



BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET

Overview & Scrutiny

Annual Report
April 2005 - March 2006



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Introduction by Overview & Scrutiny Chairs

Welcome to our fifth annual update of Overview and Scrutiny activity in Bath and North East Somerset. This report highlights many of the key achievements and events of the last year as well as providing some activity statistics, and looks forward to plans for the 06/07 year.

The Report has been prepared to ensure that the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels is shared with the wider Council and the community and that it is properly focused on its agreed key areas.

We recognise the value of Overview and Scrutiny in both supporting executive activity and acting as a robust critical friend. It is the primary mechanism for engaging with the public on key community issues and informing the policy making / service review processes of the Council. It is a check and balance on the decision making of the Executive and is a way of holding the Executive to account.

The Report supports this approach, as it is designed to assist the public to identify the range of issues dealt with by Overview and Scrutiny bodies and to enable councillors and officers to plan ahead and to ensure that the work priorities agreed by the Council are properly resourced and considered.

However, the Annual Report is not a detailed work plan for the future. It provides a more general account of the approach employed by Panels, the Overview and Scrutiny process and how Panel activity has contributed to and will contribute to the delivery of the Council's key priorities.

The Report also provides an opportunity for the Council to focus on Overview and Scrutiny issues and to satisfy itself that what is in place is operating effectively and is resourced to deliver what is required.

We, as the Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Panels, commend this report to the Council and in so doing would like to express our appreciation to all the Members, Officers and community representatives who have worked with us over the year to enable us to focus on and represent what is important to local people.

Councillors: David Bellotti, David Dixon, Andrew Furse, Charles Gerris,
Cllr Steve Hedges, Martin Veal, ,Chris Watt

Overview and Scrutiny Highlights during 2005/6

As well as activities taking place in 05/06 mentioned in the subsequent Panel pages, some highlights from this year relate to the implementation of recommendations from previous years, showing how Overview and Scrutiny can influence changes and service improvements to the community.

- Primary Schools Geographical area reviews:-
 - The North West Bath review in Spring 2005 eventually (following SOC and referral to Schools Adjudicator) resulted in the decision on 2nd December 2005 to allow the creation of a new Community Primary School. This will generate savings of around £80K a year.
 - Completion of Bathavon Review (Summer 2005) and Peasedown area review (Spring 2006) although not resulting in any major changes are providing the strategic view of all our schools and keeping us on target for completion by 2008.
- School Meals - real shift towards providing healthy local produce, prompted by some active parental engagement (pre Jamie Oliver), the best consultation response yet at O&S and close working with local producers.
- Leisure Centres Review - Review of Aquaterra's performance in 2003/4 has produced continued growth in popularity of new facilities in Bath in 05/06.
- Passenger Transport Review - Joint meetings of 3 O&S panels making many recommendations which have resulted in a number of transport initiatives including proposals to expand dial a ride, introduce "fare cars", consult young and older people (all implemented) plus a new proposal to the Executive to charge for denominational transport with an aspiration for free home to school transport for all "distant" children

Full Council Meeting

During 2004 the Corporate Issues and Partnership Panel started a review into the approach B&NES takes to its full Council meetings. In July 2005 the Panel group reported how it had examined ways in which the full assembly of local councillors could be more engaging for councillors and for the public who attend, how they had talked to other Councillors and officers about what they thought of full Council Meetings and found out about their ideas for change.

During the timescale of the review the CIP Panel membership changed. However, in agreement with the new CIP Chair, the previous Chairman continued to lead the review and work with a dedicated group of Councillors from the Panel until the review's completion.

The review's final recommendations were presented to the Council meeting in October 2005 and after further deliberations, most of the recommendations were agreed in March 2006. As a result a number of changes will be implemented from July 2006, leading to a revitalised approach to the regular meetings of Full Council.

