

# More productive scrutiny meetings

## A scrutiny development session proposal for Plymouth City Council

by Dr Dave Mckenna  
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### Summary

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This proposal covers:

- Relevant knowledge and expertise
- Aims for the work
- Proposal
- Costs
- Contact Dave

## Relevant knowledge and expertise

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Dave is a dedicated scrutiny practitioner with ten years' experience as manager of Swansea Council's scrutiny team. Dave has been based in West Sussex since 2017 working as an independent consultant. An associate with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, Dave has provided numerous training and support sessions for scrutiny councillors for more than 30 different councils across England and Wales and hosted workshops at Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and Association of Democratic Services Officers annual conferences. As a Tpas associate Dave also provides training, support and research for tenant scrutineers.

Dave has been BRIEF<sup>1</sup> trained in solution focussed techniques and has expertise in public governance; particularly local government scrutiny, partnership working and public participation. He has a PhD in local politics and is an associate of the Institute of Local Government Studies and an Honorary Research Fellow with Swansea University.

Other selected recent projects include:

**Review of Anglesey Scrutiny Arrangements** (2024) Using a research-informed framework along with interviews, observations and document reviews, provided an assessment of the Council's scrutiny structure and practice.

**Councillors and Care** (2021-24) Employed as a research fellow for this project looking at how councillors, including in the scrutiny role, can make a difference to adult social care.

<https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/councillors-and-care/>

**LGA Local Leadership Framework for Councillors** (2022-3) Part of the team that refreshed this framework for councillors to use as they work with local communities to make a difference.

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/local-leadership-framework-councillors>

**Constructive Conversations.** (2020-) Designed and delivered this virtual course for school governors, scrutiny councillors and independent members of health and housing boards.

<https://www.publicgov.co.uk/constructive-conversations-course/>

**Scrutiny Meetup.** (2020-) Co-facilitator of zoom meetings for scrutiny support officers using a range of participatory techniques. <https://scrutinymeetup.publicgov.co.uk>

**Housing Guide for Scrutiny Councillors.** (2018) A Local Government Association guide produced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny. <https://www.cfps.org.uk/taking-on-the-housing-challenge-a-scrutiny-councillors-guide/>

**Independent Review of Governance for Kensington and Chelsea Council.** (2018) Lead consultant for the Centre for Public Scrutiny. <https://www.cfps.org.uk/change-council-independent-review-governance-royal-borough-kensington-chelsea/>

Client contacts on request.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.brief.org.uk>

## Aim of the session

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Plymouth City Council would like to provide a development session for their scrutiny members to support more productive meetings. This session builds on the Council's ongoing scrutiny development work including a 2022 review of scrutiny arrangements by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS). Additional sessions might follow if helpful.

Following the CfGS review, the aim of the session is to help councillors think about how to get the best from scrutiny, focussing on effective meetings and questioning, to identify practical improvements that will fit within the Councils' approach to scrutiny.

## Proposal

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*This proposal can be adapted following discussion with the client.*

### **More productive scrutiny meetings**

This will be a two-hour, interactive development session, in person, giving councillors the opportunity to share their own good practice as well as hear about frameworks, techniques and tips that others find useful. Rather than presenting 'the right way to do this', the idea is that councillors can decide what's most likely to work for them and what they might find useful to try.

As well as helpful practice from local government and parliamentary scrutiny, the session will also include content that draws on the wisdom of conversation experts such as coaches, facilitators and mediators to provide frameworks, techniques and tips that can be easily used and shared.

The session will be a mix of work in small groups and contributions from Dave. An opportunity for whole group reflection will be provided at the end.

Key topics will include:

- What does a productive scrutiny meeting look like?
- What helps to make questioning effective?
- What helps to make recommendations and proposals impactful?
- How best to draw on the knowledge and experience of scrutiny members?
- What is working well for us already?
- What additional tips and techniques might be helpful?

The proposed menu for the session is as follows:

- **What does a productive meeting look like?** Small group discussion, ideas collected on the flipchart.
- **What do we do now that helps to make our scrutiny meetings productive?** A zero to ten scaling exercise to help participants generate examples followed by small group discussion. A summary list of 'our best examples' is produced at the end of this activity.
- **Productive scrutiny meetings – helpful ideas.** Presentation by Dave illustrated with plenty of practical things that councillors might try, followed by small group discussion.
- **Whole group reflection.** Opportunity to raise any issues and ask any questions to Dave and the whole group. Identification of helpful ideas going forward.
- **Extra Time.** Following the close of the session, Dave is happy to stay around and chat informally to participants if they want to.

All participants will receive a copy of the slides of the slides and of the work done on the flipchart.

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