

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024 – 2025 and covering 2023-24

This report covers the two municipal years from May 2023 – May 2025

Chair's Forward

"We have had two successful years of Overview & Scrutiny and with more focused positive engagement by Members, pulling together, we can look forward to continuing to grow and deliver more improvements to efficiency and effectiveness for our Council while safeguarding its financial security, and drive improvement in public services for the community.

Looking through our specific achievements covering the past two years of council it is worth expanding on how diverse the OS remit is, and the changes made.

The last two years have seen great strides in the delivery of Overview and Scrutiny (OS) with the support of a scrutiny officer and a strongly committed cross-party group of councillors giving many hours to understand complex information, to raise questions, offer suggestions and debate options for the betterment of our council. It is clear that the extent of this work carried out by working groups and Chairs is known only to those contributing directly. Therefore, this year we have ensured that all members of the OS Committee play their role in a working group which remains open to all councillors to participate. Any councillor feeling frustrated that they are not fully informed are invited to join and immerse themselves in these working groups. As Chair I have invested over 1000 hours this past year which also reflects the time others have met with me in various groups.

At the online CFGS southwest scrutiny meetings it was evident that our timings of budget scrutiny recommendations, being made in September 24 for the budget year 2025/26 were considered good practise by CFGS, and that our methods and recommendations were effective being approved by both the Leader, Executive and Full Council. Teignbridge was ahead of many other districts including unitaries who have found it difficult to impact on budget, leaving it as late as January 2025 to review the 2025/26 budgets. Thanks go to the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) Review Group for delivering this. This group has enabled the Council to follow Best Practice looking at finance from an issue-based perspective and to do this all year round.

OS, the Executive and key partners continue to work together to try to make a positive difference for the residents of Teignbridge.

OS has delivered, through thorough evidenced scrutiny and with the sole aim of improving our Council:

- several Call-ins, each of which carries costs to this council and therefore warrants early conversations with the Executive and or Scrutiny Chair to ensure that there is a strong need to pursue such a route. A summary of the call-ins can be found later in this report.

- *Proposed changes to support social values while also addressing our financial challenges as faced throughout the country, e.g. continuing to support Teignbridge CVS and rent subsidies to the voluntary sector.*
- *We have benefitted from professional independent advice.*
- *A comprehensive and extended training programme delivered by LGA and CFGS.*

As Chair I have been part of a Pilot development programme where this learning from CFGS and other OS and Audit Chairs across the country has been endorsed by the Managing Director and Monitoring Officer of Teignbridge District Council so enhancing our systems further. Additionally, attending the CFGS Conference in March 2025 brought additional education from real experiences including Bankrupt Councils, Combined Authorities and Unitary Councils so that we may benefit from their experiences and understand the challenges of what is to come in the next few years. This information has been reported back to our Managing Director bringing additional insight from scrutiny professionals.

Prior to the current administrative council, a decision was made to merge the two committees into one, for the year 2024-2025. Thanks go to Cllrs Palethorpe, Parrott and Buscombe for their roles in chairing and vice-chairing O&S in 2023-24, to Cllrs John Parrott and John Radford as Vice Chairs in 24-25, all Councillors who have contributed particularly Cllr Thorne, Chair of Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) an extensive review group, which is still ongoing, and all those who have participated in these groups as detailed below in this report.

My continued thanks to all OS Committee and other Members, officers, representatives of partner authorities and outside organisations, witnesses and members of the public who have engaged with OS, particularly the Managing Director, Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer. Their contribution towards the work of OS is essential and much appreciated as is that of Democratic Services”

Cllr Sanders

Chair OS 2024/25 (and 2023/24)

1 The Operation of Overview and Scrutiny

2023-2024

There were two Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Committees during 2023/24: OS1 and OS2 meeting alternate months.

In person Committee meetings – 6 OS1 and 5 OS2 public meetings broadcast live
A Peer Review undertaken in January 2024 directed a review of the Council's Constitution.

2024-2025

There were 7 in person public committee meetings broadcast live.

One OS Committee of 20 members was reformed in May 2024 having had two OS Committees of 13 from 2022. The OS Committee has since been reduced to 13 members to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee as approved by Council on 25 February 2025 and as advised by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGs) as best practise.