In addition to its valuable subject matter, the Full Council review also developed new ways of working within Overview and Scrutiny, and provided valuable lessons in how to continue with issues when structural or membership arrangements have changed.

2005/06 – some facts and figures

During the year, Overview and Scrutiny Panels deal with a variety of issues, hold many types of meeting and hear from a range of witnesses. They also carry out reviews and conduct call-ins when required.

Below is a brief summary of some of these activities for 2005/06:

Type of activity	Total
Panel meetings	51
Extra or special issue panel meetings	22
Contributor sessions	11
Agenda items	228
Public submissions	51
Contacts with external (non-Council) organisations	58
Reviews (wholly conducted and completed in the year)	7
Call-ins	5

Call-ins during 2005/06 looked at the following issues:

- Voluntary Sector Play Grants
- London Road Traffic Scheme
- St Catherine's Close and St Mary's Close Traffic Regulation Orders
- Weston High Street “pinch point”
- Edge of Property Refuse Collection

Corporate Issues and Partnerships Panel



Chairman:
Councillor
Chris Watt

Panel Members:

Cllr Tim Ball
Cllr Sarah Bevan
Cllr Keith Kirwan
Cllr Marie Brewer
Cllr Tim Warren
Cllr Hattie Ajderian

Following completion of the review of the Sheltered Housing Residential Warden Service in 2004, Somer Community Housing conducted more detailed work during 2005 on an approach that would move towards a more flexible non-residential service.

The Panel decided to examine the proposed changes to Somer Housing's Sheltered Housing Warden service, and to present resulting views and suggestions to the Somer Housing Board. A special public meeting was conducted and considered representations from councillors, residents and housing association representatives.

The Panel made a number of recommendations to Somer Housing Community Trust about their review on the provision of the

Warden Service, giving reassurance to residents about proposed changes to the service.

Other items on the panel's agenda included:

- presentations from Bristol Airport concerning their expansion and discussing issues relating to parking, infrastructure links and attracting tourists to Bath from the airport
- presentations and discussions on the Council's communications strategy
- exploring the Panel's role in developing and supporting the introduction of Local Area Agreements and Local Public Sector Agreements
- Culture Change Programme
- Council Equality Policy
- Performance Monitoring

The screenshot shows the header '»change bulletin' in large orange font, with 'March 2006' below it. The page features several columns of text and small images related to the newsletter's content, such as 'News roundup', 'Meeting for our Council - the vital ingredients', and 'Meeting summary - the vital ingredients'.

¹ This panel membership has reduced to 5 Councillors since Council May 2006

Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure Panel



Chairman:
Councillor
Andrew
Furse

Since 2005 the Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure Panel has been undertaking a review of Secondary Education across the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.

Work on this began autumn 2005 and will be completed during the first quarter of 2007. It is taking place in three phases which will cover all thirteen state secondary schools in the area.

- Phase one covered schools in Chew Valley & Keynsham – this was completed in December 2005.
- Phase two covered schools in the Bath area and this is now complete.
- Phase three covers schools in Radstock & Midsomer Norton and will begin in September 2006 and will be completed by the end of December 2006

Each phase will produce an interim report of its findings. After all three phases are complete, the panel will produce a final report summarising the findings and including recommendations to go forward for consideration to the Council Executive early in 2007.

Panel Members:

Cllr Dine Romero
Cllr Sally Davis
Cllr Shirley Steele
Cllr Leila Wishart
Cllr Hilary Fraser
Cllr Marian McNeir

Co-optees (voting):

Mike Brownbill
Tess Daly
Colin Hitchin
Peter Jovcic-Sas

Phases one and two both generated a great deal of interest and there has been wide consultation with the schools concerned and beyond.

