

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2022/23



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](#).

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 2022-32 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

Councillor Graham Wright, Chairman of the Committee, said:

“ This year Overview and Scrutiny (OS) has continued to play a key role in developing council policy and holding decision-makers to account, with 73% of decisions taken by the council’s Cabinet scrutinised and 65% of eligible members taking part in our work.

In November 2022, the Local Government Association (LGA) undertook a peer challenge review of the council and its report commented positively on Wiltshire’s OS function.

My thanks go to the councillors and co-opted members who lead the function, the scrutiny team that supports our work, plus all those decision-makers, witnesses and members of the public who have engaged with the process.

For the year ahead, OS will be placing an increasing emphasis on using data to inform our findings. We will be focusing on encouraging even more councillors to contribute to the process, using their diverse skills and experience to improve council policies and services for the good of Wiltshire’s residents.”

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee



Cllr Graham Wright
Chairman



Cllr Christopher Williams
Vice chairman

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

Financial health of the council

- Publicly scrutinised annual budget proposals, opposition group amendments and the key financial updates throughout the year

Customer complaints

- Introduced scrutiny of the council’s complaints data, examining the complaints received across different services, how they are resolved and how Wiltshire compares with other local authorities

Performance of council services

- Reviewed how we scrutinise corporate issues such as finance and resources, agreeing a new approach. Introduced regular scrutiny of the council’s new performance scorecard, flagging issues for further investigation by the other select committees.

Transferring council assets

- Scrutinised a new Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy prior to its adoption, submitting 11 recommendations to the Executive regarding implementing it successfully

Carbon footprint of Overview and Scrutiny

- Adopted new meeting protocols, with task groups and rapid scrutiny exercises using remote meeting technology wherever possible

Health Select Committee

Councillor Johnny Kidney,
Chairman of the Committee,
said:

“ This past year the Health Select Committee has seen how health and social care services are responding to considerable pressures. The impact of the pandemic is still ongoing, and the Committee will continue



Cllr Johnny Kidney
Chairman



Cllr Gordon King
Vice chairman

to explore how demands on urgent care can be reduced.

We will be holding an Inquiry this summer to understand the factors contributing to the acute pressures on emergency services and work with partners to explore how they could be alleviated.

We have been pleased to see the increased collaboration between the Council, Bath & North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW) Integrated Care Board (ICB) and health and care providers to develop services to meet the needs of Wiltshire residents. ”

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

Meeting future health and care needs

- Scrutinised how the needs of Wiltshire residents, identified in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2022, informed the development of the Integrated Care Strategy and Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Focusing on objectives

- In line with the Health Overview and Scrutiny principles recommended by the Department for Health and Social Care, the Committee have been focused on whether service developments and changes bring improved services for Wiltshire residents.

Transforming care services

- Monitored with interest the development of the Independent Living Service, to prioritise support at home and away from residential care. Members were reassured that the procurement of care services is developing to better meet individual need.

NHS Dentistry

- Carried out a rapid scrutiny exercise looking at the availability of NHS Dentistry in Wiltshire. The Committee will continue to scrutinise this service to ensure improved access for residents.

Children's Select Committee

Councillor Jon Hubbard,
Chairman of the Committee,
said:

“ Every time I am asked for a statement for the OS annual report my first thought is “Where has this year gone”? Then I look back over the minutes of our committee meetings and the reports from our task group and rapid scrutiny exercises



Cllr Jon Hubbard
Chairman



Cllr Jacqui Lay
Vice chairman

and I am reminded why it feels like time is just flying past!

There is nothing else I'd rather be doing though, and I know how dedicated our committee members are to making continuous improvements to Wiltshire's children's services. I am already looking forward to our upcoming work.

We all know that we are living in complicated financial times and that this will continue to have a significant impact on both services and families. As always, we will strive to add value through our OS work. ”

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

High Needs Block Funding

- Explored options to manage pressures on the high needs schools budget, which is a challenge faced across the country. Further information will now be collected on local authorities who have managed to avoid a financial deficit in this area.

Disadvantaged Learners

- Scrutinised why Wiltshire's Disadvantaged Learners underperform overall compared to the regional and national average. Its eight recommendations focused on improving outcomes for Disadvantaged Learners.

Traded Services

- Considered three reports from Traded Services and focused on ensuring there is robust, relevant and efficient reporting on Traded Services both to the council and to the committee. The task group was determined to support Traded Services to demonstrate its achievements and potential.

Environment Select Committee

Cllr Jerry Kunkler,
Chairman of the Committee,
said:

“The Environment Select Committee has a broad remit and this year we have covered significant ground. We have maintained a focus on areas that are important to our residents, like waste collection, the condition of our roads and public transport. We have also looked into issues linked to the cost of living and the economy such as the housing rental sector and the regeneration of our market towns.

Looking ahead we continue to develop our forward work plan to ensure that we are adding value, through a robust overview and scrutiny of key areas. Next year we will continue to explore housing issues in the county and through our Climate Emergency Task Group monitor the delivery of our Climate Strategy.

I would like to thank officers and members for their ongoing support.”



Cllr Jerry Kunkler
Chairman



Cllr Bob Jones MBE
Vice chairman

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

Leisure Service Insourcing

- Scrutinised the process of bringing leisure centres under direct council control and will continue to look at the effect upon services and the outcomes for service users.

Future Bus Strategy - Connect Wiltshire

- Reviewed the development of the county's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), the outcomes of which will continued to be monitored.

Highways

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

Climate Strategy

- The Climate Emergency Task Group following publication of its recommendations, formally responded to the strategy consultation, and commented on early drafts.

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 and rising costs of care for vulnerable children and adults. 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.

OS will continue to use the council's Business Plan 2023-33 as a guiding document, working to ensure that all of the agreed priorities are achieved. There will be an increasing focus on using data to monitor whether public services are delivering real outcomes for Wiltshire residents.

In 2022, a Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge panel found that Wiltshire's OS members feel able to challenge and influence the policy agenda, with effective mechanisms in place for coordination between Scrutiny and the Cabinet. In the year ahead, OS will focus more on adding more value by engaging on policy development at an early stage.

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

County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 8JN

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