

## Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

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### MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2025 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.

#### **Present:**

Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman), Cllr Christopher Williams (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Gavin Grant, Cllr Ruth Hopkinson, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Tony Jackson, Cllr Johnny Kidney, Cllr Gordon King, Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Cllr Robert MacNaughton, Cllr Pip Ridout, Cllr Tom Rounds, Cllr Jonathon Seed and Cllr Jo Trigg

#### **Also Present:**

Cllr Jane Davies, Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Nick Botterill, Cllr Richard Clewer and Cllr Laura Mayes.

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#### 1 **Apologies**

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Tony Pickernell.

#### 2 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2024 were presented for consideration.

Cllr Jonathon Seed made a statement of clarity in relation to a statement that he had made in the previous meeting in relation to the urgent item in which Wiltshire Publications and Melksham Independent News was discussed. The statement confirmed that Cllr Seed maintained his position in regard to biased journalism, however clarified some matters of detail including relating to the financial management of Wiltshire Publications and that it had been for several weeks and not months, as had been previously stated before officers had ceased sending press released to the Melksham Independent News.

After which, it was;

#### **Resolved:**

**To approve and sign as a true and correct record of the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2024.**

#### 3 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 4 **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman made the following announcement:

A) Overview and Scrutiny Legacy Process

The Chairman outlined that an opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) to look back on its activity during the outgoing council would be an important part of its improvement journey. Additionally, doing so would allow the Committee to consider its successes and challenges, including the key activities which had been undertaken. Suggestions for further scrutiny under the next council could then be made.

It was therefore outlined that at the Committee meeting in March, the Committee would receive a report outlining the Committee's key activities during 2021-24 and would also propose some future work priorities for its successor Committee after the elections in May.

To feed into this process, members of the Committee would soon receive an email from Henry Powell asking for submissions on ideas on what scrutiny should be looking at, within this Committee's remit, under the next council.

5 **Public Participation**

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

6 **Wiltshire Council's Budget 2025/2026 and Medium Term Financial Strategy Update 2025/26-2027/28**

The Chairman introduced a report and appendices within the Agenda Pack which presented the administration's Budget for 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2027/28. The Chairman noted that on Page 19 of the Agenda Pack there was a short report setting out a suggested process for the Committee's consideration of the budget.

The Chairman also noted that the debate that would take place during the meeting was in the context of the following meetings:

- An open to all members budget briefing provided on 22 January 2025;
- The special budget meeting of the Financial Planning Task Group on 24 January; and;
- Informal meetings of the other three select committees, where questions on the budget were submitted to their chairmen to be addressed to the Executive.

The draft Wiltshire Council Budget 2025/2026 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2027/28 was presented by Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Clewer and Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Nick Botterill, supported by the Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Lizzie Watkin. In addition, the Director of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) and other

members of the Corporate Leadership Team were present to provide clarification and answers to issues and queries raised by the Committee.

The published budget papers proposed the net general fund budget for 2025/2026 to be £527.420m as well as a 2.5% general increase to Council Tax and a levy of 2% to be spent solely on Adult Social Care. In addition, the papers proposed that the Council Tax requirement for the council be set at £368.818m for 2025/26 with a Band D charge of £1,886.99, an increase of £1.56 per week.

Topics were raised included but were not limited to discussion on the receipt of government grants, the removal of posts, the potential impact of savings on the delivery of services, income generated through carparking and street works, asset transfer plans and departmental capacity to deliver.

