

Welsh Assembly Government

Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members

Final Report



Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members

Prepared by:

**CRG Research Ltd
25 Cathedral Road
CARDIFF
CF11 9TZ**

**Tel: 029 20 343218
Fax: 029 20 667328
www.crgresearch.co.uk**

Prepared for:

**Frank Cuthbert
Head of Local Government Democracy
Team
Welsh Assembly Government
Cathays Park
CARDIFF
CF10 3NQ**

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
Executive Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
2. Decision Making	11
3. Overview and Scrutiny	19
4. Ward Representation	48
5. Partnership Working and Community Leadership	60
6. Underpinning Processes	74
7. Issues for the Future	96
References	100
Appendix I - Topic Guide 1: Elected Members	109
Appendix II - Topic Guide 2: Council Officers	114
Appendix III - Topic Guide 3: Local Stakeholders	120
Appendix IV - Topic Guide 4: National Stakeholders	125
Appendix V - Overview of WLGA Charter	129

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CRG Research Ltd, the Centre for Local and Regional Government Research, and the Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV), University of Birmingham and the Welsh Assembly Government would like to thank the eight authorities that took part in the case study element of the research:

Cardiff Council

City and County of Swansea

Ceredigion County Council

Monmouthshire County Council

Denbighshire County Council

Gwynedd County Council

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Sincere thanks are also extended to the twelve local authorities listed below that participated in a programme of telephone interviews and supplied documentary evidence:

Bridgend County Borough Council

Vale of Glamorgan Council

Caerphilly County Borough Council

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

Torfaen County Borough Council

Powys County Council

Pembrokeshire County Council

Carmarthenshire County Council

Isle of Anglesey County Council

Conwy County Council

Flintshire County Council

Wrexham County Borough Council

We are also grateful to the very many stakeholders who participated in a large programme of national and local stakeholder interviews including private businesses, national political parties, emergency services, the inspectorates, the voluntary sector, and many more.

Special thanks should also be extended to the Steering Group who supported this work which included representatives from the Welsh Assembly Government, Welsh Local Government Association and Torfaen County Borough Council.

The research team included:

Andrew Rix

Richard Gaunt

Faye Joshua

Katy Skidmore

Iwan Williams

Mark Beynon

Professor Steve Martin

Dr Rachel Ashworth

Dr James Downe

Dr Paul Williams

Dr Colin Copus

Executive Summary

- i The purpose of this report is to:
- provide Assembly Ministers and officials with a view of the effectiveness and efficiency of councillors in conducting their functions within the modern political structures introduced by the Local Government Act 2000
 - suggest any improvements which might be considered for the operation of scrutiny functions in local government
 - make proposals about the appropriate numbers of councillors within the county and county borough councils.
- ii The findings here are drawn from an extensive programme of qualitative research which took place between September and November 2006 which included in depth interviews with national and regional stakeholders, a series of interviews with councillors, officers and local stakeholders to collect data from 20 Welsh local authorities and case study visits to a sample of 8 local authorities. A thorough literature review was conducted, including examining documentary evidence provided by councils and local government stakeholders. Emerging themes and key issues were explored in more detail during regional workshops in December 2006. The report is structured to consider:
- Decision Making
 - Overview and Scrutiny
 - Ward Representation
 - Partnership Working and Community Leadership
 - Underpinning Processes
 - Issues for the Future.
- iii The report recognises that there is already substantial ongoing activity to support and develop local government in Wales, not least provided by 'National Partners' who include the Assembly itself, WLGA, WAO and the various professional groups. Care has been taken to build on these activities rather than seek to duplicate them.
- iv The report includes conclusions and recommendations within each section. Recommendations are made in relation to specific stakeholder groups e.g. the Assembly, Councils, WLGA but this should not be seen as precluding joint responsibility within the 'National Partnership'.

Decision Making

- v The report points out that the last decade has seen a very strong emphasis by local government, central government and the inspectorates on the importance of effective 'corporate' and 'strategic' leadership of local councils. The separation of executive and scrutiny roles as a result of the Local Government Act 2000 was designed to make a clear distinction between the roles of political leadership (by executive members) and holding the leadership to account (overview and scrutiny).
- vi Most councils have made great efforts to encourage and enable all elected members to engage with the current political structure, but the report notes the tension that exists between executive and non-executive components. The post-2000 political structures have streamlined decision making. Decisions are seen as having become quicker and in that sense 'more effective' or efficient. Large numbers of non-executive members complained however that they had been, in effect, 'disenfranchised', 'disengaged' and 'excluded' and, therefore, decision making was seen as being less 'democratic'.
- vii The report concludes:
- there has been a strong focus on the importance of effective corporate and strategic leadership in the last decade
 - effective decision making needs to be transparent and supported by effective overview and scrutiny processes
 - post-2000 political structures have streamlined decision making, although some non-executive members believe decisions to be less democratic than before
 - enabling non-executive members to attend executive meetings was welcomed as transparent and fair
 - full council meetings are now seen as less influential to council business
 - statutory committees for the most part continue to work well and are valued by councillors.
- viii The report recommends:
- all local authorities should follow good practice and produce a forward plan which provides an indication of forthcoming decisions and policies. The forward plan should be published at an early stage in order to allow overview and scrutiny committees to incorporate decisions into its work programme
 - councils should consider how to ensure that full council meetings play a positive role in enabling public accountability and policy oversight

- councils need to keep up the high standards of training associated with statutory committees. The Assembly Government should consider making this training compulsory for all members sitting on those committees.

Overview and Scrutiny

- ix Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 requires a local authority's executive arrangements to include provision for one or more internal overview and scrutiny committees to ensure the effective stewardship by the executive and to assist in developing the council's policy.
- x Our interviews, case studies and workshops produce a picture of the operation and effectiveness of overview and scrutiny in Wales which echoes the results of previous research on this issue both here and in other parts of the UK. It is clear that scrutiny is failing to achieve its full potential. There has been plenty of time since 2000 for new council constitutions to 'bed down' and there is no shortage of advice on good practice in overview and scrutiny. Simply 'soldiering on' in the hope that it will all come right in the end is not therefore a credible strategy.
- xi The report concludes:
- a large number of councillors reported that they felt disengaged from and disillusioned with the overview and scrutiny role
 - there is appreciable 'work in progress' within individual councils (and through work with national partners) but so far very few councillors or officers could point us to convincing examples of effective scrutiny in their own councils or of external organisations
 - examples of innovation are starting to emerge but at present there is too much reliance on committee style meetings
 - much overview and scrutiny is seen as being officer led; few councillors believe that it provides an effective set of checks and balances or offers a means of securing greater public awareness or accountability
 - the perceived underperformance of scrutiny more than anything else is responsible for the view among many non-executive councillors that they no longer have a significant role to play within governance of their council
 - the role of scrutiny committee chairs and vice-chairs is important in influencing the way overview and scrutiny operates. Party political allegiance is much less important than the skills, outlook, commitment and clout to provide powerful leadership
 - members of overview and scrutiny committees themselves also need further training and development opportunities. At present there is too much reliance on knowledge based training and too little emphasis on developing key skills

- most councillors have been too slow to learn from other councils - in Wales, in other parts of the UK and further afield
- the policy agenda has moved on over the last two years and there are now a number of other important issues that local authorities and others must address. For instance:
 - the role of scrutiny is particularly important in the Welsh context because of the Assembly led commitment to a 'citizen-centred model'. The perceived inability of non-executive councillors to hold executives to account means that they are not in a position to ensure that authorities are meeting local needs
 - Little effective scrutiny of external agencies, so far, means that councillors can not at present reliably promote the wider well being of the communities that they are elected to represent.
 - if these deficiencies are allowed to persist they could undermine both the citizen-centred model and the collaborative agenda, set out in the 'Making the Connections' strategy and powerfully endorsed by the Beecham Review. Authorities need rapidly to develop greater collaborative capacity, taking joint responsibility for local outcomes with other organisations (in particular the other members of Local Service Boards) and will need to become much more effective at holding other agencies to account.

xii The report directs recommendations at local councils and national partners:

Local Councils

- it is important to note the work already in hand to improve the ways in which overview and scrutiny operate. Nevertheless our findings point to the need for a clear 'step-change' in arrangement for these important functions
- overview and scrutiny should be given parity of esteem with executive functions. Executive members need to value the input of scrutiny. Non-executive members must make the overview and scrutiny role their own and seize the opportunities that it offers, rather than seeking to 'score points'
- most Councils have made a start in structuring overview and scrutiny topics, but each council needs to have clear scrutiny plans and processes which provide:
 - a strategic framework driven by key national and local policy priorities – including services which are under performing or are identified as being at risk in WPI assessments
 - published work programmes well in advance
 - a mechanism for developing, circulating and consulting on scrutiny programmes widely (to user groups, local communities and other local agencies) with an invitation to comment on and submit evidence

- consideration of the executive's forward plan and issues raised by the Wales Audit Office and other regulators in their risk assessments, inspection reports and improvement plans/programmes
 - greater use of outside experts – as advisers, witnesses and as members of scrutiny teams – who can assist in developing the scope, terms of reference and methods of enquiry for scrutiny reviews
 - clear procedures for joint or external scrutiny
 - clear processes for call-ins
 - arrangements for involving outside experts and other stakeholders in scrutiny.
- the Assembly should review the guidance in relation to the appointment of scrutiny chairs
 - every council should have a senior officer who acts as the corporate Scrutiny Champion, who is free from direct service responsibility and does not therefore have a conflict of interest or loyalty. A clear plan for allocating dedicated senior officer support to overview and scrutiny will be needed
 - the appointment of scrutiny committee chairs and vice-chairs should be on merit. They should be provided with high quality expert advice and administrative support, and should be entitled to allowances that are on a par with those of executive members
 - authorities should establish plans for joint scrutiny with neighbouring authorities particularly in relation to issues and services which transcend local authority boundaries (for example waste management, out of area placements and workforce planning)

National Partners

- the Assembly Government should consider how to build up a cadre of officers to support scrutiny across the whole Welsh public service, perhaps by establishing a 'School for Scrutiny' with inputs from Public Service Management Wales (PSMW), National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (NLI AH), the WLGA, WAO, Solace and others. In parallel, consideration should be given to how best to develop a clear rewarding career path for scrutiny support officers and committee clerks across Wales
- national partners should continue to provide advice and support to authorities in developing effective scrutiny, linked to risk assessments
- scrutiny will increasingly need to embrace issues that cut across traditional organisational or geographical boundaries, budgets and responsibilities. National partners should develop guidance and good practice support for scrutinising the policies and performance of other local agencies and of Local Service Boards
- councils need to develop clear protocols outlining the scope of scrutiny for collaborative arrangements and other agencies, and clarify the expectations of

partners Other local service providers must engage constructively and willingly with overview and scrutiny committees. We believe that central prescription or legislation is not the best means of securing the involvement of other agencies, but the Assembly Government should reserve this option as a fall-back position if other agencies do not co-operate wholeheartedly with scrutiny committees

- the national partners should again review training and support for scrutiny and overview to meet future demands. Activities must add value to the support and development offered by other organisations (building on current partnerships with the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)) and learn from experience in Scotland and England
- national partners should continue and expand work with a small number of pilot projects to develop and implement innovative and challenging forms of scrutiny. Pilots should be designed to provide learning for councillors and scrutiny officers across Wales. These could include examples of:
 - scrutiny of large 'strategic' issues involving a number of local agencies
 - joint or cross-authority scrutiny of issues that are high on the national and local policy agenda
 - scrutiny of the performance of external agencies
 - learning from innovative alternatives to 'committee-style' approaches.
- the pilots should be given modest additional funding to procure external advice and support. This might include for example mentoring, facilitation, visits, evaluation, and examination of the effective operation of local scrutiny internationally

Political Parties

- political parties should raise the profile of overview and scrutiny, and equip their members to fulfil these roles through briefings and training.

Ward Representation

- xiii Recent policies have tended to emphasise the importance of leadership and scrutiny roles. But most councillors and officers continue to see the traditional role of ward representation as being of fundamental importance.
- xiv The report notes that there is a unanimous belief that councillors play an important role in representing the communities that elect them. There is widespread agreement that most members perform effectively in this role and find it rewarding. Their electoral mandate gives them a unique source of legitimacy.

xv Previous research confirms that the role of ward representation is not straightforward and has become more complex as communities have become increasingly mobile and more diverse.

xvi The report concludes:

- changes in society, rising public expectations and an increased emphasis on direct forms of participation mean that this role has become more demanding, more complex and contested in recent years
- councillors devote a large amount of time to the role and most are seen as doing a good job. This good work is not widely recognised or appreciated by local communities or the local press
- there is a widespread feeling at national level that members could be more pro-active and play a much greater role in empowering and equipping local people to take a greater role in designing and monitoring services
- many members are increasingly recognising the importance of taking strategic decisions which are in the best interest of the area as a whole but may not be welcomed by their own ward. There can, however, inevitably be considerable tensions
- views about the relative merits of single-member and multi-member wards are divided – at both local and national level
- there is some support for devolving small budgets to local areas but little evidence that this has been successful in practice.

xvii The actions proposed in 'Widening Participation' are broadly supported by our findings. In relation to ward representation, the report recommends:

- in particular, national partners should promote guidance on the ward representation role which informs the public and inspires local councillors to become more pro-active and imaginative in how they work with, represent and empower local people
- in tandem with the launch of the guide, the national partners should launch a media campaign to raise awareness of the valuable roles performed by councillors in Wales, highlighting achievements, the levels of commitment and hard work of councillors and the value added by local councillors in their ward roles
- in order to recognise and celebrate the valuable work done by ward councillors, the WLGA and Welsh Assembly Government should launch an annual award and ceremony to recognise outstanding achievement. The categories might mirror those of the Excellence Wales scheme – for example 'ward councillor of the year'. The scheme and the presentation should be designed to attract maximum positive publicity – at local and national level

- political parties should provide prospective councillors with a clear understanding of the ward role and the time commitment involved
- individual councils should review the training and support that they provide to new councillors to ensure that it equips them to perform their ward representation role and to manage the tensions and challenges which this entails
- councils that do not already do so should review the benefits and potential costs of providing small local area budgets for use by communities and local councillors to address specific ward level issues.

Partnership Working and Community Leadership

- xviii In addition to the executive, scrutiny and ward representation roles, many councillors have roles on outside bodies, including a wide range and a growing number of partnerships - as well as Police, Fire and National Park Authorities, Local Health Boards (LHBs), and local bodies such as school governing bodies and the management committees of local voluntary and community organisations.
- xix Their roles and functions vary as do the composition of these bodies and the means of selection and appointment. In some cases, councillors are in effect delegates, selected by their authority. Examples include Police, Fire and Rescue, and National Park Authorities. In others, councillors operate in an individual capacity and are selected by an organisation because of the personal interest, skills or the public standing that they bring.
- xx The report found widespread recognition from members, officers and local stakeholders of the growing importance of partnership working and community strategies. One interviewee described partnership as the 'only show in town', another as 'the order of the day in local government'.
- xxi The report concludes:
- local councillors are, in many cases, the 'backbone' of external Partnerships, Boards, Agencies and Authorities. The capacities in which they serve on these bodies and the levels of training and support which they receive as a consequence of membership, vary but are on the whole good
 - partnership working is accepted as being good in principle but elected members are acutely aware of and concerned about the need for clear accountability and good governance
 - the time required for fulfilling 'external representation' requirements should not be underestimated: meetings, preparation and other tasks can take up a significant proportion of a councillor's overall workload and there is concern about 'partnership overload'

- the community leadership role is currently seen as needing further development in many areas. It is recognised that community leadership, while not new, is an evolving concept
- there are some concerns about the decline in discretion available and the consequent impact on local leadership
- there is concern from local authorities and LHBs that the current composition of LHBs does not sit easily with the need for joint working between health and social services.

xxii The report recommends:

- councillors who represent their local authorities on partnerships and other bodies need to be suitably trained and supported
- the national partners should review training and support for members who have these roles to ensure that it meets the challenges posed by the collaborative agenda
- individual authorities should consider the skills and knowledge they will insist on within those representing their interests
- there is scope for experimentation on devolving budgets to partnerships. The Assembly may wish to communicate information on opportunities which can be taken
- authorities should develop strategies for the scrutiny of local and area partnerships and boards
- the Assembly Government needs to examine whether the current composition of LHBs is the most appropriate for effective future joint working between health and local authorities.

Numbers of Councillors, Recruitment, Training and Support

xxiii The report notes that there are considerable variations in the ratio of population to elected members in Wales at present, but that compared with other EU countries Wales has a relatively high ratio. It also notes that research suggests that there is not necessarily a link between the size of councils and their performance.

xxiv The report identifies a number of barriers to people putting themselves forward as local candidates and a range of needs for member support and development once they have been elected.

Recruitment, Retention, Training and Development

xxv The report concludes:

- it is important to note the work already taking place within individual local authorities and through initiatives like the WLGA Charter and 'Widening Participation' but patterns of recruitment, retention, training and development in Wales remain problematic
- negative perceptions of councils and councillors can deter potential recruits; better communication could change this
- there is concern that members do not reflect the local community in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status
- requirements on councillors should be made clearer; the role is often not what new members expected, and is unclear to potential recruits
- the role of a councillor is very demanding and is seen as receiving little recompense or recognition
- there is considerable variation in the types and levels of member training and development provided
- members' views on training varied dramatically between and within local authorities
- training and development tends to be generic and focused on 'hard' technical skills, not the 'soft' skills widely seen as essential
- 'learning on the job' is widely seen as the best development tool
- under post-2000 structures it is possible for talented councillors to progress to leadership positions quickly
- attendance at internal training is often poor
- awareness of, and participation in external training provision also varies considerably, but is favoured for the opportunity to network with other members
- the level of member support has increased and is widely valued
- some elements of the WLGA Members Development Charter are seen as a useful development but the Charter has yet to make a significant impact at local level
- allowances were seen as "about right" by most interviewees, although some argued for larger allowances for leaders, deputy leaders and other executive members in order to attract the brightest and the best. The recent Remuneration Review is in line with most expectations.

Numbers of Councillors

xxvi There was a range of views about the appropriate number of councillors in Wales. Overall, the report concludes:

- the case for reducing the number of councillors in Wales across the board is inconclusive
- there is a fairly widely held view that numbers could be reduced in some areas, but that these issues need to be considered authority by authority: an approach based on standard ratios would be inappropriate
- many interviewees argued that this was not the most pressing issue or the key determinant of council performance or levels of democratic engagement. They argued that organisational and political culture and the commitment and capacity of councillors (and officers) are much more important considerations.

xxvii Whilst acknowledging the important aspirations of the WLGA Charter and 'Widening Participation'; the report recommends:

- councillors themselves need to take some responsibility for identifying and accessing the training and development they need to become more effective. Every councillor should develop a personal development plan customised to their own roles, the skills that they need to develop, and their preferred learning styles
- local authorities should support councillors in developing and implementing their personal development plans, assisting them in assessing their needs and procuring the development and training that they need, and providing a personal training budget for the training and development agreed in their personal development plans
- in-house training must be provided at times that are as convenient as possible for all councillors including evenings and weekends; officers who provide formal training to councillors must be properly trained and skilled to undertake this important role
- all authorities should put in place mentoring and buddying schemes and assist members in participating in these. Newly elected councillors may need more intensive support and mentoring, but experienced councillors can also benefit from peer support.
- authorities should actively explore the potential for joint mentoring and other support with neighbouring authorities and/or councils in other parts of the UK and make greater use of opportunities for formal peer review and coaching provided by the IDeA and others
- political parties should provide more frequent, structured opportunities for councillors from different authorities to meet for mutual support and exchanging experiences and insights
- individual local authorities and the national partners should review the support available in other parts of the UK and consider how to tap into this in ways which adds value to the Welsh context

- all local authorities should consider systematic appraisal and review, along the lines of the WLGA Members Charter, for councillors implementing their development plans and meeting identified development needs
- individual authorities and the WLGA should actively promote and publicise the valuable contribution made by councillors, as set out in the WLGA Charter
- it is too early to judge the success and what can be learned from the WLGA Member Charter and 'Widening Participation'. Careful monitoring and systematic evaluation are appropriate and should be implemented by the National partners.

Issues for the Future

xxviii Overall the report concludes that local government in Wales faces a number of challenges, including a new service delivery agenda and the continued need for community leadership. The report's recommendations are aimed at supporting councils and councillors in meeting these challenges.

1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 This report sets out the key findings from an extensive programme of qualitative research carried out on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government to review the role and functions of elected members in local authorities in Wales. The research was led by CRG Research, with support from researchers at the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University and the Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham University.
- 1.2 The next round of electoral reviews – by which the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales proposes allocations of councillors to electoral divisions within counties according to a ratio formula included within Directions issued by the Assembly – is due to commence in 2008. The exercise of preparing draft Directions, for the Assembly’s approval and issue to the Commission, will require the Welsh Assembly Government to take a view on the broad numbers of elected members it would be appropriate for Welsh local authorities to have. That in turn will depend on an assessment of the roles and functions elected members play now, and what those roles and functions might be in the future. This report is designed to provide evidence to inform this assessment based on analysis of previous research and data collected from in-depth, structured interviews with a wide range of stakeholders at both local and national levels, including in particular, councillors.
- 1.3 Current electoral arrangements in Welsh local authorities were established by the last round of reviews, which proceeded on the basis of Directions issued in 1995. These pre-dated the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, which has resulted in a major change in political structures involving the abolition of the traditional committee system and formal separation of executive and scrutiny roles. As a result of this legislative change, 19 Welsh councils now operate a leader and cabinet model, with the remaining three operating the “Fourth Option” which consists of a non-executive board. It is therefore important to determine what size of council is required for these post-2000 arrangements to work effectively.
- 1.4 It was intended that scrutiny processes would play a key role under the post-2000 arrangements. The Local Government Act 2000 required that authorities operate scrutiny committees to review or scrutinise:

- executive decisions
- council decisions, and
- matters affecting the council's area which are not council functions.

1.5 These new arrangements have had a chance to 'bed down' and the time is now right to review how well they are operating and how they might be built upon to enhance both the effectiveness of local governance and the quality and responsiveness of local public services. The study was therefore charged with:

- Providing Assembly Ministers and officials with a view of the effectiveness and efficiency of councillors in conducting their functions within the modern political structures introduced by the Local Government Act 2000.
- Suggesting improvements which might be considered for the operation of scrutiny functions in local government.
- Making proposals about the appropriate numbers of councillors within the County and county borough councils.

Overview of Local Authorities in Wales

1.6 The tables below provide an overview of the structure of each local authority in Wales as at January 2007.

Table 1: Political Representation

Local Authority	Controlling Group	Lab	PC	Con	Lib Dem	Ind	Other	Total Seats	Member – Electorate Ratio
Blaenau Gwent	Labour	31	0	0	3	0	8	42	1,259
Bridgend	Coalition (Lib Dem Leader)	22	1	8	13	4	6	54	1,943
Caerphilly	Labour	39	26	0	0	1	7	73	1,777
Cardiff	NOC (Lib Dem Leader)	27	3	12	33	0	0	75	3,255
Carmarthenshire	Coalition (Independent Leader)	25	16	1	0	32	0	74	1,790
Ceredigion	Coalition (Independent Leader)	1	16	0	9	16	0	42	1,299
Conwy	Coalition (Independent Leader)	12	9	12	6	0	19	59	1,501
Denbighshire	Coalition (Independent Leader)	8	7	7	2	14	23	47	1,521
Flintshire	Labour	37	1	4	10	12	4	70	1,608
Gwynedd	Plaid Cymru	10	41	0	7	7	5	75	1,158
Merthyr Tydfil	Labour	17	0	0	0	7	9	33	1,292
Monmouthshire	Conservative	9	2	24	3	3	2	43	1,614
Neath Port Talbot	Labour	36	10	0	2	0	12	64	1,715
Newport	Labour	31	1	11	6	40	1	50	2,001
Pembrokeshire	Independent	12	5	0	3	53	0	60	1,537
Powys	Independent	4	0	0	16	3	0	73	1,415
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Labour	57	13	0	2	0	0	75	2,234
Swansea	Coalition (Lib Dem Leader)	32	5	4	19	0	12	72	2,526
Torfaen	Labour	34	0	1	2	3	7	44	1,576
Vale of Glamorgan	Coalition (Labour Leader)	16	8	20	0	17	0	47	1,938
Wrexham	NOC (Liberal Democrat Leader)	19	0	4	15	5	9	52	1,825
Ynys Mon	Mon Ymlaen Coalition (Independent Leader)	1	8	2	1	0	0	40	1,256

Table 2: Council Structures and Statistics

Local Authority	% Councillor turnover in 2004	% Turnout in 2004	No. of multi-member wards	No. of Town/Community Councils	No. on executive /board /cabinet	Do they have a Mayor/Chairman?
Blaenau Gwent	19%	46	16 out of 16	4	9	Mayor
Bridgend	70%	53	11 out of 39	20	6	Mayor
Caerphilly	32%	40	25 out of 33	16	9	Mayor
Cardiff	no data available	38	24 out of 29	5	7	Mayor
Carmarthenshire	32%	47	15 out of 58	72	10	Chairman
Ceredigion	33%	53	2 out of 40	51	8	Chairman
Conwy	45%	42	16 out of 38	33	10	Chairman
Denbighshire	53%	45	14 out of 47	37	10	Chairman
Flintshire	45%	40	13 out of 57	34	9	Chairman
Gwynedd	20%	42	4 out of 63	76	15	Chairman
Merthyr Tydfil	50%	40	11 out of 14	1	9	Mayor
Monmouthshire	50%	49	1 out of 42	33	8	Chairman
Neath Port Talbot	30%	43	15 out of 42	19	10	Mayor
Newport	no data available	37	18 out of 20	14	10	Mayor
Pembrokeshire	40%	52	none	81	9	Chairman
Powys	16%	48	none	111	15	Chairman
Rhondda Cynon Taff	52%	46	21 out of 52	12	10	Major
Swansea	no data available	38	7 out of 25	23	10	Mayor
Torfaen	20%	40	12 out of 24	6	10	Mayor
Vale of Glamorgan	no data available	44	no data available	26	10	Mayor
Wrexham	33%	39	6 out of 47	34	10	Mayor
Ynys Mon	20%	51	none	40	10	Chairman

Table 3: Member Support Structures

Local Authority	No. of Member Support Officers	No. of Dedicated ¹ Scrutiny Staff	No. of Overview & Scrutiny Committees	Is there a coordinating Overview & Scrutiny Committee?	Are there sub-groups/advisory groups/area committees?
Blaenau Gwent	1	6	5	no	5 subcommittees, 10 community boards
Bridgend	5 (but 2 devoted)	5	5	no	no
Caerphilly	7 in general (0 devoted in practice)	3	5	yes	no
Cardiff	14 different degrees of involvement)	12	5	no	no
Carmarthenshire	7	1 FT, 1 PT	7	no	6 area panels
Ceredigion	0	0	7	yes	no
Conwy	3	2	6	yes	no
Denbighshire	7	2	4	no	no
Flintshire	4	5	6	yes	no
Gwynedd	3	2	5	yes	3 area committees
Merthyr Tydfil	7 (supporting only the executive)	7	7	yes	no
Monmouthshire	3	7	4	yes	4 area committees
Neath Port Talbot	6	0	5	no	no
Newport	4	0	8	yes	neighbourhood meetings
Pembrokeshire	no dedicated - 2 secretarial posts	1.5	4	no	Town and Community Councils group
Powys	2	1,5	6	yes	3 area committees
Rhondda Cynon Taff	6	2	5	yes	7 area committees
Swansea	3	2	8	no	no
Torfaen	6	6	5	yes	no
Vale of Glamorgan	14-15	5 or 6	4	no data available	no data available
Wrexham	between 4 (dedicated) and 10	3	5	yes	no
Ynys Mon	2	1	3	yes	no

¹ Dedicated means engaged solely on scrutiny support with no service delivery role.

