PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject:	Review of Scrutiny
Committee:	Co-operative Scrutiny Board
Date:	9th March 2016
Lead Member:	Councillor David James, Chair, Co-operative Scrutiny Board
CMT Member:	Giles Perritt, Assistant Chief Executive
Author:	Ross Jago, Lead Officer
Contact details:	01752 304469
Ref:	
Key Decision:	No
Part:	I

Purpose of the report:

This report proposes a number of recommendations to strengthen the scrutiny function along with options for structural changes to the Scrutiny Board and its panels to improve effectiveness.

The proposals modernise the Overview and Scrutiny Function and bring them in line with the Council's values. This report details the proposed recommendations for consideration at City Council.

Amendments to terms of reference will be considered through the recommended implementation plan.

The Brilliant Co-operative Council Corporate Plan 2013/14 -2016/17:

Effective scrutiny impacts upon all aspects of the Corporate Plan by providing a process for challenge to decision making and development of policy.

The recommendations within the report will open the function to community involvement and enable members to demonstrate check and balance to executive power within the City Council.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:

Implementation of recommendations within the report will likely require increased officer resource if members are minded to retain the structural status quo.   If alternative structures are considered appropriate recommendations could likely be implemented at a reduced cost overall, subject to a review of special responsibility allowance by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

There is a risk that by not making recommended changes to the scrutiny function the Council will be ineffective in challenging decision-making and monitoring the performance of the Cabinet.

Equality and Diversity:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?

No: the overall scope of services included within the overall scrutiny function terms of reference remain the same.

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

The Board is asked to -

1. agree, in principle, recommendations R2 – R17 as outlined on page 27 of the report;
2. delegate to the lead officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, the preparation of an implementation plan to define the tasks, actions and resource required to implement each recommendation;
3. delegate to the lead officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair the development of a scrutiny training programme;
4. delegate to the lead officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair the preparation of a report to council to include the implementation plan and recommended structural option.

Reason: The recommendations outlined above will allow presentation of the full resource implications of changes to the current scrutiny function and a timescale for delivery to Full Council.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

The establishment of this review satisfies an undertaking in the working arrangement agreed by the City's largest political parties.

Published work / information:

Background papers:

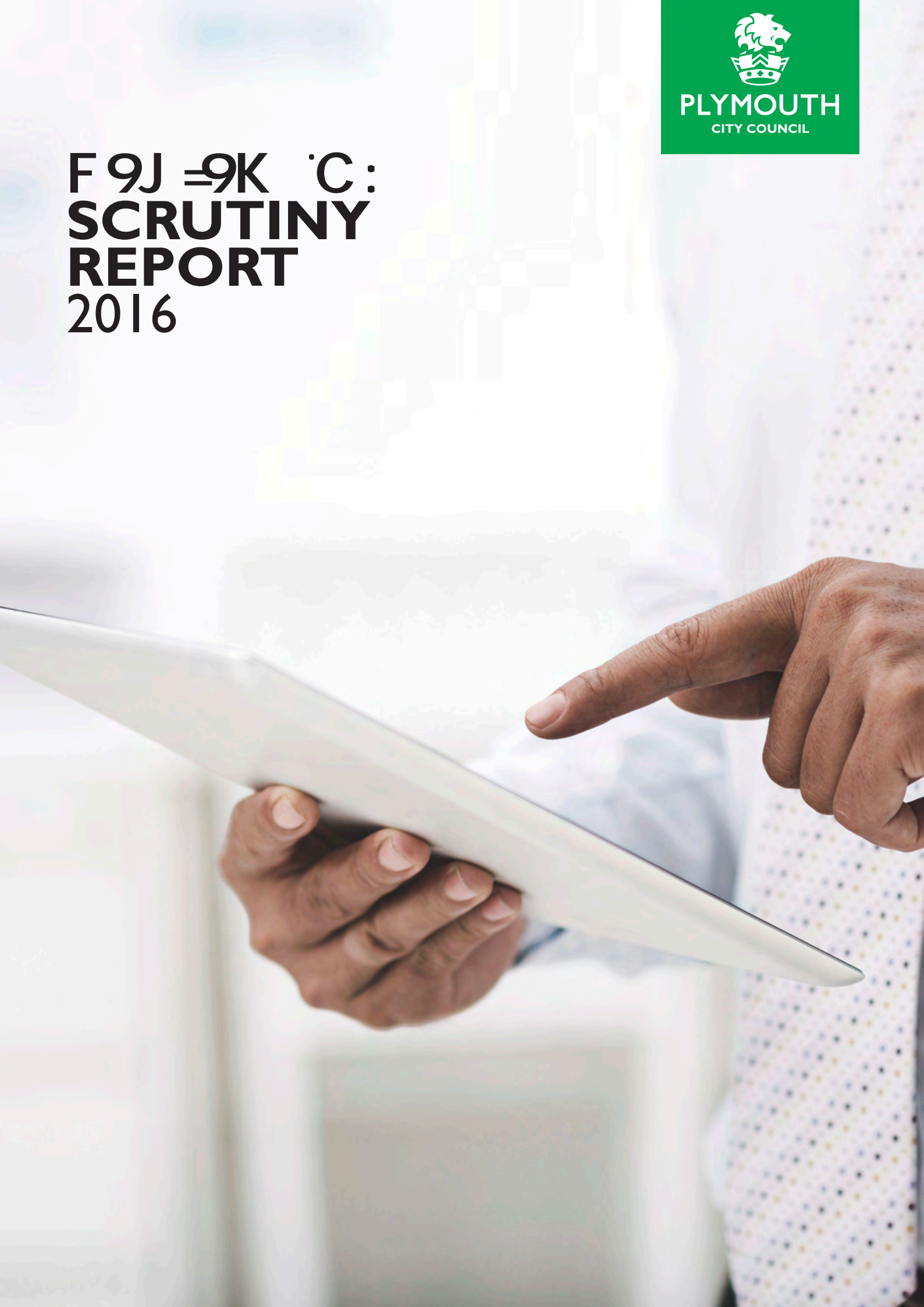| Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin		Leg	DVS 25204	Mon Off		HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member – Giles Perritt													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? **N/A**													

PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

F 9J =9K ˙C :
SCRUTINY
REPORT
2016

Foreword

Following the election in May and the resulting working arrangement the Co-operative Scrutiny Board has taking the opportunity to strengthen the scrutiny function that sits within the council and deliver against the Council's pledge 49, to enhance the scrutiny programme.

