

Annual Scrutiny Report 2025-26

(May 2026)



West Berkshire
C O U N C I L

CONTENTS

Foreword	2
1. Key Information About Overview and Scrutiny	4
1.1 Scrutiny's Role	4
1.2 Operation of Overview and Scrutiny in West Berkshire.....	4
1.3 Community Involvement	6
2. Scrutiny Work Programme	6
2.1 Complementing the Work of the Executive	6
2.2 Pre-Decision Scrutiny	6
2.3 Post-Decision Scrutiny	7
2.4 Scrutiny of Partners and Third Parties	7
2.5 Prioritisation.....	7
3. Summary of Activity for 2025/26	7
3.1 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee	7
3.2 Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.....	8
3.3 Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee	10
3.4 Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee	11
4. Scrutiny Highlights for 2025/26	11
Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.....	11
4.1 Statutory Co-opted Members	11
4.2 Young Person Co-opted Members	11
4.3 Ofsted Thematic Review.....	12
4.4 Report on Education Outcomes	13
Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee.....	14
4.5 Project Management Task and Finish Group	14
4.6 Budget Scrutiny	15
4.7 Transformation Programme	18
4.8 Local Government Reorganisation	19
4.9 Affordable Housing.....	20
4.10 Three weekly refuse waste collections.....	22
4.11 Procurement Governance	22
Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.....	23
4.12 Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task and Finish Group	23
4.13 Oral health and dentistry – Public Health and NHS Services.....	24
5 Call-In of Decisions	27

Foreword

This has been another busy year of scrutiny activity for the Council's scrutiny committees and their task and finish groups. In the following pages you will see a summary of this work.

Following a review of our scrutiny function, West Berkshire Council has moved to a three-committee structure from 2025/26, with a focus on Children and Young People, Health and Adult Social Care, and Resources and Place. This has supported an increased level of scrutiny activity and has allowed the members of each committee to develop a level of expertise in their subject matter.

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee has provided a much-needed focus in this area. Children's Social Care and the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) High Needs Block have been areas where the Council has experienced significant overspend, so it has been important to review these services to understand where the issues lie, the drivers of demand, and whether service improvements and controls on spending have been effective.

Schools and education have also been in the spotlight this year. The visit from Dame Kate Dethridge (DfE Regional Director) highlighted a number of areas of concern, particularly in relation to younger pupils achieving a good level of development, attainment of Key Stage 2 pupils not being good enough at too many of our schools (particularly disadvantaged pupils), and the effectiveness of our School Improvement Service. Her comments will be used to shape the Committee's work programme over the coming year.

There have been positives too, such as the 'Good' rating achieved following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, the 'Outstanding' Ofsted rating achieved by the Castle Gate Short-Break Service, the excellent work of the Youth Justice Team, and the development of a Best Start in Life Strategic Plan.

As well as successfully recruiting to three out of the four statutory co-opted member positions, we were delighted to welcome two young people as non-statutory co-opted members of the Committee. They have made an immediate impact, providing valuable insight and challenge, and bringing a fresh perspective to meetings. They also ran a training session for the other Committee Members on how to engage effectively with young people, prompting much reflection on how we can do things differently and better in future.

The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee has continued to play a key role in representing the views and experiences of residents, working closely with NHS partners, service providers and commissioners to ensure that local needs are reflected in service delivery and future planning. During the year, the Committee undertook evidence-based scrutiny of priority areas including oral health and dentistry, and All Age Complex and Continuing Care, bringing together clinical expertise, commissioning insight and public health perspectives to develop a shared understanding of complex system challenges.

Following expansion of its remit in May 2025, the Committee strengthened its role by incorporating Adult Social Care into its work, enabling a more joined-up approach to scrutiny across health and care services. This has supported improved partnership working and greater transparency in areas such as system performance, access to services and care pathways, ensuring that scrutiny provides constructive challenge while contributing to service improvement and better outcomes for residents.

A key aspect of the work of the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee has been the continued scrutiny of the Council's finances. This has included a review of the outturn for the 2024/25 financial year, monitoring the 2025/26 budget, and contributing to the formation of the budget for the 2026/27 financial year. The Committee has considered the financial pressures being felt by the Council and the actions being taken as a result, including the utilisation of Exceptional Financial Support received from the Government. The work undertaken as part of the Transformation Programme and how this contributes to the Council's financial position has also been explored. At the scrutiny meeting of 17 March, it was suggested that the committee consider the establishment of a task and finish group or sub-committee focused on budget making. The committee will consider this further during the 2026/27 municipal year'.

The proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire (Ridgeway) was reviewed prior to its submission to the Government. Scrutiny involvement will need to continue in order to determine what LGR (in whatever form it is ultimately agreed) will mean for West Berkshire and its residents.

The Committee has also scrutinised more specific areas of Council activity. This has included affordable housing provision across the district and the ongoing work, in collaboration with partner organisations, to improve this for residents. The impact of the move to three weekly black bin collections has also been a focus, with consideration given to the ongoing support available to residents and whether this can be enhanced, gaining an understanding of how this has influenced recycling rates and the cost benefits achieved from this change.

We would like to thank everyone who has played a part in the scrutiny process over the past 12 months including Members of the Scrutiny Committees and task and finish groups. The quality of scrutiny is only as good as the effort Members are prepared to devote to the task. We serve our residents by fulfilling our privileged role of challenging those with positions of power within the Council and ensuring their accountability. We must act independently and transparently, and be seen to do so by residents, if we are to maintain their trust in scrutiny.

Our thanks also to the officers who have made such an important contribution to the scrutiny process, including Gordon Oliver, Vicky Phoenix and Stephen Chard. We would also like to thank external guests who have attended meetings to give evidence and submit their organisations' roles in service provision to scrutiny.

Cllr Dominic Boeck
Children & Young People
Scrutiny Committee
Chairman

Cllr Martha Vickers
Health & Adult Social Care
Scrutiny Committee
Chairman

Cllr Carlyne Culver
Resources & Place
Scrutiny Committee
Chairman

1. Key Information About Overview and Scrutiny

1.1 Scrutiny's Role

- 1.1.1 The role of scrutiny is to improve the lives of residents through improved public services and ensuring that those public services are delivered economically, and efficiently, and are effective in meeting the needs of the local area.
- 1.1.2 Scrutiny committees have the power to look at any issue which affects the area or the area's residents. This gives them a unique legitimacy to examine cross-cutting issues in a way that no other individual or organisation can.
- 1.1.3 Key roles for scrutiny committees include:
 - Holding the Executive and other decision makers to account;
 - Policy development and review;
 - Scrutiny of external partners;
 - Performance management.
- 1.1.4 The principles of good scrutiny are:
 - To provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
 - To amplify the voice and concerns of the public;
 - To be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role;
 - To drive improvement in public services.

