

LDS/25/16

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee
27 March 2025

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee – 4 Year Overview

Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

1) Preface

It gives us great pleasure to present this end-of-term report which provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services (CIRS) Scrutiny Committee over the last four years and hope it provides some help to the new Committee in considering their work programme for the coming municipal year.

The 2021-2025 Council terms began in the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of which has been significant and the Council and partners had to respond accordingly. The Committee maintained a strong focus on the response to, and impact of, the Covid pandemic. Each meeting of the Committee, until March 2023 inclusive, received an update report from the Director of Public Health and Chief Executive.

The report shows that the CIRS Scrutiny Committee has covered a range of topics during the 2021-2025 term, in line with its terms of reference.

These last four years have seen the Council face significant challenges and opportunities. This council term draws to a close and we remain mindful of the challenges and opportunities that require ongoing focus, including climate concerns, maintaining the Council's highways network as well as the Council's ongoing transformation and continued focus on delivering best value.

Let us conclude by thanking all the Members who have served on the Committee over the past four years, for their energy and commitment. We also thank the officers and partners for their time, engagement and commitment to the Overview and Scrutiny function. We remain grateful to all those who have contributed to the task groups and spotlight reviews, including representatives of partner organisations.



Councillor Alistair Dewhirst, Chair (2021-2024) and Councillor Frank Letch, Chair (2024-2025)

CIRS Services Scrutiny Committee Members

- Councillor Frank Letch (Chair)
- Councillor Colin Slade (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Alistair Dewhirst (Chair 2021-2024)
- Councillor Yvonne Atkinson
- Councillor John Berry
- Councillor Jerry Brook
- Councillor Richard Chesterton
- Councillor Paul Crabb
- Councillor Jacqi Hodgson
- Councillor Ray Radford
- Councillor Debo Sellis
- Councillor Margaret Squires
- Councillor Jeffrey Trail BEM
- Councillor Dan Thomas
- Councillor Jeffrey Wilton-Love
- Councillor Phil Bullivant (2023–2024 Vice-Chair)

2) Committee Meetings

A formal public Committee meeting, held 6 times per year, where Councillors hold decision makers to account through 'critical friend' questioning, seeking assurance and contributing to future direction. These meetings are livestreamed and open to the public.

As mentioned in the preface, the CIRS Scrutiny Committee maintained a strong overview of the impact and response to the Covid-19 pandemic this included further insights into equality and food insecurity, and bus service improvement plans.

Concentrating on the way the Council works, the Committee has maintained a strong focus on the Council's delivery of the actions arising from the Race Equality Audit, and subsequently the work on equality, diversity inclusion aimed at reducing inequalities and fostering good relations.

The Committee has evaluated the performance of Connecting Devon and Somerset, a key delivery project for the rollout of broadband across Devon to residents and businesses. Receiving annual reports on the expenditure of locality budgets has led to recommendations which has increased the transparency of Councillors spend in communities. Maintaining an overview of the performance of Devon Highways has been a priority for the Committee, receiving winter and summer dashboards; The Committee, at its budget Scrutiny Committee has continued to recommend additional investment in on highways maintenance including drainage and cyclic maintenance where additional funding is available.

In the four-year term, the Committee has continued to consider the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and Mid-Year Report and Outturn report. Recently, the Committee has taken the view that further overview should be established as the Council looks to borrow externally.

Recognising the overview role of the Scrutiny function, each November the Committee receives an 'In Year Briefing Report' of the following Council directorates related to the remit of the Scrutiny Committee:

- Corporate Services: Legal and Democratic Services, People and Culture and Transformation and Business Support,
- Communities
- Finance and Public Value,
- Performance and Partnership,
- Climate Change, Environment and Transport.

This provides an opportunity for the Committee to learn more about the performance other the directorates, issues arising and success stories from Cabinet Members and senior officers, and helps inform the Committee's work programme which is kept under review to meet changing priorities.

The Committee also had an opportunity to ask questions of the Acting Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent on Organisations priorities and Community Policing. The Committee welcomes partner organisations attendance at Scrutiny and encourages the next Committee to continue to engage with partners.