During the review which followed we have recognised that the tools available to us are numerous and diverse and while there are members who want to focus on particular issues or processes there are others who prefer a more varied approach.

Since the Local Government Act of 2000 we have seen scrutiny take place through written and oral questions to the Council and the Cabinet, through ward casework and the Scrutiny Process. The effectiveness of the latter has lately been a cause of concern for many members and, although effectiveness will differ according to the issue and the individual, we must acknowledge there is not an automatic, positive, relationship between the quantity of scrutiny and the quality of its outcomes.

During the review process we have acknowledged that scrutiny is finite. It is impossible and undesirable for council members to scrutinise absolutely everything all of the time. The scale of the challenges ahead of Local Government and the multitude of demands on councillors, make such scrutiny impractical even if it were desirable.

We believe that we do not enjoy a monopoly of scrutiny. The media in particular perform a scrutiny role, but also pressure groups, bloggers and our residents are all part of what is a network of scrutiny. So through our review of scrutiny we have sought to understand how we can place ourselves at the heart of this network and through a series of workshops have used some new approaches to aide our discussions.

In producing this report and its findings the Board was greatly assisted by the cooperation of the council officers, especially those providing support to scrutiny panels. We were also encouraged by the support from the Cabinet Members and Senior Officers who attended some of our workshops.

In addition to the support from Plymouth City Council the Board received assistance and cooperation from officers and members from local authorities across England, and the Board has drawn on published works from institutions in the UK and elsewhere.

Finally I would like to thank members of the Co-operative Scrutiny Board itself, who bravely initiated a form of scrutiny review which enabled purposeful self-examination of the work of scrutiny.

Councillor David James, Co-operative Scrutiny Board Chair

1   **How did we get here?**

        Local Authority Scrutiny

1.1   The concept of 'overview and scrutiny' was originally introduced by the Local Government Act 2000. Prior to this Act, all local authorities in the UK made decisions through meetings of the full council or of committees; this was known as 'the committee system'.

1.2   The 2000 Act obliged local authorities to adopt political management systems with a separate executive. The 'executive' would take the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and a cabinet of no more than nine members in addition to the Leader / Mayor. Reflecting the relationship between Parliament and government, the remainder of the council was required to scrutinise the executive by establishing at least one overview and scrutiny committee. The committee or committees would investigate the policies of the executive and their implementation, issuing reports and drawing attention to shortcomings.

1.3   With the priority of central government being to establish new, swifter, streamlined, corporate- style decision-making processes, it could be said that the idea of retaining accountability through the establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee came as an after-thought. Of the thirty-eight sections within Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, only one deals with 'Overview and Scrutiny' and the Act is not prescriptive about how scrutiny should be organised.

1.4   Since its introduction, the legislative provision for overview and scrutiny has changed and for scrutiny in England, the main provisions can now be found in schedule 2 of the Localism Act 2011, which mostly consolidated previously existing law.

1.5   The Localism Act 2011 extended a fourth option of a 'streamlined committee system to all councils in England, and since then many councils have readopted the committee system. Councils which adopted this system were still required to establish at least one overview and scrutiny committee, which would scrutinise the decision-making committees.

1.6   The powers and functions of overview and scrutiny committees, include:

        • Any member of an overview and scrutiny committee has the right to refer a relevant matter to the committee. This provision does not apply to matters concerned with planning and licensing, or to any matter which is vexatious, discriminatory or not reasonable to be included in the agenda;
        • Overview and scrutiny committees may hold inquiries and produce reports;

- Committees may require executive members and officers of the authority to appear before them. Individuals from outside the council can be invited, but not compelled to attend (except with regard to Health Services);
- Overview and scrutiny reports must receive a response from the council executive within two months;
- Overview and scrutiny committees cannot oblige the executive, the council or external bodies to act upon their findings.

1.7   The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 legislated that each authority must appoint at least one 'scrutiny officer' although it made no provision for dedicated staff or financial resources for the overview and scrutiny role. The 'scrutiny officer' does not have to be a dedicated post, and may be combined with other responsibilities.

External Scrutiny

1.8   The 2000 Act provided for a system of overview and scrutiny which was directed solely at the internal functions of the council. However, many committees set up under the new arrangements covered policy areas spanning both the council and other public bodies, and thus began to take an interest in matters outside their council's direct control. This form of overview and scrutiny, which examines the influence of other public and private bodies in a policy area of interest to the council has become known as 'external scrutiny'.

1.9   External scrutiny demands a different dynamic from scrutiny of council functions. Councillors who have conducted an enquiry and drafted a report on council functions will be able to influence the outcome of the report through the council's procedures, and potentially through their party group. Councillors have no such direct influence over external bodies. It follows that external scrutiny relies on good relationships and joint working with external bodies to allow the councillors to influence other organisations' behaviour.

1.10   Overview and scrutiny committees have accumulated a number of powers to undertake 'external scrutiny' of specific additional bodies. These have been enacted through legislative changes such as the NHS Act 2006 which requires Local Authorities to set up Health Scrutiny Committees.

1.11   Many local authorities in the UK continue to struggle with the implementation of scrutiny arrangements. Executives do not have a great incentive to firstly grant, and secondly protect, the powers that scrutiny needs to be effective. As such common sense needs to be applied in discerning what balance of power is in the interest of the local residents and to ensure that this is achieved. The legislation relies on a culture of 'fair-play' and 'reasonableness' that it is in everyone's interest to uphold.

Scrutiny in Plymouth

1.12   The form and function of scrutiny at Plymouth City Council has changed and developed over the years since its initial implementation and since 2013 the work of scrutiny in Plymouth has been coordinated by the Co-operative Scrutiny Board. As required under rules of proportionality this Board has cross party representation and is currently chaired by a member from a different political group to the Leader of the Council.