The Chairman noted that the key points of the debate that took place would form a report which would be taken to the Cabinet meeting set to take place on 4 February 2025 as well as the Full Council meeting scheduled for 25 February, along with the budget report of the Financial Planning Task Group. In addition, it was noted that an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to scrutinise any opposition amendments to the budget before Full Council had been arranged for Thursday 13 February at 10.30am. The deadline for submitting budget amendments was 5.00pm on Wednesday 5 February.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

**Resolved:**

**The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed:**

- A) To note the Draft Wiltshire Council budget for 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025-26 to 2027-28 and to refer the comments of the Committee and the report of the Financial Planning Task Group to Cabinet and Full Council for consideration on 4th February and 25th February respectively.**
- B) To support ongoing scrutiny investigation of the budget, including the Financial Planning Task Group's continued focus on monitoring delivery of the budget and the development of the budget for 2026-27.**

## **7 Executive Response to the Final Report of the Evolve Task Group**

The Chairman noted that on page 21 of the agenda pack, was a report presenting the response of the relevant Cabinet Members to the Final Report of the Evolve Task Group. The Chairman noted that on 27 November 2024 the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee endorsed the Final Report of the Task Group and that the Committee resolved to refer the following Task Group's recommendations to the relevant Cabinet member for response at the Committee's next meeting on 28 January 2025.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Military Civilian Integration, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, and Tourism discussed the report and stated that the work which had taken place had been useful and had produced positive recommendations.

Cllr Jon Hubbard, Chair of the Task Group thanked the Leader for his acceptance of the recommendations and that having a dedicated Cabinet Member for this area of work would be positive. Reference was also made to how the LGA had set up a Transformation Network and that through discussion it was shown that the issues encountered had not been exclusive to Wiltshire. Gratitude was also placed to the Members of the Task Group who had been willing to spend their time on the work.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

**Resolved:**

- A. To note the Executive Response to the Final Report of the Evolve Task Group.**
- B. To note that further monitoring and scrutiny of the actions set out in the Executive Response will be considered as part of the Committee's legacy process.**

**8 Executive Response to the Final Report of the Transformation Task Group**

The Chairman noted that on page 29 of the agenda pack, was a report presenting the response of the relevant Cabinet Members to the Final Report of the Transformation Task Group. The Chairman noted that on 27 November 2024 the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee endorsed the Final Report of the Task Group and that the Committee resolved to refer the following Task Group's recommendations to the relevant Cabinet member for response at the Committee's next meeting on 28 January 2025.

Cllr Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Military Civilian Integration, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Development, Heritage, Arts, and Tourism discussed the report with it noted that it would be positive to have a dedicated Cabinet Member for this area of work.

Cllr Chris Williams, Chair of the Task Group thanked all that were involved in the Task Group including Members, Officers and Cabinet for accepting the recommendations. It was suggested that having the Cabinet Member leading on this area would be positive with various projects set to take place within the area.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

**Resolved:**

- A. To note the Executive Response to the Final Report of the Transformation Task Group.
- B. To note that further monitoring and scrutiny of the actions set out in the Executive Response will be considered as part of the Committee's legacy process, including the Committee's request to receive quarterly performance reports on the Transformation Programme.

9 **Forward Work Programme**

The Committee considered the forward work programmes for each select Committee, as well as updates from the Chairman for each Select Committee with gratitude placed towards officers for their work over the past four years.

At the conclusion of discussion, it was,

**Resolved:**

**The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee agreed to note the updates on select committee activity and approve the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme.**

10 **Cabinet Member Update**

The Committee received a Cabinet Member update from Cllr Laura Mayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, and Skills, which outlined that earlier in the day she had attended a SEND into employment event in Devizes. The event had been attended by employers and young people, with positive work being done for young people which would enable them to be employed and active members of the Wiltshire community.

11 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meetings were confirmed as 13 February 2025 (opposition budget amendments) and 13 March 2025.

12 **Urgent Items**

There was no urgent items.

(Duration of meeting: 10.30 am - 12.22 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ben Fielding - Senior Democratic Services Officer of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 718656, e-mail [benjamin.fielding@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:benjamin.fielding@wiltshire.gov.uk)

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January 2025  
Wiltshire Council**

**Cabinet 4 February 2025**

**Council 25 February 2025**

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**Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the Draft Budget  
2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26-2027/28**

**Purpose of report**

1. To report to Full Council a summary of the main issues discussed at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee held on 28 January 2025.

