

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2025 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

Present:

Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman), Cllr Christopher Williams (Vice-Chairman),
Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Jerry Kunkler,
Cllr Robert MacNaughton, Cllr Tony Pickernell, Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Tom Rounds and
Cllr Jacqui Lay (Substitute)

Also Present:

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling and Cllr Richard Clewer

13 **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Jo Trigg, Cllr Ruth Hopkinson,
Cllr Johnny Kidney and Cllr Jonathon Seed.

The following substitutions had also taken place with Cllr Jacqui Lay attending
the meeting in place of Cllr Jonathon Seed.

14 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2025 were presented for
consideration, and it was;

Resolved:

**To approve and sign as a true and correct record of the minutes of the
meeting held on 28 January 2025.**

15 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

16 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chairman's Announcements.

17 **Public Participation**

There were no questions or statements submitted by members of the public.

18 **Procedure of Meeting**

The procedure for consideration of amendments to the budget was detailed as set out in the agenda papers.

19 **Wiltshire Council's Budget 2025/26: Amendments**

A budget proposal was agreed by Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for discussion at Full Council on 25 February 2025, following its consideration by the Committee at its meeting on 28 January 2025.

On 5 February 2025 proposed amendments to that budget were received from Cllr Jon Hubbard

The amendments were presented as detailed in the agenda supplement.

Amendment A – Free swimming for children and young people during school holidays

The proposal sought to introduce free swimming for children and young people during school holidays across Council run facilities within Wiltshire. This would cover all school holidays including half term breaks. The proposal would increase Council Tax by 0.115% in 2025/26 resulting in an impact of £1.288m over the MTFS period and would have a cumulative positive impact on the Council Tax income for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years.

Comments from statutory officers including the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer were set out in the agenda supplement with further clarifications set out in the appended Committee report.

Amendment B – Increased capacity in the Reablement service

The proposal sought a permanent increase in Wiltshire Reablement Services. It was proposed that this would deliver increased capacity to work with individuals to improve levels of independence and quality of life and reduce reliance of funded long-term care. The proposal would increase Council Tax by 0.375% in 2025/26 resulting in an impact of £4.201m over the MTFS period and would have a cumulative positive impact on the Council Tax income for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years.

Comments from statutory officers including the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer were set out in the agenda supplement with further clarifications set out in the appended Committee report.

The Committee discussed the proposed amendments as detailed fully in the report appended to these minutes, seeking details on what data had been used to calculate cost implications of the amendments, why the amendments had been proposed and the relation of the amendments to the Business Plan.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

- 1. To thank Cllr Hubbard for submitting his budget proposals to the Committee and to note that they have been scrutinised.**
- 2. To ask Full Council to take note of the comments of the Committee, which will be presented in a report.**

20 **Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budget Setting 2025/26 including Dwelling Rent Setting 2025/26 and 30-Year Business Plan Review**

The Chairman noted that within the agenda pack was a report proposing the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, Budget and associated housing funding decisions.

Leader of the Council, Richard Clewer introduced the report and noted the importance of council housing provision and that if the Council wasn't to build it would need to find other ways to provide affordable housing. Reference was made to the challenges faced from inflation and government decisions and how it was important for Wiltshire to keep leaning into work taking place, for example the Leader had signed the Council up to a report being produced by Suffolk Council, which promoted council house building. Reference was made to the funding that was available to boost the programme and that the Council had a coherent long-term plan including retrofitting which would mean that the Council would not drift into areas of unaffordability like other councils.

James Barrah, Director for Assets, provided the Committee with a presentation on the HRA 30-year Business Plan, HRA Budget and Rent setting. The presentation covered, but was not limited to the following points:

- It was noted that last year's report focused mainly on rent setting with inflation however this year's report had a focus on the Business Plan with a priority to set a rent, revenue and capital budget for the coming year.
- Detail was provided in relation to assumptions and changes to the current Business Plan, which covered areas including rents, right to buy, management and maintenance costs, depreciation and the move from a repayment model to greater refinancing in earlier years.
- Detail was provided of the debt profile in comparison to the previous base in December 2023. With it noted that the level of debt and peak borrowing had increased however, reduced depreciation would mean that more revenue balances were available to support higher borrowing throughout the plan.
- An explanation of the repayment of debt over a 30-year period was provided, with it noted that the Council had a commitment to assessing how the financing could be reduced.
- Conclusions of the current Business Plan were outlined as well as next steps.

The following comments were received by Committee Members with clarity sought on where delivery would stop and whether there was an aspiration for over a thousand homes, to which it was noted that the plan would change in an

effective and intelligence manner over time. It was also stated that 1,000 homes would be a challenging target given local site availability, the potential acquisition of additional sites which could require additional costs and grant funding. Clarity was also provided that council house building had started before the 1,000 target, with circa 200 homes build outside of the target with more either having been built or in the pipeline, therefore suggesting that positive progress was being made.

A discussion took place regarding the funding for housing associations and local government authorities with it noted that there had been some shifts in government to acknowledge local experiences however the core grant remained the same for both parties involved. It was also noted that Wiltshire Council was well placed due to having a build programme when other authorities did not.

