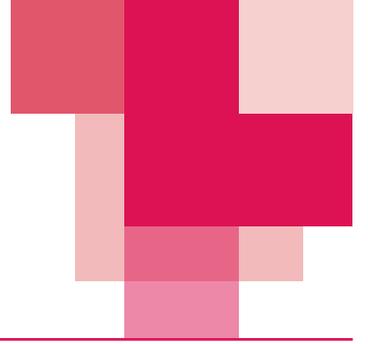


Annual Survey of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government 2012/13





The Centre for Public Scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), an independent charity, is the leading national organisation for ideas, thinking and the application and development of policy and practice to promote transparent, inclusive and accountable public services. We support individuals, organisations and communities to put our principles into practice in the design, delivery and monitoring of public services in ways that build knowledge, skills and trust so that effective solutions are identified together by decision-makers, practitioners and service users.

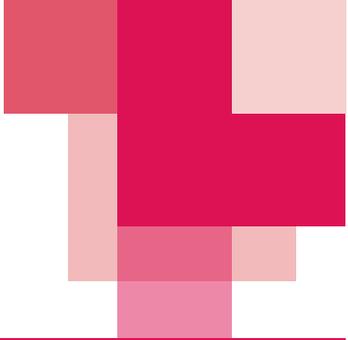
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Introduction and executive summary



This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Centre for Public Scrutiny, and the tenth anniversary of our Annual Survey of overview and scrutiny in local government. The survey represents a definitive snapshot of the overview and scrutiny function, with nearly four hundred responses from over two hundred separate councils.

Methodology

As in the 2011/12 survey, respondents had the option to fill in the full survey, or an abridged version. One full response was requested from each council, from the most senior officer with day-to-day responsibility for scrutiny. All other respondents were asked to complete an abridged version of the survey.

The final date for the submission of survey responses was 30 April 2013. As such the results all reflect the political balance and control of authorities on that date.

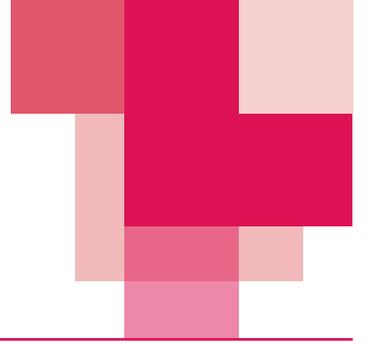
Responses

- Responses were received from 388 people in total;
- 205 councils provided a full response to the survey;
- Of those 205 councils:
 - 109 were Conservative-controlled;
 - 57 were Labour-controlled;
 - 6 were Liberal Democrat controlled;
 - 1 was controlled by an independent group;
 - 21 were under no overall control and led by a coalition administration;
 - 8 were under no overall control and led by a minority administration.
- Of those 205 councils:
 - 24 were county councils;
 - 91 were districts in a two-tier area;
 - 24 were London boroughs;
 - 16 were metropolitan boroughs;
 - 37 were other unitary authorities in England;
 - 13 were unitary authorities in Wales.
- The most responses received (by region) were from the south east, with 72 out of 388 responses (18.5%).

Key highlights

Scrutiny continues to be effective and succeeds in making a real difference to the lives of local people. Scrutiny practitioners are prepared and willing to innovate – to think about working differently and working creatively with a much wider range of partners. However, resource constraints now appear to be actively hindering this aim, and the move to dilute the level and nature of officer support to scrutiny presents real risks to its future success and effectiveness.

- **Resourcing:** Levels of resource for scrutiny continue to decline across all types of council, with discretionary budget at its lowest level ever and the number of FTE officers per council also dropping. 33.65 FTE scrutiny support posts will be lost in 2013/14;
- **Impact and influence:** The majority of councils responding did not appear to have a formal system for monitoring the implementation of recommendations. Where councils did have such a system, the number of recommendations accepted and implemented remains a high proportion of those made, demonstrating the real value of effective monitoring to ensure the impact of scrutiny is felt. Those councils also considered themselves to be more effective at scrutiny;
- **Political factors and committee structure:** in those councils where scrutiny is seen as the object of political interference, this unsurprisingly had a negative impact on respondents' perceptions of the future of scrutiny. Respondents in Labour authorities were more positive about the future of scrutiny. Committee size appears to have little effect on the effectiveness of scrutiny, but councils with fewer committees tend to be more effective. CfPS has long argued for a 'less is more' approach to scrutiny, where councils focus their resources and work on the most important issues;
- **Partnerships:** an acceleration in the trend identified in recent years for scrutiny to engage more with partners and partnership work. However many authorities (in particular districts) face challenges in realising these opportunities, for the most part due to resource constraints.
- **CfPS and you:** our services continue to be well-received by practitioners, but we need to do more to properly recognise, and act on, the resource pressures and barriers that practitioners are facing on a day-to-day basis, and to use our national position to further promote networking and the sharing of good practice.



Scrutiny structures – the size of committees, the number of committees, and so on – do have some impact on scrutiny’s effectiveness. But they ultimately come second to culture. The lack of significant correlations, and causations, between different aspects of the way that the process of scrutiny is carried out suggests to us that culture has this effect. While we can measure aspects of culture – by asking people about how their authority values scrutiny, for example, or about political interference – these aspects of scrutiny’s success can be difficult to quantify.

What these results make clear is that practitioners can, and do, make a success of scrutiny against the odds, in challenging circumstances and with limited resources – irrespective of structures and processes.

Resourcing

In the 89 authorities answering this question, the number of FTE officer posts was reported as likely to drop by 33.65 in 2013/14, 18% of the total number of FTE officer posts which existed in the authorities answering this question in 2012/13.

Dedicated budgets for scrutiny continue to decline, having now fallen by an average of £8,000 since 2007 when this downward trend began; respondents felt that this was actively hindering moves to improve.

There is an increasing trend towards supporting scrutiny through twin-hatting and generic posts (where officers are not devoted exclusively to scrutiny policy responsibilities), which our analysis suggests risks a detrimental effect on scrutiny's effectiveness, based on our later finding that authorities without dedicated scrutiny officers or teams tend to be less effective.

