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# **The Scrutiny Role of Regional Assemblies**

**by Mark Sandford**

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**The Constitution Unit**

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The work of Regional Chamber scrutiny</b>	<b>9</b>
Scrutiny structures	10
Planning work and selecting topics	12
<b>Appendix 1: Glossary of Acronyms</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix 2: details of scrutiny reports produced so far by Regional Chambers</b>	<b>19</b>
West Midlands	19
East Midlands	19
South-East	19
South-West	19
Yorkshire and Humber	19
North-East	19
North-West	20
<b>Appendix 3 : other outputs from Effective Scrutiny</b>	<b>21</b>



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# Executive Summary

1. This briefing forms part of the Constitution Unit's research into effective scrutiny. The research is taking place from 2002–2004, and is examining the practice of scrutiny at all levels of government: national, devolved, regional and local. This briefing is the seventh output of the project (see Appendix 3 for details of other outputs).
2. The briefing outlines and analyses the practice of scrutiny in the Regional Chambers, in the eight regions of England outside London. The Chambers are voluntary bodies, which formed through 1998 and 1999 (see Appendix 1). Under sections 10 and 18 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 the Government has 'designated' them as bodies entitled to monitor the work of the development agency in their region. All of the Chambers were designated in 1999.
3. The Regional Chambers' membership consists of elected councillors representing local authorities, and of a diverse group called 'social and economic partners' (SEPs). Local authority members make up approximately 70% of the membership of Regional Chambers and social and economic partners (also known as 'community stakeholders') some 30%. These proportions were required by Government guidance for designation to take place. Many of the SEP groups have begun to establish electoral colleges and mechanisms for accountability mimicking those of democratic organisations: their initial membership was more or less self-selecting.
4. The Regional Chambers began life with very few powers and very limited budgets. Most of them were set up on the back of regional local government institutions, and hence depended on local authority subscriptions for funding. This changed in March 2001, when the consultation paper Strengthening Regional Accountability made available a £5 million fund for the Chambers collectively to access. Additionally, the Government made it clear through 2001 and 2002 that it wanted Chambers to take on the role of producing draft Regional Planning Guidance—absorbing the Regional Planning Bodies (RPBs). In some regions RPBs and Chambers already acted as single organisations, but from early 2003 Regional Planning grants were paid directly to Regional Chambers instead of arriving via local authority subscriptions. Most Chambers today have annual budgets of £2–4 million.
5. The £5m annual fund is intended to be used for the purpose of monitoring (i.e. scrutinising) Regional Chambers. This purpose has been interpreted very liberally by the Government, who have been happy to see Chambers develop general strategy-writing and policy capacity to understand the region better before they try to scrutinise the development agency. Hence the funds directed towards activities commonly recognised as scrutiny—panel hearings, consultancy, and member preparations—are only a fraction of the £600,000 share of the fund enjoyed by each Chamber. The Chambers also benefit from a £200,000 collective fund, much of which is used to provide research support and share best practice on scrutiny and other matters.
6. The research for this report derives from existing published material on the Regional Chambers, and from analysis of their websites. As the English Regions Network had commissioned research on the scrutiny process when this report was being written, it was decided not to overload the small Chamber staff teams with further interviews. The author is also part of a team led by Arup Economics and Planning, commissioned by the ODPM to carry out a study entitled "Evaluation of the Role and Impact of Regional Chambers". This study is taking place between July 2003 and December 2005, and covered the scrutiny work of the Chambers. This report draws on interview material from that study.
7. As Regional Chambers have no executive powers, their entire scrutiny role consists of 'external scrutiny' (see below for an explanation of this term). It is therefore very difficult to compare them with other

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tiers of government, where scrutiny committees, most of the time, address the work of their own executive. Therefore, we have not tried in this report to use the classification of enquiries and the typologies used in previous reports on this project. Our aim in this report is to set out how each Chamber has interpreted their scrutiny role, examining the structures set up, subjects selected for enquiry, and methods used to undertake scrutiny. Because of the ongoing work of the English Regions Network and Warwick Business School, we have also avoided making recommendations in this report.<sup>1</sup> The Chambers are all tightly engaged in an on-going process of sharing best practice amongst themselves, and we would have little to add to that.

