

Wiltshire Council's Annual Governance Statement 2017/18

1 Introduction

1.1 Wiltshire Council is a local authority that is responsible for providing services to nearly half a million residents, tens of thousands of varied businesses and over a million visitors per year. It secures funding from national government, local taxation and charges. So as a public body it needs to have a strong governance framework that ensures that its business is conducted to the highest standards, ensuring:

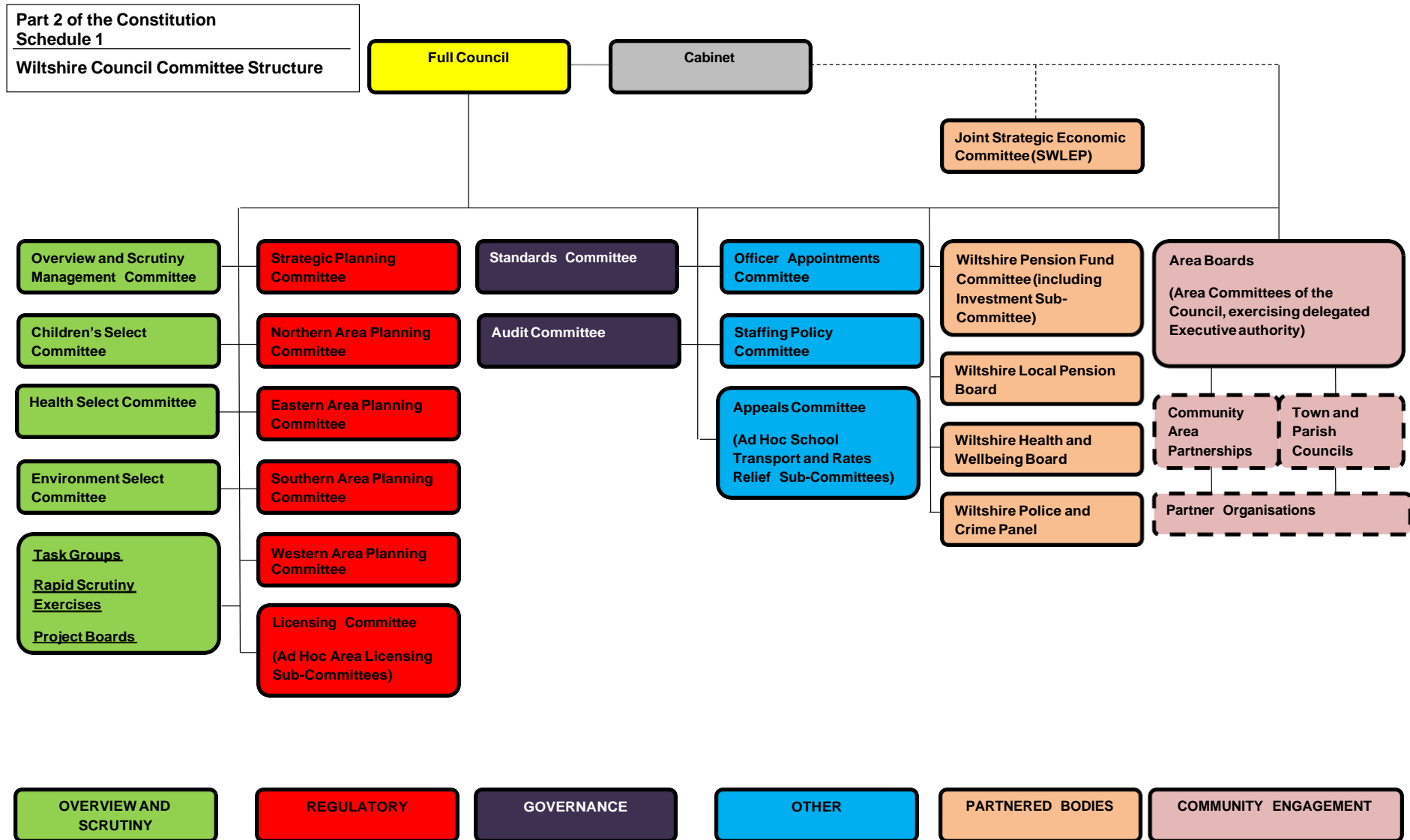
- resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities;
- there is sound and inclusive decision making, conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards;
- there is clear accountability for the use of those resources in order to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities; and
- public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised is secured, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

1.2 Ensuring good governance fits with the principles of the Council's current Business Plan 2017-27 which states that the Council will deliver its vision of strong communities by working according to the principles set out under eight key themes:

Community Involvement Robust decision making which is open, inclusive, flexible and responsive	Commercialism An efficient, commercial and long term approach with an increase in trading of our services and £45m savings by 2021.	People An outstanding workforce with a can-do attitude - supported through clear career paths, talent management and learning and development	Change Transforming services through systems thinking, underpinned with a rigorous programme approach.
One Wiltshire Estate Shared estate with public partners and a strategic, commercial approach.	Digital Use of dynamic, digital technology and shared records with partners.	Performance A focus on customers and delivering good outcomes	Delivering together Designing services with communities; considering new delivery models and joint commissioning with partners

- 1.3 Elected members are collectively responsible for the governance of the Council. The full Council's responsibilities include:
- agreeing the Council's constitution, comprising the key governance documents, including the executive arrangements, and making any necessary changes to ensure that the Constitution remains fit for purpose and reflects legislation and best practice.
 - agreeing the budget and policy framework, including key strategies
 - appointing the head of paid service
 - appointing members to committees responsible for overview and scrutiny functions, audit, standards and regulatory matters.
- 1.4 The Council operates a leader and cabinet executive model in accordance with the Localism Act 2011. Under these arrangements the Cabinet carries out all of the Council's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council. Cabinet meets monthly and its decisions in 2017/18 can be found [here](#).
- 1.5 The cabinet is held to account by overview and scrutiny committees whose function is to review and/ or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's functions and assist with policy development.

1.6 The political structure of the Council is shown below:



- 1.7 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which the Council accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
- 1.8 The assurance framework and the system of internal controls are significant parts of the governance framework . They are designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. They cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The assurance framework and the system of internal controls are based on an ongoing process that is designed to:
- a. identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives;
 - b. evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised;
 - c. assess the impact of the risks if they are realised;
 - d. manage the risks efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 1.9 The assurance framework also provides a mechanism for monitoring and implementing a system of continuous governance improvement. The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2018 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts for 2017/18.
- 1.10 As part of ensuring the highest standards are set and maintained the Council regularly reviews its governance arrangements. This statement reflects how Wiltshire Council has met those standards in 2017/18 and the ongoing actions it is taking to maintain and improve its governance arrangements. Evidence of how we have assessed ourselves in line with good practice set out by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in its publication 'Delivering good governance', has been grouped into six sections:
1. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and representing the rule of law.
 2. Ensuring openness, transparency and comprehensive stakeholder engagement – delivering accountability
 3. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

4. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes
5. Developing capacity, including the capacity of the Council's leadership and the individuals within it
6. Managing risks and performance through robust internal controls and strong public financial management.

1.11 The following sections set out how Wiltshire Council delivers good governance, how it performed in that role in 2017/18 and what it is doing to continually improve its arrangements.

2. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and representing the rule of law.

- 2.1 The Council's [Constitution](#) provides the framework within which the Council operates. It sets out how decisions are made and the procedures which must be followed to ensure that these are efficient, effective, transparent and accountable. The Constitution is reviewed on an ongoing basis and Full Council updated Parts 11A and 11B (relating to corporate parenting and safeguarding children) in May 2017 and Part 4 (council procedure rules) on recorded votes in October 2017. In 2017/18 specific reviews on parts 3D (3) (scheme of delegation specific to planning) and various changes to Part 2 (The Constitution), Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions), Part 9 (Finance Regulations and Procedures) and Protocol 11 (Governance Reporting Arrangements) have commenced. These will be assessed by the Standards Committee and considered by [Full Council](#) on 22 May 2018. This practice ensures that the Constitution remains fit for purpose and is updated for national and local changes in circumstances.
- 2.2 The Constitution includes at Part 13 the Members' Code of Conduct, which makes clear the obligation of elected members in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct and ensuring the principles of public life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership) are adhered to. Pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests are registered and published on the web site in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Conduct and the underlying legislation. There is a process for dealing with complaints under the code of conduct for unitary, parish, town and city councillors in Wiltshire. This process and its application is set by the Council and reviewed regularly by the Council's Standards Committee. Minutes from the meetings of this Committee can be found [online](#).
- 2.3 The Council has a policy and [register](#) of interests, gifts and hospitality for councillors. This is also reviewed regularly by the Council's Monitoring Officer. The registers are available for public scrutiny.

