

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2020/21



Wiltshire Council

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 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. Overview and Scrutiny 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 Overview and Scrutiny 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 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



Overview and scrutiny during COVID-19

As we all know, this has been an unprecedented and challenging year and the ripples caused by the pandemic will be felt for some time to come. Every department of the council has been involved in supporting the residents of Wiltshire through the pandemic and Overview and Scrutiny has needed to adapt its approach to support that effort.

In normal circumstances, Overview and Scrutiny operates four committees, all meeting regularly and providing 'critical friend' input on most decisions taken by the council's executive. However, as the pandemic situation began to unfold in April 2020 it was agreed that Overview and Scrutiny should temporarily switch to a streamlined model, maintaining scrutiny's crucial role while allowing officers to focus on the urgent day-to-day challenges. The streamlined model comprised the following:

- **Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group:** A dedicated working group of 7 members who met regularly with the Leader, Chief Executive and Corporate Leadership Team to receive updates on the pandemic and scrutinise the council's response.
- **Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee:** The council's lead Overview and Scrutiny committee continued to hold public meetings online throughout the pandemic and oversaw the work of the Wiltshire COVID-19 Response Task Group.
- **Children's, Environment and Health Select Committees:** To allow officers to focus on the incident response, formal meetings of these committees were paused between April 2020 and January 2021. However, they continued to meet informally, discussing issues of local concern and agreeing key questions for the Executive and officers. These were then taken forward by the COVID-19 Response Task Group and OS Management Committee.
- **Briefings for select committee chairmen and vice-chairmen:** The lead Overview and Scrutiny members were provided with regular briefings on proposals coming to the council's Cabinet, during the temporary pause of select committee meetings.

While COVID-19 remains in our lives, since March 2021 the council's full select committee structure has been back in place and has been providing Overview and Scrutiny input across the full Cabinet work programme and beyond.



Children's Select Committee



Cllr Jon Hubbard
Chairman



Cllr Jacqui Lay
Vice chairman

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

Adoption West Joint Scrutiny Panel

- Adoption West and ensure that it meets its performance targets and expectations. The joint scrutiny panel started in 2020 and submitted its first annual report to the committee.

FACT (Family and Children Transformation) programme

- Received regular updates and recommended that the next committee (post May 2021) consider setting a task group to scrutinise the impact and effectiveness of the FACT programme.

Youth Voice

- Considered the outcomes of youth surveys and the changes to the service. Working to embed the voice of children and young people in the work of the council and monitoring the implementation, and impact, of the proposed approach for Youth Voice.

Environment select committee



Cllr Stuart Wheeler
Chairman



Cllr Bob Jones
Vice chairman

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

Global Warming and Climate Change

- Produced two detailed reports with 141 recommendations about how to reduce carbon emission through energy, transport, air quality and planning

Waste

- Reviewed the delivery of the Household Waste Management Strategy including waste collection, recycling and fly-tipping.

Highways

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



Health Select committee



Cllr Chuck Berry
Chairman



Cllr Gordon King
Vice chairman

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

Royal United Hospital (RUH)

- Considered the Government's Health Infrastructure Plan and the potential to secure funding to transform services and develop new hospital buildings at the RUH.

COVID-19 Response

- Reviewed the council's and the Bath, Swindon & Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group's (BSW CCG) activities to mitigate the impact of the pandemic within Wiltshire.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Reviewed the mental health services for children and young people in Wiltshire, with all recommendations accepted by the Executive.

Management committee



Cllr Graham Wright
Chairman



Cllr Alan Hill
Vice chairman

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

Financial robustness

- Scrutinised council budget proposals in detail to ensure that they were sound and reviewed potential impacts on services.



Looking forward

Overview and Scrutiny has reflected on its work over the past four years, undertaking a detailed review of its activities and approach. You can read the full report on the council website [here](#).

With the 2017-21 council term at an end, the function will soon be forming a new work programme for 2021-25. This will reflect some of the issues raised by residents during the local election campaigns, as well as the corporate priorities agreed by the council as part of its new Business Plan.

Like local authorities across the country, Wiltshire Council is playing a central role in responding to COVID-19 and supporting residents to meet the challenges of the pandemic. It is working with its partners to ensure that communities are supported, local businesses receive government funding and critical services continue to protect people during an unprecedented and rapidly changing situation.

To add maximum value, Overview and Scrutiny will be focusing on how Wiltshire can recover as fast as possible and what new and improved ways of working can be found.

Covid-19 has placed significant new financial pressures on local authorities, on top of existing demographic challenges and rising costs. 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.

Getting involved

Overview and Scrutiny welcomes suggestions from councillors and members of the public regarding issues that could be investigated. If you would like to suggest an issue that Overview and Scrutiny 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?

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