8. Finally, the Regional Chambers have all changed their name to 'Regional Assembly'. For the purposes of this report, we continue to refer to them collectively as Regional Chambers, to avoid confusion with any future elected regional assemblies in England. However, where a single Chamber is referred to we use its actual name.

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular Stephanie Snape, Rachel Ashworth, Sundeep Aulakh, Lynn Dobbs, and Craig Moore, *The Development of Regional Scrutiny*, Warwick Business School, 2003, available at [http://www.emra.gov.uk/publications/documents/development\\_of\\_regional\\_scrutiny.pdf](http://www.emra.gov.uk/publications/documents/development_of_regional_scrutiny.pdf) amongst other locations, which is referred to as "Snape: 2003" throughout this briefing.

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# Introduction

9. Regional Chambers do not have any precise role set out in statute or in Government guidance. Their role has been mostly self-defined and has grown organically in response to Government priorities, regional perceptions of potential added value, and available resources. Chambers' tasks can be roughly divided into five categories. Scrutiny is one of these categories: the others are planning and transport; policy development; civic engagement; and communications.

10. Communications describes the role of 'voice of the region', taken by many Chambers as meaning the ability to speak for the region due to their representative (but un-elected) members. Whatever the validity of that concept of 'representativeness', Chambers have nevertheless issued regular press releases and made regular representations, both individually and collectively, to central government on matters of importance affecting the region(s).

11. Civic engagement describes the new departure of bringing 'social and economic partners' on to a quasi-democratic body as full, voting members. The SEPs bring with them some level of representation of their sector and some degree of expertise in its affairs. Civic engagement, however, runs throughout the processes of Regional Chambers: all of their policy work is replete with public and stakeholder consultation requirements and commitments. Many have committee and panel structures that embrace a hundred or more representatives of civil society within their region.

12. We list 'policy development' separately from 'planning and transport' because the former has been carried out far more in some regions than others. Planning and transport have now become a statutory responsibility of the Chambers, under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. They were recognised as a central government requirement for at least two years before that, with Chambers becoming responsible in all but name for producing draft Regional Planning Guidance. In some regions—particularly the South-East and East of England, with strong Conservative Party representation—the Regional Chamber has largely stuck to planning and transport. Elsewhere, where stronger sentiments in favour of regional government prevail, Chambers have sought wider involvement in policies as diverse as culture, health, sustainable development, rural development, skills, and housing. We refer to the latter involvement in other policy work—which takes place at the Chambers' discretion—as 'policy development'.

13. All members of Regional Chambers are part-time, and the time commitment is small compared to other tiers of government. The most active members may spend up to two days per week on Chamber business, but this is only a tiny minority of members. Moreover, most of the membership by its nature is likely not only to have a full-time job but other voluntary responsibilities as well: most are activists in the widest sense. And in most Chambers, planning and transport and policy development take up the majority of staff time. The scrutiny role has at most six full time equivalent staff running it. This does not mean that those staff members are isolated from the work and expertise of the Chamber as a whole: they are not. All of these factors mean, however, that the standard caveat that scrutiny has tiny resources compared to the executives that are scrutinised applies even more starkly at regional level than at other tiers.



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## The work of Regional Chamber scrutiny

14. Formally, Regional Chambers are permitted only to scrutinise the work of their Regional Development Agency. The majority of Chambers have stuck to this requirement until now, holding scrutiny hearings only with senior staff and board members from their RDA. On some occasions, other regional executive agencies have been invited to question and answer sessions. The South-West Regional Assembly invited the Environment Agency and local Learning and Skills Council representatives to one in 2001.

15. Some Chambers intend to do this again in the future, though they have no ability to summon organisations to appear before them. Regional executive agencies are formally accountable to Parliament, and have no obligation to account for their actions to Regional Chambers. Nevertheless, in many cases they have built relationships with Chambers and regularly discuss their work with them.

