



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Annual Plan 2026/27

Contents

Annual Plan 2026/27	1
Foreword	3
Introducing our Annual Plan.....	4
Our focus in 2026/2027	5
Effective Services	8
Communities.....	10
Environment	12
Growth	13
Connections.....	14
Homes	16
Learning.....	17
Care (Children).....	18
Care (Adults)	19
Health and Wellbeing.....	20
Culture	21
How we work	23
Monitoring our progress.....	24
Looking ahead	25
How to stay in touch	26

Foreword

Welcome to our Annual Plan for 2026/27. This plan highlights the wide range of work happening across the Council and highlights some key focus areas for the year ahead. It doesn't attempt to capture everything we do but instead reflects where we will place our energy to make the biggest difference, deliver the best value for money and support our communities to thrive.

Over the past year, we've achieved a great deal together. We were proud to continue supporting 16–19 year olds through our education travel scheme and delighted that our Adult Learning service received Outstanding and Good Ofsted ratings. With a focus on sustainable growth, we launched our new 10 year Inclusive and Green Economic Growth Strategy and took a major step forward in delivering Barrow's Marina Village, which will create 1,350 new homes. After listening to our communities, we approved 24 new 20mph speed limits across our villages and towns, which will be introduced this year. We'll share more about these achievements, and others, in our Annual Report this May

As we begin our fourth year as Westmorland and Furness Council, we do so in a challenging financial climate. With reduced funding and increasing demand for services, it is more important than ever that we remain focused on delivering services that are efficient, effective and represent real value for money for our residents.

Our residents rightly expect services that are reliable, high quality and cost effective. To deliver this, we are streamlining our ways of working, making the most of our resources and ensuring our staff have the tools, systems and processes they need to work confidently and efficiently.

At the same time, we will seize new opportunities including our work through the new Cumbria Combined Authority, which will allow us to work closely with our partners to champion the ambitions of our area and communities.

While reductions in funding are never welcome, we are determined to meet this challenge head on. By working smarter, partnering more effectively and focusing on what makes the greatest difference, we will continue moving toward our vision to make Westmorland and Furness a great place to live, work and thrive.

Cllr Jonathan Brook

Leader of Westmorland & Furness Council

Introducing our Annual Plan

Over 3,500 dedicated staff are providing hundreds of essential services across Westmorland and Furness every day. From keeping our streets clean to supporting vulnerable adults, maintaining roads to supporting local businesses, helping families to thrive to preserving our heritage, and promoting health and wellbeing to keeping our communities safe.

This Annual Plan cannot possibly capture everything we do in a year. Instead, it is deliberately concise and focused on the activity and measures that will highlight delivery of our 10 missions, which underpin our vision of making Westmorland and Furness a great place to live, work and thrive.

For 2026/27 we are operating in the context of a challenging Government funding settlement. This increases the pressure on our resources and means we must be even more focused on delivering value for money. We are determined to ensure that every pound we spend achieves the greatest possible impact, which will require a continued and determined focus on efficiency, clear prioritisation and smarter ways of working across all our services.

We remain committed to continuously improving what we do. Our new Transformation Plan will make real lasting change, reshaping the Council to focus on people and place, strengthen prevention, making the best use of resources and working as one system.

Our Annual Plan is both a tool to help us stay focused on what matters and a transparent way for our communities to hold us to account, particularly as we navigate financial challenges and work to deliver the high-quality, efficient services our communities expect and deserve.

Our focus in 2026/2027

We have made steady progress and continue to have ambitions to do the best for our communities. A significant reduction in national funding means that to continue to deliver for our communities, we will need to focus on services that people rely on the most, concentrate on the things that will make the biggest difference, create efficiencies and move us closer to achieving our goals.

Council Plan Delivery Missions

In 2023 we agreed a single council vision, six Council Plan priorities and 10 delivery missions:

- Effective Services
- Communities
- Environment
- Growth
- Connections
- Homes
- Learning
- Care
- Health and Wellbeing
- Culture

The 10 missions help us to focus on the actions we need to take to make our vision a reality for everyone. They do not stand alone and are closely linked and often overlap, which helpfully encourages cross-sector working, multi-disciplinary approaches and opportunities for all of us to work together to do the right things in the right places.

