

# North Somerset Council

## Report to the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel

**Date of Meeting: 13 July 2023**

**Subject of Report: Role, Remit and Work Plan of the Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel**

**Town or Parish: All**

**Officer/Member Presenting: Policy and Scrutiny Manager**

**Key Decision: NO**

**Reason:**

It does not meet the criteria for a key decision.

**Recommendations**

That the Panel:-

1. Receive the contents of the report and information provided on policy and scrutiny.
2. Develop and agree the Panel's Work Plan.

**1. Summary of Report**

- 1.1 The details of the role, remit and work plan of the Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel (TCC) are discussed below.
- 1.2 Members will have this opportunity to begin the process of developing the Plan going forward.

**2. Policy**

- 2.1 A copy of the Corporate Plan 2020-24 can be found by following this link: <https://n-somerset.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-03/corporate%20plan%202020-24.pdf>  
This sets out the priorities and vision of North Somerset Council. Most reviews undertaken by this Panel contribute towards the council's corporate aim of being an open and enabling organisation.

**3. Details**

- 3.1 Members are referred to **Appendix 1** for an overview of the policy and scrutiny function and how it currently 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 guidance on developing the work plan and **Appendix 3** sets out the current work plan template.

3.2 The remit of the TCC Panel (as defined in the Council's Constitution): -

- External partnerships; local and regional governance
- Climate Emergency
- Corporate organisation
- Procurement and contract management including capital projects.
- Council owned/controlled companies and organisations.
- Highways and transport
- Waste, recreational services, environmental protection including flooding and marine environment.
- Crime and disorder, community safety including review of Prevent activity.
- Corporate Service finance and performance

3.3 The Panel's Work Plan summarises the activity that the Panel plans to undertake in its consideration of issues of significant public concern, areas of poor performance and areas where Members think the Council could provide better value for money. The work plan is a "live" document and is subject to change as priorities or circumstances change.

The Panel meets formally three times a year but its Work Plan is informed and supported by a range of on-going "informal" activity undertaken by Panel members - including task and finish working groups and briefings. See Appendices 1 and 2 for further information.

3.4 The Work Plan is reviewed at every formal meeting for review and update.

3.6 The TCC Panel's corresponding scrutiny panel in the last administration was the Partnerships, Corporate Organisation and Overview Management Scrutiny Panel (PCOM). At its last meeting (2 March 2023) before the recent election, PCOM recommended a number of areas of work plan focus - for consideration by the scrutiny panel that would replace it in the new Council administration. These recommendations are as follows:

- Contribute to policy discussions for the procurement of energy.
- Arrange all member briefings/consultations on 2023-24 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
- Ensure Customer Services improvements happen as planned.
- Ensure capital spending and major projects provide value for money.
- Ensure Climate Emergency actions are met.
- Support Community Safety initiatives.
- Ensure Accommodation Strategy progresses to plan.

#### **4. Consultation**

Members will agree the Panel's work plan, taking into account any views that local constituents have expressed to them. Officers are encouraged to contribute their ideas, and the Panel is cognisant of the work being undertaken by the relevant Executive Members.

#### **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. Legal Powers and Implications**

N/A

## **7. Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

N/A

## **8. Risk Management**

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

## **9. 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.

## **10. Corporate Implications**

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

## **11. Options Considered**

N/A

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### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: The Policy and Scrutiny Function

Appendix 2: Panel Work Planning guidance

Appendix 3: (attached separately) The Panel's Work Plan template June 2023

### **Background Papers:**

North Somerset Corporate Plan 2020-24 (see link above).

## **Appendix 1**

### **The Policy and Scrutiny Function**

Policy and scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that decision makers remain effective and accountable. It helps in ensuring 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.

*[Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Good Scrutiny Guide]*

### **WAYS OF WORKING:**

- Formal work: Panel meetings (three meetings per year) – held in-person and in public to review issues and make recommendations.
- Informal work– a significant amount of Panel work will be done informally (typically – though not exclusively held virtually). This includes:
  - Task and finish working groups - meetings involve small groups of Councillors 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. Topics are agreed and prioritised with the Chairman, taking account of officer resource to ensure capacity;
  - Steering Groups – ongoing monitoring and policy development. These can be organised and progressed by identified lead members in direct consultation with the relevant directorate officer/team;
  - Site visits / public consultation;
  - Workshops – usually ad hoc 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 Executive Member, undertaken at a panel meeting where the decision will be examined and recommendations sent back to the Executive or Executive Member; and
  - 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.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Work Planning Guidance**

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?
- 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 to address the basic questions of:

- What does the topic include?
- Why should the Panel consider?
- How should the Panel proceed? (such as working group, workshop, site visit, informal briefing, item for agenda)
- Who should be involved? (agree appropriate Members, Officers and witnesses)

- Timescale

## Appendix 3

### **Current Panel Work Plan (template) – July 2024**

The current work plan template is attached separately with the agenda papers.