

Policy Development and Scrutiny Annual Report 2022-2023

Section 1 - Introduction

- The 2022-2023 Annual Report provides a summary of Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) activity over the last 12 months, the final year of the 2019-2023 administration. It also looks to the future as the PDS function begins its work within a newly elected Council.
- Unlike in previous years the PDS 2022-2023 meeting cycle was unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Meetings returned to in-person, broadcasted live over the council's YouTube channel.
- PDS continued to play an integral role in delivery of the council's purpose and principles. Meetings actively helped to give local **people a bigger say**, with agendas including public statements and questions on an array of council and partnership led topics.
- Once more PDS was a member-led process. Agenda setting meetings took place regularly and all three panel Chairs and Vice Chairs met every other month to ensure a consistency in approach across PDS.
- PDS continued to make a positive contribution to council governance and decision making. By providing an evidence based constructive challenge, PDS helped ensure the council continued to be a transparent organisation where decision makers are accountable.

Section 2 - Policy Development & Scrutiny in numbers

Number of panel meetings	23
Number of items scrutinised	48
Number of statements or questions	15
Number of call-ins	2

Section 3 – What we have looked at...

Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing PDS Panel



Cllr Vic Pritchard
Chair



Cllr Michelle O'Doherty
Vice Chair

Key items we have looked at...

Adult Social Care Transformation Programme

- The panel received regular programme updates, focusing on timelines, budgets and seeking assurances on service provision for residents.

Integrated Care System (ICS)

- Focus was given to the new system for delivery of health and care across B&NES, Swindon and Wiltshire, with 'place' (B&NES) level scrutiny prioritised by members.

Suicide Prevention

- Considered in October 2022, panel members welcomed the work being undertaken to reduce suicide levels across B&NES, flagging the importance of support services and the impact negative social media can have on young people's mental health.

Education landscape

- The panel continued to review performance within Bath and North East Somerset's schools, with an emphasis on identifying evidence to help address any potential attainment gaps.

Climate Emergency and Sustainability PDS Panel



Cllr Karen Walker
Chair



Cllr Joel Hirst
Vice Chair

Key items we have looked at...

Climate Emergency Annual Report and Ecological Emergency Action Plan

- In January 2023 the panel reviewed council progress in response to the climate and ecological emergencies. Members provided input towards future metrics and presentation of the reports.

West of England Combined Authority – Scrutiny of bus provision

- Mayor - Dan Norris attended the panel's November 2022 meeting. Members challenged the process of determining future bus provision across B&NES, with funding and driver shortages discussed in detail.

Renewable Energy

- The panel explored the current provision of renewable energy sources across B&NES and explored future opportunities to move further towards net zero.

Corporate PDS Panel



Cllr Karen Warrington
Chair



Cllr Winston Duguid
Vice Chair

Key items we have looked at...

Scrutiny of 2023-24 budget proposals

- To streamline activities the draft budget proposals were considered solely by the Corporate PDS Panel, with other PDS members invited to attend. The panel discussed in detail savings proposals, inflationary pressures and confirmed reserve levels.

Equality Improvement Plan

- The panel scrutinised delivery of the Equality Improvement Action Plan (EIP) exploring the level of training available and the extent to which equalities is embedded into the organisation.

Somer Valley Enterprise Zone

- Members were updated on delivery of the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone. During questioning transport links, the programme timeline and environmental implications were all discussed.

Section 4 - Looking forward

Following the May election of the 2023-2027 Council, PDS membership has changed with new Chairs and Vice Chairs for all three panels. Subsequently, this provides an opportune moment to consider how the function continues to evolve to deliver on its goals:

- **Continued positive relationships with the executive** – as with all scrutiny arrangements the relationship with the executive is key. A trusting mature relationship will ensure meetings are non-adversarial and will encourage early executive engagement with PDS.
- **More policy development** – a positive relationship with the executive will ensure that PDS members not only hold Cabinet to account but are invited by the Cabinet and Council to develop policy. This has already been realised with Council inviting PDS to review knife crime prevention across B&NES. Policy development is often the most rewarding element of PDS and is an area the function continues to develop.
- **Forward planning** – with the 2023-2027 Corporate Strategy already adopted by Council, PDS will focus on the council's key priorities and help deliver our purpose – to **improve people's lives**. The Chairs and Vice Chairs will monitor the executive's forward plans and, where appropriate, ensure a constructive check and balance on Cabinet decisions.
- **Expanding how we operate** – looking forward PDS will continue to operate effectively and constructively panel meetings. There will also be a focus on other scrutiny approaches such as the use of task groups, inquiry days and briefings. The emphasis will be to expand the use of the function's tool kit to make it as flexible and dynamic as possible. This flexibility will enable PDS to generate more value adding recommendations to the executive.
- **Giving people a bigger say** – ultimately PDS will continue to provide accountability to the executive and partners, ensuring the Council's decision making continues to be extremely effective, whilst providing a forum for the public to make their views known.