

# **Bath and North East Somerset Council**

## **Policy Development and Scrutiny**

### **Annual Report 2024–25**

#### **Foreword**



As Chair of the Chairs and Vice Chairs Policy Development and Scrutiny Group, I am proud to present this year's Policy Development and Scrutiny Annual Report. The past year has seen our Panels engage in a wide range of complex and impactful issues, from climate resilience to health inequalities. Our work has focused on the values of openness, collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making. I would like to thank all members, officers, and residents who have contributed to our scrutiny processes. Together, we continue to help shape a more responsive, inclusive, and forward-looking Council.

This report outlines the work of the Council's three Policy Development and Scrutiny Panels during 2024–25. It reflects the council's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, and highlights how scrutiny has supported the delivery of the Corporate Strategy 2023–27. Each Panel has taken a proactive approach to identifying key issues, engaging stakeholders, and making evidence-based recommendations to Cabinet and partners.

Cllr Dine Romero

## **Policy Development and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024–25**

1. Effective scrutiny is fundamental to good governance. It ensures that decision-making is transparent, evidence-based, and accountable to the public. In Bath and North East Somerset, the Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) Panels play a vital role in holding the executive to account, shaping policy, and improving outcomes for residents.
2. Over the past year, the PDS Panels have worked constructively with Cabinet Members and senior officers to provide robust challenge and informed support. This collaborative approach has helped to strengthen the quality of decision-making and ensure that the Council's strategic priorities are delivered in a way that reflects the needs and aspirations of our communities.
3. Among the overarching achievements of 2024–25, scrutiny has contributed to the development of a more outcomes-focused Corporate Strategy, supported the council's response to the climate and nature emergency, and championed improvements in health and social care integration. The Panels have also embraced new ways of working, including greater use of data dashboards, hybrid meetings, and targeted engagement with residents and stakeholders, particularly through the use of task groups.
4. This report provides an account of the work of each PDS Panel over the past year. It highlights the breadth and depth of scrutiny activity and demonstrates the value that effective scrutiny brings to local democracy by working collaboratively across the political spectrum.

# **Corporate Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel**

**Chair - Cllr Robin Moss**

**Vice Chair - Cllr Malcolm Treby (replacing Cllr Lucy Hodge)**

## **Strategic Oversight and Performance**

5. The Corporate PDS Panel played a central role in monitoring delivery of the Corporate Strategy. It reviewed the 2023–24 End-of-Year Performance Report, which showed strong progress in areas such as climate action, visitor economy, and digital engagement. Members scrutinised the alignment between strategic objectives and operational delivery, ensuring that the council's ambitions were underpinned by measurable outcomes.

## **Key Scrutiny Topics**

### **Corporate Strategy Delivery:**

6. The Panel reviewed performance against the council's strategic indicators, with a particular focus on prevention, infrastructure, and inclusive growth. Members challenged the robustness of the data and called for greater transparency in how outcomes were linked to investment decisions.

### **Commercial Estate Strategy:**

7. The Panel scrutinised the updated strategy for managing the council's commercial estate. Discussions focused on risk mitigation, diversification of income streams, and the balance between financial returns and community benefit.

### **Value for money and budget scrutiny:**

8. The Panel supported the external audit process by reviewing benchmarking practices and data usage. It recommended a deeper dive into procurement efficiency, contract management, and the use of digital tools to track performance. The Panel led a successful review of the developing 2025-26 revenue and capital budgets. Members requested to be provided with detailed budget information as early as possible to enable further value to be added to the process. The Panel has taken quarterly budget monitoring reports enabling scrutiny members to track progress against the medium term financial strategy (MTFS).

## **Public Engagement**

9. The panel noted a record 10,600 responses to online consultations and welcomed the increased use of Power BI dashboards to share performance data. Members praised the accessibility of the new digital tools and requested further development of ward-level insights to support local decision-making.

## **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Panel**

**Chair - Cllr Andy Wait**

**Vice Chair – Cllr Grant Johnson**

### **Climate and Nature Emergency**

10. The Panel reviewed the joint Annual Climate and Nature Progress Report, which highlighted a 25% reduction in Council emissions since 2019. It welcomed the adoption of an energy-based net zero policy for new housing and continued investment in active travel and sustainable transport.

