

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Review 2024 -2025

Chair's Review

2024/25 is the final year of the 2021-2025 Council. Each Scrutiny Committee has written a 4 year overview report focused on both the work and the impact they have had:

- [Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Service \(CIRS\) Scrutiny](#)
- [Children's Scrutiny](#)
- [Health and Adults Scrutiny](#)

As Chairs, we hope the new Committees will find these informative as they develop their work programmes.

Focusing on the work of Scrutiny over the past year, CIRS had a significant focus on the future delivery of the highways maintenance service; holding two masterclasses, officers heard key concerns and recorded key attributes for Members and residents. The Climate Change Standing Overview Group met with Barclays, the Council's banking provider on their policies regarding climate transition and financing of fossil fuels. The Committee also focused on the Council's implementation of the new finance system, specifically assurance on budget, timelines, and objectives on the implementation.

Children's Scrutiny continued its focus on monitoring the improvements of the Children's Social Care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities services at its Committee meetings. The Fostering Task Group highlighted how the Council can improve the experiences of Foster Carers in Devon and the Budget Monitoring Standing Overview Group helped improved Member's knowledge and understanding of the Budget.

Health and Adult Care Scrutiny has continued to respond to the concerns of local people holding a Task Group review of End of Life Care, as well as using the Standing Overview Group to review Integrated Adult Social Care (IASC) Customer Feedback, Quality Accounts and the draft Dementia Strategy. The Committee has further focussed on services for unpaid carers; transitions; safeguarding adults, IASC finance and performance. Members have also continued to monitor the 'One Devon' Integrated Care Board budget deficit.

Looking to the future the Council faces several opportunities and challenges, including balancing its budget while delivering services and transformation for the residents of Devon. The importance of working with partners to deliver on these matters is an important area the next committees will want to consider. The Government has set out a series of reforms and ambitions for local government that the new committees will also need to keep abreast of whilst bringing the voice of residents to the forefront of policy and decision-making.

As this is the final year of the Council it presents an opportunity to once again reiterate our thanks to the witnesses, members of the public, officers and Cabinet Members who have engaged with Scrutiny over the past four years. Scrutiny works well when viewed positively with an opportunity to influence change, while bringing to the fore, the voice of residents. Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs express their continued thanks to all Scrutiny Committee Members across the four year term, the dedicated Scrutiny Team and the Special Advisors.

Councillor Frank Letch MBE

Chair of the Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services (CIRS) Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Sara Randall Johnson

Chair of the Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Tracy Adams

Chair of the Children's Scrutiny Committee

Highlights



In person Committee Meetings

- 19 Public meetings, broadcast live
- 92 Substantive item reports
- 0 Call-ins
- 2 Representations from the public

Task Groups / Spotlight Reviews

- 2 Reports published
- 48 Witnesses

Masterclasses and Standing Overview Groups (SOG)

- 14 SOG Meetings
- 10 Masterclasses
- 9 Visits completed



How has Scrutiny listened and learned?

CIRS Scrutiny Committee Members visited the Materials Laboratory to understand its role in the construction and maintenance of the highways assets. Members gained a greater understanding of the work of Devon's Materials Laboratory and the crucial role it plays in the construction and maintenance of the highway asset. The report can be found here: [Materials Laboratory Visit Report](#)



Councillors Margaret Squires (left) and Frank Letch MBE (right) at the Materials Laboratory.


The [End of Life Care Task Group](#) received evidence from a range of groups and experts including from Integrated Adult Social Care, the NHS and Healthwatch. Councillors also listened to the views and first-hand experiences of professionals who support and care for those at the end of their lives such as GPs, care homes and hospices. Members identified key area to inform the end of life care commissioning plan.


Health and Adult Care Scrutiny Members undertook a visit to Franklyn Hospital, run by Devon Partnership Trust (DPT) - a 30 bed hospital for older people with dementia and a range of mental health needs providing assessment and treatment as well for those with depression, anxiety and psychosis. The report can be found here: [DPT Visits Report](#)


Councillors attending the Mockingbird Celebration Event with staff from the Fostering Service and Foster Carers.





