

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

15 June 2021

Overview and Scrutiny work priorities and approach:

Recommendations from the 2017-21 council

Purpose

1. To report relevant topics on the single overview and scrutiny (OS) forward work programme as agreed by the OS Management Committee at its meeting on 25 May 2021. (The OS Management Committee co-ordinates the overview and scrutiny forward work programme).
2. To report the task group activity of the previous Environment Select Committee (ESC) and re-establish those task groups and appoint memberships as appropriate.
3. To report the next steps for developing this Committee's section of the single OS forward work programme.

Background

4. An opportunity for Overview and Scrutiny (OS) to review its activity during the outgoing council is an established part of its learning and improvement journey. This "legacy process" allows for consideration of OS's approach and key work priorities for the future. In March 2021, the Management Committee, following dialogue with the ESC, agreed a report that highlighted:
 - a) The key pieces of OS work undertaken during the 2017-21 council;
 - b) The work priorities to be recommended for inclusion on the OS work programme during the 2021-25 council;
 - c) In terms of the approach OS takes, key strengths and improvement areas for OS to reflect on under the 2021-25 council.
5. This report presents the results of that process for the new Environment Select Committee to consider.

Overview and Scrutiny forward work programme

6. The topics recommended by the previous Management Committee for further work by ESC are listed in **Appendix A**. The new ESC is invited to consider their

inclusion, as well as potential additional topics, within a new OS work programme.

7. To use OS's resources most effectively, the committee's work programme should primarily be aligned to the council's strategic priorities. The Management Committee has therefore supported early discussions between select committee chairs/vice-chairs with the Executive and directors to gain a more informed understanding about key priorities and projects. This will be vital to deliver a focused, relevant and effective work programme.
8. The OS work programme should also provide space for further topics raised by the select committees and non-executive councillors and requested by the Executive and Full Council. It is also important that OS is outward facing in terms of seeking and understanding the views of customers, partners and stakeholders.
9. The OS work programme should be viewed as a live document that is constantly reviewed and updated. It will be reported to every meeting of the Management Committee and relevant sections to every meeting of the other select committees. The Management Committee will be mindful of the capacity of councillors and officer resource when determining its work programme.
10. At the beginning of this council term, the ESC is asked to note council's agreed OS core values:
 - Mature and harmonious working relationships
 - OS should be an integral part of decision-making
 - OS should add value to decision-making and focus on the big, important matters
 - A "two-way street" for communication
 - Responsible behaviour and sound practices based on evidence
 - All councillors and officers should work together.

Environment Select task groups

11. The Committee may wish to appoint or re-appoint members to those activities it decides should continue or commence. As vacancies have arisen following the elections, the Committee may wish to simply re-appoint those members who remain on the Council subject to their wish to continue and authorise the chairman and vice-chairman to fill any vacancies following expressions of interest. Proposed and new task groups are listed below:
 - **Global Warming and Climate Emergency task group** (to continue the work of this task group)

Overview and Scrutiny's approach

12. In March 2021, the previous Management Committee, supported by its other committees, highlighted the following as key strengths of Wiltshire OS during 2017-21:

- a) Positive OS-Executive working relationships
- b) In general, good opportunities to influence policy at an early stage
- c) An apolitical and collaborative culture
- d) Focused on the council's key priorities
- e) An appropriate balance of proactive-reactive OS (with few "call-ins")
- f) Willingness and support from officers across the council
- g) Dedicated scrutiny officer resource
- h) Information briefings to inform and educate councillors, as a complement to OS meetings
- i) Particularly valuable work undertaken by OS task groups
- j) Positive engagement with a variety of partners
- k) Efficient and effective engagement on the COVID-19 response when a streamlined OS model was necessary

The following were identified as approaches that OS could develop further:

- a) Be more proactive in identifying and pursuing work priorities beyond the Cabinet forward work programme
- b) Reintroduce regular liaison between OS chairmen/vice-chairmen and their Executive counterparts to support OS work planning
- c) More regular liaison between all OS chairmen and vice-chairmen, focusing on oversight and continuous improvement
- d) Give greater profile to financial and corporate scrutiny
- e) Seek more opportunities to influence policy at an early stage
- f) Continue to make efficient use of virtual meetings for task groups, rapid scrutiny exercises and briefings etc.
- g) Continue to aim for committee agendas focused on priority areas, delivering sub-2-hour meetings where possible
- h) Undertake more liaison with MPs on local issues with a national component
- i) Increase public awareness of, and engagement in, OS work
- j) Make better use of councillors' diverse knowledge and experience
- k) Maximise the number of non-executive councillors participating in OS, taking the post-election induction as an opportunity to promote OS
- l) Expand the use of information briefings, taking advantage of remote meeting technology to arrange these flexibly, having discussed the most appropriate topics with Executive, officer and partner colleagues
- m) Refine the process for OS task groups jointly established by two or more select committees

13. The new Select Committees will naturally want to consider the areas highlighted above alongside their own experiences of OS as work begins in the new council. There will be further opportunities to evaluate OS's approach and impact, including discussions with the Executive and key partners (reflecting the two-way nature of OS), with this process being led by the Chair and Vice-chair of the Management Committee in partnership with the other select committees.

Next Steps

14. The Environment Select Committee will have appointed its Chair and Vice-chair at today's meeting. This will provide leadership and, as outlined above, allow for initial meetings to be arranged with Executive members and directors in order to gain common understanding and support over priorities in the work programme.

Recommendations

1. To note this council's agreed core values for its OS function.
2. To note OS's key strengths and development areas as highlighted by the previous council and Management Committee's resolution to include these in any review of OS's approach and effectiveness in the new council.
3. To note the forward work programme agreed by Management Committee, delegating authority to the Chair and Vice-chair to develop this further (including the timing of activities), with proposals brought back to Committee.
4. To support early discussion between the Chair and Vice-Chair with Cabinet members, portfolio-holders and directors to gain a more informed understanding about Executive priorities, with outcomes reported back to Committee.
5. To note this committee's task group structure at the conclusion of the previous Management Committee as follows:
 - Global Warming and Climate Change Task Group
6. To approve continuation of the above task groups and memberships, and to authorise the Chair and Vice-chair to name councillors to fill vacancies on task groups and other ad hoc activities following an opportunity for expressions of interest from all non-executive councillors.

Report author: Ceri Williams, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 713704,
Ceri.Williams@Wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A Work areas recommended for further scrutiny by Management Committee under the previous council