1.13   The City Council appoints members to form the Co-operative Scrutiny Board and the four scrutiny panels that the Board manages. The panels include councillors from all political groups as well as a number of statutory and non-statutory co-opted representatives.

1.14   The Cabinet and Council can ask scrutiny to undertake reviews on its behalf, although ultimately scrutiny determines its own work programme and the issues that it will review.

1.15   There are currently four scrutiny panels made up of councillors, statutory and non-statutory co-opted representatives. The four scrutiny panels are:
- Ambitious Plymouth
- Caring Plymouth
- Working Plymouth
- Your Plymouth

1.16   The four scrutiny panels have their own terms of reference (found in the Constitution) to ensure that work between panels is focused, relevant to the priorities of the Council and not duplicated.

1.17   The work scrutiny function should reflect the Council's corporate priorities, as set out in the current Corporate Plan. Members of each scrutiny panel have the opportunity at the beginning of each year, and at each panel meeting, to submit suggestions for topics to be reviewed by the scrutiny panels.

1.18   Selecting the right issues for a scrutiny work programme has historically been a challenge. To make the best use of panel members' time and to achieve measurable results for scrutiny work, the function is required to prioritise its work load in an environment of reducing resources.

1.19   At the start of each municipal year each panel is provided with an update on the challenges, priorities and issues that are expected over the next 12 months for the Directorate and service areas that each panel is responsible for. This information is provided by senior officers and Cabinet members and partner organisations. It provides a good basis for each panel to identify issues to be suggested for inclusion in the work programmes.

1.20 Following the election in 2015 a working arrangement under which The Chair of the Co-operative Scrutiny Board and the Chairs of the Scrutiny Panels will be held by the largest opposition group (Conservative) and Vice-Chairs held by the largest group (Labour). This working arrangement has been a key driver of the current review of scrutiny.

Summary of 2014/15

1.21 Following a comprehensive review of agendas and minutes we have found that in 2014/15 the committee room time allotted to scrutiny was 13.5 working days. This time did not account for report, agenda and minute preparation or any other preparatory work such as research.

1.22 During this period scrutiny made 13 actionable recommendations[1] from 58 hours spent in business meetings (£541 per recommendation) and 57 actionable recommendations from 37 hours in Co-operative Reviews, including budget scrutiny (£77 per recommendation)[2]. The break-down of recommendations (actionable and non-actionable) is detailed below.

1.23

	Administrative (work programme, terms of reference etc.)	Agreed recommended course of action	Noted Report	Required action outside scrutiny
Panel Business Meetings	81%	7%	7%	5%
Scrutiny Reviews	9%	35%	6%	50%

1.24 Given the lack of an appropriate tracking mechanism it is difficult to evaluate the impact of actionable recommendations. However recommendations were agreed by an acted upon by the Cabinet in relation to Budget Scrutiny 2015 and Co-operative Reviews into Problem Debt and the Transformation Programme.

1.25 To support the scrutiny process during this period 218 reports were written and provided to scrutiny members within agendas which in total resulted in approximately 40,000 printed pages costing approximately £5,000. (this figure does not include supplementary paper work such as printed copies of presentations etc).

---

[1] These actions were capable of being acted upon by a body other than the originating panel.
[2] Estimated figures based on £120 per hour (Total membership allowances, one Democratic Support Officer and Panel Lead officer + 25% on costs)

2   What do our members think of the Status Quo?

2.1   At the beginning of the 2014-15 municipal year members of the Co-operative Scrutiny Board met informally to discuss the previous year's work and how to take scrutiny further in the future. Before the meeting members of the Board undertook a short survey[3] on which to base their discussions.

2.2   Overall members of the Board agreed that Scrutiny in Plymouth provided a 'critical friend' challenge to the executive, reflected the voice and concerns of the local community and making an impact on the delivery of public services.[4]

2.3   All members agreed that opportunities were available for scrutiny to question cabinet members, challenge the executive and that financial priorities and how they met corporate objectives were effectively scrutinised.

2.4   However, opinions were split on the questions of public involvement and executive challenge.

Does Scrutiny effectively challenge the Executive?

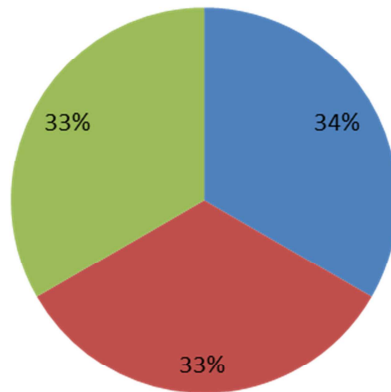■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know

0%

33%

67%
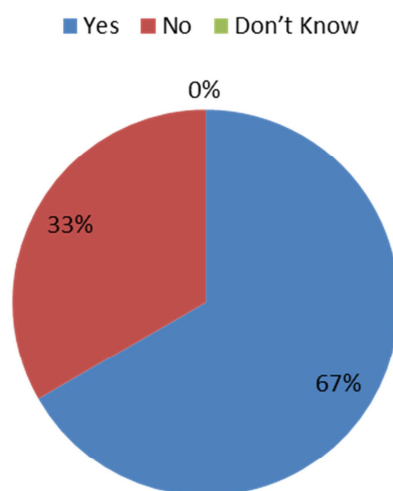
9 Board Members Responded

2.5   Members felt that Cabinet members did not respect the function as essential for local accountability and democracy. Some felt that executive members were active in preventing items being included on scrutiny agendas until the last possible minute, preventing meaningful pre-decision scrutiny which could enhance the policy development process.