1.7 Table 1 shows:

- **Over half of cabinets are single party controlled**
- **Rural authorities are largely controlled by Independent leaders:** as well as a small number of urban areas
- **The ratio of councillor to population varies widely across Wales:** the total number of members per authority ranges from 33 (Merthyr Tydfil) to 75 (Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taff). The lowest ratio is one councillor per 1,256 constituents to each member (Ynys Mon), and the highest is 3,255 (Cardiff).

1.8 Table 2 shows:

- **There were wide variations in the level of turnover of members in 2004:** ranging from 16 per cent in Powys to 76 per cent in Blaenau Gwent
- **The majority of councils operate some multi-member wards**
- **Whilst town and community councils operate across Wales, the numbers vary widely -** from 1 (Merthyr Tydfil) to 111 (Powys).
- **Most councils have appointed close to the maximum number of members to their cabinet or board i.e.** 10 members or 20 per cent of the council membership.

1.9 Table 3 shows:

- **Councils have put in place a wide range of overview and scrutiny arrangements:** and have established between three and eight scrutiny committees covering diverse topics and themes
- **There are large variations in levels of support given to scrutiny:**
 - 19 councils have dedicated scrutiny support
 - on average, councils have three scrutiny support officers
 - support varies from no officers dedicated to scrutiny to 15 dedicated professional officers including a chief officer
 - 12 councils have exclusive teams dedicated to scrutiny and research support
 - 7 councils have scrutiny support that is linked to other responsibilities.
- **Half of councils have established a coordinating or principal overview and scrutiny committee:** including councils that operate the fourth option
- **Some authorities make use of advisory, sub-groups and area committees** although comparing these is difficult because of the complexity of structures and different uses of terminology.

Table 4: Age and Gender Breakdown of Councillors in Wales

	Male	Female	Gender not given	TOTAL
Under 25	1			1
25 - 34	18	2		20
35 - 44	50	8		58
45 - 54	112	39		151
55 - 64	271	77	1	349
65 - 69	113	30		143
70+	122	35	1	158
Age not given	6	11	5	22
TOTAL	693	202	7	902

(WLGA, 2006)

- 1.10 According to the WLGA survey in 2006, 22.6 per cent of councillors in Wales are female, an increase from 21.8% in 2004. (WLGA, 2005)
- 1.11 The age profile of councillors in Wales has changed very little in recent years. The majority are over 45 years old (88.8% in 2006 and 88.1% in 2004). The proportion of men and women in each age bracket is similar (Table 1).
- 1.12 The WLGA 2004 National Census reported that in Wales (WLGA, 2005):
- 99.2% of councillors were white and 0.8% had an ethnic minority background
 - 42.4% of councillors were retired
 - 35.7% of councillors had a skill or skills in the Welsh Language.

Support for Local Government in Wales

- 1.13 Local government in Wales is supported by the Assembly Government Local Government Policy Division, the WLGA, Wales Audit Office and a number of professional bodies with a specific Welsh dimension.

Methodology

- 1.14 The findings in this report are drawn from four main sources of evidence:
- an extensive desk review of existing national policies, strategies, research evidence, and local authority documentation
 - a series of national stakeholder interviews: including policy makers, local government specialists, the inspectorates, national parties and

pressure group officials

- eight in-depth case studies and a programme of telephone interviews in twelve local authorities with a wide range of executive and non-executive members, council officers and representatives of other local agencies including Local Health Boards, Fire and Rescue Service, Police Authorities, Further Education Colleges, and Voluntary Services
- five deliberative regional workshops with council officers and elected members.

1.15 All twenty-two local authorities in Wales were invited to contribute to the study two declined. A total of 302 interviews were conducted. The work programme was designed to allow in-depth exploration of participants' views of the current roles and effectiveness of elected members in Wales. The semi-structured interviews were based on Topic Guides covering the main issues identified in the Assembly Government's research specification (see Appendices).

1.16 This research was conducted before the announcement of the UK Government's Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill and the Assembly Government's intention to establish Local Service Boards (LSBs).

Structure of the Report

1.17 The aim of this report is to provide evidence to support current thinking in relation to local government and address areas for short and long term action.

1.18 Broadly speaking, the roles and functions of elected members can be grouped under four main headings as represented diagrammatically below:

Figure 2: Roles and Functions of Members



1.19 These are underpinned by a number of processes relating to recruitment, retention, training and development and ultimately the effects of all these impact on the question of councillor numbers.

1.20 The remaining Sections of the report reflect this pattern and are structured as follows:

- Section 2: Decision Making
- Section 3: Overview and Scrutiny
- Section 4: Ward Representation
- Section 5: Partnership Working and Community Leadership
- Section 6: Underpinning Processes
- Section 7: Issues for the Future



**Decision
Making**

2. Decision Making

Introduction

2.1 The operation of executive arrangements in Welsh local authorities varies greatly, depending on the:

- pattern of decision-making delegation
- degree to which councillors and officers have adapted to the new structures.

The majority of councils in Wales operate the cabinet and Leader model, while two councils have chosen to run a non-executive council board. The prevailing model is a cabinet or board with the maximum number of members (ten) with assigned portfolios. Non-executive boards must reflect the political balance of the full council, but in a council operating the cabinet model, the leader is free to appoint either a single party cabinet or some other combination. (See Table 1, page 3)

2.2 The last decade has seen a very strong emphasis by central government, local government and the inspectorates of the importance of effective 'corporate' and 'strategic' leadership of local councils – in England and Wales. The 1998 Local Government White Paper emphasised the importance of 'effective leadership' in giving local people what it described as 'a bigger say and better deal'.

2.3 The separation of executive and scrutiny roles as a result of the Local Government Act 2000 was designed to make a clear distinction between the roles of political leadership (by executive members) and holding the leadership to account (overview and scrutiny). The adoption of directly elected mayors in England was also seen by the Government as a means of 'strengthening' local political leadership, and Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPAs) have placed particular weight on inspectors' views of an authority's 'corporate capacity' reflected in its ability to set clear priorities and to focus on key areas for improvement. The Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) has a less explicit focus on political leadership, but it too considers leadership to be one of the key determinants of performance and drivers of service improvement.

2.4 Research conducted by the Local Government and Public Services Committee '*The Operation of New Political Management Structures in Local Government*' published in 2005 concluded that "*accountability had improved following the introduction of the new structures, with clearer lines of individual and collective responsibility*"(2005:19). However the report also notes evidence submitted by the Audit Commission in Wales which indicated that executive leadership is less well advanced in some authorities "*where councils struggle to find a sufficient number of capable portfolio members*

where there is a lack of clarity or protocols for schemes of delegation and where the quality of information available to the executive leadership is poor, or officers' reports are insufficiently succinct or direct to allow for well informed, risk based decision making"(2005:20).

- 2.5 The title of the 2001 (English) Local Government White Paper ('Strong leadership-quality public services') signalled the Government's continuing belief that it was leadership by officers and councillors that held the key to improvements in performance and enhanced democratic engagement. It stated that '*An effective local democracy, with strong and accountable political leadership, is central to community leadership and the delivery of public services*'. The Government's ten year strategy for local government (in England) continued the theme, emphasising the need for what it called 'vibrant leadership'. The 2006 White Paper echoes this stating that '*Leadership is the single most significant driver of change and improvement in local authorities*', and promising that the Government will take steps to put in place 'stronger leadership models' and 'a new framework for strategic leadership in local areas, bringing together local partners to focus on the needs of citizens and communities'.
- 2.6 The local government associations in England and Wales and improvement agencies, notably the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) and Scottish Improvement Service, have bought into this model. The IDeA for example funds a Leadership Academy (in which Welsh authorities participate) and has set great store by peer review, which includes assessments of the quality of political leadership.
- 2.7 Effective political leadership is then seen as key to the performance of local government in both England and Wales and although executive members were not the focus of our research it would not be possible to comprehensively review the role and functions of elected members without exploring political leadership and structures across Wales.
- 2.8 Our review of the role and effectiveness of councillors therefore sought evidence on the effectiveness of the political leadership role, and the extent of changes in the nature and effectiveness of political leadership since the introduction of the 2000 Act.

Existing Evidence

Political Leadership

- 2.9 Leach and Wilson (2002) have identified from the literature (see Selznick (1957) Kotter and Lawrence (1974) and Stone (1995)) four key leadership tasks which may be characterised as:

- maintaining a critical mass of political support
- developing strategic policy direction
- seeking to further leadership priorities outside the authority
- ensuring task accomplishment.

2.10 These tasks are shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Local Political Leadership Tasks



2.11 Research carried out by Leach et al (2005) for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that although the context has changed in recent years, the key tasks of civic leaders remain the same. They also found that:

- changing internal structures is not as important as Government expected. Behaviours are the key to change
- the relationship between chief executives and leaders is vital
- 'strong' leadership is not necessarily effective leadership

- some political leadership skills (strategic vision and political intelligence) can be improved through practice and development.
- 2.12 Leach *et al* (2005) emphasise the importance of 'context' and presented a model of five arenas of civic leadership: the regional, national, European and supranational; the private and voluntary sector; civic society and grassroots organisations; public agencies and services; and, the local authority. The report found that council leaders and executive members found working within the party/coalition and working within partnerships as particularly challenging.
- 2.13 They concluded that the legislative and wider political agenda, which is largely generated by central government, is a vital part of the context in which political leadership is developed and displayed. The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process is "the most striking example" of the impact of central government initiatives on local government political leadership (2005:10 and 2005:31-32). The results of external inspection have an enormous potential to change or to divert the priorities and policies of the political leadership, away from those that secured some form of democratic mandate in the local elections and towards those imposed by unaccountable and unelected external inspectors.
- 2.14 Rao (2005:13) found that a majority of members agreed that the role of the council leader had become stronger and that leaders have a higher profile as a result of the shift to executive arrangements. Members were not convinced that the new arrangements had made it easier to identify who was responsible for particular decisions, although a larger proportion of members in mayoral authorities (67 per cent), reported speedier decision-making, compared with 52 per cent of councillors in leader and cabinet authorities.

Our Findings

Political Leadership: the tension

- 2.15 Almost everyone who we interviewed reported that the post-2000 political structures had streamlined decision making. Decisions were seen as having become quicker and in that sense 'more effective' or efficient. However, many non-executive members reported that they felt that they had been marginalised. They referred to being "*disenfranchised*", "*disengaged*" and "*excluded*" and complained that decision making had become 'less democratic'.
- 2.16 There was widespread agreement that the role of executive members is a complex and demanding one. Many interviewees argued that it was in effect a full time job. Some reported that, in comparison to the positions of committee chairs under the pre-2000 arrangements which had often been according to length of service, appointment

to the executive was in some authorities on the basis of ability. A significant proportion of non-executive members did not aspire to be in the executive because they saw it as too complex and/or time consuming.

- 2.17 Councils have made great efforts to encourage and enable all elected members to engage with the current political structures. For instance, most local authorities allow non-executive members to attend the executive meetings and to speak provided notice is given to the leader. Many interviewees welcomed this and saw it as promoting transparency.

"I have opened up cabinet meetings to all elected members because I want to engage them all. If you are an elected member you should be able to speak on all council issues."

[Leader of the Council]

- 2.18 But this was seen as a small concession and several members said that they were unable to contribute to decision-making in the way they wanted to and had done in the past.

"I attend cabinet but I can't vote. I'm an elected member but I can't vote... It's a dictatorship!"

[Councillor]

- 2.19 In practice the operation of the executive varies greatly between councils depending upon the degree of delegation to leaders, portfolio holders and officers, meeting practices and decision-making and the extent to which both portfolio holders and officers have adapted to their new roles. The distribution of power is influenced by whether the leader can:

- take decisions alone
- appoint cabinet members
- allocate portfolios.

Full Council Meetings

- 2.20 The role of full council has been seen as problematic since the new arrangements came into place. For instance, CIPFA, commenting on new Political Management Arrangements in Wales in 2001, stated the importance of *"the council's over riding responsibilities for establishing a broad approach to policy with particular emphasis on cross cutting issues"*. CIPFA's view was that this would *"help to ensure that the full council is seen to be a positive and proactive forum rather than a kind of high level check on the executive"* (CIPFA, 2001). Some councils are addressing this issue by

making full council meetings more of an 'event' - inviting guest speakers, theming meetings, and encouraging public participation.

- 2.21 A clear majority of councillors were critical of the role of full council meetings. In theory full council meetings set and agree overarching policy, but several interviewees spoke of them being “rubber stamping” exercises or an opportunity for the disengaged and disenfranchised to score political points often through a concentration on petty detail. Full council was seen as a “court of last resort” and sometimes, this had led to votes of ‘no confidence’ either in the Leader or the Cabinet more widely. A few councillors felt the full council meetings were useful for taking the overall political temperature and there was a strong feeling – even amongst those who felt that they had little impact on decision-making – that they were an essential part of local democracy which played an important part in public reassurance that the small number of key decision makers were being held to account because they are much more likely than scrutiny meetings to be reported in the local press.

Statutory Committees

- 2.22 Statutory committees with responsibility for licensing and planning were seen by most non-executive members as areas where “ordinary councillors could still make a difference”. As a result in some councils all councillors sit on the planning committee because they believe, that it provides them with ‘the only real opportunity to make decisions’. Councillors also felt that planning and licensing allowed them to affect the ‘shape’ of their community. This was often seen as a two way process with councillors playing an active information role with constituents, explaining planning decisions to residents as well as representing more negative views to the committee about the potential local impact of decisions.
- 2.23 The training associated with membership of planning and licensing committees was generally seen as good, and most interviewees believed that councillors should not undertake these duties without training. Indeed, some councils already insist that members attend mandatory training prior to sitting on planning or licensing committees. Most of these committees were seen as being well resourced by officers.

Mayors and Chairs

- 2.24 Although it was not the intention of this research to focus on the role of Mayors and Chairs the fact that they were rarely nominated or mentioned as interviewees with whom we should meet was illuminating. The Mayors and Chairs of council to whom we did speak mostly saw their role as predominately consisting of external networking and community leadership, acting as a focal point and a facilitator.

Conclusions

2.25 We conclude:

- there has been a strong focus on the importance of effective corporate and strategic leadership in the last decade
- effective decision making needs to be transparent and supported by effective overview and scrutiny processes
- post-2000 political structures have streamlined decision making, although some non-executive members believe decisions to be less democratic than before
- enabling non-executive members to attend executive meetings was welcomed as transparent and fair
- full council meetings are now seen as less influential to council business
- statutory committees for the most part continue to work well and are valued by councillors

Recommendations

2.26 The report recommends:

- all local authorities should follow good practice and produce a forward plan which provides an indication of forthcoming decisions and policies. The forward plan should be published at an early stage in order to allow overview and scrutiny committees to incorporate decisions into its work programme
- councils should consider how to ensure that full council meetings play a positive role in enabling public accountability and policy oversight
- councils need to keep up the high standards of training associated with statutory committees. The Assembly Government should consider making this training compulsory for all members sitting on those committees.



Overview and Scrutiny

3. Overview and Scrutiny

Introduction

- 3.2 Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 ("the Act") requires a local authority's executive arrangements to include provision for one or more internal overview and scrutiny committees to ensure the effective stewardship by the executive and to assist in developing the council's policy. Each of the four 'executive' models contained in the Act is premised on a formal separation of executive and scrutiny roles, with executive councillors taking key decisions and non-executives undertaking a role of 'holding the executive to account' through the overview and scrutiny function. These committees were designed to provide an effective set of 'checks and balances' to executive decision-making.
- 3.3 This chapter draws on existing knowledge of the operation of overview and scrutiny from previous research (in Wales and England)² and the first hand evidence that we have gathered in the course of the current study through interviews and workshops with a wide range of councillors, officers and other interested parties from across Wales.

Existing Literature

- 3.4 Central government believed that overview and scrutiny would develop into an accountability mechanism which would engage both stakeholders and the public. The White Paper 'Local Leadership, Local Choice' (1999) stated that:

'All councillors will have powerful roles, acting together in the full council, or as members of the executive or powerful overview and scrutiny committees. People will know who is responsible for decisions, and communities will have a clear focus for leadership. Decisions will be scrutinised in public, and those who take them and implement them will be called publicly to account for their performance'

[Para 3.3]

- 3.5 Yet from the outset, many in local government saw the overview and scrutiny function as the most problematic and controversial element of the post-2000 council structures. There has been growing evidence that not all councillors

² This section draws in particular on a recent review of the evidence on overview and scrutiny by Rachel Ashworth and Stephanie Snapewich was published in *Local Government Studies* in 2005.

perceive themselves as having the kind of 'powerful roles' outlined in the 1999 White Paper. At first it was assumed that this was because it would take time for the new arrangements to 'bed down' and for councillors and officers to become accustomed to the overview and scrutiny role. But recent research has shown that many non-executive councillors continue to feel marginalised and isolated from the decision-making processes. They continue to express concern about what they perceive to be a lack of access to information from their authorities and limited contact with and minimal support from officers in the council. Councillors believe that these problems constrain their ability to represent their constituents and influence the work of the authority (Local Government Committee National Assembly of Wales, 2004, Gardiner, 2006).

3.6 Existing literature on scrutiny in English and Welsh local government presents a very mixed picture of progress on scrutiny's key roles. The evidence suggests that:

- scrutiny has the difficult task of trying to perform multiple roles simultaneously
- there has been some good work on policy development and review
- scrutiny has been less successful in fulfilling its key accountability role: holding the executive to account
- scrutiny of performance is not yet systematic or sufficiently challenging
- there are few examples of external scrutiny and there is some confusion about how far local government overview and scrutiny can go in holding other organisations to account.

3.7 The WLGA recently released a statement summarising the limitation of the current design of the scrutiny function and what can be self-limiting expectations arising from this design:

"It is the view of the Association that without a renewed and more ambitious and demanding role for scrutiny, this important function will not meet the expectations of government or the elected members themselves, and will be seen to be a compound disappointment if not failure."

(WLGA, 2007:3)

3.8 Research reported for the Local Government and Public Services Committee (2005), whilst acknowledging the diversity of Welsh local authorities, supported a flexible approach that allows local authorities to devise overview and scrutiny arrangements that they deem most appropriate. It acknowledged the considerable efforts made by the Assembly, WLGA and other interested parties to support the role of overview and scrutiny and concluded that *"the role of scrutiny generally needs to be developed and strengthened further"*. (2005:28)

- 3.9 There has been a flurry of academic research and policy debate about overview and scrutiny and there is now a plethora of good practice guides including Baker, 2000; Charteris and Corrigan, 2000; Dungey, 2001, 2004; Leach, 2001; WLGA, 2004; as well a number of academic studies that have sought to determine how well overview and scrutiny are working and what impact they have been. Key studies include Leach, 1999; Snape et al, 2000; Cole 2001; Stoker et al, 2003, 2004; Ashworth, 2003a, 2003b; and Leach 2005.
- 3.10 According to this voluminous literature, the main duties of non-executive are to:
- Consider and investigate broad policy issues and make reports and recommendations to the executive or council, as appropriate
 - Consider the budget plans, proposed policy framework and other plans of the executive, and make reports and recommendations, including recommendations proposing amendments, to the executive or council as appropriate
 - Provide advice to the executive on major issues before final decisions are made
 - Review decisions of the executive and how it is implementing council policy, and make reports and recommendations including proposals for changes to policies or practices, to the executive or council as appropriate.
- 3.11 The WLGA strategy "*Public Services Scrutiny in Wales: Future Direction*" outlines their commitment to support the development and performance of the scrutiny function, and has recently announced increased capacity to do so in partnership with the Centre for Public Scrutiny in the form of:
- elected member and officer networking meetings
 - good practice guides and the sharing of practice
 - direct support for councils in scrutiny systems development
 - direct support for councils in training and development
 - the development of new national models of recommended scrutiny practice.
- 3.12 The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), with whom the WLGA work closely, has recently launched a second edition of its '*Good Scrutiny Guide*' which outlines four principles of effective scrutiny and how they can be evidenced.

Table 5: Four Principles of Good Scrutiny³

	Understanding the scrutiny role	Creating an enabling environment for good public scrutiny	Supporting public scrutiny
<p>Principle 1: <i>Good scrutiny...</i></p> <p>Provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision makers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of purpose • Constructive, robust and purposeful challenge • Respect for the scrutiny role as a legitimate check on executives • A constructive working relationship with executive colleagues including external bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear rules of engagement • Work programmes that fit with existing corporate processes • Non-aggressive environment and behaviours to create optimum conditions for investigative evidence-based process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective questioning • Inclusive, focused chairing • Access to information and advice
<p>Principle 2: <i>Good scrutiny...</i></p> <p>Enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities to be heard</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring an ongoing dialogue with the public, to create an 'accountability relationship' • Representing and engaging diverse communities • Promoting public understanding of the scrutiny role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open and transparent processes with public access to information • Meetings conducted in public which invite public participation and 'active citizenship' • Innovative public communication, consultation and feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active listening and sympathetic questioning • Adequate resourcing for public dialogue • Professional communications advice and support
<p>Principle 3: <i>Good scrutiny...</i></p> <p>Is carried out by 'independent minded governors' who lead and own the scrutiny role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent and impartial 'non-executives' appointed/ elected to ensure the public interest is served • Champions of the value and potential of good scrutiny • Active engagement on the board/committee • Constructive working relationship with professional officers /advisers in support of the 'lay' scrutineers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active engagement of members in a scrutiny role • Ensure adequate public accountability and community leadership • Create conditions for deliberations and consensus building • Independent work programme informed by the public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberative skills and consensus building • Reflect on the process, learn from the experience and innovate • Acknowledges professional support for 'lay' members • Appropriate induction and development
<p>Principle 4: <i>Good scrutiny...</i></p> <p>Drives improvement in public services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote community well-being and improve quality of life • Strategic quality assurance • Harness public concern as a lever for addressing wider issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic review of corporate policies, plans and budgets • Co-ordinate reviews of policy and service performance in line with strategic objectives • Monitor recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to timely and accurate performance information • Analysis/interpretation of performance data • Resources and professional support for collection /presentation of performance data • Clear understanding of the distinction between strategic/operational performance review

³ CfPS adopts a broad definition of 'scrutiny' that encompasses audit and inspection as well as the activities of overview and scrutiny committees but its principles nevertheless provide a useful checklist.

Holding the Executive to Account

- 3.13 This role has been described as the “scrutiny’ side of overview and scrutiny” (Snape et al 2002:42) and emphasises scrutiny’s primary role as an accountability mechanism. ‘Holding the executive to account’ involves scrutinising executive decisions at a number of key stages: before they are made, before they are implemented and after they have been implemented.
- 3.14 Overall, the evidence suggests that ‘holding the executive to account’ has proved problematic for all councils and progress has been limited even in ‘best practice’ councils:

“It is the most problematic role to perform since it is the role that most directly challenges the power, influence and culture of the party group system. It also directly challenges often the most powerful elements within the decision-making system. Although leaders, cabinet members and senior officers declare their support for robust scrutiny, in reality some will not complain if the role emphasis lies with policy development and review rather than holding the executive to account”
[Snape et al, 2002:42]

- 3.15 These findings are echoed by a range of studies including Ashworth, 2003a, 2003b, Ashworth et al, 2003; and Leach et al 2003 which suggest a number of reasons for the problems which have been encountered including:
- majority party dominance of chairing
 - reluctance by non-executive councillors to challenge their party colleagues and
 - reluctance by overview and scrutiny committees to use their powers to call-in decisions.
- 3.16 These findings were reinforced by a review undertaken by the Local Government and Public Services Committee of the National Assembly for Wales in 2004 which called for scrutiny committees to reflect the political balance of authorities and for better officer support.

