

The **2008** annual survey of overview and scrutiny in local government



Introduction

This is a report of the Centre for Public Scrutiny's sixth annual survey of overview and scrutiny in local government. We are very grateful to all the officers and Members who took the time this year to complete the questionnaire.

The scope of the survey has developed since 2003 to provide what is now the most comprehensive national picture of overview and scrutiny available. For some areas of questioning we are now able to provide useful trend information that enables us to chart the development of overview and scrutiny within the context of other changes to the work of local authorities.

We are pleased that this year the rate of responses to the survey has increased to a healthy 67% of all local authorities in England and Wales. For the second year running we asked respondents to identify whether they are officers or members and we are pleased that the response rate from elected members has increased significantly, giving us a much stronger picture of what elected representatives with responsibility for scrutiny are feeling about their role.

In terms of benchmarking information and trends, there have been some modest changes since 2007. The overall average number of scrutiny officer posts per authority has remained the same, but discretionary budgets for scrutiny have fallen. While not surprising in the financial climate this is of concern given scrutiny's ever-increasing powers and responsibilities.

Our concern is enhanced when this figure is set against other findings from the survey, such as the finding that the two areas of greatest challenge for scrutiny are felt to be scrutiny of partnerships and holding the executive to account, and the fact that public engagement remains an issue, with the number of topics suggested by the public falling. Scrutiny needs to make the case for proper resourcing more strongly, and CfPS will be focusing on this in the coming year to support scrutineers in doing so.

Finally for the first time in the survey we asked for your feedback on the services that CfPS provides. This reinforced the importance that our on-line services such as the library of scrutiny reviews and downloadable publications hold for practitioners, but also a need for us to do more to reach scrutiny elected members who showed much lower awareness of our services. What was really encouraging, however, was the appetite amongst members and officers for training. Scrutineers seem keen to improve their practice and to access development opportunities, and in the coming year we will focus on improving both the reach and quality of the services that we provide.

1. Response Rates

The survey was conducted amongst local authorities in England and Wales. Invitations for completion were sent to councillors and officers from local authorities that are registered with the CfPS' Scrutiny Champions Network, along with individuals from councils who are directly involved in the scrutiny function and the survey was also available on the CfPS website <http://www.cfps.org.uk/>

A breakdown of the response rate is shown in the table below:

Total	67% (275 authorities +16)
District / Boroughs	(144 authorities +13)
County Councils	(27 authorities +1)
London Boroughs	20 authorities -3
Metropolitan Borough Councils	27 authorities +3
Unitary Authorities	47 authorities +7
Welsh Authorities	10 authorities -4

The response rate for the 2008 CfPS Annual Survey is 67% of all authorities in England and Wales, which is an improvement of 4% on last year despite the imminent cessation of 35 authorities to form new unitary authorities. The absolute number of responses is 690, which is a 110% increase on last year's total of 329. This increase is largely due to encouraging Members to get involved in the survey this year.

In 2008 for the second year we asked respondents to identify whether they were an Elected Member or an Officer of a local authority. The relative response rates are provided below:

Role	% of respondents
Councillor	39.9%
Scrutiny manager/officer	43.8%
Other local government officer	7.4%
Other	9.0%

2. Committees, meetings and participation

Committees and structure

The average number of committees on an authority is 4 with a range from 1-15. These figures are sustained across most variables. The exception, as might be anticipated, is a low average and range among district and fourth option councils.

The following table documents the typical committee structures reported to be used for overview and scrutiny over the last four years, showing the growth of more streamlined structures and a less rigid split between “scrutiny” and “overview”.

Committee Structure	2008	2007	2006	2005
Multiple overview and scrutiny committees	64%	65%	54%	59%
One "scrutiny" committee and multiple "overview" committees	7%	12%	8%	16%
One OSC that commissions time-limited panels	19%	17%	12%	14%
One OSC that does all the work	11%	7%	8%	7%

Number of scrutiny reviews

The average number of scrutiny reviews undertaken, across all authorities, is **6 (5.73)** with a range from **0-28**. The table below shows the percentage of councils that told us they had completed a certain number of scrutiny reviews. There is a clear cluster between 2-6 reviews being undertaken by most authorities.

No of reviews	% of councils	No of reviews	% of councils
0	7%	11	0%
1	7%	12	2%
2	10%	13	0%
3	13%	14	2%
4	9%	15	2%
5	10%	16	1%
6	14%	17	1%
7	4%	18	1%
8	5%	19	0%
9	4%	20	1%
10	5%	20+	3%

Committee membership

Across all authorities that responded, the average number of members on an overview and scrutiny committee is **eleven**, which has stayed the same in each of the last 4 CfPS surveys of overview and scrutiny. The numbers ranged from **3-34**, which is wider in range than last year.

Non-statutory co-opted members

Across all local authorities each year, the average number of non-statutory co-opted members (i.e. not including parent governor and diocesan representatives in single and upper-tier councils) appointed to overview and scrutiny committees was **2.2**. This is a fall of **0.8** from 2007 when the average was **3**. Over half of all authorities (57%) reported having no non-statutory co-opted members which is up 3 percentage points on last year.

80% of authorities do **not** give these co-opted members of overview and scrutiny committees full voting rights, whilst **20%** of authorities do, which is an increase of 7 percentage points on the 2007 results.

Public engagement

The average number of suggestions for scrutiny topics coming from the general public in the last year was **4**, a marked decrease from the average of **6** in 2007, and **11** in 2006. The range of the responses to this question has narrowed this year to 0-200 from 0-500 in 2007. **55%** of authorities reported having received 0 suggestions for scrutiny topics from the public which is an increase of 4 percentage points since last year.

External witnesses

The average number of external witnesses who have attended overview and scrutiny meetings in 2008 was **20**, which is **1** fewer than in 2007. The range of figures received showed responses from 0 to over 500. The average value is skewed by a small number of large values and when the top 10 results are removed the average value falls to 14. Only **45%** of authorities reported having between 11-50 external witnesses at their scrutiny meetings which has fallen from **54%** in 2007. This suggests a general trend towards using fewer external witnesses whilst notable exceptions have much larger numbers.