Number of FTE officers over time

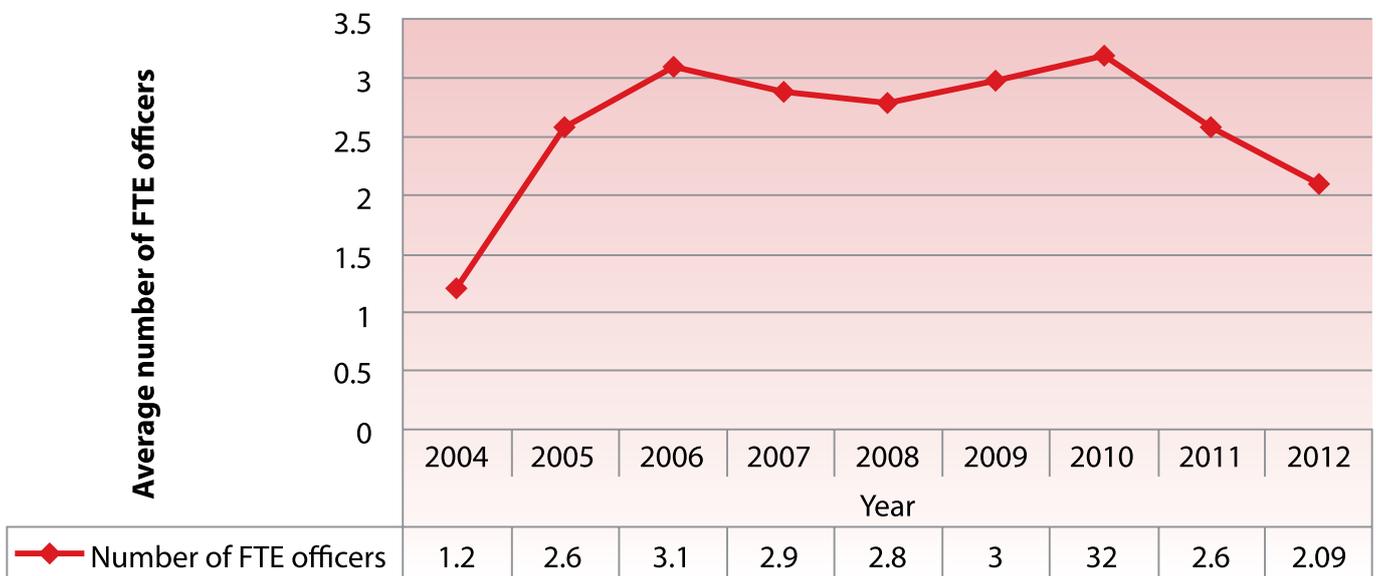
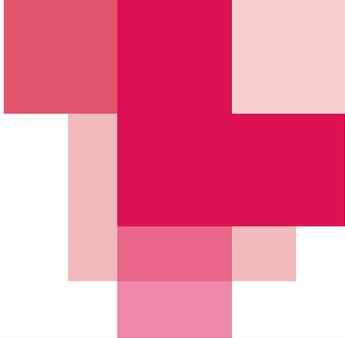


Fig 1: Average number of full time equivalent scrutiny officers per authority, over time. This includes partial posts (eg 0.25, 0.5 and 0.75 of a post being dedicated to scrutiny support).



The survey asked a series of questions about how scrutiny is resourced. This sought to determine:

- **The number of FTE (full time equivalent) officers employed by the council to support scrutiny.** This includes officers whose time is fully taken up with providing policy support to scrutiny, and those who support the scrutiny function as part of a wider range of duties (often called “twin-hatting” or “generic” officers);
- **Where support for scrutiny sits in the council.** We divide this three ways – the “committee model” (whereby officers supporting scrutiny also have responsibility for committee administration), the “specialist model” (whereby officers supporting scrutiny do that job as their sole role) and the “integrated model” (whereby officers supporting scrutiny also carry out work in service departments, or work in the council’s corporate core).

Across all councils the number of FTE (full-time equivalent) officers continues to decline, and is at its lowest since our first survey. Considered alongside information about scrutiny support over time, which sees a decrease in the number of councils with dedicated scrutiny teams, this suggests that **more councils are moving to “generic” or “twin-hatting” posts**, whereby officers previously working exclusively on scrutiny policy support now have other duties. Our evidence on “impact and influence” below demonstrates that **councils operating such arrangements tend to be less effective.** We are also aware that there have been a number of redundancies.

Councils responding expected this trend to continue into 2013/14. The 89 councils which provided a figure for officer numbers in both 2012/13 and 2013/14 between them employed, in 2012/13, 186 officers. Of those, in 2013/14 **a further 33.65 FTE posts will be lost across the country**, representing 18% of that total. Again, while some of these will be redundancies we expect from anecdotal information that more will be as a result of officers taking on additional duties beyond scrutiny support. We cannot say whether this figure can be extrapolated across all English and Welsh authorities.

Discretionary budgets (the amount of money available for scrutiny’s exclusive use) have also dropped dramatically, and are now at an average of £4,319. This represents a drop of almost £8,000 since 2007. Some of this may be reflected by the fact that scrutiny may still have a budget available, but this is shared by other services and requires the approval of a budget-holding senior officer rather than a scrutiny team manager. **Many respondents considered that the lack of a dedicated budget was actively hindering attempts to improve the function.**

Scrutiny support over time

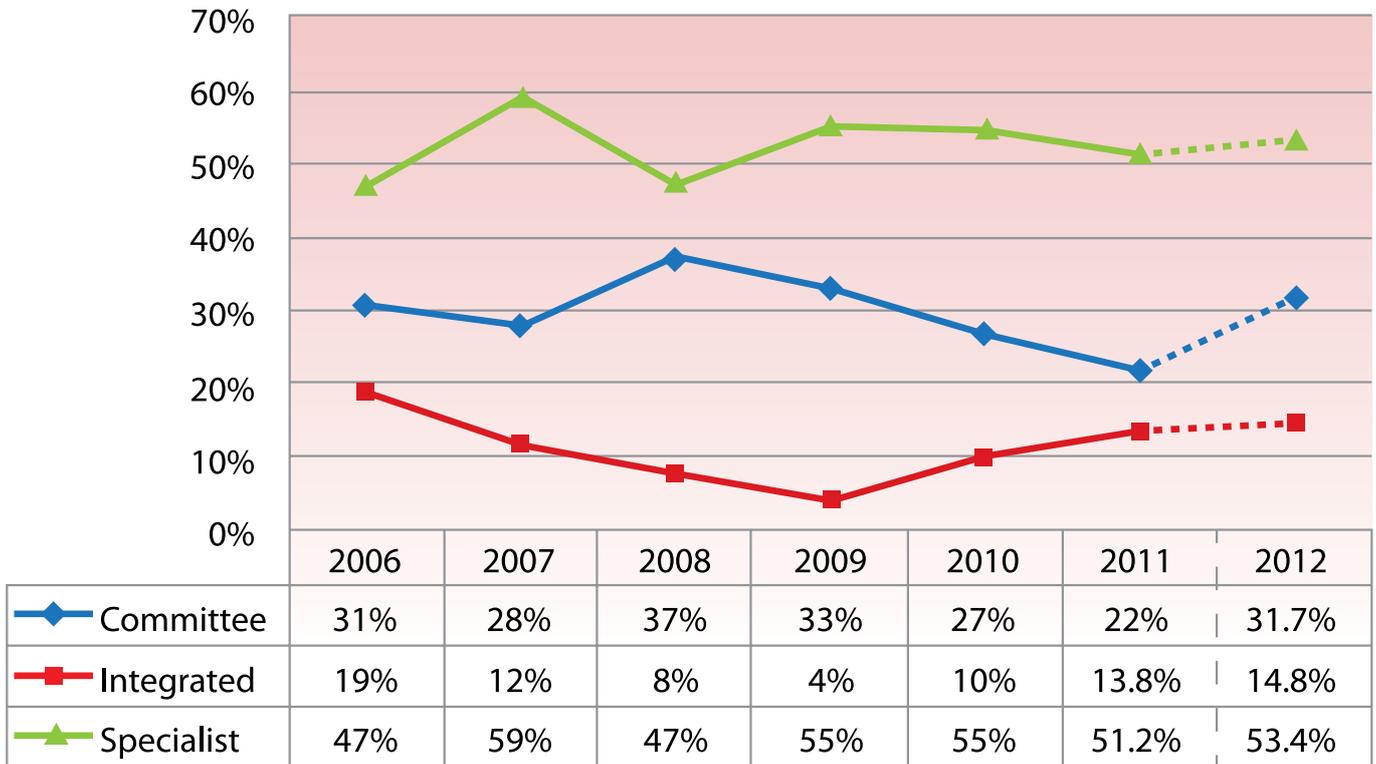
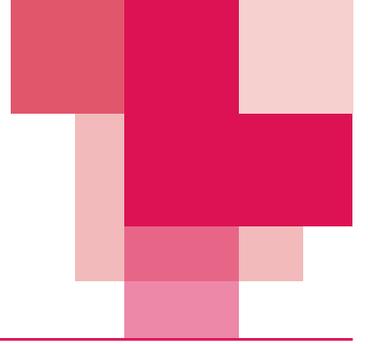


