

Scrutiny Inquiry Day into Urban Gulls

Basic information about the Policy Development & Scrutiny system in Bath & North East Somerset Council

Where does Policy Development and Scrutiny fit within the Council's decision-making structure?

There are two main statutory functions involving elected members within every district, county or unitary council in England – the Executive (Cabinet) and Overview and Scrutiny. Different councils structure this in different ways, but there is a clear division between the roles and responsibilities of these two functions.

The main decision making powers rest on the **Cabinet**. The Cabinet is intended to create clear leadership and clear accountability for service delivery. Here in Bath & North East Somerset Council, these decision-making powers lie with nine councillors, each with a distinctive portfolio of work.

Overview and Scrutiny is the name given in legislation to the system of checks and balances implemented by all other councillors as they monitor the activity of the Cabinet and assist them in developing and reviewing policy. In Bath & North East Somerset Council, this is known as Policy Development and Scrutiny. Policy Development and Scrutiny is intended to review the work of the Cabinet and to enhance the performance of services. It is also designed to provide a forum through which policy review and policy development can be extensively examined before consideration and decision by the Cabinet and/or Full Council.

There are **six Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels** which meeting approximately six to seven times a year and oversee a specific area of work, generally matching the Cabinet portfolios. These panels are:

- Early Years, Children and Youth
- Economic and Community Development
- Housing and Major Projects
- Planning, Transport and Environment
- Resources
- Wellbeing

How do Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels operate?

All Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels are led by councillors and have a **Chair and Vice Chair**. Membership consists of (non-executive) councillors of all parties, and may also include co-optees from voluntary organisations, and other outside agencies.

In addition to their **regular meetings**, Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels in Bath & North East Somerset carry out **reviews**. These involve undertaking a mixture of "overview", "scrutiny" and "policy development" on a selected subject, which may be a review of a policy, service or an investigation of an issue of local concern.

Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels achieve their impact and initiate change through **making recommendations to the Cabinet, Full Council or partners**. The formal **meetings are open to the public**, and always include space on the agenda for public statements. Their agendas and minutes are available to the public via the council's website.

What is a Scrutiny Inquiry Day?

A Scrutiny Inquiry Day is a mechanism for a **short single topic scrutiny**, used where a formal panel meeting may not be as effective or appropriate, or to review progress in an area which has already been the subject of scrutiny work.

Scrutiny Inquiry Days are often informal and may not be open to the public, although their final reports and recommendations will be a public document. It is standard practice for Policy Development & Scrutiny Panels to invite people with relevant experience or knowledge to give information, expert opinion or advice. Such experts may be Council officers, outside agencies, academics, voluntary organisations, community or campaign groups, local residents, service users etc.

In an inquiry like this, it is on-the-day assessment of findings, and development of conclusions and recommendations (in conjunction with other interested parties) that differs from a traditional "contributor session" in more complex Policy Development and Scrutiny reviews.

How will the Scrutiny Inquiry Day achieve an impact?

There are two main aims of Scrutiny Inquiry Days. These are to:

- enhance understanding of an issue that involves many organisations, in addition to the Council
- develop recommendations for an inclusive and positive way forward.

These recommendations may require a response from the relevant Cabinet member(s), but in other cases will be more appropriate for another Council or partnership body.

Given that the scrutiny methodology more often than not involves bringing together practitioners and strategic-level staff from different sectors, scrutiny activities may also have a lasting beneficial effect beyond their immediate aims. These benefits include facilitating communication and co-operation between jointly interested parties on a topic or issue.