1.2 Operation of Overview and Scrutiny in West Berkshire

- 1.2.1 West Berkshire Council reviewed the structure of its scrutiny committees in May 2025, moving from two to three scrutiny committees. Collectively, these are responsible for reviewing the decisions, policies, strategies, services, and spend of West Berkshire Council and, in some cases, those of external organisations and partners.
- 1.2.2 Scrutiny reviews may be undertaken at a scrutiny committee meeting or delegated to a time-limited task and finish group where a more in-depth review is required, with findings reported back to the parent committee.
- 1.2.3 Scrutiny committees may make recommendations to the Council's Executive, or partner organisations, where it is felt that action needs to be taken in response to issues uncovered by scrutiny reviews.
- 1.2.4 **The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee** is responsible for scrutiny of all universal, targeted and specialist services that are provided for children and young people in West Berkshire, including those related to children's social care, child protection, education (including schools), special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), family support, and youth justice.
- 1.2.5 The committee is comprised of nine back-bench councillors, reflecting the political composition of the Council, as well as the following statutory co-opted members:
 - two parent governors (representing local authority maintained primary and secondary schools);
 - one Church of England representative; and

- one Roman Catholic diocesan representative.
- 1.2.6 In addition, two non-statutory co-opted members have been appointed to the Committee to represent the voices of young people in West Berkshire.
- 1.2.7 The committee has four scheduled meetings per year.
- 1.2.8 **The Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee** is responsible for scrutiny of services delivered by the Resources and Place Directorates, including those related to: planning, housing, economic development, waste management, environment delivery, parks, public rights of way, public protection, emergency planning, culture, sports and leisure, commissioning and procurement, customer engagement, transformation, financial and property, HR, legal, democratic services, electoral services, and communications. It also acts as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, undertaking scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership.
- 1.2.9 It comprises nine Members, reflecting the political composition of the local authority.
- 1.2.10 The committee has five scheduled meetings per year, including one dedicated to scrutiny of the budget (to which the chairmen of the other two scrutiny committees are invited). In 2025, it also held extraordinary meetings in November, February and May.
- 1.2.11 **The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee** is responsible for reviewing, the decisions, policies and services of West Berkshire Council that relate to public health and adult social care.
- 1.2.12 It also has statutory powers relating to the scrutiny of health services delivered by or on behalf of the NHS. It seeks assurance that the needs and experiences of local residents are considered as an integral part of the planning, development and operation of health services and that those services are safe and effective in meeting local needs. It has a legitimate role in: proactively seeking information about the performance of local health services and institutions; challenging the information provided to it by commissioners and health service providers; and testing this information by drawing on different sources of intelligence.
- 1.2.13 The committee responds to formal consultations on health matters. Health bodies are required to consult the committee about any proposals they have for a substantial development or variation in the provision of health services in their area.
- 1.2.14 In addition, the committee considers how well integration of health, public health and adult social care services is working.
- 1.2.15 The committee is comprised of nine back-bench councillors, reflecting the political composition of the Council.
- 1.2.16 The committee has four scheduled meetings per year.
- 1.2.17 **The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (BOB JHOSC)** comprises membership drawn from drawn from Buckinghamshire Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council, with numbers reflecting the

population of each local authority, as well as the political composition for each local authority. West Berkshire is allocated two positions on the BOB JHOSC. The BOB JHOSC reviews activities relating to the BOB Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the BOB Integrated Care Partnership (ICP).

- 1.2.18 The committee meets as and when necessary – it met twice in 2025/26.

1.3 Community Involvement

- 1.3.1 The Scrutiny Committees engage with a range of stakeholder groups, organisations and individuals when undertaking their reviews.
- 1.3.2 Healthwatch West Berkshire is invited to give an update at all Health Scrutiny Committee meetings to provide feedback from patients and service users. Other stakeholders are invited to give evidence in relation to specific reviews, either individually or collectively (e.g., via surveys).
- 1.3.3 All scrutiny meetings are open to the public and residents are welcome to come along and listen to the presentations and debates. Task and Finish Group meetings tend to take place in private to allow for full and frank discussion, including those related to confidential matters. However, their reports are made public and are discussed at the relevant scrutiny committee which considers whether the recommendations should be referred to the Executive, relevant health body, or other external organisation for response.
- 1.3.4 Members of the public are encouraged to suggest topics for scrutiny by [completing our online form](#).

2. Scrutiny Work Programme

2.1 Complementing the Work of the Executive

- 2.1.1 The Scrutiny Committees seek to complement the work of the Executive. Liaison is undertaken with Executive Portfolio Holders and senior officers to understand their priorities for the coming year and identify any areas where there are concerns about performance, or where changes are planned / needed. This helps to highlight areas where scrutiny could add value. However, each committee has autonomy over its own work programme.

2.2 Pre-Decision Scrutiny

- 2.2.1 Scrutiny undertaken in advance of a decision being taken by the Executive (or an individual decision delegated to an Executive Portfolio Holder or senior officer) can be highly beneficial. It reduces the need for call-in by helping back-bench councillors to develop an understanding of relevant issues. It also allows councillors to be assured that public engagement has been properly carried out, and alternative courses of action considered. Early involvement in helping to develop and review strategies and plans can be particularly beneficial. The Scrutiny Committees regularly review the Executive's Forward Plan to identify where they could get involved in pre-decision scrutiny.

2.3 Post-Decision Scrutiny

- 2.3.1 Call-in is an important mechanism that allows back-bench councillors to hold the Executive to account. It allows for decisions that have been made (but not yet implemented) by the Executive, an individual Executive Portfolio Holder, or an officer with delegated authority, to be put on hold so they can be scrutinised. The Council's Constitution requires a call-in request to be submitted by at least five back-bench councillors. The decision will be reviewed by the relevant Scrutiny Committee, which may either endorse the original decision (in which case it can be implemented immediately), or make recommendations back to the Executive.