Fig 2: Percentage of authorities where scrutiny support follows each of the three principal support models for scrutiny¹.

¹ In all surveys prior to 2012/13 respondents were able to select an “other” option. We noted that in previous years many people selecting the “other” option seemed to be from authorities where scrutiny support was, in fact, provided via one of the main three models. As such, the “other” option was removed in 2012/13 which accounts for the uplift in all support models this year. We have factored this uplift into our calculations.



In previous years we have identified a correlation between the number of dedicated scrutiny officers, the nature of scrutiny support and the effectiveness of the council's scrutiny function overall (with effectiveness being judged by the number of recommendations accepted and implemented). We still think that such a correlation exists although the evidence for it in this year's results is weaker. We think that this is because more councils are moving to support scrutiny using the "integrated" or "committee" models, which may mean that while in many authorities quantitative support for scrutiny in terms of FTE posts is not decreasing, or is decreasing only slightly, for practical purposes "twin-hatting" officers will not have the time or management support to provide the same standard of assistance to scrutiny members.

We have broken down the results by type of authority. **In districts, the committee model is the most popular for scrutiny support (44.6%) – in unitaries, only 28.6% of councils support scrutiny this way, with 62.9% using the specialist model.** The reason for this significant imbalance is unclear, but is likely to relate to the resourcing implications of having separate scrutiny officers, or teams, in authorities with smaller budgets.

Impact and influence

Fewer than 50% of councils report having a formal system to track the acceptance and implementation of scrutiny recommendations. We are planning to take action on this worrying finding which has not previously come to light – both by publishing a practice guide setting out the benefits of such an approach, and realistic steps for putting a tracking system in place, and engaging with those authorities without such systems both directly, and through national and regional networking forums, to offer additional assistance and support where it might be required.

Councils without monitoring systems were not appreciably worse resourced than those with such a system, but were more likely to be authorities without a dedicated scrutiny officer or scrutiny team.

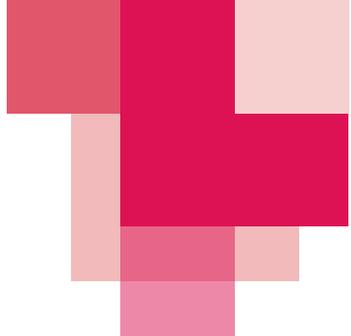
Councils with a monitoring system were 28.4% more likely than other councils to perceive the work they do as having a positive impact on local people.

For those councils with a monitoring system, having dedicated scrutiny support does not make a statistically significant difference to the number of scrutiny recommendations accepted and implemented. But the presence of a dedicated scrutiny support officer or team does make a positive difference to other measures of effectiveness.

Notwithstanding changes in the way we make our calculations, fewer scrutiny recommendations are being accepted and implemented (as a proportion of the total made). We hypothesise that this is related to the reduction in the amount of officer support for scrutiny, which could make negotiation with the executive and partners over the nature and wording of recommendations more difficult.

We use three measures together to assess effectiveness.

- The number of recommendations made by scrutiny which are subsequently accepted and implemented;
- Respondents' own perceptions of their effectiveness. We asked the question, "How much of a difference do you think that scrutiny makes to people's lives?";

- 
-
- Respondents' perceptions of the value placed on scrutiny by the authority. This is a useful measure because an authority that highly values scrutiny is more likely to constructively engage with it and have regard to its recommendations.

Individually, none of these three measures can tell the whole story. In particular, looking just at recommendations accepted and implemented provides what looks like a scientific figure, but does not say anything about the quality or ambition of those recommendations. Less ambitious recommendations will inevitably be easier to implement, resulting in “quick wins” but not necessarily in a scrutiny function which could be regarded as “effective” in improving local people’s lives.

This is one of the reasons why we look at recommendations alongside perceptions of the impact on local people and of the value that the authority places on the scrutiny function.

Even taken together, these three measures don’t capture everything that scrutiny does. However, we do think that they allow us to make a reasonable attempt at drawing some national conclusions about trends towards increased effectiveness.

Tracking recommendations

Only 89 of 169 councils responding to the question, “Are you able to track the implementation of scrutiny recommendations?” said that they had a system to do this. No one type of council (eg district, county etc) was disproportionately represented here – there is a relatively similar proportion of all kinds of authorities in all regions, that lack a formal system for tracking recommendations.

While this is worrying, it should be stressed that for some scrutiny work, the act of scrutiny itself will be the outcome. We do also note that a number of councils deliberately do not monitor their own recommendations because they feel that those recommendations are “owned” and therefore tracked by the executive’s performance management system once they are made, and that further monitoring is a bureaucratic exercise. Equally, some councils may not track individual recommendations, but may still receive updates from the executive and partners on issues that they have investigated in the past. We plan to explore further with those authorities who do not track recommendations what the reasons are behind this headline finding and to establish what CfPS can do to assist them to overcome any barriers.

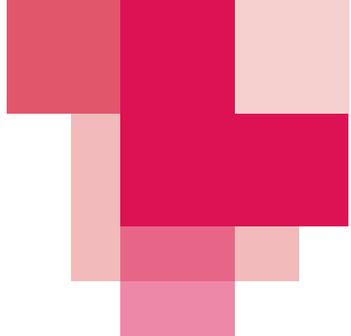
Councils without a system for tracking recommendations had an average of 2.25 FTE officers working on scrutiny – slightly above the national average but not enough to identify an obvious link, and within the margin of error². CfPS would expect that councils with more dedicated officers would have the resource to be able to carry out recommendation monitoring: this does not appear to be the case. However, councils without monitoring systems for recommendations seem to be more likely to be those with twin-hatting officers, sharing a committee administration role and a scrutiny role.