The notion of shared ownership was discussed with it questioned whether there was assistance in place for tenants of modest wages to move into shared ownership, to which it was clarified that there was no financial support available with shared ownership already being an affordable product, there was however wider support offered for hardship such as advice for benefit and mental health support.

Clarity was sought on borrowings and the cost of debt servicing, to which it was noted that this was a difficult space following the pandemic and cost of living crisis with the Council having to consider forecast modelling when borrowing and doing HRA on a worst-case scenario of known figures. It was also noted that the Council sought advice from treasury managers and would be considering short term borrowings over 12-24 months until there was more stability in the market. The profile of debt was also considered in order to not burden the Council with repaying all in one space in order to have a good debt portfolio in place.

Risk mitigation measures were discussed as well as whether this might affect the general finances of the Council, to which assurance was provided that the development programme could be switched on or off. It was also noted that the Council was making sure not to be overly committed on too many sites or contracts at one time in order to ensure that action could be taken. Furthermore, the HRA was a ring-fenced fund within the general budget, therefore if the finances of the HRA was not managed this could have an impact on the general finances, however modelling was constantly taking place so there would be an awareness if action would need to be taken. It was therefore deemed not to be a current risk.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:

1. To note the HRA Annual Revenue Budget for 2025/26 as described in the report and Appendix 1, subject to an in-year review.

21 **Performance and Risk Report 2024/25 - Quarter 3**

The Chairman noted that within the agenda pack was a report providing a quarter three update on performance against the stated missions in the Council's Business Plan 2023-24. A Strategic Risk Summary was also included. The report had been considered by Cabinet on 4 February.

Leader of the Council, Richard Clewer introduced the report with its importance stressed in order to understand whether the Council was meeting the strategic objectives set out in the Business Plan and spending money wisely. It was suggested that following the local elections it might be a good time to consider whether the data included within the report was right or whether improvements could be made, Reference was also made to the how Wiltshire Council was perceived to be doing well with performance and risk monitoring, however the sector as a whole still had improvements to be made.

The following comments were received by Committee Members with it questioned whether there was an upward trend related to Library and Leisure services, to which it was confirmed that there had been an upward trend for these services, with reference made to how 10 leisure centres had been insourced enabling the Council to operate in a commercial way alongside what had been mandated within the Business Plan. Praise was also placed on the staff working in Leisure Centres. Regarding Libraries, though there wasn't a commercial aspect to this area, the Council was successfully innovating and broadening what Libraries offered in order to support the business plan with contributions towards adult care and children's services which was ultimately increasing footfall.

A question was raised regarding the recycling of incorrect items and how this was impacting metrics as well as whether there was any plans to educate the public. Detail was provided from officers that a "Recycling – Let's Sort It!" campaign had been launched in 2023 in order to educate residents as to what could be placed into bins as well as a "dos and don'ts" campaign in the run up to Christmas 2024. In addition, clarity was provided regarding the process of how the Council was attempting to prevent recycling from being contaminated with Hills Waste now tagging and recording bins depending on the level of contamination and potentially contacting homeowners directly to discuss issues. It was noted that for 2023/24 (e.g. last full year of data), if all the target materials within the sorting facility rejects had been recycled instead, the Council recycling rate would have improved by 1.9% (increasing from 43.7% to 45.6%); equating to 4,294 tonnes as data suggested that up to 56% of sorting facility rejects included target materials that could potentially have been recycled.

A discussion took place regarding potholes with it suggested that the system used by the Council aimed to create value for money with repairs able to be made within specified times and able to last until resurfacing was planned to take place. It was also clarified that the system used did not vary for different road classifications. Metrics for potholes was also discussed with it suggested that it was better to measure the speed in which potholes were being filled due to varying weather conditions each year, rather than the number of potholes reported due to often receiving multiple reports for each individual pothole. It was suggested that the Council was making better headway in dealing with the potholes which were occurring. A suggestion was made that activity data could be provided alongside the performance data in order to provide wider context, such as potholes reported, and potholes closed.

Further clarity was sought as to how improvements had been made to deal with potholes, with it cited that the bobcats and velocity dragon patcher were now able to work all year round whereas previously other interventions had been weather dependent. The Council taking a preventative approach was also discussed, for example the use of surface dressings and reinforcing corners on country roads used by tractors. This was acknowledged in the Department of Transport statistics that - road network repairs in Wiltshire were increasing compared to other areas.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

Resolved:

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed to note:

- 1. The updates and outturns against the measures and activities mapped against the Council's priorities.**
- 2. The Strategic Risk Summary.**

22 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 13 March 2025.

23 Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.30 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ben Fielding - Senior Democratic Services Officer of Democratic Services, e-mail benjamin.fielding@wiltshire.gov.uk

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APPENDIX to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee Minutes of 13 February 2025

Wiltshire Council

Full Council

25 February 2025

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the Wiltshire Council Budget 2025/26 - Amendments

Purpose of report

1. To provide to Full Council a summary of the key issues discussed at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held on 13 February 2025.