Policy Development and Review

- 3.17 Existing research evidence indicates that scrutiny committees are seen as having been much more successful in developing a policy development and review role (Ashworth 2003b; Leach et al, 2003) than in holding executives to account. A study of best practice conducted shortly after the introduction of post-2000 structures found that even at that stage policy development and review work conducted through

scrutiny committees had been based upon a wide range of methods and produced competent evidence-based reports (Snape *et al*, 2002). Again, this finding chimes with views of Welsh councillors recorded in previous research on scrutiny in England and Wales:

“Detailed and probing examination of policy issues takes place, much more so than under the old committee system. The most useful contributions have been in terms of ‘cross-cutting’ policy areas and in visiting Beacon and other councils similar to our own”

[Scrutiny Councillor, Welsh Unitary, Ashworth 2003b]

- 3.18 However, whilst members find this work rewarding, they also report that it is extremely time-consuming (Snape *et al*, 2002). In some cases it seems that there are too few members on each committee/panel with the time to engage in effective policy development work (Johnson and Hatter, 2004). Furthermore, the focus has been on *reviewing* rather than *developing* policy (Snape *et al*, 2002), a finding which echoes research in Wales which found that members criticised scrutiny for being ‘too reactive’ and concentrating on reviewing policy that had already been formulated and ratified (Ashworth, 2003a).

Scrutiny, Performance Management and Service Improvement

- 3.19 Policy-makers have made an explicit link between scrutiny, Best Value style performance management processes and service improvement. Local authorities themselves have also made the connection, with an overwhelming majority of councillors and officers stating that, in their experience, scrutiny worked successfully in conjunction with Best Value (Ashworth, 2003b). Indeed, several local authority scrutiny units have recently been renamed ‘Scrutiny and Improvement’ in an attempt to foster a closer relationship between scrutiny and performance. However, in practice, there has been a great deal of diversity in the way in which local authorities have responded to developing synergies between scrutiny and performance management/improvement. Evidence suggests that early overview and scrutiny was commonly interpreted as ‘performance monitoring and review’. This resulted in the domination of lengthy Best Value reviews within scrutiny work programmes and a general lack of thought as to how councillors could best contribute to what is mostly a bureaucratic and managerialist process. Snape *et al* (2002) concluded:

“Above all, Best Value reviews and general performance monitoring is often presented to members as though they were fellow officers. This tends to produce a very negative reaction amongst the majority of members. Many councillors particularly dislike Best Value work – precisely because it is often presented in a highly technical format. More attention needs to be given to the particular value that members can add to Best Value work”

[Snape et al 2002:26]

- 3.20 Once again, these early research findings resound with those generated more recently. For example, Leach et al (2003) report that, in several councils, the role of scrutiny had been interpreted in terms of filling committee agendas with performance reviews, whilst interviewees within Welsh local government articulated similar frustrations:

“We look at inspection reports and monitor action plans but Best Value reviews should not be looked at in the scrutiny committees. They are too time-consuming”

[Scrutiny Officer, Welsh Unitary, Ashworth, 2003b]

External Scrutiny

- 3.21 External scrutiny is a developing feature across the public sector and has proved to be a particularly challenging form of scrutiny, largely because it involves scrutinising partner organizations and therefore has the potential to affect working relationships between agencies (Ashworth et al, 2007, forthcoming). Recent work on external scrutiny argues that the approach to this kind of scrutiny and its effectiveness depends upon a range of factors. These include: the complexity of the accountability arrangements for the organisation under scrutiny, the perceived legitimacy of the scrutineer the level of sanction available to the scrutineer, the accessibility of performance data and the level of co-dependence between the scrutineer and the organisation being scrutinised (Snape et al, 2005).
- 3.22 Existing research indicates that, at the local government level, external scrutiny has increased council engagement with the public. This is largely because the focus is often on relevant, cross-cutting issues – examples include reviews of flooding, foot and mouth epidemics and rural bus services (Leach and Davis, 2004). However, levels of public engagement in the scrutiny process are generally low. Even powers to scrutinise the health sector (albeit weaker in Wales) have yet to prompt scrutiny to address issues of public concern (Leach, 2005).

- 3.23 Stoker et al (2003) report that almost half of local authorities had investigated non-local authority service providers through scrutiny although Leach *et al* (2003) urge councils to strike a more appropriate balance between external and internal scrutiny, finding that only a minority of authorities had a “good track record of successful (and influential) external scrutinies” (2003: 38).
- 3.24 Similarly Cole (2001a) expresses concerns around the definition of ‘external scrutiny’. He refutes the idea that the external reviews he observed at Devon County Council actually constituted *scrutiny*:

“...these sessions were not focused primarily on holding those bodies accountable. In contrast, they were policy seminars in which witnesses were asked for their opinions rather than questioned on performance”

[Cole 2001a: 30]

Scrutiny: different points of focus

- 3.25 There were concerns expressed when the new structures were first introduced in 2000/2001 about the ability of scrutiny to develop policy whilst also holding the executive to account. A number of studies have now identified that the scrutiny role varies from authority to authority. For example, Stoker et al (2004) identified four scrutiny forms:
- ***‘Management Tool’***: where scrutiny adopts an executive-driven agenda and is encouraged to develop and review policy rather than provide internal challenge
 - ***‘Apolitical Entrepreneurship’***: with scrutiny characterised by dedicated support, strong questioning and cross-party consensus
 - ***‘Opposition Game’***: where scrutiny is used to score political points and the executive is less likely to take on scrutiny recommendations
 - ***‘Disengaged’ scrutiny***: which is little understood, under resourced, and lacks influence.
- 3.26 Stoker et al (2004) report findings from English local government which indicate a predominance of the ‘management tool’ model. They suggest ‘that the scrutiny function is not bedding in as well as the overview function’ (2004:62). This means that the effectiveness of scrutiny can not only be attributed to the impact of party politics but also to a tendency on the part of Chief Officers to ‘manage’ and direct scrutiny activities and agendas.
- 3.27 The WLGA suggest the solution lies in what they refer to as the ‘public scrutiny model’ which promotes increased inclusivity (including public involvement), thematic inquiry,

high profile inquires where appropriate, increased resource allocation, a duty to collaborate between public service provisions. They also recommend the scrutiny function discharge its duties for monitoring the performance of the council and its services, intervening where necessary.

3.28 Various other ways of improving scrutiny have been proposed, most of which involve a clearer demarcation of roles and responsibilities within the scrutiny function, for example:

- different committees, different scrutiny responsibilities
- alternative scrutiny methodologies (Stewart (2003) for example recommends different formats for different scrutiny activities)
- different elected members performing different scrutiny activities.

Our Findings

3.29 Overall, the findings of previous research are remarkably consistent with the evidence from the interviews that we have undertaken. It is clear that in Wales (as in England) overview and scrutiny is struggling to achieve its full potential and remains a largely unfulfilling role for the majority of non-executive councillors.

3.30 We found huge variations between councils in terms of the level of commitment to, the approach to implementation, and the resources allocated to overview and scrutiny, as well as in councillors' and officers' views of the role and effectiveness within their own authorities.

3.31 Six years on, some councillors continued to lament the loss of the old committee system. But others argued that overview and scrutiny offers a range of opportunities which they welcomed. Overall we found less evidence of a desire to return to the previous political structures than was detected by research on scrutiny in Wales four years ago (Ashworth, 2003). But there was widespread belief among local councillors that the opportunities afforded by scrutiny have for the most still to be properly grasped. Some interviewees at national level believed that the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny had improved in recent years, in part because of the efforts that have been made by organisations such as the WLGA to build up capacity. But almost all of those to whom we spoke at national and local level saw it as the element of the post-2000 arrangements that was working least well and most used phrases such as 'underdeveloped' and 'underpowered' to describe the current state of scrutiny and overview.

"Scrutiny is good by design but it isn't delivering yet".

[National stakeholder]

"We all know that we have to do something about scrutiny".

[National stakeholder]

"Scrutiny is not as good as in parts of England".

[National stakeholder]

- 3.32 The reasons for this continuing lack of effectiveness several years after the introduction of new structures varied between councils, are represented by the range of views expressed below:

"I don't think as yet we've really grasped the concept of scrutiny. It hasn't quite clicked yet because we tend to work on the principle that officers provide support to the board (the executive) and it's only after that scrutiny seems to come in".

[Councillor]

"I don't think we have assimilated the concept of scrutiny as such and most of the scrutiny meetings I go to are predominated by people making statements and stating policies and that kind of thing rather than actually scrutinising".

[Councillor]

"Members are still not very capable of constructing questions and following them up and being incisive in that way".

[Councillor]

"It's bedding down, not fully developed".

[Councillor]

- 3.33 Furthermore, in their eagerness to embrace scrutiny and get it right, many members and officers admitted they, their colleagues and their council had lost sight of the concept of 'overview', and many felt they needed to take a broader view of their remit.

- 3.34 Different authorities have used different methodologies for scrutiny. A small number of our case studies use relatively informal approaches typified by members and officers 'brainstorming' together, holding public workshops, conducting exploratory site visits and using 'mystery shopping' to assess services. But in most councils the main form of scrutiny is via oral evidence taken in formal proceedings involving officers, executive members and external witnesses (e.g. the police, local health

board etc.) who are invited to attend to provide advice, guidance and answers on issues being examined.

- 3.35 Councillors' and support officers' knowledge of models of effective scrutiny varies. There is now a plethora of good practice guidance and training on overview and scrutiny but many councillors are still not aware of the variety of different approaches which can be taken and many scrutiny committee members (as opposed to Chairs) had very little internal or external scrutiny training (other than on induction). Some staff in Democratic and Member Services also spoke of feeling isolated.
- 3.36 The interviews that we undertook suggested many members have a narrow view of overview and scrutiny and lacked examples of how it could be made more effective. Members were more inclined to speak in broad and abstract terms, rather than to specify what they require for and from overview and scrutiny. Involvement of members in an effective scrutiny activity (e.g. 'task and finish', working groups) was thought by both members and officers to increase confidence and build momentum for the overview and scrutiny process.
- 3.37 Many officers and councillors identified significant advantages of the new overview and scrutiny arrangements, including that it has provided a strong evidence-based approach, more accountability, more policy development work, better team working between officers and councillors, greater partnership engagement, and the sourcing of additional expertise.
- 3.38 But conversely they also highlighted a number of problems with the current system. There was a view that scrutiny does not make effective use of member and officer time. Some felt that better use could be made of the expertise of officers, members of the public and local partners who attend overview and scrutiny meetings. Some complained that scrutiny reports lacked insight, were unchallenging, too narrowly focused and over-politicised.
- 3.39 Interviewees – at local and national levels – reported that :
- attendance at meetings can be poor
 - scrutiny is often too reactive and focused on short-term issues
 - scrutiny reports are often ignored by the executive
 - scrutiny committees are sometimes handed issues that the executive does not want to have to address head on
 - scrutiny is often 'managed' by officers and/or the executive and sometimes used by individual officers and/or members to pursue personal interests or for party political reasons
 - there is a reluctance of members to hold executives from their own party to account.

"Party politics is important to the effectiveness of scrutiny. You need a cross-party, non-partisan approach which is very different to 'yah boo' style local politics. We and the other political parties need to do more to get this message across".

[National stakeholder]

Good scrutiny... provides 'critical friend challenge'

3.40 There was strong evidence that current practice is falling short of the four principles of good scrutiny outlined in Table 5 above. Most of the executive members and officers whom we interviewed said that scrutiny did hold them to account.

"Scrutiny is holding the Leader and the executive to account. The call-in process is used quite regularly and the executive have changed things as a result of this process".

[Leader of the Council]

"I'm always wary of scrutiny in my cabinet work. Are my Liberal Democrat colleagues going to be happy with my decisions?"

[Leader of the Council]

"As an officer I can't go lightly into it, I need to be prepared".

[Chief Officer]

3.41 And most non-executive members felt their concerns were largely ignored by the executive.

"As it stands the right questions are not always being asked, and members don't push hard enough".

[Councillor]

"There is more holding to account in the Community Council meetings than in the local authority".

[Councillor]

"Not very effective. Some councillors are not good enough to scrutinise".

[Officer]

“There is a sense of helplessness. The policies come before us done and dusted. It is difficult to change anything”.

[Councillor]

3.42 National interviewees agreed with this. A typical comment was:

“We need to change the language and perceptions of non executive roles. Councils need to get more value from non execs. Senior councillors and officers need to see them as a resource not an irritant”.

[National stakeholder]

3.43 Non-executive members also reported that because scrutiny is not perceived to be effective, councillors often use motions of no confidence as a means of signalling disquiet.

Case Study 1:

One authority found that because powers of call-in are limited to "any member of the relevant scrutiny committee" (the Council Constitution) and the scrutiny committees do not directly align with Executive portfolios, members were uncertain which committees could call in a decision, and how wide ranging the debate should be once called in. To address this issue the council proposed setting up a scrutiny committee with the specific remit to scrutinise, monitor and review executive decisions.

3.44 Our findings reinforce the conclusions of previous studies which have suggested that organisational and structural change needs to be accompanied by cultural change within local authorities. Executive and non-executive members alike do not believe that scrutiny is currently fulfilling the role of a "critical friend". But many felt that it was important that it could not do so unless councils developed cultures which are more open to questioning and where requests for information and questioning the executive and officers are seen as a "safety valve on decisions". The role of the Leader is particularly important. In one authority, the Leader was seen as an advocate of scrutiny – ‘they can go wherever they want’ but this was an exception.

"We feel ignored and powerless, it is very frustrating... ..in the absence of effective scrutiny the most effective tool is to put public pressure on the cabinet in the week prior to cabinet meetings... ..we go to the press the week beforehand".

[Councillor]

"We don't do it [hold the executive to account] early enough - we allow situations to deteriorate to such a level when they cannot be ignored any longer. Had we taken earlier action it might have been easier all round".

[Councillor]

- 3.45 Changing structures, support and processes is not then sufficient. Councils also need to develop a political and organisational culture which welcomes challenge and is receptive to scrutiny and questioning, and this can be at odds with the pressures on service managers and the realities of local party politics.
- 3.46 Scrutiny is seen as working best in those authorities which publish well in advance details of the issues that are expected to come up for discussion at the Executive (the 'forward plan'). Whilst this is a requirement in England, not all Welsh councils have implemented these plans and they vary substantially in terms of detail. Some forward plans give only generic titles which do not enable members to inform themselves in advance of a meeting. Other councils use 'traffic light' systems to highlight to members more controversial decisions to enable them to prepare for meetings appropriately. A 'red' light highlights a potential controversial decision which is likely to require pre-decision scrutiny, 'amber' refers to decisions where scrutiny is appropriate after the decision has been taken and 'green' indicates that scrutiny is not necessary.
- 3.47 We found that a small number of authorities have adopted "contemporaneous scrutiny", whereby decisions came before scrutiny committees first and are then discussed in a cabinet meeting. A number of interviewees cited this as good practice as it enabled scrutiny to add value by examining a 'live' issue.

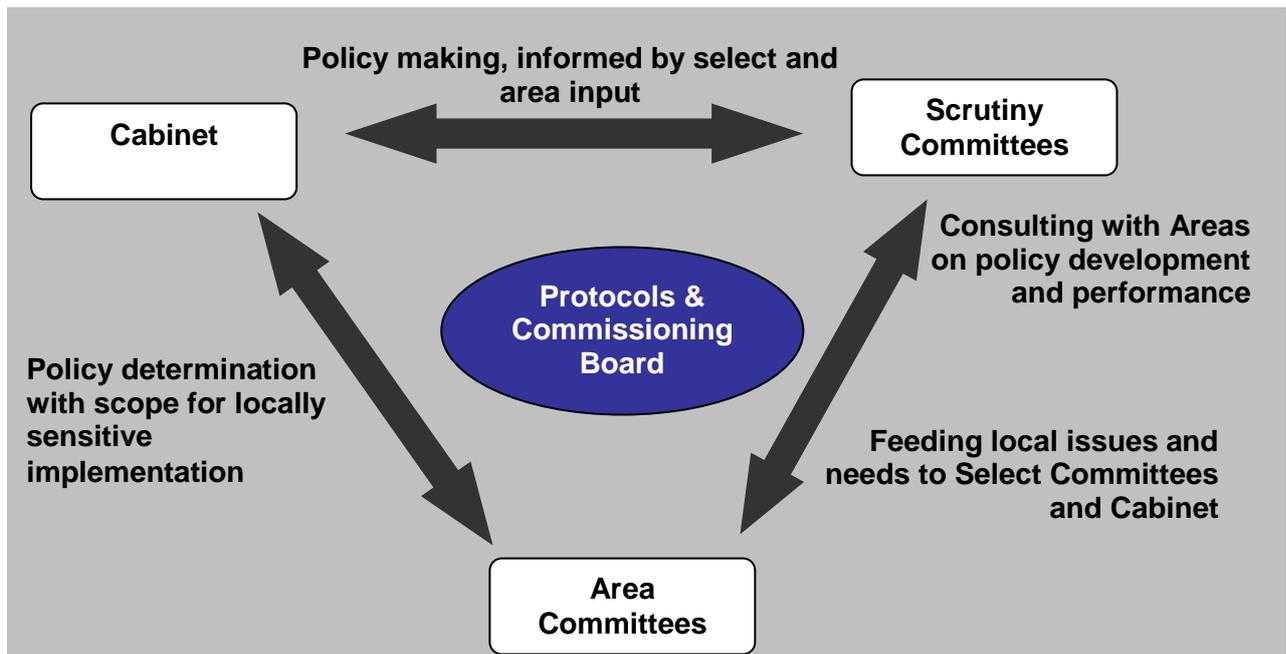
"Because scrutiny happens early in the process it tends not to be about challenging. Emphasis is on being constructive".

[Councillor]

Good scrutiny... 'enables the voice and concerns of the public to be heard'

- 3.48 In general, councillors saw their roles as ward representatives and scrutineers as being largely separate. Questions about community leadership did not naturally flow into discussions about scrutiny or vice versa.
- 3.49 In all authorities, members of the public are welcome to attend meetings, hear evidence being submitted and to listen to discussions. However, we found few examples of councils effectively promoting public understanding of the scrutiny role, conducting effective open dialogue with the public regarding scrutiny matters, and innovative public communication, consultation and feedback in relation to overview and scrutiny. A number of councils publish leaflets about overview and scrutiny and publish details on their council's website, but information tends to be restricted to presenting committee structures and meeting times. Few councils provide user-friendly information (in terms of jargon free, large texts, simplistic diagrams, etc).
- 3.50 Communication with the public and the provision of accessible public information are important if scrutiny is to enable the voice and concerns of the public and its communities to be heard and thus delivering citizen centred services. Scrutiny is seen as working best where members of the public are actively engaged with scrutiny and are properly briefed before invited to attend meetings. There are examples of service users being co-opted onto scrutiny panels but as this was predominantly in relation to social services, housing and education users it seemed mainly to be a legacy from the committee system. There were other examples of members of the public being invited to contribute to scrutiny. For instance, in one authority, members of the public were recently invited to attend a scrutiny meeting to open up the debate surrounding a new housing development.
- 3.51 The structure and information flows of one council, as illustrated below, shows one method employed by an authority to try and improve scrutiny in respect of enabling the voice and concerns of the public and its communities to be heard.

Case Study 2:



3.52 This approach is a result of consideration of the tension between holding large inclusive meetings periodically, and holding small regular representative meetings. This authority believes more frequent small meetings which are well coordinated can ensure, amongst other benefits, that scrutiny enables the voice, and addresses the concerns, of the public and its communities to be heard.

Good scrutiny... is carried out by 'independent minded governors'

3.53 In order to fulfil their role as independent-minded governors, councillors need to be fully aware of the potential of the role, well-supported and resourced and led by an apolitical chair who is committed to fair and open scrutiny rather than 'point scoring'

Scrutiny Training and Development

3.54 Several interviewees – at local and national levels - highlighted the importance of the commitment, capability and desire of individual councillors who drive the scrutiny process. Our evidence suggests that councillors and officers believe that without the right attitude on the part of councillors themselves, scrutiny cannot work, whatever structures and officer support is put in place.

3.55 However, it seemed that some councillors were unsure of their role and lacked confidence. One scrutiny chair reported that he persistently asks his committee for 'Any Questions?' but that no one raises issues.

- 3.56 Interviewees indicated that the majority of councillors had not received any formal or external scrutiny training, other than receiving general information on the structure and remit of specific committees within their authority. In contrast, scrutiny chairs had often taken up external training on scrutiny. Consequently there was a 'skills and understanding gap' in relation to scrutiny.

Officer Support

- 3.57 Officer support for the scrutiny function varied widely across authorities. In one council there was a large scrutiny team led by a senior officer. In other councils, committee clerks were responsible for scrutiny, whilst in many, chief, and other service officers provided the support. Hence perceptions of scrutiny officer support varied across councils:

"The quality of people [officers] is second to none".

[Chair of Overview and Scrutiny]

"I went to a training event and got talking to other councillors and I couldn't believe they get no support... we could not do what we do without officer support... it's too much".

[Councillor]

"Scrutiny needs more highly paid support rather than committee clerks".

[Chief Officer]

"It (scrutiny) is undertaken by committee clerks with no policy or research expertise – and it is not independent".

[Councillor]

- 3.58 A number of members believed that service-based officers may have divided loyalties. Some suggested that it was impossible for an individual officer to provide impartial reports to both the executive and scrutiny committees.
- 3.59 The Centre for Public Scrutiny identifies three types of scrutiny support (see below). Its recent survey of scrutiny across English and Welsh local government reveals that increasing numbers of single tier authorities are adopting a specialist model of scrutiny support (78% of metropolitan boroughs, 63% of English unitaries and 68% of County Councils along with each of the four Welsh councils taking part in the survey). This stands in contrast to our evidence which suggests that scrutiny support in the majority of Welsh councils resembles either the Committee Support Model or the Integrated Model.

SCRUTINY OFFICER SUPPORT

Committee Support Model – in which support is provided by committee officers, who also provide support to other ‘democratic services’ functions such as the executive, full council and the quasi-judicial roles

The Integrated Model – where support is provided on an ad hoc basis, from a variety of sources including committee services, officers within service departments and corporate performance and policy officers.

The Specialist Model – in which support is provided by a scrutiny support unit with dedicated officers who work only to the overview and scrutiny function.

- 3.60 A number of interviewees felt there was a difference in the approach and understanding of recently appointed officers who they believed had embraced scrutiny to a greater degree than those who had worked under the pre-2000 arrangements.
- 3.61 There was also a view that in addition to day-to-day support, there was a need for a ‘Scrutiny Champion’ within the Corporate Management Team. In one council, the advocate for scrutiny was an Assistant Chief Executive with no direct service responsibilities. It was perceived that having a corporate advocate helped to ensure that scrutiny achieved parity with the executive.

Committee Chairs

- 3.62 The role of chairs of overview and scrutiny committees is seen as pivotal, and there is an overwhelming case for appointing chairs on merit, according to their interests and abilities, rather than on the basis of their party affiliation or length of service. In some authorities, the chair of scrutiny is seen as being a grooming role for future executive members.
- 3.63 However, the appointment mechanism for and allocation of Scrutiny Chairs was a bone of contention in many councils. In those authorities where majority groups held all or the vast majority of chair positions interviewees suspected that the executive was in fact controlling scrutiny through the appointments process.

“Scrutiny does not work well here – we are in the minority on all committees and I can think of no examples where it has worked well the scrutiny agenda is set by the administration”.

[Councillor]

Resources

- 3.64 Levels of resources allocated to overview and scrutiny varied substantially between local authorities. A small number of authorities had devoted no additional resources at all to scrutiny since the implementation of the Local Government 2000 Act. The level of seniority of scrutiny support officers also varied – from administrative grade to chief officer grade. Similarly the budget for scrutiny varied from nothing to almost £1 million.
- 3.65 Of course, some of the variation in the numbers of scrutiny support officers and the size of the dedicated scrutiny budget reflect differences in the size of councils in Wales. But scrutiny was generally perceived to be working best in those authorities which had provided the highest levels of investment.

External Advice and Support

- 3.66 Examples of involving external witnesses to support scrutiny for different Welsh authorities are limited, but include:
- Receiving advice from a previous director of housing from another local authority to produce a hard hitting report from a review of community and housing arrangements
 - Chief officers acting as critical friends and supporting scrutiny reviews of services other than their own. This was reported to be very successful in that scrutiny was more independent but proved too time-intensive to be a permanent arrangement
 - Purchasing the expertise of a Professor who specialises in cities and urban regeneration to examine how the city should best develop
 - Inviting a senior member of the police authority to discuss problems associated with anti social behaviour.
- 3.67 Interviewees reported that most examples of involvement by external agencies or experts in scrutiny were restricted to questions and answers, rather than providing expert guidance and advice which many participants would have preferred.

Good scrutiny... drives improvement in public services

- 3.68 Existing research evidence and the data that we collected both point to the fact that scrutiny can produce a considerable evidence base that could not have been generated via the traditional committee system. Councillors also told us they found the investigative approach particularly satisfying.

"For example we recently looked at the issue of tree management because the council was receiving complaints from all angles and it was obvious no other organisations were looking at it.... Previous this wouldn't have happened - that is the unique role of scrutiny".