Other items on the EYCL panel's agenda during 2005/6 included:

- School Meals Review
- Community Learning Service Strategy
- Bathavon & Peasedown Primary Schools Reviews
- Food for Life Pilot
- Green Spaces Strategy



Health and Social Services Panel



Chairman
Councillor
Martin
Veal

Panel Members:
Cllr Loraine Brinkhurst
Cllr Lynda Hedges
Cllr Sally Davis
Cllr Bryan Organ
Cllr Adrian Inker
Cllr Tim Ball

The Health and Social Services Panel undertook a review of the services provided by Keynsham Hospital as part of a "Joint Health Scrutiny Committee" with Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council.

Keynsham Hospital has played an important role in the rehabilitation of older people in the Bristol and Keynsham areas for many years, and the Clara Jefferies unit has provided respite care to a wide population including North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

The Committee held 5 meetings between November 2005 and March 2006 which sought information and views from various stakeholder groups including a wide range of community and voluntary organisations, GPs and local councillors. In addition to this, the Committee visited local hospitals to gain an understanding of the key issues by talking to staff and patients.



The proposed changes for the services provided by the hospital were proposed by the PCT's involved in the running of the Hospital; primarily UBHT, B&NES PCT and BS&W PCT, the major fundholder being UBHT. The proposals included improving services for the residents of the Keynsham area, offering new plans for Health Care delivery and for making the hospital into more of a community facility.

Other reviews carried out by the Panel included a review into the Pre-school Assessment Therapy Centre (PAT) at the Royal United Hospital (RUH) and the changes to the services provided there. Other items on the Health and Social Services agenda included:

- Government imposed Primary Care Trust (PCT) Reconfiguration
- Infection Control within B&NES PCT
- Children and Young People's Plan

Housing and Community Safety Panel



Chairman:
Councillor
Steve
Hedges

Panel Members:
Cllr Roger Symonds
Cllr Sarah Webb
Cllr Hilary Fraser
Cllr Les Kew
Cllr Sharon Ball

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The March 2005 Full Council meeting adopted a 3-year Community Safety and Drug Strategy. In doing so, Council asked the Housing & Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Panel to undertake a review of this strategy within 12 months.

The Panel received a verbal briefing on the contents of the Community Safety & Drug Strategy from the Council's Community Cohesion Unit at its meeting in July 2004 and again as a report at its November 2005 meeting. This briefing provided the Panel with more detailed information as to the process behind the report and requirements for delivery of the report.

The Panel agreed that the briefings they received served to answer many questions raised at the original Council referral. They resolved to take a more detailed look at the strategy at a date in 2006, allowing time for the strategy to be more established and for the action plans within it to be completed

Other items on the Housing Community Safety Panel's agenda for this period included:

- An update on the Bed & Breakfast action plan
- Night Vision
- Street Trading Policy



² This panel membership has reduced to 5 Councillors since Council May 2006

Major Projects and External Bodies Panel



Chairman:
Councillor
Charles
Gerrish

Panel Members:

Cllr Rosemary Todd
Cllr John Bailey
Cllr Brian Barrett
Cllr Nigel Roberts
Cllr Jane Lewis
Cllr David Hawkins

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During this year, the Panel completed a review of proposals for Bath Western Riverside. This review was conducted in private session due to the commercially sensitive nature of the information. This is a complex development and the Panel process was used as a means to engage with elected members as the project took shape.

The findings and recommendations of this review have had an impact in taking forward the proposals for Bath Western Riverside, particularly in highlighting and promoting a joined up approach to working within the Council. It is anticipated that report will continue to be used as a useful starting point/reference for future stages of the developments in this area.

³ This panel membership has reduced to 5 Councillors since Council May 2006

The Panel has also spent some time examining the processes for commissioning major projects within the Council, considering in depth both the procurement and gateways processes. It aimed to tighten procedures and ensure that work on future major projects is conducted according to rigorous systems.

At the end of the year, the Panel also started a review into the Boards responsible for Major Projects within the Council. This was conducted via a small task group, with a view to making recommendations for improvements to the role and operation of Boards. The outcomes of the review were planned for later in 2006.