2.4 Scrutiny of Partners and Third Parties

- 2.4.1 The Council has statutory duties to undertake scrutiny of services delivered by particular external partners, especially around areas such as crime and disorder, education, and health. These parties are legally required to attend scrutiny meetings, provide the information as requested, and answer questions. In the case of health partners, they must respond to any recommendations made by the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee within 28 days.
- 2.4.2 Health partners are also required to consult the Health Scrutiny Committee on proposed substantial variations to services that would be likely to affect residents of West Berkshire. A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed with local NHS stakeholders to help inform this process.
- 2.4.3 The Local Government Act (2000) also gives scrutiny committees the power to investigate and report on any matter which affects a local authority's area or its inhabitants. This type of scrutiny brings its own challenges, as most other organisations are not legally obliged to participate in scrutiny reviews. However, in previous years, Thames Water and the Environment Agency have attended scrutiny meetings to answer questions in relation to flooding and pollution incidents.

2.5 Prioritisation

- 2.5.1 Once potential review topics have been identified, it is important to prioritise them into a realistic work programme. The PAPER tool has been developed to help rank competing proposals. This considers the following aspects:
- Public interest
 - Area affected
 - Performance Issues / Local Priority
 - Effectiveness
 - Available Resources

3. Summary of Activity for 2025/26

3.1 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1.1 The Committee met four times in 2025/26. Details of topics considered are set out in the table below.

Date	Topics
05/06/2025	LGA Peer Review of Children's Social Care
	Castle Gate Ofsted Report
	Ofsted and CQC Thematic Review Into Children Not in School
	Delivering Better Value in SEND Closedown and the Innovation in SEND Delivery Plan
	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Recommendations
11/09/2025	Youth Justice Annual Plan
	Children's Services Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024/25
	Child Protection Annual Report 2024/25
	SEND High Needs Block and Implementation of the SEND Strategy Delivery Plan
	Young Persons Co-opted Members Proposals
04/12/2025	Local Authority Statutory Duties Around Attendance
	Ofsted School Inspection Reports
	Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Report
15/04/2026	Education Outcomes
	Exclusions
	West Berkshire Best Start Local Strategic Plan

3.1.2 The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee did not set up any task and finish groups in 2025/26.

3.2 Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee

3.2.1 The Committee met eight times in 2025/26. Details of the topics considered are set out below.

Date	Topics
01/07/2025	Capital Financing Report Outturn: Financial Year 2024/25
	2024/25 Revenue Financial Performance: Provisional Outturn
	2024/25 Performance Report Q4
16/09/2025	Review of Transformation Programme
	Review of the Library Service performance and funding model
	Capital Financing Performance Report Q1 2025/26
	Revenue Performance Report Q1 2025/26

	Sports Hub Task and Finish Group Report
10/11/2025 (Special)	Local Government Reorganisation - Full Proposal for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire
25/11/2025	Community Safety Partnership Update
	Options for Improving Affordable Housing Delivery
03/02/2026 (Special)	Transformation return on investment
	Asset Disposals
	Effectiveness of Project Management
	Mosaic briefing note
10/02/2026 (Budget)	2025/26 Q3 Financial Performance Report
	Medium Term Financial Strategy: Financial Years 2026-2030
	Treasury Management and Investment and Borrowing Strategy
	Capital Strategy and Supporting Programme: Financial Years 2026/27 - 2029/30
	Financial Year 2026/27: Revenue Budget
17/03/2026	Three-weekly refuse waste collections progress update
	Procurement Governance
	Swift Bricks
	Project Management Task and Finish Group Report
12/05/2026 (Special)	Called-in report – Response to Council Motion: decisions following public consultation
	Called-in report – Parking Review Amendment Order No 37 (Lower Way in Thatcham)
	Playing Pitch Strategy
	Environment Strategy Annual Report
	Procurement Governance
	Task and Finish Group Guidance

- 3.2.2 The findings of the Sports Hub Task and Finish Group were reported to [Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee in September 2025](#), with the responses to the recommendations subsequently presented to the [Executive in December 2025](#).
- 3.2.3 The Project Management Task and Finish Group undertook a review of the Council's project management methodology and also undertook a review of two recent major projects – Care Director v6 and iTrent (Phase 1). In addition, the group reflected on the project management related aspects of the Sports Hub review. It presented its findings to the [Resources and Place Scrutiny](#)

[Committee in March 2026](#), with the responses to the recommendations due to be presented to the Executive in July 2026.

3.3 Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

3.3.1 The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee met five times in 2025/26. Details of the topics considered are set out in the table below.

Date	Topics
12/06/2025	Health Inequalities
	All Age Continuing Care
	Integrated Neighbourhood Teams
	Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust Strategy Engagement
15/07/2025 (Special)	Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task Group Report
30/09/2025	Dementia
	The Director of Public Health Annual Report
	Adult Social Care Annual Report 2024/25
	Adult Social Care Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2024/25
	Safeguarding Adults Performance Annual Report 2024/25
16/12/2025	Update on Oral Public Health and Dentistry
	All Age Complex and Continuing Care
	Care Quality Commission Inspection of Adult Social Care – Progress update
	Client Level Dataset - Statutory Return for ASC
	Better Care Fund
	Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Review: Berkshire West
	Dementia
10/03/2026	Provision of Social Care and Community Equipment
	Inquest Review Panel – Annual Report
	South Central Ambulance Service Update

3.3.2 The Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task and Finish Group reported its findings to an extraordinary meeting of the [Health and Adult Social Care Committee in July 2025](#), with responses to recommendations subsequently presented to the [Executive in May 2026](#).

- 3.3.3 The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee maintains watching briefs on topics such as the Royal Berkshire Hospital Redevelopment, Hampshire Hospitals new hospital programme (both of which have been pushed back until at least 2040) and the relocation of Eastfield House Surgery. Members engage with the relevant key partners through informal briefings and other mechanisms. The Committee also responds to notifications of proposed changes to NHS services.

3.4 Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.4.1 The BOB JHOSC met twice in 2025/26 to consider the following topics.

Date	Topics
16/10/2025	NHS reforms - update on the development of a Thames Valley Integrated Care Board
	Provider Collaboratives
17/03/2026	Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) Update

- 3.4.2 Within the context of the 10 Year Plan, ICBs are being restructured to make them coterminous with strategic (regional) authorities. The existing BOB and Frimley ICBs will be dissolved and a new Thames Valley ICB created from the 2026/27 municipal year. This will expand the existing BOB ICB footprint to include Bracknell Forest, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Slough. The JHOSC will need to expand its remit accordingly, with a revised terms of reference approved by each Council.