[Scrutiny Chair]

- 3.69 The much wider availability from autumn 2006 onwards of comparative performance data as part of the new performance framework was widely welcomed by councillors who saw this as a valuable tool which should increase the effectiveness of scrutiny. Some believed that in the past officers had 'filtered' the performance information given to scrutiny committees and that the new performance framework will enable councillors to get data first hand which will make for more rigorous scrutiny.
- 3.70 Whilst there is scrutiny of performance in all authorities, our interviews suggest that it is patchy and not sufficiently challenging. Interviewees told us that where scrutiny uses performance data it is usually more rigorous. But we found clear evidence that much more use could be made of Wales Programme for Improvements (WPI) reports, risk assessments and improvement journeys.
- 3.71 Officers expressed concerns that councillors could be overwhelmed by too much performance management information, but some councillors felt that more could be done to make information available to them in user-friendly formats.
- 3.72 It is important that scrutiny activities drive improvement in services but unfortunately for many scrutiny councillors in practice this involves the routine analysis of PIs against targets, a task which is also performed by corporate management teams and executive members. There was little evidence within our case study councils of any innovative thinking about the ways in which overview and scrutiny can contribute to the improvement agenda in a more meaningful way.

Case Study 3

One authority has developed a new performance management procedure for areas of poor performance. A team would be created comprising the executive member with responsibility for performance and improvement, the cabinet member for the particular service in question and relevant officers in order to develop an action plan. Rather than ask scrutiny to repeat this analysis and review performance indicators, the executive member would instead present the action plan to scrutiny in order to outline any necessary policy changes and gain feedback.

External Scrutiny

- 3.73 Local authorities have been encouraged to develop a strong external focus in order to hold organisations to account and enhance stakeholder and public participation in the scrutiny process. Some councils in Wales have begun to develop this ‘external scrutiny’ role. For instance, one authority recently embarked on a multi-agency approach to scrutinise the problem of runaway horses which involved the local police, British Transport Police, RSPCA, the Highways Agency and more. Another recently reviewed post-16 education and called in a number of agencies including ELWA.
- 3.74 We found that relatively few interviewees could cite examples where external scrutiny had been effective. Most saw it as being at best a marginal activity others were more critical of the current state of external scrutiny.

‘External scrutiny is constrained by the quality of the non-executives in that role. The problem is not the constitution. The problem is that too many councillors are boxed in by an expectation that it is just about scrutinising the executive only’.

[National Stakeholder]

- 3.75 We did find examples of initial steps towards joint scrutiny across authorities. For example, across Wales groups of councils are working together to tackle the important issue of waste management and are embarking on joint scrutiny exercises within regions. However, most of these arrangements were at a very early stage, and interviewees reported problems resulting from the fact that different authorities have different scrutiny structures, processes and support arrangements. For instance, a recent exercise involving three local authorities was assigned to a non-executive member in one authority, an executive member from another and an officer from the third authority.
- 3.76 Authorities which had actively sought to learn from good practice elsewhere were generally seen as performing scrutiny more effectively than those which had not. As discussed in Section 6, members particularly valued exposure to practice in other

local authorities and wanted more opportunities to share experiences with colleagues from other councils.

- 3.77 Arrangements for the scrutiny of health and social well being in Wales are still in development stages, and some were very critical of its current lack of impact.

"The present state of local government scrutiny of the NHS is lamentable. We need to clarify what local government's role in this is".

[National stakeholder]

- 3.78 But many interviewees told us that their authorities now regularly engage with relevant partners such as the Local Health Board (LHB). At present though, interviewees admit these partnerships are largely based on "good will" and "the personalities involved". In one authority, the chief executive of the LHB was surprised that he hasn't been asked to be involved (or attend) the local authority's Health and Well Being scrutiny.

- 3.79 A significant number of members and officers whom we interviewed from different authorities across Wales talked of what they saw as a reluctance on the part of health professionals to cooperate in external scrutiny.

"We recently embarked on a joint project with Wrexham to look at North East Wales NHS Trust - but found a definite resistance by health and social professionals".

[Officer]

But interviews with health professionals showed that they were concerned that some members lack the knowledge to be able to scrutinise health and social well being effectively.

- 3.80 Most of the members whom we interviewed argued that councils should be given equivalent powers over health to those that exist in England. Most interviewees from Local Health Boards would not welcome this (See Section 5).

- 3.81 It is clear that many non-executive members do not fully understand the extent and limitations of their powers of external scrutiny. This applies particularly to the scrutiny of health and social well being. Officers believe this to be a barrier to effective external scrutiny and some admitted to trying to persuade members "not to go too hard" on external witnesses because legislation does not support scrutiny of health in Wales, and they fear that goodwill could be compromised which could affect other working arrangements with that organisation.

"Because legislation doesn't support scrutiny of external services we have to encourage members not to grill people as they may like to as they wouldn't come again and partnership work would be hampered".

[Officer]

- 3.82 Tensions can occur when there is overlap of councillor roles on different bodies. For instance, executive members (and officers) with responsibilities for social services are members (by right) on LHBs. When "health" is brought before scrutiny committees, these LHB members tend to present only a local authority view - not a LHB one.

"We've got a crazy position where the head of social service sits on our board but is advising on the scrutiny of us - not being scrutinised himself".

[Chief Executive Officer, Local Health Board]

"Because LHB budgets have risen much faster than social services budgets we are under pressure to take on some aspects of social care. It's not about integration - it's about who pays and scrutiny is being used to put pressure on us to make up local authority funding shortfalls".

[Chief Executive Officer, Local Health Board]

- 3.83 External bodies, such as Police Authorities, which may be the subject of scrutiny by several local authorities, report widespread variations in the conduct of scrutiny.

"In [Local Authority A] it's very much a partnership, looking at better ways of making structures like Crime Reduction Partnerships work. In [Local Authority B] it's about being called in to be given a bollocking about something that's not our responsibility....

In [Local Authority A] we discuss agreed performance measures in a sensible and strategic way. In [Local Authority B] you never know what you are going to be grilled about".

[Chief Superintendent]

- 3.84 Involvement of external stakeholders including the public, public service and voluntary service partners, and established experts was seen by many interviewees as a key determinant of the success of overview and scrutiny.

- 3.85 Effective briefing of internal and external witnesses is also seen as important. External witnesses who were thoroughly briefed before meetings perceived overview and scrutiny more positively, whereas those who were not briefed reported feelings of

being 'ambushed' and were often resentful about the way in which they had been treated.

Scrutiny Structures

- 3.86 Many authorities emphasise certain roles (most commonly policy review and performance management) and downplay others (most commonly holding the executive to account and external scrutiny). Some interviewees argued that there should be different committees with different scrutiny responsibilities. For example, an overview and scrutiny co-ordination panel could be charged with fulfilling the role of holding the executive to account and conducting external scrutiny, whilst cross-cutting scrutiny panels would focus on policy development and review.
- 3.87 Eight local authorities in Wales have established a coordinating board or have an overseeing committee comprised of all overview and scrutiny chairs, including five authorities who are not required to do so because they are not operating under the fourth option (See Section 1). Many interviewees believed that this had enabled a strategic and coordinated approach to the allocation of work and centralised information. But others felt that it reduces the autonomy of individual overview and scrutiny committees, and creates another "unnecessary" meeting. In some authorities, chairs of scrutiny committees meet on an informal basis to ensure the council engages with the full range of public interests.
- 3.88 In terms of structures, many local authorities have now developed cross-cutting scrutiny committees in order to facilitate a more holistic approach to overview and scrutiny. Working in silos was thought to create gaps where overview and scrutiny would never venture.
- 3.89 There was a view from some authorities that they simply had too many committees which resulted in a degree of overlap between committees and a lack of focus, despite the presence of a coordinating scrutiny panel. There was also evidence of scrutiny agendas being heavily over-loaded with interviewees reporting future intentions to focus on an average of three big issues a year.

Conclusions

- 3.90 Our interviews, case studies and workshops produce a picture of the operation and effectiveness of overview and scrutiny in Wales which echoes the results of previous research on this issue both here and in other parts of the UK. It is clear that scrutiny is failing to achieve its full potential . There has been plenty of time since 2000 for

new council constitutions to 'bed down' and there is no shortage of advice on good practice in overview and scrutiny. Simply 'soldiering on' in the hope that it will all come right in the end is not therefore a credible strategy.

3.91 We conclude:

- a large number of councillors reported that they felt disengaged from and disillusioned with the overview and scrutiny role
- there is appreciable 'work in progress' within individual councils (and through work with national partners) but so far very few councillors or officers could point us to convincing examples of effective scrutiny in their own councils or of external organisations
- examples of innovation are starting to emerge but at present there is too much reliance on committee style meetings
- much overview and scrutiny is seen as being officer led; few councillors believe that it provides an effective set of checks and balances or offers a means of securing greater public awareness or accountability
- the perceived underperformance of scrutiny more than anything else is responsible for the view among many non-executive councillors that they no longer have a significant role to play within governance of their council
- the role of scrutiny committee chairs and vice-chairs is important in influencing the way overview and scrutiny operates. Party political allegiance is much less important than the skills, outlook, commitment and clout to provide powerful leadership
- members of overview and scrutiny committees themselves also need further training and development opportunities. At present there is too much reliance on knowledge based training and too little emphasis on developing key skills
- most councillors have been too slow to learn from other councils - in Wales, in other parts of the UK and further afield
- the policy agenda has moved on over the last two years and there are now a number of other important issues that local authorities and others must address. For instance:
 - the role of scrutiny is particularly important in the Welsh context because of the Assembly led commitment to a 'citizen-centred model'. The perceived inability of non-executive councillors to hold executives to account means that they are not in a position to ensure that authorities are meeting local needs
 - little effective scrutiny of external agencies, so far, means that councillors can not at present reliably promote the wider well being of the communities that they are elected to represent.

- if these deficiencies are allowed to persist they could undermine both the citizen-centred model and the collaborative agenda, set out in the 'Making the Connections' strategy and powerfully endorsed by the Beecham Review. Authorities need rapidly to develop greater collaborative capacity, taking joint responsibility for local outcomes with other organisations (in particular the other members of Local Service Boards) and will need to become much more effective at holding other agencies to account.

Recommendations

3.92 We recommend:

Local Councils

- it is important to note the work already in hand to improve the ways in which overview and scrutiny operate. Nevertheless our findings point to the need for a clear 'step-change' in arrangement for these important functions
- overview and scrutiny should be given parity of esteem with executive functions. Executive members need to value the input of scrutiny. Non-executive members must make the overview and scrutiny role their own and seize the opportunities that it offers, rather than seeking to 'score points'
- most Councils have made a start in structuring overview and scrutiny topics, but each council needs to have clear scrutiny plans and processes which provide:
 - a strategic framework driven by key national and local policy priorities – including services which are under performing or are identified as being at risk in WPI assessments
 - published work programmes well in advance
 - a mechanism for developing, circulating and consulting on scrutiny programmes widely (to user groups, local communities and other local agencies) with an invitation to comment on and submit evidence
 - consideration of the executive's forward plan and issues raised by the Wales Audit Office and other regulators in their risk assessments, inspection reports and improvement plans/programmes
 - greater use of outside experts – as advisers, witnesses and as members of scrutiny teams – who can assist in developing the scope, terms of reference and methods of enquiry for scrutiny reviews
 - clear procedures for joint or external scrutiny
 - clear processes for call-ins
 - arrangements for involving outside experts and other stakeholders in scrutiny.
- the Assembly should review the guidance in relation to the appointment of scrutiny chairs

- every council should have a senior officer who acts as the corporate Scrutiny Champion, who is free from direct service responsibility and does not therefore have a conflict of interest or loyalty. A clear plan for allocating dedicated senior officer support to overview and scrutiny will be needed
- the appointment of scrutiny committee chairs and vice-chairs should be on merit. They should be provided with high quality expert advice and administrative support, and should be entitled to allowances that are on a par with those of executive members
- authorities should establish plans for joint scrutiny with neighbouring authorities particularly in relation to issues and services which transcend local authority boundaries (for example waste management, out of area placements and workforce planning).

National Partners

- the Assembly Government should consider how to build up a cadre of officers to support scrutiny across the whole Welsh public service, perhaps by establishing a 'School for Scrutiny' with inputs from PSMW, NLIAH, the WLGA, WAO, Solace and others. In parallel, consideration should be given to how best to develop a clear rewarding career path for scrutiny support officers and committee clerks across Wales
- national partners should continue to provide advice and support to authorities in developing effective scrutiny, linked to risk assessments
- scrutiny will increasingly need to embrace issues that cut across traditional organisational or geographical boundaries, budgets and responsibilities. National partners should develop guidance and good practice support for scrutinising the policies and performance of other local agencies and of Local Service Boards.
- councils need to develop clear protocols outlining the scope of scrutiny for collaborative arrangements and other agencies, and clarify the expectations of partners. Other local service providers must engage constructively and willingly with overview and scrutiny committees. We believe that central prescription or legislation is not the best means of securing the involvement of other agencies, but the Assembly Government should reserve this option as a fall-back position if other agencies do not co-operate wholeheartedly with scrutiny committees
- the national partners should again review training and support for scrutiny and overview to meet future demands. Activities must add value to the support and development offered by other organisations (building on current partnerships with the CfPS and IDeA) and learn from experience in Scotland and England
- national partners should continue and expand work with a small number of pilot projects to develop and implement innovative and challenging forms of scrutiny. Pilots should be designed to provide learning for councillors and scrutiny officers across Wales. These could include examples of:
 - scrutiny of large 'strategic' issues involving a number of local agencies

Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members

- joint or cross-authority scrutiny of issues that are high on the national and local policy agenda
- scrutiny of the performance of external agencies
- learning from innovative alternatives to 'committee-style approaches.
- the pilots should be given modest additional funding to procure external advice and support. This might include for example mentoring, facilitation, visits, evaluation, and examination of the effective operation of local scrutiny internationally.

Political Parties

- political parties should raise the profile of overview and scrutiny, and equip their members to fulfil these roles through briefings and training.



**Ward
Representation**

4. Ward Representation

Introduction

- 4.1 All of those whom we interviewed believed that councillors have an important role to play in representing the communities that elect them. Their electoral mandate gives them a unique source of legitimacy. There was widespread agreement that most members perform this role well and find it rewarding, but many report that the role is nevertheless time consuming and demanding.
- 4.2 There was also recognition of the tensions that exist between this and the other roles that councillors fulfil. Councillors spoke of needing to weigh up the interests of their ward against the wider needs of the local authority area as a whole. They also said that they had to inform, shape and lead local public opinion, rather than simply reflecting it. And they needed to be able to explain and account for council policies and performance to local communities as well as representing communities' interests in the council. Increasingly, councillors also have to work with and influence other local service providers.
- 4.3 The ward representation role is therefore about much more than 'case work'. At its best it plays a pivotal role in ensuring local democratic accountability and improving the design and delivery of local services. This broader view of the 'ward representation' role places demands on councillors and calls for a range of skills.

Existing Literature

- 4.4 The ward representation role has not until recently loomed large in Government policy statements, white papers or recent legislation. However, there are now signs of increasing acknowledgement of the importance of the role which councillors have in representing and articulating the interests of local people living in the wards they represent.
- 4.5 The (former) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister stated in 2005 that:

'Ward councillors are democratically accountable to all the communities in the ward they represent, giving them a unique role, including the responsibility to act as advocates and community leaders for their ward and neighborhoods. They have a responsibility both to ensure that the views of all communities are articulated and heard, and to provide

leadership in reconciling or balancing conflicting local interests and brokering local solutions' (OPDM 2005b).

The paper goes on to say that:

'giving councillors this role of neighborhood leadership should strengthen local democracy. It can counter the perception, perhaps unfair, but held by many, that councillors are 'out of touch' and put the needs of their party ahead of the needs of local people'.

- 4.6 The 2006 Local Government White Paper in England reiterates this view. It argues that:

'Councillors should be champions for their local community, able to speak out on all issues affecting their local area and able to sort out issues on the ground' and advocates giving ward councillors 'small budgets to tackle local issues' (DCLG, 2006).

- 4.7 Previous research suggests that the role of ward representation is not however as straight forward as these Government statements imply. Copus (2004) suggests that in practice a majority of councillors act as representatives, not of the electorate, but of their political parties. Other researchers have suggested that councillors too often find themselves defending the council to local people rather than championing the needs of local people in the council.
- 4.8 It is also clear that the ward representation role has also become more complex as communities have become more mobile and more diverse. The promotion of community cohesion and engagement of so-called 'hard to reach' groups have therefore become increasingly important policy issues in recent years.
- 4.9 The ward role has also become more contested than in the past. A range of Government initiatives have emphasized the importance of involving local communities directly in housing management, regeneration schemes and a range of other services, and there has been a huge increase in the level of consultation with the public. This has given a platform to a range of non elected 'community representatives'. The tensions which this can create were highlighted by the recently published independent evaluation of the Communities First initiative (WAG, 2006b) and are experienced by many councillors.
- 4.10 In addition to new forms of community representation there has been an increasing emphasis on empowering users and allowing neighbourhoods a bigger say in the design and delivery of services. Several of the key proposals in the 2006 English Local Government White Paper are, for example, designed to give local communities more control over services.

- 4.11 There is a long tradition in local government of user involvement in services such as social care and housing management and in attempts to engage the wider community in planning decisions. But the last ten years has seen a huge increase in attempts to engage with the public (Martin and Boaz 2000). Most upper tier and unitary authorities in England have introduced citizens' panels and now undertake regular public satisfaction surveys. Many have also experimented with initiatives such as focus groups, citizen's juries, area forums, neighbourhood structures, referenda and participatory budget setting processes (Martin 2003). As noted by the Beecham review the level of engagement is generally lower in Wales, where only a minority of authorities currently undertake regular survey of citizens' views (WAG, 2006a). But here too there is increasing recognition of the value than can be added by increased public involvement in both strategic decisions and the 'co-production' of individual services.
- 4.12 Research suggests that only about a quarter of the public want to have more involvement with their local councils (Martin, 1999) but, like the rise of unelected community representatives, the growth of more participative forms of local democratic engagement, that involve direct communication between service users and service providers, has changed the representation role of local councillors.
- 4.13 Leach and Lowdnes (2005) report that public engagement by local authorities in England has both widened and deepened in recent years, although they note that there is less evidence to indicate that the public engagement generated is having a demonstrable impact on policy-making. They point out that the emphasis has been upon engaging the public largely as service users. There has been less attention given to and less success in achieving citizen engagement in local politics and decision making (see also Copus, 1999).
- 4.14 Within Wales, the Assembly Government and WLGA (with support from WAO and other bodies) promoted the 'Widening Participation' initiative prior to the 2004 local elections (a further initiative is planned prior to the 2008 election) which includes aims to support wider strategies to wider participation in local democracy (considered later in this section).
- 4.15 Developments in information and communications technology have also opened up new ways for councils and councillors to communicate promptly and directly with local people. Most councillors have benefited from this in that they are now able to deal with case work on-line and have easier access to councils reports, agendas, performance data and so forth. However, the introduction of call centres and other e-services means that they now have less involvement in individual cases and problems than in the past and may therefore feel more 'out of touch'.

Our Evidence

- 4.16 When asked to outline what they saw as the main roles of councillors, almost all interviewees reported that it was first and foremost to represent their wards, and almost all of the elected members, council officers and other local and national stakeholders believed that most councillors performed this role reasonably effectively.

"The most important job of a councillor is to look after the people that elected them."

[Councillor]

- 4.17 Some experienced councillors saw this role as the aspect of their roles that had not changed significantly since the time when they first entered local politics. But others believed that it had assumed greater importance in recent years.
- 4.18 Some non-executive councillors who felt that they had been marginalised by the separation of executive and scrutiny roles had sought to reposition themselves more clearly with a community based role and have placed greater emphasis on consultation through street surgeries and other means, such as developing local networks which include faith and voluntary sectors and community groups.
- 4.19 Executive members also rated their ward work as important and several noted that leaders who were perceived to have neglected their own local 'patch' risked losing their seats at election time. Many councillors saw case work as a valuable source of intelligence which added to their knowledge about local performance and enabled them to raise wider issues within the council.
- 4.20 Many councillors spoke of the demands of the role. Some saw it as a "24 hours a day, 365 days-a-year" job. Councillors typically reported spending anything from 8 - 20 hours each week on ward work. But the time which councillors commit to their ward role - both formally and informally - varies depending on a range of factors including what other council responsibilities they have, the needs of their wards, whether they are in a multi-member ward and if so whether they share wards with members from their own parties or the opposition, and their own availability. Although finding time for the ward role was proving increasingly difficult for some councillors all of them wished to retain it. Many said that it was the reason that they came into local politics.

"I hold regular surgeries and often get out on the street... you can generate as much case work as you like by being proactive... some councillors don't put this amount of work in."

[Councillor]

- 4.21 Some highlighted many ways in which they represented their community either formally, for example by being a school governor (most councillors are governors of at least one school and often chair of governors and lead governor on selection and discipline issues), or less formally, through membership of local clubs or societies. Many made the point that "you have to be available" and that there is a public expectation that councillors can be approached on at social occasions and are expected to respond sympathetically. Many believed that the high level of commitment needed for the ward representational role goes largely unrecognised and unrewarded by the public at large.
- 4.22 Much of the 'case work' which councillors reported undertaking involved explaining council policy to constituents or dealing with specific problems brought to them by constituents. Some case work extended way beyond a council remit into cross agency negotiation. For instance, several councillors had become involved in asylum seeker issues, leading support across their community more widely and liaising on behalf of asylum seekers and their families. This too was very time consuming but councillors felt that it was at the heart of their job to "do what's right".
- 4.23 Members believed that most of their colleagues were dedicated and hard working. But in every local authority we were told that there were one or two members who were thought to be ill equipped, under performing or simply "lazy", and officers and national stakeholders also voiced concerns about the calibre of some councillors.

"There is a minority of councillors who don't have the competence to be in the role. They worry all of us"

[National Stakeholder]

- 4.24 Many national stakeholders believed that the ward role was often too reactive. They argued that councillors needed to do more to raise expectations of what councillors can and should be doing. Several argued that this could be achieved by providing a clear and ambitious statement or 'job description' of what the ward role should involve.
- 4.25 However, many councillors do solicit case work as well as reacting to direct and indirect requests. Regular surgeries are of course the traditional way of generating case work, but many councillors told us of a variety of ways in which they urge local people to bring issues to their attention including distributing leaflets and newsletters, inviting telephone contact and walking the streets. Some of the local councillors who we interviewed suggested that a more pro-active approach was desirable but would require a greater level of administrative and officer support for case work than is currently available to them.

- 4.26 Some national stakeholders also expressed concerns about the demographic and gender profile of local councillors. They believed that an increase in the numbers of women and young people would make councillors more representative of the communities they served and therefore in some senses better able to represent them.
- 4.27 There was widespread acknowledgement that the role is a demanding one. Members talked of the challenges of acting as arbitrators or mediators between sections of the community. They described having to decide between equally legitimate points of view and ‘holding the ring’ between different opinions.

"Councillors are the bridge between the citizen and the system. It's a big ask but we need them to do this"

[National Stakeholder]

- 4.28 Officers spoke of the need for councillors to “orchestrate local voice”. Another summarized the role as being to “represent his/her community and to take on board views of community but also to think holistically about the whole authority area and act ‘in the greater good’”. A significant number of councillors saw this role as being ‘nothing new’ citing inspirational community leaders of the past who drew them into local politics.
- 4.29 Balancing representative and participatory forms of democracy was also seen as a challenge. Some officers and other stakeholders believed that many councillors wanted to hold onto the reins too tightly. They argued that councillors had to do much more to empower and equip local people to make decisions and to monitor performance and outcomes.

"We need to move away from the view that the councillor is the decision taker on behalf of the communities they represent. Councillors need to empower local people to make decisions. Some councillors are doing this but most aren't"

[National Stakeholder]

- 4.30 Many members spoke of acting in the wider interest of the local area as a whole and lamented the unwillingness of the electorate to see what was best for the area as a whole as opposed to their particular neighbourhood in areas such as school reorganisation, waste management and housing stock transfer.

"Sometimes my opinions are not always the same as my community and I need to strike a balance and provide a vision".

[Councillor]

“Many issues may evoke substantial emotion and councillors should be brave and accept the brickbats – they must lead from the front”.

[Councillor]

- 4.31 One councillor told us: “what happens in the county affects us all”. But a large proportion of the councillors who we interviewed were primarily interested in the local ward-based issues and saw representing the interests of their ward as being their primary duty.
- 4.32 But some officers believed that members were becoming increasingly willing to take strategic decisions and the difficulties this presented. One stated “we can’t ask them to commit political suicide”. Another interviewee told us that it was important to educate the electorate so that local people did not focus solely on very parochial issues.

“We need to educate the electorate politically so that councillors don’t just focus on complaints about dog dirt and street lighting”

[National Stakeholder]

- 4.33 Many members saw part of their role as community leaders being to act as community facilitators, enabling community groups and voluntary organisations to improve their communities. Community leadership facilitation was especially evident in Communities First areas where several examples of councillors supporting and enabling the voluntary services to work more effectively were cited. Evidence included transference of soft skills, providing support and guidance for grant applications, and encouraging local people to support activities. Examples of community empowerment included the development of integrated children’s centres and the establishment of Swansea Sewage Liaison Committee. However, some members felt that other people in their community were the real community leaders.
- 4.34 Many councillors spoke of the benefits of either being a town or community councillor and/or attending meetings. This gave them additional access to the electorate and helped them to facilitate excellent local partnerships in the community. However, being both a town or community councillor was thought to create tensions between the needs of the community and governing the county.
- 4.35 Some of those who represented areas where there is no community or town council believed that it would be helpful to have access to a small budget which enabled them to address particular local issues. Suggestions about the size of budgets varied but were typically under £10,000 per annum. The voluntary sector also supported the idea of devolved budgets, though it suggested that these should be firmly under the control of local communities rather than councillors. However, the small number of

councils that have tried this approach report difficulties in appropriately accounting for the spend or the results of the spending.

