

Policy Development & Scrutiny Annual Report

2023 to 2024



Section 1 - Introduction

- Bath and North East Somerset Council (B&NES) operates an executive (cabinet) model within its political management structure. As a consequence it is **statutorily** required to have at least one overview and scrutiny committee.
- The 2023 to 2024 Policy Development & Scrutiny (PDS) Annual Report provides a summary of the council's PDS activity over the last 12 months, which marked the first year of the 2023 to 2027 Council.
- A focus this year has been on developing the relationship with the new executive, with excellent representation from cabinet at PDS Panel meetings being seen as a result.
- Each of the three Panels have concentrated on the priorities of local people, with the member-led PDS work programmes shaped to add value to the council.
- The Annual Report demonstrates how PDS has promoted transparency across the organisation, working to ensure decision makers are held to account and contributing towards realising our overall purpose to **improve people's lives**.



Section 2 – Key Successes for 2023-2024

- This section summarises some of PDS function’s collective achievements over the last twelve months. It also provides an opportunity to review how PDS has delivered against the priorities identified in last year’s Annual Report, which are listed below:
 - i. Continued positive relationships with the executive.
 - ii. More policy development activity.
 - iii. Forward planning to ensure work programmes reflect local priorities.
 - iv. Diversifying how scrutiny is undertaken with increased use of task groups, for example.
 - v. Giving people a bigger say by encouraging public engagement.

Key Successes

- PDS induction – following the 4 May 2023 Council election councillors were invited to attend two PDS induction sessions. These were held on 17 and 18 May and covered the decision-making structure, the purpose of scrutiny and how to deliver effective scrutiny. The sessions were well supported with fifteen councillors attending in person.
- In response to our corporate priority of giving people a bigger say and last year’s PDS target of further encouraging public engagement, PDS Panel meetings have continued to be webcast live. Over two and a half thousand hits have been registered on the council’s YouTube channel, with November 2023 Corporate PDS Panel’s meeting attracting over a thousand views.



Corporate Policy, Development and Scrutiny Panel 14.11.23

1.1K views • Streamed 9 months ago

- Webcasting views on YouTube channel

Month	CAHW	Corporate	CES
July 2023	33	(no meeting)	90
Sept 2023	46	52	193
November 2023	68	1,100	(no meeting)
December	67	(no meeting)	(no meeting)
January 2024	82	160	178
February 2024	83	84	296
March 2024	46	(no meeting)	156
Total	425	1396	913

Total hits 2,734

- As prioritised in last year's Annual Report, there has been an emphasis on developing a positive non-adversarial relationship with the executive, a fundamental in the delivery of effective scrutiny. This aim has very much been realised with nearly all Panel meetings held across the year having cabinet member attendance, with one exception through illness. PDS Panel meetings now all provide an opportunity for Panel members to ask questions of the political portfolio holder, with senior officers also in attendance to provide technical support.
- This year the PDS Chairs and Vice Chairs agreed a new approach towards scrutiny of the 2023 to 2024 draft budget proposals. Collaborating across the function, the draft growth and savings proposals relevant to the Climate Emergency and Sustainability (CES) PDS Panel and Children, Adults Health and Wellbeing (CAHW) PDS Panel were considered by those respective committees. Both the CES and CAHW Chairs then attended the Corporate PDS Panel **23 January 2024** and fed in to discussions around the full draft budget.
- PDS has diversified the way it operates by establishing two task groups this year. Task groups provide an opportunity to explore in detail a specific work area and are an effective tool to help shape policy. The Local Food Growing Task Group explored the challenges and opportunities faced by our residents interested in this area, with the final report's recommendations being positively received by the cabinet member. The Knife Crime Prevention Task Group, formed in response to a Council resolution, is nearing completion and will report its findings and recommendations shortly.
- Forward planning to ensure work programmes reflect local priorities was a priority identified in last year's Annual Report. The next section will provide snapshots of each of the workplans to illustrate how this has been delivered.

Section 3 – Snapshot of Panel activities 2023 to 2024

Snapshot of the work of the Corporate PDS Panel



Chair Cllr Robin Moss

Vice Chair Cllr Lucy Hodge

- **Budget and performance monitoring** – Corporate PDS Panel has extended its historic approach to the budget scrutiny by introducing in year budget monitoring into its work programme. In the past the focus had been solely towards scrutiny of next year’s budget. To complement this approach the Panel is also reviewing quarterly updates on performance to examine how the organisation is performing against its agreed priorities.
- **Council Tax Support Scheme** - following constructive dialogue between the cabinet member and Panel, scrutiny recommendations led to a revision of the scheme, which is designed to support low-income households. The revised model seeks to improve the equity of the scheme to protect the most vulnerable.
- **Working relationships with audit** – work is taking place to coordinate the Audit committee’s work programme with Corporate PDS. Both committees are interested in corporate risk and meetings are scheduled in the autumn to coordinate activities.
- **Call in** – the Panel has considered one call-in this year – this related to Entry-Hill and the disposal of the site for employment use. The decision was called-in by the previous Council but due to the local election the meeting did not take place until the new Panel membership was finalised on 11 July 2023.