4. Scrutiny Highlights for 2025/26

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

4.1 Statutory Co-opted Members

- 4.1.1 The Council has successfully appointed to three of the four statutory co-opted member roles:

- Tony Wilson (Church of England diocesan representative)
- Catherine Hobbs (Roman Catholic diocesan representative)
- Emily Daly (primary school parent governor representative)

- 4.1.2 The secondary school parent governor co-opted member role remains unfilled, despite two recruitment rounds.

4.2 Young Person Co-opted Members

- 4.2.1 Following a competitive recruitment process, Charlie Gale and Natasha Rowe were successfully appointed as co-opted members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee, with Berkshire Youth appointed to provide

ongoing support for them. These appointments represent a positive change that will ensure the voices of young people are heard when the Committee undertakes scrutiny reviews.

- 4.2.2 Following their appointment, Charlie and Natasha delivered a training session for the other Committee Members on how to improve engagement with young people, which has since been circulated more widely so that lessons can be learned across the Council.

4.3 Ofsted Thematic Review

- 4.3.1 At its meeting on 5 June 2025, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee received a report on the Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) a review of children with SEND who were not in school.

- 4.3.2 Key findings from the review were grouped under the following headings:

- Information sharing (with families and between support agencies)
- Access to health services
- Oversight of provision
- Enablers and barriers to remaining in education
- Children not in school who need help and protection

- 4.3.3 Where improvements were needed, these have been incorporated into the SEND & Inclusion Strategy Delivery Plan, with progress on delivery to be closely monitored through the SEND Strategic Improvement Board to ensure ongoing accountability and success.

- 4.3.4 Questions were asked about a number of different aspects, including:

- Whether it would be better for children to be given support with school readiness and socialisation rather than being diagnosed as SEND.
- The support offer available to parents, signposting and take-up of that support.
- The role of Family Hubs.
- Arrangements for alerting professionals across different agencies about children who were not in education.
- Areas of good practice that were not yet implemented in West Berkshire, including joint commissioning.
- Challenges experienced by parents in accessing therapy support
- Concerns about children not in education who were presenting at the crisis service with acute mental health needs, having not being identified earlier.
- Take up and capacity of the respite care offer in West Berkshire.
- The circumstances in which a social worker could intervene where there were concerns about a child being home educated.
- What was being done to reduce the number of permanent exclusions.
- Challenges around emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) and take-up of the Council's EBSA service amongst local schools.

- 4.3.5 The Committee asked for the following actions:

- Bring an update on Family Hubs to a future meeting (this was included in the report on the Best Start in Life Local Strategic Plan that was brought to the meeting on 15 April 2026).

- Provide data in relation to the Dynamic Support Register.
- Bring a report on exclusions to a future meeting (this was brought to the meeting on 15 April 2026).
- Bring a report on attendance to a future meeting (this was brought to the meeting on 4 December 2025).

4.3.6 Further details of this meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 5 June 2025, 6.30 pm](#)

4.4 Report on Education Outcomes

4.4.1 A report on Education Outcomes was brought to the meeting on 15 April 2026. The report set out the Council's initial response to concerns highlighted in a recent letter from the DfE Regional Director in relation to outcomes for pupils in West Berkshire's schools. These related to:

- Key Stage 2 outcomes, which had been consistently below the national average.
- Phonics, where West Berkshire performed poorly relative to other local authorities, with results for disadvantaged pupils being particularly poor.
- Underperformance in relation to Good Level of Development (GLD) measures.
- Schools being vulnerable to downgraded Ofsted inspection results in future due to poor outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- The lack of suitable interventions at schools with exceptionally low outcomes.
- The lack of a robust, centrally funded school improvement strategy.

4.4.2 The DfE Regional Director was invited to attend the meeting to present her concerns, share best practice, and answer Members' questions. She made a number of observations, which included the following points:

- Whilst the School Improvement service had capable staff, it lacked sufficient capacity—this limited the ability to hold school leaders to account and provide support.
- The School Improvement Service had previously been a traded service and although funds were now ring-fenced, additional funds had not yet been committed.
- A recent universal RISE offer had not been fully taken up by schools, which was disappointing.
- West Berkshire pupils entered Reception broadly at/above national average levels of attainment, but this attainment was not sustained through primary school.
- Scrutiny needed to focus on performance data and make use of available DfE tools.

4.4.3 Responses were also provided to a number of questions in relation to:

- How DfE challenged performance in academy schools.
- Available funding and support for school improvement.
- How to make effective use of best practice exemplars.
- Areas that had high levels of achievement for disadvantaged pupils.

- How GLD performance could be scrutinised.
- 4.4.4 Officers set out intended actions to improve performance, including:
- Codifying and strengthening the school improvement visit model with greater rigour and links to outcomes data.
 - Developing earlier, non-statutory intervention before escalation to warning notices and Interim Executive Boards.
 - Strengthening governance and governor training and linking headteacher performance management to outcomes.
 - Convening system leadership to focus on equity and disadvantaged pupil outcomes. Auditing schools' use of pupil premium funding to ensure it is spent effectively.
- 4.4.5 Members tasked officers with a number of actions as follows:
- Arrange a development session to coach Members on what they could do to encourage schools to do better.
 - Develop a performance dashboard for education services, with regular updates for the CYP Scrutiny Committee.
 - Bring a progress report the next meeting, to include greater clarity on funding for school improvement and the uptake of the universal RISE offer.
- 4.4.6 Further details of this meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 15 April 2026, 6.30 pm](#)

Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee

4.5 Project Management Task and Finish Group

- 4.5.1 A Task and Finish Group was established to review the Council's approach to managing major projects and identify lessons to be learned from recent projects, including Care Director v6, and iTrent (Phase 1). The scope of the view included:
- Contract management
 - Project management methodology
 - Project management structure
 - Resourcing
 - Project governance
 - Factors affecting project outcomes
 - Lessons learned and recommendations for changes to processes
- 4.5.2 The Task and Finish Group met five times between September 2025 and January 2026. Members heard evidence from a variety of West Berkshire Council (WBC) officers, including procurement professionals, solicitors, project managers, client teams, project sponsors, technical specialists, and auditors. The Task and Finish Group also undertook primary research via an online survey of staff who had been involved in user acceptance testing of Care Director v6.
- 4.5.3 In addition, best practice exemplars of local authorities that had already improved their project management practices were sought out to understand

what changes they had introduced, and to see if any of the lessons they had learned could be applicable to West Berkshire Council. Local authorities interviewed included Kent County Council and Winchester City Council.

