

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2015/2016



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 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 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 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

"Overview and Scrutiny continues to be involved in all of the key priorities of the council, providing constructive challenge and helping to develop policy. In a time of reducing resources, the contribution of non-executive councillors to delivering better outcomes for Wiltshire communities has been more important than ever."

Key items we have looked at

Call-in of a decision regarding the Royal United Hospital (RUH) Patient Hopper Bus

Campus Governance

Financial Planning

Engaging with key partners

... and what we have achieved

Enabled member and public challenge of how this important decision was taken to ensure it was fair and constitutionally sound.

Developed a governance framework recognising the varied nature and composition of area boards and community areas. Reviewed the Administration and Opposition groups' draft budget proposals for 2016/17 leading to a smoother process of agreement at Full Council.

Identified risks and opportunities presented by the Military Civilian Partnership (a major programme of military re-basing in Wiltshire). Also established a positive relationship with the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), which is led by the business community, ensuring democratic accountability in its use of public funds.

Health select committee



Cllr Chuck Berry



Cllr Gordon King

"As funding reduces and demand for many health and care services grows we are continuing to focus on how different assets, such as pharmacies, dentists, first responders, acute services and private providers, can come together to deliver health outcomes collaboratively. We must also not ignore the fact that prevention is always better than needing a cure."

Key items we have looked at

Continence Services

Help to Live at Home

Obesity and Child Poverty

NHS Health Checks

... and what we have achieved

Sent a letter to national policymakers seeking guidance on the interpretation of the Policy to enable better provision of products and parity of esteem with regard to social and wellbeing considerations.

Having interviewed key witnesses to assess whether the service fulfils its objectives, made recommendations that were taken forward including greater use of technology in providing care and a single point of contact for clients.

Recommended targeted, evidenced ways of tackling the links between deprivation and unhealthy eating amongst children, including increasing uptake of Free School Meals amongst eligible families.

Identified variances in implementation across the county and planned further work to assess its impact on the numbers of diagnoses and interventions.

Children's select committee



Cllr Jon Hubbard



Cllr Jacqui Lay

"This past year the Children's Select Committee has become involved with a number of successful and high profile projects including the work of the Child Sexual Exploitation task group, the Children's Community Health Services retender, and the establishment of a task group to examine Wiltshire's school improvement strategy. Alongside this we have grown closer with the Wiltshire Assembly of Youth (WAY) to ensure that the priorities of Wiltshire's young people are heard through new regular updates to Committee meetings, and the inclusion of their representative, James Wilkins, in the construction of the Committee's agendas."

The Committee will focus on the continuation of strengthening our relations with young people and the WAY to ensure that Wiltshire's youth have their voices heard in Children's Services scrutiny. We will work to ensure that decisions are made with the best interests of Wiltshire's young people in mind."

Key items we have looked at

Child Sexual Exploitation

Safeguarding Children and Young People

Children's Community Health Services

...and what we have achieved

Extra CSE training sessions for Wiltshire councillors and recommendations on the council's CSE action plan including ensuring that the outcomes are measured and monitored.

Made six recommendations regarding the county's Multi Agency Forums to ensure consistency of quality and effectiveness for this key part of the council's safeguarding strategy.

Helped design a robust performance monitoring framework for Wiltshire's re-tendered children's community health service.

Environment select committee



Cllr Bridget Wayman



Cllr Peter Edge

"Another busy year for the Environment Select Committee with new contracts for both waste and highways, a county-wide public transport review and a rapid scrutiny of the future delivery model for the Repairs, Improvements and Maintenance of council owned assets."

Our focus remains making positive contributions to the decisions of the council on issues that affect the local environment in Wiltshire. We are looking forward to the year ahead with the mobilisation and implementation of the new contracts."

Key items we have looked at

Public Transport Review

Resident Engagement

Waste Service Changes

...and what we have achieved

Reviewed the options being developed for consultation and made suggestions, which were taken into account, to ensure that the full impact of the proposed options could be measured.

Used evidence gathered from three other housing providers in Wiltshire to draw up recommendations on good practice for the council's own housing arrangements.

Visited three sites across Wiltshire to gather first-hand evidence of the impact of changes to Household Recycling Centres (HRCs) and also garden waste collections.

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 council's corporate office, 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 also undertakes 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 and 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 as well as attending the Centre for Public Scrutiny's annual conference.

Following an independent review of Overview and Scrutiny in 2015, it continues to develop its ways of working, including:

- Focusing on how council decisions impact on service users and communities
- Tracking the progress of the recommendations it makes to decision makers
- Open channels of communication and clarity of roles with the Executive



Looking forward

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

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

In a time of reducing resources, it will help the council to develop new and innovative ways of working that achieve service improvements even in a tough financial climate. This will include more joint working and resource sharing with a wide range of local partners, supporting communities to do more for themselves, and looking at how the council can use technology to help people access the services and information they want quickly and easily.

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