16. However, there is a difference in the character of scrutiny at regional level. Because all regional scrutiny is external scrutiny, in all regions there has been a strong tendency towards scrutiny as a form of partnership in policy development. This tendency has several sources. On the one hand, the statutory basis of the scrutiny role (in the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998) is unclear and vague. In the early days of the RDAs, in 1999–2000 (when ‘scrutiny’ was still a novelty within British governance), the right of the Chambers to scrutinise was contested by some of the RDAs (notably in the West Midlands and East of England). Section 18 (1) of the RDA Act 1998 states:

*“The Secretary of State may by directions require a regional development agency for which there is a regional chamber under section 8 (1)-*

*(a) to supply the chamber with information of such description as may be specified in the directions,*

*(b) to answer questions put by the chamber about information supplied to it by the agency and to do so in such manner as may be so specified, and*

*(c) to take such other steps for the purpose of accounting to the chamber for the exercise of its functions as may be so specified.”*

17. Sections 10 and 18 of the Act, which refer to regional chambers, do not use the word ‘scrutiny’. However, some Chambers initially approached the scrutiny role believing that it could only work if it were adversarial. This reflects the background of ‘scrutiny’ in the House of Commons select committees, which do have an adversarial approach (linked to specific rights of Parliamentary privilege). In the regions, however, this antagonised some RDA representatives and abetted an early lack of co-operation between Chamber and RDA.

18. Joint working, partnership and sharing information have thus been the main tools by which the relationship between the two bodies, in each region, has been built (or rebuilt). It is questionable, however, how far the process described in this report can be regarded as ‘scrutiny’ at all. In many ways it is closer to a form of network governance, with privileged access for Chamber representatives. Snape (2003:23–24) reports that the word ‘scrutiny’ is almost universally unpopular with those involved in the process, because of its adversarial connotations.

19. The vast majority of scrutiny work has been focused on economic policy or closely related issues. This can be seen from the list of scrutiny reports provided in Appendix 2. Where other policy areas, such as culture, health or the environment, have been addressed, it has normally been in the context of their

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economic impact. At the same time, the range of issues that can be accessed in this way is quite wide: economic scrutiny acts as a gateway to a number of regional policies. Snape (2003:30) mentions that “assemblies appear to have made conscious efforts to address issues holistically, exploring the social, environmental and spatial implications of what may appear to be in some cases largely ‘economic issues’. However, the different types of scrutiny in other tiers of government are not available in the English regions. Under external scrutiny there can be no equivalent of an event enquiry, for instance (Sandford and Maer 2003:12).

20. After exploratory starts in 2001 and 2002, the Chambers have put together forward plans for the scrutiny processes that they undertake, and reference is often made to ‘rounds’ or ‘programmes’ of scrutiny. In the West Midlands, the first round of scrutiny, in 2002–03, formed around the four pillars of the Regional Economic Strategy (a diverse and dynamic business base; a learning and skills region; conditions for growth; regenerated communities). One scrutiny panel was set up for each of these four areas, and the members of the panels were invited to put forward specific topics for scrutiny. The South-West began a new programme of scrutiny in 2004, focusing on the Regional Economic Strategy. A further programme is planned for 2006–07, which will focus on the Integrated Regional Strategy—hence moving the focus of scrutiny from economic policy to wider policy issues. This demonstrates that Chamber scrutiny is part of a system of governance, and more than a random activity unconnected with other regional developments.

## Scrutiny structures

21. Each Chamber has established either a standing panel, or a series of task and finish groups, to carry out scrutiny enquiries. In this sense the scrutiny process resembles what is done at other tiers of government. In most cases the memberships of panels is restricted to Chamber members, though there are some instances (for instance, Yorkshire and Humber) of non-Chamber members sitting on panels. Some Chambers have attempted to move away from the term ‘scrutiny: the North-West has a Regional Review panel, and the South-West increasingly also uses this term.

22. Table 1 shows the different scrutiny structures used so far in the eight Regional Chambers. The variation between them is considerable. In most cases the membership of the panels or committees is proportional to overall representation on the Assembly (both between political parties, and local councillors and partners). This is not true in the North-West or Yorkshire and Humber, where partner members are disproportionately well-represented.

