

## Environment Select Committee

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**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 4 MARCH 2025 AT KENNET ROOM - COUNTY HALL, BYTHESEA ROAD, TROWBRIDGE, BA14 8JN.**

**Present:**

Cllr Jerry Kunkler (Chairman), Cllr Derek Walters (Vice-Chairman), Cllr Richard Budden, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Ian McLennan, Cllr Iain Wallis, and Cllr Stuart Wheeler

**Also Present:**

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling, Cllr Richard Clewer, Cllr Dominic Muns, Cllr Tamara Reay, and Cllr Graham Wright (Virtual)

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**14     Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor Tony Jackson
- Councillor Dr Brian Mathew MP
- Councillor Charles McGrath
- Councillor Dr Nick Murry

**15     Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes for the previous meeting held on 14 January 2025 were considered.

Councillor Derek Walters suggested an amendment to the wording of Bullet Point 5 of Minute Item 7, Previous Investment in Carriageway Surfacing Activities, which was accepted by Members.

Following which, it was:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee approved and signed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 January 2025 as a true and correct record, including the amended wording to Minute Item 7 as agreed during the meeting.**

16     **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

17     **Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman noted that the order of the agenda would be amended to accommodate conflicting work commitments; therefore, Agenda Item 8, Review of the Work of the Climate Emergency Task Group, would be brought forward and considered before Agenda Item 6, Leisure Services.

18     **Public Participation**

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

19     **Leisure Services**

Councillor Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries, alongside David Redfern, Director – Leisure, Culture, and Communities, delivered a presentation regarding leisure services.

A series of slides were presented which detailed the income and expenditure for all sites for the year 2023-24, alongside the core membership and swim school membership growth as at January 2025. Latent demand was then raised with Members being shown a table setting out the current membership position for each site, 2015 and 2022 latent demand targets, and membership as a percentage of latent demand, with all figures being correct as at 3 February 2025. It was highlighted that a number of sites were over 100%, with others on a trajectory to surpass the latent demand figure, and officers detailed the impacts on membership growth following investments in developing, upgrading, and improving facilities across the County, such as the recent fitness suite launched in Devizes.

Reference was then made to 'Moving Communities', which was explained as a national initiative that provided a real-time view of delivery across programmes, facilities, and places, with benchmarking and filtering functionalities alongside mapping tools to allow for actionable insights on quantifiable data. A table was then presented which detailed the results of a recent survey and showed that Wiltshire was above the average national score on factors such as helpful and friendly staff, cleanliness, and value for money.

The public holiday opening project was then briefly discussed, with officers reminding Members that the project was due to last over a period of 4-5 years and that as working Bank Holidays was not a contractual requirement, each relevant site relied on the goodwill of staff volunteering to work on those dates. It was highlighted that since the trial was launched, the Council had not failed to

open a facility across the four areas thanks to those dedicated members of staff.

Finally, it was noted that officers were looking to focus on outreach work in order to improve the overall social benefits of the leisure service and to further understand and address health inequalities in different community areas across the County.

During the discussion, points included:

- The insourcing of 10 leisure centres since October 2021, with Wiltshire Council directly running all 20 leisure centres across the County was highlighted, and Members discussed the importance of keeping leisure centres financially sustainable alongside the importance of their social value and raising the levels of the health and wellbeing of residents.
- Members commended the different mindset and approach taken to the leisure service over the past 4 years and the ambitions for the future, and it was emphasised that leisure as an industry was connected to a number of different areas within the Council. Therefore, taking ownership of all of the leisure centres allowed for greater flexibility and agility across those linked services.
- It was noted that for those leisure centres that were not achieving a level of income above their expenditure, officers were working with site managers to developing action plans to help support those sites. Furthermore, it was explained that at present there was a higher demand for swim schools than could be supplied, with there being challenges in the recruitment of swimming teachers. As such, officers had developed an in-house Swim Teacher Academy and further updates would be brought to future meetings.
- Outreach work and understanding why residents were or were not using leisure centres was raised and Members were informed that officers were continuing to invest in sites and build new facilities bearing in mind distances to areas of deprivation in each community area. Furthermore, officers were in the process of looking at Playing Pitch Strategies in tandem with built facilities and the installation of Multi-Use Game Areas (MUGAs) to bring leisure infrastructure into the heart of communities and working closely with other partners such as Spurgeons with the Family Hubs located in different leisure centres, Council hubs, and libraries across the County. Members were reassured that although it was difficult to measure the social benefits of the work being undertaken in the service, further updates would be provided to future meetings and that officers were working hard to understand how best to evaluate the service's social value.
- It was further explained that officers were undertaking a review on built facilities which when combined with the latent demand figures would contribute to understanding further investment opportunities and what scale of investment may be justified.
- Members were reassured that there was a 5-year warranty on all fitness equipment with any technical issues or faults being escalated to leisure

centre management who would then contact the suppliers to address any concerns.