Other items on the agenda included:

- Keynsham Development Project Board
- Combe Down Stone Mines
- New Schools
- Elderly People's Homes reprovision
- Norton Radstock Regeneration
- Southgate Development



Planning, Transportation, Economy and Sustainability Panel



Chairman:
Councillor
David
Dixon

Panel Members:

Cllr Ruth Griffiths
Cllr Caroline Roberts
Cllr David Hawkins
Cllr Peter Edwards
Cllr Steve Willcox
Cllr Chris Cray



The Planning, Transportation, Economy and Sustainability Panel undertook a review to explore current practice in Bath and North East Somerset on Employer Travel Plans. A travel plan is a package of measures tailored to the needs of individual sites and aimed at promoting greener, cleaner travel choices and reducing reliance on cars.

The Task and Finish Group undertook research into issues surrounding national guidelines and best practice guidance, as well as exploring the current status of Bath and North East Somerset's own travel plan, the travel plans of local employers, and how other Authorities have worked on their own plans, and promoting them amongst their local employers. The Panel conducted surveys with council employees, other local authorities and local employers. A

contributor session held in October also heard evidence from the Executive Member for Transport and Highways, Service officers, a representative from another Local Authority, and representatives from local employers.

It is hoped that the improvements identified will help the Council to develop a strong travel plan and leading by example, to encourage other local employers to do likewise.

In addition, the Panel also completed investigations into

- Sustainable Economy,
- Horse Riding Strategy,
- Passenger Transport,
- Urban Public Realm and
- Waste Services.

Resources Panel



Chairman:
Councillor
David
Bellotti

Panel Members:

Cllr Mike Kelleher
Cllr Shaun McGall
Cllr Colin Barrett
Cllr Gordon Wood
Cllr Brian Webber
Cllr Betty Perry

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A Task & Finish Group from the Resources Panel conducted a review into Electoral Services at the Council. The aim of the review was to increase the number of residents on the electoral roll and to encourage more people to vote on Election Day.

In order to gain a greater understanding of the processes of registration and elections, the Task & Finish Group held briefing sessions with electoral services officers and sent out questionnaires to other local councils to explore other methods of electoral registration.

The Councillors also focused significantly on those groups in society who tend to be under represented on the electoral register e.g. students, Black and

Minority Ethnic Communities, disabled people and homeless people.

A contributor session was held specifically to ensure that the views of these groups were taken into account. The meeting also considered ways of encouraging young people to be more interested in democracy.

The Panel made recommendations to improve the election process itself in order to increase the turnout on election day.

The Resources Panel also continued their review of public engagement on the Council's budget after reports highlighted that the public are increasingly interested in the detail of how Council Tax money is spent.

The Panel also reviewed the Council's whole budget whilst it was being developed for the following year.

Other items on the Resources Panel's agenda included:

- Community Safety Budget Overview
- Social Services Budget Overview:
- WorkSMART Project: Aimed at driving forward the Council's vision and culture change in order to improve customer service and modernise ways of working.

⁴ This panel membership has reduced to 5 Councillors since Council May 2006

Looking forward to 2006/07

Corporate Issues and Partnerships

The Panel is undertaking a review to look at the way the Council engages with its partner bodies and organisations across the Authority (often referred to as Outside Bodies) and specifically the role of elected members appointed, nominated or co-opted on to these bodies.

Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure

As well as the Secondary Schools Review, this Panel will also be looking at Passport to Health, a new scheme where individuals complying with certain criteria can be referred by their GP for a 12 week supervised activity programme. Following on from the Play Policy agreed in 2000, the Panel are also now writing a Play Strategy which will inform priorities for development of free play activities for children from 5-14 throughout Bath and North East Somerset.

Health and Social Services

The high number of changes currently underway within the NHS nationally inevitably has a consequential effect on the delivery of health services locally. To avoid meeting agendas being hampered with items relating to these changes, the Panel have suggested that additional meetings be held to provide a forum through which the local population can become more engaged at an earlier stage with the decision making process.