No of external witnesses	No of authorities in range
0	11%
1 to 10	38%
11 to 20	29%
21 to 30	11%
31 to 40	2%
41 to 50	3%
51 to 60	3%
100+	2%

Chairing overview and scrutiny

As part of the survey, we asked for details of how chair and vice-chair positions were apportioned. Across all authorities, the figures are as follows:

- Authorities giving NO scrutiny chairs to opposition: 38%
- Authorities giving SOME scrutiny chairs to opposition: 41%
- Authorities giving ALL scrutiny chairs to opposition: 21%

The table below summarises how chairs are shared according to majority party control.

Control	Don't share Chairs		Keep at least one Chair but share others		All Chairs held by other parties	
Con	35%	(+2)	40%	(-10)	25%	(+7)
Lab	70%	(+15)	26%	(-17)	4%	(+2)
Lib Dem	17%	(-6)	72%	(+22)	11%	(-16)

There may be a number of reasons why chairing positions are offered or not and accepted or not, so it should be noted that these figures do not necessarily indicate good or bad practice on the part of the controlling group in individual authorities. The principle of sharing chairmanships according to the political composition of an authority is good practice, and CfPS would encourage administrations with an overwhelming majority to offer at least one such position to another significant group. Note that the change from the previous year's figures (2007) is displayed in brackets after the results from 2008.

3. Support for Scrutiny

Support type

The following table documents the types of model by which overview and scrutiny is supported in authorities¹.

Authority Type	Committee Model		Integrated Model		Specialist Model		Other
	2008%	% (=/-)	2008%	% (=/-)	2008%	% (=/-)	2008%
County Council	15%	-2	15%	7	55%	-20	15%
District Councils	50%	11	7%	-10	36%	-7	8%
London Borough	23%	23	0%	-7	69%	30	8%
Metropolitan Boroughs	24%	-3	6%	2	59%	-16	12%
Unitary Authorities	24%	1	9%	0	65%	-3	3%
Welsh Authorities	30%	17	10%	-3	60%	-15	0%
All Authorities	37%	9	8%	-4	47%	-12	8%

The results suggest that there has been an increase in councils using the committee model and moving away from the integrated and specialist models, although the latter remains the dominant model in all types of authority except Districts. The exceptions to this trend are among county and metropolitan authorities which have seen a small decrease in use of the committee model.

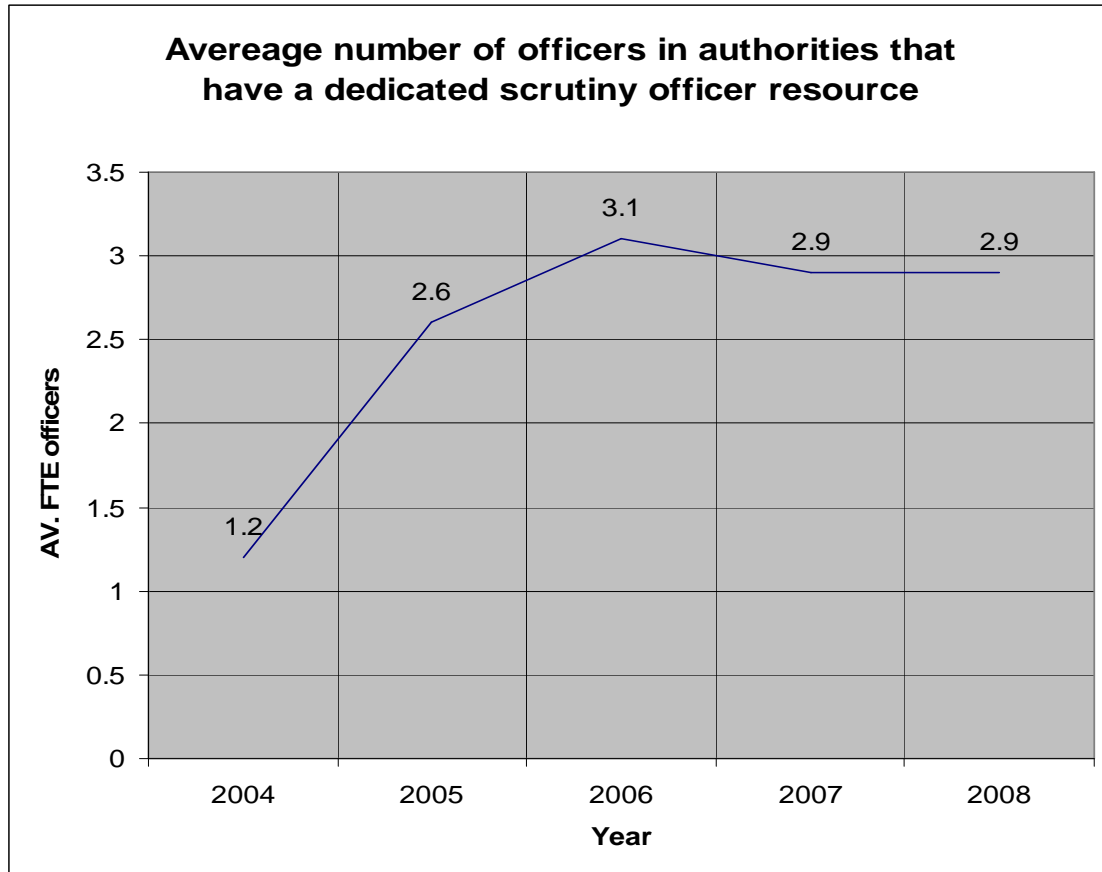
Scrutiny teams and FTE officers

From the survey, **74%** of authorities had a dedicated scrutiny officer/team, whereas **26%** did not. These figures represent a positive but small (**1%**) change since last year towards more authorities declaring that they have a dedicated scrutiny officer.

The average number of FTE scrutiny officers for all authorities, including those who have no dedicated support, is **2.08** whilst amongst District / Borough councils the average is

¹ **Committee Model** – where committee officers, who also support other political forums, such as the executive, provide support to the full council and so on.
Integrated Model – where support is provided, on an ad hoc basis, from a variety of sources, including committee services, officers within departments, and corporate policy officers.
Specialist Model - support is provided by a scrutiny support unit with dedicated officers, who only work to the overview and scrutiny function

0.94. Amongst authorities that said they do have a dedicated scrutiny officer/team the average number of FTE officers was **2.9** which is the same as in 2007.