- 4.36 The negative portrayal of politics, local government and elected members in general by the media was widely seen as a problem and as an impediment to securing the trust of local communities.
- 4.37 Our data also pointed to another side of community leaders as a focal point in a crisis. Examples cited range from members leading local rescue efforts in extreme weather conditions and members encouraging their constituents to support police efforts which led to a high profile crime being resolved. Councillors are generally left to fend for themselves in their external work and efforts to be a community leader (in a crisis situation or not). We found little evidence of support being provided by councils to members in their community leadership role.
- 4.38 Many (mostly executive) members reported benefits from joint working in multi-member wards. They saw the advantages as being:
- **team work between members increased access to council representation for the electorate:** as members are able to share case work, provide cover for holidays and sickness, provide additional support for busy executive members, etc.
 - **increased access for constituents in large geographical rural wards:** many members located in rural wards demonstrated the size of their ward made it extremely difficult for them to physically see their constituents as regularly as they would like [note: rural wards are usually single member]
 - **increased personal choice strengthens the link between the councillors and those they represent in their wards:** members felt this potentially leads to fewer wasted votes and electors feeling more directly involved with local government democracy. It was also felt that high density wards often included very different groups of society which require different representatives
 - **more accurate representation of constituent views:** some members believe council decisions are more adequately discussed and scrutinised because more than one member gathers the views of constituents in their ward.
- 4.39 But other members (largely non-executive members) prefer single member wards, reporting multi-member wards create difficulties because they:
- **dilute accountability:** members reported multi-member wards had in some instances created a blame culture which some felt had negatively portrayed the council as a whole

- **confuse the electorate:** which is unsurprising given our evidence and existing research shows the general public do not fully understand local government structures and often do not wish to
- **create unnecessary duplication:** members referred to all ward representatives attending meetings and feeling they could not miss a meeting because another councillor may incorrectly inform or lead the group in a particular way.

4.40 According to the members we interviewed, the merits of each form of ward structure is largely dependent on individual members. Being from the same political party can support joint collaborative working within a ward, but ultimately could work irrespective of political persuasion should all members be inclined for it to do so.

4.41 National stakeholders' views on the merits of multi-member and single member wards also varied. Their attitudes were informed by the same considerations that local interviewees mentioned, although in addition some linked the issue to the possible future introduction of PR in local government.

Overlap and Duplication

4.42 This feeling is supported by interviewees reporting overlaps and duplication of effort by and between Assembly Ministers, Members of Parliament and themselves. The AM role (and particularly that of the list AM "anxious to carve out a role for themselves") is a source of some frustration and friction in some authorities where they get involved in matters which are the responsibility of ward councillors, although in some authorities interviewees praised Assembly Ministers for working effectively alongside and complimenting the role of ward councillors.

4.43 MPs can also get involved in issues outside their remit and there is a perception that the public is confused about who to contact. There was evidence of some confusion between community councils and local authorities, particularly in those councils where some parts of a borough had Community Councils and others did not.

Conclusions

4.44 Recent policies have tended to emphasise the importance of leadership and scrutiny roles. But most councillors and officers continue to see the traditional role of ward representation as being of fundamental importance.

4.45 The report notes that there is a unanimous belief that councillors play an important role in representing the communities that elect them. There is widespread agreement that most members perform effectively in this role and find it rewarding. Their electoral mandate gives them a unique source of legitimacy.

4.46 Previous research confirms that the role of ward representation is not straightforward and has become more complex as communities have become increasingly mobile and more diverse.

4.47 We conclude:

- changes in society, rising public expectations and an increased emphasis on direct forms of participation mean that this role has become more demanding, more complex and contested in recent years
- councillors devote a large amount of time to the role and most are seen as doing a good job. This good work is not widely recognised or appreciated by local communities or the local press
- there is a widespread feeling at national level that members could be more pro-active and play a much greater role in empowering and equipping local people to take a greater role in designing and monitoring services
- many members are increasingly recognising the importance of taking strategic decisions which are in the best interest of the area as a whole but may not be welcomed by their own ward. There can, however, inevitably be considerable tensions
- views about the relative merits of single-member and multi-member wards are divided – at both local and national level
- there is some support for devolving small budgets to local areas but little evidence that this has been successful in practice.

Recommendations

4.48 The actions proposed in 'Widening Participation' are broadly supported by our findings. In relation to ward representation, we recommend:

- in particular, national partners should promote guidance on the ward representation role which informs the public and inspires local councillors to become more pro-active and imaginative in how they work with, represent and empower local people
- in tandem with the launch of the guide, the national partners should launch a media campaign to raise awareness of the valuable roles performed by councillors in Wales, highlighting achievements, the levels of commitment and hard work of councillors and the value added by local councillors in their ward roles
- in order to recognise and celebrate the valuable work done by ward councillors, the WLGA and Welsh Assembly Government should launch an annual award and ceremony to recognise outstanding achievement. The categories might mirror those of the Excellence Wales scheme – for example 'ward councillor of the year'.

The scheme and the presentation should be designed to attract maximum positive publicity – at local and national level

- political parties should provide prospective councillors with a clear understanding of the ward role and the time commitment involved
- individual councils should review the training and support that they provide to new councillors to ensure that it equips them to perform their ward representation role and to manage the tensions and challenges which this entails
- councils that do not already do so should review the benefits and potential costs of providing small local area budgets for use by communities and local councillors to address specific ward level issues.



**Partnership
Working &
Community
Leadership**

5. Partnership Working and Community Leadership

Introduction

- 5.1 In addition to the executive, scrutiny and ward representation roles, councillors have a range of roles on outside bodies including a wide range and growing number of partnership bodies, as well as police, fire and national park authorities, Local Health Boards (LHBs), and local bodies such as school governing bodies and the management committees of local voluntary and community organisations.
- 5.2 The roles and functions of these external organisations vary considerably, as does their composition and the means of selection and appointment of councillors. In some cases councillors are in effect delegates selected by their authority. In others, they are recruited as individuals who bring their own particular expertise or interests.
- 5.3 Police Authorities have 19 members, of whom the majority (10) are drawn from local authorities within the police authority area. They must reflect the overall political balance of the member authorities and are appointed by a joint committee established specifically for this purpose between the member authorities. The Police Authority must accept the nomination of this committee. Police Authorities select a further six independent members from amongst the general public having a mind to the overall demographic characteristics of the area and the skill requirements of the authority. Currently, a further three magistrate members are appointed by the local magistrates committee but this may soon change to give the Police Authority some say in their selection. The authority elects its own chair, and who in turn appoints chairs of the various committees. Members serve for four years.
- 5.4 The constitutions of LHBs are governed by the Local Health Boards (Committee, Membership and Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2003. They consist of a chair appointed by the Assembly, Officer members (CEO, medical, finance and nursing officers), a vice-chair, a public health specialist, up to three general practitioners, a pharmacist, a dental practitioner, an optometrist, a nurse, midwife or health visitor, a therapist, up to two voluntary members, up to two local lay members (one of which should be a carer) and up to four associate members. Additionally, there are up to four local authority members, one of whom must be a senior social services officer of that authority. Usually there are two elected local authority members of whom one is the Executive lead on social services. There is also provision for co-opted members. Members serve for four years.
- 5.5 The Fire and Rescue Services in Wales (of which there are 3) are responsible to their Fire and Rescue Authorities which each comprise 24 Councillor members

representing relevant local authorities in proportion to their population. They elect their own chair and subsequently chairs of committee.

- 5.6 The three National Parks in Wales each has its own National Park Authority. Authorities vary in size (15-24) and consist of two-thirds local authority elected members and one third of members appointed by the Welsh Assembly Government.
- 5.7 Councillors sit on school Boards of Governors as a result of various pieces of legislation which mainly predate the establishment of the Welsh Assembly Government. At least two local authority nominees are required and although they need not be current councillors they usually are.
- 5.8 NHS Trust Boards have a membership appointed by the WAG which include executive directors (CEO, Director of Finance, Medical Director and Nursing Director) and an equal number of non-executive directors. By virtue of their presence in public life **some** elected local authority members are invited to become non-executive members and occasionally chairs, but they are not there as a **consequence** of their local authority elected status.
- 5.9 Some external bodies operate a strategic level - devising strategies, developing programmes, appraising projects, allocating funding and so forth. Other cases have a more operational focus and are concerned primarily with the delivery of particular services at a local level.
- 5.10 The number and range of external organisations with which councils and councillors interact has grown in recent years because of the increased emphasis on their 'community leadership' role and the requirement for partnership working.
- 5.11 The concept of community leadership is not, of course a new one. It has been an important part of local government's role since at least the mid-nineteenth century. However, its interpretation and understanding has evolved over time as the role of local government has changed.
- 5.12 Similarly the concept of 'partnership' is well established but the number, type and functions of partnerships have been expanding rapidly in recent years. This in turn has had important implications for the role of local councils and local councillors.

Existing literature

- 5.13 Historically, the emphasis in local government has shifted from one of civic entrepreneurship at its inception, through to a focus on service delivery and corporate planning in the post war period, to the 'enabling authority' of successive Conservative administrations in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently to a focus on partnership

working and notions of 'place shaping'. Definitions of community leadership are not therefore clear-cut.

5.14 Sullivan (2006) offers four views of the resurgence of central government's interest in community leadership in recent years. It can, she suggests, be seen as:

- **A symbol of change:** designed to signal that local government is moving from an old-fashioned institution to a more modern one
- **A formalisation of local government's enabling role:** by shaping the actions of other agencies to work in consort with its own through partnership working and community governance
- **An expression of citizen voice:** through strategies designed to secure an effective engagement with citizens and communities, devolving decision making to neighbourhoods and local areas, and seeking to involve disadvantaged groups
- **An expedient or cynical device:** used by central government to deflect attention from the reality that local government's influence generally is waning. Clarity of meaning is a prerequisite for individual local councils wishing to be effective in practicing their role as community leaders.

5.15 Whatever the underlying motivation (and the truth is probably that it is combination of all four of the elements listed by Sullivan), community leadership is a multi-faceted and a multi-levelled concept which is seen both as an end in itself and as a means for delivering better outcomes.

5.16 Sullivan and Sweeting (2005) define it as '*the pursuit of well being through the facilitation of strategic interventions that would not otherwise have happened and which are informed by and accountable to the public*'. And according to Sullivan et al, (2006) it three main types of activity:

- **Engaging with local communities:** and the public at large about strategic direction and service delivery
- **Providing strategic leadership:** and 'vision' for their areas
- **Working in partnership:** with other public sector agencies, business and voluntary groups to co-ordinate action.

5.17 As Sullivan and Sweeting note, these three roles are not necessarily compatible. Much earlier analyses have also highlighted the potential for tension between what might be called leadership at the 'strategic' and 'ward' levels. Glassberg (1981) the categorised the extent to which councillors see the borough as whole, or their particular ward, as the 'scope of representation'. Those with a focus on the ward were classified as 'classic parochials' and were contrasted to 'localists' who approached ward representation in a broader political context than the parochial, seeking to make sense of and understand local issues within a national framework.

5.18 This literature reiterates the existence of the tensions that councillors described to us in relation to their ward role and which we have discussed in section four (above). In practice though when interviewees talked to us about what they called 'community leadership' and 'partnership working' they were referring to the wider, strategic roles rather than ward representation, and it is this which Government policy statements usually mean when they refer to 'community leadership'.

5.19 This is reflected in the 1998 English Local Government White Paper which stated that:

'Community leadership is at the heart of the role of modern local government. Councils are the organisations best placed to take a comprehensive overview of the needs and priorities of their local areas and communities and lead the work to meet those needs and priorities in the round' (DETR, 1998:8.1).

and the Assembly Government's 2001 Policy Statement on Local Government which followed suit, stating that local authorities in Wales needed to provide 'clear leadership for their communities'.

5.20 This message is then echoed in the 'ten year strategy' for English local government, which was published by central government in 2005. It argued for the:

'development of the community leadership role of councils who have a key role in leading their communities, focused on networking, influencing and working through partnerships, building on the governance arrangements for LSPs and approaches for local area agreements' (ODPM, 2005a).

5.21 All of these statements focus on the important role that authorities play in leading and co-ordinating strategies and services in their areas and they are consistent with Government policies such as encouragement of the development of Local Strategic Partnerships, the requirement to produce community strategies, the introduction of a new power to promote well-being and a duty to collaborate (already in existence in Scotland and now proposed in England and Wales).

5.22 The community strategy is a clear expression and test of a local authority's community leadership role. Strategies are intended to relate, not just to the council's activities but also to each of the public, private and voluntary stakeholders in a local area and to national agencies acting locally. Critically, they are meant to be founded upon constructive and real engagement with local people and communities, and prepared and delivered through an approach based on collaboration between agencies and organisations.

- 5.23 Statutory guidance on the preparation of community strategies to all local authorities (National Assembly for Wales, 2001) underlines the fact that they are very complex exercises in strategic management involving a multitude of objectives including being a mechanism to encourage an integrated approach which addresses the social, economic and environmental well-being of local communities and contributes to sustainable development providing a forum for debating local needs, priorities and aspirations, and a mechanism for integrated planning and resourcing of local needs by all agencies acting locally as well as informing Assembly priorities and their local implementation. In addition, community strategies are intended to be a means of co-ordinating service provision and initiatives, tackling cross cutting issues, acting as an overarching framework for the plethora of other plans and strategies, and to be reflected in the plans of other bodies acting locally.
- 5.24 The two most important defining characteristics of community strategies relate to the process through which they are formulated, delivered and evaluated. Firstly, they are intended as expressions of effective involvement of local people and communities and, secondly they need to be grounded in a partnership approach involving public, private and voluntary organisations. Specifically in relation to the former, the guidance refers to the need to take account of the need to be sensitive to the tensions between representative and participatory forms of democracy, because the role of elected councillors can be challenged by the juxtapositioning of these two modes within a community strategy process.
- 5.25 Evidence of the effectiveness with which community strategies are being designed and delivered is now emerging from a raft of evaluation studies covering England, Scotland and Wales.
- 5.26 On the basis of a survey of officers and members and a series of case study interviews in England Sullivan and Sweeting (2005) concluded that:
- the focus in most authorities has been upon generating a strategic framework for action, partnership working and engaging with the public there is little evidence of improved accountability, innovation or representation of community interests outside the locality
 - the introduction of community strategies has boosted many authorities' community leadership role, but some partners are unconvinced of a local authorities' capacity to undertake community leadership effectively
 - public and private sector agencies are more likely than voluntary and community interests to see the council as the community leader
 - new council constitutions and CPAs have also encouraged authorities to forge better links with partners
 - past experience of partnership working was an important factor in conditioning local responses to community leadership, and exercising community

leadership may be particularly difficult where poor relationships currently exist between local councils and their partners and the public

- elected members and officers need support and training to improve their competency in community leadership
- some authorities believe that there is a tension between effective community leadership and high quality service delivery.

5.27 In England, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have been central to the development and implementation of community strategies, and also have a key role in the areas covered by neighbourhood renewal funding. Key findings from the evaluations of the implementation of these policies in England (ODPM, 2004a, b, c and d ODPM, 2005c-j) are:

- the context (including political turbulence and uncertainty) is an important determinant of an authority's ability to give sustained community leadership (ODPM/DfT, 2006: 117)
- it takes time for local authorities to develop their capacity and proficiency to act effectively as community leaders (ODPM, 2005e)
- there is a delicate balance between local government in knowing how to support the development and operation of LSPs without dominating them. Local authorities have a key role to play by virtue of the democratic legitimacy but they are often accused of 'paternalism' and domineering behaviour (ODPM/DfT, 2005)
- executive councillors are members of LSPs and are directly engaged in the development of community strategies, but non-executive councillors remain largely disconnected from them. There is also limited engagement of political parties outside the ruling group(s). This marginalisation of councillors is compounded where LSPs have their own links with communities, for example through area forums or committees.
- where elected members are engaged there is concern that their contribution operates below their capacity, and that the precise roles of executive and backbenchers are not fully understood (ODPM, 2005:39)
- the role of the local authority is probably the most important local factor in the success of the LSP and community strategy because of the community leadership role they play in providing infrastructure support for the operation of the LSP and the development of the community strategy, and in ensuring 'good governance' of the activities of the LSP and the delivery of the community strategy.

5.28 The national evaluation of community strategies in Wales published by the Assembly Government last year (Williams et al, 2006) highlighted similar issues in relation to the future role and function of elected members. It concluded that:

- community strategies are complex and multi-purpose in nature. A number of different purposes can be identified although different interest groups or organisations place a different emphasis on different purposes they can exist in various permutations in the same community strategy, and can change over time. The main purposes in Wales are rational planning, civic renewal, network governance, multi-level governance, learning and public relations. The roles of elected members in relation to each of these models vary considerably and there are inherent tensions between them.
- there was no evidence to suggest a need to impose a duty to collaborate on local agencies. Unwilling partners have the ability to subvert, dilute and undermine attempts to force collaboration. Authorities must therefore build the case for working together through client-centred models of public services, developing a collaborative culture, aligning organisational self-interests, building robust trusting relationships, promoting appropriate forms of leadership and management, and providing evidence of the benefits of a commitment to co-operative ways of working. This requires time and effort over a sustained period of time and political and executive leadership at different levels of governance.
- the development of area-based forums in some areas as a result of community strategy public engagement programmes highlights the tensions that exist between representative and participatory forms of democracy. In a number of areas, elected representatives were excluded or had their role diminished within the public involvement process in general and the area based committees in particular. This has led to some councillors to conclude that successful local forums can potentially undermine and destabilise their representative legitimacy resulting in a waning appetite for participatory democracy. In some cases, changes have been made to seek a better connection between area forums and locally elected representatives and to find mechanisms where both can co-exist. However, the extent to which this is viewed as controlling as opposed to empowering is a matter of opinion.
- many stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and other public bodies, viewed the preparation of the community strategy as a council-dominated exercise. Many believed that local councils had failed to interpret their community leadership role in other than a dictatorial fashion. So, rather than being facilitative and catalytic, they were perceived as being controlling and oppressive in style. Local authorities need to walk a fine line between offering direction and leadership without appearing to be intrusive and controlling.
- the degree of political commitment from elected members to community strategies was seen to be problematic in some areas particularly in relation to continuity of approach between successive political administrations; the strength of political commitment to the process through the involvement of council leaders and other key members; and the lack of integration of community strategies within formal political processes, structures and decision making frameworks.

5.29 Research on community planning in Scotland has reached similar conclusions to those of evaluations of policies in England and Wales. There is evidence that developing a community leadership role in a period of political uncertainty is particularly difficult (Rogers et al, 2000); that local authorities have to play a delicately balanced role in leading the community planning partnership towards independent functioning, gradually achieving a 'life of its own' (Carley, 2004); and that there is no research evidence that demonstrates the effect that the statutory duty on all public bodies to cooperate with the local authority on community strategies makes a difference. However, anecdotally there appears to be a strong belief that the provision of the duty has generally had a positive effect, but this is tempered by awareness that the duty may be more symbolic than practical in its effect.

Our Findings

5.30 We found widespread recognition from members, officers and local stakeholders of the growing importance of partnership working and community strategies. One interviewee, for example, described partnership as 'only show in town', another said that it was 'the order of the day in local government'.

5.31 Our interviews with councillors, officers and other stakeholders showed that the concepts of 'community leadership' and 'community strategies' are now firmly embedded in the vocabulary of many members. However, when questioned in detail about how their role has changed in recent years members focused on the new executive arrangements, the scrutiny function and their ward representation roles. The development of community strategies and indeed community leadership did not appear to be at the forefront of their minds.

5.32 Officers and other stakeholders (at national and local levels) felt that in practice most councillors had not yet fully embraced the community leadership role. They believed that councillors should be doing more to make sure locally that the right people make community decisions (which may or may not be councillors themselves) and should place an increased role in monitoring outcomes of those decisions.

5.33 Similarly, whilst there was strong support in principle for greater collaboration - between local government and other local agencies and also with the voluntary sector - interviewees voiced concern about how well this would work in practice and its implications for local accountability.

5.34 However, we were told of many examples which had the makings of good partnership working. In one of the case study authorities, there is a cabinet member responsible for cross-cutting issues and partnerships. This authority is represented on a new trunk road agency in the area they have a joint adoption panel in social services and make joint appointments in education. Another council had recently launched its

Corporate Plan accompanied by a speech from the Leader which focused on “XXX Public Services” rather than ‘XXX County Borough’ signalling a move to partnership working.

- 5.35 There was a widespread view that the success of partnership working was ‘down to personalities’ and the development of respectful and trusting inter-personal relationships. Both local authority and stakeholder Interviewees spoke of the importance of ‘energetic’ and ‘enthusiastic’ Chief Executives and Leaders who were helping to drive the partnership agenda.
- 5.36 In almost all cases, councils are represented on strategic partnerships by executive members – the argument being they have the status, authority and expertise to represent the authority effectively. Non-executive members usually served on very local partnerships such as those associated with Communities First and Boards of Governors, Tenants Associations etc.
- 5.37 The disadvantage of this division of labour was that it was seen as placing a considerable burden on a small group of executive members and depriving experienced non-executive councillors of the opportunity to engage in partnership working.
- 5.38 Some interviewees were very positive about the roles played by elected members on partnerships. For example, the chief executive of a LHB suggested that, ‘There are some excellent councillors who care about the health of the local population but the level of contribution does vary’.
- 5.39 However, many members and partners believed that partnerships were not achieving their full potential. Some spoke of existing arrangements as being “*a mess*”, and of partnerships as being “*semi-detached*” from each other. For example representatives from one authority explained that the Acute Care Review was carried out in isolation of the Community Strategy and the Spatial Plan and the review did not involve the ambulance service or the PCT. In another council the NHS was seen to be “protective of their turf” and saw the Council as “the funding stream”.
- 5.40 While some members have embraced the partnership working role with passion, others have found it difficult. Many seemed unclear about its likely implications for the role of councillors. There was concern among officers that many members were slow to embrace partnership working. For their part many councillors expressed concern that it was always ‘the usual suspects around the table’ and that some partnerships lacked democratic legitimacy.
- 5.41 Officers too gave examples of partnership working which they felt undermined the councillors’ traditional representative role. A common example was when the council

was not the budget holder as is the case with the Communities First initiative. Officers complained about the lack of understanding and respect for their role.

"They do not understand why they don't have a stronger voice than a parent from the parent-toddler group."

[Officer]

"This is my community. I have been elected to represent the people in this room."

[Councillor]

"I wouldn't listen to officers talking to me in this way, so why should I tolerate it from (the community)?"

[Councillor]

Examples of councillor activities on other bodies

5.42 The time devoted to partnership working varies widely depending on the partnerships in question and the roles which members play. We were told of some roles that were seen by councillors as being very demanding and time consuming. For instance, official guidance suggests that a chair of a Police Authority would be expected to set aside 2-3 days each week for this role, but councillors reported that in practice it is a full-time job – involving a considerable amount of evening work representing the authority. Some chairs also have a national role with membership of various Associations of Police Authorities or Home Office committees and working groups. Local authority members, being the majority, tend to chair the majority of the committees (finance, HR, professional standards, etc). Typically, full authority meetings take place six or seven times a year, interspersed with training and workshop days. Committees tend to meet at least as frequently and in addition elected members serve on joint working groups with their police force and are expected to represent the Authority in its dealings with the public. They are very much working members and are expected to develop expertise in a number of ways in order to hold the police force to account.

5.43 Partly because they are reasonably well remunerated (circa £20k for the chair and £11k for a committee chair) there have been various efforts to review performance – usually via a three way meeting between the member, chief executive (clerk) and chair. This has been resisted by some members. Also because job descriptions exist for independent (selected) members there is some sympathy for the WLGA charter approach and efforts have been made to ask joint appointing committees to bear in mind the police authority's skill-mix need, as well as the requirement to be politically representative, in making appointments. Because police authorities are

strategic bodies there is a need to have strategic thinking members and this is largely achieved. As well as setting the budget they are increasingly involved in developing the community involvement aspect of policing. Elected members cannot really reflect their “ward” on a police authority, although their experience of it enhances their understanding of police work.

- 5.44 Although the elected members represent the political spectrum of local authorities in the police authority area, CEOs report that they tend to be relatively apolitical when engaged in Police Authority business. On the whole elected members are seen as playing a useful role in holding the force to account, representing the police to the wider community and bringing their community experience to the development of local policing. We interviewed all four CEOs of Police Authorities in Wales who largely concurred in their views about local authority members and their contribution.
- 5.45 Councillors’ roles on LHBs are much more confined but there are potential contradictions and tensions in their roles as part of **joint** arrangements between health and social care. They are very different from Primary Care Trusts in England where membership is via a “Public Appointments” process and there are statutory duties for joint planning and action. This is an area where there is general agreement that different arrangements will be needed if new service provision arrangements are to succeed. Although some good examples of joint working to mutual benefit can be demonstrated, on the whole, partnership is typified by protectionism and silo thinking. Councillors often get embroiled in local service issues such as hospital closures which prevent them taking a more strategic approach to healthcare across the patch and the requisite balance between local and/or primary care and wider, acute services provided on a regional basis.
- 5.46 The Fire and Rescue Authorities, consisting of entirely local authority members more closely resemble cross-county service provision partnerships. Although there are issues about representativeness (members tend to be older and are mostly male), on the whole they tend to act apolitically and strategically. As with Police Authorities there are tensions when it comes to setting the annual budget – the cost of which is added to local Council Tax but there are few examples of conflict.
- 5.47 Similarly, the National Park Authorities in Wales are seen as acting strategically for mutual benefit and for members to be knowledgeable and serving the wider public interest.
- 5.48 Almost every councillor we spoke to acted as a governor of at least one school and some had senior roles in determining appointments and managing finances. The majority of school boards of governors are chaired by a councillor.
- 5.49 The lack of councillors on Health Trusts is a concern for some councillors as they have large budgets but are seen as lacking local elected accountability. This also has implications for joint service and partnership arrangements as councillors have

no direct equivalent on Health Trusts which means that joint boards cannot have equivalence in terms of member power.