Type of council	Specialist model (separate scrutiny officers)	Committee model (twin-hatting officers)
All councils	53.4%	31.7%
Councils with monitoring system	58.2%	25.3%
Councils without monitoring system	42.5%	37.9%

Fig 3: showing the percentage of councils both with and without monitoring systems where scrutiny is supported by the “specialist model” and the “committee model” respectively.

There is a clear indication that councils with dedicated scrutiny officers tend to monitor the acceptance and implementation of recommendations more than those who don’t. Shire districts are disproportionately absent from this group (with the largest group of councils, 44.6%, providing support in Democratic Services) we can draw the conclusion that district councils are less likely to have systems for tracking recommendations. However, there are a substantial number of shire districts, and a substantial number of authorities supporting scrutiny using the “committee model”, who do have tracking systems – there is not likely to be any direct causation here. We think it is more likely that shire districts have less resource available for scrutiny in general, and that a lack of recommendation tracking and a tendency towards “committee model” support is an indication of this.

² Particularly considering that removing three outlier councils with officer numbers of 11, 7 and 6 respectively then gives an average of 2.04 officers per council.



It is impossible to say that overview and scrutiny is “more effective” when it monitors and tracks its recommendations, because by definition we cannot ascertain the effectiveness of those councils without monitoring systems. However, we can do the next best thing, and look at councils’ perceptions of their own effectiveness.

Monitoring recommendations compared to perceptions of effectiveness.

Compared to those who do not use a monitoring system, the ones that do use one perceive themselves to be 28.4% more effective. As such, those councils using a monitoring system have an 18% “uplift” in terms of whether they consider their scrutiny function to be effective.

This does not mean that having a monitoring system will make scrutiny more effective. We instead consider that someone in a council with a monitoring system will be able to more clearly evidence the impact of scrutiny in that authority and will therefore have more confidence in perceiving it as more effective.

Recommendations being implemented³

Where councils had a system for monitoring recommendations, of recommendations made in 2011/12,

- 83.36% of those recommendations were accepted by those to whom they were made;
- Of those recommendations, 62% had been implemented by the time of the survey.

The 2011/12 figures show that, in that year, 86% of recommendations were accepted and of those, 85% were implemented.

We set out in the more detailed appendix to this report some of the changes we have made to the way that we record the number of recommendations being accepted and implemented. We think that part of this decrease in the acceptance and implementation of recommendations rests on these changes in methodology. However, we also think that this represents a substantive downward trend, which is comparable with the figures reported in our 2010 survey.

³ A small number of councils (nine) either provided a verbal response (eg “Vast majority implemented”) or a percentage figure. Where percentage figures were provided, a baseline number of recommendations was not given, which means that we have had to exclude those authorities from this figure.

We consider that this may be attributable to a combination of the continuing drop in the number of FTE officers dedicated to scrutiny support and the increase in the prevalence of “twin-hatting” scrutiny support teams, based on our finding in the 2010 Annual Survey that there is a direct correlation between the existence of dedicated scrutiny officers and effectiveness of scrutiny.

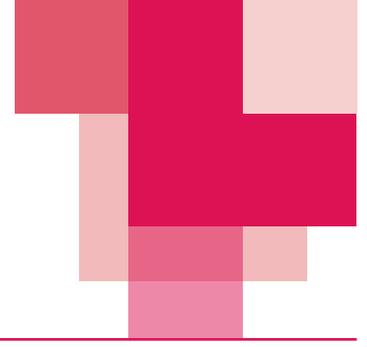
It could also be attributable to the fact that scrutiny is making more ambitious, longer-term recommendations that have yet to bear fruit. We do note that a number of respondents described the implementation of many of their recommendations as “ongoing”.

Does having dedicated scrutiny officers lead to more recommendations being accepted and implemented?

We looked just at councils with dedicated scrutiny support to see if this made a difference to the number of recommendations accepted and implemented. In these authorities:

- 86.86% of recommendations made were accepted by those to whom they were made, compared to 76.16% of recommendations in councils without dedicated scrutiny support;
- Of those recommendations, 63.46% had been implemented by the time of the survey, compared with 67.4% of recommendations in councils without dedicated scrutiny support.

On this measure of effectiveness alone, having dedicated scrutiny officers makes an appreciable difference to having recommendations accepted, but not to having them implemented, where the opposite trend is marginally apparent. It does, however, make a difference to the people’s perceptions of effectiveness; these figures are rather higher in authorities with a dedicated scrutiny officer, or team. There is also an effect on the value given to scrutiny by the authority, which is higher in those authorities with a dedicated scrutiny support team or officer. This is echoed by a related finding that scrutiny is valued less, and perceived to be less effective, in districts.



How much value do you think your authority gives overview and scrutiny?

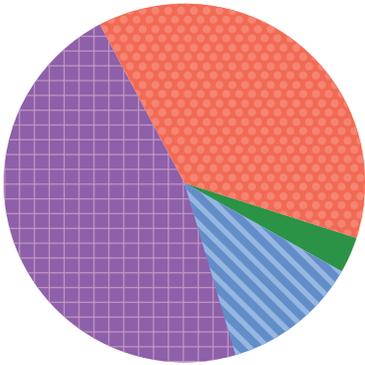


Fig 4: left: Value given to scrutiny by the authority where the council operates the “specialist model”

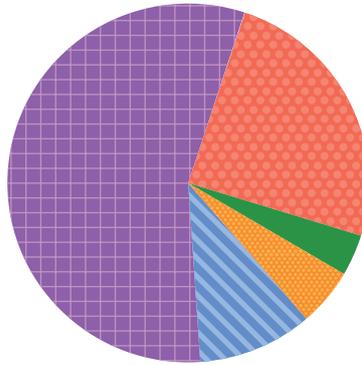


Fig 5: right: Value given to scrutiny by the authority where the council operates the “committee model” or “integrated model”

1. None 2. Very little 3. A little 4. A lot 5. A great deal

We consider that part of the reason for this finding may lie in the reduction of the number of FTE posts. As the size of scrutiny teams decreased and duties are spread more thinly, a smaller team (or a set of officers who are expected to carry out duties unconnected to scrutiny) is less able to check up on recommendations and their implementation. We’ve yet to identify whether there is a “tipping point” where a scrutiny team is so small as to confer no material advantage in terms of the number of recommendations accepted and implemented. Experience suggests that it is likely to be different for every council. **Taken together, this data supports our contention that authorities with dedicated scrutiny officer support tend to be more effective.**

How our own work helps

A confident perception of effectiveness is directly related to the number of CfPS publications that respondents had read. The more CfPS publications people read and used, the more they feel that they are being effective in their work. It is highly statistically likely that using CfPS publications directly leads to an improvement in councils’ perceptions of their own effectiveness.