**Background**

2. The meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee provided an opportunity for non-executive councillors to question the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance and the Chief Executives with the Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer on the draft 2025-26 budget and medium-term financial strategy before it is considered at Cabinet on 4 February 2025 and Full Council on 25 February 2025.
3. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Richard Clewer and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Nick Botterill were supported by the Director for Resources and Section 151 Officer, Lizzie Watkin. In addition, Director of Legal & Governance (Monitoring Officer) and other members of the Corporate Leadership Team were present to provide clarification and answers to issues and queries raised by the Committee.
4. In addition to the draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy made available on the Council's website on 21 January 2025 and other public events, a briefing had been arranged on 22 January 2025 open to all elected Members to explain the budget and for technical questions to be answered.
5. Details had included:
  - The net general fund budget of 2025/2026 was proposed as £527.420m.
  - Council Tax requirement for the Council be set at £368.818m for 2025/26 with a Band D charge of £1,886.99, an increase of £1.56 per week; which would be a 2.5% general increase plus a levy of 2% to be spent solely on Adult Social Care.

**Main issues raised during questioning and debate**

6. This report is divided into sections relating to each of the Select Committee areas as budget proposals and impacts on services were discussed, before opening up to general queries.

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### Financial Planning Task Group

7. The report of the Financial Planning Task Group on the budget proposals was received. The report and its comments would be forwarded for attention at Cabinet and Full Council along with the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee itself.

### Children's Select Committee

8. Clarity was sought regarding funding from government grants, to which it was noted that there were several grants that although previously assumed to continue were confirmed in both the policy statement and provisional settlement as no longer continuing. These grants were listed within the budget papers with the total amount of grant funding lost representing a figure of circa £8million.
9. It was questioned how the placement sufficiency programme of work would achieve £0.350m savings, to which it was stated that work was taking place at director level in regard to operational work within commissioning that would aim to take opportunities to step down placements from high to low costs over a broad spectrum of work across placement management.
10. The national shortage of foster carers was discussed and how Wiltshire would be looking to improve on this situation with in-house foster carers which had previously been difficult to recruit. Detail was provided that this was being addressed at a national level through initiatives as well as regionally and that there was confidence in recruiting given a positive track record and reputation.
11. It was suggested that four qualified social worker posts were being removed and case reviews would be carried out by less qualified staff (family key workers) to which assurance was provided that due to having a good history in early intervention and prevention, through good management of caseloads, these posts could be safely removed. It was also outlined that family key workers would work with people who had a lower risk but would not receive less supervision because of this.
12. Reference was made to savings on SEND transport 'across MTFS', with the capacity to deliver the plans questioned, to which assurance was provided that it was believed that capacity was there and that this was not a new saving but a continuation of the MTFS. Detail was provided that investment had been made in route planning technology as well as staff training to consider routes and fleet. Further savings for years two and three would be evidence led; therefore, work was being undertaken towards this.
13. Assurance was provided that there was a high degree of confidence in the council being able to attract an additional £500K in health funding, with an income of £500k already realised this year working with the ICB for children with complex needs and medical diagnoses. Furthermore, work was being undertaken with two other local



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authorities within the ICB to build a solid funding footprint with confidence that income could be increased in future years.

14. Detail was sought regarding £0.319m savings identified through staffing review and deletion of vacant posts, to which it was noted that this would be within the social work teams, with caseloads to be reviewed with some assessment work to be moved into the safeguarding and support teams. It was stated that the deletions would be of vacant posts or if through natural wastage through the year rather than redundancy.
15. Feedback was provided that it would be positive for a savings section to be included within the main report beside each subject.
16. The impact of savings on the delivery of children's services was questioned, to which assurance was provided that savings would not be accepted if they were not considered to be deliverable, with each individual saving assessed by officers also through a lens of equality and accumulative impact.