- 5.50 In addition to the formal position councillors hold on statutory bodies, outlined above, they also play an important role with the community and voluntary sectors. Voluntary sector informants to this study spoke highly of councillors' involvement as members of main committees or sub groups where the presence of elected members is often seen to add legitimacy or weight to local organisations. Councillors are also valued as facilitators and contact points, people who can provide access and information and bring together groups with similar interests. The Assembly through its promotion of Voluntary Sector Compacts has underlined the vital role councillors can play with the third sector both locally and nationally.
- 5.51 For many councillors, involvement in community groups and the voluntary sector was, in any case, their starting point in public life. For some, involvement in single issue campaigning allowed them to develop skills in community leadership which they are subsequently able to apply most broadly as a councillor. Considerable effort, by the WLGA and WCVA, is expended in developing councillors' skills in relation to fulfilling this role (for instance through the WLGA Induction Pack, 2004).

Conclusions

5.52 We conclude:

- local councillors are, in many cases, the 'backbone' of external Partnerships, Boards, Agencies and Authorities. The capacities in which they serve on these bodies and the levels of training and support which they receive as a consequence of membership, vary but are on the whole good
- partnership working is accepted as being good in principle but elected members are acutely aware of and concerned about the need for clear accountability and good governance
- the time required for fulfilling 'external representation' requirements should not be underestimated: meetings, preparation and other tasks can take up a significant proportion of a councillor's overall workload and there is concern about 'partnership overload'
- the community leadership role is currently seen as needing further development in many areas. It is recognised that community leadership while not new, is an evolving concept
- there are some concerns about the decline in discretion available and the consequent impact on local leadership
- there is concern from local authorities and LHBs that the current composition of LHBs does not sit easily with the need for joint working between health and social services.

Recommendations

5.53 We recommend:

- councillors who represent their local authorities on partnerships and other bodies need to be suitably trained and supported
- the national partners should review training and support for members who have these roles to ensure that it meets the challenges posed by the collaborative agenda
- individual authorities should consider the skills and knowledge they will insist on within those representing their interests
- there is scope for experimentation on devolving budgets to partnerships. The Assembly may wish to communicate information on opportunities which can be taken
- authorities should develop strategies for the scrutiny of local and area partnerships and boards
- the Assembly Government needs to examine whether the current composition of LHBs is the most appropriate for effective future joint working between health and local authorities.

Underpinning processes:

Recruitment and Retention,
Training and Development,
Member Support, Number of
Councillors

6. Underpinning Processes

Introduction

- 6.1 Previous sections have looked at the role of councillors in relation to four broad categories of work:
- Decision Making
 - Overview And Scrutiny
 - Ward Representation
 - Partnership Working And Community Leadership
- 6.2 There are a number of factors which impact on all of these broad spheres of activity which are best seen as processes which help or hinder councillors to a greater or lesser extent. These centre on the ways in which councillors are recruited, trained supported, and encouraged to stay in local government and develop their roles. These processes themselves are closely linked to the time needed to fulfil the councillor roles, and to the numbers of councillors in individual authorities.
- 6.3 Being a councillor can involve having to reconcile a number of different expectations and priorities including:
- local ward needs and the wider strategic needs of the area as a whole
 - the council's priorities and those of wider partnerships
 - representing community views and trying to lead communities
 - taking a critical stance on decisions whilst being bound by them.
- 6.4 These tensions are not helped by some confusing messages inherent in the role of a councillor, such as:
- being a volunteer but being 'paid' allowances⁴
 - being accountable but having no formal training or recognised qualification
 - being expected to make a difference but often having relatively little power in some key areas of delivery
 - facing high public expectations but often having relatively low public esteem.

⁴ These views are a summary of a workshop facilitated by the WLGA at the Local Democracy Conference 16th October 2006, Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells.

Existing Evidence

Number of councillors: International comparisons

- 6.5 At the time of the last re-organisation in Wales, the Welsh Office suggested that there should be a reduction in the number of councillors (Deacon, 1995). There were then 1,977 members in the two-tier system of districts and counties. The representative body of Welsh district councils (Council of Welsh Districts) presented a methodology for the reduction of members which was accepted by the Secretary of State for Wales. This included a rule that none of the new unitary authorities would have more members than the largest existing local authority (Mid Glamorgan had 74 members). The boundaries of 12 of the 22 new unitary authorities closely reflected those of the old districts, but for the other authorities a formula was used to allocate members to these new organisations. This formula included a managerial body of 15 members who 'undertake the core tasks of political management which are necessary simply because the authority exists, whatever the population or its geography'.
- 6.6 The Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales recommended council sizes between 30 and 75 members (Cardiff, Gwynedd and Rhondda, Cynon, Taff all have 75 members). There was also the aim to have electoral divisions with a member to electorate ratio no lower than 1:1,750. However, as Table 6 illustrates, the member to electorate ratio varies quite extensively across Wales, with many local authorities having a lower than recommended ratio:

Table 6: Member to elector ratios in Wales

Authority	Member – electorate ratio
Gwynedd	1,158
Isle of Anglesey	1,256
Blaenau Gwent	1,259
Merthyr Tydfil	1,292
Ceredigion	1,299
Powys	1,415
Conwy	1,501
Denbighshire	1,521
Pembrokeshire	1,537
Torfaen	1,576
Flintshire	1,608
Monmouthshire	1,614
Neath Port Talbot	1,715
Caerphilly	1,777
Carmarthenshire	1,790
Wrexham	1,825
The Vale of Glamorgan	1,938
Bridgend	1,943
Newport	2,001
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	2,234
Swansea	2,526
Cardiff	3,255
Average	1,781

6.7 As Table 7 illustrates, the UK has an average member to elector ratio of 2,603 which is significantly higher than nearly every other western European country. These figures should however be interpreted with caution since different countries operate very different systems of local government systems with widely varying powers and functions.

Table 7: Member to elector ratios in Europe

Country	Population (million)	Number of principal local councils	Average population per council	Average size of council	Population per elected member
France	59.6	36,700 communes	1,600	14	118
Austria	8.2	2,350 Gemeinden	3,500	17	209
Sweden	8.8	310 kommuner etc	28,400	111*	256
Germany	83	15,300 Gemeinden etc	5,400	15	350
Norway	4.5	435 kommuner	10,300	28	367
Finland	5.2	452 kommuner	11,500	28	410
Italy	57.7	8,100 Communi	7,100	12	608
Spain	40	8,100 municipios	4,900	8	610
Belgium	10.3	589 communes	17,500	22	811
Greece	10.6	1,033 dimi, koinotites	13,300	10	1,075
Denmark	5.4	275 kommuner	19,600	17	1,115
Portugal	10.1	308 municipios	32,800	29	1,131
Netherlands	16	548 Gemeenten	29,000	19	1,555
Ireland	3.8	114 counties, etc.	33,000	14	2,336
UK	59.6	468 counties, districts etc	127,350	49	2,603

Notes: * Includes deputies, elected at the same time.

[Source: Wilson and Game: 2002: 247]

- 6.8 Evidence suggests that the member to electorate ratio can have a powerful impact on the allocation of time to council duties. Rao (1994) for example found that councillors in authorities with very high representative ratios (between 6,000 and 10,000 electors), spent on an average 101 hours a month compared with 72 hours a month spent by councillors in authorities with low representative ratios (1,700 to 3,000 electors).

Council size and performance

- 6.9 Recent local government re-organisations around the globe have resulted in the creation of ever larger units of local government. The UK has been at the forefront of this trend and has some of the largest local authorities in Europe. The average population size of English shire districts is now over 10 times the European average for lower tier authorities.
- 6.10 The move towards ever larger units of local government has been fuelled in part by an assumption that larger authorities are more efficient. But, as Stewart (2003) notes, research has 'failed to find any clear link between size and efficiency and/or effectiveness' [Stewart, 2003:181].
- 6.11 Muzzio and Tompkins (1989) too found that '*there are few empirical analyses of the effects of city council size ... much of the available information on the effects of legislative (council) size is speculative and anecdotal*'. They conclude that 'one size cannot be called better than the others; rather, different sizes are conducive to different goals' (1989:95)
- 6.12 Equally though there is evidence that turnout at local elections, direct citizen contact with councillors and officers, citizen attendance at council or public meetings, political discussion, citizen perception of influence over local affairs, trust in local councillors and officials, citizen identification with the local council and levels of political engagement may all be adversely affected by larger units of local government (see, Oliver 2000, Denters 2002, Downe 1998, Ladner 2002, Baglioni 2003, and Kelleher and Lowery 2004). Nielsen (1981:57) for example claims that:

"local distrust, local lack of efficacy, and local lack of saliency are systematically higher in medium - large municipalities than in smaller ones, even when a control is made for the fit between the party (bloc) of the mayor and the party of the voter... that local government is rated more positively is an argument in favour of decentralization... the size factor may be a warning against far-reaching amalgamation".

- 6.13 Some researchers have suggested that as the population size of a council area increases, citizen involvement increases up to a point and then began to decline,

suggesting that there is an optimal council size, at least as far as public engagement is concerned, but that biggest is not best (Keating 1995, Cusack, 1997, Rose, 2002, Frandsen, 2002).

- 6.14 However, Newton (1982:193) maintains that 'the search for optimum size ... has proved to be as successful as the search for the philosophers' stone, since optimality varies according to service and type of authority'. He indicates that small and large authorities do not differ by any more than a small amount on various measures of functional effectiveness and democracy.
- 6.15 The Redcliffe-Maud report (Cmnd. 4040, 1969) struggled with this underlying desire to see larger units of local government whilst recognising that they might have a deleterious affect on democratic engagement. The committee acknowledged that democratic considerations pointed to an upper limit on the size of authorities running all main services, and that if councils became too large and too remote councillors would find it difficult to maintain contact with constituents. Equally, members of large councils might find it difficult to effectively monitor and hold council officials to account, or to comprehend the problems of the area, determine priorities and take decisions on policy. Moreover, citizens would fail to identify with large units of local government and lack any sense of belonging to it. Redcliffe-Maud also recognised that when an authority is very large there is less chance that citizens will be willing to regard it as the only authority that ought to provide all their local government services. Yet, Redcliffe-Maud argued that it was a requirement of effective local democracy that authorities should be in charge of areas within which they can provide efficient services and moreover, that areas must contain populations large enough for effective use of resources.
- 6.16 The report concluded:

"There can be no firm rule about the maximum size of an authority. But we concluded that the range of population, from about 250,000 to not much above 1,000,000, which we considered most suitable on functional and organisational grounds for authorities administering all local government services, was also appropriate on democratic grounds. Within this range the size of each particular unit should be determined by reference to all the local circumstances – the social, economic and geographic facts, the areas most appropriate for organising services, the accessibility of a suitable headquarters, the existing pattern of local government and other relevant considerations."

and recommended a maximum of 75 councillors for the largest local authorities to reduce the problems of service co-ordination and management (1969, para 456).

- 6.17 Widdicombe also considered the number of councillors appropriate for councils and

representative ratios (1986, para 7.3) and recognised that reducing the number of councillors to improve service co-ordination would result in councillors representing a larger area and population, which could be disadvantageous to minorities. The inquiry was aware of how larger councils exacerbate the tension between the management and representative roles of the councillor and saw these more easily reconciled in smaller authorities but it made no recommendations about council size other than to say that the matter should be reviewed in the light of developments in local democracy.

- 6.18 The French communes show the potential that small councils can have, and that such small councils, by forming partnerships with surrounding authorities, can provide services as efficient and effective as far larger authorities, whilst at the same time, protecting and maintaining as distinct community and political identity (Borraz and Le Gales, 2005). This, of course, has strong echoes of the vision outlined by the Beecham Review.

Time taken by councillors on council business

- 6.19 Evidence suggests that the amount of time members have allocated to their duties has increased steadily since the 1960s. In 1967, the Maud Committee found that the average number of hours spent on council duties in a month was 52. According to the Widdicombe Committee, this figure had risen to 74 hours in 1986. In 2005, the government-funded evaluation of the new political management arrangements found that the average number of hours spent on council work had increased to 83 per councillor per month (Stoker et al, 2005).

Widening Participation

- 6.20 There have been concerns for many years that councillors tend to under-represent women, young people and ethnic minorities. Indeed the number of people presenting themselves for possible election as a councillor at all has been seen as lower than would ideally be the case for some time. Within Wales, a 'Widening Participation' campaign preceded the 2004 local elections, with aims to "promote public awareness of the role of elected members, secondly to encourage a wider interest amongst the communities of Wales in candidature for the local elections..." (WLGA, 2006:1).
- 6.21 A further 'Widening Participation' campaign is being planned for the 2008 elections, with aims:
- *"to support wider strategies to revitalise public interest in local democracy, such as those directed at encouraging voting and citizenship*
 - *to support wider strategies to promote participation in local democracy, community affairs and citizenship*
 - *to improve public knowledge of the role and value of the local elected member*

- *to promote the changing role of the elected member and the values and behaviours needed to lead and develop participative democracy (e.g. amongst candidates and sitting councillors)*
- *to increase interest in candidature for local elections*
- *to promote diversity in local elected representation and to broaden the base of local people showing an interest in standing for election and*
- *to prepare candidates for office (readiness through a sound knowledge of the role, the workings of local government, and issues with the public services local government provides)".*

(WLGA, 2006:2)

6.22 Planned activities are, potentially, wide-ranging and include:

- "a national publicity campaign to promote the role and value for the elected member drawing on real life stories and experiences (to be lead by the Assembly)
- work with other organisations who can help and support existing or newly elected members, specifically working with employers of councillors/potential councillors to encourage them to be supportive and flexible in valuing public service (to be lead by the Assembly with the support of the national partners)
- the provision of briefing and training materials for those interested in local democracy, including potential candidates, to develop knowledge of the role of the elected member, how councils work, and the public services councils provide and govern (to be lead by the Association)
- open events, mentoring and shadowing opportunities for any individual interested in standing for office (to be lead by the Assembly and the Association) and
- work with the national political parties who should be expected to draw on their own capacity and resources to support and develop their own members (existing and newly recruited) in readiness for the local elections (to be lead by the Association and its Group Leaders)."

(WLGA, 2006:)

Our Findings

Recruitment and Retention

6.23 The national stakeholders whom we interviewed expressed three main concerns about recruitment and retention:

- the difficulty of attracting councillors of high calibre

- the unrepresentativeness of councillors in terms of age, gender and background
- the challenge of ensuring that there is a sufficiently large pool of candidates in the future.

6.24 The concerns of the local councillors and officers whom we interviewed focused on:

- the burdens placed on councillors
- issues of remuneration and recognition
- the impact of the post-2000 structures on recruitment and retention.

6.25 Many interviewees believed that the local party structures are not attracting sufficient interest from people with the ability and availability to take on the role of local councillor. Many also expressed concern that a disproportionate number of councillors are self-employed or retired, male and over the age of 60.

6.26 As well as 'Widening Participation' at an all-Wales level, some councils have tried their own initiatives to attract and retain younger people and women as councillors by:

- providing better support services
- ensuring that meeting times are convenient for those in paid employment with (child) care responsibilities
- providing childcare facilities.

6.27 Many interviewees highlighted negative public perceptions of councils and of councillors as an obstacle to recruitment and some argued that councils need to do more to publicise their achievements and the valuable role that they play in society. (This echoes the findings of research undertaken for the 'Beecham Review' which found that in general Welsh councils are perceived by the public to be communicating less well than their English counterparts).

6.28 Many interviewees argued that more also needs to be done to make the requirements placed on councillors clearer so that candidates know what will be expected of them. Some new councillors reported that they had been persuaded to stand for election on the grounds that they stood little chance of being voted in and so were unprepared for their new roles.

6.29 Although most of the 2004 intake to whom we spoke were enthusiastic about being a councillor, some reported that they have found the role more complex and demanding than they had expected and that even after two and half years they were still "feeling their way".

Time given by councillors to council duties

- 6.30 In theory, the post-2000 structures might be seen as reducing the amount of time which non-executive councillors need to devote to council duties. In practice, however, most interviewees believed that the demands on members' time have increased because of an increase in the number of meetings that they are required to attend.

"My local casework is fine. That is not an issue but there is, and it's something which has been developing for the last two or three years, every year there seems to be more meetings than there was before within the council".

[Councillor]

"When I started in 1999 we had 200 meetings a year, that was every committee, whatever committee you were on or however it was run, it was 200. We're now up to 450".

[Councillor]

- 6.31 At face value this might be taken to be an argument against reducing the numbers of councillors. However, some of the members and officers whom we interviewed believed that it was possible for councillors to work more effectively in future and for the numbers of meetings to be reduced in order to enable councillors to cope with the workload.

Allowances

- 6.32 There was a widespread feeling that councillors are "*unsung local heroes*" who willingly give their time for little recompense or recognition.

"The role of the elected member should be championed, they do a fantastic job for little public recognition and don't get rewarded sufficiently".

[Officer]

- 6.33 Not surprisingly, many interviewees expressed strong views about the level of allowances. Some believed that allowances were undesirable because they attracted people to become councillors 'for the wrong reasons'. Others argued for a significant increase in the level of allowances for all members to ensure that the role attracted the brightest and best.
- 6.34 Most interviewees took the view that allowances were needed to remove barriers to entry but they resisted the idea that all councillors should become in effect professional politicians.

6.35 There was a general view that the current level of allowances for non-executive members was "*about right*" but that there may be a case for increasing allowances for the leader, their deputy and perhaps other members of the executive in order to attract the most able. However, most interviewees saw this as a difficult proposal to sell to the public and were wary of press reaction to what would in effect be full-time salaries for executive members. The Review of Councillors' Allowances Regulations (2006) was welcomed by members as it enforced that allowances were an appropriate amount and because it was an independent review it gave the process transparency - "*better than awarding ourselves pay rises like MP's*".

"Payment for councillors would be counter-productive as it would encourage candidates interested in money only."

[Councillor]

"The electorate would be against this because they do not fully understand the role."

[Councillor]

"Wales couldn't afford to sanction another full-time tier of local government."

[Councillor]

Many of those who supported an increase in allowances therefore argued that there should also be a reduction in the overall numbers of councillors and in the size of executives as a quid pro quo for larger allowances (see below).

Training and Development

6.36 The WLGA Member Development Charter was launched in 2005, and sets out three levels of a national standard for the support and development of elected members covering the four areas of:

- (i) modernised constitutional arrangements
- (ii) member development
- (iii) member support services
- (iv) member facilities.

6.37 The Charter was created to give structure and impetus to the growing body of support services for elected members within Welsh local government. The WLGA reports that seven local authorities have submitted a statement of intent to sign up to the Charter and the remaining local authorities plus the Fire and Rescue, Police and National Park authorities are moving towards doing so. This is likely to improve member training, development and support in the future through increased attention to

established good practice.

Case Study 4: Implementation of the Members Charter:

One council has enthusiastically adopted the Charter and actions so far include:

The identification of job roles for different members which have been agreed for cabinet members and scrutiny chairs

A list of necessary skills and competencies

Training needs analysis undertaken in order to identify shortfall in individual members capabilities and personal goals and development plans

Performance appraisal – initial plan is for leader to review deputies deputies to review other cabinet members external review of leader by other c/e or leader of another council

Modernisation Working Group manages all matters relating to member development

A Community Leadership module is to be built into training programme

- 6.38 The WLGA Charter and other initiatives are promoting more systematic approaches to member development, but we gathered strong evidence that much more work is needed before consistent good performance is going to be achieved. The Charter is still in its infancy, very few members and officers were aware of its existence and even fewer were able to discuss the Charter's substance.
- 6.39 The evidence that we have gathered suggests that there are considerable variations between authorities in the types and levels of member training and development that is provided and in levels of awareness and participation in opportunities provided by external agencies such as the WLGA, IDeA and WAO. The level of investment by individual authorities in the number of officers and resources allocated to member development also vary widely.
- 6.40 At national level the main focus of member development work over recent years has been on the overview and scrutiny role. Local government agencies such as the English and Welsh Local Government Associations and the IDeA, auditors and inspectors, and the Centre for Public Scrutiny have produced good practice guides and toolkits. Much less attention has been given to training and development in other roles including community leadership, executive functions and ward representation although the WLGA Induction Pack (2004) represents a significant contribution in this area.
- 6.41 Councillors' views of the quality of training provision within their authorities varied. Some reported that the training was "*really good, very comprehensive*". Some felt over loaded: there was, we were told, "*too much, it was exhaustive*". Others in the

same authority complained that there was inadequate provision: *"it was useless, we hardly got any information"*.

- 6.42 Many members recognised the value of training opportunities and acknowledged their own need to continuously develop their knowledge and skill base in line with the changing nature of their role and new policies and practices (in their local authority, region and nationally), and yet many also admitted they rarely made time available to attend training events.
- 6.43 A significant number of officers and councillors complained that whilst members expressed support in principle for training, attendance at events was often poor and it was often the same few people who did participate. Officers, who had invested a great deal of effort and resource in developing training packages to meet what they believed to be the needs of councillors in their authorities, felt particularly disappointed by this.
- 6.44 In some cases accessibility was an issue. Councillors complained that training was put on at times which made it difficult for those in paid employment and/or with family commitments to attend. Although not widespread, we did however find instances where the timing of training sessions had been designed carefully with councillors' needs – for example sessions put on before or after agreed meetings. Some interviewees argued that attendance figures should be published to encourage members to turn up to training sessions.
- 6.45 Most authorities had sought to tailor training to members' views of their training needs. Some had undertaken surveys of members. Some had created membership development boards made up of members to increase 'buy-in' to development. There are also examples of relevant training being compulsory – for example in some councils members have to undergo training before serving on planning or licensing committees.
- 6.46 The abolition of the committee system is also seen by many members as having destroyed what was in effect an informal apprenticeship model whereby new councillors could observe senior colleagues in action on committees and build up their experience in particular service areas by serving on committees. Many councillors reported that they relied heavily on skills derived from (past or present) paid employment.

"When I first became a councillor I hadn't appreciated how complex and detailed the role was... it hasn't been a problem for me because I have been a senior manager and director of a large multinational before"

[Councillor]

6.47 Frequently cited examples of skills gained in paid employment included people skills, chairing a meeting and financial management. Some interviewees suggested that members' previous experience was now becoming more varied.

6.48 Training provided by councils tended to focus on the delivery of information and technical skills. Much of what was described as 'training' by interviewees was in fact information provision - for example updates on new policies and legislation. Some complained that these sessions involved lengthy presentations from officers and afforded councillors little opportunity to engage and develop skills. There was a view that there was a need for more interactive and participative development events and a greater emphasis on developing 'softer' skills (e.g. negotiation, questioning and communication skills) and competencies.

"I'd like to see more developmental training for leadership and learning the skills of leadership rather than lip-service that is paid to leadership".

[Councillor]

6.49 Training opportunities provided by councils tended to focus on the delivery of information and 'hard' technical skills. Both members and officers often referred to information provision as training. Many were satisfied with this, but others argued that there was a need for more interactive and participative development events and a greater emphasis on developing 'softer' skills and competencies were really needed and not currently provided.

"I'd like to see more developmental training for leadership and learning the skills of leadership rather than lip-service that is paid to leadership."

[Councillor]

6.50 Areas in which more training was needed are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Areas for member development

- Questioning skills designed for different audiences and purposes
- Debating and deliberation
- Investigative and Inquisitive skills
- Research skills
- Public speaking
- Presentation skills
- Listening skills
- Chairing meetings
- Developing a vision

- 6.51 We found that most training was also generic. There was little evidence of training being customised to individual needs and there was little use of personal development plans.
- 6.52 The majority of member training is delivered in-house. Interviewees believed that this made it more easily accessible, cost effective and promoting team work across parties. But some councillors were suspicious of training provided by officers and said that they would welcome more training from peers.
- 6.53 New members were generally positive about the quantity and quality of training that they had received, although some suggested that it had come too late. They had therefore 'muddled through' the first few months, learning 'on the job', although some saw this as a better means of learning than formal training.
- 6.54 'Learning on the job' was widely seen as the best development tool. Most councillors reported that they relied largely on this informal approach, although some acknowledged that it was a slightly 'hit and miss' affair. Many newer members reported that more experienced colleagues from the same party taking them under 'their wing', but independent members and those from smaller political groups often missed out on this kind of support and reported feeling unsupported.
- 6.55 Some longer standing members felt some nostalgia for the pre-2000 committee structure.

"you know you had to sit on council for 2 years and shut up. you became the chair when you had sat on social services committee for 25 years.. were the oldest member and became an expert"

[Councillor]

- 6.56 But some interviewees welcomed the fact that under the post-2000 structures it was possible for talented councillors to progress to leadership positions (either as chairs of overview and scrutiny or members of the executive) without having to serve a long apprenticeship.
- 6.57 We found little evidence of peer mentoring schemes or 'buddying' systems. And the few examples that we were reported to us were not seen as working very well. One interviewee for example reported that shadowing a cabinet member had not helped them they had felt like a 'gofer'.
- 6.58 Many interviewees talked positively about the benefits of events which enabled learning from other authorities – in Wales and further a field, but most reported that such networking opportunities were too few and far between. Some had found that

devolution has meant that training provided by organisations based in England is now less relevant to Welsh councillors.