A sample of the work programme undertaken by Corporate PDS is detailed below:

Item	What was scrutinised?
Corporate Strategy	The draft Corporate Strategy before adoption at Council.
Commercial Estate Update	The income, lettings and void numbers linked to our commercial estate.
Heritage Services Business Plan	Future priorities for the service 2024-29.
Developing Economic Strategy	The draft Economic Strategy and its focus on meeting the needs of residents and places whilst reducing the impact on natural resources and the environment.
2024/25 Medium Term Financial Strategy	Review of the council's medium term budget setting and planning 2024/25 – 2028/29
Key Performance Update	Review of the end of year performance against our corporate priorities.
Aequus Update	Overview of the Aequus Group including project pipeline and financial forecasting.
Somer Valley Enterprise Zone Update	Review of the associated Local Development Order (LDO) and future ambitions for the SVEZ.
Budget and Council Tax 2024/25 and Financial Outlook	Draft budget proposals for the forthcoming financial year
Council Tax Support Scheme	Consultation update and consideration of the draft proposals

Snapshot of the work of the Climate Emergency & Sustainability Panel



Chair Cllr Andy Wait

Vice Chair Cllr Grant Johnson

- **Core Policy To lead the UK in climate and nature action, building a sustainable future for Bath and North East Somerset - net zero, nature positive by 2030** – the Panel’s work programme has supported delivery of this core policy with regular updates taken on the Climate Strategy and various transport schemes working towards net zero.
- **Local Plan** - recognising the council’s Corporate Strategy commitment to deliver **The right homes in the right places** the Panel reviewed the developing Local Plan, questioning in particular how transport development can support this objective.
- The Panel established a Task Group to review local food growing, chaired by Cllr Sam Ross. The review was successfully completed and recommendations positively received by the cabinet member.
- The Panel held one call-in, **19 February 2024**, relating to the liveable neighbourhoods proposals for Southlands in Weston.

A sample of the work programme undertaken by CES PDS Panel is detailed below:

Item	What was scrutinised?
Climate Strategy Overview	The policy priorities for climate and nature.
Emissions based car parking charges	The proposal to introduce emission-based parking charges at council car parks.
Engagement Strategy on Climate and Ecological Emergency Plans	The approaches to engagement, including consideration of the programme of events.
Liveable Neighbourhoods Update	Programme overview provided to the Panel.
Journey to Net Zero Update	Progress towards reduction of transport related carbon emissions.
Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan Options	The Local Plan's purpose and scope, including priorities.

Snapshot of the work of the Children, Adult, Health & Wellbeing Panel



Chair Cllr Dine Romero

Vice Chair Cllr Liz Hardman

- The Panel has benefitted from excellent support from Integrated Care System (ICS) health partners, with the Director of Place attending Panel meetings. Health scrutiny focus has been on dental and pharmacy provision in particular.
- From an adult social care perspective, the Panel has closely reviewed the transformation programme seeking reassurances on service provision and support for staff transitioning from HCRG.
- The Panel has once more scrutinised education performance asking challenging questions around our results for children eligible for free school meals, whilst also following closely the work of the council in supporting our looked after children.
- The Panel established a task group to consider local knife crime prevention, which will shortly be reporting its findings.

A sample of the work programme undertaken by CAHW PDS Panel is detailed below:

Item considered	What was scrutinised?
Health & Wellbeing Strategy	The implementation plan.
Youth Justice Plan 2023 to 24	The Panel reviewed the Plan which sets out how services will be organised and funded and what functions they will carry out to prevent youth offending
Schools Capital Programme	The Programme for Special Education Needs (SEND), Alternative Provision (AP) and mainstream school places.
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report	The work of the Independent Reviewing Service (IRS), which is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the care provided to children and young people for whom the Local Authority are Corporate Parents.
Bath & North East Somerset Community Safety & Safeguarding Partnership (BCSSP) Annual Report	The Annual Report and the Panel was able to give recommendations for consideration for the next municipal year
Homeless health	The health of homeless people in B&NES, particularly those sleeping rough.
Dental Services Provision	How the access gap can be addressed and how communication can be improved to residents.
School Meals	Considered the current provision in Bath and North East Somerset with regard the numbers of pupils who are in receipt of Free School Meals.
Education Performance Update	Early-years & school education performance in the academic year 2022-23, including information on school attendance and exclusions.

Section 4 - Looking Forward

- In 2024 to 25 once more the emphasis will be on maintaining a positive relationship with the Executive, whilst ensuring decisions are appropriately challenged.
- Inevitably there will be policy changes that impact the council following the recent change in Government. PDS will closely follow and incorporate into work programme.
- Expand PDS tool kit further to consider further task group reviews, inquiry days and briefings
- Ensure work programme continues to reflect the big local issues for residents.
- Exploit opportunities for scrutiny member development, including training available through Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGGS).