- 2.4 There is a strong culture operating in the Council of acting to the highest standards. This is rooted in the behaviours expected of councillors and staff, and upheld by the senior leaders. Where any resident feels the Council has not acted properly the Council has a corporate complaints [procedure](#). If residents are not satisfied with the response to their complaint they may complain to the Local Government Ombudsman. The complaints procedure is also subject to regular review.
- 2.5 The Council publishes and promotes both a code of conduct for its staff and a behaviours Framework that details what is expected of all employees. The behaviours framework forms a key part of the appraisal system to promote ethical awareness amongst the Council's staff.
- 2.6 The Council provided a comprehensive induction programme for newly elected councillors in May 2017, including training on the decision making framework, standards of conduct, safeguarding, overview and scrutiny and the discharge regulatory functions. Further training will be provided on an ongoing basis as the Council operates a protocol for Councillor-Officer Relations to ensure the respective roles of councillors and officers are fully understood. Joint communications are used (The Wire and Elected Wire) to ensure that officers and councillors have the same understanding of projects, plans and issues. These measures ensure that elected members have every opportunity to use their expertise.
- 2.7 The Council has established recruitment policies to ensure that appointments to the Council are fair and ethical and meet the requirements of equalities legislation takes account of the need to ensure diversity. Any applicant who has identified themselves as disabled and who meets the essential requirements of the person specification will be automatically shortlisted. This 'double tick' policy is part of the Council's wider Equality and Diversity Policy that ensures all appropriate decisions are taken with issues of equalities in mind.
- 2.8 Ethical considerations are also evident in the Council's [Procurement Strategy](#) where Social Value is a key feature. The Strategy describes a voluntary charter for suppliers asking for a commitment to local employment, skills, training and environmental issues.
- 2.9 The Council has an [Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy](#) which operates as part of the governance framework to ensure the Council recognises and responds to the threat of fraud and corruption. The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy was reviewed and updated during 2017/18 and will be published together with awareness initiatives in 2018/19. During 2017/18 SWAP Internal Audit Services took on responsibility for counter fraud across the Council following the disbanding of the in-house

counter fraud team in late 2016/17. A Counter Fraud Plan for 2017/18 was developed and agreed by the Audit Committee, delivery being reported during the year.

- 2.10 The Council is reviewing its policies on Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, Complaints and other Human Resources Policies to ensure that these are clear to staff and work effectively together.
- 2.11 The Council has independent external auditors (KPMG LLP) and internal auditors (SWAP Internal Audit Services, with the Council being a partner). SWAP's periodic update reports were considered during 2017/18 by the Council's [Audit Committee](#). No significant governance issues were raised.
- 2.12 The Council appoints an Independent Remuneration Panel when required to advise and make recommendations to the Council on the setting of member allowances in accordance with the Local Authorities (Member Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. The Panel's latest review was considered by Full Council in [October 2017](#).
- 2.13 The Council is responsible for a number of partnerships, including:
 - the [Health and Wellbeing Board](#), a committee of the council with a strategic leadership role in promoting integrated working between the council and the NHS;
 - the [Wiltshire Police and Crime Panel](#) which reviews and scrutinises decisions of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Panel is a joint committee with Swindon Borough Council;
 - The Council is the lead authority for the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership ([SWLEP](#)). Following the Mary Ney national [review](#) of LEPs, the Council as the lead authority reviewed the [governance](#) and [assurance](#) frameworks underpinning the SWLEP (such as the Joint Strategic Economic Committee) during 2017/18 with input from internal Audit and DCLG. The governance arrangements were found to be operating effectively and were commended by DCLG. These will be kept under review to reflect further [best practice guidance](#) from central Government during 2018/19.
- 2.14 The Council is the Administering Authority for the Wiltshire Pension Fund, and the [Pension Committee](#) exercises its responsibilities in relation to investment management where it sets investment policy and appoints and monitors external investment managers. This has including participation in the Brunel Pension Partnership (as agreed by full council) and

continued operation of a Local Pension Board whose purpose is to assist the Council as Administrator for the Wiltshire Pension Fund and ensure the efficient and effective governance of the pension scheme. SWAP Internal Audit undertook an audit of key financial controls in relation to the Wiltshire Fund during 2017/18.