- 6.59 The WLGA was generally seen as doing a satisfactory job in providing training and development, but some interviewees believed that there had been a reduction in the number of opportunities provided by the WLGA in recent years. A number of officers and councillors welcomed recent training provided by the WAO.
- 6.60 The WLGA's Member Development Modular Programme is working towards nationally available materials which can be adapted for local use such as:
- e-learning materials on knowledge and skills acquisition
 - materials to support locally delivered training and development
 - fully developed training modules for external delivery
 - regional and national induction sessions.
- 6.61 The WLGA has also recently announced the development of a pilot scheme with a select number of councils to train and support councillors to host individualised websites, following the success of a similar scheme in England. Initiatives like this are supported by the demands we heard from councillors in the field.
- 6.62 The representatives of all four main political parties accepted they need to become more active in providing training and development. But they pointed out that they have very limited capacity and resources to devote to this and could not therefore be expected to make a major contribution. The WLGA has made initial contact with the political parties to discuss how they might legitimately, and without favour, work together to support this.
- 6.63 External training tends to come from a narrow range of sources and there some councillors and officers reported that there was a danger that training and development in Wales is in danger of becoming too insular with trainees not given exposure to practices in the rest of the UK and further afield.
- 6.64 There is also an issue about the timing of training and subsequent development. A lot of training is cyclical and aimed at new members. It is hard to access as members move about within their various roles and - because councillors' 'careers' cannot be planned in the same way as mainstream careers, development is much less easy to achieve and is more likely to be self managed. Mentoring programmes would help here too.

Member Support

- 6.65 Resources allocated to member services have increased over recent years and overall members were extremely positive about the level of IT support that they

received - in terms of equipment provided, training, and officer support. Members reported that this:

- Facilitated more rapid and efficient correspondence to the electorate
- Gave them greater access to information about council policies and decisions than in the past and
- Provided quicker and easier access to performance data.

"There's lots more information available out there now but it's available in a different way, which has been a culture shock to some members".

[Officer]

6.66 A minority of members reported difficulties coping with software. A small number of members were also concerned that increased interaction with the public via IT was taking away the 'personal touch' and that the customer contact centres meant the public are able to by-pass their councillor.

6.67 In general, whilst there was substantial support for the use of member role descriptions and the use of the self assessment framework for members, and some officers were keen to develop member support and development in line with the Charter. However, others argued that resources could be better used in other ways (for instance, front line services) with the Charter perceived as "too idealistic" and "implausible" given the current limitations on resources.

6.68 We have noted the latest version on the 'Widening Participation' campaign earlier, and this has links to training and development too. Work includes activities and support (such as open events, training materials, and shadowing opportunities) for those interested in local democracy, including potential candidates. These types of activities are not part of the election campaigning strategy but designed purely as techniques to prepare individuals for office, should they choose to stand and be successfully elected. In due course, therefore, 'Widening Participation' could have important implications for the calibre of councillors (which could have an impact on their readiness to take up training and the kind of training they need) and their level of preparedness for the councillor role when first elected.

Numbers of Councillors

6.69 We were asked to give a view on what might be the right number of elected members in local government in Wales. This of course begs a number of questions, not least the scope of what local government is to do and the style it is expected to adopt in achieving its aims.

- 6.70 None of our interviewees argued strongly that their councils need more members. Most of the councillors who we interviewed believed that current numbers are "about right". But most officers, a majority of the national stakeholders and some councillors argued that there was a need to reduce numbers. Some believed that there would be benefits in having fewer councillors working longer hours (and being better paid). However, others believed that this would exclude younger people who would be unwilling to take the risk of committing to a career in local politics at the expense of developing a mainstream occupation.
- 6.71 A general conclusion in this report is that some changes in local government have become well embedded - executive decision making and case work, for example, while others - scrutiny and community leadership - are less well developed and partnership working has raised a new agenda which has yet to be addressed. Arguably, much is already asked from councillors and if the full potential of scrutiny, community leadership and partnership activities is to be realised they may be asked to do still more.
- 6.72 Some councillors in rural areas argued that town and community councillors could be more effectively utilised to deal some very local issues and that this could enable a reduction in the numbers of county councillors, although it was recognised that at present their role is restricted by legislation, insurance requirements and in some areas a lack of will and expertise.

"Town or Community Councillors are potentially better placed for community engagement, they could provide community services in the future".

[CEO, Voluntary Organisation]

- 6.73 It seems clear however there is no 'one size fits all' formula that can be applied across Wales. The appropriate number of councillors will depend not just on population size but also on:
- **Population sparsity:** travel times around the ward and to meetings will be greater in more sparsely populated areas which will therefore require more councillors than urban areas with similar population sizes
 - **Socio-economic demographics:** it might be argued that deprived wards need more support and create more case work than more prosperous areas
 - **Nature of town and community councils:** areas with active town and community councillors may need fewer county councillors than those which lack them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recruitment, Retention, Training and Development

6.74 We conclude:

- it is important to note the work already taking place within individual local authorities and through initiatives like the WLGA Charter and 'Widening Participation' but patterns of recruitment, retention, training and development in Wales remain problematic
- negative perceptions of councils and councillors can deter potential recruits; better communication could change this
- there is concern that members do not reflect the local community in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status
- requirements on councillors should be made clearer; the role is often not what new members expected, and is unclear to potential recruits
- the role of a councillor is very demanding and is seen as receiving little recompense or recognition
- there is considerable variation in the types and levels of member training and development provided
- members' views on training varied dramatically between and within local authorities
- training and development tends to be generic and focused on 'hard' technical skills, not the 'soft' skills widely seen as essential
- 'learning on the job' is widely seen as the best development tool
- under post-2000 structures it is possible for talented councillors to progress to leadership positions quickly
- attendance at internal training is often poor
- awareness of, and participation in external training provision also varies considerably, but is favoured for the opportunity to network with other members
- the level of member support has increased and is widely valued
- some elements of the WLGA Members Development Charter are seen as a useful development but the Charter has yet to make a significant impact at local level
- allowances were seen as "about right" by most interviewees, although some argued for larger allowances for leaders, deputy leaders and other executive members in order to attract the brightest and the best. The recent Remuneration Review is inline with most expectations.

Numbers of Councillors

6.75 There was a range of views about the appropriate number of councillors in Wales.

Overall, we conclude:

- the case for reducing the number of councillors in Wales across the board is inconclusive
- there is a fairly widely held view that numbers could be reduced in some areas, but that these issues need to be considered authority by authority: an approach based on standard ratios would be inappropriate
- many interviewees argued that this was not the most pressing issue or the key determinant of council performance or levels of democratic engagement. They argued that organisational and political culture and the commitment and capacity of councillors (and officers) are much more important considerations.

6.76 Whilst acknowledging the important aspirations of the WLGA Charter and 'Widening Participation'. We recommend:

- councillors themselves need to take some responsibility for identifying and accessing the training and development they need to become more effective. Every councillor should develop a personal development plan customised to their own roles, the skills that they need to develop, and their preferred learning styles
- local authorities should support councillors in developing and implementing their personal development plans, assisting them in assessing their needs and procuring the development and training that they need, and providing a personal training budget for the training and development agreed in their personal development plans
- in-house training must be provided at times that are as convenient as possible for all councillors including evenings and weekends; officers who provide formal training to councillors must be properly trained and skilled to undertake this important role
- all authorities should put in place mentoring and buddying schemes and assist members in participating in these. Newly elected councillors may need more intensive support and mentoring, but experienced councillors can also benefit from peer support.
- authorities should actively explore the potential for joint mentoring and other support with neighbouring authorities and/or councils in other parts of the UK and make greater use of opportunities for formal peer review and coaching provided by the IDeA and others
- political parties should provide more frequent, structured opportunities for councillors from different authorities to meet for mutual support and exchanging experiences and insights
- individual local authorities and the national partners should review the support available in other parts of the UK and consider how to tap into this in ways which adds value to the Welsh context

Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members

- all local authorities should consider systematic appraisal and review, along the lines in the WLGA Members Charter, for councillors implementing their development plans and meeting identified development needs
- individual authorities and the WLGA should actively promote and publicise the valuable contribution made by councillors, as set out in the WLGA Charter
- it is too early to judge the success and what can be learned from the WLGA Member Charter and 'Widening Participation'. Careful monitoring and systematic evaluation are appropriate and should be implemented by the National partners.

6.77 Key to the future will be the extent to which the Assembly Government, WLGA, political parties and others are able to establish, disseminate and gain ownership at local level of a more ambitious vision of local democracy and therefore the role of the local councillor. Only then will it be possible to determine how many councillors are needed to ensure effective service delivery and healthy local democracy.



**Issues
for the
Future**

7. Issues for the Future

- 7.1 As well as providing “*a view of the (current) effectiveness and efficiency of councillors in conducting their functions within the modern political structures*”, our terms of reference call for us to suggest “*any (future) improvements which might be considered for the operation of scrutiny functions in local authorities*”.
- 7.2 Sections 2 to 6 offer a series of recommendations for improving effectiveness in the short and medium term. These recommendations are based on all sources of evidence (i.e. documentary evidence, interviews with local councillors and officers, as well as national, regional and local stakeholders, case studies and regional workshops).
- 7.3 In addition to these important, short and medium term issues, there is a set of important future considerations which our interviewees were not well placed to comment on. Many interviewees were unsure what the exact implications of the Beecham Review would be, although many speculated on the impact of the new powers that the Assembly will have from May 2007. As we have already noted, our interviews predated the publication of some key policy documents including the Assembly Government’s response to the Beecham Review, the English 2006 Local Government White Paper, the Lyons Review and the Assembly Government’s Policy Statement on Local Government. Again this did not prevent speculation in what they each might contain.
- 7.4 In this final section we therefore consider the possible implications of our findings in the light of recent and future policy developments. Our conclusions are necessarily tentative, not least because the Lyons Review and the Assembly Government’s policy statement have yet to be published. However, it is important that decisions about the future role and numbers of councillors are forward looking and therefore take account of likely future developments.

External Scrutiny

- 7.5 As we have noted in section 3, almost all local councillors, local authority officers, local partners and national stakeholders reported that to date scrutiny of external organisations by councillors has been largely ineffective. The emphasis on collaboration between local service providers in both the Beecham Review and recent statements by the Assembly Government make it imperative that councillors become much more adept at scrutinising the performance not just of their own authorities but of other councils and organisations with which they work in partnership in the future.

- 7.6 The creation of Local Service Boards and Local Service Agreements will make it vital that councillors are able to undertake effective, whole systems scrutiny which focuses on outcomes for local people regardless of which organisation (or organisations) are responsible for delivering a service. Our interviews suggest that very few councillors or officers have yet grasped the implications of the collaborative agenda for scrutiny and that there will need to be a rapid and fundamental shift in attitudes and approach if Local Service Boards and other emerging collaborative arrangements (including regional partnerships) are to held accountable to service users and tax payers via their elected local representatives.
- 7.7 As we recommend in Section 3, local scrutiny pilots could prove a useful means of beginning to develop and model these new approaches to scrutiny. The Local Service Board development projects should also be encouraged to experiment with approaches to effective scrutiny from which other areas can then learn. Alongside these local, 'bottom up' initiatives it may be appropriate for the National Assembly and/or WLGA to issue guidance on how to secure effective scrutiny of Local Service Boards and Local Service Agreements, perhaps drawing on the early experiences of the development projects and/or experience of analogous arrangements in other countries.
- 7.8 External scrutiny should not however be tied exclusively to LSBs and LSAs. There are many issues that will fall outside of their remits and in relation to which clarification of the roles of councillors and other forms of overview and scrutiny would be very valuable.

Non-councillor appointments

- 7.9 As we noted in section 3, few councils in Wales use non-councillors as scrutineers (as opposed to witnesses). The emergence of the collaborative agenda and increased partnership working mean that in future councils will need to develop much more inclusive approaches to scrutiny which make better use of the expertise and insights offered by the voluntary and community sector, local activists and independent experts. Co-opting a wider range of people onto scrutiny committees could, for example, be a useful way of increasing capacity to scrutinise health and other services much more effectively. An important issue will be whether co-opted members have equal voting rights.
- 7.10 It will, of course, be important to ensure transparency in the appointment of non-councillors. Issues that will need to be considered include:
- taking care to avoid overt or covert political bias
 - capabilities for contributing to general scrutiny (rather than, say, single issue advocates)
 - credibility and understanding of the purpose of scrutiny

- the ability to provide appropriate time and support for the scrutiny process.

7.11 Again, the inclusion of non councillors as scrutineers is something that might usefully be piloted in some areas over the next year or so and on which the National Assembly and/or WLGA and others might issue guidance – either before and/or after the piloting process.

Scrutiny across local authority boundaries

7.12 As authorities develop more shared services, there will be increased scope and need for joint scrutiny arrangements between councils.

7.13 As with external scrutiny, there are few examples of effective cross-border scrutiny at present; most authorities focus on their ‘own’ service provision and priorities. But boundaries often make little sense to local people who may, for example, work and spend their leisure time outside the local authority area in which they live.

7.14 Joint scrutiny will inevitably be more complex but it could be a useful means of increasing the capacity for effective scrutiny since it will require authorities to pool support staff and establish joint scrutiny teams.

7.15 Our interviews suggested considerable scepticism and reservations among local councillors about joint scrutiny and it may be that there is therefore a need for pilots and guidance on this issue as well. These might usefully consider the most appropriate ways of:

- forming joint scrutiny panels
- chairing joint scrutiny panels
- choosing topics to be addressed by joint scrutiny panels
- providing appropriate resources
- responding to findings and implementing recommendations of joint scrutiny panels.

Future provision of member support

7.16 As we noted in section 6, although there are already ample opportunities for training in most councils, much of the existing provision is officer led, in-house and mainly concerned with passing on information rather development in the broader sense of exposure to new ideas and developing new skills and behaviours. Perhaps because of this, the level of participation in training events by councillors is widely seen as disappointing.

7.17 However, councillors were keen to tell us about the kinds of development opportunities that they valued. They said for example that the consultation events

held in connection with this study were a very useful forum for exploring potential new ways of working, and many said that they valued meeting other councillors in a non-political setting. Broader partnership working presents opportunities for training across partner agencies which would meet many of these needs.

- 7.18 There was a feeling that Welsh local government is often too insular, but at the same time many training events in England are increasingly irrelevant to councillors from Wales because they do not take account of the Welsh context and/or policy agenda which is increasingly diverging from that in England.
- 7.19 The result is that councillors in Wales may miss out on good practice elsewhere. English local government may for example provide useful lessons on joint scrutiny and the operation of Local Area Agreements. Unless Wales's councillors can tap into this wider experience they are likely to struggle, as they have with scrutiny at a more basic level, with the increased sophistication of joint scrutiny and shared commissioning.
- 7.20 Unlike the IDeA in England, the WLGA has dual responsibilities. It both represents its members and it provides advice, support and training to the local government sector. It is important that it gives sufficient emphasis to the second role and also that it works closely with the IDeA and Scottish Improvement Service - to make sure that it avoids 're-inventing the wheel' in terms of training and support and also that councils in Wales have access to the largest possible pool of good practice and potential mentors.

References

- Andrews, R., Boyne, G.A., Chen, A. and Martin, S.J. (2006) *Population size and local authority performance*, DCLG: London.
- Ashworth, R.E. (2003a) Toothless Tigers? Councillor Perceptions of Local Scrutiny Committees in England and Wales *Local Government Studies* 29 (2) 1-18.
- Ashworth R.E. (2003b) *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Local Scrutiny Committees in England and Wales*, Final Report for the Economic and Social Research Council.
- Ashworth, R.E., Entwistle, T. and Martin, S.J. (2003) *The Future Role of Elected Members*, Association of Public Service Excellence: Manchester.
- Ashworth, R.E. and Hunt, S. (2003) *Evaluating the Effectiveness of Local Scrutiny Committees: A Report to Case Study Authorities*, Cardiff: Cardiff University.
- Ashworth, R.E. and Skelcher, C. (2005) *Meta-evaluation of the local government modernisation agenda: progress report on accountability*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London.
- Audit Commission (1990) *We Can't Go on Meeting Like This: The Changing Role of Local Authority Members*, HMSO: London.
- Audit Commission in Wales and the Welsh Local Government Association (2004) *Making Government Local: Early Steps in the Political Modernisation of Wales*, London: Audit Commission
- Audit Commission in Wales and Centre for Public Scrutiny (2005) *Scrutiny in Welsh Local Government*, AciW/CfPS: Cardiff.
- Baglioni, S. (2003) 'The Effects of Political Institutions and City Size on Political Participation: The Swiss Case', Paper presented to ECPR Joint Sessions, Edinburgh, 28th March - 2nd April.
- Baker, K. (2000) *New Democratic Structures – Education*, The Education Network: London.
- Borazz, O., and P. Le Gales (2005) France: the intermunicipal revolution, in Denters and Rose (eds), *Comparing Local Governance: Trends and Developments*, Palgrave.

Carley M. (2004) *Implementing Community Planning – building for the future of local governance*. Research from Communities Scotland, Report 44. Communities Scotland.

Charteris, S. and Corrigan, P. (2000) *Starting to Modernise: Developing Your Council's Scrutiny Role*, New Local Government Network for Joseph Rowntree Foundation: London.

Clarke, M. and Stewart, J. (1989) *Councillors and the Enabling Council: Changing Roles*, Local Government Training Board: Luton.

Cole, M. (2001) Executive and Scrutiny Reforms: the agenda and its impact at Devon County Council, *Local Government Studies* 27 (4) 19-34.

Copus, C., (1999) The Councillor and Party Group Loyalty, *Policy and Politics* 27 (3) 309-324.

Copus, C. (2004) *Party Politics and Local Government*, Manchester University Press: Manchester.

Copus, C. and Leach, S. (2004) 'Scrutiny and the Political Party Group in Local Government: New Models of Behaviour', *Public Administration*, 82 (2) 331-354.

Corrigan, P. (2000) *Overview and Scrutiny: A Practitioners Guide*, Local Government Network with IDeA: London.

COSLA (2005) *Community Planning - a report to the Modernising Government Executive Group*, 8/12/2005. Item 7. COSLA: Edinburgh

CPIG (2004) *Making a Difference – Community Planning A Year On*. Report of the Community Planning Implementation Group. CPIG.

CPTF (2003) *Final Report of the Community Planning Task Force*. CPTF.

Cusack, T. R. (1997) '*Social Capital, Institutional Structures, and Democratic Performance: A Comparative Study of German Local Governments*', Publication of the Berlin Social Research Centre's department *Institutions and Social Change* (Research Group on Social Change, Institutions, and Mediation Processes), January.

Davis, H. and Geddes, M. (2000) 'Deepening Democracy or Elite Governance? New Political Management Arrangements in Local Government', *Public Money and Management*, April-June, 15-20.

Denters, B. (2002) 'Size and Political Trust: Evidence from Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*.20: 793-812.

Department for Communities and Local Government (2006) *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, DCLG: London.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1998) *Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People*, DETR: London.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1999) *Modernising local Government*, HMSO: London.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (2000) *Community strategies guidance*, DETR: London.

Department of Local Government, Transport and the Regions (2002) *Evaluation of Area-Based Initiatives*, DLTR: London.

Downe, J (1998) *The Determinants of Turnout in Local Government Elections*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Plymouth.

Downe, J. and Martin, S.J. (2006) 'Joined Up Policy in Practice? The Coherence and Impacts of the Local Government Modernisation Agenda', *Local Government Studies* 32 (4) 465-488.

Dungey, J. (2001) *Open to Scrutiny?* LGIU: London.

Dungey, J. (2004) *Scrutiny Solutions*, LGIU: London.

Entwistle, T., Martin, S.J. and Enticott, G. (2005) The politics of performance improvement, *Local Government Studies* 31 (5) 541-554.

Gains, F., Greasley, S. and Stoker, G. (2004) *A summary of the research evidence on new council constitutions in local government*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: London.

Geddes Institute (2001) *Community Planning in Scotland: A Final Report to the CPTF Project*, Geddes Institute, School of Town and Regional Planning, University of Dundee. CPTF. www.communityplanning.org.uk

Glassberg, A. (1981) *Representation and Urban Community*, Macmillan: London.

Gyford, J. (1991) *Citizens, Consumers and Councils*, Macmillan: London.

Harlow, C (1999) Accountability, New Public Management and the Problems of the Child Support Agency, *Journal of Law and Society*, 26 (2) 150-174.

Hawes, D. (1992) Parliamentary Select Committees: Some Case Studies in Contingent Influence, *Policy and Politics*, 20 (3) 227-236.

Johnson, K. and Hatter, W. (2004) *Realising the Potential of Scrutiny: Research and Recommendations on the Overview and Scrutiny Function in Local Government*, London: New Local Government Network.

Jones, G.W. (1972) The Functions and Organisation of Councillors, *Public Administration*, 51 (2) 135-146.

Keating, M. (1995) Size, Efficiency and Democracy: Consolidation, Fragmentation and Public Choice, in D. Judge, G. Stoker and H. Wolman (eds.) *Theories of Urban Politics*, Sage: London, pp. 117-134.

Kelleher, C. and Lowery, D. (2004) Political Participation and Metropolitan Institutional Contexts, *Urban Affairs Review*.39 (6) 720-757.

Laamanen, E. and Haveri, A. (2003) *Size, Efficiency and Democracy – How Local Government Boundaries Affect Performance*, Paper presented at the EGPA Conference on Public Law and the Modernising State, Oerias, Portugal, 3-6 September.

Ladner, A. (2002) Size and Direct Democracy at the Local Level: The Case of Switzerland, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*.20 (6) 813-828.

Larsen, C.A. (2002) Municipal Size and Democracy: A Critical Analysis of the Argument of Proximity Based on the Case of Denmark, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 25 (.4) 317-332.

Leach, S. (1999) Introducing Cabinets into British Local Government, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 52 (1) 77-93.

Leach, S. (2001) *Making Overview and Scrutiny Work*, Local Government Association: London.

Leach, S. (2005) *Practice, Progress and Potential: An Assessment of the Local Government Overview and Scrutiny Function*, CfPS: London.

Leach, S., J. and Wilson, D. (2000) *Local Political Leadership*, Policy Press: Bristol.

Leach, S., J. Hartley, V. Lowndes, D. Wilson, and J. Downe (2005) *Local Political Leadership in England and Wales*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York

Leach, S., Skelcher, C., Lloyd-Jones, C., Copus, C., Dunstan, E., Hall, D. and Taylor, F. (2003) *Strengthening Local Democracy: Making the Most of the Constitution*, ODPM: London.

Leach, S. and Davis, H. (2004) *Scrutiny and Public Involvement in Local Government*, draft research findings, Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York.

Martin, S.J. (1997) Leadership, learning and local democracy: political dimensions of the strategic management of change, *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 10 (7) 534-546.

Martin, S.J. (1999) Achieving Best Value through Public Engagement', DETR: London.

Martin, S.J. (2003) 'Engaging with citizens and other stakeholders' in *Public Management and Governance*, in Bovaird, A.G. and Loeffler, E. (eds), pp. 189-201. Routledge: London.

Martin, S.J. and Boaz, A. (2000) Public participation and citizen-centred local government: lessons from the Best Value and Better Government for Older People pilot programmes, *Public Money and Management* 20 (2) 47-54.

Mouritzen, P.E. (1989) *City Size and Citizens' Satisfaction: Two Competing Theories Revisited*, *European Journal of Political Research* 17 (6) 661-688.

Muzzio, D. and Tompkins, T. (1989) On the Size of the City Council: Finding the Mean, *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* (37) 3 83-96.

National Assembly for Wales (2001) *Preparing Community Strategies*, National Assembly for Wales: Cardiff.

National Assembly for Wales (2006) *The Local Government Act 2000 Part II Guidance for County and County Borough Councils in Wales on Executive and Alternative Arrangements 2006*, National Assembly for Wales: Cardiff.

Newton, K. (1982) Is Small Really So Beautiful? Is big Really So Ugly? Size, Effectiveness and Democracy in Local Government, *Political Studies* 30 (2) 190-206.

Nielsen, H.J. (1981) Size and Evaluation of Government: Danish Attitudes Towards Politics at Multiple Levels of Government, *European Journal of Political Research*.9 (1) 47-60.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004a) *Local area agreements: a prospectus*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004b) *Governance action learning set report: national evaluation of LSPs*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004c) *Performance management action learning set report, national evaluation of LSPs*, ODPM: London.

Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004d) *The Future of Local Government: Developing a 10-year Vision*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005a) *Vibrant local leadership*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005b) *Citizen Engagement and Public Services: Why Neighbourhoods Matter*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005c) *LSPs: Shaping their future, a consultation paper*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005d) *Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation/Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies*, Annual Report, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005e) *Take-up and implementation of the Well-Being power*, Baseline study, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005f) *Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation/Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies: overview of all and more detailed assessment of 50*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005g) *Strategic planning action learning set report, national evaluation of LSPs*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005h) *Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation/Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005i) *National evaluation of Local Public Service Agreements: first interim report*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2005j) *Process Evaluation of Plan Rationalisation/Formative Evaluation of Community Strategies: consultation findings and evaluation framework*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Department for Transport (2005) *National evaluation of LSPs: interim report*, ODPM: London.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister/Department for Transport (2006) *National evaluation of LSPs: Formative evaluation and action research programme, 2002-2005*, ODPM: London.

Oliver, J. E. (2000) City Size and Civic Involvement in Metropolitan America, *American Political Science Review* 94 (2) 361-373. Rao, N. (1994) *The Making and Unmaking of Local Self-Government*.