There have been many challenges to OS with the Democratic Services Team being one member less with the absence of the Democratic Services Team Leader for most of 2024-25 impacting on the workloads of other staff, particularly scrutiny. We look forward to our new and experienced Team Leader joining us in June 2025.

2 Quarterly Council Strategy Performance Reports

From the data presented to us we have considered further information for our forward plan but it remains a generally retrospective format where little impact can be made by OS, while highlighting any serious concerns we may choose to add to the work program. Additional system change is required for this to be of deeper use to bring performance information to OS at an earlier time, with the impact of enabling them to make more timely and informed recommendations on officer actions to improve performance.

3 Pre-scrutiny briefings and Work Planning

The implementation of the CFGs model of scrutiny has, through pre-scrutiny, led to better member engagement and focussed debate at official public OS Committee meetings. The informal forum of pre scrutiny briefings enables the OS Committee to understand issues coming forward proposed for consideration by Senior Leadership Team and in the Executive Forward Plan.

The impact of pre-scrutiny has been positive for both officers and Cllrs and well received. Members have praised this system where we have discussions on specific

issues such as housing, and risk training with Devon Audit Practice when we were shown the complexities of the Risk Register. All Members are invited to attend these pre-scrutiny meetings.

Pre-scrutiny briefings provide an educating forum and enables free discussion prior to a formal OS meeting where recommendations can then be made by better informed Committee members with good scrutiny questioning, to enable the 'critical friend' challenge of the Executive. Pre-scrutiny briefings were agreed by the OS Committee in September 2024 and were highlighted at the CFGS Conference as a much-desired quality of Members by professional scrutiny officers throughout the country. It is a normal system to engage members in a specific key item akin to a spotlight focus affording greater depth and is encouraged by CFGS.

4 OS Training

A comprehensive programme of Councillor Training has been delivered.

All Councillors were invited to attend the training for 2023.

Attendance was as indicated below:

8 June 2023 - CFGS Scrutiny effective work programmes (attended by 16 Cllrs)

14 June 2023 - CFGS the essentials of effective scrutiny including Gateway Questions to interrogate data and evidence. (attended by 7 Cllrs)

14 Sept 2023 - CFGS Scrutiny effective work programmes (attended by 10 Cllrs)

24 Oct 2023 - CFGS Finance, Budget and Scrutiny (attended by 9 Cllrs)

Two CFGS facilitated overview and scrutiny training workshops were held in July 2024: *scrutiny effective work programmes, and the essentials of effective scrutiny.*

In addition, Cllr Sanders as Chair: took part in the Pilot Development Programme with CFGS; undertook online scrutiny training such as Financial Scrutiny, & Chairing & Leading; and attended the CFGS Annual Conference 'Bold Governance & Courageous Scrutiny.'

At the Council meeting in February 2025, it was resolved that OS training becomes mandatory for all OS committee members from 2025/26. A 12-month rolling programme is being arranged for 2025/26 and future years to be delivered by the CFGS.

Dates are as follows for 2025.

- Scrutiny Essentials – 29th May 2025
- Scrutiny Questioning – 10th July 2025
- Scrutiny Budget Monitoring – 17th November 2025

5 Task and Finish (T&F) Groups and Review Groups

All working groups are cross party in membership and other forms of enquiry are created by the OS Committee to consider issues in greater detail. They are subject to staff resources and full consideration of the best method of scrutiny. All scrutiny groups have been supported by a minimum of one member of the senior leadership team and relevant service officers

It has been a key focus that these are chaired by any member other than the majority party to ensure transparency

Car parking Task and Finish Group

The group had seven meetings. Membership: Cllrs Palethorpe, P Parker, Parrot, Peart and J Taylor.

The main purpose of the group was to develop a new Car Parks plan for Council run car parks and parking spaces, to make the car parks service and processes as transparent as possible. The group's work included comparisons across districts as well as vehicle type which enabled officers to re-evaluate imbalances and variances for example where coaches accessed cheaper parking than cars.

9 April 2024 OS1 Committee –The Executive approved adoption of the Operational Car-Parking Plan as recommended by the task and finish group of the OS Committee.

The Group identified additional matters which needed further review including :-

- Engagement with users, businesses and Parish/Town Councils regarding the use of car parks
- Promotion of Car parks with better signage
- Fees and Charges
- Maintenance and enhancement of Car Parks
- Improved safety measures such as CCTV and lighting
- Overnight Motor Homes charging policy
- Parking enforcement policy
- Climate change and energy efficiency measures including provision for charging electric vehicles.