3. Ensuring Openness, Transparency and Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement – delivering Accountability

- 3.1 The Constitution sets out the legal and constitutional framework for good decision making, including the principles of decision making, schemes of delegation, recording of decisions and access to information relating to decisions. All Council, Cabinet and Committee report templates include a section on legal and financial considerations. These can be seen in all decisions made, see for example reports available to the public made by [Cabinet](#) during 2017/18.
- 3.2 The Council publishes a Forward Work Plan once a month giving details of all matters anticipated to be considered by the Cabinet over the following 4 months, including items which constitute a key decision.
- 3.3 The Council has established 18 area committees known as Area Boards. Each area board exercises local decision making under powers delegated by the Leader.
- 3.4 The Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements consist of an Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee supported by 3 select committees:
 - 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)
- 3.5 The management committee co-ordinates the work of the select committees and also covers internal services such as finance, performance, staffing and business planning. Most overview and scrutiny work is done by small groups of elected members who meet to review single issues in detail. Interested parties are often invited to contribute to this work. The group then produces a report presenting their findings and recommendations to the cabinet and others as necessary on how the issue or service could be improved. During 2017/18 49.5% of Cabinet decisions received Overview and Scrutiny input. No cabinet decisions were called in and considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

- 3.6 Rapid scrutiny exercises provide the opportunity to be able to react more readily to issues as they emerge. Scrutiny member representatives can also be appointed to boards of major projects to provide challenge. Partners and contractors also contribute to the scrutiny process.
- 3.7 These arrangements serve to hold the Cabinet, its Committees, individual Cabinet Members and officers to public account for their executive policies, decisions and actions and serves to make sure that decisions are taken based on sound evidence and are in the best interests of the people of Wiltshire.
- 3.8 In 2017/18 Scrutiny Committees consider a wide range of subjects and produced an [Annual Report](#) to the Overview and Select Management Committee on its work. In addition the Council carried out several public consultations to provide feedback to Cabinet as part of informing their decision making, including:
- [Car parking charges](#)
 - [Waste Management](#)
- 3.9 An electoral review committee was also established during 2017/18 to undertake detailed work on behalf of full council to inform a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England for the electoral review of Wiltshire. Full council's submission emphasised the importance of the council's area boards for local accountability and delivery.
- 3.10 The Council consults appropriately in line with its [Consultation Strategy](#) and legal requirements in order to inform its decision making. Consultation also takes place with the Council's partners in particular partnerships such as the Health and Wellbeing [Board](#) and the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise [Partnership](#) to enable more effective partnership communication and consultation.
- 3.11 There has been no residents survey undertaken in Wiltshire for a number of years. The Council is aware a number of other local authorities and partners undertake such an exercise, and it will consider the need and format going forward as part of its assessment of its governance arrangements in 2018/19.
- 3.12 The Council makes available a range of important information on its website including its strategic aims and ambitions in its published [Business Plan](#) and via its [publication scheme](#). Further information is available on request and through the

council's arrangements for dealing with requests under Freedom of Information legislation. In 2017/18 there were 1,495 requests received, 97% were responded to within the legal compliance time.

4. Defining Outcomes in terms of Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits

- 4.1 Wiltshire Council has operated a four year planning cycle in line with its electoral cycle, as such in 2017/18 the Council agreed a revised and updated Council's [Business Plan](#) 2017 – 2027. It continues to build on and extend the vision, goals and achievements from the previous business plans and has been prepared to reflect both the significant external challenges and changes that the council will have over the coming years as well as the changes to the way the council will have to operate to manage these challenges.
- 4.2 Part of the building of communities involves capital developments of buildings, highways and other such infrastructure. The Council sets out a four year [Capital Programme](#) tied into its Business Plan. During 2017/18 a hub was completed in Devizes, building on a health and wellbeing centre in Pewsey began and centres in Calne, Cricklade and Melksham had their revised budgets [approved](#) in Dec 2017 and have now progressed to design phase. This aims to bring communities together in one location to enable them to connect, seek services and take on more responsibility. In addition, the Council is applying the learning from the recently completed devolution of assets to Salisbury City Council to other parts of Wiltshire. The Council's decision-making framework has ensured that all of these decisions are reported through Cabinet. This is seen as a key strand of the future delivery of the Council's business.
- 4.3 The Council's directorates and services plan their activity around these outcomes and review those plans on an annual basis. The performance against the Business Plan is reported every quarter to Cabinet and the final outturn for 2017/18 is on the same agenda as the Annual Governance Statement.
- 4.4 The actions arising from the Business and Service Plans must all comply with key procedures, including following the Council's procedures on project management, procurement, consultation and risk management. Regular reports are taken to senior management and councillors via the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and appropriate regular councillor meetings, for example Audit Committee.
- 4.5 Wiltshire communities are engaged with the delivery of the long-term aims of the Council through Local Area Boards. These Boards prioritise the Council's ambitions within local areas and help direct resources. The reach of the Local Area Boards extends beyond the physical meetings through the work of Community Engagement Managers and the virtual network *Our*