Transformation Plan

Our new Transformation Plan will reshape the Council to focus on people and place, strengthen prevention, making the best use of resources and working as one system. The Plan introduces the below three guiding principles that provide a clear focus for the year ahead.

Community focused

As part of a wider system, we work with people and places to shape services that work for them. Our focus is on prevention, long-term outcomes and reducing escalation of need, risk and demand.

Digitally enabled

We use digital, automation and data where they improve services or reduce cost. This enables simple access, modern ICT and streamlined processes that reduce repeat contact and rework.

Financially sustainable

We improve productivity and value for money of service delivery for our residents. Our staffing, structures and processes are aligned to what we can sustain over the long term, keeping resources focused on the services that matter most to our communities.

Delivering within our means

Our Medium-Term Financial Plan was agreed in February 2026 and sets the context for this Annual Plan. It explains how we will allocate our available revenue and capital budgets over the next five years to deliver on our ambition and priorities.

Our 2026/27 Budget was set in a time of unprecedented pressure following the Government's Fair Funding Review 2.0. The Review intentionally moved government funding to areas of highest perceived deprivation and removed rurality and remoteness adjustments and consolidates grant streams, resulting in a substantial loss of core funding for Westmorland and Furness, equating to a £12m reduction in 2026/27, rising to £27m in 2027/28 and reaching £43m by 2028/29.

At the same time, demand for our services is increasing, creating additional pressures on our budget – to combat this we have developed a comprehensive savings programme totalling £30.9m for 2026/27.

Working with others

As a council we cannot achieve our missions alone, they require a collective effort to make Westmorland and Furness a place everyone is proud to call home.

Over the coming year, we will take every opportunity to work collaboratively with our partners from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to deliver better outcomes for our communities, including:

- Our continued commitment to Team Barrow, brings together partners to drive the long-term regeneration of Barrow, with a focus this coming year on progressing the housing and town centre regeneration projects.

- Maximising the opportunities that the new Cumbria Combined Authority will bring to influence regional priorities, secure investment and deliver coordinated action that supports sustainable growth, stronger communities and improved opportunities for residents and businesses.

This plan describes key activity for this year associated with each of our 10 delivery missions.

Effective Services

Our mission

The council listens and takes pride in delivering services that make a difference. It is a modern, innovative and inclusive council with communities and customers at the heart of everything we do.

How we will continue to make a difference

Ensure the council is modern, effective and financially sustainable, with residents at the centre of service delivery. By improving digital access, strengthening customer experience and engagement, workforce support and secure digital infrastructure, deliver responsive and reliable services. By continuing to embed a culture of good governance and improving formal decision-making support the delivery of the Council's priorities. Through robust financial management, procurement, asset stewardship and effective use of digital, data and transformation, ensure resources and external investment deliver value for money and continuous improvement.

Key focus for 2026/27

Transformation Journey

Deliver our Transformation Plan, reshaping the Council to focus on people and place, strengthen prevention, making the best use of resources, and working as one system. Key activity planned includes:

People, Place, Prevention: Test Learn Grow

- Develop a Prevention Framework for Westmorland and Furness that establishes our approach to early intervention and helps people stay healthier, safer and more independent for longer.
- Identify the most important tasks in response to the Care Quality Commission assessment that will deliver improvements to adult social care and will help us meet increasing demand and cost.
- Develop a new approach to locality working, including which services can move locally, how local decisions will be made, and how we will test and roll out the new local delivery model.

Future Focused Workforce

- Design and implement changes to our Senior Leadership Team structure in a smooth and planned way.

- Support our senior leaders to grow the skills and behaviours they need, and to build a positive workplace culture that enables future change.

Customer Experience

- Develop a deeper understanding of how people contact us and use this information to identify changes needed to improve their experience and make our customer services easier, quicker, and more efficient.
- Continue improving how customers contact us and get help, by making our systems easier to use and better at managing their requests.

Employee Experience

- Engage with staff to design easier and more efficient ways for them to deliver what they aim to do get the support they need.
- Improve processes that staff use every day to make immediate efficiency changes.