- 4.5.4 Through evaluation of this evidence base and with technical support from officers, Members were able to highlight a number of issues and identify where potential improvements could be made, or where further work may be beneficial.
- 4.5.5 The Task and Finish Group report was presented to the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on 17 March. This included 25 separate recommendations. The Scrutiny Committee resolved that the report's recommendations be referred to the Executive for consideration. The report and minutes from the meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 17 March 2026, 6.30 pm](#)
- 4.5.6 The Task and Finish Group's recommendations along with suggested responses from senior officers are due to be considered by Executive on 2 July.

4.6 Budget Scrutiny

- 4.6.1 Scrutiny of the budget took place throughout the year.

2024/25

- 4.6.2 The 2024/25 outturn reports were received for the Capital and Revenue budgets at the meeting on 1 July 2025. In relation to Capital, discussion took place on borrowing levels and the repayment of these sums. Members were advised that Emergency Financial Support (EFS) allows councils to use capital resources (borrowing and proceeds of asset sales) to cover revenue costs, therefore enabling the creation of a balanced budget. While there was no specific loan or set interest rate assigned to EFS, repayment was required over a period of 20 years.
- 4.6.3 Members requested more detail on:
- Capital projects up to or below £250k to be presented at the Executive.
 - Why some capital projects had been reprofiled into the following financial year.
- 4.6.4 The revenue outturn report outlined increasing financial pressures that were felt during the 2024/25 financial year, in particular in Children's Services and in meeting the costs of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities SEND provision. This resulted in EFS being applied for, with the £13m allocation for 2024/25 fully deployed to mitigate the Council's outturn position and rebuild the Council's General Fund. £3m in EFS had also been provisionally agreed for 2025/26, however the forecast pressures for 2025/26 (in Children's Services and Adult Social Care) meant it would remain challenging to balance the budget.
- 4.6.5 Members voiced concern at the sale of a commercial property, the income from which had been included in the budget for 2024/25. The view was expressed that full consideration needed to be given to the full cost implications of a sale, beyond the capital receipt. The Committee was advised

that the Property Investment Board did consider the benefits of a one-off capital receipt vs the loss of long term revenue streams.

4.6.6 Members requested further information on:

- Budget variances against the budget lines for Executive Directors of Place and Resources, and for the Chief Executive to be presented at the Executive.
- Budget overspends against the budgets for Transformation and for Finance, Property and Procurement to be presented at the Executive.
- The use of capital receipts for transformation activity.

2025/26

4.6.7 Monitoring of the 2025/26 budget took place at the meetings held on 16 September 2025 (Q1) and on 10 February 2026 (Q3).

4.6.8 At Q1 (capital), Members continued to hear about pressures within Education. This was expected to have a negative impact on what could be funded from the Capital Programme in the coming years.

4.6.9 The reprofiling of projects from year to year could impact on the delivery of the current year's Capital Programme. Causes of slippage could often be outside of the Council's control. For some projects, delivery could take place over a number of years.

4.6.10 The following actions were identified:

- For a full list of reprofiled projects to be included in future reports.
- To be provided with the business case for the solar farm.
- For confirmation of the Capital Financing Requirement.

4.6.11 Q1 (revenue) was an opportunity for Members to understand the variance between the budget set in February 2025 and the forecast at Q1 (an overspend of £681k).

4.6.12 The Committee reviewed the delivery of savings identified for 2025/26.

4.6.13 Members were provided with a transformation cost tracker which covered all such activity across the Council, not just that in the Transformation Programme.

4.6.14 The following actions were identified:

- Scrutiny Members would receive a private finance briefing to aid Members' understanding of factors related to the budget and how best to scrutinise them.
- For further information on the profiling of short term borrowing and repayment.

4.6.15 The Q3 report advised that the revenue overspend had continued to increase to £8.5m. An underspend was forecast against the capital budget, post reprofiling, of £8.4m.

4.6.16 A request for further EFS had been submitted for £20m. This was in order to maintain the recommended General Fund level. There was an increasing reliance of EFS across local authorities.

4.6.17 Members were advised of the Government announcement which proposed that it would meet 90% of existing costs being incurred against the Dedicated

Schools Grant (DSG) and for SEND placements up to the end of the 2025/26 financial year subject to meeting certain conditions. The full detail of the announcement still needed to be analysed at that point. The potential financial benefit had not been taken into account within the budget.

- 4.6.18 The controls of non-statutory spend were described to the Committee, including the role of the Financial Review Panel. However, it was explained that the Administration's policy was to maintain a broad range of services.
- 4.6.19 Members were informed of demographic modelling undertaken for Adult Social Care. An increase in the average costs for care providers was highlighted as a concern.
- 4.6.20 It was explained to Members that in-year financial pressures and/or mitigations had not led to reduced capacity or raised thresholds for service provision.
- 4.6.21 Concern was highlighted at the reducing level of Business Rate retention. The Council only expected to retain 13p in the pound in 2026/27.
- 4.6.22 The Portfolio Holder acknowledged the point made by the Committee that the continued ownership of care homes should have been budgeted for as a contingency. However, it was pointed out that final negotiations were ongoing for the outsourcing of care homes when the previous year's budget was set.

2026/27

- 4.6.23 Detailed scrutiny of the budget for 2026/27 was undertaken at the meeting held on 10 February 2026, before the budget went to Executive and onwards to Council for final approval.
- 4.6.24 This provided Members with a detailed explanation of the process that had been followed in developing the budget and an opportunity to challenge the underlying assumptions and allocations to ensure they were robust.
- 4.6.25 The Scrutiny Committee reviewed the following:
 - Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS): Financial Years 2026 – 2030
 - Treasury Management, and Investment and Borrowing Strategy
 - Capital Strategy and Supporting Programme, Financial Years 2026/27 to 2029/30
 - Revenue Budget 2026/27
- 4.6.26 Key points and actions arising from the debate, included:
 - The increased annual savings target for the period of the MTFS was noted as increasing from that set for 2026/27. Members were informed that this was a reflection of the Council's financial situation and the need to meet EFS conditions. There would be a focus on reducing the proportion of the budget that was funded by EFS.
 - The increasing proportion of revenue spent on debt interest and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) was identified as a growing concern. This would be monitored on an ongoing basis.
 - The majority of capital spend was directed towards priority areas of Social Care, Education and local infrastructure improvements. The importance of ongoing investment in infrastructure was discussed in order to maintain

West Berkshire as an attractive place for families to live in and businesses to operate in.