23. Each Chamber’s scrutiny panel has a set of terms of reference (where it is a standing panel) or specific terms of reference for task and finish groups. Terms of reference typically require the Chamber to comment on the economic strategy documents of the RDA, to monitor progress quarterly jointly with the Government Office, and to discuss issues of sustainable economic development for the whole region.

24. In the North-West the Regional Review group has a remit to improve implementation of the Regional Economic Strategy, RPG, and Action for Sustainability (the Sustainable Development framework). This huge potential remit has led to a long term assessment of projects contributing to the RDA’s tier 2 targets. They have also interpreted their role as being to scrutinise the work of the Government Office, and to look at the economic facets of such subjects as transport and tourism. Both NWDA and GONW actually have seats on the Regional Review group, and are therefore aware of potential subjects of scrutiny.

25. The East of England Regional Assembly organises scrutiny through its EEDA-EERA Liaison Panel (EEDA is the development agency). Four of the twelve members on this panel are from EEDA (East of England Development Agency) itself. The work of the Panel takes place within a wider agreed ‘scrutiny framework’ which includes a programme of joint research. EERA also hold at least one ‘sub-regional

accountability event' in each of its six county areas per year, in recognition of the strength of county identity in the region. These events often throw up specific concerns from the sub-regional stakeholders who attend, which influences the long-term direction of EEDA policy.

26. The East Midlands and South East have begun to integrate their scrutiny process with the RDA's own performance management systems. This lessens the amount of work that the RDA has to do to make itself accountable, and enables closer working between RDA and Assembly.

27. The South-East, North-East and Yorkshire & Humber use task and finish groups instead of a standing scrutiny committee. Use of task and finish groups is relatively common in local government, but they are usually under the direction of a main scrutiny committee. This permits members to be selected for their interest and expertise in a subject—and this ensures that members attend and participate constructively in meetings.

**Table 1: scrutiny structures in the Regional Chambers**

Region	Chair	Scrutiny protocol	No. staff	Meetings per year	Members per panel	Scrutiny committees
South-West	Local authority member	Yes	1	3–4	12	One standing Scrutiny Committee (to be renamed the Regional Review Group)
South-East	Volunteer member	No	1	3–4	10	Task and finish groups newly selected for each process.
East of England	Local authority member	Yes	6	3	12 (5 LA, 3 SEP, 4 EEDA)	EEDA-EERA Liaison Panel
West Midlands	Any member		1	4	7–8	Strategy Review Group (members and officers) plus four themed scrutiny panels.
East Midlands	Partner member	Yes	1	N/A <sup>2</sup>	15	Regional Scrutiny Board replaced the Economic Review group. Conducts its own work and also handles the Panels.
North-West	Business member	Yes	4	2–3	20 3 GONW 3 NWDA 7 SEP	Standing committee—NW Regional Review—with wide remit. GONW & NWDA represented.
Yorkshire & Humber	Assembly member	No		4	6 (up to 4 non-members)	Task and finish groups newly selected for each process. Must be from an approved list of those who have undergone training.
North-East	Local authority chief exec	No	2	5		Task and finish panels newly selected for each process. Self-selecting members.

28. Potential disadvantages of this format is that monitoring of scrutiny impacts and outcomes by members is difficult: this often falls on officers or on the chair of the task and finish group. Also, it is

<sup>2</sup> The scrutiny process has just been entirely revised in the East Midlands.

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easier for a standing committee to build up experience in the art of scrutiny: when new members are selected for each scrutiny process, this is not so easily done (it is an equivalent problem to turnover in membership at other tiers of government). Yorkshire & Humber have attempted to overcome this by establishing a form of accreditation: only members who have undergone a training programme may sit on a scrutiny committee. However, very few local authority members in Yorkshire & Humber have taken the training programme so far.

