

Annual Scrutiny Report 2023/24

Foreword

Scrutiny Members have worked hard in the first year of the council, striving to ensure that overview and scrutiny supported the creation of a council that we can all be proud of. This Westmorland & Furness Scrutiny report details the work of Scrutiny Members, highlighting the impact this has made.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Scrutiny Members for their commitment and enthusiasm in holding decision-makers to account on the design and delivery of services, helping to provide the best outcomes for our communities.

Scrutiny Members have also been involved in a wide range of strategy and policy development where their knowledge and experience has been invaluable to enrich and develop new ideas for the council, and the delivery of services and programmes.

All the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have built strong relationships with Members of the Cabinet and Senior Officers, by together focusing on the issues and opportunities faced by the council and our communities. We hope to continue to forge this relationship and to build more with non-executive Members, officers and partners in the coming year.

Strong leadership is needed to ensure that overview and scrutiny is run well and adds value. Therefore, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs for their dedication in providing a critical friend challenge to the Cabinet and other service provider organisations; with special thanks to my Vice-Chair Cllr Vicky Hughes for her insight and support.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the officers that have attended or supported the Committees over the past year, with particular thanks for our Policy and Performance team and Democratic Services team.

Cllr Beverly Morgan

Chair, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Westmorland & Furness Annual Scrutiny Report

This report details the work of the Westmorland & Furness Overview and Scrutiny Committees in the Council's first year, between April 2023 and March 2024. Within the report the Chair of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee has provided a brief overview of the committees' ambitions and focus for the year.

This Annual Report also highlights scrutiny activity that demonstrates the positive impact of scrutiny in improving outcomes for our communities; as well as how we can continue to contribute to effective strategy development and decision-making in the future.

Overview and Scrutiny

Public scrutiny is the way in which the decision makers in the Westmorland & Furness area can be held to account so as to protect the public interest and to ensure high-quality public services. Scrutiny acts as a 'critical friend' to policy and decision-makers through careful consideration of the effectiveness of both existing and future policies. Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee provides constructive challenge to improve decision-making.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Westmorland & Furness Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee has overall strategic responsibility for the overview and scrutiny function. To support this Westmorland & Furness have additional Committees that focus on outcomes and services for specific council functions.

In addition, some of the Westmorland & Furness Committees scrutinise and oversee partner functions, such as the NHS and the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

Scrutiny Committees and Panels:

- Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Health and Adults Scrutiny Overview and Committee
- Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee – includes both Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland Councillors
- Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel - includes both Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland Councillors

Overview and Scrutiny roles and responsibilities

Westmorland & Furness Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Three of the key roles for Scrutiny are policy review, policy development and scrutiny of decisions and performance. In relation to these, Overview and Scrutiny Committees may:

- Review and scrutinise the decisions and performance of the Cabinet and/or Committees and Council Officers, both in relation to individual decisions and over time;
- Assist the council and the Cabinet in the development of its Budget and Policy Framework by in depth analysis of policy issues;
- Conduct research, community and other consultation in the analysis of policy issues and possible options;
- Review and scrutinise the performance of the council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets, and/or particular service areas;
- Question Members of the Cabinet and/or Committees and Directors about their decisions and performance, whether generally in comparison with Service Plans and targets over a period of time, or in relation to particular decisions, initiatives, or projects;
- Review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area, and invite reports from them by requesting them to address the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and local people about their activities and performance; and
- Make recommendations to the Cabinet and/or appropriate Committees and/or council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process.

Health Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and scrutiny of health services in the Westmorland & Furness area is conducted by the Adults and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee:

- Discharge the functions conferred on the Authority by Section 244 of the National Health Service Act 2006 on matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in Westmorland & Furness;
- Make reports and recommendations on matters relating to the health service in Westmorland & Furness to local NHS bodies and to the council (including the health and wellbeing of Westmorland & Furness' population);
- Act as consultee as required by the relevant regulations in respect of those matters on which local NHS bodies must consult the Authority;
- Consider and respond to referrals from the Cumbria Health Watch on health matters under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 as amended by the Social Care Act 2012;

- Undertake and arrange joint health scrutiny arrangements where necessary to support effective consultation with NHS bodies or local health service providers on any proposal for a substantial development of or variation in health services.

