

# North Somerset Council

## Report to the Council

**Date of Meeting: 16 April 2024**

**Subject of Report: Report from all Policy and Scrutiny Panels**

**Town or Parish: All**

**Officer/Member Presenting: Councillors Steve Bridger, John Crockford-Hawley, Dan Thomas, Helen Thornton, Joe Tristram**

**Key Decision: NO**

### **Reason:**

No decision being taken.

### **Recommendations**

That Councillors receive and consider the report from the Chairs of all five Policy and Scrutiny Panels.

#### **1. Summary of Report**

This report provides comment from the Chairs of each of the Policy and Scrutiny Panels, highlighting:

- a) key areas and achievements that the Panels have focused on for the current municipal year; and
- b) on-going issues for consideration of each Panel in the 2024-25 municipal year.

#### **2. Policy**

The Corporate Plan sets out the Council's vision for: an open, fair, green North Somerset. Policy and Scrutiny Panels have an integral role in the delivery of the Council's aims and priorities by engaging with the development of policy, monitoring performance, and holding decision makers to account.

#### **3. Details**

##### **3.1 Adult and Social Housing Policy and Scrutiny Panel (ASH)**

This first year has been a period of learning for the panel, we have many new Members, myself included and I've appreciated the collaborative way that we approach ASH meetings. Attendance of Members has been highlighted as an issue elsewhere, but ASH has not experienced this. Member participation has remained consistent despite the complexity of the panel's remit, and potential clashes with other commitments.

I'm grateful to the previous chair Tim Snaden for his support and agreeing to vice-chair the panel, Members new and returning and the Executive Members Roger Whitfield & Jenna Ho Marris who attend and provide useful insight. These meetings would not run without our dedicated officers particularly our democratic services officer Brent Cross who has proved invaluable.

Much of our current work is planning for the forthcoming inquiry day on improving property conditions in the rental sector and assessing preparations for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection due before the end of 2025.

### **Panel activities 2023-24**

Reports to Panel:

#### **July 23**

Care Quality Commission Assurance  
Carers Strategy Update  
Adult Social Care Year-end Finance Update

#### **November 23**

Better Care Fund Plan 2023-25  
Performance Report  
Housing Strategy Year 1 Review  
Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Plan  
Adult Social Services Commissioning Strategy  
Finance Update (as at month 5)

#### **March 2024**

Alliance Homes update  
Update on CQC inspection preparations  
Report of the ASH KPI working group  
Time to think differently about Adult Social Care  
Update on the management of 'Transitions' between Children's social care and Adult social care  
Adults Social Services and Housing Commissioning Intentions 2024-25  
Finance update

#### **June 2024**

Planned inquiry day on improving property conditions in the private rental sector.

### **3.2 Children and Young People's Policy and Scrutiny Panel (CYPS)**

Overall this has been a period of very fast learning for the CYPS panel. The majority of the panel are newly elected Members, and I'm very grateful to Wendy Griggs my deputy chair who has made her experience as last session's chair available to me. My colleagues on the panel, coming from a wide variety of walks of life are very clear that looking after the best interests of North Somerset's young people is probably the most important role we could have been given.

At the same time as being new we had the additional challenge that both the DCS Sheila Smith and the assistant director for social care were about to leave. For the majority of this time we have had interims in both those roles. These interims were great (Jane Anstis of course has stayed with us) and brought useful experience from elsewhere.

It has also been very useful to us that Catherine Gibbons, while not on the panel has worked closely with us and of course has a great deal of useful experience.

Brent Cross, our democratic services officer, has been invaluable in showing us the ropes and mechanisms of the Council, and letting us know who would be the correct officer to speak with on a particular topic.

Not dismayed by the situation we found ourselves in, and very strongly briefed that we must work hard to get out of the “requires improvement” designation by the DfE we set to with a programme of work shown here:

**Reports to Panel:**

June 23 - Performance Monitoring  
Ofsted Inspection Update  
SEND Improvement Plan and the Safety Valve

October 23 - SEND Self-Assessment  
Adoption West Annual Report  
Children’s Safeguarding Report

February 24 - Q3 Performance Monitoring  
2023/24 MTFP Progress and 2024/25 MTFP Delivery Plan  
Children’s and Young People’s Social Worker Recruitment and Retention

**Working Groups:**

School Organisation Steering Group: 9 June 2023, 8 September 2023, 8 December 2023 and 8 March 2024.