Community Matters. In 2017/18 there were 124 [Area Board](#) meetings, and all minutes and actions from these meetings are publicly available. Area Boards have been essential in delivering improvements in youth development and health initiatives such as rights of way and walk to school. The Council has also started initiatives such as the Legacy programme and the Big Pledge to improve the connectivity and health of its communities. More decision making and funding is now devolved at local area level. In addition to the funding grants and Highways (CATG) and youth activities, there is also funding for older people's champions and health and wellbeing projects

- 4.6 The Council receives reports on the combined economic, social and environmental impacts of its policies in the form of various reports including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment ([JSNA](#)), and the Annual Statement of Accounts, as well as regular performance and financial updates to Cabinet e.g. [here](#) and [here](#).
- 4.7 The council continues to have a relentless focus on safeguarding improvement in Children's Services. An Improvement Board chaired by the Corporate Director with statutory role of Director of Children's Services (DCS) has continued to be in place during 2017/18 ([Link](#)). In early 2018 the LA and partner agencies were subject to an OFSTED Inspection focussing on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and High Needs. The [outcomes](#) of this review were very positive.
- 4.8 Similarly, the council received the [findings](#) of an LGA peer review on Outcomes Based Commissioning in adult social care in Wiltshire during 2017/18. This found that:
- It was clear to the team that there was strong political leadership for Adult Social Care.
 - There were improving relationships with partners.
 - The Council's Area Boards were widely viewed as a positive way of engaging with local communities and for ensuring that local needs were addressed.
- 4.9 The team also observed that:
- More could be done to increase the amount and profile of coproduction with service users.
 - The Council should encourage providers to work more collaboratively with each other and with the Council itself in addressing skills shortages.
 - There needs to be a clear 'front door' to accessing adult social care services.
- 4.10 These findings have been used to inform the development of an Adult Social Care Transformation [programme](#), building on the successful model established within children's services and using additional and time-limited adult social care funding to

deliver this. A system wide review of the health and wellbeing system was also undertaken by the CQC in March 2018, with the findings due to be released later this year. An action plan will be agreed with partners in the NHS to deliver this.

4.11 The council continues to engage in annual LGA peer reviews and in November 2017 it underwent its second Corporate Peer Review. The detailed [report](#) was presented to March Cabinet. The key findings were:

- The council has strong and accessible political leadership which sets a clear direction for the council and the place.
- Stakeholders are clear what the council stands for, how it goes about its business and what its plans are.
- The council benefits from a committed workforce. All staff that the Peer team met told them that Wiltshire Council is a great place to work; that they feel valued, are developed to undertake their roles and feel supported to progress their careers.
- The Council has a strong record in terms of financial management.
- There has been a very good recovery in Children's services since a disappointing Ofsted inspection in 2012.

4.12 There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, including:

- Building a shared understanding of the opportunities, investment and skill needed in the areas of commercialism and 'digital'.
- More closely aligning financial and budget planning to organisational priorities and underpin this with a more robust planning and performance management regime.
- Applying the same approach and commitment to the Adults Services Transformation plans as was afforded to the council's previous children services recovery plan.
- Ensuring that both the council and CLT themselves invest sufficient time in focussing on their development as a team.

4.13 An [action plan](#) is being implemented and overseen by CLT and Cabinet with the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee monitoring progress on a six-monthly basis.

5. Determining the Interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes

- 5.1 In 2017/18 the Council also refreshed its [Medium Term Financial Plan](#) as part of a four-year financial settlement with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). As part of that and in setting the 2018/19 budget the Council has several key Programmes of activity it is managing to improve the outcomes of its residents, these have included the Campus Programme, with Devizes hub opening in 2017/18. The Campus programme has been the subject of various reports and programme management [updates](#) during 2017/18, and its financial progress [reported](#) to Cabinet.
- 5.2 Oversight of corporate projects is undertaken by the Corporate Leadership Team, supported with advice from Finance, Legal HR and Procurement Teams. The Corporate Directorate includes the Programme Office which manages projects and programmes on behalf of the Council and provides reports to the Council on ongoing work. During 2017/18 the majority of projects were delivered or progressed according to schedule. Monthly reports were provided to CLT with appropriate actions taken.
- 5.3 As part of the financial settlement for 2017/18 additional Adult Social Care grant was awarded. This was used to establish the transformation [programme](#) for adult social care within Wiltshire. Health partners are actively engaged in this Programme at a senior level through the Health and Wellbeing Board as well as operational representation on the programme board.
- 5.4 Regular Performance and financial updates are reported to senior officers and councillors, including scrutiny through the Finance and Performance Task Group which is a task group established by the [Overview and Scrutiny](#) Management Committee.