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel

The role of the Panel is to scrutinise and support the work of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) in their engagement with the public, setting policing and fire and rescue service priorities and holding the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to account.

The Panel scrutinises the delivery of the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan, the Cumbria Fire and Rescue One Year Action Plan and the Commissioner's budget. The Panel's other statutory functions include:

- Annual scrutiny of the Commissioner's Council Tax Precept proposals for the Police Service, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner;
- Holding Confirmation Hearings on the appointment of a new Chief Constable, Chief Fire Officer and senior officer positions within the Commissioner's office;
- Handling complaints made about the conduct of the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner;
- Reviews and scrutinises the Commissioner's annual report; and
- Reviews and scrutinises the Commissioner's decisions and actions.

Scrutiny Chairs' Reflections

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Our aim is to demonstrate that we add value and make a positive difference to the council and to the lives of local people. This year Corporate Overview and Scrutiny have focused on pre-decision scrutiny, challenging assumptions, assessing risks, and identifying success measures prior to Cabinet decision-making. This has provided us with the opportunity to influence and improve Cabinet decisions by giving a different perspective, and allowing us the time to delve more deeply, both impartially and independently.

Examples of where pre-decision scrutiny has worked well include the Budget; Delivery Framework; Performance Management Framework; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement; and Enabler Strategies such as Customer, People, Digital and ICT. Engaging us early is the best way for us to scrutinise major decisions and strategic issues thus avoiding delays or misunderstandings further down the line.

High on our agenda is the harmonisation and transformation of services, and the integration between financial and service planning to better understand the impact of budget decisions on service performance, and testing whether the council is directing its resources effectively. We continue to challenge the accepted ways of working and act as champions of improvement and transformation.

We recognise and highlight good practice where we see it, and identify where there are financial, social, economic and environmental benefits for our council and residents. We also review our own progress as a committee to ensure we are as effective and forward thinking as can be, making positive recommendations and changes to improve how we work, and continue to build constructive relationships between scrutiny members and officers.

Cllr Beverly Morgan

Chair, Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

A new council and a new Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to review decisions of the Cabinet, Officers and other Committees and ensure that policies and services reflect and respond to the needs of local people and communities.

Our brief has, for the first time, principally combined looking at both health services and council services. This is important given the interdependence between the two in supporting and caring for more vulnerable people.

So, in the first place, we have been working at getting to know and understand how these services work, and the key people involved in providing them. Given that the Westmorland & Furness Council area straddles two Integrated Care Boards, and we are only a small part of both, this has taken some time in this first year. We have been helped by a workshop provided for us by our local Healthwatch service. I have also found it useful to attend the Health and Wellbeing Board and am pleased that I am now included in their development sessions.

Although work is planned to learn lessons about some of the practicalities of how Overview and Scrutiny Committees can become most efficient and effective, it feels that we have now settled into a working routine and relationships are beginning to mature within the Committee.

Whilst we are now looking at how the health and social care system works (who's responsible for what and how do they work together), we have started to examine some of the pressures, especially around the increased demands of winter, and recruitment and retention of staff, dental services and mental health. This should enable us to start to support and drive improvements.

We have a new Director of Public Health who is leading on a new Joint Strategic Needs Assessment so that we can have our own joint local health and wellbeing strategy. We are looking at plans to become smoke free by 2030.

Ambitious plans are being developed by the council's Adult Social Care services to promote independence and well-being, and we are looking forward to hearing more as they develop. We are anticipating an inspection from the Care Quality Commission and checking the council's readiness for this.

An early suggestion from the Cabinet member for Adult Social Care was to look at the opportunities of making more use of Assistive Technologies, already supported by the Better Care Fund, and we have started some task-and-finish work on this which should report in summer 2024.

The work programme is developing, we will continue to monitor Safeguarding, and want to look at the needs of Carers (and how they are supported) as well as potential best use of Direct Payments.

Cllr Janet Battye

Chair, Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee has held four meetings over the past twelve months with the aim of ensuring the best possible provision and outcomes for all the children, young people and families who are served by Westmorland & Furness Council. Meetings have been well supported by senior officers, including the new Director of Children's Services, Milorad Vasic and the portfolio holder, Sue Sanderson.

The committee has received reports on the SEND Improvement Plan and the Children's Services Post Inspection Improvement Plan, and it has also had a briefing on the council's approach to Early Help, including the recruitment of Early Help Officers and the provision of Family Hubs.