Subject to the necessary resources being available it is hoped to reconvene the Car Parking Task and Finish Group to consider these issues during 2025.

Rent subsidy/Community Interest Company (CIC)

The group had 2 meetings. Membership: Cllrs Bullivant, Buscombe, Hall, C Parker and Sanders.

The group was set up to review TDC policy and implementation reference Community (CIC) Assets Rents/Charges Subsidy by: reviewing and considering the policy and implementation of rent subsidies with reference to CIC assets; providing a report and make recommendations for consideration by the Executive on Rent Subsidy Policy.

12 December 2023 OS2 Committee – The task and finish group recommended to OS Committee that: the Rent Subsidy for TDC owned Commercial Property (Conditions of Funding) Policy updated in November 2023 for implementation from April 2024 be approved; and the Buckland Centre (as part of the Newton Abbot CIC) can reapply under the terms of the updated policy for further rent subsidy, subject to a new lease being in place.

The Executive 2 April 2024 recommended to Full Council the above and that those voluntary sector organisations that were in receipt of a rent subsidy as of 31st March 2024, be permitted to apply for a further 12 month period of subsidy pending the outcome of the asset review and any further amendment to the rent subsidy policy. This was ratified by Council 23 April 2024 and fed into the 2024/25 budget.

All groups ceased in November 2024 due to the committee decision to re-prioritise and also due to staff resource issues but should resume during June 2025 when the new democratic services team leader commences and work currently absorbed can be redistributed in the team. The capital programme, planning and leisure are currently our next priorities. Membership for these have already been agreed.

- Leisure Task and Finish Group

This group has been delayed due to a change in the Committee's priorities and dealing with the Notice of Motion (NOM) regarding a review of the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy since November 2024. The group will meet in 2025/26 in accordance with the Committee's priorities. Membership includes Cllrs Bullivant, Dawson, Hall, Rogers, Rollason, Sanders, Steemson and Thorne.

- Planning Task and Finish Group

The group was also delayed as a result of the Council's priorities change and dealing with the NOM as above and will meet in 2025/26 in accordance with the Committee's priorities. Membership includes Cllrs Bullivant, Hall, Nuttall, C Parker, Sanders, Steemson, Thorne.

- Medium Financial Plan T&F group - OS Sept 24

This cross-party group was set up in September 2023 to conduct an overview of 2024/25 Budget and Review & Scrutinise 2025/26 Medium Term Financial Strategy

and Teignbridge Financial Plan, and address the projected shortfall in the medium term in order to avoid Bankruptcy while maintaining service provision for our residents. Its work impacted on the budget process by enabling looking at finance from an issue based perspective and to do this all year round.

The group membership includes Cllr Phil Bullivant, Cllr Sally Morgan, Cllr Charles Nuttall, Cllr John Radford, Cllr Suzanne Sanders, Cllr Robert Steemson, Cllr Bill Thorne (Chair), Cllr Hall. Cllrs Parrott, Buscombe, Williams and Palethorpe, P Parker were also members of the group and contributed to the group's earlier work. (some of whom subsequently left when joining the Executive)

The group had seven meetings in 2024/25 resulting in successful recommendations to the Executive for the 2025/26 and ongoing budgets including: amendment to the Council Tax Support Policy to remove the 100% Council Tax exemption (1 month period) for empty, unfurnished properties; amendments to the Discretionary Non-Domestic (Business) Rate Relief Policy; changes to car parking fees; and Council tax increases at the maximum allowed of 2.99% for 2025/26 amounting to projected savings of £70K, and Council tax increases at the maximum allowed.

Special thanks to the Chair of the group Cllr Thorne for his extended time and effort serving on this group.

The group will continue its work into 2025/26 looking initially at the Capital Programme

Scrutiny of the Council budget

In addition, the initial and final Financial Plan proposals 2025/26 – 2027/28 were also scrutinised by the OS Committee. OS requested: service managers consider and suggest potential areas for the MTFP review group to look at to save money; increases in fees and charges we requested where possible of up to 10% rather than the outlined 5%, not a flat rate but applied to each element as officers reviewed increase options. The outcome was an increase in receipts projected.