Political factors, nature of committees and their impact on effectiveness

Party control makes no difference to the amount of value that respondents feel their authority places on scrutiny, although respondents in Labour-controlled authorities are more positive about scrutiny's future.

The impact of negative aspects of party politics has a measurable impact on the perception of scrutiny's effectiveness.

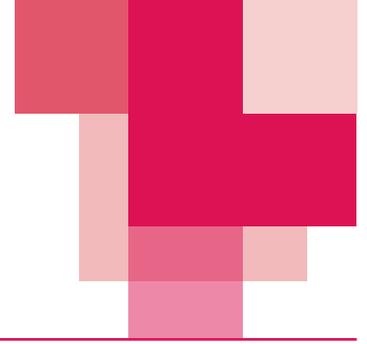
20.5% of councils apportion chair and vice chair positions to reflect the council's political balance, but there is no appreciable positive or negative impact on effectiveness.

Councils with larger average committee sizes tend to be no more or less effective than those with smaller committees, but they do tend to have fewer committees.

Councils with fewer committees tend to be more effective, judged by the number of recommendations accepted and implemented.

In wishing to obtain a more detailed picture of how scrutiny operates in , this year's survey asked a larger number of questions about how party politics affects scrutiny. Whilst a number of detailed academic studies have been carried out on this issue, this represents the first time a comprehensive national analysis has been carried out.

Although we have tried to establish correlations between political control, political balance and effectiveness, any connections that appear to exist are too weak to be statistically significant. Councils of a particular political hue or with large or small majorities are not prone to carrying out scrutiny better or worse than any others.



The effects of party politics on effectiveness

We looked at whether councils under no overall control were more likely to have vigorous and effective scrutiny functions, and whether such councils were more inclined to value scrutiny. We also looked at whether party politics was seen as an influence on the effectiveness of scrutiny. Our hypothesis is that councils in this position might see scrutiny as a means to manage policy disagreements between two or more evenly-matched parties, so as to remove political heat from contentious decisions. Equally, the opposite could be the case – scrutiny in finely balanced authorities could be overwhelmed by political debate and disagreement that could marginalise scrutiny’s ability to carry out effective work.

Analysis identified that there is no **significant correlation** between which party controls an authority and the amount of value which respondents thought the authority gave scrutiny. This goes for authorities under no overall control as well. However, **respondents from Labour authorities tended to be more optimistic about the future of scrutiny** (accounting for an 18% uplift in responses).

We found that there was **no significant correlation** between councils with no overall control and effectiveness, and **no correlation** between control by a particular political party and scrutiny’s effectiveness.

Whichever party is in control, where party politics is seen as negatively affecting scrutiny, there is a corresponding decline in respondents’ perceptions of scrutiny’s effectiveness (there is a causation here about which we can be statistically certain). However, it is difficult to make out a clear correlation between political interference and the number of recommendations accepted and implemented.

Chairing

Proportionality

Some councils assign Chair and Vice-Chair positions politically proportionately.

- 20.5% of 205 councils assign their Chair and Vice-Chair positions politically proportionately;
- 16.2% of councils with large majorities (19 of 117) assign their Chair and Vice-Chair positions politically proportionately;
- 38.1% of councils under no overall control (8 of 21) assign their Chair and Vice-Chair positions politically proportionately.

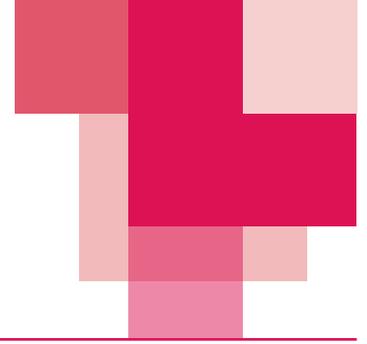
Councils closer to no overall control are marginally more likely to have politically proportionate chairs and vice-chairs. However, there is no statistically significant impact on scrutiny's effectiveness.

Gender⁴

Party control has no impact on the gender of committee chairs. Nationally (according to the 2010 Councillors' Census) around 30% of councillors are female (28% of Conservative councillors and 34% of Labour councillors). Irrespective of controlling party around 28% of chairs or vice-chairs are female, which suggests that the gender of chairs and vice-chairs broadly reflects the gender of the wider councillor cohort.

However, in Labour-controlled authorities, 36.7% of vice-chairs are female, which is above the average for authorities under the control of other parties, or under no overall control.

4 We have included a question on the gender of scrutiny chairs in response to a recommendation from the Centre for Women and Democracy in their report, "Leadership and Diversity in Local Government in England 2010/11, p45



This finding broadly supports the CWD view that scrutiny chairmanship does not provide a career path for women to leadership positions (taking into account the CWD finding that between 11% and 20% of leaders are women). However, in order to be certain about this conclusion, we will need to gather more evidence over time and see, in individual councils, where and how scrutiny chairs take on leadership positions, including whether women vice-chairs progress to become full chairs.

Committee size and number of committees

We tried to assess whether the size of scrutiny committees made a difference to their effectiveness, or whether more effective scrutiny functions had fewer committees – it has been suggested that larger committees, and more committees, can make scrutiny less effective.

There are too few authorities in our cohort with three or more large committees, and which also have systems for monitoring recommendations, to draw any statistically significant conclusions. As such we will look at the extent to which respondents felt that scrutiny was valued and respondents' perceptions of scrutiny's effectiveness.

On both perceptions of effectiveness (figs 6 and 7), and on value (figs 8 and 9) there is no appreciable difference. This suggests that average committee size makes no difference to the effectiveness of scrutiny.

This is interesting because it diverges from our own experience, which suggests that bigger committees can make for more unwieldy scrutiny. Why is it that councils with larger committees appear to be just as effective as those with smaller committees?

How much of a difference do you think scrutiny makes to people's lives

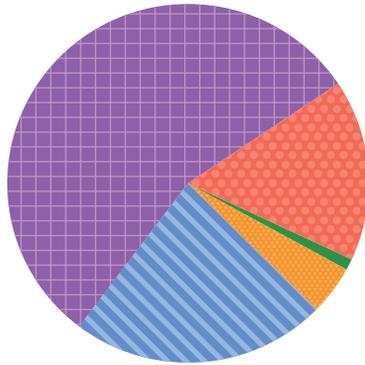


Fig 6: left: Perceptions of effectiveness (whether scrutiny makes a difference to local people's lives) in councils with a smaller average committee size

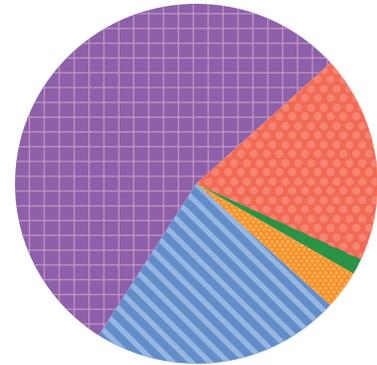


Fig 7: right: Perceptions of effectiveness (whether scrutiny makes a difference to local people's lives) in councils with a larger average committee size

1. None 2. Very little 3. A little 4. A lot 5. A great deal

How much value do you think your authority gives overview and scrutiny?

