

North Somerset Council

Report to the Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy & Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 31 July 2023

Subject of Report: Role, Remit and Work Plan of the Placemaking, Economy and Planning (PEP) Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Town or Parish: All

Officer/Member Presenting: Brent Cross, Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer

Key Decision: NO

Reason: It does not meet the criteria for a key decision.

Recommendations

That the Panel:

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

1. Summary of Report

- 1.1 The details of the role, remit and work plan of the Panel are discussed below.
- 1.2 Members will have an opportunity to shape the Work Plan of the Panel to decide how best to fulfil this role.

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 aims of being an open and enabling organisation, and being a council which empowers and cares about people.

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 a reminder of the Panel's remit and guidance on developing the work plan. **Appendix 3** is the Panel's current work plan.

- 3.2 The remit of the Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel is:
- To scrutinise the regeneration of Places and communities in North Somerset
 - To scrutinise Town and Country Planning
 - To scrutinise parking strategy and car parks
 - To scrutinise decision on Tourism and Economic Development
 - To scrutinise decisions on Heritage
 - To scrutinise Place directorate finance and performance
- 3.3 The Panel's Work Plan summarises the activity that the Panel has undertaken to consider issues of significant public concern, areas of poor performance and areas where Members think the Council could provide better value for money. This is a "live" document and is subject to change as priorities or circumstances change. The Panel only meets formally three times a year, which necessitates most of the work of the Panel being done in informal sessions, such as working groups and briefings. The Panel's remit has changed along with the renaming from the Place Panel, but the previous working groups that fit with the new remit are set out below as an example:
- 3.3.1 The Local Plan working group – this met to enable Member engagement with Local Plan (LP) development, providing meaningful engagement with, and hence assurance around, the development of the Plan.
- 3.3.2 The Directorate Statement 2023/24 Working Group – for Members to engage with officers on development of the 2023/24 Directorate Statement.
- 3.3.3 The Place Panel also did a lot of work in informal briefings on issues such as the Castlewood redevelopment, the Winterstoke Road bridge replacement, Local List nominations, among others that have now been moved as within the remit of the Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel.
- 3.4 The Panel may wish to set up new working groups or continue with the work undertaken previously.
- 3.5 The Work Plan is reviewed at the end of every formal meeting, and Members are invited to provide input into updating it.
- 3.5.1 Although this item is at the start of this meeting's agenda, Members will have an opportunity to add to the Work Plan at the end of the meeting once any issues requiring informal working have been identified.

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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Policy and Scrutiny Senior Officer

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Policy/Overview and Scrutiny

Appendix 2: Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel remit

Appendix 3: The PEP Work Plan July 2023

Background Papers:

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

POLICY/OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

WHAT IS IT?

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.

[CfGS Good Scrutiny Guide]

THE CURRENT STRUCTURE OF POLICY AND SCRUTINY AT NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL:

There are currently 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 individual Executive Member 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 or individual Executive Member.

The functions of the Panels are to:

- review and engage in the development of 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 nor Licensing Committee)
- review finance and performance and contribute to the budget setting process
- Report to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate
- exercise overall responsibility for the work programme of the Officers employed to support their work

WAYS OF WORKING:

- Panel meetings – these will take place in public to review issues and make recommendations to Council, the Executive, and Executive Members;
- Task and Finish Groups (Working Groups) – much of the 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. 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 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 Executive Member, undertaken at a panel meeting where the decision will be examined and recommendations sent back to the Executive or Executive Member;
- 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 and the Executive.

REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REFERRED TO COUNCIL AND/OR THE EXECUTIVE

All working groups should 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:

<http://www.cfgs.org.uk/> (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities> (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities)

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

<https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=235&Year=2023>
(North Somerset Council – previous Place Policy and Scrutiny Panel meeting agendas, reports and minutes)

<https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/mgDelegatedDecisions.aspx?bcr=1&DM=0&DS=2&K=0&DR=&V=0>
(North Somerset Council - decisions of Executive Members)

PLACEMAKING, ECONOMY AND PLANNING POLICY AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Panel remit

- To scrutinise the regeneration of Places and communities in North Somerset
- To scrutinise Town and Country Planning
- To scrutinise parking strategy and car parks
- To scrutinise decision on Tourism and Economic Development
- To scrutinise decisions on Heritage
- To scrutinise Place directorate finance and performance

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?
- 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