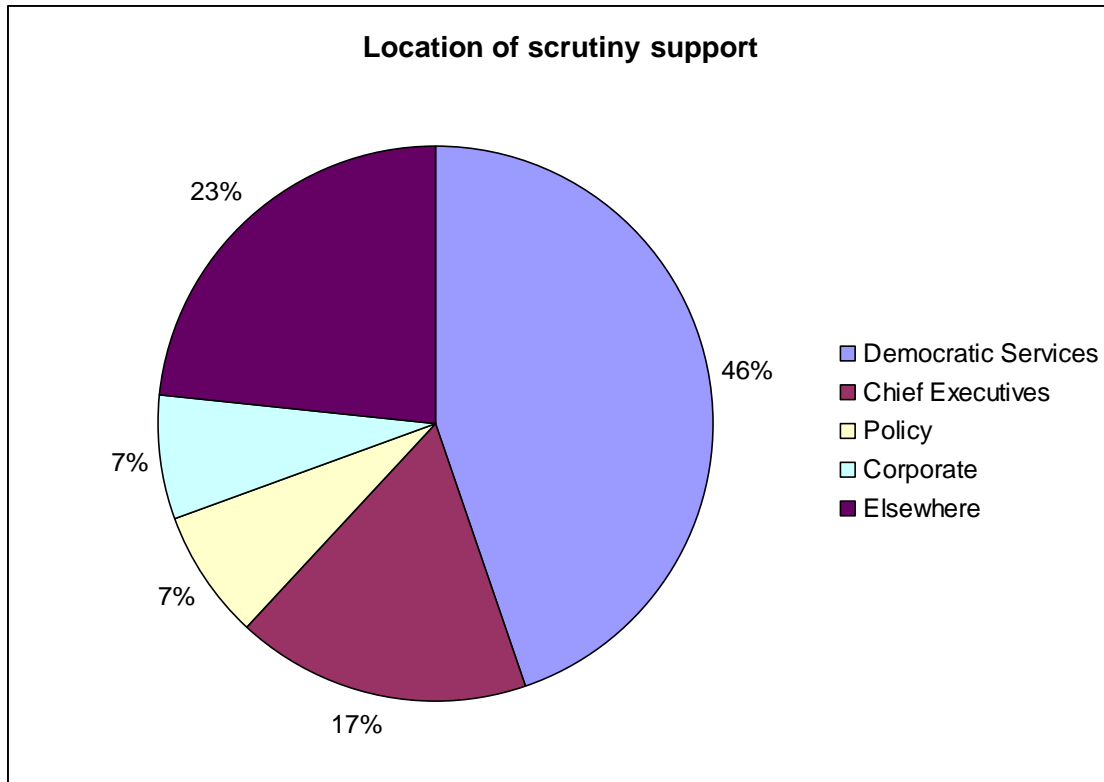


The average number of support officers in authorities that have dedicated support has remained largely stable when plotted across types of authority (see below). The major exception to this rule is unitary authorities which have seen a relatively large decrease of almost one whole FTE scrutiny officer (0.9) in the support staff levels available. Another exception is Welsh authorities with dedicated officers who have gained 0.5 FTE scrutiny officers since 2007.

Authority Type	Ave # (of those who have a dedicated officer)	Change from 2007
County Concils	4.8	0.5
Unitaries	3.3	-0.9
Met Borough	4.5	-0.1
Welsh	4.3	0.1
LBs	5.3	1
Districts	1.4	no change
All authorities	2.8	-0.1

Location of scrutiny support within the council

This year, the survey repeated a question to identify what department scrutiny officers or teams are located within. There were a variety of responses, but the most popular location for scrutiny support was within the Democratic Services department. Other popular departments for scrutiny support were the Chief Executive’s office, Policy and Performance and Corporate Services.



Scrutiny budgets

In 2004, the average amount of money available to conduct scrutiny across all authorities was £8,280. In 2005 that figure had risen 120% to £18,141, decreasing to £11,853 in 2007. The 2008 survey shows a continuation of this downward trend with a reduction of **£1,936** from 2007 to **£9,917**. It is worth pointing out that a discretionary budget may be inflated for a variety of reasons that do not necessarily relate to the relative health of support for scrutiny. As such the large range (0 - £280,000) illustrates the differing circumstances of each authority and explains why such large annual fluctuations are possible. Nevertheless there is a clear negative trend in the size of allocated discretionary budgets for scrutiny.

As shown in the table below, the average budget at district councils (£3,735) is quite dissimilar to the budgets elsewhere (up to £60,302 in London boroughs, for example). The average scrutiny budget in top-tier authorities is **£17,336**.

Authority Type	Av. Discretionary budget	
County Councils	£13,812	(-£5,780)
District Councils	£3,735	(-£1,588)
London Boroughs	£60,302	(+£38,940)
Metropolitan Boroughs	£22,961	(+£6,307)
Unitary Authorities	£5,989	(-£11,837)
Welsh Authorities	£7,544	(-£26,830)
All Authorities	£9,917	(-£1,936)
Av. Excluding districts	£17,336	(-£2,061)

4. Roles for OSCs and members

Roles undertaken by OSCs

Respondents were asked to identify what types of role are undertaken by the overview and scrutiny function at their authority.