The Committee recommended proposals taking on board the recommendations from the MTFP review group.

- Assets and Estate Management Strategy Task and Finish Group

6 February 2024 –OS agreed this group be formed and meet in accordance with the Committee's priorities. Membership includes: Cllrs Bullivant, Clarence, Foden, Hall, C Parker, P Parker, Radford, Sanders, Steemson, Swain, Thorne. The work of this group is linked to the compilation of a comprehensive Asset Portfolio by Officers and as such this T&F group will recommence within the MTFP group in June 2025. The disposal of Old Forde House was one outcome agreed during 2024/25.

- Constitution Review Group (Following on from Peer Review recommendations)

The review group facilitated by the CFGS commenced in October 2024, focusing on and reviewing particular issues of the Council's Constitution.

The group membership includes: Cllrs Bullivant, Clarence, Daws, Dawson, Palethorpe, Sanders, Steemson, J Taylor and Thorne, and there has been nine x 2 hour meetings of the group to the end April 2025.

The group will continue to meet into 2025/26. A report of recommended changes to the Constitution should be presented to Annual Council on 20 May 2025.

6 Call-in of Decisions

20 June 2023 OS1 Committee - Call-in of the Executive decision regarding the purchase of a replacement baler at the Council's recycling bulking station (April 2023). Following a full debate and challenge of the decision it was resolved that the decision be implemented in accordance with the Executive Member's original decision.

12 December 2023 OS2 Committee – Call-in of Executive Minute 77 October 2023 on the future high street fund (FHSF) for improvements to Newton Abbot town centre. OS2 Committee resolved that the call-in be referred to Full Council as it was considered a matter of significant importance for the whole district.

Full Council authorised delegated powers to the Leader and Executive Members to fulfil their roles as is necessary to implement the approved redevelopment of the Market Hall to which the approved funding scheme relates

As a result of the call-in, officers were able to review and present alternative options producing a change to the FHSF offer which were then decided by Full Council. All funding was secured and spent to the time frame of March 2025 for the benefit of Newton Abbot town.

7 Notices of Motion (NOM)

June 2024 meeting outcomes:

- a. Loss of Section 106 contributions: Recommendations approved by Full Council 30 July 2024 that: the current planning systems and procedures for dealing with both minor amendments to planning applications, and Section 106 agreements continue: and a recap on the above be provided in the next all Councillors planning training.
- b. Green improvements in conservation areas: Referred to the Planning Task and Finish Group identified on the Committee's forward plan's priority list.

November 2024

Review of Equality and Diversity Policy - referred from Full Council 29 October 2024.

Counsel advice has been received and the matter is to be considered at OS 13 May 2025, having already been able to be better informed regarding the complex nature of the law through pre-scrutiny.

This issue was given priority as a topic over all other scrutiny.

8 Scrutiny of Partners and Holding them to Account

26 September 2023 – Teign Housing - Jo Reece the Chief Executive presented an update

12 December 2023 - Voluntary sector Funding Annual Review on the funding the Council provided to the voluntary and community sector and the outcomes this provides for residents in the District.

Representatives of the voluntary sector in attendance:

- Teignbridge Community and Voluntary Service: Sue Wroe, Chief Executive
- East Teignbridge Ring and Ride: Sally Preston, Valerie Jeffery

It was recommended to the Executive that the current direct funding to the groups listed in the agenda report continue to the same level for 2024/25 subject to budget provision being available, ~~and other issues were recommended to Executive.~~ The Executive agreed the OS recommendations.

A task and finish group was also set up to review voluntary sector funding for future years.

South West Water - July 2024

To scrutinise SWW's emerging Management Plan and Storm Action Plan.

In attendance: Representatives of SWW including Head of External Liaison and Devon County Council: Head of Flood Risk and Coastal Management. The EA were unable to attend at this time.

Focus: Wastewater treatment and networks, storm overflows and SWW's associated action plans. (River quality would need to be addressed by the Environment Agency)

SWW will continue to feature on our work-programme, it impacting on our residents, our future residents and our economy.

All members were then invited by SWW to visit and look around the CREWW centre in Exeter. Four attended and were given a thorough tour of the facilities, received a

presentation of the projects aims and discussed for example the impact of microplastics.