2.6   Concerns about the impact of scrutiny were also raised as illustrated below.

---

[3] Based on the Centre for Public Scrutiny Self-Assessment
[4] Centre for Public Scrutiny: Principles for Effective Scrutiny

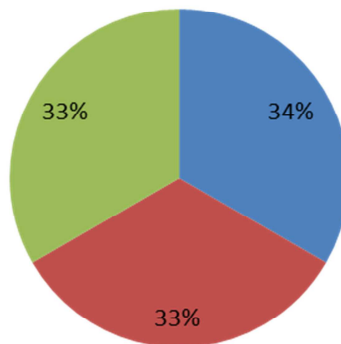## Has Scrutiny had a direct impact on the work of the Executive?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know

34%

33%

33%

9 Board Members Responded

Has a Cabinet Member had a change of mind on a decision due to Scrutiny?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know

34%

33%

33%

9 Board Members Responded

2.7   Whilst these results may suggest an executive which is unwilling to listen or act upon the views of the Scrutiny function, members were clear that further development of the skills and capability of members involved in scrutiny was required to ensure that scrutiny recommendations were relevant, appropriate and therefore had impact on the decision making of the executive.

2.8   Public involvement and communication continued to be a cause for concern of

many scrutiny members.

Does Scrutiny make itself accessible to the public?

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know

0%

33%

67%
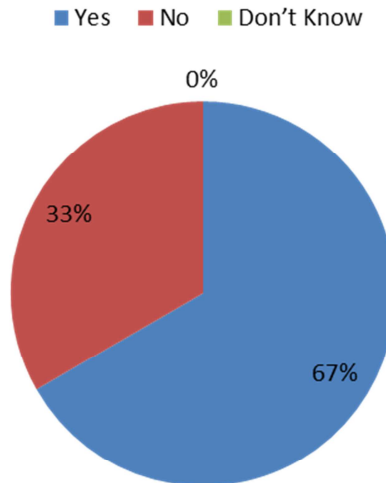
9 Board Members Responded

2.9   Members felt that successful internal communication is critical to getting all parts of the organisation involved with the scrutiny process. It was also felt that external communication needed the same care in order to communicate the successes of scrutiny and develop its role to reflect the voice of the people. Members highlighted that the review of scrutiny must look at how members of the public can both access scrutiny and suggest items for its forward work programme.

3   **Peer Review**

3.1   As part of our review process we asked, via the Centre for Public Scrutiny website, for Officers and Elected members across the country to view a webcast meeting of the Co-operative Scrutiny Board and provide feedback on the meeting via an online survey.

3.2   The webcast meeting took place on the 19th August 2015. The agenda included the Corporate Plan Performance report and the Capital and Revenue monitoring report.

3.3   The webcast was viewed by around 75 people and we received 11 responses from Local Government Officers and Members from around the country to our short survey.

3.4   Overall responses were generally positive, most respondents agreed that members contributed to the success of the meeting and that the opinions of all members were taken into consideration when offered.

3.5   Respondents also agreed that the time allotted to each agenda item and that the general pace of the meeting was appropriate. Respondents found that the agenda papers were easily accessible and were useful.

3.6   However the survey suggested that we still have work to do. 45% of respondents believed that there was little evidence of scrutiny of financial priorities and 72% felt that the meeting did not offer robust challenge.

3.7   The results of this survey are not based on a statistically valid sample size and are reflective of only a single meeting. However the survey does support some of the views held by members involved in scrutiny and suggests that change may be required to further strengthen the scrutiny function.

4   Review of Scrutiny

4.1   Following the development of the working arrangement at Plymouth City Council an opportunity arose to strengthen the role of the scrutiny function. The review sought to identify where changes to Plymouth City Council scrutiny function may enhance the process of open, transparent and democratic decision making.

4.2   The City Council will continue to experience significant sustained change which requires many new and innovative approaches to service delivery. The development of effective scrutiny arrangements for new delivery vehicles which may result will be a key focus in Plymouth over the coming years and the scrutiny function will also need to continue to respond to the changes introduced through national legislation.

4.3   Any changes to the scrutiny function will need to include the requirement to take into account the views of the public, and the ability to form joint overview and scrutiny committees with one or more local authorities.

Scope of Review

4.4   The scope of our review included customers, processes, services, products and technology aligned with the scrutiny function and included –

4.5
- Scrutiny Processes and Procedures
- Members Development and Training
- Democratic Support
- HR and OD
- Scrutiny lead officers
- Statutory Lead Officer role

4.8   The establishment of the review satisfied an undertaking in the working arrangement agreed by the City's largest political parties.

Methodology

4.9   A new approach has been required in developing the recommendations for this review. Scrutiny is a member led process as such the methodology for this review has put members at the centre of the process.

4.10   We have attempted to use a number of new and existing tools such as nominal group technique, Open Space and World Café[5] in addition to the standard processes of review meetings.

---

[5] http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/docs/The%20Art%20of%20Change%20Making.pdf

4.11   The review has also used the technology with the Council House and the online surveys to assist in the development of recommendations.

5   What's the point of scrutiny?

5.1   The first meeting of the review was aimed to discuss the purpose of scrutiny and to develop a view of what good scrutiny seeks to achieve, what it would look like and how we and the public could recognise it.

5.2   We considered that this question (What's the point of scrutiny?), if answered, could provide a shared understanding of the purpose of Scrutiny and provide a foundation on which to build the rest of the review.

5.3   Such a complex question, and one which many members had not had a previous opportunity on which to comment, demanded a new way of attempting an answer.

5.4   Led by the Chair, the Board invited all elected members, the council's senior management team and other officers from across the council to take part in an 'Open Space' event. The purpose of the event was to identify where changes to Plymouth City Council scrutiny function may enhance the process of open, transparent and democratic decision making and offers participants a chance to discuss, in an informal setting, their understanding of scrutiny and make suggestions for the future.

5.5   In Open Space events participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme. Open Space is a powerful tool for engaging large groups of people in discussions to explore particular questions or issues.

5.6   Although it is true that an Open Space event has no pre-determined agenda, it must have an overall structure or framework. This framework is not intended to tell people what to do and when, instead it creates a supportive environment in which the participants can solve those issues for themselves.