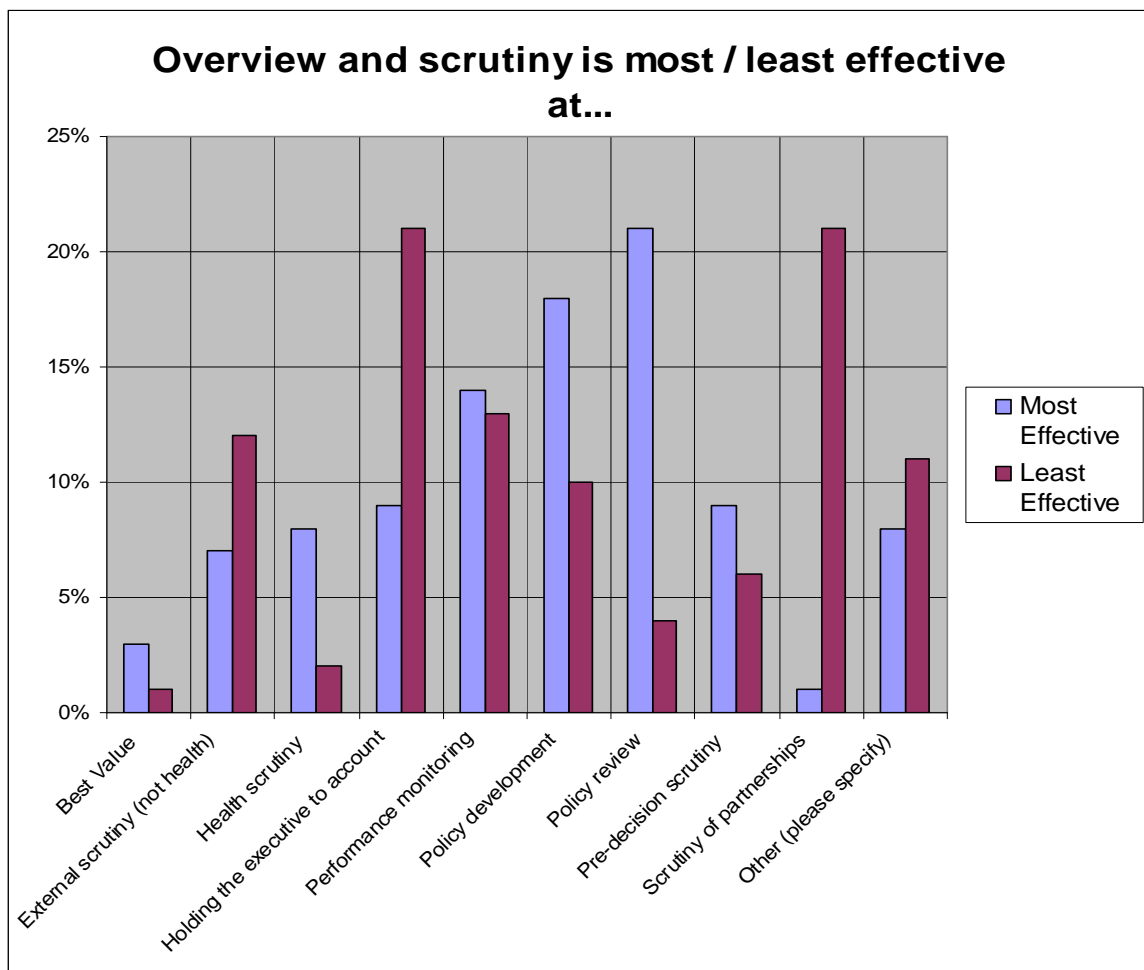
Rank (change)	Role	Percentage of authorities	Change (+/- %) from 2007
1 (1)	Performance monitoring	85%	-8
2 (2)	Holding the executive to account	79%	-12
3 (3)	Policy review	78%	-13
4 (4)	Policy development	69%	-12
5 (5)	Pre-decision scrutiny	62%	-11
6 (6)	External scrutiny (not health)	60%	-2
7 (7)	Scrutiny of partnerships	60%	-2
8 (8)	Health scrutiny	54%	-7
9 (9)	Best Value reviews	31%	-4
10 (new)	Other	4%	new

As last year, **performance monitoring** is the role most frequently undertaken by the overview and scrutiny function. However there have been decreases in the prevalence of all roles on the whole since 2007. This may suggest that the scrutiny function is

becoming a more intuitive process that has matured sufficiently to focus on the work in which it can add the most value. The least commonly ascribed role for overview and scrutiny is that of ‘best value reviews’ and this has decreased further by 4 points from last year’s results.

Role: Most effective at

This year the research also asked respondents to identify which role that overview and scrutiny has been most effective at. Below is an illustrative summary of the responses.



The most frequent response in terms of scrutiny being most effective was **policy review** followed by **policy development**. Respondents felt that they were least effective at the **scrutiny of partnerships** and **holding the executive to account**, which indicates the areas where local authority scrutiny functions need most support in the future, as both of these are significant responsibilities for overview and scrutiny.

Member involvement

This year's survey also asked respondents about the roles that members undertake as part of the overview and scrutiny process. Below is a table summarising these responses.

Member role	Percentage of authorities	Percentage change (+/-)
Presenting recommendations	84%	+2
Monitoring outcomes of previous work	81%	+2
Critically challenging decision-makers	84%	+7
Proposing/writing recommendations	66%	+3
Presenting an annual report to Council	63%	+1
Conducting research outside of meetings	59%	+3
Proposing scrutiny topics at the public's request	55%	+9
Writing reports	21%	+3

The fact that this year the number of elected members who responded to our survey rose from just 36 to 275 accounting for 40% (rather than 11% as in 2007) of the respondents has led to a more balanced picture of Member roles. The slight increase in the involvement of Members in all roles this year viewed alongside increased Member representation in our survey would seem to suggest that Members feel they are more active than scrutiny officers assert.

The most significant increase in Member involvement seems to be in **proposing topics on the public's behalf** with an increase of **9%**. This balances the picture which we receive elsewhere from the survey which shows that more than half of all authorities report receiving no suggestions for topics for scrutiny reviews direct from the public. It suggests that members may be filling an important gap in councils' engagement with the public in this area and are ensuring that scrutiny reviews focus on topics of importance to local residents. In future councils might usefully consider developing more transparent procedures for raising topics for scrutiny on behalf of the public. Councillor Calls for Action (CCfA) provide an avenue for residents to lead scrutiny through elected members. Utilising CCfA can help to ensure that scrutiny is relevant to the local community and empower Members to lead on behalf of residents.

