

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2014/2015



What is overview and scrutiny?

Wiltshire Council is run by councillors elected by the people of Wiltshire. A small number of them form the cabinet which sets the direction, determines the priorities and takes the important decisions often referred to as the Executive. The councillors in the cabinet hold powerful positions and it is important that they are held to public account for their actions. This is done through a system called overview and scrutiny and is undertaken by the non-executive councillors.

This is common to most local councils. They ensure that decisions are taken based on good evidence including the views of those with an interest in the matter and are in the best interests of the people of Wiltshire. Overview and scrutiny is selective in what it looks at so that it can add value to the most important services provided by the council, its partners and contractors. Wherever possible it helps to shape policy through early discussions as well as scrutinising proposals before they are finally agreed. A list of the matters which will be considered by overview and scrutiny is published in its forward work programme.



How do we do it in Wiltshire?

There is an overview and scrutiny management committee and three specialist select committees covering the following main service areas:

- Health (including the NHS, public health and adult social care)
- Environment (including highways, waste and transportation)
- Children (including education, vulnerable children, youth services and early years)

The management committee, as well as co-ordinating the work of the select committees, covers internal services such as finance, performance and staffing. Most of the work is done by small groups of elected members from across the political parties reviewing single specific issues in detail. These then report to the select committees and make recommendations for improvement to the cabinet and others as necessary.

Focus

The work programme focuses on the commitments given by the council in its Business Plan 2013-2017 and approaches its work in the following way:

- Better outcomes for the people of Wiltshire
- Adds value to the way decisions are reached
- Works constructively with the cabinet
- Challenges positively as a critical friend
- Bases its findings on good evidence
- Learns from others

Overview and scrutiny management committee



Cllr Simon Killane



Cllr Alan Hill

"We have had another successful year as we continue to make a positive contribution to the important decisions of the Council. Although we face challenging times, non-executive councillors work towards ensuring that key services are maintained and delivered in the most efficient way through their work on the various scrutiny committees."

Key items we have looked at ... and what we have achieved

OS Peer Challenge

Had a positive outcome to the independent review of how the OS function performs in the Council and will continue to seek opportunities for further improvement including promoting the work it does.

Financial planning

Monitored the Council's spend throughout the year focusing on key pressure areas and supported the process of setting the budget for 2015/16 including considering options and alternative proposals.

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Introduced a pioneering joint arrangement with Swindon Borough Council to scrutinise the operation of the LEP

Military Civilian Integration Partnership

Scrutinised the potential impact of Army re-basing in the County

Health select committee



Cllr Christine Crisp



Cllr John Noeken

"We have continued building relationships with external partners, achieving positive outcomes with the NHS 111 service and Arriva (Patient Transport Services) with continuing scrutiny of the SW Ambulance Service. Internally, we're ramping up resources to support the 100 Day Challenge (Better Care Plan), HTLAH areas of concern identified by the CQC as well as supporting Childhood Obesity – Child Poverty and AWP scrutiny working groups."

Key items we have looked at ... and what we have achieved

Help to Live at Home

Worked in partnership with all providers of Help to Live at Home Services to support them in making the improvements required to meet CQC standards and deliver safe, efficient and quality care for customers.

NHS 111 and non-emergency patient transport (Arriva)

Improved responses to Wiltshire residents have been seen as a result of consistent and effective engagement with scrutiny.

Transfers to Care

Reviewed the initiatives that have been put in place to reduce delayed transfers to care. It was recommended that a holistic view be taken which has resulted in a new stream of work on the 100 Day Challenge / Better Care Plan.

Scrutiny and Health & Social Care Integration

Facilitated an Inquiry Day with a range of partners to discuss how scrutiny can add value and in aid of improving partnerships across the health and social care system.

South West Councils Joint Working Group Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership

Worked together with 3 other councils to support and be a critical friend for AWP to improve outcomes.