6. Developing capacity, including the capacity of the Council's leadership and the individuals within it

- 6.1 In order to deliver the council's priorities within a strong governance framework the Council requires a workforce that is appropriately skilled and qualified. Because of the shifting requirements of local government and the changing demands put on the Council it is essential that the capacity of the Council's workforce is reviewed and updated. Following the May 2017 elections, the council's Business Plan was refreshed and to aid the delivery of the outcomes a restructuring of Tier 1 and 2 of the council's management structure has taken place to ensure that directorates are aligned with the delivery of outcomes. A comprehensive induction programme was also put on for new councillors.

6.2 In addition to this, the Council takes an organisation wide approach to staff improvement and has, in the last year, updated its [People Strategy](#). The new strategy focuses on attracting the best people to work for the Council and engaging, developing and retaining existing staff. Full council also agreed a [pay policy statement](#) as part of the budget setting process and complies with reporting requirements on the gender pay gap.

6.3 The Council looks for good practice from other areas and other authorities in order to help improve its leadership and delivery. The Council also makes use of external reviews of its practice in order to deliver better outcomes. In 2017/18 several key peer reviews and inspection were completed and the findings of all are public:

- Ofsted [review](#) of SEND
- LGA Corporate Peer Review [report](#)
- Outcomes Based Commissioning for Adult Social Care peer review [findings](#)
- CQC system review (results due for publication in 18/19)

6.4 In March 2015 the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) carried out a voluntary audit of the Council's information governance arrangements. As reported in last two year's AGS this has been a key area for the Council to address, and with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) changes having come into force in May 2018 remains so. Actions have been taken and as well as the Senior Information Risk Owner [annual report](#) ongoing [updates](#) have been provided to the Audit Committee, which are content that significant improvement has and continues to be taken and made in this area.

6.5 Working in partnerships is increasingly important to the Council and is used as an additional method of improving and growing the skills base for delivering the Council's objectives.

7. Managing risks and performance through robust internal controls and strong public financial management

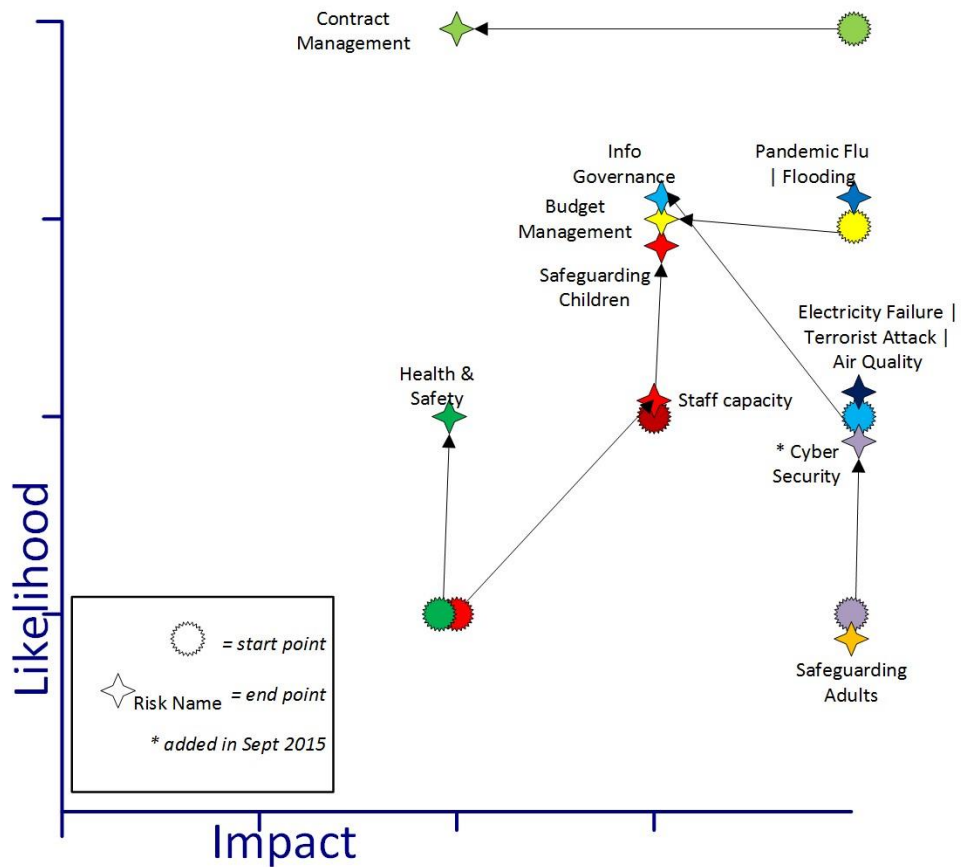
7.1 Performance management is a key component of the Council's approach to achieving its stated outcomes. Part of this process involves identifying and, where appropriate, mitigating risks, ensuring that performance and risk management processes are in place throughout the organisation with additional rigorous processes to ensure sound financial management. Performance management follows the standard planning cycle (plan, do review, revise) and allows the