Housing and Community Safety

The Panel are planning to undertake a review to make recommendations to the Executive Member for Housing concerning improvements to the provision of temporary accommodation in Bath & North East Somerset. The aim is to ensure that the temporary accommodation commissioned meets the assessed needs of residents and is to a high standard of quality.

Major Projects and External Bodies

The 'Future for Bath' is a vision being developed through Overview and Scrutiny review, to bring future development direction to the city of Bath. Building on its historic strengths, the aim of the process is to redefine its identity as a world class heritage city and to uniquely position it both nationally and internationally.

Planning, Transportation and Sustainability

In 2005 the Council signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, committing itself to: "achieve a significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from our own authority's operations". Having acknowledged that action is required to make improvements to the environment, this Panel is now examining how the Council can meet its targets for reducing carbon emissions.

Resources

It is a current objective within the Democratic Services Resource and Service Plan to produce a Member 07 strategy. This will address the Council's planning for the May 07 whole Council election and for meeting the support needs of the Council and its elected members after that election.

Background to Overview and Scrutiny in Bath & North East Somerset

Overview and Scrutiny is a legal function of the Council. Every local authority is required by legislation to have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Primarily the function is to

- Monitor executive level decisions and activity (i.e. those Councillors appointed to our “Cabinet” with the power to make decisions collectively or individually)
- Contribute to the continuous improvement of the Council and its services
- Investigate matters of community interest or concern and report with recommendations
- Review corporate and service specific policies and work with the Executive to develop new policies or services
- Examine executive decisions before they are implemented, when a validated request from Councillors to do so is received.

Overview and Scrutiny is a process of engagement for both service specific and cross-cutting issues. Most OS Panel meetings are held in public whether considering routine business or acting as a review body. The Panels will often hold open events so that individuals' comments as well as those of established representative groups can be heard and taken into account during reviews.

In this Council, the overview and scrutiny function is carried out by 7 Panels, on which elected members of the Council serve. In addition, the Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure Panel must have Parent Governor and Church Education Authority representatives co-opted to contribute to the education aspects of the Panel's work.

There are various types of business undertaken by OS Panels. When undertaking policy or issue reviews, Panels can choose to do the job together as a full Panel and conduct the review over several programmed sessions. Alternatively, they may appoint a smaller number of members to meet as a “Task and Finish” group. Such groups of interested members meet over a relatively short period, focusing on the issue in hand, and submitting their findings to the main Panel for consideration.

Either method requires full engagement with the local community in gathering evidence and reaching conclusions.

An important collective and individual role for Councillors is in community leadership. This role envisages the directly elected Council/Councillors having a mandate to act in the best interests of the community; to speak for the community and to engage with the community on important local matters. This engagement can be about Council services but may also be linked to services from other providers, eg health trust, housing associations etc.

The Overview and Scrutiny process is the principal mechanism open to the Council for sustained community involvement. In addition to citizens' rights to attend formal meetings to express their views, all Overview and Scrutiny Panels will hold what are termed "Contributor Sessions" from time to time. These are open opportunities for individuals, partner bodies and local groups to come and tell Councillors what they feel about particular issues that are being reviewed. This evidence is valuable to the Panels in exerting their influence over those within the Council or outside who make decisions that affect the community.

Panels will also act as catalysts for calling other public bodies to account for their actions. In addition, Panels have some routine but nevertheless important business to deal with on a regular basis. Primary among such business is examining performance material from services and agreeing their own rolling work programme.

For information about how you can get involved in the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels email: scrutiny@bathnes.gov.uk

Overview & Scrutiny and the Executive

Effective Overview and Scrutiny relies in this Council on a good working relationship with the Executive – i.e. the formal Council Executive comprising the Leader of the Council and 8 Executive Councillors with portfolios – and with individual Executive Councillors.