### Health Select Committee

17. Concern was raised about whether the budget would fully cover the pressures on staff costs of providers to which it was noted that the council was aware of the potential impact that the increased employer national insurance contribution and other financial pressures may have on providers and the council would continue to work with them in partnership to sustain the market. Additionally, it was noted that there was also some risk in the contractually inflationary increases across all service areas and a budget was held centrally to help mitigate where services are not able to manage such pressure if they present during the 2025/26 financial year that cannot be contained within existing budgets.
18. It was suggested whether there could be clear and literal explanations of spending lines that would be reduced by savings, particularly proposed savings over £0.500m or £1m. It was noted that savings proposal descriptions have an over all approach however it is not always possible to be literal and specific as some decisions may relate to statutory responsibilities under the Care Act.
19. Regarding the projected saving £1.4m from 'Learning disabilities/Mental Health Placements' it was questioned whether this would mean seeking to support more people living independently and spending less on residential care. It was clarified that the service was confident that this was achievable and that prudent figures had been put forward based on previous experience. This considered success in previous years of moving out of county placements which had been boosted by purchasing properties within Wiltshire.
20. The projected saving of £1.835m from "Undertake Strength Based Reviews in Whole Life pathway with a focus on Learning Disability services to deliver individual outcomes maximise community-based opportunities and reduce reliance on formal care and support" was discussed. It was suggested that, through regular adult care reviews, the council would be able to ensure that the level of care for individual needs

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was correct and would identify potential savings, for example, moving from residential to community care and improving people's homes through preventative services.

21. It was questioned whether the council was aware of how much providers were paying shareholders and whether this was factored into the procurement process, to which it was clarified that collaboration with providers takes place with a model used, however, there was no obligation for providers to provide data and that some also have charitable status and therefore do not have shareholders.
22. It was asked whether in future budgets and financial performance reports it would be possible to see detail concerning the spread of spend across the directorate so that the committee can better understand where the pressures of demand and savings are coming from. It was stated that improvements were being made to finance reporting systems, which would allow for detail to be reported more effectively.
23. It was questioned whether the projected saving of £0.180m was ambitious enough for the increased use of the shared lives programme, to which it was stated that the council was keen to promote shared lives further and that the service had expanded from 36 to 51 placements and that further expansion would be dependent on recruiting shared lives families. It was suggested that there may be opportunities for this in future financial years however a prudent approach was being taken for the coming year.
24. It was questioned whether there was elements in the budget to help speed up discharge from hospital to efficient and effective reablement to which it was noted that there were initiatives within the budget as well as discharging funding which had been received.
25. Further detail was requested in regard to capital investments in property, to which it was noted that the council had agreed to purchase 15 supported living properties and had completed on 5 of these with work looking to progress into further financial years.

### Environment Select Committee

26. Assurance was provided that there was enough capacity within the Climate Team to cover its remit and demands in the budget and that the Climate Team had additional resources added in 24/25 budget and the council always looked to include staffing needs in external bids such as the Warm Homes Grant to ensure it have the resources needed to deliver. It was also noted that responding to the climate emergency was a whole council responsibility.
27. It was noted that currently data was not available in relation to the total capital budget for programmes that are reducing the council and county's carbon footprint, however, the Environment Select Committee would be informed as work developed with the capital project and finance teams.
28. Clarification was provided regarding government funding to maintain Wiltshire highways for the upcoming and future financial years, with it stated that the Highways

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Maintenance Block would be £23.6m for 2025/26 and that funding for 2026/27 was currently unknown with no further update on the Integrated Transport Block at this time. Additional local funding already approved and being spent was £22m (prevention programme).