3) Task Groups and Spotlight Reviews

An evidence based investigation into services or issues to make recommendations for improvement. Councillors will collect primary evidence from witnesses in evidence gathering sessions and use of secondary evidence for triangulation. Spotlight reviews are shorter, more focused reviews.

Motorhomes Task Group

(click [here](#) for the full report)

In response to local concerns about improper use of facilities by motorhome and caravan users the East Devon Highways and Traffic Orders Committee asked the Committee to look into the policy on the provision for motorhome and caravan users.

The Task Group was directly responding to the view of residents. Members sought to propose recommendations that would provide consistent and clear information and approach. It was valuable to receive information from the district councils due to their first-hand experience of managing the concerns of residents.

Impact:

- Led to the development of a single webpage hosted by the County Council which signposts to district council information on the parking of motorhomes both on and off street across the County.
- Considered the definition of a motorhome/motorcaravan and provided a clear rationale for it.

Cost of Living Spotlight Review

(click [here](#) for the full report)

In their role as local Councillors and community champions, the Spotlight Review was established as Members expressed their concern for vulnerable residents with the sharp increase in the cost of living in 2022, as well as the impact on Council staff.

The Review sought to develop a strategic understanding of the challenges across Devon, evaluate whether there is scope to improve the offer and support to residents and community groups, and be assured that the Council was doing all it could to support staff.

Impact:

- Members were provided with a Cost of Living resource list and invited to subscribe to Devon Funding News, to support their role as community champions.
- Two full and comprehensive reports were received by the Committee providing assurance of the range of scheme available to support communities and staff.

Milestone Spotlight Review – 2021

(click [here](#) for the full report)

Following the Committee's work programme masterclass the Milestone Spotlight Review sought to consider the evidence and make recommendations to Cabinet on the future of the highways maintenance contract. Two options were considered: recommission the service, or extend the current contract.

The Committee received regular dashboard reports on highways, and were invited to inform the future delivery model of the highways maintenance service in 2024.

Impact:

- Through a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis the Committee were confident, supported by evidence, in recommending Cabinet extend the contract, which was agreed.

Moving Traffic Offences Spotlight Review

(click [here](#) for the full report)

Following an invitation from the Cabinet Member and Lead Officer for Scrutiny to provide a policy steer on whether adopting the enforcement of Moving Traffic Offences was the right option for the Council, Members set out to examine the benefits and disbenefits of applying to become the enforcement agency and make recommendations to Cabinet.

The review considered learning from Transport for London and Cardiff City Council, alongside views from the AA and RAC and identified a series of recommendations that took learning from other areas, including that of a 'common sense approach' to enforcement, and considered the impact of the cost of living on Devon's residents.

Impact:

- The Committee recommended that the Council apply to the Department for Transport for powers to enforce Moving Traffic Offences. New powers came into effect on 7 December 2024.

Modernisation of the Corporate Finance System Spotlight Review

(click [here](#) for the full report)

Established following the 2022 Scrutiny work programme masterclass, this spotlight review sought to evaluate the Future Finance Project's aims, plans and risks to determine if the approach aligned with the Council's corporate priorities and best value, with a focus on quality, governance and budget.

Through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis Members were confident in supporting the aims and vision of the project and recommended Cabinet provide the project with the staffing resources it needed to ensure delivery.

The Committee has maintained a Standing Overview Group on the Future Finance Project, with the latest meeting of the SOG held in January 2025.

Impact:

- This review strengthened Members understanding of the purpose of the Future Finance Project.
- It provided assurance of the aims, plans, risks, best value approach, and governance.
- Members have maintained oversight of the project including on quality, implementation, governance and budget reporting regularly to the Committee.

Monitoring: Where a task group or spotlight review's recommendations are accepted, a progress report is presented to the Committee after 6-12 months. This is important in monitoring and understanding implementation and the ongoing impact of the work of Scrutiny.

4) Standing Overview Groups

A Standing Overview Group meeting takes place outside of the formal Committee, where Members discuss and review key topics. These sessions help to both develop Members knowledge and understanding of complex issues/topics but also promote good

governance and accountability through Members critical friend challenge and recommendations.

