

Annex 12

Corporate PDS Panel 3rd February 2026- Draft minute on item 11 'Draft Budget and Council Tax 2026/27 and Financial Outlook'

Councillor Mark Elliott, Cabinet Member for Resources, introduced the item.

Councillor Dine Romero gave the following feedback as Chair of the Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development Panel.

Children's Services and Adult Social Care are under significant and increasing pressure. Demand is rising, needs are becoming more complex, and inflation continues to strain budgets. Without government reform of social care funding, the situation is likely to continue this trajectory.

The panel looked at proposed savings related to increased Care Act reviews, short-term care pathways, enablement, and universal services. Concerns were raised about potential negative impacts and that cost-driven decisions might disrupt essential support. Officers provided reassurance that reviews will remain person-centred, based on eligibility and outcomes.

The panel discussed co-production in recommissioning learning disability services, reflecting on last year's engagement work. They emphasised the importance of early, meaningful engagement with individuals and families.

Concerns were expressed about joint working between the Council and the Integrated Care Board (ICB), especially as the ICB expands and may lose focus on B&NES. There was reassurance that there will still be a dedicated Place Director. Funding disputes for people with complex needs were also highlighted, and the panel welcomed a commitment to bring forward joint reports on dispute resolution.

The Panel reviewed the "top 25 contracts" and asked for more transparency. Positively, it was noted that Children's Services are concentrating on slowing growth rather than finding new savings. SEND pressures were discussed, with early signs of improvement in EHCP timeliness and fewer complaints.

The panel still had questions about how some savings—particularly relating to transitions from high-cost residential placements to supported tenancies—would be achieved without reducing support. The Panel is committed to ongoing scrutiny to ensure vulnerable residents' needs remain central to decision-making.

Councillor Andy Wait gave the following feedback as Chair of the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Policy Development Panel

This Panel has fewer statutory pressures and a focus on steering the Council's future direction. Officers described the current year's budget as "benign", a view the panel broadly shared.

A major concern was the potential reduction in opening hours at the Bath and Midsomer Norton recycling centres. The panel welcomed the decision not to proceed, noting that cuts would have increased mileage to the Keynsham depot. Members also raised issues about kerbside waste route revisions, but were reassured that operational adjustments were manageable.

Parking enforcement and active travel were also discussed, particularly blocked dropped kerbs and whether enforcement could be carried out using electric cycles—currently limited by technology. Misuse of Park & Ride sites as general car parks was highlighted, prompting conversations about improving monitoring technology.

The panel examined funding for school streets, supported bus services and community travel initiatives, and was reassured these were supported through earmarked reserves or WECA-related funding. They welcomed plans for electric refuse vehicles from 2026, and sought clarification about associated costs.

Concerns were raised about Clean Air Zone operational deficits and parking charge increases affecting small businesses. Officers noted that reserves were available for the CAZ and that evidence does not show a direct link between parking charges and high street health, though the Council will continue monitoring.

Finally, members emphasised the need for clear communication around waste, recycling, and transport changes so residents understand the rationale behind them. Overall, the panel was supportive of the budget and commended the work undertaken by officers.

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

Councillor Hounsell stated that the assumption made by Government regarding the Fair Funding Formula was 100% Council Tax collection rate and asked what our collection rate is. The officer responded that it was approximately 98.5%. Councillor Hounsell commended the Cabinet Member and officers on the collection rate figure.

Following a question from Councillor David, it was explained that B&NES has the third lowest core spending power among unitary authorities, partly due to incorrect assumptions in the funding formula.

Councillor MacFie asked if social housing funding came under Capital Schemes. The Cabinet Member explained that major housing delivery is typically grant-funded rather than borrowing-funded.

Councillor Blackburn raised concerns about limited trend data and context in the report, making scrutiny difficult. The Cabinet Member stated that previous year's figures are given, portfolio cash level reporting shows budget lines so you can see movement from one year to the next. He asked that the Panel raise queries about this type of information in October time when the report is being prepared.

Councillor Blackburn pointed to the figure of 7.5% down regarding homelessness but asked what this was down from. The Cabinet Member will follow up with data on this.

Councillor Blackburn asked what underpins the £250k yellow box enforcement estimate. The Cabinet Member stated that it is based on departmental estimates and explained that enforcement aims to improve traffic flow.

Councillor Blackburn asked why CIL money is being used for the new waste centre and cemetery. The Cabinet Member stated that the corporate CIL pot is there to serve infrastructure needs linked to development.

Councillor Romero asked if the income from Heritage Services and parking mitigates what we lose in terms of HMOs on Council Tax. The Cabinet Member stated that it makes up some of the difference but not all.

Councillor Moss asked if the £150 per (band D) household from Heritage Services mitigates the effect of the Heritage status of the city on housing overall. The Cabinet Member did not accept the premise. Councillor Moss stated that we are proud of Bath and the tourism generated but it comes with a consequence in that a lot of people who work in Bath, live in North East Somerset and a lot of industry has moved to South Gloucestershire. He added that he believes the focus has been lost in that the tourism industry is to the detriment of North East Somerset and that he did not believe this budget has the vision to reduce the trend. The Cabinet Member stated that there are economic development plans in the budget and that some of this discussion is around Local Plan issues.

Following a question from Councillor Hounsell, the Cabinet Member stated that the relationship with WECA (West of England Combined Authority) is positive.

Councillor Hounsell asked for an update on BOB (Being Our Best programme). The Cabinet Member stated that 67% got a pay rise and nobody's pay was reduced.

Councillor Simon asked why the corporate contingency has reduced. The Cabinet Member explained that last year's contingency was unusually high due to uncertainty and that levels are now normal.

Councillor Treby asked why there are not more savings proposed this year in order to mitigate the effect of the Fair Funding Formula in subsequent years. The Cabinet Member explained that many other Council's would be pleased at our budget proposals and we will always protect frontline services. We now have a 3-year settlement and time to plan.

Councillor Treby stated that some Council's have used moving traffic offence enforcement as a revenue source and asked for reassurance that we will not do that. The Cabinet Member stated that it will be used for what it is there for which is improving traffic flow.

Councillor Blackburn asked for an update on the Commercial Estate. The Cabinet Member stated that he is happy to come to the Panel to talk about this at a future meeting and it is on the future workplan.

Councillor Moss referenced the comment about it being difficult to scrutinise the figures as the Government settlement comes so late – he suggested that an item on budget scrutiny be added to the workplan so that Panel members can look at questions they want to ask and information they need in future years.

Councillor Moss stated that he was pleased to hear that recycling centre opening times have been addressed and that the Discovery Card will not have a charge and was pleased with the ability to look at differentiation of costs for residents and tourists. The Cabinet Member stated that he looked forward to proposals regarding the Tourism Levy which can hopefully be used to mitigate some of the effects of tourism.

Councillor Moss asked if the contract savings target are achievable. The Cabinet Member stated that yes this was achievable as it represents under 1% per contract and is supported by new contract management tools. Councillor Moss stated that some of the highest value contracts are in the health and care sector.

Councillor Moss asked about delivery of the Capital Programme, the Cabinet Member stated that he does have confidence in this but noted that it is never spent entirely due to allowances for contingency.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, officers and Panel Chairs.