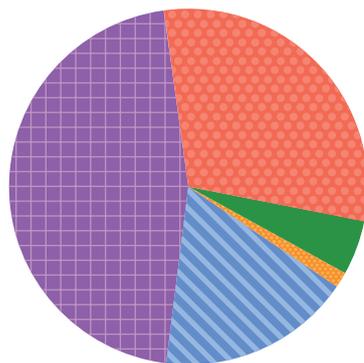


Fig 8: The value placed on scrutiny by authorities with a smaller average committee size

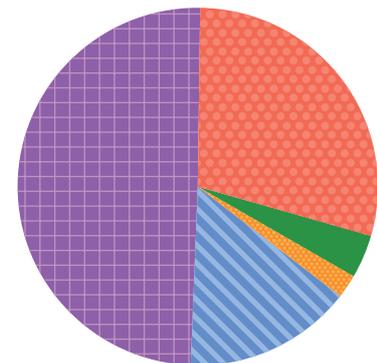
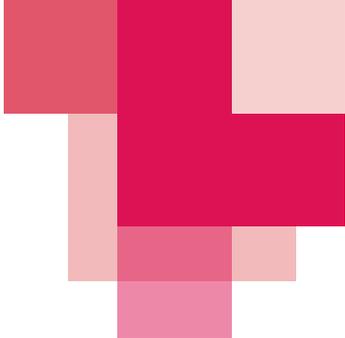


Fig 9: The value placed on scrutiny by authorities with a larger average committee size

1. None 2. Very little 3. A little 4. A lot 5. A great deal



On both perceptions of effectiveness (figs 6 and 7), and on value (figs 8 and 9) there is no appreciable difference. This suggests that average committee size makes no difference to the effectiveness of scrutiny.

This is interesting because it diverges from our own experience, which suggests that bigger committees can make for more unwieldy scrutiny. Why is it that councils with larger committees appear to be just as effective as those with smaller committees?

There are a number of possible explanations for these apparently divergent views.

- Councils with larger committees will also have fewer committees (because the statutory education co-optees, in some authorities, will push up the average disproportionately), and councils with fewer committees will tend to be more effective;
- Councils with more and larger committees will involve more councillors, and will therefore be valued more by a wider range of elected members;
- Councils with larger committees are more effective in some places, and less in others, because of local political circumstances.

We can only test the first one of these possibilities:

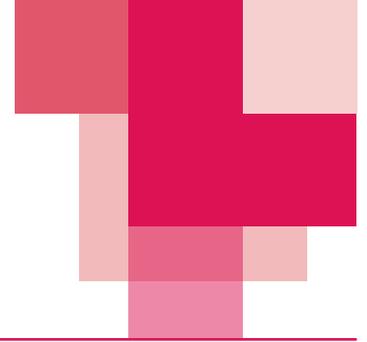
- Councils with larger committees do tend to have fewer committees
- In 30.6% of councils with one committee, committee sizes average between 15 and 19, compared to only 9.6% of all other authorities.
- Councils that operate fewer committees are more effective

This is marginal in terms of value and in terms of perceptions of effectiveness, but there is a much clearer correlation with recommendations being accepted and implemented.

Type of council	% of recommendations accepted	% of accepted recommendations implemented
All councils	83.36%	62.12%
Two committees or fewer	84%	82%
Three or more committees	81%	61%

Fig 10: the percentage of recommendations accepted and implemented in councils with different numbers of scrutiny committees

So there is no correlation between causation between larger committees and effectiveness, but councils with fewer committees do tend to be more effective judged by the number of recommendations being accepted and implemented, and councils with larger average committee sizes are disproportionately represented in this group.



Respondents considered that the scrutiny of partners and partnerships represents a significant opportunity in future, continuing a trend set last year.

Working with partners, and carrying out partnership scrutiny – especially in relation to health, but increasingly in relation to housing – is now the norm rather than an innovation.

While barriers exist to joint working, the overwhelming reason why work of this nature has not been carried out is a failure to identify an opportunity to carry it out; officer resourcing also played a part.

Districts in particular are working hard to engage with partners more effectively.

We asked whether respondents anticipated changes to their scrutiny functions to look at services delivered across partnerships.

Where people said that they did anticipate such changes, they were markedly more positive about the future of scrutiny than where those changes were not anticipated.

Do you think the future for scrutiny is positive or negative?

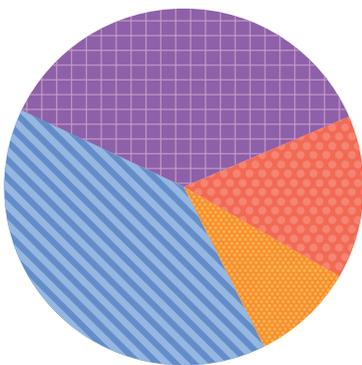


Fig 11: (left) Respondents saying whether the future for scrutiny is positive or negative, when responding “yes” to the question of whether they were considering more scrutiny of partners and partnerships

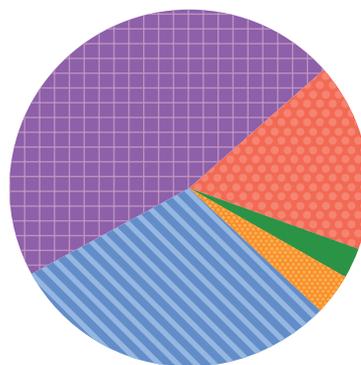
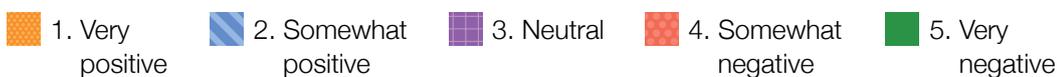


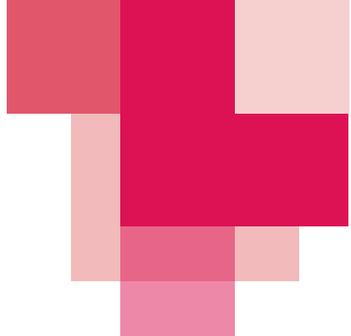
Fig 12: (right) Respondents saying whether the future for scrutiny is positive or negative, when responding “no” to the question of whether they were considering more scrutiny of partners and partnerships



Both last year and this year we asked, “What do you think that scrutiny will look like in ten years’ time?”. In 2011/12 53.7% of respondents suggested that it would be more partnership focused – this year that figure was slightly lower but still the most popular response.

We asked a question about working with others in the local area who have responsibility for accountability, such as Police and Crime Panels, Local HealthWatch, tenant scrutiny and similar bodies.

