

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING

Tuesday 16th September 2025

Present:- **Councillors** Robin Moss, Hal MacFie, Toby Simon, Malcolm Treby, Colin Blackburn, Duncan Hounsell, Jess David and Gavin Heathcote

Apologies for absence: Councillors: Ian Halsall

159 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

160 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

161 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Ian Halsall gave his apologies.

162 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

163 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

164 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

There were none

165 MINUTES

The Panel confirmed the minutes of the previous meetings as a true record and they were duly signed by the Chair.

166 CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

The Council Leader was present and stated that he would answer any questions under this item and others.

167 Q1 MONITORING REPORT

The officer introduced the report.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor MacFie asked about the difference in numbers regarding international visitors. The Council Leader explained that the Chinese market had not fully recovered since Covid where the US had bounced back. He stated that this trend is in line with UK inbound and museum numbers. He added that the Roman Baths have received accreditation based on value for money and that the spend per individual is up. He stated that this was a credit to the Heritage Team.

Councillor Heathcote asked for confirmation that the 8 residential placements in Children's Services (£2.7m) were young people and not asylum seekers. The officer stated that was how he understood it. The Council Leader explained that there could be some policy development work regarding the private sector exploiting Local Government.

Councillor David asked if there is confidence in the level of savings regarding the BOB (Being Our Best) scheme. The officer explained that any savings are delayed due to the delays in the programme – we are currently working through the appeals process.

Councillor David asked if agency costs are a factor. The officer explained that relevant services will be working with HR (Human Resources) colleagues to address this.

Councillor MacFie asked about flexible capital receipts. The officer explained that this was introduced by the Government so capital profit can be used to fund one off revenue costs if certain criteria are met. The Council Leader gave an example of the Englishcombe Lane project where significant revenue savings could be used towards staff costs.

Councillor Blackburn asked about our marketing budget line outside of Visit West which is funded by WECA (West of England Combined Authority). The Council Leader explained that there is a marketing team in Heritage Services and we are aware of the need to push.

Councillor Simon asked that the Panel look at the Council Tax Reduction Scheme again and asked if there was a feel for levels of arrears. The officer explained that he did not have specific figures but thought that collection figures were generally holding up. Regarding Council Tax, the Council Leader added that we are lobbying the Government to take into account the number of students in a city with regard to the Fair Funding Review.

Councillor Treby asked how it is decided which Capital Schemes are paused. The officer explained that Capital Schemes generally would have a project contingency and there is also a corporate contingency.

Councillor Treby asked if there had been any change in the risk environment since the report went to Cabinet in July. The officer explained that the Fair Funding amount is still unclear and we will find out November/December time.

Councillor Moss stated that we have an officer coming to the November meeting of the Panel to talk about the Capital Programme and stated that the outcome of the Fair Funding Review is likely in the week before Christmas. He stated that there will be transitional protection. The officer stated that a couple of weeks are needed to work through it and transition funding would be 3 years. He added that Business Rates are unclear for us, there may not be protection regarding pilot reductions.

In response to a question from Councillor Moss regarding home to school transport, the officer explained that demand is not certain until we get confirmation of the September intake numbers. There is no flag of significant variance so far.

Councillor Moss noted that a small number of placements can have an impact on budgets. He asked if any placements were ceasing and if there was any discussion with the NHS regarding medical/social care. The officer stated that discussions are ongoing with our health partners. The Council Leader added that the new Director of Children's Services will be looking at procurement and that other authorities have been more ruthless in their discussions with the NHS.

The Chair thanked officers and the Council Leader.

168 PROCUREMENT UPDATE

The officer introduced the report and gave a presentation, the slides are attached to these minutes.

Panel members made the following points and asked the following questions:

Councillor Simon stated that the 'social value' work is appreciated. He asked about member involvement being more proactive in terms of contract vetting. The officer explained that member involvement at the point of design was built in during the Standing Order Review. Councillor Simon explained that he was a member of that group and wanted it to go further. The Council Leader explained that the Cabinet Member for Resources is working with the Resources Director on this. Councillor Simon stated that members could look at scoring/weighting systems. He welcomed the start that had been made.

In response to a question from Councillor Treby, the officer explained that there is no forecast at this stage on how much more would go to local businesses.

Councillor Moss thanked the officer for the report and noted the balance between legal requirements and the outcomes we want. He stated that in the legislation, contracts are not supposed to be broken down in size but the Voluntary Sector have highlighted that smaller contracts are more winnable for SMEs and the Voluntary Sector. He added that larger organisations have bid writing teams. There are concerns about contracts being awarded late. He also stated that with larger integrated care boards, 'local' might mean larger than we think and asked whose policy (NHS or Council) takes precedence. The Council Leader stated that it would be the one that pays.

In response to a question from Councillor Blackburn, the officer confirmed that the Council property company is inside the procurement rules.

The Chair thanked the Council Leader and officer.

169 PANEL WORKPLAN

Panel members noted the workplan with the following items scheduled for future meetings:

November 2025

- Home to School Finance Report
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme Update
- Capital Delivery Project Assurance
- Parish Council Election and by-election recharges

January 2026

- Library IT
- Budget discussion

The Panel agreed a new meeting date in February 2026 for the Panel to review feedback from each PDS Panel on the Budget.

The meeting ended at 5.09 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services