5.7   The attendees undertook the following process -

- **Welcome from Chair and Lead Officer**
  - We placed everybody in a circle and welcomed them with a description of the session. Sitting in a circle placed everyone equally. It changed dynamics, removed positions of power and allowed everyone to speak and be heard.
- **The bulletin board**
  - Everyone in the room was asked to post anything and everything they would like to talk about on the bulletin board which was provided in the room.
- **Open the market place**
  - The person who posted the idea for discussion persuaded people asked people to join them.

5.8   During the process attendees agreed to adhere to the following guiding principles [6]–

- **Whoever came to the session were the right people**
  - The fact that they came showed that they cared enough to want to work on the issue and cared enough to do something about it.
- **Whatever happens is the only thing that could have**
  - There was no point thinking about could haves, should haves and might have beens.
- **Whenever it started was the right time**
  - True creativity happens in its own time, it can't be forced or rushed, so when it happens it happens.
- **When it's over it's over**
  - Do what needs doing and then move on.

5.9   Attendees also agreed to abide by one rule: **the law of two feet[7]** –

---

[6] http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/docs/The%20Art%20of%20Change%20Making.pdf

[7] http://www.localleadership.gov.uk/docs/The%20Art%20of%20Change%20Making.pdf

13

- If you don't like where you are for whatever reason, then move, go somewhere else. We had to ensure people owned their own learning, they could not be forced or pressured and they must want it.

5.10 Over 30 people, both members and officers, attended the session from across the council. We had many suggestions for group sessions, but 6 questions were chosen by the group for further discussion and resulted in some valuable conversations.

How do we ensure good quality debate?

5.11 Conversations in this group focused around –

- Whether the quality of paperwork / information provided was good enough on which to base debate and recommendations. It was felt that often information had been filtered down through a number of different processes which resulted in only a small amount of information to be scrutinised.
- The capacity and capability of scrutiny panel members. This was informed by what was seen as a lack of focus on issues presented at scrutiny with often irrelevant lines of enquiry being pursued.
- The number of panels meant that scrutiny members did not prioritise appropriately, which could lead to discussion of "pet projects"
- That whilst party "whipping" was not present within scrutiny, many members still felt unable to challenge the party line stifling debate.

Is there an alternative to scrutiny?

5.12 - It was not felt that there was an alternative arrangement to scrutiny, however during this discussion it was considered important to make scrutiny more accessible.

How can the local community be involved?

5.13 Conversations in this group focused around –

- What is a community? It was felt that the scrutiny function required a clearer understanding of what a community was and subsequently how communities could be targeted.
- Profile – It was felt that scrutiny did not have sufficient public profile which made it difficult to represent the views of local residents through the process.
- Panels – it was felt that communities did not understand what the panels were for, it was felt that in the main the panels were not effective and smaller, focused task and finish groups provided improved results on

issues that members of the public care about.

How much scrutiny before scrutiny?

5.14
- This discussion considered whether scrutiny members received the full story when presented information when at scrutiny.
- It also considered whether scrutiny could provide an opportunity for officers to say what could be done differently to improve services.

The scrutiny process

5.15
- This discussion included a number of process considerations, including –
- Membership of scrutiny reviews
- Creation and ownership of agenda and work programmes
- Refresher for panel members at start of municipal year
- Timing of reports
- Flexible meeting times
- Meetings in the community
- Webcasting

How do we evaluate scrutiny?

5.16   This group considered that –

- Panel meetings don't always appear 'achieve' anything a lot of items can be for information only and don't have any obvious impact on the citizens of Plymouth.
- There was no tracking system in place for recommendations that come out of business meetings.
- There is no solid methodology for filtering what is actually considered at a business meeting or even for review.

Recommendations

5.17   All of the group leaders were asked to feedback the outcomes of the discussion to form the basis for recommendations within this report.

6   Councillors Learning and Development - Rights and Responsibilities

6.1   Ensuring that individuals involved in the scrutiny process have the right skills and competencies is a key element of preparing for effective scrutiny. This is not limited to those involved in supporting and providing information to scrutiny committees, but also applies to scrutineers themselves. Access to training for scrutiny members that is focused on need positively supports effective scrutiny. Both the Scrutiny Peer Review and 'What's the Point of Scrutiny?' event suggested that strong scrutiny skills such as chairing and questioning skills were less evident and needed to be improved.

6.2   The Board met in October to discuss their rights and responsibilities in relation to learning and development. This session was planned to have been delivered in through the 'World Café' but unfortunately due to a low level of attendance that was not possible. During the session the Board considered the following questions –

6.3   • What learning and development do you need to challenge more effectively in a safe and respectful way?
  o How do you strike a balance between effective challenge and support?
  o What are the risks of challenging too much or not enough?
  o What kind of practical training do you think you may need?

  • How can you build your own knowledge base?
  o What do you need to know?
  o When do you need to know it?
  o How much should you be expected to know about the work of the panel?
  o How much should you expect to know about the system of scrutiny?

  • How we evaluate the effectiveness of the learning and development activities undertaken by Members?
  o How can we measure the impact on individual councillors?
  o How can we measure the impact of the work of the panels and board?
  o How will we know what we are doing is right?

6.4   During the discussion the following comments were made –

  • Working councillors did not have the time to read long agenda reports.
  • Agenda reports needed to be shorter, in plain English, with an executive summary.
  • If agenda reports did not meet these criteria, Chairs should reject them.
  • Late agenda reports should also be rejected by Chairs. If Chairs were

aware of the schedule of dates when reports were due, they could take an active role in chasing them.

6.5   It was noted that on occasion agenda reports needed to be detailed in order to tackle complex issues; the alternative was a risk of challenge to the legitimacy of decisions, including judicial review. However, there was clearly a balance to be achieved.

6.6   The subsidiary issue of officers attending panel and Board meetings to talk to agenda reports was raised. Points considered included –

- Lead officers were likely to be more protective of their own departments.
- Officers talking to agenda reports were expected to be truthful but there was the possibility that they would tell councillors what they felt they wanted to know. Officers could be good at 'spin', focussing on the positives. As a result, councillors might experience difficulty in identifying any negatives and challenging them effectively.
- Panels/Chairs could consider making a formal challenge when officers did not attend to talk to reports or expected reports did not appear as agenda items.
- Meetings for panel training were traditionally not well attended, and the pros and cons of either holding them half an hour before the start of the actual meeting or on an earlier day were explored.
- Holding pre meets with a multidisciplinary team was proposed, as this would better enable lines of enquiry to be identified for members to pursue at the meeting itself.

