

# Wiltshire Council – Chief Executive

Backing the national trend in local government, Wiltshire Council is financially strong and able to invest in services at a time when many others are cutting back.

Its leader, Councillor Richard Clewer, puts it down to long-term planning and a commitment to placing prevention at the heart of the council's work.

'As an organisation we are not typical for a local authority and I think that's one of the reasons we are performing so well,' he explains.

One of the largest unitary authorities in England by both population and area, the council is home to 17 market towns, a cathedral city, around half of the British Army and an abundance of beautiful countryside.

With that comes many and varied challenges – from housing affordability

and the struggle to ensure high streets remain viable to rural poverty and significant health inequalities.

Whoever becomes the council's next chief executive will find themselves at the helm of a local authority with a clear sense of direction and a determination not to be distracted by political cycles or ever-changing Government policy.

'We have taken an approach that's very much focused on long-term thinking,' Cllr Clewer explains. 'It's based on understanding what problems we are likely to be facing rather than sitting and waiting for Government.'

'Prevention is the most important part of us continuing to be a stable and well-functioning council and we have invested time to ensure we have really strong collaborative relationships within the authority which allows



for robust challenge and provision of support, enabling us to deliver our business plan commitments for residents across Wiltshire – taking decisions as one council. It enables us to have an impact on demand, control costs and invest. For example, regeneration in market towns is challenging and we often must be the catalyst through our investment.'

That approach can be seen in Community Conversations, a new programme that's being piloted in several areas with the aim of drawing out the lived experience of residents in more deprived areas to co-produce sustainable ways to support communities.

More than simply a consultation

exercise, it's designed to become part and parcel of the way the council works and reflects the considered way solutions are developed.

'We really think about our problems and approach things in an evidence-based way through strong working relationships between members and officers where we talk through ideas. This isn't a hierarchical organisation – it's about honesty, openness, respect and trust. Challenge is welcomed both ways. If Officers disagree with my suggestions, I expect them to challenge/tell me!'

Above all else, he wants the next chief executive to really get under the skin of Wiltshire.

'We're covering a large number of areas with more than half a million people so it's someone thoughtful who is able to get that complexity, understand problems and work on meaningful solutions that can be delivered through a one council approach.'

He adds: 'The fact that we have financial stability means someone can come in and really focus on transformational things that make a massive difference to people's lives. It's not a place to come in and firefight, but to come and make the world a better place – surely that's the reason we all get into local government?'

The successful candidate will need to spearhead our strategic initiatives and cultivate strong, effective relationships across the board, with elected members and officers alike – to ensure seamless governance and the achievement of our ambitious goals. ■



**Cllr Richard Clewer – Leader, Wiltshire Council**