- Reference was made to the first slide of the presentation relating to the income and expenditure of all sites, and queries were raised as to energy costs. In response, officers noted that the review on built facilities would provide further data as to full income and costs and it was noted that leisure centre managers were engaging with Council Environment Officers to further understand energy costs and how to work at reducing them. Furthermore, the Council had made the decision to close all saunas approximately 18 months ago due to their high energy costs, but officers were now conducting a trial to reopen one sauna as a test case to determine its impact and to consider the benefit of the offering against its operational costs.
- It was explained that there were other Local Authorities who had insourced their leisure services, but that there were others which were managed by external operators, however it was emphasised that this was dependent on the contracts in place and the financial position of each Local Authority. Despite this, it was highlighted that although officers felt confident in the service being provided in Wiltshire, there was always room for further improvements and lessons to be learnt from other Authorities across the country.
- Finally, officers highlighted the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre project and emphasised that the site was due to be one of the most sustainable in the country, and that it was a priority for the Council to have full ownership of the project to prevent partnership complications, dependencies or unexpected delays.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was then:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- a) **Noted the contents of the update.**
- b) **Requested that the next Select Committee asks for a further update including financial information, leisure membership, satisfaction levels, bank holiday opening, outreach, and emerging social benefits.**

20 **Cabinet Member Updates**

Verbal updates were provided by Councillor Ian Blair-Pilling, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries, Councillor Tamara Reay, Cabinet Member for Transport and Assets, and Councillor Richard Clewer, Leader of the Council.

### Public Health, Communities, Leisure, and Libraries

Cllr Ian Blair-Pilling provided brief updates on the Library Strategy, newly developed dashboards being used at Area Boards, and the Trowbridge Leisure Centre project.

Members were informed that the Library Strategy had been published and that it highlighted the breadth and depth of the different services offered in Wiltshire's libraries to counter the more traditional perspective of libraries. It was then noted that a dashboard had been introduced to Area Boards which would look at how to learn from other community areas to drive forward improvements. Finally, it was confirmed that Pellikaan Construction, who built the Melksham Community Campus which opened in 2022, would be the construction partner for the new Trowbridge Leisure Centre project.

### Transport and Assets

Cllr Reay provided brief updates on the progress of the draft Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4), Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services, and the work of the LEVI (Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure) Team.

It was noted that the draft LTP4 had been approved at the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 4 March 2025 and that following feedback from the consultation, a more succinct Executive Summary had been published for greater accessibility. Furthermore, a draft Delivery Plan had been published within the agenda ahead of the extraordinary Full Council meeting on Tuesday 11 March 2025 which provided further details on the themes of the plan, how they would be taken forward, and relevant time frames. Following which, it was confirmed that the draft Delivery Plan would be subject to consultation in the near future.

It was then explained that officers were working hard on a Network Review and that two additional DRT services were intended to be launched within the next year, with one focussing on the Royal Wootton Bassett and Malmesbury areas, and the other focussing on the Mere and Warminster areas. As such, officers were in the process of procuring vehicles and finalising the necessary work before launching the service. It was further highlighted that once the results of the Network Review had been published, there would be a list of recommendations, with it being expected that in a number of areas the stronger and more economic offer would be to replace limited and sparse fixed timetable bus services with DRT to better serve those communities.

Finally, it was noted that the LEVI Team had secured funding from the LEVI Fund and were focussing on particular areas that do not have access to off-street parking and were therefore looking at providing on-street electric vehicle charging points. The Team had also been reviewing various emerging technologies and were working closely with Highways Officers to work through the requirements and implications for highways practices and policies.

In response to questions from Members, it was explained that officers were focussing on providing DRT services in more rural areas rather than smaller

towns as it was more financially efficient and provided greater opportunities for patronage, however different community areas were being considered within the Network Review. It was further noted that it was the intention for the DRT service planned for Mere and Warminster to also serve Gillingham train station to provide a connection for those nearby villages onto the rail network.

#### Update from the Leader of the Council

Cllr Clewer provided a brief update on the Wiltshire Marque in which it was highlighted that more time was needed before producing definitive data, however although it was early into the project, initial feedback was that it was proving useful for those members who had joined so far.

#### **Resolved:**

**The Committee noted the Cabinet Member updates.**

### 21 **Review of the Work of the Climate Emergency Task Group**

Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Climate Emergency Task Group, presented the report which updated the Committee on the work of the Climate Emergency Task Group since 14 January 2025 alongside learnings, improvements, and a number of key areas that the Task Group suggested should be scrutinised in the next Council session.