Digital, Data & Technology

- Build a single ICT network for Westmorland and Furness Council that works well for everyone and makes it easier to get work done.
- Design and implement changes to create a single ICT support service that supports modern ways of working and helps us choose the right technology for the future.
- Create the systems and tools to enable the council to make better use of data to better inform our decision making.
- Test new Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools that can help us work smarter, while making sure we use them safely and responsibly.
- **Mayoral, Local and Town and Parish Elections 2027:** Ensure effective arrangements are in place to deliver the May 2027 elections.

Communities

Our mission

Communities are welcoming, inclusive and provide a good quality of life. They are proud of and care for their local areas and the people who live in them. They are able to make the right choices for them. They are resilient, and their voices and choices are heard through local participation.

How we will continue to make a difference

Deliver services that strengthen communities and increase local participation through community development, libraries and initiatives such as Family Hubs and Community Wellbeing services. By working closely with the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector, as well as town and parish councils, support community organisations, invest in local activity and build strong partnerships.

Through a community-focused approach enable residents to influence decisions, shape services and take action on the issues that matter most to them, helping to create more resilient, connected and empowered communities.

Key focus for 2026/27

Locality Working

As part of the Transformation Plan, develop a new approach to locality working, including which services can move locally, how local decisions will be made, and how we will test and roll out the new local delivery model.

Pride in Place programme

Supporting the establishment of the Pride in Place Programme in Barrow Central with an independently chaired Neighbourhood Board in place and meeting before July 2026. Supporting the Board to work with and enable communities to be empowered to make decisions that affect their own futures and developing a Pride in Place Plan setting out their vision by November 2026.

Playground Strategy

Continue to implement improvements to playgrounds in line with the Council's Playgrounds Strategy, ensuring investment is prioritised, evidence-led, and focused on safety, accessibility, and play value. Including improvements to Hall Park in Burneside, Scaws in Penrith and Biggar Bank in Walney.

Community Safety Partnership Plan priorities

Continue to deliver the Community Safety Partnership priorities ensuring that crime prevention and feeling safe is at the heart of what we do. Including a review of the Community Safety Assessment, monitoring of Public Space Protection Orders implementation and continuing to embed PREVENT across the Council and our partners.

Environment

Our mission

Our environment positively impacts on health, wellbeing and economy and together we build our resilience to climate change and take action to reverse biodiversity loss and to achieve carbon net zero.

How we will continue to make a difference

Protect and enhance the local environment by delivering high-quality waste, recycling, street cleaning, grounds maintenance, parks and tree management services that keep places clean, safe and well cared for. Through strategic planning and place-shaping, alongside work on ecology, climate, nature recovery and flood and coastal risk management, lead efforts to tackle climate change, strengthen resilience to environmental risks and protect and restore biodiversity, creating sustainable, attractive places for people and nature.

Key focus for 2026/27

Waste Change Programme

Begin the phased implementation of the new waste and recycling collection service, including the new green bin subscription service and harmonised recycling offer to maintain high efficiency standards while transitioning. Develop and deliver a programme of community initiatives to promote activity to reduce waste and litter, reuse, repair, share and recycle.

Protect our Environment

Deliver our Climate Change Action Plan, Cumbria Local Recovery Strategy, Nature Strategy and Climate Adaptation Plan, including nature recovery habitat restoration and biodiversity recovery projects. Planting 125k trees (or one metre hedgerow) as part of our one tree for every resident project. Delivering the greening businesses scheme and creation of rural energy feasibility reports. Setting up a nature credit model and secure sites for biodiversity. Working with partners to improve water quality in Windermere. Publishing our Climate Adaptation Strategy.

Planning for a greener future

Implement Government legislation, particularly where requirements such as Nutrient Neutrality are perceived to be slowing development.

Growth

Our mission

Our economy is growing and providing people with access to a diverse range of good employment opportunities for them to be economically secure. Our businesses are more diverse and thriving, our large businesses continue to grow, and investment is further increasing the contribution made to national growth and prosperity.

