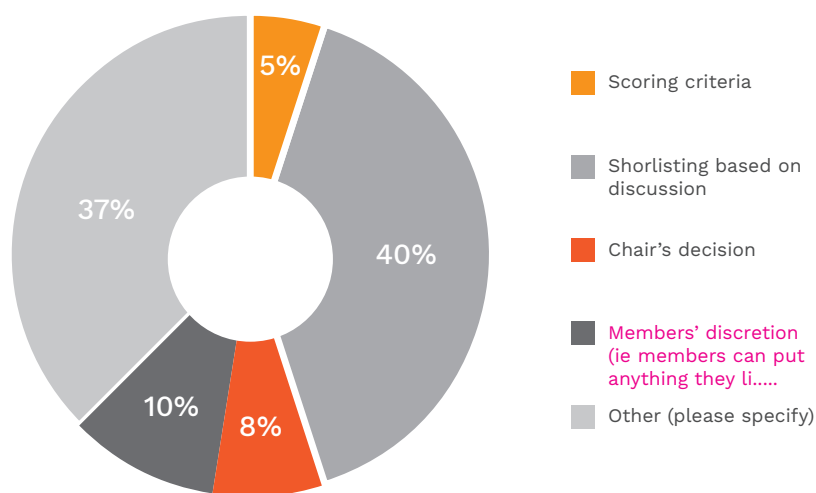
These examples demonstrate the wide variety and methods, including using technology, that authorities use to communicate with their councillors on matters related to scrutiny. Despite information sharing being positive as a matter of general principle, it is unclear whether this influences effectiveness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

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

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

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

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

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

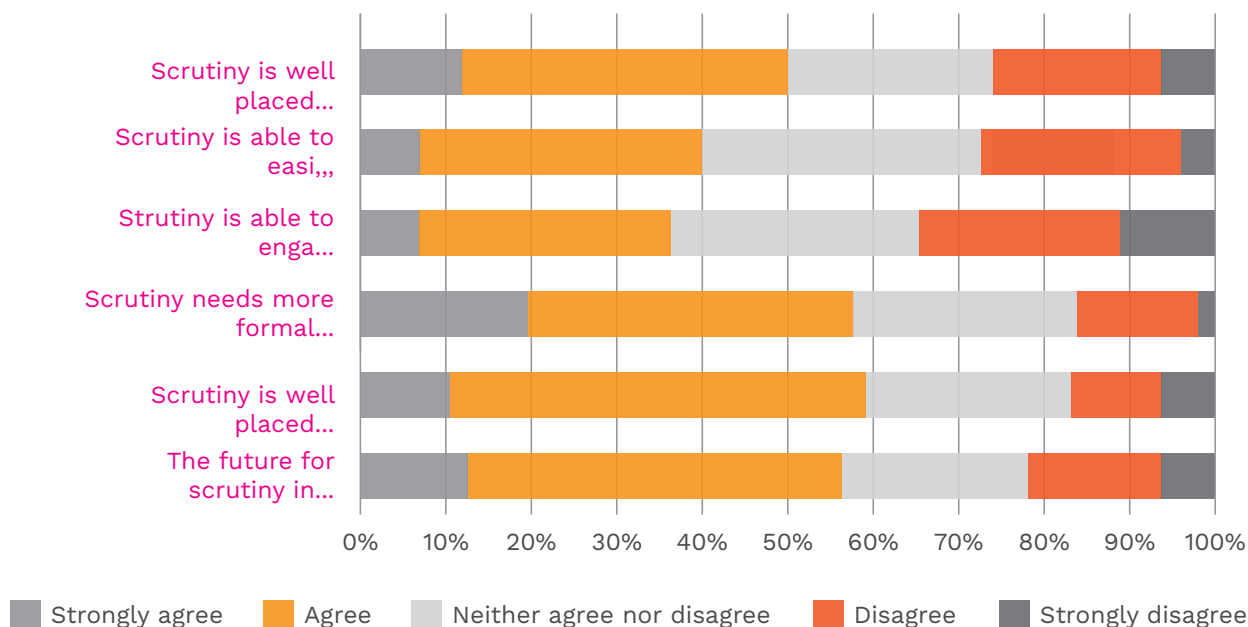
Key Highlights:

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

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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