Party politics

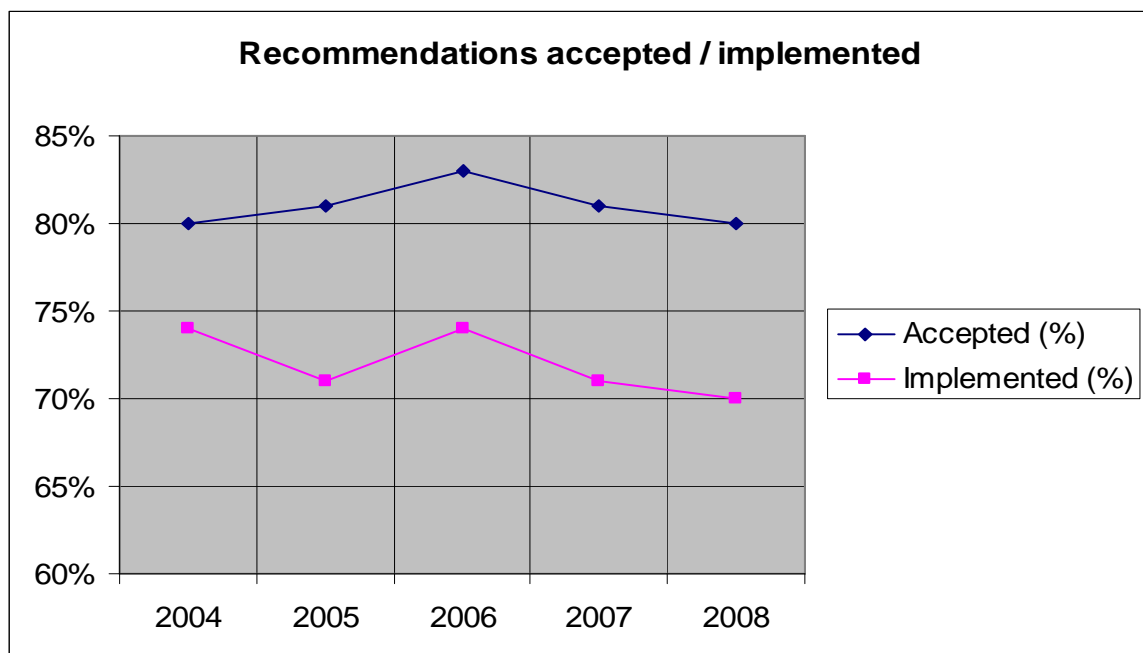
The survey also questioned the extent of the role that respondents thought that party politics plays in overview and scrutiny. This was ranked on a scale from 1-5 where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 strong agreement. The modal and average response to this question was **3** indicating that respondents were neutral towards the statement.

The survey further questioned whether the respondent thought that the impact of party politics was positive, negative or had no impact on overview and scrutiny, again ranked on a scale of 1-5. The average response has increased from **2.3** in 2007 to **2.5**, meaning that although the majority of respondents thought that party politics had a negative impact on overview and scrutiny they are less inclined hold this view than last year.

6. Impact and Influence

Recommendations

Over the last five years this survey has asked what percentage of recommendations from overview and scrutiny have been accepted by the executive or policy committee. Last year the average was 81% whilst this year it has dropped slightly to 80%. Questioning the percentage of recommendations accepted by the executive or policy committee is usefully supplemented by asking how many of those accepted have gone on to be implemented. In 2007 the response to this question was 71%, which again has dropped in 2008 to 70%. Below is a graph plotting the average responses to these two questions over the last five years. It would seem that there is a clear downward trend with fewer recommendations being accepted and implemented year on year, particularly since 2006. Statistical analysis of the data also suggests a correlation between those authorities who felt that party politics had a greater impact on overview and scrutiny, and those authorities reporting a lower percentage of recommendations accepted. Whilst these trends are disappointing taken at face value it may well be that scrutiny is getting better at tracking recommendations resulting in a more accurate account in recent years.



Call-ins

As last year, we asked how many call-ins there has been in each authority in the last year. The average number of call-ins this year was **2.5** which is a slight fall from 2007 where the average was **2.8**. The range of results has appears to have broadened dramatically from **0 -30** last year to **0 – 90** this time. However, if we remove the one response with the highest figure this range falls to **0 -15**, which represents a halving of last year’s range and may give a more representative picture overall.

Further to this question, we asked how many of those call-ins had resulted in an amended decision. In 2007 the average was **0.48** which has remained relatively stable at **0.43** in 2008. However, the range of results has widened this year to 0 -11 from 0 - 4 in 2007.

Evaluating scrutiny

The research also posited a question regarding the methods used to evaluate the impact of individual pieces of overview and scrutiny work and the function as a whole. Shown below are the tabulated responses.

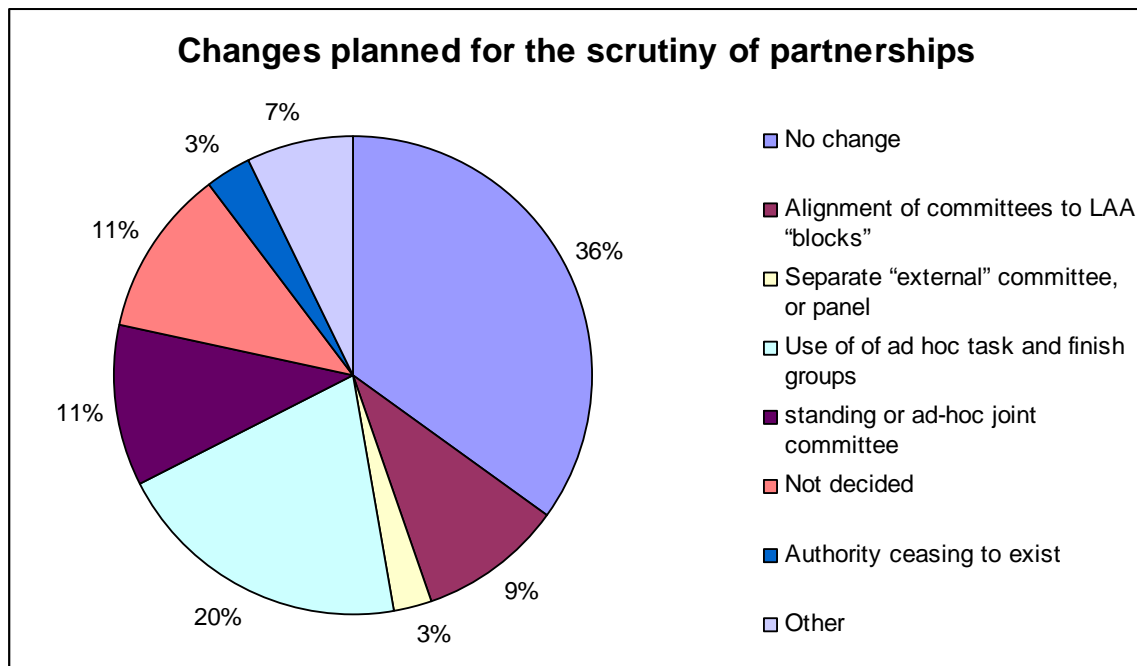
Options	Percentage of councils	Percentage change (+/-)
Regular update on recommendations from scrutiny support	50%	+7
Regular update on recommendations from those responsible for implementation	70%	+9
Regular update on recommendations from Members	22%	+1
An annual report for O&S is produced	88%	+14
Reporting on performance measures and targets developed in house	61%	+13
External consultants have reviewed overview and scrutiny	24%	+6
An internal review of overview and scrutiny has been undertaken	34%	no change
The CfPS self-evaluation framework has been used	23%	+4

As shown in the table, the most popular way to evaluate the impact of overview and scrutiny is via an **annual report**. The most significant increases since 2005 have been annual reports, an internal review of scrutiny function and regular updates on recommendations from members. Use of the CfPS self-evaluation framework has also increased to nearly one quarter of all authorities.