How we will continue to make a difference

Deliver investment and growth programmes through economic development and regeneration, including Team Barrow, the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund delivering in our urban and rural areas, to attract investment, support business growth and create more diverse and higher-quality employment opportunities across the area.

Key focus for 2026/27

Local Plan Development

Progress our new Local Plan to guide future development and identify the future needs of our area, including housing, employment, shops, roads, schools, and health and community facilities. Publishing our notice of intention to commence Local Plan preparation by 30 June 2026 and the Gateway 1 self-assessment by 31 October 2026.

Heart of Kendal regeneration programme

The Heart of Kendal project brings together a package of town-centre improvements focused on public realm, connectivity, cultural assets and nature supporting environmental enhancements. Progressing the project by delivering the next stage of conversation of Kendal College's Westmorland Campus and complete the design phase for Riverside Corridor, Indoor Market Hall and Market Place/Kent Street.

Connections

Our mission

Transport and infrastructure enables people and businesses to reliably and easily access the places and services that meet their needs, including online, in an environmentally sustainable way.

How we will continue to make a difference

Maintain safe, reliable and well-managed highways and transport, ensuring communities and businesses remain well connected. Through sustainable transport initiatives, including bus support, active travel, community rail, and improvements to digital infrastructure, enable more reliable, accessible and environmentally sustainable access to services, jobs and opportunities.

Key focus for 2026/27

Local Transport Delivery Plan

Deliver sustainable transport and highways interventions, schemes and initiatives as set out in the Draft Cumbria Combined Authority Local Transport Delivery Plan 26/27, including delivery of £39m of capital funding and £0.5m for integrated transport on infrastructure projects across all modes (including for highways maintenance, active travel, footpath improvements, bus, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure) and appropriate supported bus services and enhancements using the £3m Bus Grant funding, improving access to education, employment, and services.

A595 Grizebeck

Complete the £23 million A595 Grizebeck road improvement scheme, a 1.4 kilometre single carriageway road between Chapels and Grizebeck.

Parking Strategy Implementation

Implement the Parking Strategy and Action Plan for 26/27 to support better delivery of parking outcomes for our local businesses, communities and visitors. Activities to include improving access and car park provision through delivery of new parking payment systems and a comprehensive review of fees and charges.

A66 Northern Trans-Pennine project

Continue to work collaboratively with National Highways, contractors and government throughout final design and construction phases, ensuring National Highways deliver appropriate mitigations, robust traffic management, safe diversion routes and minimised disruption during construction and coordination with other major projects; to secure high-quality walking, cycling, and horse-riding provision across and alongside the route; and making the case for social value and local benefits, including community projects, temporary accommodation, environmental enhancements and legacy benefits.

Homes

Our mission

Everyone can live in a place they call home, one which is affordable, clean, safe and warm, where they can build stable, independent, fulfilling lives and have access to schools, work and cultural activities.

How we will continue to make a difference

Increase the availability of high-quality and affordable homes and bring long-term empty properties back into use, helping to create stable and sustainable communities. Making effective use of Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 developer contributions to secure the infrastructure and services needed to support communities. Through housing and homelessness prevention services, work with partners to prevent homelessness, support vulnerable residents to maintain secure housing and improve living conditions across communities.

Key focus for 2026/27

Warm and Efficient Homes

Keeping existing homes safe, warm and compliant whether these are social housing tenants or in the private sector, owned or rented. Deliver the warm and efficient homes grant scheme and funding through the Crisis and Resilience Fund to support homes who rely on heating oil and off-grid heating on low incomes.

New Homes

Through planning policy and partnership working with Homes England and local Registered Providers, support the delivery of the right homes in the right places to make the most of opportunities to create new affordable housing.

Supported Housing

Create and deliver a new Supported Housing Strategy which will provide homes for those most in need and reduce the need for temporary accommodation

Learning

Our mission

Everyone has access to high quality education, where children, young people and adults are equipped with relevant tools, skills and aspiration to pursue the life they want to live and to access a rich and varied choice of local employment opportunities that contribute to a fulfilled and happy life.

How we will continue to make a difference

Improve learning outcomes and skills development for children, young people and adults by working with schools, early years providers and further education partners. Expand opportunities through Adult Learning to build essential skills such as English, maths, digital skills and employability, and through Enterprising Cumbria and Cumbria Combined Authority align skills provision with local labour market needs to help people access employment and progress in work.