Connecting Devon and Somerset UKBD

January 2024 - Connecting Devon and Somerset rural broadband programme (CDS) update UKBD. In attendance: Devon County Council: Matt Barrow, CDS Project Officer

July 2024 - In attendance: Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS): Stakeholder Engagement Officer and Building Digital UK: Local Delivery Lead

Focus: Improvements in digital connectivity across Teignbridge – particularly rural areas

We are expecting UKBD to revisit OS on the June 2025 agenda as we continue to seek ways to improve services in our rural areas.

The South Devon and Dartmoor Community Safety Partnership was scrutinised through the presentation of the annual review 26 March 2024. The next annual review will be considered by Committee in June 2025.

Strata - IT provision for the Council

The Strata Business Plan was scrutinised by Committee in September 2024 before consideration by Council in October 2025.

Looking forward we have

PCC update - June 2025

9 Outside Organisations updates by the Council's appointed Councillor representatives

Teignbridge Councillors sit on numerous external bodies and are able to report back to us how they are promoting the Council's priorities, policies and strategies, and advising on partnership discussions which are open and in the public domain.

December 2023 OS agreed that the work the Council's partners and voluntary organisations be reviewed through the Council's appointed representatives on these group reporting to OS meetings.

The appointed Cllr representatives reported to the O&S Committee throughout the year on a rolling annual schedule.

10 Site visits

Site visits form a discrete part of O&S research and have been undertaken by the Chair Cllr Sanders to the Buckland centre in December 2023 whereby I was given a tour of the building and then invited a representative to come to speak with the working group later that week. This informed the rent subsidy/Community Interest Company (CIC) task and finish group recommendations

Together with the then OS Vice Chair Cllr Parrott, Bradley lane, Newton Abbot was visited to view the site due to come under discussion to understand its location and traffic passing through to inform our proposed asset scrutiny.

Attending CREWW at Exeter University, greater knowledge was gleaned regarding protecting the water supply network, predicting and preventing storm overflow and pollution, and maintaining a sustainable water supply and demand balance.

As Chair Cllr Sanders walked the Dawlish sea wall with Cllr Dawson the Chair of the Council following the death of a young person to view first hand and consider the safety of this pedestrian wall. At that time there were outstanding enquiries with the Railway Network.

Future site visits linked to housing have been proposed such as that regarding modular builds in Mid Devon who are also scrutinising the value for money and viability which they may share in due course.

11 Looking ahead 2025-26

Into the third year of this Council the OS Forward plan has been built for the coming months but allows a degree of flexibility and is a rolling live programme.

The economy service has been invited to report to us and this is expected in June, on its achievements. The service is looking into a local business representative to present to OS on how the Council might be able to support the local economy further and so bring greater impact to our region.

Additionally, as mentioned at a previous meeting, following a member of the public raising an issue of school transport safety we contacted both the school and bus company to enquire regarding their protocols and found they would be interested in a review involving more interested parties and partners to present to OS at a future time if the committee decides it is a priority.

These are two new matters for the new fiscal year of OS to consider.

Policy and Strategy Reviews

As Chair Cllr Sanders has input into the Procurement Strategy at pre-policy stage – another CFGS target the Council has delivered very recently.

The Car Park Policy was incomplete when the current council term began in May 2023 and that was re-visited and revised.

Part of the remit is to ensure that policies are up to date and as accurate as is possible to enable officers to deliver their work in line with them.

Other issues for consideration to keep O&S striving for the best and where Officer resources allow

A scrutiny newsletter to keep councillors up to date on OS work and will aim to let all members know about scrutiny impact.

Greater engagement of the public in OS through the website and as witnesses to task and finish groups

Regular contact with Audit which will enhance scrutiny further.

Monitoring the delivery of actions from task and finish groups and the rolling list to ensure nothing is omitted.

Reviews of what has been delivered by OS and what we can learn to improve scrutiny further.

Annual feedback officers as to what OS has delivered and if it has made them think differently and how informed and engaged members feel.

The Chair to liaise with other OS Chairs across Devon especially with the shaping of a Unitary Council. This networking would ensure that districts do not duplicate their work, for example homelessness scrutiny covered by a neighbouring district can inform our scrutiny. Similarly, Teignbridge's invitation to Mid Devon District Council to view modular builds which are currently being assessed by their OS regarding value to money means the Council would not need to repeat but to gain through sharing knowledge.

Cllr Sanders

Chair 2023-2025