7. Models and structures for the scrutiny of partnerships

Planned structural changes for the scrutiny of partnerships

We asked respondents to tell us what structural changes were being planned for scrutiny in their authority. The pie chart below presents their responses.



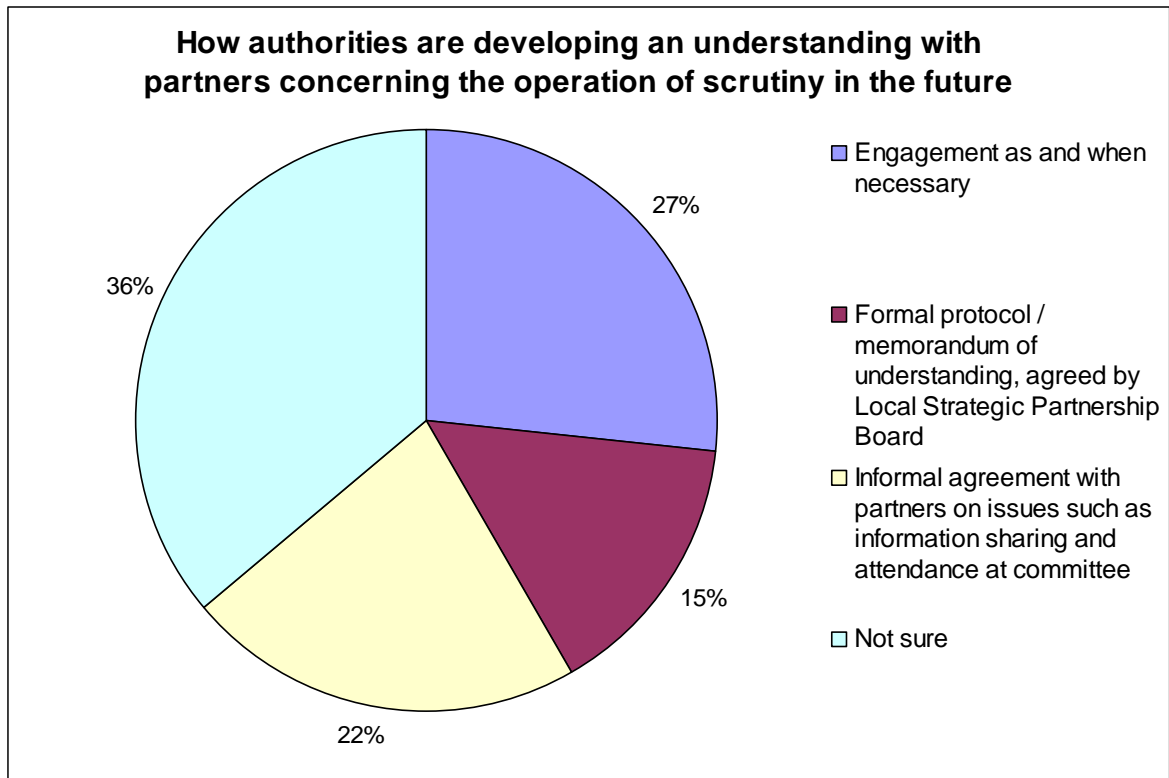
Other necessary steps in preparation for scrutinising partnerships

We asked respondents to tell us what other steps they thought were necessary in preparation for the scrutiny of partnerships and although we received a wide range of opinions there were some common issues that many felt needed to be addressed. The most consistently identified need was for more **Member training** on the scrutiny of partnerships whilst many respondents recognised a need for more support for scrutiny, particularly in the form of **increased officer support**. Many of our respondents identified the need for a **culture shift** amongst both officers and Members while others saw a need for **new protocols** for overview and scrutiny.

Scrutiny's relationship with partners

The chart below shows a still evolving picture of scrutiny's relationship with external partners, in line with the earlier finding that scrutiny of partnerships was not felt to be

scrutiny's strongest activity. While 15% of authorities reported developing formal relationships with the Local Strategic Partnership, well over one third (36%) reported being unsure about how the relationship would develop.



8. Developing professional standards for scrutiny

The research which CfPS recently carried out into the role of the professional scrutiny support officer has led to the development of core competencies or skills necessary to support effective scrutiny. We are interested in developing further ways of improving the quality of scrutiny practice and the questions in this part of the survey were designed to help us understand how we might best achieve this.

Personal development to improve scrutiny

This year we asked respondents which development opportunities they would be interested in that could add value to overview and scrutiny. The table below shows how respondents with different scrutiny roles answered this question.

Answer Options	Councillor	Scrutiny manager/officer	Other local government officer	Other	Total
joining a membership body for scrutiny	24%	65%	38%	45%	48%
joining an accredited scheme for professional standards of scrutiny practice	24%	61%	38%	42%	46%
attending ad hoc scrutiny development sessions as and when appropriate	66%	90%	69%	81%	80%
nothing - I don't see scrutiny as a profession or career	26%	2%	14%	12%	12%

The table above shows a clear demand amongst scrutiny officers for formal development and recognition. **90%** of scrutiny officers said they were interested in attending ad-hoc development sessions and an encouraging **65%** and **61%** said they would be interested in joining a membership body for scrutiny and an accredited scheme for professional standards of scrutiny practice respectively. Members are less interested in the more formal and professional development but two-thirds still show interest in attending training and development.

Benefits of a membership body for scrutiny

The table below shows the most popular benefits of joining a membership body for scrutineers amongst respondents to our survey. Each respondent was asked to choose the three most attractive benefits.

Benefits of joining a membership body	Percentage chosen
Regular news about developments in policy and practice	54%
In-depth policy and practice analysis	30%
Discounts for general CfPS events and services	19%
Accredited recognition for skills I have gained to assist future career development	35%
formal training and development sessions	44%
coaching and/or mentoring	23%
private /distance learning focused on practical skills and competencies	17%
private /distance learning with an academic component	14%
informal networking and learning from others in the field	22%
All are important to me	29%

Overall **receiving regular news about developments in policy and practice** and receiving **formal training** were the most popular benefits with **54%** and **44%** respectively. However, there was a marked difference between different scrutiny roles. While the most popular choice for councillors was formal training (**51%**), the most popular choice for scrutiny officers was receiving regular news about developments in policy and practice (**58%**).

