

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2023/24



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 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](#).



Cllr Graham Wright
Chairman



Cllr Christopher Williams
Vice chairman

OSMC Chair's statement

"As we enter the final year of the 2021-25 council, OS is continuing to play a central role in developing council policy, scrutinising the council's performance and holding decision makers to account. In 2024-25, OS have provided pre-decision input on a remarkable 90% of all decisions taken by the Cabinet and 67% of eligible members took part in our work.

The select committees have continued to look closely at the key issues affecting Wiltshire residents, including the demand pressures faced by emergency health services, activities and support for young people and how affordable housing is allocated based on need.

My thanks go to all scrutiny councillors for their hard work, especially the three other committee chairmen and also the Scrutiny team that supports our work. We will continue to work constructively with the council's cabinet to achieve the very best outcomes for Wiltshire's residents."

- Cllr Graham Wright, Chairman

Key items we have looked at:

Customer complaints

- Scrutinised the council's complaints data, examining the number of complaints received across different council services, how they were resolved and how Wiltshire compares with other local authorities.

Financial management

- Undertook detailed quarterly scrutiny of the council's revenue and capital budgets and reviewed the administration's and opposition groups' budget proposals for 2024-25 prior to consideration by Full Council.

Stone Circle Companies

- Commenced a review of the governance arrangements in place for the council's wholly-owned companies to ensure they are robust, including how scrutiny will engage in this area.

Performance of council services

- Performed quarterly scrutiny of the council's performance and risk metrics, flagging issues for further investigation by the other select committees.





Cllr Johnny Kidney
Chairman



Cllr Gordon King
Vice chairman

Health Select Committee – Chair’s statement

“The Health Select Committee is responsible for scrutinising health services, adult social care and public health provision in Wiltshire. In July 2023 we brought together representatives from organisations delivering front line health and care services including the ambulance service, primary care and hospital staff, reablement and community-based support to review the exceptional pressures on emergency services and the strategies – planned or in place – to reduce the demand on acute services.

The inquiry has shaped the work of the committee this year and members have followed with interest interventions and services that focus on prevention and community-based support.”

- Cllr Johnny Kidney, Chairman

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

Reducing hospital admissions

- Received an update on two initiatives: NHS@Home Wiltshire and Urgent Community Responses. Members welcomed the provision of urgent and acute care outside a hospital setting and recommended publicising the service to carers.

Smoke Free Generation

- Supported a proposal to reduce smoking and vaping in young people, improving future health outcomes and quality of life. Engaged in the national consultation on how the policy should be implemented.

Dementia Care strategy

- Supported a drive to increase community awareness around dementia and the involvement of Area Boards in promoting dementia-friendly towns. The implementation plan of the strategy will be reviewed this year.

Regional Health Scrutiny

- Met with counterparts in Bath and Northeast Somerset to discuss collaboration at a regional level. This partnership will continue to be a feature of the committee’s work.



Cllr Jon Hubbard
Chairman



Cllr Jacqui Lay
Vice chairman

Children’s Select Committee - Chair’s Statement

“It has been a notable year in the transformation of services for children in Wiltshire. At the end of 2023, the committee was pleased to congratulate officers on achieving an Ofsted rating of ‘outstanding’ for ‘making a positive difference to children’s lives.’ The committee knows that its constructive and robust challenge ensures that the Council are accountable when making decisions that affects the lives of families, children and young people.

Every service we consider is significant to the overall outcomes for children and young people. We will, however, continue to have a particular focus on two areas that are developing new ways of working; neighbourhood-based Family Hubs and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Both services will remain a priority for the Council and committee in the coming years.”

- Cllr Jon Hubbard, Chairman

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

Activities and support for young people

- Following recommendations from the committee, the council agreed to develop an overarching youth strategy, to review funding criteria for youth grants and to explore how we can involve young people in decisions affecting them.

Family Hubs

- Scrutinised the findings and learning from the pilot project and plans for rolling out family hubs. The committee will continue to monitor how the hubs are meeting their objectives to support the needs of families

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

- Appointed a committee member to the governance board for SEND. This body will now oversee the government-funded safety valve investment programme in Wiltshire.





Cllr Jerry Kunkler
Chairman



Cllr Derek Walters
Vice chairman

Environment Select Committee – Chairs statement

“In 2023/24 the committee continued to investigate issues impact the day to day lives of Wiltshire residents, concentrating on how services can improve and adapt to current challenges. We have focused on core services such as highways, including pothole repairs, housing and waste management.

There are significant challenges ahead with the implementation of the Environment Act 2022, the transfer of responsibilities from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and our ongoing response to climate change. Consequently, our work plan continues to grow but we welcome the opportunity to help shape and add value to the work of the council.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the loss of two experienced members of the committee this year; Cllr Bob Jones MBE and Cllr Tony Trotman, whose commitment and local knowledge will be missed. I would also like to welcome Cllr Derek Walters, as our new Vice-Chairman.”

- Cllr Jerry Kunkler, Chairman

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

Housing

- Reviewed the council’s Housing Allocations Policy, which allocates social homes including allocations into those homes managed by other providers. Submitted thirteen recommendations to the Executive, all of which were accepted.

Leisure centres

- Asked for a Bank Holiday opening pilot to be undertaken, which is still ongoing, to assess demand and viability.

Climate adaptation policy

- Helped shape the council’s developing climate adaptation policy. This will be crucial in supporting the county to make adaptations to alleviate the effects of climate change.

Potholes

- Continued to monitor this issue and will receive further updates before the start of the winter.



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. The Scrutiny 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

Local authorities continue to face significant financial pressures on top of existing demographic challenges. In Wiltshire, OS will contribute to meeting this challenge by acting as a ‘critical friend’ to decision-makers and acting as the voice of the people when important decisions are being made. The council is increasingly looking at how digital innovation and prevention can help to support residents most effectively while protecting the council’s financial health. OS will need to reflect this in its work.

OS will be holding its annual round of meetings with the council’s Executive to discuss council priorities for the next 12 months and decide where OS input can add value.

Since its introduction, 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

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