Climate Change Standing Overview Group

The Committee has continued to have a Standing Overview Group (SOG) on Climate Change aligned to the Council's priority 'Respond to the climate emergency'. The SOG championed community involvement as a key priority in the development of new energy infrastructure to help Devon meet net-zero targets; reviewed Devon County Council's Environmental Policy and 2021 Carbon Footprint Report, Low Carbon Supply Chain Strategy, Socio-economic Impacts on Farming Sector and Carbon Impact of the Waste Management System, Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Climate Adaptation Strategy, and met with representative from Barclays who provide the Council's banking services having heard concerns about their approach to climate transition and financing of fossil fuels.

Future Finance Standing Overview Group

Following the Modernisation of the Corporate Finance System Spotlight Review the Committee has maintained a Standing Overview Group on the Future Finance Project and implementation of the Unit 4 system.

Following the purpose of the Spotlight Review, the SOG has continued to seek assurance on quality, governance and budget, reporting back to Committee regularly.

5) Visits

Site visits provide Members with the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge and understanding, getting a first-hand account from staff where things are working well, how supported they feel and where there may be issues of concern. There is huge value in Councillors being able to triangulate theory with practice and experience, and enhancing their constructive 'critical friend' challenge, and drive improvement in public services.

The number of site visits the Committee undertook was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic at the start of the term. Nonetheless, the Committee undertook two visits, to the:

- [Anaerobic Digestion Plant](#), learning about the benefits as an eco-friendly sustainable source of electric, gas and potent plant food.



- [Materials Laboratory](#): learning about the crucial role the laboratory has in the construction and maintenance of the highways asset.



6) Masterclasses

Masterclasses are open to all Members of the Council at the invitation of the Scrutiny Chair. Masterclasses raise Member awareness and increase knowledge through the sharing of information. These sessions have enabled trusting and candid relationships to develop with officers and generally take place ahead of an item at the Committee.

Members held the following sessions over the 4 years:

- Property Consultancy and Facilities Management Service Model
- Management Information
- Utilities Companies – co-ordination of work
- Trading standard including farming standards
- Active Travel
- Buses
- Resettlement and Migration
- Serious Violence Duty
- Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Future Delivery Model of Highways Maintenance Service I and II
- Devon's Protected Landscapes

The Committee also held annual work programming sessions to review their priorities for focus over the 12 months ahead.

7) Conclusion

The Committee appreciate the culture Cabinet and officers of the County Council have established with the Scrutiny function; recognising Scrutiny as key to good governance and in turn good outcomes for local people. The Scrutiny challenge is welcomed by the County Council, giving those Members without a portfolio an important role in holding the decision makers to account and making a difference to communities. Better Scrutiny leads to more effective decision-making, reduced risk and ultimately, improved outcomes.

8) Strategic Plan

The alignment of all Scrutiny activity with the Strategic Plan is detailed on the Scrutiny work programme. The issues raised in the report and the benefit of developing Member knowledge, and the 'critical friend' challenge of Scrutiny contribute to the Council achieving its strategic plan.

Improving Member knowledge on key issues contributes to the Council's commitment to being a trusted, inclusive and innovative Council. It ensures good decision making and that the Council listens and learns.

9) Financial Considerations

There are no specific financial considerations in this report.

10) Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations in this report.

11) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)

There are no specific environmental impact considerations in this report.

12) Equality Considerations

There are no specific equality considerations in this report.

13) Risk Management Considerations

The activity of Scrutiny Members contributes to the mitigations for:

- Ineffective Member Scrutiny defined as: 'Due to ineffective scrutiny, the level and quality of service management may drop, leading to financial mismanagement or harm to staff and/or citizens and reputational damage e.g. Grenfell.
- Member effectiveness defined as: 'Inadequate member effectiveness due to a lack of training, support and knowledge leads to a lack of challenge to corporate officers and/or poor decision making, resulting in a negative effect on the County's citizens (poor value for money, poor service delivery, harm, etc).

Name

Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Maria Price

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Organisational Development, Workforce & Digital Transformation,
Councillor Andrew Saywell.

Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers

Background Paper

Date

File Reference

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