- Government funding was often targeted at areas with higher deprivation, thereby limiting the Council's opportunities. However, the Council had achieved much success in securing external grants.
- The suggestion was made that reporting on the Capital Programme could be made clearer to be able to distinguish between annual, ongoing and multi-phase projects.
- The business case was being developed for the solar farm project.
- The new social care case management system, Mosaic, was shortly due to go live.
- The focus for the Revenue Budget had been on statutory services within Adult Social Care and Children's Services. Non-statutory services would be maintained, although this needed to be supported by EFS.
- The top priorities identified by the resident consultation were roads/highways as the top priority, followed by Education and Children's Services. The largest share of the revenue budget was spent on people-related service and Members felt that more could be done to communicate that point with residents.
- The Council Tax collection rate had fallen. In response, the Council was taking a balanced approach of pursuing outstanding Council Tax debt alongside supporting residents in need of financial support.
- The Council was highly dependent on Council Tax in comparison to many other local authorities. A growth in Council Tax from development would be beneficial, although a concern was raised that Council Tax income might not be sufficient to cover increasing costs of a growing population. It was suggested that scrutiny could monitor this point in future.
- The importance of modelling the impact of savings in one area on outcomes in another was highlighted to ensure that savings made did not have a negative impact on another service provided to residents.
- It was felt that charges could be brought in cases of upheld enforcement breaches. Members were advised that all fees and charges were being reviewed and this could include additional fees.
- Members felt there was potential for further scrutiny of revenue raising opportunities.
- The importance of consulting staff for ideas on savings and income generation was raised. A staff suggestion scheme was in place.
- The role played by technology, such as AI, in improving productivity and generating savings was being explored.

4.6.27 Further details of this meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 10 February 2026, 6.30 pm](#)

4.7 Transformation Programme

4.7.1 The review of the Transformation Programme took place at the Committee held on 16 September 2025. The Committee were informed of outcomes delivered to date against a range of projects and savings achieved, challenges encountered and future plans.

4.7.2 A number of points were discussed both in general terms and in relation to specific projects. These included:

- The need for greater clarity on funding. This included a fuller understanding of the costs incurred to deliver a project, how work/posts were funded, income from the sale of assets and the cost implications of doing so vs retaining and utilising the asset, to help identify the net savings that had been achieved and cost avoidance.
- The need for specialist officers for projects was raised, alongside the move to a centralised service. Members were advised that portfolio managers would be in place for this purpose. Not all activities/projects were being centralised.
- A Policy Development Group was to be formed to help take transformation work further forward, this would include performance monitoring.
- Business cases were formed for each project.

4.7.3 It was agreed that the further financial information requested would be provided to a future meeting and this was presented to Committee at the extraordinary meeting held on 3 February 2026. A number of points were identified for action/for inclusion in future reports:

- Information on costs and savings, both one-off and recurring.
- Officers agreed to explore the need to identify social value benefits being achieved in addition to financial savings.
- That officers would develop a consolidated list / tracker of transformation projects (including care homes and resource centres), setting out all costs, savings, and opportunity costs of properties sold (including lost income). This should set out what was transformation and what was delivered by services.
- The Committee was provided with information on the transformation expenditure funded by capital receipts/asset disposals. Further detail was provided on this at the Budget meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 10 February 2026. Elements including expenditure, savings (including for agency workers), cost avoidance, and foregone income were all confirmed at that meeting. The Committee stated the need for this information to be held in one place for future monitoring.

4.7.4 Further details of these meetings can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 16 September 2025, 6.30 pm](#)

[West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 3 February 2026, 6.30 pm](#)

[West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 10 February 2026, 6.30 pm](#)

4.8 Local Government Reorganisation

4.8.1 An extraordinary meeting of the Committee was held on 10 November 2025 to consider the full proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

- 4.8.2 The background to LGR was provided. The English Devolution White Paper outlined the Government's plans to reset the relationship with local and regional government, including rebuilding and reforming local government. LGR commenced with all two-tier councils.
- 4.8.3 West Berkshire Council became involved having received a formal request from South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Councils to consider the option of a new unitary council for the three areas, with a working title of Ridgeway Council.
- 4.8.4 Members received information on financial implications and potential savings, as well as the consultation and engagement that had taken place. The Ridgeway Council proposal was in line with the Government's criteria which required local authorities to be the right size to be financially stable, while still being able to meet local needs. West Berkshire was considered to share many commonalities with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.
- 4.8.5 Members raised a wide range of questions and concerns, with information and clarification provided on the following areas:
- Levels of support for the Ridgeway proposal were noted. A number of meetings had been held with a number of parishes and, predominantly, the view was given that communities felt part of West Berkshire and many residents were in favour of the proposal. It was however further noted that some residents in the east of the district felt a closer link to Reading.
 - Consultation also incorporated Council officers.
 - Should Ridgeway not be accepted then an alternative proposal would need to be sought. However, the potential merging of existing unitary authorities would need to be led by secondary legislation.
 - Potential financial implications and benefits. A relatively sound financial position for Ridgeway was outlined to Members, but risks were also made clear.
 - The Committee was advised that only a minimal reduction in councillors was expected for West Berkshire. There was however concern that councillors could need to represent a wider number of residents.
 - Provisional election plans were outlined. This could be for shadow elections in May 2027 if Ridgeway was approved. Members highlighted the need to amend the Ridgeway proposal document to ensure that the proposed date for the election of the shadow authority was correct throughout.
 - Members felt there was scope to investigate whether Ridgeway Council could establish a Housing Revenue Account.
 - Members agreed that should Ridgeway be approved, then a report would need to be brought to scrutiny setting out next steps and preparatory work.
- 4.8.6 Further details of this meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Monday 10 November 2025, 6.30 pm](#)

4.9 Affordable Housing

- 4.9.1 At its meeting on 25 November 2025, the Committee considered a report outlining the options available to the Council (a toolkit) for the delivery of

additional affordable housing, the Council had a target to deliver 1,000 units by 2030.