Background

2. The meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 13 February 2025 provided an opportunity to scrutinise amendments to the budget. The meeting on 28 January 2025 had considered the initial proposals from the Cabinet, which were subsequently agreed at Cabinet on 4 February 2025 for recommendation to Full Council on 25 February 2025.
3. Two proposed amendments were received for the meeting from Councillor Jon Hubbard.
4. All proposals were provided to the Committee with comments by the Section 151 Officer, Head of Paid Service, and the Monitoring Officer. They were confirmed as financially and legally viable, with comments included on any increased risks such as in relation to use of reserves or use of assumptions to fund additional expenditures.

Proposed Amendments

Amendment A

5. The proposal from Councillor Hubbard was as follows:

To introduce free swimming for children and young people during school holidays across Council run facilities within Wiltshire.

6. This would have the following financial impact on the 2025/26 base budget:

Proposal	Impact £m
To introduce free swimming for children and young people during school holidays across Council run facilities within Wiltshire.	
2025/26 pressure of proposal	0.406
2026/27 pressure of proposal	0.429
2027/28 pressure of proposal	0.453

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Total pressure across MTFS	1.288
Funding Proposal of Pressure	
Increase Council Tax by 0.115% in 2025/26 resulting in an impact of £1.288m over the MTFS period	1.288

Amendment B

7. The proposal from Councillor Hubbard was as follows:

A permanent increase in Wiltshire Reablement Services. This would deliver increased capacity to work with individuals to improve levels of independence and quality of life and reduce reliance of funded long-term care.

8. This would have the following financial impact on the 2025/26 base budget:

Proposal	Impact £m
A permanent increase in Wiltshire Reablement Services. This would deliver increased capacity to work with individuals to improve levels of independence and quality of life and reduce reliance of funded long-term care.	
2025/26 pressure of proposal	1.324
2026/27 pressure of proposal	1.400
2027/28 pressure of proposal	1.477
Total pressure across MTFS	4.201
Funding Proposal of Pressure	
Increase Council Tax by 0.375% in 2025/26 resulting in an impact of £4.201m over the MTFS period	4.201

9. For each amendment, the Chairman gave the opportunity for Members of the Cabinet who were present to respond if they wished, as well as opportunity for the Corporate Leadership Team to add anything further to the statutory officer comments provided with the submissions. The Section 151 Officer, Lizzie Watkin, provided clarification on the amendments where appropriate.

Introduction of the Amendments

Amendment A

10. Councillor Jon Hubbard presented the amendment with it outlined that there had been a decline in physical activity levels for children particularly from low-income backgrounds and that swimming was a life skill and that regardless of background young people should have an opportunity to stay active. It was suggested that swimming would provide structure and reduce isolation whilst improving wellbeing. It was noted that this amendment was proposed on the cautious assumption that some people would continue to pay for swimming lessons which would mitigate the potential impact. Furthermore, that the amendments would cost 4p per week. It was suggested that this proposal was in line with the Wiltshire Council Business Plan and represented sensible, evidence-based investment whilst being financially sustainable.

Amendment B

11. Councillor Jon Hubbard presented the amendment with it noted that reablement was a proven cost-effective approach for supporting individuals to regain independence after hospital stays and reduced pressure on social care. The amendment proposed an additional 450 hours of support a week including therapy and the expansion of the reablement team which would prevent higher costs in the future should adult social care prices rise. It was suggested that this would be a sustainable way of expanding the service for 13p per week. It was suggested that this proposal was in line with the Wiltshire Council Business Plan and represented sensible, evidence-based investment whilst being financially sustainable.

Key issues raised during questioning and debate

12. Clarity was sought regarding how much free swimming has cost in the past, to which it was noted that the costing basis for the amendment had been based on current use and charges for children and up to date information for leisure services rather than past and pre-pandemic data. Additionally, the notion of additional administrative and lifeguarding costs had been considered as prudent assumptions.

13. It was noted that additional income such as paying parents had not been included within the costing of amendment A and that the proposal costing took a worst-case scenario perspective.

14. Other ways of providing free swimming were discussed, with a past example of Area Board grant funding being used to provide swimming lessons.

15. A discussion took place as to why these specific amendments had been proposed rather than ones to increase other areas of funding, to which it was clarified that Councillors were able to put forth amendments for individual areas in which they held passion for and that it was a personal belief that these areas could benefit from further spending.

16. Clarity was sought as to how the amendments correlated or caused risk to the Business Plan, to which it was noted that the Business Plan had strategic objectives for prevention, early intervention and improving the quality of resident's lives, to which it was suggested that the amendments aligned with.

17. A point was raised as to why the respective Cabinet Members had not considered these amendments within the draft budget, to which it was suggested that it was likely that the Cabinet Members had considered the spending within the amendments, however they had not been included within the financial envelope proposed by the administration. The amendments tabled therefore sought to expand the spending proposed, with it suggested that investment in both services would bring a higher return in cash savings and life quality.

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February 2025**

Conclusion

18. Cllr Hubbard was thanked for submitting his budget proposals to the Committee, and it was noted that they had been scrutinised.
19. To ask Full Council to take note of the comments of the Committee, as presented in this report.

Councillor Graham Wright

Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

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Report Date: 19 February 2025