Costs of a membership body for scrutiny

There was a consensus amongst our survey sample that the annual cost of membership of a scrutiny body ought to be no more than £100 with **73%** of respondents seeing this as a sensible threshold. However, **26%** thought that a fair price was between £100 and £150 while just **2%** thought it should be more than £150.

CfPS will use this information to develop its approach to supporting practitioners to improve their standards of scrutiny practice, in line with our mission to improve scrutiny as a professional discipline.

9. Perception Tracking

As last year, the survey asked respondents for their perceptions about the overview and scrutiny function. This is to assess how practitioners think and feel about the function and its value to councils and beyond. Below is a summary of the results.

This question is ranked on a scale from 1-5 where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 strong agreement.

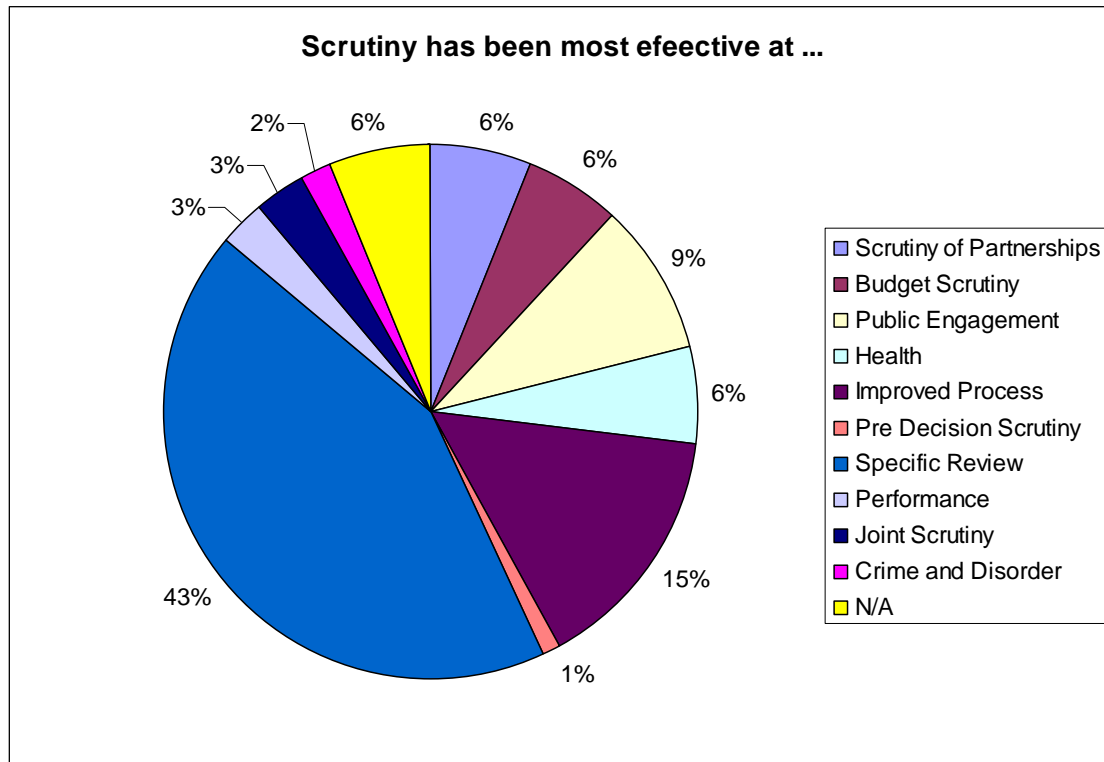
Statement	Ranking	% change (+/-)
Overview and scrutiny is good at holding the authority to account	3.2	+0.1
Those being held to account by overview and scrutiny are co-operative and helpful	3.4	-0.1
Overview and scrutiny adds value to the authority	3.6	no change
Overview and scrutiny is valued by the authority	3.0	+0.1
Overview and scrutiny is recognised and valued by the public	2.2	-0.3

Despite the fact that a larger proportion of respondents to the 2008 survey were elected members than in 2007 the level of agreement with the above statements has remained quite stable. Perceptions amongst Members and officers of the health of overview and scrutiny were very similar. The major exception to this was in the extent to which respondents felt scrutiny is valued by the public. It would seem that Members close involvement with the public has resulted in a slightly more negative perception.

10. Final Thoughts

Now and in the future

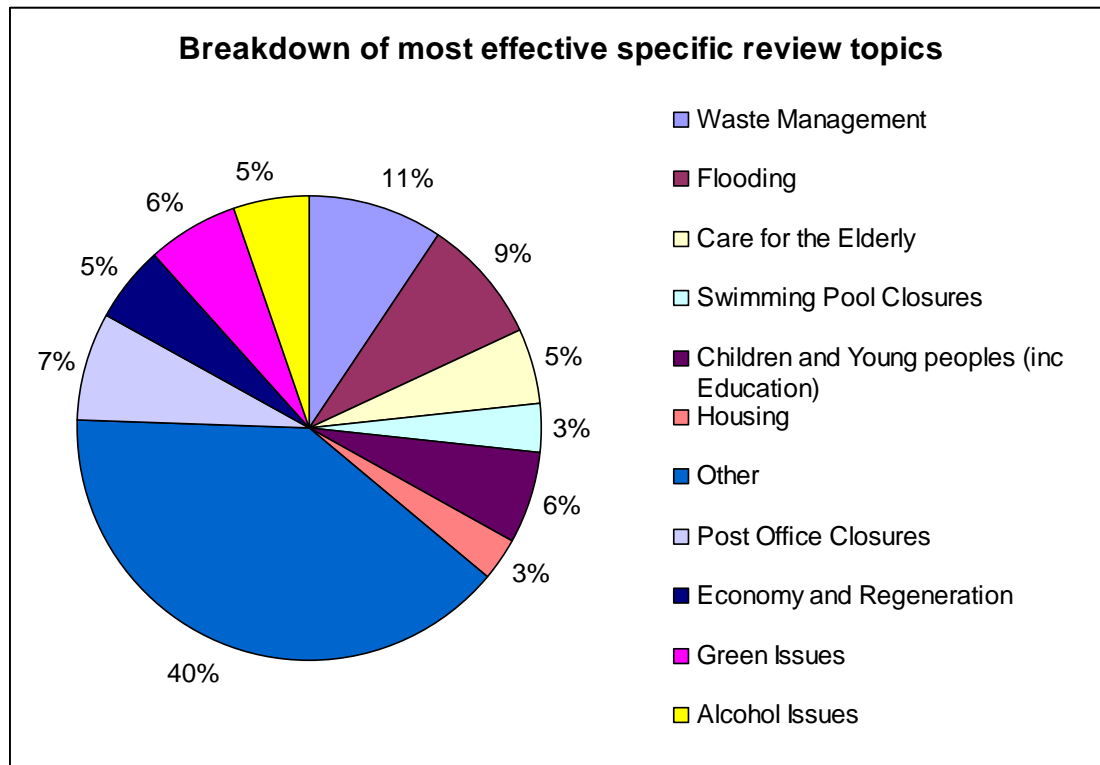
As in previous years we asked respondents an open-ended question to tell us what had been the single most effective thing that overview and scrutiny had done in 2008. The responses have been categorised and are presented in the charts below.