The [Fostering Task Group](#) in 2024 heard from 26 witnesses, including staff, Foster Carers, Independent Fostering Agencies and other Local Authorities.


 Cabinet accepted or partially accepted 11 of the Fostering Task Group's recommendations, relating to Devon's offer to Foster Carers, Mockingbird, re-instating an annual celebration event, developing a Foster Carer portal system, improvements to the payments system, stopping the use of Egress, and promoting best practice within the Fostering Team. Foster Carers told the Fostering Task Group that their work felt like Members were genuinely engaging with Foster Carers in a substantial way and they felt listened to.

 CIRS undertook two masterclasses on the Future Delivery Model for Highways maintenance service which considered the key attributes for a new service, following the principle of 'amplifying the voice and concerns of the public'. The second session focused on the business case for the delivery model options; this work helped inform the Council concerns and areas of focus moving forwards

 Focused on providing improvements, the CIRS committee recommended a three tier system be considered for street lighting across Devon that considered the separate needs of city, market town and rural villages, recognising the importance of dark skies, the benefits to wildlife and environment.


 Health and Adult Care Scrutiny met with officers from DPT as well as the Council's Integrated Adult Social Care and Public Health to review the emerging Devon Dementia Strategy. Acting as a critical friend, Members identified a series of areas to strengthen the strategy and crucially its implementation.


 In the budget process, an amendment that reflected the Scrutiny recommendation to increase the locality budget from the proposed reduction to £5,000 in 2025/26 to the 2024/25 level of £8,000, was carried. The focus of the fund is small grants for projects that benefit local communities in Devon.


 Children's Scrutiny hosted the Regional Adoption Agency Joint Scrutiny Group for 2025/26, reviewing the terms of reference of the group and meeting twice to discuss the performance of the Adopt South West (ASW) service. This work ensured the scrutiny arrangements are now included and strengthened in the Inter-Agency Agreement of ASW.





Scrutiny contributions to strategic priorities


-  **Tackle poverty and inequality**
 - The CIRS Committee received a further report on the five recommendations arising from the cost of living spotlight review. The update sets out the offer and support to residents, community groups and staff.
 - January 2025 budget scrutiny recognised the importance of auto-enrolment for free school meals.
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-  **Help communities to be safe, connected and resilient**
 - The CIRS Committee have received reports on broadband coverage across Devon and understood mitigations to reduced delivery. The CIRS Committee also received reports on the Countywide Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure places, and Bus Service Improvement Plans.
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-  **Be ambitious for children and young people**
 - The Children's Scrutiny Committee's Committee meetings have been focused on ensuring oversight and improvements to Children's Social Care and SEND services. Members also invited partners, such as NHS Devon and School Leaders, to these meetings to provide critical friend challenge across all parts of the system
 - The Fostering Task Group put forward recommendations to improve the experience of Foster Carers.

-  **Support sustainable economic recovery**
 - CIRS Scrutiny has continued to have oversight of Treasury Management throughout the year.
 - The Children's Scrutiny Budget Monitoring Standing Overview Group met 7 times over the course of the year to improve Member knowledge of the budget process, focus on areas of pressure and the SEND Safety Valve programme.
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-  **Respond to the climate emergency**
 - The CIRS Committee have heard concerns about Barclays approach to climate transition and financing of fossil fuels. To understand Barclays approach in greater detail, the Committee held a Standing Overview Group on 4th October 2024, where officers from Barclays provided an overview of their approach to climate transition, and answered Member questions.
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-  **Improve health and wellbeing**
 - Health & Adult Care Scrutiny has continued to champion health improvement and prevention in their communities. Members undertook Local Government Association's Prevention Matters training which centred on the opportunity to shift the focus from treating sickness to actively promoting health and wellbeing. This session was followed by a comprehensive report on the Council's approach to prevention and the role of Members