Most respondents had worked with at least one of these bodies.



Districts

Have you worked with any of the following groups who also have a role in holding other partners to account? (Please tick all that apply)

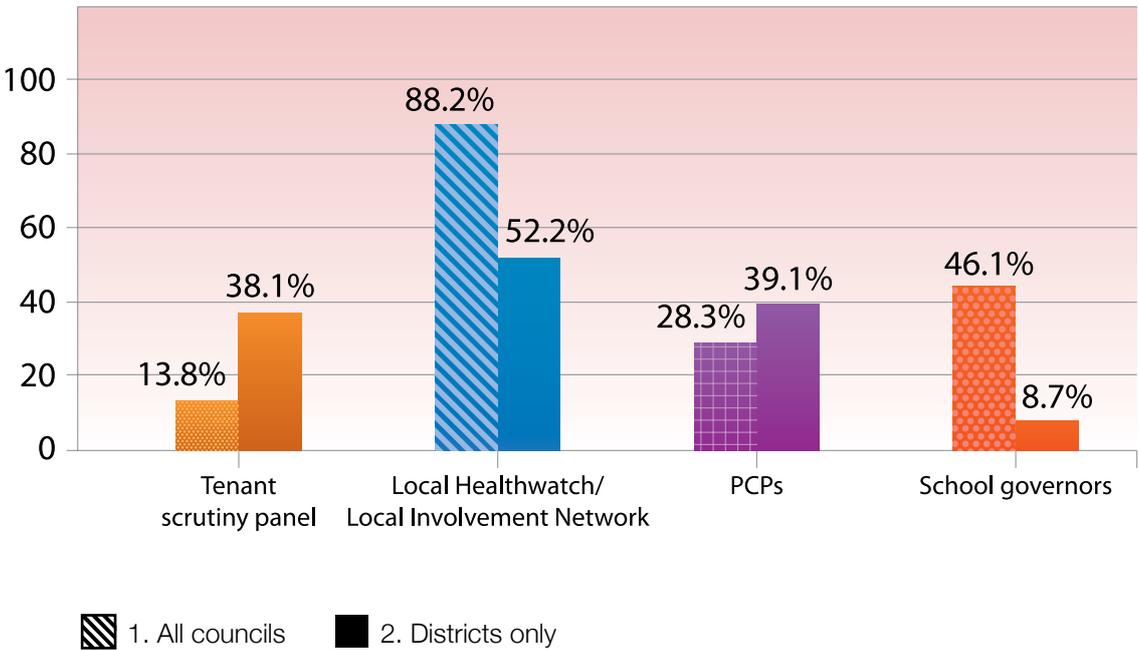


Fig 13: (above) whether councils have worked with other local bodies with a responsibility for accountability (all councils / districts).

Anecdotally we are aware that districts are finding partnership working, and scrutiny of partnerships, a challenge, and that they would appreciate more support in doing so. **While many respondents (50.7%) from districts felt that scrutiny of partnerships and partners represented the future for the function**, there remain barriers and confusion about mutual roles and responsibilities.

Despite this concern, districts have experienced success in engaging with tenant scrutiny (significantly above the average of other authorities, even when counties, which have no housing responsibilities, are excluded) and with local health structures, even though they have no formal powers on health issues.

Lack of resource does not seem to be disproportionately more of a problem for districts than other authorities in engaging with partners.

CfPS and you: services we provide to practitioners

While CfPS services continue to be highly rated by those who use them, a significant percentage of respondents are not regular users of our services.

Most respondents indicated that our work had had “some effect” on their work. 18.7% of respondents said that what we do had had no effect on their work.

CfPS needs to continue to produce work that has practical value to scrutineers, and respondents appreciate the informal advice that we are able to offer over the phone or in person at regional (and other) networking events.

Some of our publications and research were perceived as being esoteric, despite the relevance of their subject matter.

Local resourcing was highlighted as a barrier in being able to effectively tap into and use some of the resource that CfPS provides.

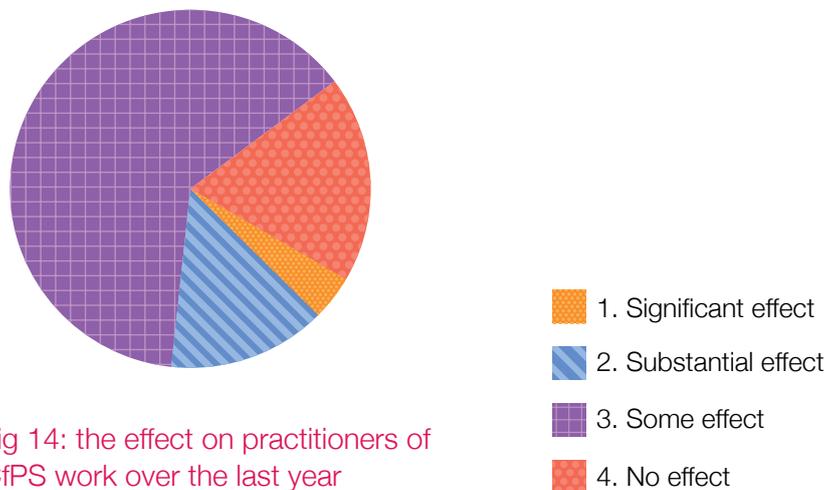
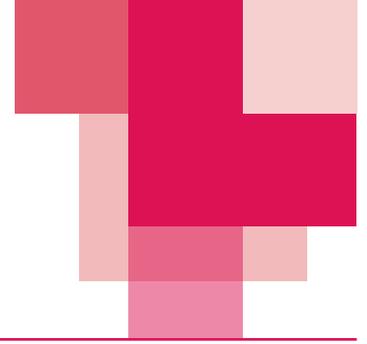


Fig 14: the effect on practitioners of CfPS work over the last year



For the first time this year we asked a general question about what effect the work we do has on respondents in the last year. 81.3% of respondents stated that our work had had some to substantial impact

We asked people to explain how our work had helped them in the last year – we also asked if there was anything that we could do differently. There were several themes coming out of these text responses.

- Our work around health scrutiny, our guidance on Police and Crime Panels, our Policy Briefings and our “Pulling it together” guide to legislation were all cited as particular strengths which had had significant impact at local level;
- Respondents appreciated the support that CfPS was able to provide in person and over the phone, and the support offered by CfPS’s Expert Advisers. People were particularly keen to see us being more active in regional networking, and using regional networks to deliver training;
- There was a concern that some of our publications can be too prone to use jargon and are not always as focused as they might be on the experiences and needs of practitioners on the ground – particularly given practitioners’ straitened financial circumstances. People were keen to see shorter, snappier pieces of research which focused on “scrutiny fundamentals”;
- Some respondents felt that we could do more to support districts.

We also asked which of our services people had used in the last year. All our services were highly rated, broadly reflecting last year’s satisfaction levels.