Children's select committee



Cllr Jon Hubbard



Cllr Jacqui Lay

“Having undertaken major reviews of how we help prepare young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) for adulthood, and on the council’s relationship with schools, Children’s Select Committee has recently embarked on a major new programme of work. This focuses on task groups that are looking in detail at some of the council’s biggest priorities for young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable.”

Key items we have looked at

Children’s Centres

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

School Improvement

Early Help

...and what we have achieved

Looking at what should be included in the council’s new contracts with children’s centres so that they help provide the best start in life for Wiltshire children and their families.

Helping to monitor and develop the CSE action plan, particularly looking at how the council and partners seek to prevent CSE from happening in the first place.

Investigating how effectively the council supports Wiltshire schools to improve and provide a good education for all pupils, including how this compares with the approach taken by other local authorities.

Looking at how the committee will monitor delivery of the council’s Early Help Strategy, which sets out how vulnerable children and young people will be supported at the earliest possible stage.

Environment select committee



Cllr Peter Edge



Cllr Bridget Wayman

“At Environment we have engaged with the Council and provided support where necessary to fulfil the Council’s overall priorities but also addressed public concerns head on to ensure that Wiltshire is the best environment to live in. Our focus has been issues that affect the local environment in Wiltshire, such as waste, car parking, adoptable estates and the performance of the Highways and Streetscene contract. We are looking forward to the year ahead starting with the Passenger Transport review.”

Key items we have looked at

Waste

Car Parking Review

Adoptable Estates

Balfour Beatty Living Places
Highways and Streetscene contract

20 mph Policy

...and what we have achieved

Supported the executive in improving Communications to householders regarding waste and recycling as this is key to increasing recycling rates and counterbalancing the increasing associated costs.

Supported the executive in its review of the Car Parking Strategy.

Encouraged a review of the process by the service itself as a suitable individual or team would be able to take a fresh and impartial view.

Monitoring the performance of the Highways and Streetscene Contract, including the report to be produced after the first full year of operation, and ensuring that outstanding issues area are addressed.

Encouraged communities, through the Area Boards and C.A.T.Gs to pursue local road safety initiatives and alternative funding, including undertaking fundraising to implement community backed

How is overview and scrutiny supported?

The non-executive councillors run overview and scrutiny but are supported in their work by a team of four officers. They sit within the wider corporate office of the council which supports all aspects of decision-making. The team ensures that the councillors have all the necessary information and evidence they need and can speak to those people that have a direct responsibility or interest in the matter. This can include making arrangements to hear from service users and going on site visits.

The team does research and writes reports on behalf of the select committees and task groups.

Events during the year

Wiltshire Council is an active member of the national and south-west overview and scrutiny networks. It regularly speaks to others about how things can be done better. It is open to learning and has held a number of related training events including attendance at the Centre for Public Scrutiny annual conference.

Overview and scrutiny was independently reviewed during the year and it was recommended that it should increase its attention on focusing on better outcomes for the people of Wiltshire. Questions are now being asked in every overview and scrutiny review about the impact on service users and local communities of the council's proposals. It also asks questions about how things can be done better so that more can be done with less.



Looking forward

Overview and scrutiny will spend more of its time in supporting delivery of the council's key priorities of:

- protecting the most vulnerable in our communities
- boosting the local economy – creating and safeguarding jobs
- supporting and empowering communities to do more for themselves.

It will do this by focusing its reviews on challenging and encouraging progress on the things that need to be done to act on these priorities. The Business Plan sets out these actions and a number of intended outcomes. Further consultation is planned to ensure that overview and scrutiny stays on the right path and is successful in making a difference. This will be done by ensuring that the cabinet delivers on its stated priorities and by helping to shape improvements for the future on behalf of the people of Wiltshire. Overview and scrutiny is aware that much can be done through doing things differently in order to achieve service improvements even in a tough financial climate.

These are challenging but exciting and rewarding times for overview and scrutiny.

Want to know more?

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Information about Wiltshire Council services can be made available on request in other languages and formats such as large print and audio.

Please contact the council by telephone: 0300 456 0100, or email: customerservices@wiltshire.gov.uk