Rogers S. (1998) *Community Planning and Engagement*, School of Public Policy: University of Birmingham.

Rogers, S, Smith, M, Sullivan, H and Clarke, M. (2000) *Community Planning in Scotland. An Evaluation of the Pathfinder Projects*, COSLA/Scottish Executive: Edinburgh.

Rose, L.E. (2002) Municipal Size and Local Non-electoral Participation: findings from Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 20 (6) 829-851.

Scottish Executive (2004a) *The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003*. Community Planning Advice Notes. Scottish Executive: Edinburgh.

Scottish Executive (2004b) *The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003*, Community Planning Statutory Guidance. Scottish Executive: Edinburgh.

Snape, S. (2004) *The Killing of Overview & Scrutiny*, Unpublished paper, University of Warwick: Coventry.

Snape, S., Hall, D., Taylor, F., Stewart, J., Clarke, M. and Leach, S (2000) *New Forms of Political Management Arrangements*, DETR: London.

Snape, S. and Taylor, F. (2000) Scrutiny, *Local Governance* 26 (3) 187-203.

Snape, S. and Taylor, F. (2001) *A Hard Nut to Crack? Making Overview and Scrutiny Work*, IDeA: London.

Snape, S., Leach, S., Copus, C. (2002) *The Development of Overview and Scrutiny in Local Government*, ODPM: London.

Snape, S. and Dobbs, L. (2003) The Scrutineer: The Impact of Overview and Scrutiny on Councillor Roles, *Public Policy and Administration* 18 (1) 46-62.

Stewart, J. (2003) *Modernising British Local Government: An Assessment of Labour's Reform Programme*, Palgrave: Basingstoke.

Stoker, G., John, P., Gains, F., Rao, N. and Harding, A. (2002) *Report of ELG Survey Findings for ODPM Advisory Group*, ODPM: London.

Stoker, G., John, P., Gains, F. Rao, N. and Harding A. (2003) *Implementing the 2000 Act with respect to New Council Constitutions and the Ethical Framework: baseline findings from a long-term evaluation*, ODPM: London.

Stoker, G., Gains, F., Greasley, S., John, P. and Rao, N. (2004) *Operating the New Council Constitutions in English Local Authorities: a Process Evaluation*, ODPM: London.

Sullivan, H. (2006) Interpreting 'community leadership' in English local government, *Policy and Politics*, forthcoming.

Sullivan, H. and Sweeting, D. (2005) *Meta-evaluation of the local government modernisation agenda: progress report on community leadership*, ODPM: London.

Sullivan, H., Downe, J., Entwistle, T. and Sweeting, D. (2006) The three challenges of community leadership, *Local Government Studies* 32 (4) 489-508.

Sweeting, D. (1999) Leadership, Scrutiny or Mutiny? New Councillor Roles in Local Government in the United Kingdom, paper presented to the workshop on *The Changing Role of Local Councillors* at the European Consortium for Political Research, Joint Sessions, Mannheim, Germany, 26-31 March 1999.

Travers, T., G. Jones, and J. Burnham, (1993) *Impact of Population Size on Local Authority Costs and Effectiveness*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation: York.

Watson, B. (2000) Democratic Renewal in Local Government – A False Dream!, *Public Money and Management*, 20 (4) 14-15.

Welsh Assembly Government (2006a) *Beyond Boundaries: towards citizen-centred local services for Wales*, WAG: Cardiff.

Welsh Assembly Government (2006b) *Evaluation of Communities First*, WAG: Cardiff.

Welsh Assembly Government (2007) *Making the Connections - Local Service Boards in Wales: A prospectus for the first phase 2007-2008*, WAG: Cardiff

Widdicombe (1986) *Committee of inquiry into the conduct of local authority business*. Research Volume 2, the Local Government Councillor. London: HMSO.

Williams, P. Crow, A. Evans, L. Rogers, S. and Sullivan, H. (2006) *People, Plans and Partnerships: A national evaluation of community strategies in Wales*, Cardiff.

WLGA (2005) *National Census of 2004 Local Authority Councillors: An Overview*, WLGA: Cardiff

Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members

Appendix I - Topic Guide 1: Elected Members

**Welsh Assembly Government:
Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members**

Topic Guide 1: Elected Members

Interviewee Briefing:

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has commissioned a consortium led by CRG Research Ltd, including partners from the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University, and the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University, to review the role and functions of elected members in local authorities in Wales.

The next round of electoral reviews - by which the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales proposes allocations of councillors to electoral divisions within counties according to a ratio formula included within Directions issued by the Assembly - is due to commence in 2008. The exercise of preparing draft Directions, for the Assembly's approval and issue to the Commission, will require the Welsh Assembly Government to take a view on the broad number of elected members it would be appropriate for Welsh local authorities to have. That in turn will depend on an assessment of the roles and functions elected members play now, and what those roles and functions might be in the future. This research needs to provide the factual basis for such an assessment.

This part of the review consists of a series of semi-structured face to face and telephone interviews, across all 22 local authorities, with:

- Council members
- Council officers
- Local stakeholders.

We recognise that data from each of the areas will vary, and that during each interview the weight and nature of the questions will be dependent on the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.

Interview Details:	
Local authority:	
Interviewee:	
Job title/role:	
Length of time in post:	
Date and time:	
Contact details/ email:	Check whether it would be possible to contact them following the interview if needed to clarify any points.
Interviewer(s):	

THE ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

1. **What do you think are the main roles of councillors?**
2. **Overall, how well do you think that councillors in your authority perform these roles?**
(Prompt: What roles are performed well? Which roles, if any, are not performed effectively at present? What are the reasons for this?)

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

3. **What do you believe community leadership by councillors should involve?**
4. **How effective are councillors in your authority at providing an overall vision for the area?**
5. **How effective are councillors in your authority at representing the interests of their wards and individual constituents?**
6. **How well do you think you perform as a community leader?**
(Prompt: What helps you to undertake this community leadership role? What, if anything, would help you to fulfil your community leadership role more effectively? Can you give an example of effective community leadership that you have provided?)
7. **In your experience, are there any overlaps with the role of town/community councillors, AM and MPs in terms of representing the interests of local people?**
(Prompt: If so, has this causes any difficulties? How can these problems be overcome?)

SCRUTINY

8. **How well is the scrutiny process performed in your authority?**
(Prompt:
 - a. Internal scrutiny - does scrutiny hold the Executive/Policy Committee(s) to account?
 - b. Policy review
 - c. Policy development - does scrutiny set the agenda in the authority?
 - d. Service improvement reviews – does scrutiny drive performance improvement?
 - e. External scrutiny of local partner organisations – does scrutiny hold other organisations to account?
 - f. External scrutiny of local issues – (including cross-cutting issues?)Does scrutiny address areas of potential risk? Is scrutiny party political? Is scrutiny well attended? Are service users involved in scrutiny? Can you give an example of effective scrutiny conducted in your authority?)

9. How well is the scrutiny function in your authority supported by (a) officers and (b) outside experts?

(Prompt: What changes have been introduced in your authority to improve scrutiny? Has your council provided sufficient resources/officer support/training for scrutiny? What, if any are the barriers to you undertaking a scrutiny role more effectively? Are there structural changes which could make scrutiny more effective?)

SKILLS, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

10. What, if any, support/development have you had access to which assist you in your role as a councillor (e.g. from your party council the WLGA IDeA etc.)?

11. How useful was this support?

12. What other forms of support would be useful to you?

(Prompt: How would this help you to become a more effective councillor? If a programme of formal training was provided for councillors in Wales would you be likely to participate?)

COUNCIL ROLE

13. Do you think the current balance of your council activities is about right or not?

(Prompt: Which activities, if any, would you like to spend less time on? Which, if any, would you like to spend more time on?)

14. Is your current case work load too heavy, about right or too light?

(Prompt: What practical steps/support, if any, would enable you to fulfil your case work more effectively? Do you receive any support from your local authority in managing your case work? What, if any, factors (apart from time) inhibit you from performing your role? Do you believe the workload in single-member wards is heavier than those in a multi-member wards?)

15. Do you experience any difficulties combining your work as a councillor with other aspects of your life (e.g. job, family, other responsibilities)?

FUTURE ROLES

16. Do you think that your authority has the 'right' number of councillors to fulfil the following roles effectively:

(Prompt: e.g. to

- a. Provide effective community leadership at a strategic level (developing the community strategy working with partners etc.)
- b. Represent the council in the outside world (to the Assembly Government, UK government and others)
- c. Represent the needs and interests of local wards to the council and other bodies (including dealing with case work on behalf of individual constituents)

- d. Conduct effective scrutiny of the council policies and performance
- e. Conduct effective scrutiny of other agencies (e.g. health trusts)
- f. Provide effective political management of the authority).

If no, do you need more or fewer councillors than at present and why?

17. Does your authority have any multi-member wards? If so, would you be in favour of the introduction of single member wards throughout the authority?

(Prompt: If yes, what would you see as the benefits of this? If no, why?)

18. How, if at all, do you think the role of elected members in your authority will change over the next ten years (in what areas, why, is this for the better or worse etc)?

(Prompt: How would you feel about a clearer and more explicit division of roles between councillors (with some acting as full-time executive members, some as community champions, and others as scrutineers etc?) How will the scrutiny system in your authority cope with the partnership delivery of services likely to be brought about by the Making the Connections agenda? Should councillors be full-time paid professionals?)

19. What changes would make the role of councillor more attractive to potential 'recruits'?

20. What could be done to make councillors more representative of the population they serve?

21. What, if anything, would you like to see the following organisations do to enhance the effectiveness of the role of local councillors in Wales:

- Your authority
- Welsh Assembly Government
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Political parties
- Others (please specify)

Thank respondent for their contribution.

Please note, regional dissemination events will be held during November 2006 to discuss initial findings with council members, council officials and stakeholders (with a maximum number of attendees per local authority). The final report will be presented to the Assembly in December 2006.

Appendix II - Topic Guide 2: Council Officers

Topic Guide 2: Council Officers

Interviewee Briefing:

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has commissioned a consortium led by CRG Research Ltd, including partners from the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University, and the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University, to review the role and functions of elected members in local authorities in Wales.

The next round of electoral reviews - by which the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales proposes allocations of councillors to electoral divisions within counties according to a ratio formula included within Directions issued by the Assembly - is due to commence in 2008. The exercise of preparing draft Directions, for the Assembly's approval and issue to the Commission, will require the Welsh Assembly Government to take a view on the broad number of elected members it would be appropriate for Welsh local authorities to have. That in turn will depend on an assessment of the roles and functions elected members play now, and what those roles and functions might be in the future. This research needs to provide the factual basis for such an assessment.

This part of the review consists of a series of semi-structured face to face and telephone interviews, across all 22 local authorities, with:

- Council members
- Council officers
- Local stakeholders.

We recognise that data from each of the areas will vary, and that during each interview the weight and nature of the questions will be dependent on the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.

Interview Details:	
Local authority:	
Interviewee:	
Job Title/role:	
Length of time in post/previous experience:	
Date and Time:	
Contact details/ email:	Check whether it would be possible to contact them following the interview if needed to clarify any points.
Interviewer(s):	

INTERVIEWEES ROLE

1. **Please outline your current role and responsibilities, and any other recent relevant experience**

THE ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

2. **What do you think are the main roles of councillors?**
3. **Overall, how well do you think that councillors in your authority perform these roles?**
(Prompt: What roles are performed well? Which roles, if any, are not performed effectively at present? What are the reasons for this? In what areas of your work would you like to receive more support from a councillor?)
4. **Have you experienced a difference since the introduction of the new political management arrangements brought about by the Local Government Act 2000?**
(Prompt: Which part(s) of the new political management arrangements are working well and which need improving (why and how)?)

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

5. **What do you believe community leadership by councillors should involve?**
6. **How effective are councillors in your authority at providing an overall vision for the area?**
7. **How effective are councillors in your authority at representing the interests of their wards and individual constituents?**
8. **How well would you say elected members in your local authority are currently performing in terms of community leadership?**
(Prompt: Should this role play a larger part in their activities in the future? What, if anything, would help elected members to fulfil the community leadership role more effectively? Can you give an example of effective community leadership that elected members have provided?)
9. **In your experience, are there any overlaps with the role of town/community councillors, AM and MPs in terms of representing the interests of local people?**
(Prompt: If so, has this causes any difficulties? How can these problems be overcome?)

10. How effective are councillors in partnership working in this local authority?

(Prompt: How well do officer/member relations work? Can you provide an example of effective partnership working in your authority? Are there problems of accountability in working with partnerships?)

SCRUTINY

11. How well is the scrutiny process performed in your authority?

(Prompt:

- g. Internal scrutiny - does scrutiny hold the Executive/Policy Committee(s) to account?
 - h. Policy review
 - i. Policy development - does scrutiny set the agenda in the authority?
 - j. Service improvement reviews – does scrutiny drive performance improvement?
 - k. External scrutiny of local partner organisations – does scrutiny hold other organisations to account?
 - l. External scrutiny of local issues – (including cross-cutting issues?)
- Does scrutiny address areas of potential risk? Is scrutiny party political? Is scrutiny well attended? Are service users involved in scrutiny? Can you give an example of effective scrutiny conducted in your authority?)

12. How well is the scrutiny function in your authority supported by (a) officers and (b) outside experts?

(Prompt: What changes have been introduced in your authority to improve scrutiny? Has your council provided sufficient resources/officer support/training for scrutiny? Are there structural changes which could make scrutiny more effective?)

SKILLS, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

13. What support do you give to councillors?

(Prompt: Is formal/informal support provided? In what areas do councillors need support/development? What internal support/development sessions does your council provide?)

14. What capabilities should councillors have to make them effective?

(Prompt: Do elected members need a particular set of skills and/or capabilities to help them work more effectively - in partnership arenas, scrutiny functions etc? If yes, what are these? (e.g. interpersonal skills, negotiation, building trust etc)

FUTURE ROLES

15. Do you think that your authority has the ‘right’ number of councillors to fulfil the following roles effectively:

(Prompt: e.g. to

- g. Provide effective community leadership at a strategic level (developing the community strategy working with partners etc.)
- h. Represent the council in the outside world (to the Assembly Government, UK government and others)
- i. Represent the needs and interests of local wards to the council and other bodies (including dealing with case work on behalf of individual constituents)
- j. Conduct effective scrutiny of the council policies and performance
- k. Conduct effective scrutiny of other agencies (e.g. health trusts)
- l. Provide effective political management of the authority).

If no, do you need more or fewer councillors than at present and why?

16. Does your authority have any multi-member wards? If so, would you be in favour of the introduction of single member wards throughout the authority?

(Prompt: If yes, what would you see as the benefits of this? If no, why?)

17. How, if at all, do you think the role of elected members in your authority will change over the next ten years (in what areas, why, is this for the better or worse etc)?

(Prompt: How would you feel about a clearer and more explicit division of roles between councillors (with some acting as full-time executive members, some as community champions, and others as scrutineers etc?) How will the scrutiny system in your authority cope with the partnership delivery of services likely to be brought about by the Making the Connections agenda? Should councillors be full-time paid professionals?)

18. What changes would make the role of councillor more attractive to potential ‘recruits’?

19. What could be done to make councillors more representative of the population they serve?

20. What, if anything, would you like to see the following organisations do to enhance the effectiveness of the role of local councillors in Wales:

- Your authority
- Welsh Assembly Government

**Welsh Assembly Government:
Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members**

- Welsh Local Government Association
- Political parties
- Others (please specify)

Thank respondent for their contribution.

Please note, regional dissemination events will be held during November 2006 to discuss initial findings with council members, council officials and stakeholders (with a maximum number of attendees per local authority). The final report will be presented to the Assembly in December 2006.

Appendix III - Topic Guide 3: Local Stakeholders

TOPIC GUIDE 3 - LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Interviewee Briefing:

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) has commissioned a consortium led by CRG Research Ltd, including partners from the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University, and the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University, to review the role and functions of elected members in local authorities in Wales.

The next round of electoral reviews - by which the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales proposes allocations of councillors to electoral divisions within counties according to a ratio formula included within Directions issued by the Assembly - is due to commence in 2008. The exercise of preparing draft Directions, for the Assembly's approval and issue to the Commission, will require the Welsh Assembly Government to take a view on the broad number of elected members it would be appropriate for Welsh local authorities to have. That in turn will depend on an assessment of the roles and functions elected members play now, and what those roles and functions might be in the future. This research needs to provide the factual basis for such an assessment.

This part of the review consists of a series of semi-structured face to face and telephone interviews, across all 22 local authorities, with:

- Council members
- Council officers
- Local stakeholders.

We recognise that data from each of the areas will vary, and that during each interview the weight and nature of the questions will be dependent on the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.

Interview Details:	
Interviewee:	
Organisation:	
Job title/role:	
Length of time in post/previous experience	
Area:	
Contact details (Tel/Email):	
Date and Time:	
Interviewer(s):	

INTERVIEWEES ROLE

**Welsh Assembly Government:
Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members**

- 1. How closely do you work with councillors and in what capacity?**
(Prompt: How much time does a councillor(s) spend supporting your organisation (including attendance at meetings, provision of advice/information, lobbying of other agencies, taking up local causes etc?))

THE ROLE OF COUNCILLORS

- 2. What do you think are the main roles of councillors?**
- 3. Overall, how well do you think that councillors in this authority perform these roles?**
(Prompt: What roles are performed well? Which roles, if any, are not performed effectively at present? What are the reasons for this? In what areas of your work would you like to receive more support from a councillor?)
- 4. Have you experienced a difference since the introduction of the new political management arrangements brought about by the Local Government Act 2000?**
(Prompt: Which part(s) of the new political management arrangements are working well and which need improving (why and how)?)

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

- 5. How well would you say elected members in this local authority are currently performing in terms of community leadership?**
(Prompt: Should this role play a larger part in their activities in the future? What, if anything, would help elected members to fulfil the community leadership role more effectively? Can you give an example of effective community leadership that elected members have provided?)
- 6. In your experience, are there any overlaps with the role of town/community councillors, AM and MPs in terms of representing the interests of local people?**
(Prompt: If so, has this causes any difficulties? How can these problems be overcome?)
- 7. How effective are councillors in partnership working in this local authority?**
(Prompt: Should there be more or less partnership working? Can you provide an example of effective partnership working with this authority? Are there problems of accountability in working with partnerships?)

SCRUTINY

8. **In your experience, how effective are councillors in providing scrutiny of their own authorities?**
9. **In your experience, how effective are councillors in providing scrutiny of other organisations?**
(Prompt: How effective is scrutiny of service delivery partnerships and of health and well being?)
10. **What, if anything, would help elected members to be more effective in providing scrutiny?**
(Prompt: Are there structural changes which could/make scrutiny more effective?)

SKILLS, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

11. **What capabilities should councillors have to make them effective?**
(Prompt: Do elected members need a particular set of skills and/or capabilities to help them work more effectively - in partnership arenas, scrutiny functions etc? If yes, what are these? (e.g. interpersonal skills, negotiation, building trust etc)

FUTURE ROLES

12. **How, if at all, do you think the role of elected members in this authority will change over the next ten years (in what areas, why, is this for the better or worse etc)?**
(Prompt: How would you feel about a clearer and more explicit division of roles between councillors (with some acting as full-time executive members, some as community champions, and others as scrutineers etc?) Should councillors be full-time paid professionals?)
13. **What changes would make the role of councillor more attractive to potential 'recruits'?**
14. **What could be done to make councillors more representative of the population they serve?**
15. **Do you have any views on the numbers of elected members that are needed in this authority (and Wales)?**
16. **What, if anything, would you like to see the following organisations do to enhance the effectiveness of the role of local councillors in Wales:**

**Welsh Assembly Government:
Review of the Role and Functions of Elected Members**

- Welsh Assembly Government
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Political parties
- Others (please specify)

Thank respondent for their contribution.

Please note, regional dissemination events will be held during November 2006 to discuss initial findings with council members, council officials and stakeholders (with a maximum number of attendees per local authority). The final report will be presented to the Assembly in December 2006.

**Appendix IV - Topic Guide 4:
National Stakeholders**

Topic Guide 4 – National Stakeholders

Introduction

The Welsh Assembly Government has commissioned a consortium led by CRG Research Ltd, including partners from the Centre for Local & Regional Government Research at Cardiff University, and the Institute for Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at Birmingham University, to review the role and functions of elected members in local authorities in Wales.

Purpose of the Research

The next round of electoral reviews - by which the Local Government Boundary Commission for Wales proposes allocations of councillors to electoral divisions within counties according to a ratio formula included within Directions issued by the Assembly - is due to commence in 2008. The exercise of preparing draft Directions, for the Assembly's approval and issue to the Commission, will require the Welsh Assembly Government to take a view on the number of elected members it would be appropriate for Welsh local authorities to have. That in turn will depend on an assessment of the roles and functions elected members play now, and what those roles and functions might be in the future. This research needs to provide the factual basis for such as assessment.

This part of the review consists of a series of interviews with national stakeholders plus semi-structured face to face and telephone interviews, across all 22 local authorities, with:

- Council members
- Council officers
- Local stakeholders.

We recognise that data from each of the areas will vary, and that during each interview the weight and nature of the questions will be dependent on the role and responsibilities of the interviewee.

Reference Details:

Interviewee:	
Organisation:	
Job title/role:	
Length of time in post/previous experience	
Contact details (Tel/Email):	
Date and Time:	
Interviewer(s):	

INTERVIEWEE'S ROLE

1. How closely do you work with elected members and in what capacity?

ROLE OF ELECTED MEMBERS

2. What do you see as the main roles of elected members in Wales?
3. In your experience, how effectively are elected members in Wales currently performing these roles?
4. Have you noticed any change (good or bad) in the effectiveness of elected members since the introduction of the new political management arrangements in the Local Government Act 2000?
(Prompt: Which part(s) of the new political management arrangements are working well? Which part(s) of the new political management arrangements need improving (why and how)?)

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

5. How well would you say that elected members in Wales are currently performing in terms of community leadership?
6. What, if anything, would help elected members to fulfil community leadership roles more effectively in the future?

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

7. In your experience, how effective are councillors in working in partnership with other authorities and organisations?
8. What, if anything, would help elected members to make a greater contribution to partnership working?

SCRUTINY

9. In your experience, how effective are councillors in providing scrutiny of their own authorities?

10. In your experience, how effective are councillors in providing scrutiny of other organisations?

(Prompt: How effective is scrutiny of service delivery partnerships and of health and well being?)

11. What, if anything, would help elected members to be more effective in providing scrutiny?

(Prompt: Are there structural changes which could/make scrutiny more effective?)

FUTURE

12. How, if at all, do you think the role of elected members in Wales will change over the next ten years (in what areas, why, is this for the better or worse etc)?

13. How would you feel about a clearer and more explicit division of roles between councillors (with some acting as full-time executive members, some as community champions, and others as scrutineers etc.?)

14. What changes would make the role of councillor more attractive to potential 'recruits'?

15. What could be done to make councillors more representative of the population they serve?

16. Do you have any views on the numbers of elected members that are needed in Wales?

17. What, if anything, does your organisation do to enhance the effectiveness of the role of local councillors in Wales?

18. What, if anything, would you like to see the following organisations do to enhance the effectiveness of the role of councillors?

- Welsh Assembly Government
- Welsh Local Government Association
- Political parties
- Others (please specify)

THANK RESPONDENT FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION

Appendix V - Overview of WLGA Charter



A Wales Charter for Member Support & Development

Charter Structure Overview

The Charter is divided into four areas:

- A. Modernised constitutional arrangements**
- B. Member personal and role, skill and knowledge development**
- C. Member support services**
- D. Member facilities**

A. Modernised constitutional arrangements

Authorities will be awarded the Charter if:

- The Council operates modernised constitutional arrangements which function effectively and support strong corporate governance. Namely:
- Members are supported with role descriptions.
- Arrangements are in place for members to receive personal support and development interviews which address the areas of responsibility set out in the role descriptions and identify any development needs.
- Arrangements made for the business of the council are flexible and allow all members to participate equally, taking into account employment, family, and caring responsibilities.
- Members undertake their duties according to high standards of conduct.
- The constitution itself supports strong corporate governance by setting out the roles of each of the member "teams".

B. Member personal and role, skill and knowledge development

Authorities will be awarded the Charter if:

- They have a member development strategy in place which meets the learning and development and wider needs of elected members, is based on the council's key aims and objectives and the expressed needs of councillors, and

prioritises activities to maximise available resources.

- An annual development programme for councillors is in place, which recognises specific roles and responsibilities, identifies individual learning needs, and is based on principles of good practice.
- Information and briefings are available for prospective candidates.
- Development activities are diverse in style and setting and are based on the identified learning needs and styles of the individuals and teams.
- There are named people with responsibility for driving, monitoring and reviewing the Member Development Strategy, the Annual Development Programme and the development activities.
- Resources are identified and provided for member development within the Charter framework.
- All councillors are made aware of, guided to, and are able to access the development activities equally.
- The development activities provided are of a sufficiently high quality.
- Councillors participate in a level of development activities previously identified within their personal development plans.
- The authority and members work together to create an environment which encourages learning and development.
- Members are offered the opportunity to be mentored by their peers.

C. Member support services

Authorities will be awarded the Charter if the following are in place:

- Officer support for all the member functions.
- Dedicated support for the overview and scrutiny function.

D. Member facilities

Authorities will be awarded the Charter if:

- Members are provided with adequate access to ICT.
- Library and intranet facilities are provided.
- A location and facilities where members can work in privacy undisturbed within the council is provided.
- Telephony services are available including call referral/handling services.