Key focus for 2026/27

School Attendance

We will concentrate on improving school attendance and reducing exclusions by working directly with schools and parents and by embedding our new Belonging and Inclusion Strategy. We will support stronger outcomes at every stage of education through our Best Start in Life programme and targeted work with school leaders, including focused support around SEND and safeguarding.

Investing in our schools

We will continue to invest in our school estate to make sure there are enough suitable places for children and young people, including additional SEND provision. This includes extending Beaconside School to create new mainstream and SEND places, and increasing specialist Social, Emotional and Mental Health provision at Ullswater Community College

SEND Reform

We will develop a SEND Reform Plan that responds to national expectations while reflecting local need. The plan will strengthen early support, improve outreach services and expand post 16 options so that children and young people with SEND, and their families, can access the right help at the right time and are supported to prepare for adulthood.

Care (Children)

Our mission

Children, young people and adults are supported to achieve a good life, safeguarded from harm, in the place they call home, with the people and things that matter most to them.

How we will continue to make a difference

Ensure children, young people and families are safe, supported and able to thrive. By strengthening early help, safeguarding and targeted support, ensure families can access the right help at the right time and that children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, receive the support they need to succeed. Through fostering, adoption, youth and family services, and by fulfilling our corporate parenting responsibilities, enable children and young people in our care to achieve positive outcomes and reach their full potential.

Key focus for 2026/27

Social Care Reforms

Implement national children's social care reforms with a clear emphasis on prevention and family-based support. Through the development of Family Help services, we will provide clearer, more joined-up support for families, reduce duplication between services and support smoother transitions when statutory social care is needed. We will strengthen partnership working within multi agency children's hubs and increase the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in supporting families.

Child-Friendly W&F

We will continue to develop our Child-Friendly Westmorland and Furness programme, ensuring that children and young people have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions that affect them. This will include a young people led Discovery Day, the delivery of a clear action plan shaped by young people's priorities, and improved monitoring so we can track what difference this work is making.

Cared For Sufficiency Strategy

We will move forward with our Cared For Sufficiency Strategy to ensure there are enough suitable, local placements to meet the needs of children in our care. This includes working with local providers and opening a new children's residential home, helping more children to remain closer to their communities, schools and support networks.

Care (Adults)

Our mission

Children, young people and adults are supported to achieve a good life, safeguarded from harm, in the place they call home, with the people and things that matter most to them.

How we will continue to make a difference

Enable adults to live safe, independent and fulfilling lives in their own homes and communities through early support, safeguarding and person-centred care. By assessing needs, coordinating support and providing services such as reablement, care at home, supported living, community equipment and intermediate care, to support people to maintain or regain independence. Through a range of accommodation and community-based options, including residential care and extra care housing, ensure people receive the right support at the right time while remaining connected to their communities.

Key focus for 2026/27

Reducing Assessment & Care Management Wait Times

We will improve our performance to ensure that at least 70% of care reviews are completed within 12 months, an increase of 5% from the baseline of 65%.

Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance Framework Action Plan

Develop and action the CQC Assurance Framework Action Plan, which will also support the ambitions described in the Transformation Plan to respond to rising demand and costs.

Adult Social Care Strategy Development

Co-produce our Adult Social Care Strategy with partners, users of our services and wider system stakeholders.

Health and Wellbeing

Our mission

No matter where you are born or where you live, there is equal opportunity for everyone to live an active, happy, healthy life, and to feel empowered and confident to choose the best ways in which this is achieved for each individual and for every community.

How we will continue to make a difference

Support residents to lead healthier, more active lives through public health, leisure, wellbeing and community services. By working with partners and communities to strengthen prevention and early intervention, improve physical and mental health, reduce inequalities and help people make the most of local places and the natural environment to support wellbeing.

Key focus for 2026/27

Active Wellbeing

Deliver our Active Wellbeing Strategy, agree our delivery model for leisure facilities and community outreach delivery. Create an Active Wellbeing action plan and prioritised investment strategy for Active Wellbeing facilities.