The responses to this question show that scrutiny has been both quick to adapt to the challenges of the economic downturn and dexterous in seizing the opportunities offered by government policy. For example, many overview and scrutiny committees decided to expand scrutiny of the budget to include treasury management amidst the Icelandic banking crisis. This was clearly seen as a valuable exercise as it has led to a rise in those who identified **budget scrutiny** as the most effective piece of work undertaken by scrutiny from **2%** in 2007, to **6%** in this year's survey.

Other contemporary issues in local government scrutiny are also well represented in the responses to this question. The number of respondents who thought that **public engagement** was the most effective area of work grew from **4%** in 2007 to **9%** this year. **Scrutiny of partnerships** was highlighted by **6%** of scrutineers as the most effective work area this year after barely being on the radar in 2007.

6% of respondents felt that scrutiny had not been particularly effective in any area for a number of reasons ranging from developmental issues to the negative influence of party politics. Others could not pick anything as ‘most effective’ as their work had not yet come to fruition and so could not be judged on its effectiveness.



The pie chart above shows a breakdown of reviews into specific topics that respondents felt were most effective in their authorities. The fact that the top 10 topics only account for 60% of the most effective topics is representative of the diversity of local concerns and the scope of work being undertaken by scrutiny. However the chart clearly shows that scrutiny is responding to the major issues of public concern to many local communities, from flooding to post office closures.

Scrutiny topics for 2009

This year we asked respondents to tell us what scrutiny reviews were planned for 2009. In a continuation of established scrutiny activities many authorities are planning to scrutinise the budget, health issues and **waste management**. As expected many authorities are planning to review areas that have been subject to recent government policy objectives such as **public involvement in scrutiny** and the **scrutiny of partnerships**. Other popular themes for scrutiny reviews in 2009 relate to recent events that are of concern such as the provision of **children and young people’s services**.

The economic downturn and the Icelandic banking crisis have resulted in growing public concerns and overview and scrutiny will be undertaking reviews that look the current economic situation from a number of different angles. Some authorities have decided to look at **treasury management** and **financial risk** whilst others have focused on how to mitigate the effects of recession by looking at **regeneration**, **worklessness** or supporting **local businesses**. The survey reveals that **climate change** looks set to be one of the biggest issues for scrutiny in 2009 despite being somewhat crowded out of the media by other events recently.

CfPS is ensuring that its products and services will be geared towards these priorities for scrutiny in the year ahead. We have already produced a guide to scrutiny of treasury management, *Treasure Your Assets* (available to order from our website), which supplements our popular generic guide to budget scrutiny, *On the Money*. We are currently working on a guide with IDeA on scrutiny of services for safeguarding children, and guidance on scrutiny of partnerships to supplement the new legislation. We also intend to produce publications during 2009 on scrutiny's role in ensuring authorities respond effectively to the recession and on public involvement in scrutiny.

11. CfPS and you

Satisfaction with CfPS services

We asked respondents to tell us what services they were using and rate their satisfaction with those services 1 to 5 (1 being very poor and 5 being excellent). As part of our own commitment to being open to scrutiny as an organisation, the table below shows both the popularity (percentage of those who answered the question who are using a given service) and the average satisfaction rating for each CfPS service. We will use these results to inform our own service planning for the future and this survey provides a valuable baseline assessment for future improvements.

Answer options	Respondents using service (%)	Scrutiny officers	Members	Overall rating average
Reviews library	78%	4.1	3.9	4.0
Online Discussions forum	60%	3.7	3.3	3.6
Other sections of the website	73%	3.7	3.4	3.6
Events	66%	3.8	3.3	3.7
In-house training from CfPS staff or Associates	39%	3.7	4.2	3.8
Health programme	33%	3.6	3.0	3.5
Free publications	78%	4.2	3.6	4.1
Priced publications	36%	3.8	3.1	3.6
Monthly e-bulletin	72%	4.0	3.5	3.8

The table above shows that our most popular services, not surprisingly, receive the highest average scores for customer satisfaction. 78% of respondents to this question had used the CfPS scrutiny reviews library, rating their satisfaction as 4 out of 5 on average. Similarly popular amongst respondents were our free publications which had been used by 78% of respondents in the last year and received an average satisfaction rating of 4.1 out of 5.

There were some significant differences between Members and officers in terms of their satisfaction with services. Members rated all of our services between 0.2 and 0.6 points lower than scrutiny officers apart from in-house training from CfPS staff or Associates which Members rated 0.5 points higher than scrutiny officers at 4.2. The general trend of

Members rating services lower than officers could be due in part to their lower exposure to CfPS activities compared with scrutiny officers. This is a clear indication that we should do more to reach Members directly. The fact that Members rated their satisfaction with **in house training from CfPS staff or Associates** as 4.2 out of 5, however, is encouraging and we are committed to continuing to provide high-quality support for Member development in the future.

CfPS in the future

In response to our request for suggestions of things that CfPS ‘should do, or do more of’ respondents provided us with a wealth of useful information which we will be using to help ensure our services are as targeted as possible. The most common suggestions were asking for CfPS to ‘do more of’ its existing activities, particularly in terms of providing updates and **guidance on government legislation, providing free publications, sharing good practice and offering training and networking opportunities**. Some respondents felt that CfPS should do more to **champion the role of scrutiny** to executives and outside the authority whilst others wanted CfPS to continue to provide **regional events**.