29. East Midlands, meanwhile, apes the practice in some local authorities where a general committee (here, the Regional Scrutiny Board) oversees the scrutiny process and carries out some enquiries itself (such as routine reviews of the development agency's performance, and examinations of specific strategy documents). It also establishes Scrutiny Panels, which consider topical aspects of the work of emda such as the performance of sub-regional strategic partnerships. This new approach was established in late 2003 following a change of chief executive in the Chamber.

30. In East of England and North-West, non-Assembly members are full members of the scrutiny committees. This also occurs in Yorkshire and Humber. Yorkshire and Humber supplements its small Assembly (36 members) with five policy Commissions (containing 30–50 members each) to bring in a wide range of viewpoints. Any member of the Commissions can sit on a scrutiny panel. The presence of RDA representatives on the committees in the East of England and North-West is odd compared with other tiers of government, but it reflects the degree to which regional scrutiny is really joint working and policy development. It should be noted that RDAs work closely with Chambers generally: in most regions, high-level bilaterals take place between senior representatives of both organisations. The practice of scrutiny takes place in that context.

31. In many regions, whether a standing panel or task and finish groups are responsible for scrutiny, there was a slight concern that scrutiny was dominated by those who were particularly interested in a certain issue or particularly committed to the Chamber as a whole. Most scrutiny panel members are essentially self-selecting, subject to proportionality. However, this criticism could be applied to Chambers as a whole: there are plenty of Chamber members who play very little active part in the conduct of its business, and merely use it to keep in touch with developments on behalf of their local authority or sponsor organisation. It is also common elsewhere for assemblies to find it difficult to interest members in scrutiny: many local authorities would be grateful to suffer from this 'problem'.

## **Planning work and selecting topics**

### **Setting the workplan**

32. In most regions, the RDA is closely involved in the selection of subjects for scrutiny. Discussing possible subjects with the executive arm under scrutiny may appear counter-productive to effective scrutiny happening, but this is a realistic response to the situation that Chambers find themselves in—of carrying out solely external scrutiny. Through co-operation they can obtain goodwill and information that might otherwise not be forthcoming: and in early attempts at scrutiny (in particular in the West Midlands and East of England) there was considerable antagonism between Chamber and RDA.

33. The downside of this approach is that tricky subjects may be avoided by the scrutiny process: and some interviewees indicated that they felt that the process was 'too cosy'. Strongly criticising RDA performance was felt to be hard to do in the present circumstances.

34. Close relationships with RDAs are often reciprocal. Chamber senior staff and members will be invited to RDA board meetings. Likewise, in several regions RDA representatives sit on Chamber committees. One

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sits on the Regional Spatial Strategy committee in the South-West, and in the East of England several committees have RDA representation.

35. Although formally Chambers may decide to scrutinise any aspect of regional economic development that they choose, in practice most of them have adopted a 'routine' of scrutiny to a greater or lesser degree. Scrutiny programmes are frequently linked to the main pillars of the regional economic strategy or relate to the Integrated Regional Strategy (for instance, North-East, West Midlands, South-West). There have also been recent attempts to link scrutiny with other performance management or audit frameworks. East Midlands ensures that scrutiny topics complement the performance management of emda carried out by the Government Office. The South-East is integrating the scrutiny process with SEEDA's own performance management framework. The North-West and South-West carry out quarterly monitoring work of their development agencies.

36. Many Chambers have in place a written protocol between Chamber and RDA that governs the scrutiny relationship. The protocols often frequently outline the nature of the scrutiny role as perceived by the Assembly. The West Midlands' Strategic Review Protocol states that:

*“Strategic Review is more than mere scrutiny of decisions that have already been taken and actions that have been completed. It is an examination of the effectiveness of regional economic activity that will assist in setting future priorities for the region. It will also ensure that Regional Development Agencies are aware of the views of the region and that their plans reflect the needs of the region.”*

37. Similarly, high-level relations between Chamber, Government Office and RDA form a backdrop to the scrutiny process in each region. Scrutiny and challenge of the RDA does not take place 'cold' or in a vacuum: relationships exist independent of the scrutiny process. Regular discussions take place to keep all organisations in the loop.