- 4.9.2 The challenges being faced were discussed, these included the number of applicants on the Common Housing Register and the limited development opportunities across West Berkshire. Viability issues were raised by developers and by registered providers as being a significant barrier to delivery. Members raised particular concerns on how regularly developers sought to make this case through the planning process.
- 4.9.3 Future opportunities were described to help facilitate affordable housing delivery. This included variations to S106 agreements being considered, but only in cases where viability had been clearly evidenced.
- 4.9.4 The Council was petitioning the Government for assistance in this area, in particular the Government's Housing Select Committee.
- 4.9.5 As well as hearing from Council officers and the Portfolio Holder, the Committee was provided with a presentation from Sovereign Network Group (SNG), a primary registered provider in West Berkshire. This generated a lengthy question and answer session, which included confirmation of the following points:
- SNG explained that the preference was to retrofit or regenerate existing homes, but disposal was an option if this was not possible and it was not always possible to replace homes in the same precise area.
 - It was not financially viable to replace standalone properties and net zero requirements meant that some locations were less feasible. Smaller sites were more difficult to manage.
 - New homes were being built in some locations, some of those in partnership with the Council.
 - The support that SNG sought to provide to residents.
- 4.9.6 Members identified actions to be taken forward, including the following:
- Confirmation of the affordable housing targets for the Local Plan period (up to 2041).
 - Information on specific projects that were expected to come forward.
 - That officers should continue to progress with the toolkit, and its associated actions, for the increased delivery of affordable housing locally.
 - For Planning Members to be made aware of the options available within the toolkit, subject to agreement.
 - Further detail to explain why the Chestnut Walk Joint Venture had not progressed.
 - To engage with both West Berkshire's Members of Parliament in order to lobby government and providers to tackle significant barriers to affordable housing delivery.
- 4.9.7 Further details of this meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 25 November 2025, 6.30 pm](#)

4.10 Three weekly refuse waste collections

4.10.1 At its meeting on 17 March 2026, the Committee were provided with an update on the early performance and impacts of the move to three weekly refuse (black bin) collections since this was implemented in September 2025. The purpose of this change was to increase recycling rates, reduce waste and achieve cost savings.

4.10.2 Members sought information and raised points on a number of different aspects from this service change and this included:

- Understanding the environmental benefits that were being achieved.
- The need for ongoing communication with residents.
- The support available to residents was explored in detail, such as provision of larger bins (subject to meeting relevant thresholds).
- Establishing the public response to the consultation and following implementation of the change.
- Costs had increased during the initial implementation but had since returned to normal levels.
- An increase in fly tipping had not been noted.
- Only a small percentage of residents had left excessive waste for collection at the kerbside.
- The number of recycling containers issued in West Berkshire was very conducive to achieving high recycling rates.
- The potential to increase recycled materials, including electrical items.

4.10.3 The Committee commended the progress made to date and acknowledged the efforts of officers in the implementation of these changes and those of residents in adapting to the changes which was helping to increase recycling and achieve cost savings. However, some areas of concern remained on behalf of residents, and Members raised the importance of continuing to support residents where possible. They asked that the potential to create an app be kept under review to assist residents with tracking their collection days.

4.10.4 Officers confirmed that data collection and analysis would continue of the move to three weekly collections and its impact on recycling rates, fly tipping and resident satisfaction.

4.10.5 Further details of this meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 17 March 2026, 6.30 pm](#)

4.11 Procurement Governance

4.11.1 A request for a scrutiny review was received from a member of the public which sought, in summary, the following:

- *The justification, authority, approval process, governance, supporting documentation, transparency, accountability and consequences with respect to: "Contracts for Award Under Delegated Authority from Executive; To gain approval from Executive to delegate authority to an individual (Service Lead or Service Director) to proceed with contract awards with a value in excess of £2.5m".*

- 4.11.2 The Committee accepted the scrutiny request and this has been considered at meetings of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 March 2026 and 12 May 2026. Further details of both meetings can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 17 March 2026, 6.30 pm](#)
- [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 12 May 2026, 6.30 pm](#)
- 4.11.3 The following points were noted:
- That there is the need for an appropriate level of transparency, alongside recognising the importance of the timing of this in order to adhere to the requirements of the Procurement Act.
 - There could be a greater level of involvement for scrutiny at the pre-procurement phase, including the development of business cases.
 - New Procurement Strategy due to go to the Executive for approval and this could be reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee.
 - Contract standing orders would be reviewed.
 - The Constitution would be clear on procurement processes and required levels of approval. Relevant training would be provided to officers on this point and information from this training could be shared more widely.
- 4.11.4 The Committee resolved to recommend that Executive agree to individually highlight all contracts in excess of £2.5m on the Forward Plan and not be captured under the generic title of 'Contracts for award under delegated authority from Executive'.

Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee

4.12 Children's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Task and Finish Group

- 4.12.1 As reported in the 2024/25 Annual Scrutiny Report, the Health Scrutiny Committee (as it then was) set up a Task and Finish Group to undertake a review of children's mental health and emotional wellbeing. The task and finish group's work is detailed in the 2024/25 Annual Scrutiny Report, but in summary the scope of the review focussed on the following key areas:
- Assessment of the current needs and provisions in West Berkshire.
 - The system approach to prevention, early intervention and mental health support for young people.
 - Extensive, evidence informed treatment and crisis services.
- 4.12.2 The Task and Finish Group report was presented to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on 15 July 2025. This included 21 separate recommendations grouped beneath six priority areas. The Scrutiny Committee resolved that the report's recommendations be referred to the Executive and the BOB ICB for consideration. The report and minutes from the meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 15 July 2025, 1.00 pm](#)

4.12.3 The Task and Finish Group's recommendations, along with suggested responses from senior officers, were considered by the Executive on 21 May 2026. The BOB ICB submitted their response to the relevant recommendations in writing.

4.12.4 The Executive resolved that the report and its recommendations be referred to the Health and Wellbeing Board to consider the work that can be taken forward in collaboration with partner agencies. The Executive noted that this area of work tied in with one of the Health and Wellbeing Board's key priorities to improve the mental health of children and adults.

4.13 Oral health and dentistry – Public Health and NHS Services

4.13.1 At its meeting on 12 June 2025, the Committee considered issues relating to oral health outcomes in West Berkshire, including data on tooth decay and dental extractions. Members expressed concern regarding local outcomes and agreed a formal recommendation that an Oral Health Needs Assessment be undertaken to strengthen the evidence base and inform future action.

4.13.2 Building on this, the Committee undertook further engagement with system partners, with oral health and dentistry considered as a system-wide issue at its December 2025 meeting. The discussion reflected a whole-system perspective, recognising the shared responsibilities of the Council and the NHS. Key themes included:

- Evidence of poor oral health outcomes, particularly among children
- Challenges in accessing NHS dental services, including difficulties registering with an NHS dentist
- The impact of the national NHS dental contract on service capacity and delivery
- The importance of prevention and early intervention, particularly in reducing inequalities

4.13.3 Members received first-hand clinical insight from a practising dentist, which provided detailed evidence of access pressures within NHS dentistry. This complemented the data presented and strengthened the evidence base for scrutiny, including the impact of the national dental contract on service capacity and patient access. The Committee used this evidence to further explore how local prevention activity and NHS commissioning arrangements interact.