29. Detail was provided on the income generated by Highways & Transport services through car parking and street works with it noted that for 2024/25 the forecast income from Permits was £574,000, but this was ring fenced to pay for the service including staff 2024/25 forecast income for other street works activities is £1.927m. Further information on fees and charges could be found via the following report: [Appendix 4 - Fees and Charges 2023-24 1.pdf](#)
30. Clarity was provided that the ongoing costs of providing car parking services were covered by income and that the extent of the service was determined by income received; additional funding had been provided for cleansing and maintenance in previous and current year. Additional costs would be considered as part of the forthcoming parking review to ensure assets and service meet the council Business Plan objectives
31. It was questioned whether the New Burdens budget would be used in 2025/26 to prepare for the implementation of food waste collection to which it was stated that Waste Services would be working through the detail as to how food waste would be collected in Wiltshire and that the capital funding received had been set aside for that purpose for collections to start in 2027. However, details of the revenue element promised as part of new burden funding for these new mandatory collections was still awaited.
32. It was questioned whether there would be Asset Transfer Plans in place for towns and parishes in addition to Westbury, to which it was stated that other discussions had been ongoing however with elections taking place in May it would not be prudent to allocate savings into such an item until the conclusion of elections.
33. Clarity was sought regarding the current trend on car parking charges in terms of patterns of use and occupancy of car parks, to which detail was provided that off Street (car parks) parking charges had remained unchanged for three years, also time limited stays had remained unchanged. Only a few fees and charges had changed, with minimal impact on income. Additionally, a Parking Review was being undertaken, aligned to the fourth Local Transport Plan for Wiltshire (LTP4), and it was intended this would be subject to consultation later in the year. It is challenging recording occupancy as there are many different types of users, many of which do not pay (for example, customers in St Stephens, Trowbridge and staff). Furthermore, whilst the council knows how many season tickets are sold per car park, it was not known whether these are always used, although, there was a need to ensure these spaces are available, as they are paid for. As part of the Parking Review, the council would be collecting additional data where possible and the objective of parking strategy would be to ensure appropriate balance for all users.

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34. Reference was made to the ending of the £1m Wiltshire Towns Programme, with it questioned whether there would be an alternative source available from Government or elsewhere to sustain this funding, to which it was noted that Government had not yet announced any funding in this area beyond the next financial year, however, this could be something crystallised through devolution.

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35. A suggestion was made that it would be positive to include a contents page for easy reference within the budget pack.
36. It was clarified that 5% of the core spend goes towards running the council – not just toward running elections – with it noted that this would include income from parishes and towns towards the costs. Furthermore, that the PCC election costs were funded through a government grant.
37. Clarity was provided in relation to the Chief Executive's Budget with it outlined that the capital financing costs of the schemes were included in the capital programme that are funded by borrowing and would include both the technical financing in lieu of principal debt repayment as well as interest cost.
38. Reference was made to the Business Plan Programme, with it outlined that the figure of £2.265m related to the reinstatement of the Transformation Team. Further clarity was outlined that by the end the 2025/26-year, transformation would have a projected closing balance of £2.618m from the general fund reserve, however by the close of 2027/28 the team would be fully funded by the base budget.
39. Officers provided clarity on the Collection Fund referenced within the budget papers, with it noted that Wiltshire Council was the administering authority for business rates and council tax and that deficits and surpluses accrue when the actual performance does not align with the assumptions of the previous year for the Fund.
40. Assurance was sought regarding the Capital Investment Programme Board, to which it was suggested that the Board was having a positive output with assurance being provided by the Board and that it could act as a beneficial management tool across schemes allowing for cross scheme scrutiny in order to present learning opportunities.

### **Conclusion**

41. To note the Draft Wiltshire Council budget for 2025-26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2025-26 to 2027-28 and to refer the comments of the Committee and the report of the Financial Planning Task Group to Cabinet and Full Council for consideration on 4 February and 25 February respectively.
42. To support the Financial Planning Task Group's ongoing monitoring of the delivery of the budget and the development of the budget for 2026-27.

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Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management  
Committee**

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