Social Worker Recruitment and Retention working group: 25 October 2023, 27 November 2023 and 11 January 2024.

Home to School Transport, jointly with the TCC Panel: 8 February 2024.

Social Media and Children’s Mental Health: 5 September and 14 December 2023.

LGA trainings have been invaluable to understand our role, especially that we are to provide input on policy as well as scrutinise it, and that we can call officers and commission work on topics that don’t automatically come to us.

We are also learning from other panels and as a result are now planning extra meetings between the three main timetabled ones. These are to be less formal and at venues relevant to the topics under discussion.

I was warned at the outset that there had been a problem with Member attendance and at Nick Brain’s suggestion proposed a slight alteration of the constitution to reduce the number required to be quorate. We have also had better attendance.

We have welcomed our new director Claire Shiels and observed with gratitude the energy and enthusiasm with which she is tackling her role and how well she and her Assistant Directors work together.

As the timetable above shows we have been using working groups to investigate areas of need and then aim to propose policy solutions. I have been impressed by the willing openness of Council Officers to engage with this member-initiated process.

We were very pleased to note the lifting of the “requires improvement” from the SEND part of our service in August 2023, a testament to our predecessors, and a demonstration that real improvement is possible even in the current financial climate.

We are pleased to be partnering the Transport, Climate and Communities panel in our investigation into Home to School Transport, aware both that this is a big overspend for the Council as well as central to the lives of many of our families with SEND children.

With the ongoing school visits programme it is becoming clearer than ever that the CYPS scrutiny has a lot to do in the remaining three years of this session. We hope that as we get to understand the system and the needs of children and families better we will become better at serving them.

### **3.3 Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel (HOSP)**

According to government regulations the role of Local Authority Health Scrutiny is *“to strengthen the voice of local people, ensuring that their needs and experiences are considered an integral part of the commissioning and delivery of health services and that those services are effective and safe. Health scrutiny also has a strategic role in taking an overview of how well integration of health, public health and social care is working - relevant to this might be how well health and wellbeing boards are carrying out their duty to promote integration - and in making recommendations about how it could be improved.”*

This is a very difficult job currently given the challenges faced by Local Government and the NHS, with underfunding of adult social care and NHS services, hospital waiting lists the highest they have ever been, recruitment issues across health and social care services, pharmacies closing, and difficulties for people accessing GP appointments and for new patients accessing NHS dentists.

I'd like to give my thanks to all panel Members, Council, Healthwatch and Health colleagues, our Vice Chair Cllr Ian Parker and our Committee clerks Leo Taylor and Harriet Isherwood.

#### **Panel Activities**

In our three formal meetings in 2023/24 we have considered:

- Integrated Care Strategy
- Update on Weston General Hospital UHBW
- Recommissioning of the BNSSG Integrated Sexual Health Service
- Dental Access for Adults and Children in North Somerset
- Public Oral Health Promotion
- Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Winter Plan
- Better Care Fund Plan 2023-25
- Health Protection update
- Healthwatch Annual Report 2022-23
- Graham Road Surgery and Horizon Health Centre Care Quality Commission Inspections

We have had the first of what will be quarterly joint briefings from the ICB with our colleagues at Bristol and South Glos Councils. The agenda items for this recent meeting included the Dynamic Support Register for people with Autism and/or Learning Disabilities, and the temporary closure of the Riverside facility for young people.

We have also received briefings on:

- Dentistry

- Healthy Weston
- Integrated Care Board / Integrated Care System / Integrated Care Partnership and Locality structures

We have a forthcoming briefing on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

We also hope to receive briefings in future on:

- Community Diagnostic Unit in Weston
- Neurodiversity services across the BNSSG area
- New Hospital group being formed by UHBW and North Bristol NHS Trusts

**Our ongoing Work Plan also includes:**

- Pharmacy Closure on Bournville
- Weston Hospital Performance Reports
- Healthy Weston Phase 2
- Winter Plans
- Update on Recommissioning of Sexual Health Services
- Updates from Locality Partnerships
- Mental Health Services at Blackberry Hill
- Joint meetings with Bristol and South Glos HOSCs
- Memorandum of Understanding with ICB on what constitutes a substantial variation

**My Priorities as Chair**

We will continue with the priorities of the previous HOSP which were:

- **Priority 1:** Ensuring that North Somerset residents see the benefits of the new Integrated Care System and this is truly collaborative across all partners.
- **Priority 2:** Access to dentist across North Somerset needs to vastly improve and with the Integrated Care System taking on greater responsibility for this locally it offers an opportunity to influence. Working with Bristol and South Gloucestershire Councils via the Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee will be important.
- **Priority 3:** Weston General Hospital has made significant improvements in recent months following their latest CQC report. Continue to work closely with the Trust to ensure continued improvement in patient outcomes.
- **Priority 4:** Monitor the Healthy Weston 2 programme and whether this has delivered the benefits envisaged and influence the next stages of the strategy.
- **Priority 5:** Hospital discharge remains a challenge, so work closely with the Adult Services and Housing Policy Scrutiny Panel to provide assurance and scrutiny that steps are being taken to address this.
- **Priority 6:** The Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy is relatively new across North Somerset and has the potential to reduce health inequalities across North Somerset, but it will only be effective if all partners fully embrace and commit to it. So engage with the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Board, and use the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel to support this.

As Chair my additional and related priorities are:

- 24/7 A&E at Weston Hospital
- National NHS Workforce plan and how it will be implemented in North Somerset
- NHS Waiting lists
- New Hospital Grouping of UHBW and NBT and impact on services
- Health Inequalities

- Arts and Health – working with Super Culture
- Relocation of Graham Road surgery
- Access to NHS dentists and GP appointments
- Dynamic Support Register
- Young People’s Mental Health services

### **3.4 Placemaking, Economy and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Panel (PEP)**

During the past year formal in-public PEP panel sessions have scrutinised progress of the North Somerset Local Plan (NSLP), UK Shared Prosperity Fund Year 3 Allocation (31 July 23); Placemaking & Development Update, Levelling Up Fund (LUF), Development sites, Infrastructure Development Plan progress (22 Nov 23); Economic Plan, Place Directorate Performance Plan, Draft Tropicana Procurement Plan (6 Mar 24). The Directorate’s financial updates featured on each occasion.

Informal on-line sessions included an all-Member NSLP briefing (27 Sept 23); Parking Policy (14 Nov 23); Parking Charges Proposals (10 Jan 24); Parking Management Strategy (21 Feb 24).

The first of four scheduled in-depth investigations of a District-wide Parking Management Strategy began on 15 March 24.

It’s been pleasing to see a large attendance of councillors at all PEP Panels, both in-person and on-line, and recently elected colleagues are now fully engaged in the scrutinising skills.

Food for thought on three points: (1) We spend time scrutinising the menu set before us and sometimes do so in fairly robust and forensic manner but we seldom invite Executive Members to the pleasures of being scrutinised. (2) Should Members become more active in suggesting items for scrutiny? (3) We are a Policy and Scrutiny panel but are we playing a sufficient role in policy formulation?

My thanks to all colleagues, councillors and officers, for your support, friendliness and forbearance, especially when I forget that I’m no longer a teacher!

### **3.5 Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel (TCC)**

Over the course of the 2023/24 municipal year the Panel has met formally three times, with a further 20 separate informal Panel-led briefings at the time of writing. Additionally, the Panel stands up the following Steering Groups as required:

- Transport and Highways Scrutiny Steering Group
- Waste Scrutiny Steering Group
- Community Safety Steering Group

We also established a small Panel-led scrutiny working group to keep Members updated on progress and opportunities through the 2-year transition to the new set of arrangements following the decision to break up the **Support Services Contract**.

To forward plan scrutiny engagement with upcoming milestone decisions, the Chairman meets frequently with the Director of Place, Director of Corporate Services, Assistant Directors, and holders of the relevant Executive portfolios:

- Leader of the Council

- Highways and transport
- Climate, waste and sustainability
- Safety in the community

In the current municipal year, the Panel has formally considered:

- **Flood Risk in North Somerset** - following concerns raised at full Council in November about a lack of routine maintenance on structures by the Environment Agency. Three representatives from the Environment Agency were invited to attend and answer our questions, and an invitation to the Chairman of the North Somerset Internal Drainage Board was also accepted.
- Clarification/assurance on the funding for the **A38 Major Road Network capital project**.
- A progress report on the **Green Infrastructure Strategy**. We have also asked officers to consider and respond to the Panel's proposal that the Council publish an annual "State of Nature in North Somerset" report.
- An update on the delivery of the **Rights Of Way Improvement Plan**.
- A progress update on the actions of the Projects and Property team with regards the delivery of the ten-year **Strategic Asset Management Plan** programme, with a commitment to rationalising, developing, and maintaining the Council's asset portfolio.
- The performance of the **WESTLink service**. Members' comments were fed into the review of the service.
- Helping to shape the communication and engagement process and timeline around delivery of the **Medium Term Financial Plan** (MTFP) plan for the period 2024 to 2028 and draft **revenue budget** for the 2024/25 financial year.
- Progress reports on the **Climate Emergency Action Plan**.