## Methods of investigation

38. As Regional Chambers exclusively carry out external scrutiny, in order to achieve any impact on RDAs and other bodies there is a strong pressure on them to adopt a partnership approach to scrutiny. Earlier attempts to adopt a more adversarial approach along the 'classical scrutiny' model, particularly in the South-West and East of England, did not produce results. Indeed, in the South-West the meeting room where the scrutiny hearing was held was consciously redesigned from a format of two groups facing one another to a horseshoe.

39. Most of the scrutiny work carried out by the Chambers is in a form recognisable from local or devolved government. A set-piece question and answer session is the focus of the scrutiny process in most Chambers. The scrutiny hearing usually takes place on the afternoon of a single day. The morning of that day is spent briefing the members of the scrutiny committee or panel—normally by expert witnesses or consultants—and decisions by the panel on where to concentrate their interest.

40. Part-time Chamber members are rarely able to hold several hearings on the same subject (the exception being the North-East, which has a five-session procedure for each scrutiny process). Therefore, most scrutiny sessions are preceded by increasingly extensive information-gathering processes. These may include interviews of relevant officials by Chamber members: workshops at various places in the region, giving stakeholders a chance to input into the process and to hear from expert presenters; and calls for 'written evidence' in the manner of scrutiny committees at other tiers of government. Written evidence almost always comes from interested organisations or member organisations—those people who would already be interested in the work of the Chamber.

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41. Many Chambers have appointed teams of consultants to produce issues papers for individual scrutiny processes (South-East), or to carry out ongoing research into longer-term issues (North-West). Some interviewees indicated that consultancy papers could be of variable quality. In the West Midlands, the use of consultants was abandoned after one attempt. The RDA, Advantage West Midlands, had been able to respond to the consultants' paper before the scrutiny hearing, and the hearing itself was thus unable to take the issues any further. However, in mid-2004 the West Midlands regional assembly intended to tender a research project, jointly with AWM, examining "the impact of the actions within the West Midlands Economic Strategy". They also propose to carry out four detailed reviews on innovation, social enterprise, rural renaissance and equalities. The Strategic Review Group also reviews AWM's Annual Report following an analysis by the WMRA secretariat.

42. Some of the Chambers' processes are relatively informal, in line with a move in the Chambers away from the strictures of local government process. East Midlands holds relatively informal question and answer sessions with emda, which lead to recommendations being agreed between the two sides. Its panels, meanwhile, are free to decide on the appropriate method of scrutiny for their terms of reference. In the North-West, longer-term research is considered to be part of the scrutiny process. The research results feed in to choices of future topics and to scrutiny processes themselves.

43. Some Assemblies have begun to use more sophisticated methods of information gathering. The North-East occasionally uses away-days where Panel members listen to the opinions of stakeholders and other witnesses. The South-East plans to encourage members to interview relevant officials as part of the information-gathering process. Part of the advantage of these initiatives is that they encourage greater member involvement, instead of restricting members to a single day of participation.

44. Asking questions in oral hearings in Regional Chamber scrutiny is not afforded the same level of importance as it is at other tiers of government. This is another consequence of Chambers being more concerned with the overall process and the relationships which are built and sustained through it. Some evidence suggests that partner members tend to ask more knowledgeable questions, but this is only a marginal difference.

45. Using the typology we developed in previous reports for this research, the character of Regional Chamber scrutiny as external scrutiny determines that the vast majority of questions asked will be informative rather than interrogative questions. Evidence from the minutes of scrutiny meetings bear out this expectation. The East Midlands Economic Review Group (the predecessor of the recently-established Scrutiny Board) contains long series of questions from panel members which are exclusively informative, and which cover extremely wide areas.

46. Chambers vary on whether they permit members of the public to attend scrutiny sessions. North-West, South-East and South-West do; East Midlands do not. In some cases, such as South-East and South-West, the public are not permitted to attend the briefing sessions which take place before the formal scrutiny hearing. It seems odd that the public should be entirely barred from attending scrutiny hearings, as part of the purpose of scrutiny is accountability to regional electorates. This will not be achieved by preventing the electorate from taking part. It is, however, rare for members of the public (as opposed to stakeholders or directly interested parties) to attend scrutiny sessions and the minutes of private sessions are normally available on Chamber websites.