Anti-Poverty Delivery Plan

Administer the new Crisis Resilience Fund, deliver an Income Maximisation Project to help people get the financial support and benefits they are entitled to; and work with residents with lived experience of poverty to “poverty-proof” our policies, plans and projects so they support those most affected by financial hardship.

Neighbourhood Health Plan

Support the development of a Neighbourhood Health Plan for Westmorland and Furness, in line with national guidance, and overseen by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Public health advice and support to reduce smoking

Provide high quality stop smoking services with the aim of supporting at least 5% of current smokers in Westmorland and Furness to set a quit date.

Culture

Our mission

Culture is embedded in all we do and contributes to improved health, wellbeing and quality of life. Everyone has access to a diverse and distinctive range of opportunities to be creative and enjoy high quality cultural experiences across our area.

How we will continue to make a difference

Strengthen community identity, wellbeing and the local economy by improving access to culture, creativity and heritage through libraries, arts and culture services, museums and cultural partnerships. Support a wide range of cultural activities and opportunities that enable residents and visitors to experience and contribute to a vibrant local cultural offer.

Key focus for 2026/27

Cultural and Heritage Compact

Cocreate with our partners a Cultural and Heritage Compact for Cumbria, to create a single cultural and heritage vision for Cumbria, that can be used to secure funding.

Community and Culture Sites

Progress improvements to key cultural and community sites, with a focus on continued stakeholder engagement, and insight and needs analysis to guide investment, including:

Ulverston Coronation Hall

Continue the engagement and design phase for the redevelopment of the venue and deliver targeted practical improvements to address long-standing issues.

Penrith Town Hall

Continue engagement and co-design the scheme with local communities, partners and stakeholders, working collaboratively to refine and finalise the design proposals for transforming the building into a creative and community hub.

Heart of Barrow

Progress the procurement of a development partner and continue to develop the wider scheme masterplan, ensuring culture remains at the heart of the vision for long term regeneration. In the meanwhile, deliver a programme of town centre activities to sustain footfall, support local businesses, and maintain town centre vitality. This will include enhancing the spaces in and around the Town Hall, creating The Assembly Yard market village for traders, and establishing a temporary performance space.

How we work

The focus of this plan is on what we will do this year. But how we do it is important too.

Our organisational values describe the expectations we have set ourselves for how we behave. As we continue to transition from four separate organisations into one, they underpin the development of a cohesive and positive organisational culture.

- Our Values
- Ambitious
- Outcomes focused
- Inclusive
- Ecologically aware
- Collaborative
- Responsible
- Needs-led

Alongside our values, our organisational operating model describes how we want our council to work. Changing how we work to align with our design principles is an ongoing process.

Several of the delivery priorities for this year are directly related to this journey. These design principles will ensure the most efficient and effective use of public money to support local people and communities.

Over the next 12 months we will be working deliberately across all of our services to embed these values and implement our guiding principles We call this 'Doing things the Westmorland and Furness Way'.

Our plan for the coming year is bold with clear goals in mind. However, we recognise the need for focus and flexibility to navigate some significant challenges at local, national and global levels. To ensure success, we will continuously assess and manage both internal and external risks affecting this plan and all services across our organisation.

Monitoring our progress

Our quarterly public performance reporting is directly linked to our missions with key performance indicators included to update on progress towards each mission, with commentary highlighting key achievements and challenges. Progress against our focus areas will be tracked in detail, with remedial action taken if progress is not being made.

Looking ahead

We are determined to deliver for our communities in the year ahead. With a clear vision and focus on community, digital and financial sustainability we will continue to be a council with a strong commitment to our communities, strengthening our relatively new yet highly ambitious organisation and planning for a thriving and sustainable future.

Our robust performance management framework will ensure we stay on track, continuously monitor our progress, and allow us to adapt as needed to maximise our impact. By remaining responsive and focused on achieving the best outcomes, we will ensure we are achieving the right outcomes for the people and communities we serve.

How to stay in touch

We welcome any feedback or comments on our Annual Plan.

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Follow and contact us on social media:

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Or you can visit or write to us at one of our three primary offices:

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