

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny: Annual Report 2017/18



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 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. 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 2017/27 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

Councillor Graham Wright said:

“As well as holding decision makers to public account, this year Overview and Scrutiny has helped the council’s cabinet to develop a number of key council policies and services. 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



Cllr Alan Hill
Vice chairman

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

Council Business Plan 2017/27

- Helped to define the council’s main priorities in its new ten-year Council Business Plan and how they will be supported.

Income from advertising

- Helped to shape how the council will generate income from advertising and sponsorship opportunities, including what kinds of advertisements reflect the council’s values.

Digital strategy and implementation

- Ensured that user feedback is reflected in the final strategy to make the council’s digital systems accessible to all.

Budget scrutiny

- Ensured that the council budget, and suggested amendments to it, were sound and also explored potential impacts on services.

Health select committee

Councillor Chistine Crisp said:

“As funding reduces and demand for many health and care services grows, it has been another busy year for the health select committee.

With so many areas of change for scrutiny to contribute to, most of all the council’s adult social care transformation, the committee has continued building relationships with external partners whilst ensuring that decisions are made with the best interests of Wiltshire’s residents in mind.

We are looking forward to the year ahead starting with a rapid scrutiny on NHS health checks.”



Cllr Christine Crisp
Chairman



Cllr Gordon King
Vice chairman

Key items we have looked at

...and what we have achieved

Adult social care transformation

- With two members of the committee as OS representatives on the transformation board, helped to define the future of adult social care in Wiltshire.

Customer Engagement with adult care

- Ensured that all required re-assessments were undertaken, with the last few scheduled to have taken place by the end of May 2018.

Places of Safety

- Ensured that a workable solution was reached between Wiltshire Council and Swindon Clinical Commissioning Group regarding the Place of Safety and Section 136 assessments for Swindon patients in Wiltshire, following concerns raised at a committee meeting.

Adult care charging policy

- Ensured, by highlighting issues at a committee meeting, that more time was allowed for further discussion with the user-led organisations to address these issues.

Children's select committee

Councillor Jon Hubbard said:

“ It has been a particularly busy year for children's select committee. Members have engaged with a number of high-profile scrutiny exercises, including special school provision in Wiltshire; outdoor education; and CAMHS. The committee has also been active in monitoring a number of our performance areas. Topics such as elective home education and children out of education; school Ofsted judgements; the education transformation board; the Wiltshire standards board; and the disadvantaged learners strategy have been identified as future topics. Although this is a full list we are looking forward to the opportunities it provides to make positive inputs in the future of Wiltshire's children's services. ”



Cllr Jon Hubbard
Chairman



Cllr Jacqui Lay
Vice chairman

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

SEND school provision

- Working with SEND schools and the Wiltshire Parent Carer Council, undertook an intensive review helping to define the future of SEND education in Wiltshire.

Care leavers Local Offer

- Helped to define the priorities in the council's new Local Offer for care leavers.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

- Highlighted lessons learned from the previous primary and specialist CAMHS model and quality assured the new governance arrangements.

Nursery places

- Helped to ensure sufficient childcare is available in Wiltshire for working parents and parents who were studying or training for employment.

Environment select committee

Cllr Matthew Dean said:

“ Following the local elections in May 2017, the environment select committee has hit the ground running, adding value in a number of areas such as local provision on rail services and the council’s waste management strategy. The committee has also been very active in addressing the performance management of flooding and highways. We have a demanding agenda for the next municipal year and the committee is looking forward to contributing to policy development at the council and scrutiny of the executive in the environmental arena.”



Cllr Matthew Dean
Chairman



Cllr Bob Jones
Vice chairman

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

Highways and Streetscene

- Analysed how street and utility works are managed across the county. This highlighted the vital role that local communities play and how the council can achieve its business plan priority of ‘stronger communities’.

Local Provision on Public Transport

- Looked at joint working between the council and train operating companies and considered the transport outcomes for Wiltshire. Helped to assess the economic benefits of Wiltshire’s train stations.

Development

- Considered how funding from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions are managed for the benefit of the local community.

Waste

- Provided input for Wiltshire’s waste management strategy and have engaged with much public participation in this area. Helped with the development of the council’s waste communication strategy, as changes to the waste collection service come into force in the summer.

How is overview and scrutiny supported?

The council's non-executive councillors run OS, but are supported in their work by a small team of officers. They sit within the council's legal and democratic team, 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.

Events during the year

Following elections in May 2017, the council welcomed many new councillors and in-depth training was provided to those wishing to participate in OS.

November 2017 saw OS councillors taking part in the council's corporate peer challenge, which gave a positive report of how the council is tackling its priorities.

In December 2017 leading OS councillors attended the Centre for Public Scrutiny's annual conference, while in March 2018 they presented at the South West OS Network in Bath. OS is open to learning and regularly speaks to others about how things can be done better.

In March 2018 OS considered the findings of a national review of the function's effectiveness in local government. This was to ensure any learning points could be reflected in how OS operates in Wiltshire.

Looking forward

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

In order to help address this challenge, Wiltshire Council's business plan focuses on innovation and transformation. Key projects include transforming adult social care, using digital technology to increase access to services, and increasing income by taking a more commercial approach. Non-executive councillors have an important role to play in ensuring that new approaches have positive outcomes for residents.

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.

Please contact the council by telephone: 0300 456 0100, or email: customerservices@wiltshire.gov.uk