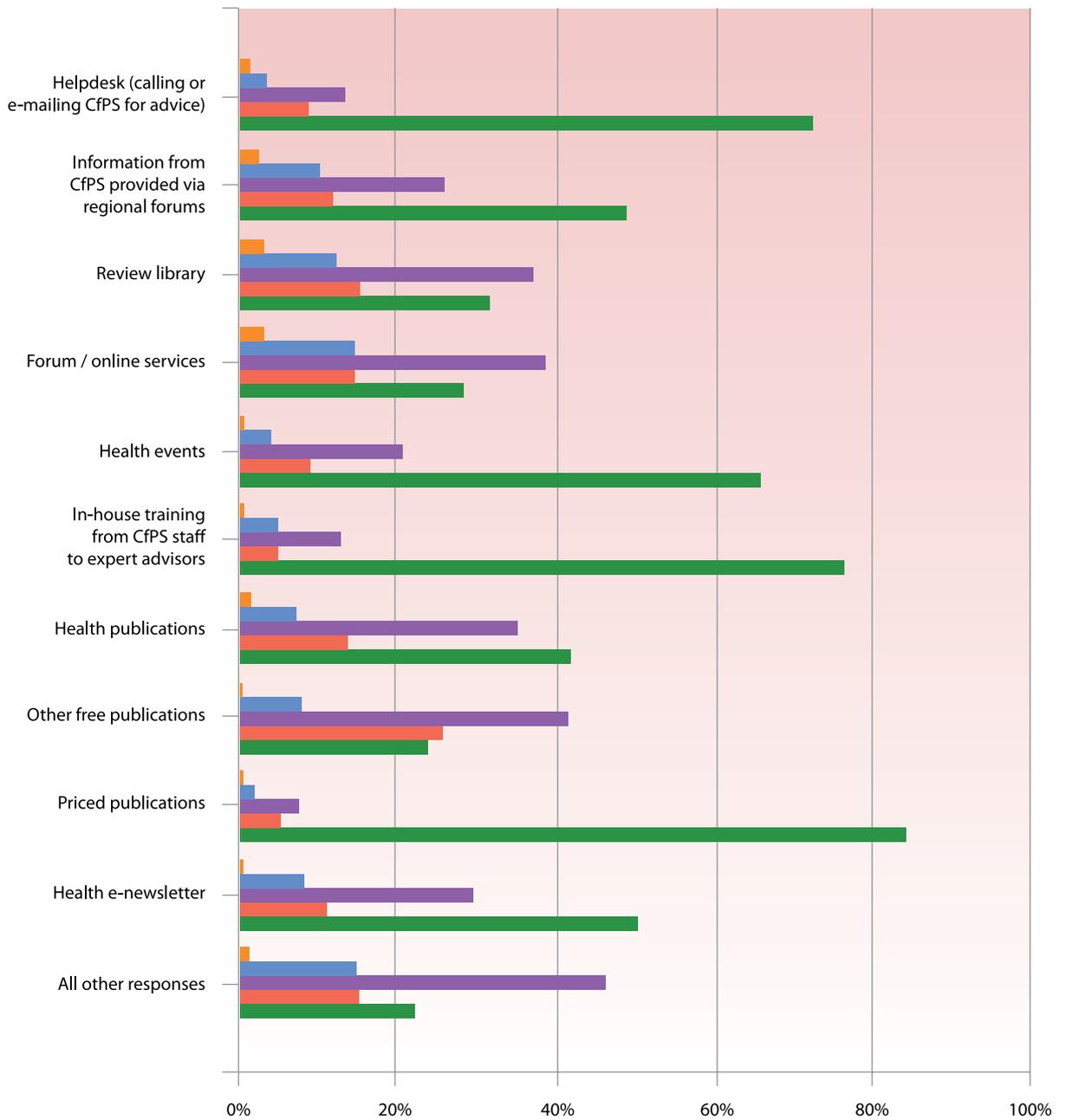
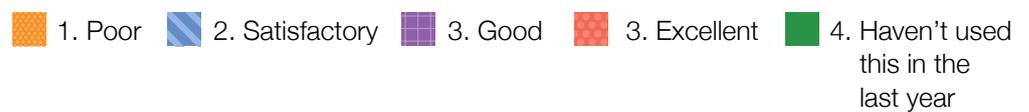
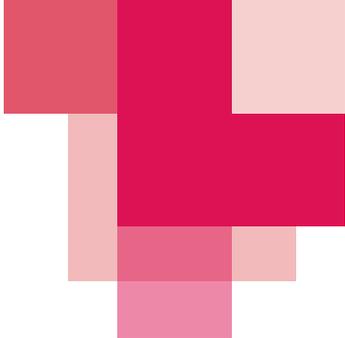


Fig 15: rating of CfPS services that respondents had used in the last year





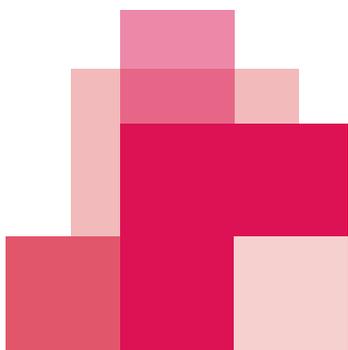
As in previous years, large numbers of people had not used a number of our services, in part reflecting councils' different responsibilities, for example the health e-newsletter and health events are targeted at councils with formal health scrutiny powers, excluding districts. However, only a small proportion of respondents (fewer than 5%) had not used any of our services.

As last year, our Policy Briefings were the highest rated of all our publications, although with 35% of people saying that they were "very useful", there has been a drop-off from last year's figure of 44%. There has been a significant volume of work done on our website during the last year to improve usability and functionality; we think that the relatively high numbers of "poor" ratings for the two main on-line services, the forum and library (while still low overall) are related to difficulties experienced while this work was being done. We would hope to see these figures improve next year as a result of the improvements.

What are we planning to do?

We always use the findings from our Annual Survey to inform the work we do. For the rest of 2013/14, we plan to:

- Explore in more depth in partnership with the National Overview and Scrutiny Forum, the finding relating to the lack of formal tracking and monitoring of scrutiny recommendations;
- Develop, over the summer (and in partnership with the National Overview and Scrutiny Forum) a series of short practice guides for scrutineers, providing advice on basic scrutiny issues and using them to signpost to more detailed studies we have carried out of various issues;
- Amending our Policy Briefings to be even shorter, focused on topics requested by the National Overview and Scrutiny Forum and to use more examples of good scrutiny carried out by local authorities;
- Explore with our Regional Advocates and with the National Overview and Scrutiny Forum how the nature and level of support we provide to practitioners in regional networks can be enhanced;
- Continue to make the case for the role of scrutiny in the face of cuts in resources that are making it increasingly difficult for practitioners to carry out their functions effectively - and to demonstrate how effective scrutiny can add value to the work of executives seeking to find solutions to challenges;



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