organisation to know what it wants to achieve, how it's going to achieve, whether it's achieving and what more could be done to achieve. [Performance reports](#) are a regular part of the Council's business. In addition to cabinet performance reports the Council updates a [Citizens' Dashboard](#) with statistics about Wiltshire for easy public consumption. The format of the dashboard will be reviewed during 2018/19 to ensure it reflects the new business plan and delivers maximum openness and transparency.

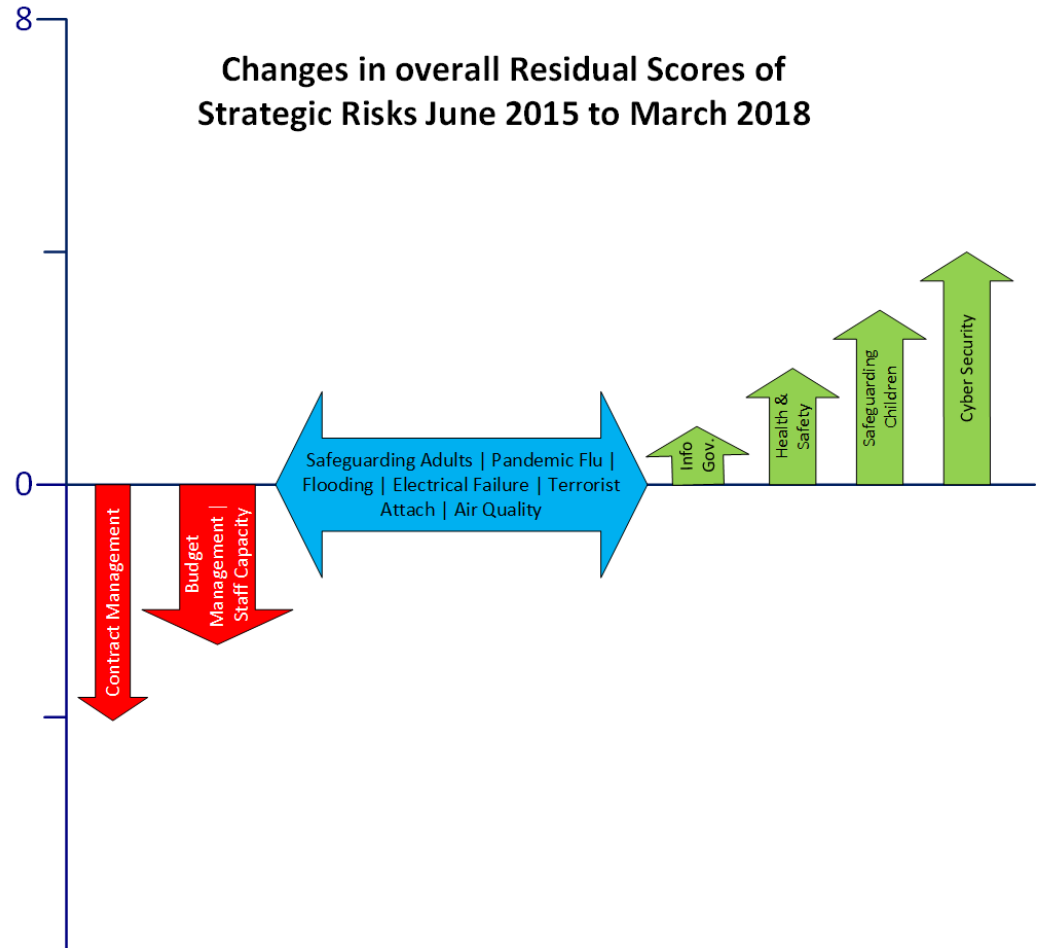
- 7.2 Financial reporting is currently undertaken separately, although reported on the same agenda as performance, this is an area for improvement in 2018/19. During 2017/18 there were four budget monitoring updates to councillors (period 4, 7, 9 and outturn), and 11 to senior officers (monthly, period 2 to outturn). These identified potential overspends, and appropriate action was taken. This raised the risk of the Council's financial position in its Corporate Risk Register however, effective management meant that a small surplus was delivered by year end. The Council also undertook robust scrutiny of the 2018/19 budget and this was set at Full Council in February 2018.
- 7.3 The Council's risks are monitored at various levels in the organisation including by the Cabinet on a quarterly basis. Managing risks is the responsibility of services who define the risks related to their service areas and assign individuals to be responsible for their management. All services risks are scored on the same basis and some service risks are elevated, through a set strategy, onto the corporate risk register which is published and reviewed quarterly. Service risks that are high scoring or appear on, or are referenced on, the strategic risk register require a greater level of mitigating action planning with those actions assigned a time scale and an owner. The Council recognises that in order to make successful changes some risk must be undertaken. Therefore, some risks are accepted. This overarching risk management strategy will be reviewed again during 2018/19 alongside the Corporate Performance Strategy.