6.7   During the discussion on training the following points were made –

- Training should not be restricted to classroom training at specific times, which traditionally had a number of drawbacks. There were other training delivery methods, such as e-learning, shadowing and briefing reports, that could usefully be explored.
- Councillors felt that holding training sessions at weekends was not viable.

6.8   Evaluating the success of training and other measures to improve the effectiveness of scrutiny could be undertaken by –
- Recording if there was an increase in scrutiny challenge.
- Implementing a range of relevant, cost-effective training.
- The scrutiny annual report reflecting the effectiveness and impact of improvement measures.

Recommendations

6.9   The outcomes of these discussions form the basis for recommendations within this report.

7   **Scrutiny Support Arrangements**

7.1   Scrutineers are charged with a wide range of activities, including holding decision-makers to account, informing policy, and performance review. Given the complexity of the public sector, it is clear that the different groups of people engaged as scrutineers work all require adequate support in order to work most effectively, and to focus their limited time on activities where they will be of the most value.

7.2   The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) undertakes a survey of local authority scrutiny annually. It has reported that in 2014-15 scrutiny capacity and resources are in decline.

7.3   The CfPS reported that -

- The average full time equivalent officer support for Scrutiny at Local Authorities in the municipal year of 2014/15 was 1.87.
- 19 of 271 respondents provided no policy support to councillors performing a scrutiny role at all
- Only 43% of councils reported having one or more dedicated scrutiny officers, the lowest level in a decade.
- 22% of respondents expected scrutiny resources to decline[8]

7.4   CfPS are concerned with the continued declining resources dedicated to scrutiny, and state -

"Inevitably, it fails to take into account the unique skillset required by dedicated scrutiny officers, and risks officers' time for scrutiny support being "crowded out" by work for the executive, to say nothing of the potential for conflicts of interest between executive, and non-executive, support."

7.5   In order to learn from members what level of support would enable them to carry out their scrutiny role we held a short workshop session. During this session we discussed two issues; Support Arrangements and Public Engagement which is covered in the next section. Using an augmented World Café process we encouraged a structured conversation by asking members to outline what the best and worst scenario would be and given the currently financial restraints on the authority what other form support could take.

7.6   **Worst Scenario**
- No 'buy in' from Cabinet
- No influence
- No power to request attendance

---

[8]http://www.cfps.org.uk/domains/cfps.org.uk/local/media/downloads/CfPS_Annual_Survey_2015_WEB_1.pdf

- No officer support
- No budget

7.7 **Best Scenario**
- Dedicated support - lead officer, two democratic support officers, Policy, Performance and Partnerships and Research Assistants
- High quality training
- PA for Chairs
- Full tracking of effectiveness of recommendations

7.8 The conversations held have highlighted a requirement develop the capability of the scrutiny functions by providing policy, performance, financial and communication support.

7.9 Direction and content of scrutiny work should ideally be driven by the members themselves. The role of officers is to facilitate this, providing evidence and support which adds value to the discussions held and recommendations made at scrutiny.

Multidisciplinary Approach

7.10 A future arrangement may include a multidisciplinary approach. This approach is an inter-professional working arrangement which has been recognised, particularly in healthcare, as playing a key role in ensuring that all aspects of service users' needs are properly considered and then providing appropriate advice and/or interventions.

7.11 Given the wide ranging brief of scrutiny such an approach should be utilised to ensure that scrutiny members have access to the information and advice they require in order to perform the scrutiny role.

7.12 A flexible Multi-disciplinary Team wrapped around scrutiny could enable a variety of skillsets to support scrutiny and provide horizon scanning and the ability to provide objective, evidence-based analysis of complex information and translate this into accessible information and advice for the scrutiny function.

7.13 This approach has the potential to provide a wraparound service to the scrutiny function, increasing the capacity of scrutiny members to deliver a member led, evidence based scrutiny function with robust outcomes.

Recommendations

7.14 The outcomes of these discussions form the basis for recommendations within this report.

8 Public Engagement

8.1   The Annual Audit of Political Engagement is produced by the Hansard Society. Now in its 12th year it provides a benchmark to gauge public attitudes to politics and the political process across Great Britain.

8.2   In 2014 it was reported that the proportion of people who are prepared to participate in action through a political process has declined significantly. Only 69% would be prepared to take action if they felt strongly about an issue compared to 80% in 2013 and 78% in 2012.

8.3   This national dip in willingness to participate when combined with the decline in the level of influence people feel they have over decision-making at the local level (see below) has been seen as a worrying development . Given that people's first practical experience of politics tends to be at the local rather than national level, disempowerment could drive disengagement from a range of political activities beyond just voting.[9]

8.4   At the national level just 20% of people feel that they have at least 'some influence' over local decision-making. This indicator has declined six percentage points between 2013 and 2014 and now stands at the lowest level ever recorded in the Audit series. This decline in perceived influence is particularly marked among older respondents age 55 and above.

8.5   Mirroring this decline in perceived influence, fewer people also want to be involved in decision-making in their local area, declining five percentage points to 38%.

8.6   If delivered effectively, scrutiny could offer an avenue to amplify the voice and concerns of the public. Public engagement through the scrutiny function could improve the evidence base for decision making whilst increasing public accountability and act as an advocate for the local community.

8.7   As with Scrutiny Support arrangements, in order to learn from members what kind of Public Engagement would be appropriate for Scrutiny and how it could be delivered we undertook a workshop exercise. Using an augmented World Café process we encouraged a structured conversation by asking members to outline what the best and worst scenario would be.

