

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2021/22



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 (also referred to as the executive) which sets the direction, determines the priorities and takes the important decisions. 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 (OS) and is undertaken by the non-executive councillors.

This is common to most local councils. OS ensures 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. OS 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 OS is published in its [forward work programme](#).

How do we do it in Wiltshire?

There is an OS 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 coordinating the work of the select committees, covers internal matters 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 groups 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 2022-32 and approaches its work in the following way:

- Better outcomes for the people of Wiltshire
- Adding value to the way decisions are reached
- Working constructively with the cabinet
- Challenging positively as a critical friend
- Basing its findings on good evidence
- Learning from others

Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Committee, said:

“ This year Overview and Scrutiny has continued to play a key role in developing council policy and holding decision-makers to account. It has scrutinised 80% of the decisions taken by the council’s Cabinet and submitted 35 recommendations to improve services, with 67% of eligible members taking part in our work.

Following the shift to remote working during the pandemic, we have moved to a hybrid approach, with committee meetings taking place in-person, and task groups and rapid scrutiny exercises using remote meeting technology.

My thanks go to the councillors and co-opted members who lead the function, the scrutiny team that supports our work, plus all those decision-makers, witnesses and members of the public who have engaged with the process.

For the year ahead, Overview and Scrutiny will be focusing on scrutinising the big priorities in the council’s new Business Plan. Like the rest of the council, we will be placing an increasing emphasis on using data to inform our findings. ”

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee



Cllr Graham Wright
Chairman



Cllr Christopher Williams
Vice chairman

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

Business Plan

- Reviewed the council’s new ten-year business plan, submitting detailed comments from all of the select committees

Financial robustness

- Scrutinised council budget proposals as well as opposition group amendments to ensure that they were sound and reviewed potential impacts on services.

Area Boards

- Provided scrutiny input into proposed changes to how the county’s 18 area boards should function in terms of grant funding criteria, working groups and priority setting.

Health Select Committee

Councillor Johnny Kidney, the Chairman of the Committee, said:

“The last 12 months have once again been dominated by the pandemic. The Health Select Committee has prioritized its focus on Covid-19, reviewing the impact on health and care provision for Wiltshire’s residents.



Cllr Johnny Kidney
Chairman



Cllr Gordon King
Vice chairman

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

Significant changes are also taking place in response to the recent Health and Care Bills, with Integrated Care Systems (ICS) scheduled to become a statutory requirement from July 2022. The committee will continue to scrutinise this system transformation, with consideration given to the ongoing role of health scrutiny within the new ICS governance model. ”

Community diagnostics

- Scrutinised the national diagnostics programme and opportunities for future community-based diagnostic centres within Wiltshire.

Future health and care model

- Reviewed and contributed to the new model being developed across the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) system.

Adult social care

- Considered the ongoing transformation of the service, including rapid scrutiny reviews of grant-funded clubs and housing-related support.

Councillor Jon Hubbard, Chairman of the Committee, said:

“Following the local elections in May 2021, the committee has hit the ground running with new members getting to grips with our work, and all of us learning new ways of working during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Cllr Jon Hubbard
Chairman



Cllr Jacqui Lay
Vice chairman

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

The committee launched a Standing Task Group that allows members to dedicate more time to a number of our annual reports, adding value, through robust overview and scrutiny on topics including Safeguarding, Traded Services, Corporate Parenting Panel, Early Years and Childcare Standards and Performance Monitoring.

Our forward work programme keeps growing and we are looking forward to the opportunities it provides to make positive inputs in the future of Wiltshire’s children’s services. ”

Provision of accommodation for young people at transition time

- Conducted a gap analysis of the council’s provision of accommodation for young people, ensuring that gaps and needs are considered when the council develops its strategies.

Traded Services

- The committee’s Standing Task Group considered the first annual report from the Traded Services Team, ensuring a clear direction for Traded Services and robust future reporting to the committee.

Getting to Outstanding

- Reviewed the council’s intention and strategy for achieving a rating of Outstanding from Ofsted. Ensured the committee remains fully involved with this crucial work through a clear, practical and focused reporting mechanism.

Environment Select Committee

Cllr Jerry Kunkler,
Chairman of the
Committee, said:

“The Committee has continued to focus on areas that are important to our residents, like waste collection, the state of our roads and public transport. Also important to the people of Wiltshire is the climate emergency, and our Climate Emergency Task Group has continued to seek practical solutions to this urgent issue.

The last 18 months have not been easy, but it has shown how Wiltshire can rise to a challenge. The committee has been keen to see how council services have adopted new ways of working as we emerge from the pandemic. The success of our economic recovery will be seen through our market towns and high streets, which are so important to Wiltshire, and we will be closely monitoring progress over the coming year.

I would like to thank officers and members for their ongoing support. ”



Cllr Jerry Kunkler
Chairman



Cllr Bob Jones MBE
Vice chairman

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

Leisure Service Insourcing

- Scrutinised the process of bringing leisure centres under direct council control and will continue to look at the effect upon services and the outcomes for service users.

Future Bus Strategy - Connect Wiltshire

- Reviewed the development of the county's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), the outcomes of which will continue to be monitored.

Highways

- Considered the effectiveness of the highways service over the last 12 months, looking at road maintenance, drainage and traffic management issues.

Climate Strategy

- The Climate Emergency Task Group following publication of its recommendations, formally responded to the strategy consultation, and commented on early drafts.

How is overview and scrutiny supported?

The council's non-executive councillors lead OS but are supported in their work by a small team of officers. They sit within the Democracy and Governance team, which supports all aspects of the council's democratic decision-making. The team ensures that the councillors have the 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 also undertakes research and writes reports on behalf of the select committees and task groups.

Looking forward

Covid-19 has placed significant new financial pressures on local authorities, on top of existing demographic challenges and rising costs of care for vulnerable children and adults. In Wiltshire, Overview and Scrutiny will contribute to meeting this challenge by acting as a 'critical friend' to decision-makers, supporting innovation in how the council and its partners deliver services and acting as the voice of the people when important decisions are being made.

In February 2022, the council agreed a new ten-year business plan. OS will be using the plan as a guiding document, working to ensure that all of the priorities agreed in the Plan are achieved. There will be an increasing focus on using data to monitor whether public services are delivering real outcomes for Wiltshire residents.

Since its introduction in 2000, OS has become an integral part of decision-making at the council. We will be working to ensure this remains the case, with all significant executive decisions receiving prior OS input and as many elected representatives as possible contributing to OS's work.

Getting involved

OS welcomes suggestions from councillors and members of the public regarding issues that could be investigated. If you would like to suggest an issue that OS should look into, please contact us via the details at the end of this report.

Members of the public can also get directly involved by attending committee meetings, submitting a question before a meeting or giving notice to make a statement on an item on the agenda.



Want to know more?

Contact Henry Powell, Democracy and
Complaints Manager

Email committee@wiltshire.gov.uk

Visit www.wiltshire.gov.uk

County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 8JN

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