7.4 The Council's risk management reports are reviewed by Cabinet within performance and risk reports. In 2017/18 the main changes to risks were:

Changes in Residual Scores of Strategic Risks June 2015 to March 2018



Changes in overall Residual Scores of Strategic Risks June 2015 to March 2018



- 7.5 Wiltshire's section 151 Officer or Chief Finance Officer has a statutory duty to ensure that the Council has a strong financial control environment, including an effective and independent Internal Audit function in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. As at April 2018, SWAP Internal Audit Services completed 40 reviews ,to draft and final report including significant high risk areas e.g. contract management and project management. Reporting also has included action to follow up implementation. The Audit Committee raised concerns regarding the timeliness of finalising some audits and the implementation of agreed audit recommendations and improvements were made. Overall SWAP Internal Audit Services assessed the Council's control environment as 'adequate' with no significant issues raised. The Council's external auditors have also not raised any significant matters during 2017/18. We have sought to advise KPMG at all times and sought their views on a number of occasions before taking key decisions. A review was carried out on role of the Audit Committee in 2017/18 and agreed actions will be implemented in 2018/19.
- 7.6 The section 151 Officer's role as set out in both statute and defined by the CIPFA framework has been in place throughout 2017/18. No issues have been raised and there has been full compliance with that framework.

8. Areas for Improvement

- 8.1 The Council has identified a number of areas where further improvements to can be made to strengthen its governance framework. Work will be undertaken over the next twelve months to review the following areas.
- Responding to the recommendations in peer reviews including the Corporate Peer, SEND and CQC reviews. This will include assessing the impacts on the delivery of the Council's Business and Financial Plans of external factors including the Social Care green paper expected Summer 2018, changes to the Business Rates system and lessons learnt from the s114 issued at Northamptonshire County Council.
 - Embedding improvements to data protection to be compliant with the new regulatory framework.
 - Responding to an event in March 2018 that occurred in Salisbury the Council will seek to learn and share lessons surrounding the event, as well as assess the long-term impact and actions needed for the County, Council and Partners.
 - Ensuring the new waste contract is mobilised effectively in line with current plans for July 2018.
 - Improving the Council's counter fraud framework including greater awareness and response.

- There will be a review of the inter-relationship between key policies to improve clarity and consistency of processes including: Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistle Blowing, complaints and some staff policies, such as registering interests, gifts and hospitality.
- How the Council collects general feedback from individuals and communities to assess improvements in approach
- Reporting of finance and performance and risk management will be more closely aligned. A review of the relevant Corporate Performance Strategy and Risk Management Strategy will take place to ensure a focus on links between the use of resources and the outcomes being achieved. Alongside this there will be a focus on delivery of comprehensive plans for change for council services and a review of council commissioning, procurement and contract management.

8.2 The governance of the Council will continue to be monitored by Cabinet, other councillor committees and the Council's Corporate Leadership Team. That will include the areas to address identified above.

Leader of the Council

Baroness Jane Scott of
Bybrook OBE

Corporate Directors

Alistair Cunningham
Dr. Carlton Brand
Terence Herbert

Date