Additionally, the Panel considered the following matters informally...

- Delivery of the Winterstoke Hundred Academy Extension (now completed) and the on-going Banwell bypass project
- The Review of the Clevedon Public Realm Scheme
- Development of the Corporate Plan and four-year MTFP, with a particular focus on scrutiny of savings plans
- Home to School Transport transformation
- Leisure service contract renewal
- Biodiversity SPD
- Moving traffic enforcement
- Residential EV charging strategy
- ASB Action Plan

On 29 February, the Panel hosted a successful Inquiry Day looking at the council's **weed management policies and practices**, and to help shape policy in this area. Panel Members heard evidence from Council officers, representatives from other local authorities, town and parish councils and local volunteer groups, before an open roundtable discussion around potential areas for improvement in managing weeds. The Panel has presented its findings and recommendations to the Executive for consideration.

We have received very positive feedback on the content and organisation of the Inquiry Day and I am enormously indebted to Tess Skelly, one of our National Graduate Development Programme Trainees for leading on this.

**Priorities for the Panel for 2024/25**

- Revisit the **highways investment programme** and **Integrated Transport Scheme Pipeline**.
- Put in place a more regular cycle of Member engagement around **bus service improvements**.
- Continue to question the **resilience of the highway network** to cost pressures and rapid climate change.
- Press for resource within the Council's Flood Risk team proportionate to the level of risk of flooding events in North Somerset.
- Scrutinise the **capacity of the highway network for planned work** across the district, including BSIP capital schemes, utilities, the M5 motorway, Banwell bypass, etc., what is feasible given our minor roads have a limited capacity to accommodate diversions, and mindful of the tolerance of road users.
- Scrutinise the results of the consultation on **3-weekly bin collections** and any subsequent roll out.
- Support and monitor for **Community Safety initiatives**, including One Front Door (a new multi-agency approach to Domestic Abuse) and better alignment with Police and Crime Panel reporting.
- Plan for early **budget engagement** for 2025/26.
- Ensure **Customer Services improvements** continue to happen as planned.
- Monitor the Council's **Estate Carbon Management Plan**.
- Review North Somerset Environment Company (NSEC) governance.
- **Seek involvement in any refresh of the Joint Local Transport Plan.**
- Participate in the development of new strategies and approaches to Council communications, engagement with towns and parishes and public engagement & consultation.

My personal thanks to all Members of the Panel for their participation and shared insight, in particular vice-chair Stuart McQuillan for his valuable advice. Thanks and recognition to all those officers who presented reports to Panel meetings and briefings and for answering our questions. Special thanks and admiration for Leo Taylor, Philippa Penney, Brent Cross, Liz Godfrey-Day in the Scrutiny Team for their diligence, support, advice, and great amount of patience.

#### **4. Consultation**

The Panels undertake regular consultation with officers, Councillors, the Executive Members and relevant partners through working group and steering group monitoring and Panel reporting.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

None specific.

##### **Costs**

None specific

##### **Funding**

None specific

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

Policy and Scrutiny Panels operate within relevant legislation and in accordance with the Council's Constitution.



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

Climate Emergency is included in the remit of the Transport, Climate and Community Policy and Scrutiny Panel due to its council-wide responsibility.

## **8. Risk Management**

N/A

## **9. Equality Implications**

N/A

## **10. Corporate Implications**

None.

## **11. Options Considered**

None.

### **Authors:**

Steve Bridger – Chairperson of the Transport, Climate and Communities Panel (TCC)

John Crockford-Hawley – Chairperson of the Placemaking, Economy and Planning Panel (PEP)

Dan Thomas – Chairperson of the Adults Services and Housing Panel (ASH)

Helen Thornton – Chairperson of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel (HOSP)

Joe Tristram – Chairperson of the Children and Young People's Services Panel (CYPS)

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### **Appendices:**

None.

### **Background Papers:**

Policy and Scrutiny Panel agenda, reports and minutes

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