

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2016/2017



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 nonexecutive 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
- 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 management committee



Cllr Simon Killane



Cllr Alan Hill

Councillor Simon Killane, Chairman of the Committee, said,

“In a society with increasing access to internet data, opinion and news, the role of overview and scrutiny within local government is becoming increasingly important to give the public enhanced confidence in the complex and difficult decisions that their elected representative make. Scrutiny at Wiltshire Council has strengthened decision making by empowering non-executive councillors and the wider public to challenge and help shape important policy decisions.”

Key items we have looked at

Voluntary groups using Household Recycling Centres (HRCs)

... and what we have achieved

Ensured that proper processes had been followed before changes to HRC use were implemented

Hydrocarbon Extraction (fracking)

Explored the legal framework around ‘fracking’ and checked what policies the council has in place

Four-Year Financial Settlement

Scrutinised the pros, cons, risks and opportunities of accepting the four-year financial settlement offered to the council by central government

Budget scrutiny

Ensured that the proposed council budget was sound and explored potential impacts on services

Health select committee



Cllr Chuck Berry



Cllr Gordon King

Councillor Berry, the Chairman of the Committee, said:

“The Health Select Committee has contributed to, and scrutinised, the delivery of Wiltshire and its partners with regard to health and care for our residents. The committee has offered up and shared new ideas and listened to and considered new approaches from Wiltshire and the wider health community as we work together for the betterment of the county's health and wellbeing.”

Key items we have looked at

Helping pharmacists do more

... and what we have achieved

Began developing a training programme to enable pharmacists to play a greater role in providing local health care services

Wiltshire ambulance service

Scrutinised the response times and other performance measures of the South West Ambulance Service Trust in Wiltshire

Standards of care at local acute hospitals

Held to account the Great Western and Salisbury District hospitals for recent CQC inspection gradings of “Requires Improvement”

Better Care Plan

Provided ongoing member scrutiny of how innovation funding was being used. Made recommendations on addressing the significant workforce challenges in the care sector and the adoption of a shared approach to risk across health and care partners.

Children's select committee



Cllr Jon Hubbard



Cllr Jacqui Lay

Councillor Jon Hubbard, the Chairman of the Committee, said:

"Children's Select has continued to work increasingly closer with the young people we are representing through our sitting representative from the WAY(Wiltshire Assembly of Youth). We have contributed to and scrutinised many big-name topics, including Child Sexual Exploitation and the ever-changing arena of School Improvement. Together we have worked as a committee to ensure that the young people within our county are healthy, safe, and provided with exceptional youth and educational services."

Key items we have looked at

Wiltshire Assembly of Youth (WAY)

...and what we have achieved

As part of a commitment to closer working with young people the committee now receives update reports from their young people's representative

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Extra CSE training sessions for Wiltshire councillors and monitoring of the council's CSE action plan.

The task group produced recommendations on the council's CSE action plan including ensuring that the outcomes could be measured and monitored.

School Improvement

Compared Wiltshire's School Improvement Strategy with those of other local authorities and made recommendations to help ensure all pupils attend an excellent school and can achieve their full potential.

Adoptions West

Monitored progress of Wiltshire's collaboration with five other local authorities developing a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

Environment select committee



Cllr Bridget Wayman



Cllr Peter Edge

Many key pieces of scrutiny work for ESC this year, including work on Housing Service Support, Resident Engagement, Waste, and the Gypsy and Traveller Plan. The committee also considered the draft version of Wiltshire's first ever Playing Pitch Strategy before it was approved by Cabinet. Committee members provided several useful comments before endorsing the draft including several previously not included pitches across the county. The strategy will come back to ESC as a legacy topic.

Key items we have looked at

Waste Service Changes

Resident Engagement for Social Housing Tenants

Highways Maintenance

Housing Service Support Contracts

...and what we have achieved

Investigated the impact of reduced Household Recycling Centres' hours and traffic management issues and the impact of the new green waste collection service, particularly in relation to fly-tipping.

Provided feedback on Wiltshire's approach to engaging with social housing tenants following meetings with three other key housing providers in Wiltshire.

Received the first annual report since the new highway contract started and was assured that good progress had been made on implementing the 'Local Highways Investment Fund 2014 - 2020', and there had been a substantial improvement in road conditions in Wiltshire.

Two separate rapid scrutiny exercises held to investigate the recommissioning of the contract along with the approach taken to procure services and made recommendations on what form the option to procure would look like.

How is overview and scrutiny supported?

The nonexecutive councillors run overview and scrutiny, but are supported in their work by a team of three 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.



Looking forward

Events during the year

Wiltshire Council is an active member of the national and south west overview and scrutiny networks. It 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.

With elections coming up, overview and scrutiny has been looking back on its successes and challenges during the 2013-17 council. In January, councillors attended a workshop to discuss what overview and scrutiny does well and where it could improve. The workshop formed part of a wider reflective process that will lead to a report to the next council making recommendations on what topics deserve further focus and what new approaches to scrutiny might be effective.

In January central government launched an enquiry into whether overview and scrutiny is working effectively and whether local communities are able to contribute to and monitor the work of their councils.

The enquiry comes almost two decades after the original overview and scrutiny legislation was introduced and follows failures in a number of high profile cases, including child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, poor care and high mortality rates at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and governance failings in Tower Hamlets.

As a council that is committed to overview and scrutiny, Wiltshire Council has submitted an individual response to this national enquiry and will monitor its progress and findings.

In a time of reducing resources, Overview and Scrutiny will need to help councils develop new and innovative ways of working that achieve service improvements even in a tough financial climate.

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.

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