4.13.4 The Committee engaged constructively with NHS commissioners, clinical representatives and public health officers to develop a shared understanding of the issues, highlighting the importance of a coordinated approach across partners to address both access to services and underlying population health needs.

4.13.5 Impact:

- Scrutiny has supported engagement between clinical, public health and NHS commissioning perspectives, strengthening shared understanding of local challenges

- The Committee's recommendation for an Oral Health Needs Assessment was agreed by [Executive in March 2026](#) and has established a clear and evidence-led foundation for future planning and commissioning decisions
 - The Committee has ensured that oral health and dentistry remain a priority area for system partners, linking access, prevention and inequalities
- 4.13.6 This area has been included within the Committee's forward work programme to enable continued monitoring and engagement with partners.
- 4.14 All Age Continuing and Complex Care**
- 4.14.1 The Committee has maintained ongoing scrutiny of All Age Complex and Continuing Care (AACCC) over a number of years, reflecting the complexity of the system and its significance for residents. This has included a sustained focus on variation in referral and eligibility rates, access to support, and the experience of individuals navigating the system.
- 4.14.2 During 2025/26, the Committee continued this programme of work, receiving an update from the BOB ICB at its meeting on 12 June 2025. This included progress in delivering the transformation programme, addressing variation in referral and eligibility rates, and improving collaboration between NHS and local authority partners.
- 4.14.3 Building on this, the Committee undertook further scrutiny at its December 2025 meeting, where a substantive update was provided on system performance. The discussion reflected a partnership approach between the NHS and local authority, with key themes including:
- Variation in referral and eligibility rates, including historically lower levels in West Berkshire
 - Progress in implementing a central referral hub to improve consistency and resilience
 - Development of joint funding arrangements and dispute resolution processes
 - The importance of robust, place-based data to support effective oversight
- 4.14.4 Members received detailed performance information and challenged partners on variation in outcomes and the availability of West Berkshire-specific data. Officers committed to strengthening local-level reporting to enable more effective scrutiny. This evidence-based discussion supported further analysis of local variation, including consideration of population factors and system processes.
- 4.14.5 The Committee engaged constructively with NHS and local authority partners to understand the complexity of AACCC processes, including eligibility decision-making, joint working arrangements and the impact of system changes on residents.
- 4.14.6 Impact:
- Sustained scrutiny over a number of years has ensured that variation in eligibility rates remains a priority issue for system partners, with ongoing analysis and improvements made
 - The Committee's challenge has supported greater transparency and availability of data at a local level, commitments have been made to

provide more detailed local data, strengthening the evidence base for ongoing scrutiny

- Engagement between Members, NHS partners and Adult Social Care has contributed to improved partnership working, including the development of joint processes and clearer system governance
- Scrutiny has provided a consistent focus during a period of transformation, supporting a more equitable and coordinated approach to assessing and meeting complex care needs

4.14.7 This area will remain under active review, with a further update scheduled for June 2026 to assess progress and impact.

4.14.8 Further details of the above referenced meetings can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 12 June 2025, 10.00 am](#)
[West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 16 December 2025, 1.30 pm](#)

4.15 Adult Social Care

4.15.1 From June 2025, the Committee's remit was expanded to include Adult Social Care, marking its transition from the Health Scrutiny Committee to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.

4.15.2 During 2025/26, the Committee incorporated Adult Social Care into its work programme through engagement with council officers and system partners. This included consideration of performance, demand, service delivery and safeguarding, alongside updates on preparedness for Care Quality Commission (CQC) assurance.

4.15.3 Members reviewed evidence aligned to the CQC assurance framework, enabling them to:

- Develop understanding of service pressures and demand within Adult Social Care
- Consider how the Council demonstrates quality of provision, outcomes and continuous improvement
- Assess how effectively health and social care services are working together, particularly in supporting individuals with complex needs

4.15.4 The Committee engaged constructively with officers and partners to test assurance, ensuring that evidence reflected both organisational preparedness and the lived experience of residents.

4.15.5 Impact:

- The expanded remit has enabled more integrated scrutiny across health and social care, reflecting how services are experienced by residents
- Early engagement has enabled assurance on CQC preparedness, supporting timely identification of risks and areas for improvement
- Scrutiny has strengthened the Committee's ability to consider whole care pathways, improving oversight of joint working and outcomes

- Partnership working between Members, officers and system partners has supported a shared focus on quality, performance and continuous improvement
- 4.15.6 The Committee will continue to build on this work in 2026/27, ensuring sustained oversight of Adult Social Care and its integration with health services.

5 Call-In of Decisions

- 5.1 The call-in process is used to hold the Executive to account. The purpose of a call-in is to scrutinise the decisions taken by the Executive, Individual Executive Members, or Senior Officers making delegated decisions.
- 5.2 The process enables further public debate to be held on the subject. The appropriate Scrutiny Committee can then consider whether, in their view, the decision was appropriate or if it wishes to make recommendations back to the Executive on potential changes.
- 5.3 Two decisions were called-in during 2025/26 and were considered at the Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee held on 12 May 2026:
 - 5.3.1 EX4761 - Response to Council Motion: decisions following public consultation
 - 5.3.1.1 The Committee was provided with information from the Leader of the Council, outlining the reasons for the decision; and an explanation of the reasons for the call-in from the call-in Members, including a proposed alternative course of action. A question and answer session was then held prior to the Committee debating the item.
 - 5.3.1.2 At the conclusion of the debate, the Scrutiny Committee resolved to let the decision stand as per the Executive's resolution. The decision is therefore implemented with immediate effect.
 - 5.3.2 ID4628 - Parking Review Amendment Order No 37 (Lower Way in Thatcham)
 - 5.3.2.1 The Committee was provided with information from the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Highways, outlining the reasons for this particular element of the decision; and an explanation of the reasons for the call-in from the call-in Members, including a proposed alternative course of action. A question and answer session was then held prior to the Committee debating the item.
 - 5.3.2.2 At the conclusion of the debate, the Scrutiny Committee resolved to refer the decision back to Individual Decision to allow for the decision, where it relates to Lower Way in Thatcham, to be reviewed and reconsidered. The outcome of this is yet to be determined.
- 5.4 Further details of the above referenced meeting can be viewed on the Council's website: [West Berkshire Council - Agenda for Resources and Place Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 12 May 2026, 6.30 pm.](#)