## **Reports, recommendations and follow-up**

47. The vast majority of Chamber scrutiny processes result in the production of a short report—typically 12–25 pages—complete with recommendations for action by the RDA. The reports are similar in format to the scrutiny reports produced at other tiers of government, including information on those individuals and

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stakeholders who have submitted evidence to the enquiry, the terms of reference, and membership of the committee. Officially the report is presented to either the full Assembly or the executive committee and noted. Appendix 2 contains a list of the scrutiny reports produced so far by Chambers.

48. As with other tiers of government, the number of recommendations in some early scrutiny reports was problematic. The West Midlands' Strategic Review of 2003 contained 53 recommendations, and one early report in the North-East had over 85 recommendations. Such a huge number of recommendations, without prioritisation, is very likely to sour relations with the RDAs. RDAs have no obligation to put Chambers' recommendations into practice, and would likely not have the capacity to address 85 recommendations at once. This has not been the practice of most scrutiny reports, however: they typically contain 12 to 20 recommendations.

49. The recommendations made are mostly at the level of RDA strategy. This reflects the fact that a short, 3-hour scrutiny hearing cannot deal with detailed matters of delivery of RDA programmes. Indeed, the South-East England Regional Assembly explicitly avoids going into matters of programme delivery, seeing these as the exclusive province of the RDA. In the North-West, the Assembly expressed serious concerns at the lack of a social inclusion dimension to the NWDA strategy, something that was incorporated in subsequent versions. The North-East is required to take into account a range of cross-cutting issues in each scrutiny report (for instance, sustainability, health, social inclusion, accessibility).

50. There has been no attempt to make direct recommendations about the internal organisation of the RDAs through the scrutiny process. There appears to be a tacit agreement not to stray into this area: Snape (2003:31) records that "it was clear from interviews with RDA officers and board members that this was not considered to be a legitimate focus of scrutiny...there appears to be little appetite on the side of assemblies to undertake such scrutiny."

51. Increasingly, Chambers have in place more sophisticated follow-up procedures than exist at most tiers of government. In the South-East, for instance, regular meetings take place between the RDA board and senior staff and the Chamber senior staff. One standing agenda item at these meetings is a matrix of scrutiny recommendations and action that has been taken upon them. East Midlands agrees a monitoring framework with emda after the recommendations have been published. In the North-West, however, respondents were critical of the failure to institute such monitoring procedures, and suggested that scrutiny in that region had so far had little impact.

52. The degree of linkage between the scrutiny process and the other activities of the Regional Chambers is variable. In the East of England, the scrutiny process was claimed to have had a demonstrable impact on the priorities of the Integrated Regional Strategy. Respondents in the South-East and South-West indicated that the link between scrutiny and Chambers' planning and policy roles was not clearly visible, as was also claimed in the East Midlands.

## **Impact of reports**

53. In most regions the discernible impact of scrutiny was felt to be limited. Interviewees accepted that scrutiny of the RDA's strategic work was a long-term game, and was also an overdetermined subject. It is difficult to prove that a Chamber scrutiny was the source of an RDA change in strategy. There are exceptions to this rule, however. The East Midlands Assembly's scrutiny of SSPs (Sub-regional Strategic Partnerships) led to a reorganisation of the SSP team within emda, and the scrutiny process also built greater trust with relevant stakeholders which itself led to an improvement in the programme's effectiveness. In the South-East, a scrutiny into SEEDA's impact on cultural industries led to a reassessment of SEEDA's internal structuring of cultural support; and since the scrutiny, culture has routinely featured amongst SEEDA's strategic objectives where it was previously invisible.

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54. The media, often a source of pressure on politicians at local and national level, has virtually no regional presence in England. There is therefore no prospect of mistakes within RDAs being seized on by newspapers, giving a Chamber an incentive to scrutinise a particular policy. There are also few examples of party politics in the scrutiny process. Partly this is due to the dilution of party politics on the Chambers by the presence of the Social and Economic Partners, who have tended to take a very active role in the scrutiny process.