The Overview and Scrutiny role complements that of the Executive, particularly in the field of developing new policy and reviewing existing services. This does not detract from robust scrutiny of decisions and critical appraisal of existing policy and practice which is part of the bedrock of Overview and Scrutiny.

The requirement to publish a forward plan of decisions to be taken by the Executive is helpful to OS Chairs who may select items from that forward list for pre-decision scrutiny.

Since Autumn 2004 the recommendations for every Overview and Scrutiny review have passed through a tracking system. This monitors recommendations once they had been passed to the Executive, who have 6 weeks to respond to the Panel's recommendations. The final part of the system is to close the loop on the OS review process by the Panel inviting the Executive member to attend a public meeting to discuss the detail of the responses. The system has proved successful and contributes to measuring the effectiveness of OS reviews within the authority and in the wider community.

Overview & Scrutiny Management

Overview and Scrutiny is a member-led function. This functional lead role operates at 2 levels. Collectively, the role is delivered through regular meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Group (with Directors' Group), which:

- co-ordinates Panels' programmes and resolves conflicts
- strives for consistency in the delivery of this Council function where this is helpful and relevant
- champions the Overview and Scrutiny process within the Council and outside
- plans strategic involvement of Overview and Scrutiny Panels in supporting the Council's budgetary and service planning and performance management processes
- determines overall training requirements for members on Overview and Scrutiny
- directs key functional aspects of Overview and Scrutiny;
- monitors the overall budgetary provision for Overview and Scrutiny; and
- gives advice to the Council on Overview and Scrutiny matters, primarily through the Annual Report process.

There is also an individual leadership role of each Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair in

- agreeing with his/her Panel a programme of work that takes account of member and officer capacity;
- approving spending against the specific budget allocated for review and other costs of his/her Panel
- liaising with Project Officers, Heads of Service and Directors to progress agreed reviews and advise on programme planning
- assessing training needs of the Panel; and
- liaising with other Panel Chairs on joint Panel activity.

Budget: The overall budget for overview and scrutiny includes a sum specifically allocated to each Panel (currently £2,000 per Panel). This meets the cost of Panel activity over and above the normal meeting costs which are met from within the mainstream Democratic Services budget. These specific budget allocations have been used to finance, for example, visits to other local authorities, expert advisers, contributor expenses, additional catering, room hire, etc. The Overview and Scrutiny Chairs receive accounts of the spend level against their Panel allocations.

Staffing: During 2005/06 the Democratic Services Section was restructured and a dedicated team for Overview and Scrutiny brought together. This comprised a Manager, 2 Project Officers and 2 Panel Administrators. Various personnel changes took place during 2005/06 within these roles which was challenging for the team, however there was no break down in support to Panels and projects. The Chairs would like to thank all the officers who worked for them during that time for their hard work and integrity.

Contact Details for Individual Panel Chairs

Corporate Issues and Partnerships

Chairman: Councillor Christopher Watt

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Planning, Transport and Sustainability

Chairman: Councillor David Dixon

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Major Projects and External Bodies

Chairman: Councillor Charles Gerrish

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Resources

Chairman: Councillor David Bellotti

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Housing and Community Safety

Chairman: Councillor Stephen Hedges

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Health and Social Services

Chairman: Councillor Martin Veal

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Work Phone: 07976 858285

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Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure

Chairman: Councillor Andrew Furse

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If you wish to make any comments regarding this report or any matter concerning Overview and Scrutiny, or suggest something for review or investigation, please return the opposite form to:

Overview and Scrutiny Team

Guildhall

High Street

Bath

BA1 5AW

Or email your comments to scrutiny@bathnes.gov.uk

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

COMMENTS FORM

Name: _____

Address: _____

Comment/suggestion:

A large, dashed blue rectangular box occupies the lower half of the page, intended for the submission of comments or suggestions.