8.8   **Worst Scenario**
- Public discussion already taking place through online Social Networks, without an established online presence we have no right of reply
- No faith in message
- No engagement at all

---

[9] http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-12-2015.pdf
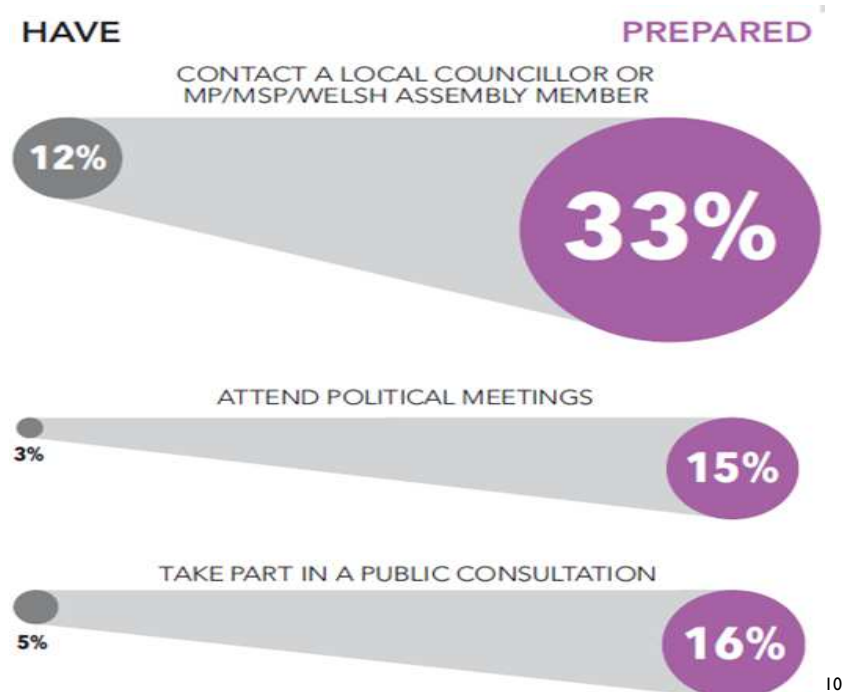
8.9   **Best Scenario**
- Public Drive Agenda
- Issues Interest the Public
- Use social networks
- Improved authority of message
- User friendly scrutiny web page
- Training in technology
- Real time engagement with meetings
- We use partners networks
- Dedicated communication officers
- E-mail newsletter
- Publication in mainstream press
- Relevant to community
- Out in the community
- Big Screen
- Community Agenda Item
- Established Social Media Presence

8.10   Members felt that many of the "Best Scenario" suggestions could be delivered quickly and within current resources. Members suggested that engaging communities did not necessarily mean geographic communities and that meaningful enagement across the city on issues shared by wards could be delivered through greater use of online platforms.

8.11   Members also expressed concern that current routes for engagement such as councillor "call for action" and petitions were overly beauracratic and focused on single issues or areas. It was felt that these beauracratic processes led to a negative demand, "turning the public off" from enagement in local accountability. Members felt that that the scrutiny function could become more flexible in the way it works by embracing new technologies.

8.12   **Why social media?**

Political Activities :Actual and Potential

HAVE — PREPARED

CONTACT A LOCAL COUNCILLOR OR MP/MSP/WELSH ASSEMBLY MEMBER
12% → 33%

ATTEND POLITICAL MEETINGS
3% → 15%

TAKE PART IN A PUBLIC CONSULTATION
5% → 16%

8.13   As the above diagram indicates there are significant groups of people who are prepared to engage with the political process. A simple and cost effective way to convert those prepared to engage into active participants may be the further use of online social networks within the scrutiny function.

8.14   In 2014, 38 million adults (76% of adults) in Great Britain accessed the Internet every day, 21 million more than in 2006. 22 million households (84%) had internet access in 2014, up from 57% in 2006 and fixed broadband Internet connections were used by 91% of households.[11]

8.15   There are now vast levels of access to the internet by the public and an opportunity exists as a by–product of this increased usage. Web-based technologies provide a platform for open political participation and direct democracy outside of traditional hierarchies and bureaucratic processes.

8.16   The internet reduces the costs of becoming politically informed, it provides the means to influencing politicians and the public at large. It is now possible to present similar material to that disseminated by other means (traditional media etc), but at a higher speed and with higher flexibility for users to pick

---

[10] http://tinyurl.com/h6ckwkq
[11] http://tinyurl.com/nw2z2ow

the topics of interest.

8.17   10 reasons to consider social media –

- It boosts the number of people we can reach when talking about the good work
- It allows for two way communication so immediate feedback can be received
- It allows us to connect with people who perhaps cannot give up the time to come to meetings
- It could widen involvement in the work of scrutiny
- It could help to bring a community around a specific issue
- Its simple and cost effective
- It would help us gather evidence for our reviews
- It overcomes council formality
- It engage people in issues that really matter
- It could provide interactivity for our webcasts

8.18   Social media platforms which could benefit scrutiny –

8.19   **Blogging**: For news sharing and comments from the scrutiny function

Scrutiny shoots and scores

November 13, 2015 by Delyth Davies   Leave a Comment

The CSSIW has just told us that our scrutiny of child & family services and adult services is doing all right, well, its more than all right, we have "effective and well managed" scrutiny arrangements!

8.20   **Twitter**: For signposting, news and quick conversations

8.21   **Facebook:** For reaching the public, polling for agenda items etc

Recommendations

8.22   Given the polar opposites of each scenario members were able to suggest a
         number of alternative options. The outcomes of these discussions form the

basis for recommendations.

Recommendations

Panel business meetings were not seen as effective as the work programmes are diffuse leading to lack of clarity on what should be scrutinised, when, how and what value is being added to the work of the council. By reducing the number of panels we introduce the concept of supply and demand into the scrutiny function. The reduced "supply" of seats on committees will increase the demand from members to be engaged, focus the work programme, driving up the impact and efficiency of decision making within the scrutiny function.

R1 The number of panels should be rationalised down to either option A, B or C (detailed at appendix i) on a bi-monthly cycle. This will enable more robust prioritisation of matters for consideration. This new structure would be underpinned by "Select Committees" to deliver in depth reviews.

R2 An effective methodology for the evaluation of issues for discussion through the Board/ and the "select committee" format should be developed.

