

REPORT TO THE ADULT SERVICES AND HOUSING POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE OF MEETING: 26 JUNE 2015

SUBJECT OF REPORT: THE PANEL'S ROLE, REMIT AND WORK PLAN

TOWN OR PARISH: ALL

OFFICER PRESENTING: HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

KEY DECISION: NO

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Panel:

1. notes the contents of the report and information provided on overview and scrutiny.
2. develops and agrees the Panel's work plan, having regard to this report and the advice of the Director of People and Communities (to be dealt with under agenda item 9).

1. SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report provides an overview of the policy and scrutiny function, confirms the remit of the Panel and invites discussion and agreement on the Panel's future work plan.

2. POLICY

Policy and scrutiny contributes towards the council's corporate aim: Improving the way we work. Most reviews undertaken by this Panel contribute towards the council's aim of enhancing well-being.

3. DETAILS

Members are referred to **Appendix 1** for an overview of the policy and scrutiny function and how it operates at North Somerset Council.

At the panel meeting, Members will develop and agree the Panel's work plan. Effective work planning will lay the foundations for targeted, incisive and timely work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. Members are referred to **Appendix 2** for a reminder of the Panel's remit and guidance on developing the work plan. The current work plan is at Item 9.

The Director of People and Communities will provide an overview of key areas of work and service pressures within the Directorate. This will help inform Members so that they are in a

better position to select relevant items to add to the work plan, all of which should fall within the criteria listed in the appendix.

4. CONSULTATION

Members will agree the Panel's work plan, taking into account any views that local constituents have expressed to them. The Chairman has requested officers from People and Communities to contribute their ideas at the meeting.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. In undertaking future work, the Panel may make recommendations that have financial implications for the council.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk assessments would be undertaken in respect of any future work.

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

The work of the Panel is based on the council's commitment to ensure that the consideration of equality and diversity becomes a day-to-day part of decision-making to bring about positive changes that are felt by services users and employees. Equality Impact Assessments should be completed for every review the Panel undertakes.

8. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Corporate implications would be dependant on the outcome of individual reviews.

9. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

N/A

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POLICY/OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

WHAT IS IT?

Policy and scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that decision makers remain effective and accountable. It ensures that the Executive's decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve council policy and services.

Policy – examining the council's aims and priorities and considering whether or not they are being achieved. This provides a vital means of ensuring all councillors can take part in the development of council policy.

Scrutiny – questioning and challenging major decisions that are being made about delivering services in order to help drive improvement. This is the main democratic means of ensuring that the council and its partners are held to account for decisions made.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF GOOD SCRUTINY:

1. Provides "critical friend" challenge to executives as well as external authorities and agencies.
2. Reflects the voice and concerns of the public and its communities.
3. Should take the lead and own the scrutiny process on behalf of the public.
4. Should make an impact on the delivery of public services.

[CfPS Good Scrutiny Guide]

STRUCTURE OF POLICY/OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY AT NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL:

There are five Policy and Scrutiny Panels. Within their terms of reference, these panels will:

- review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions
- make reports and/or recommendations to full Council and/or the Executive and/or joint or area committees in connection with council policy
- consider Councillor Calls for Action, Petitions and any other matter affecting the area or its inhabitants
- exercise the right to call-in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by the Executive.

The functions of the panels are to:

- review and develop council policy – helping shape the way council services are delivered
- review and scrutinise decisions and performance in relation to the Council's policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas – ensuring that decisions are made within policy and budget (this does not include decisions of the Planning and Regulatory Committee
- review finance and performance and contribute to the budget setting process

WAYS OF WORKING:

- Panel meetings –These will take place in public to review issues and make recommendations to Council, the Executive and individual Executive Members.
- Task and Finish Groups (Working Groups) – The bulk of scrutiny work will be done in these informal, member-led, non-public meetings. Meetings involve small groups of councillors (and other co-opted individuals) who have been appointed by the Panel to investigate a given issue before reporting back to the Panel with recommendations for improvement, or value for money (adding value).
- Site visits / public consultation
- Workshops – Usually one-off informal sessions to receive information on a service or issue of concern to Members.
- Call-in – A formal challenge of a decision made by the Executive or individual Executive Member, undertaken at a panel meeting where the decision will be examined and recommendations sent back to the Executive.
- Informal briefings or information sent to Members – Can be done at any time in order to ensure that Members are aware of changes to services and are best placed to undertake meaningful debate and make informed recommendations to Council, the Executive or individual Executive Member.

REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REFERRED TO COUNCIL AND/OR THE EXECUTIVE

All working groups have to report back to a formal panel meeting with suggested recommendations which are ratified by the Panel and referred to the relevant body. If referred to Council, the Executive or an individual Executive Member, a formal response should be made at the first panel meeting after two months.

USEFUL WEBSITES:

Centre for Public Scrutiny
<http://www.cfps.org.uk/>

Local Government Association
<http://www.local.gov.uk/>

Agenda, reports and minutes – Adult Services and Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel
<http://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/cairo/committees/comidx199.aspx>
<http://apps.n-somerset.gov.uk/cairo/committees/comidx199.asp>

Appendix 2

ADULT SERVICES AND HOUSING POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Membership of the ASH Panel includes:

- 12 elected Members

Remit of the Panel:

- Social Care for Adults
- Housing Services
- Finance

The Panel's Work Plan

The work plan is a flexible document that is updated at each meeting to reflect progress and new developments.

Scrutiny is most effective when focusing on a limited number of in-depth topics, so it is important to prioritise suggestions put forward. When identifying topics to add to the work plan, the Panel should ask the following questions:

- Have Members or Officers identified the topic as a key issue for the public?
- Is it an area of poor performance?
- Has the topic been identified as a strategic risk?
- Is there new government guidance or legislation that will require a significant change to services?
- Has the external auditor or other inspection body highlighted concerns about the issue?
- Does the topic support the achievement of the council's corporate priorities?
- Could scrutiny lead to increased value for money?
- Is there potential for policy development?
- Will the outcome make a difference?

Once topics have been chosen, brief terms of reference should be agreed at the panel meeting as follows (these all refer to headings on the work plan):

- What does the topic include? (what specific areas will the review include and, if relevant, what will it exclude)
- Why should Panel consider? (reason for undertaking the work should fit into at least one of the criteria mentioned above)
- How should Panel proceed? (eg. working group, workshop, site visit, informal briefing, item for agenda)
- Who should be involved? (agree appropriate Members, Officers and witnesses)
- Timescale (agree how long the review will take and the date(s) for report back to Panel)