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## Appendix 1: Glossary of Acronyms

<b>Region</b>	<b>Regional Chamber</b>	<b>RDA</b>	<b>Government Office</b>
East of England Regional Assembly	EERA	EEDA	GO-EAST
East Midlands Regional Assembly	EMRA	emda	GO-EM
North-East Assembly	NEA	ONE	GO-NE
North-West Regional Assembly	NWRA	NWDA	GONW
South-East England Regional Assembly	SEERA	SEEDA	GOSE
South-West Regional Assembly	SWRA	SWRDA	GOSW
West Midlands Regional Assembly	WMRA	AWM	GOWM
Yorkshire and Humber Assembly	YHA	YF	GOYH

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## Appendix 2: details of scrutiny reports produced so far by Regional Chambers

All of these reports can be accessed at the URLs given alongside the different regions.

### West Midlands

Detailed Review 1—West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy

Detailed Review 2—Re-examination of issues raised by Panel Hearings 2002/3

Detailed Review 3—Strategic Approach to Sustainable Development

Detailed Review 4—Regeneration Zones

[http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Strategic\\_Review\\_Activity\\_2003-4.htm](http://www.wmra.gov.uk/Strategic_Review_Activity_2003-4.htm)

### East Midlands

Scrutiny Review into Improving Business Birth Rate and Survival Performance in the East Midlands

<http://www.emra.gov.uk/scrutiny/planning-board.asp>

### South-East

Promoting Urban Renaissance (2004)

Enterprise Hubs and Gateways (2004)

Inward Investment (2003)

Workforce Skills (2003)

Culture and Regeneration (2003)

SEEDA's Impact on the Diversification of the Rural Economy (2002)

SEEDA's Impact in Areas of Economic Success (2002)

[http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/meetings/select\\_committees.html](http://www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/meetings/select_committees.html)

### South-West

Business Development

Urban Renaissance

Rural Economy Scrutiny

Skills and Learning Scrutiny

Corporate Plan Scrutiny

Broadband

<http://www.southwest-ra.gov.uk/swra/ourwork/scrutiny/index.shtml>

### Yorkshire and Humber

Business Birth Rate Strategy Scrutiny Report

Impact of the RES on social inclusion

Public sector investment and the achievement of RES objectives

Five Cities—drivers of economic growth

Renaissance of Market Towns Initiative

<http://www.yhassembly.gov.uk/Index.cfm?routine=content&channel=Library&contentid=170>

### North-East

SME Creation Support Services

Inward Investment and Marketing

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Job Creation in Deprived Communities  
ICT and e-Commerce  
Skills and Training (workforce development)  
Business Survival  
Tourism  
Business Sites and Premises  
<http://www.northeastassembly.gov.uk/theassembly/scrutiny.cfm>

## **North-West**

Regional Review Cluster Development Hearing  
Regional Review Education and Skills Hearing  
Regional Review Housing Hearing  
Regional Review Tourism Hearing  
Regional Review Transport Hearing  
Regional Review Waste Hearing  
<http://www.nwra.gov.uk/library/index.php>

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## Appendix 3 : other outputs from Effective Scrutiny

Lucinda Maer and Mark Sandford, *Select Committees under Scrutiny*, July 2004.

Mark Sandford and Lucinda Maer, *Issues of Importance: the scrutiny role of the London Assembly*, June 2004.

Mark Sandford and Lucinda Maer, *Old Habits Die Hard? Overview and scrutiny in local government*, February 2004, 57pp, £10.00.

Lucinda Maer and Mark Sandford, *The Development of Scrutiny in the UK; an overview of procedures and practice*, January 2004, 58pp, Available on line.

Mark Sandford and Lucinda Maer, *Scrutiny under devolution: committees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*, November 2003, 51pp, £8.00.

Mark Sandford and Lucinda Maer, *Annotated Bibliography of Effective Scrutiny*, Available on line (pdf)

Mark Sandford and Lucinda Maer, *Effective Scrutiny in the Devolved Institutions*, ESRC Devolution Programme Briefing No. 6, February 2004, 6pp.