To support the above recommendations in achieving better outcomes from the scrutiny function the following recommendations are made.

R3 Members of a rationalised scrutiny function to take a more pro-active role in informing their own knowledge base and taking an active role in developing a scrutiny specific programme of member development.

R4 A Multi-disciplinary approach should be taken to support scrutiny. A team around scrutiny should be developed to develop capability within the scrutiny functions with a specific focus on Policy, Performance, Finance and Communications.

R5 A programme of training for the Board/s should be identified and included with the annual calendar of meetings. Subjects might include questioning skills, chairing skills and financial literacy.

R6 Attendance statistics for training should be published on the council website in the same manner as attendance statistics for committee meetings.

R7 Chair of scrutiny Board/s should come from the largest minority group reflecting the status quo and national best practice. This should be enshrined within the constitution.

R8 Criteria to be agreed for attendance at external learning events, including the establishment of a discretionary fund.

R9 Alternative training delivery methods such as eLearning and shadowing to be explored by the Member Development Group.

R10   Establish a publically available tracking system for recommendations from scrutiny.

R11   Where possible, agenda reports should be more concise than at present, written in plain English and including an executive summary.

R12   Late agenda reports should not be accepted by Board/s Chair/s.

R13   Establish a process which ensures that issues raised by local people with ward councillors can be considered through the scrutiny process.

R14   Community agenda items voted for via a Social Media platform to be included in the work the Board/s.

R15   Increase the use of social media before, during and following scrutiny meetings.

R16   Scrutiny Boards should be entirely paperless, with members provided appropriate technology and training to enable this.

R17   Webcast all meetings of the Board/s.

Appendix i

OPTION A
Do nothing and retain the status quo

There has been a number of changes during this municipal year to strengthen the scrutiny function, these include –

- Greater flexibility to arrange extra meetings without having to complete bureaucratic paperwork
- Cooperative Scrutiny Board requiring Panels to carefully manage workloads through the scrutiny of Corporate Plan deliverables
- Webcasting
- Calls for Evidence to support the Co-operative Review process

The Annual Report of scrutiny also highlighted particular successes in 2014/15 including scrutiny of the Transformation Programme, Problem Debt and Customer Service reviews, mostly delivered via the Co-operative Review process.

However the perception of the current Scrutiny function is not held in high regard. Opinions gathered during the preparation of this report suggests that challenge within the function is not robust and that the function could achieve more with regard to policy development and the impact on delivery of council services as a result of recommendations.

Elements of the function are seen to be strong; in particular, the focused nature of "Co-operative Reviews" has led to a number of recommendations for action and currently delivers the most efficient use of resource in the scrutiny.

Maintaining the current approach taken by the Council will continue to see the scrutiny process carried out, although the function will not fully embrace opportunities to further engage with the public and partners and will risk the quality outcomes a more focused approach could deliver.

The opportunities outlined in the recommendations made by the review would apply to this option and are likely to strengthen the overall function, but would require additional officer support.

Option B

Co-operative Scrutiny Board and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Board

Two Boards covering the following areas -

Co-operative Scrutiny	Health and Wellbeing
Corporate Policy Development Corporate Communications Human Resources ICT Business Continuity and Civil Protection Revenue Budget Capital Programme Strategic Procurement Corporate Property Transformation and Change Management Child Poverty Welfare Reform Development planning Highways and Car Parking Plymouth and Peninsula City Deal Regional and local economic strategy Social enterprise support Strategic Housing Delivery Sustainable Transport policies and strategies Tamar Bridge and Torpoint Ferry Waste management, recycling and street scene Climate change and sustainability Services Licensing	Adult and Children's Health Drug and Alcohol Services Integrated Health and Social Care (Commissioning and Delivery) Learning Disability Services Health Services Older people's services Personalisation Physical Disability Services Public Health Children's Social Care Adoption and Fostering Early years Development Education Grants Leisure management and Sports Development Safeguarding Schools and Colleges Youth Services Anti-social behaviour Community safety Public protection service Community and neighbourhood development Community cohesion, equalities and fairness Green spaces, Culture, Heritage and Events (to include Mayflower 2020) Homelessness and Housing
This Board would consider call in and councillors call for action.	The Board will undertake statutory NHS and community safety partnership scrutiny functions. This Board would consider call in and councillors call for action.

Membership and Special Responsibility Allowance
Proportional membership based on 11 members. Special Responsibility allowance payable to Chair and Vice Chair of both Boards. Due to changes to the role and

responsibilities of members this would need to be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel which could result in a responsibility payment for all members of both Boards given the emphasis placed on "Select Committee" style work.

Urgent Decisions
Chair of each Board would be expected to sign urgent decisions within the Board's terms of reference.

Call-ins / Call for Action
Each Board would consider call-ins and councillors' call for action based on the terms of reference of each Board.

Frequency
Boards would need to meet bi-monthly to deal with what is likely to be a substantial work programme.

Reviews
Reviews to be conducted within current processes; however Chair of reviews must be members of the relevant scrutiny Board.

Support
Support as detailed within the support to scrutiny section of the report.

Option C

Co-operative Scrutiny Management Board

Single Scrutiny Management Board which plans and commissions time-limited task and finish groups and reviews.

Areas of work for reviews could be suggested by members of the public and all Members via online tool.

Membership and Special Responsibility Allowance
Proportional membership based on 11 members. Special Responsibility allowance payable to Chair and Vice Chair of the Board. Due to changes to the role and responsibilities of members this would need to be reviewed by the Independent Remuneration Panel which could result in a responsibility payment for all members of the Board given the emphasis placed on "Select Committee" style work.

Urgent Decisions
Sign off of urgent decisions to remain with the Chair.

Call-ins / Call for Action
The Board would consider call-ins and councillors' call for action.

Frequency
The Board would meet monthly with programmed provisional meetings to deal with what is likely to be a substantial work programme.

Reviews
Reviews to be conducted within current processes; however Chair of reviews must be a member of the Co-operative Scrutiny Management Board.

Support
Support as detailed within the support to scrutiny section of the report.