Firstly, the members of the Task Group and supporting officers were thanked for their dedication and commitment in contributing a significant amount of time and expertise into the Task Group to date. The recent work on scrutinising the decarbonisation elements of the Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) was raised, in particular the Task Group's response to the consultation (Appendix 1), and recent engagement with Wiltshire Climate Alliance which was noted as positive and welcomed.

It was emphasised that the Task Group was very active, having met 35 times between July 2021 and February 2025 and with further details of the activities undertaken in Appendix 2. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that although the Task Group had achieved a lot, there was always room for further improvements. As such, the agreed suggestions on how the Task Group could adjust its work were listed in Paragraphs 22 to 26 of the report alongside details of suggested further areas of focus in Appendix 3 which had also been incorporated into Agenda Item 9, Review of the Work of the Environment Select Committee.

It was highlighted that the Task Group had diverted a considerable amount of work away from the Environment Select Committee and it was felt that value was added by specifically focussing on issues of climate change and supporting Wiltshire Council in developing its thinking and approaches to climate change for the next council. However, it emphasised that a lot of work was still needed in order for the Council to meet its carbon targets by 2030. As such, Cllr Wright

strongly recommended the continuation of the Task Group, particularly when considering ongoing scrutiny of the Climate Strategy and delivery plans.

In response, Members echoed the thanks given by Cllr Wright and highlighted the quality of work produced by the Task Group and the positive working relationship of all Task Group Members and other stakeholders which led to a combined vision and the production of useful information to be implemented across the Council.

Following which, it was then:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- a) Noted the recent activity of the Climate Emergency Task Group and its response to the Local Transport Plan (LTP4) consultation as in Appendix 1 of the agenda.**
- b) Noted the activity of the Climate Emergency Task Group (2021-2025) as in Appendix 2 of the agenda.**
- c) Approved the recommendations made to improve the working of the Task Group regarding:**
  - **Recruitment of Task Group Members**
  - **Engagement with Cabinet Members and officers**
  - **Prioritisation of its workload**
  - **Time limited Task Groups and rapid scrutiny**
  - **Stakeholder relationship planning**
- d) Approved the Climate Emergency Task Group's suggested Forward Work Plan as in Appendix 3 of the agenda.**

**22     Review of the Work of the Environment Select Committee**

Councillor Jerry Kunkler, Chairman of the Environment Select Committee, introduced the report which highlighted key aspects of the work that the Committee had undertaken during the 2021-2025 Council and recommended topics as legacy items to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee for inclusion in a new Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme after the local elections in May 2025.

Attention was drawn to Appendix 1 which set out the key activities and achievements and demonstrated the Committee's contributions to decision making, policy development, and good governance of Wiltshire Council. Appendix 2 was then highlighted which listed the activities and reviews which the Committee considered important to include as ongoing pieces of work. It was noted that every effort had been made to bring reviews to a conclusion in

time for the end of the current Council, but some items remained ongoing due to the significance or long-term nature of the topic.

Finally, reference was made to Paragraphs 7 to 12 of the report, which detailed learnings and suggested improvements that could be made to the Committee during the next Council session.

During the discussion, points included:

- Members highlighted the recently implemented feedback sessions available at the end of each meeting with the actions being taken from these leading to more efficient meetings and scrutiny by limiting the length of officer presentations and reports to allow for longer discussions on each agenda item.
- Highways maintenance was raised and the importance of rigorous scrutiny in the area was emphasised, with Members suggesting further scrutiny was needed in future to ensure the Council's legal obligations to residents were being met. Furthermore, it was suggested that future Committee Members consider factors such as spending per mile/kilometre by area and road class and how this compares with previous years, the reasons behind delays to major projects, and claims against the Council arising from road conditions.

Following which, it was then:

**Resolved:**

**The Committee:**

- a) **Approved Appendix 1 as a list of the Environment Select Committee's key activities and achievements during 2021-2025.**
- b) **Approved Appendix 2 to recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee topics requiring further work in the new Council, including reasons.**
- c) **Approved the recommendations made to improve the working of the Environment Select Committee regarding:**
  - **Earlier engagement regarding reports**
  - **Prioritisation of its workload**
  - **Members' questions**
  - **Task Groups and rapid scrutiny**
  - **Briefings and site visits**
  - **Public engagement**
- d) **Noted the next steps as per Paragraph 13 of the report.**

*Councillor Richard Budden requested that his vote against the motion be recorded.*



23 **Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items.

24 **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 10 June 2025.

(Duration of meeting: 2.10 - 3.40 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Ellen Ghey - Democratic Services  
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