### **Key Scrutiny Topics**

#### **Local Plan Options:**

11. The Panel contributed to the first iteration of the Local Plan 2022–2042 Options Document, focusing on sustainable development, climate resilience, and the integration of green infrastructure. It called for stronger policies to support low-carbon housing and nature-based solutions.

### **Waste Services Transformation**

12. The Panel received detailed updates on the transformation of waste services, including the relocation of operations to the new Keynsham Recycling Hub.

### **Fleet Electrification and Depot Modernisation**

13. The Panel considered the electrification of the council's fleet, including the deployment of electric small panel vans, sweepers, and ancillary vehicles. It noted upcoming trials of electric heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) scheduled for autumn 2024, with plans to begin electrifying refuse trucks

in 2025. Additionally, the Panel reviewed the establishment of an authorised HGV MOT test facility and vehicle wash, which will be open to external customers.

### **Green Infrastructure:**

14. The Panel reviewed biodiversity net gain, tree planting, and nature recovery networks. It requested a clearer delivery plan, improved metrics for monitoring progress, and stronger links with community-led initiatives.

### **Transport and Air Quality:**

15. The Panel scrutinised the Journey to Net Zero strategy and monitored air quality data. Members raised concerns about the pace of modal shift and the need for stronger incentives for active travel, including safer cycling infrastructure and improved public transport.

### **Regional Collaboration**

16. The Panel considered the work taking place through the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) on regional climate funding and MetroWest rail operations. Members welcomed the joint approach but called for greater transparency in funding allocations, delivery timelines, and the integration of regional and local priorities.

### **Call-in**

17. The Panel considered and dismissed a call-in relating to the New Sydney Place and Sydney Road through-traffic restriction and the decision to make the scheme permanent as soon as possible. This was the only call-in considered by the three PDS Panels in 2024-2025.

## **Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing PDS Panel**

**Chair - Cllr Dine Romero**

**Vice Chair - Cllr Liz Hardman**

### **Health scrutiny**

18. The Panel continued to work closely with the Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care System (BSW ICS); key areas scrutinised included health inequalities, access to mental health services, and adult social care commissioning.
19. The Panel focused on ensuring that services were person-centred, equitable, and responsive to local needs.
20. The Panel did submit a request to the Secretary of State to call in the decision to award the integrated community-based health and care services contract to the HCRG Group, around concerns on the approach to consultation. No response has been received to date. The Panel has subsequently welcomed HCRG to brief members on a number of occasions. The focus has been to ensure that residents can access appropriate care within the new arrangements.

### **Children's Services:**

21. The Panel reviewed safeguarding, SEND provision, and early help services. It raised concerns about waiting times, workforce pressures, and the need for earlier intervention to support families and reduce escalation. The Panel ran a task group review on knife crime prevention, concluding the importance of early intervention. This has led to a new task group being established to look at targeted early help and the emerging Families First programme.
22. From an educational perspective the Panel continues to support the work taking place to address the area's educational attainment gap, whilst also exploring data trends and interventions aimed at improving school attendance.

### **Public Health:**

23. The Panel scrutinised responses to obesity, substance misuse, and health protection. It called for more targeted interventions, better integration with community services, and stronger links with schools and voluntary organisations.

### **Adult Social Care**

#### **Workforce Development:**

24. The Panel explored recruitment and retention challenges in social care, highlighting the importance of pay, conditions, and career pathways.

### **Community Engagement**

25. The Panel has offered a positive forum for community engagement particularly in regards to Newton House, with regular attendance from respective stakeholders.

## **Conclusion and Forward Look**

26. The three PDS Panels have provided robust challenge and constructive input across a wide range of policy areas.
27. In 2025–26, the panels will deepen their focus on prevention and early intervention, strengthen scrutiny of regional governance and funding. This will include the informal clustering of the BSW ICB Board with its Somerset and Dorset equivalent.
28. There is a huge commitment to ensure scrutiny continues to add value, drive improvement, and reflect the voices of local communities.
29. Policy development activities have and continue to take place around knife crime and targeted early help. There is an appetite across the authority to go even further in response to this work. Policy development will be a key priority over the next 12 months for PDS and its officer support.