Most recently the committee has focused on children and young people's mental health in order to identify shortfalls in provision and formulate an overarching strategy – prompted by the Westmorland & Furness Youth Council. This is an ongoing piece of work that will be revisited during the coming year, together with reviews of the Education Sufficiency and Ambition for Every Child strategies.

We're also aware that elections to the Youth Parliament are scheduled to take place in May and we hope that the three successful candidates will be able to contribute to the work of the overview and scrutiny committee going forward.

Cllr Phil Dew

Chair, Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny

Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committees

As a new Overview and Scrutiny Committee within a new council, we have been able to influence and support a range of strategy development and planning for the council which will drive how we will work and support our communities in new and improved ways, provide cost-effective essential services and tackle collective issues such as climate change.

The critical friend challenge provided by the Committee to Cabinet Members and Officers when designing these new ways of working for the council has both ensured a range of opinions are considered and built strong working relationships between Scrutiny Members, Cabinet Members and Senior Officers. I have been pleased to see that Scrutiny Members have brought a range of skills, knowledge and experience from their professions, and as frontline councillors, to provide effective scrutiny of a range of new areas of work for Westmorland & Furness Council, all of which supports the delivery of effective council services.

Amplifying the voice of the community is an essential part of scrutiny and was at the forefront of the Committee's thinking when scrutinising water quality with the Environment Agency and United Utilities this year. The Committee engaged with a number of community and interest groups to ensure it had the knowledge and expertise to fully investigate this issue and make recommendations, as Members understood communities' concerns with this national issue.

Looking to the future, the Committee will lead on a Scrutiny Review on housing, bringing together the interests of several of the Westmorland & Furness Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In addition, climate change and locality working will continue to be a focus for the Committee as we know this important to our communities.

Cllr Eamonn Hennessy

Chair, Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is made up of Members from Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland Councils. I

It was established to provide oversight support and to scrutinise the work of the Joint Executive Committee, which is tasked with the management of shared functions and services between the two councils. This includes the development and delivery of service strategies and, where applicable, the implementation of disaggregation plans.

Local Government Reorganisation brought together seven councils to create Westmorland & Furness Council and Cumberland Council, meaning that some services that had previously been run county wide needed to be disaggregated into the two new councils. This was, and still is, a big task and will take a number of years to be completed.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme this year has been structured to help scrutinise future disaggregation to get the best results for our residents. In the first year, the Committee has covered:

- Disaggregation of the ICT service
- Children's Care Services
- Adult Social Care
- Long Term Hosted Services
- Stronger Local Resilience Forum
- Integration of LEP activities to Local Authorities

We have worked collaboratively, delivering results to achieve the best outcomes for our residents. I have been pleased to see that good relationships have been forged between Westmorland & Furness Councillors and their colleagues from Cumberland Council and we are working productively together. We have been working methodically to understand and scrutinise the performance of the Joint Executive Committee and the decisions they have made.

Cllr Mark Rudhall

Chair, Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel

The Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel is a joint panel hosted by Westmorland & Furness Council comprising of Councillors from Cumberland Council, Westmorland & Furness Council, and two independent members.

The panel's role is to scrutinise and support the work of the Cumbria Police Fire and Crime Commissioner. It meets at least four times a year, carrying out a wide range of activity that contributes to the delivery of a safe and secure Cumbria.

The panel has several statutory functions which include annual scrutiny of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Council Tax Precept proposals, dealing with any complaints regarding the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner, and scrutinising the Commissioner's delivery of the Police and Crime Plan and the Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service Action Plan.

Early in the year the Panel also had the privilege of conducting Confirmatory Hearings for the new Chief Constable Rob Carden and the new Chief Fire Officer Rick Ogden, where the Panel asked a series of robust and probing questions to the officers proposed by the Commissioner for these senior positions, ahead of unanimously supporting their appointment.

Looking ahead, with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2024, the Panel is looking forward to working with the incoming Commissioner on the creation of new plans for Cumbria Constabulary and Cumbria Fire and Rescue service.

Cllr Bill McEwan

Chair, Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Scrutiny Highlights

Whilst Scrutiny Members are regularly engaged in the overview and challenge it delivers through regular Committee meetings, they also have the opportunity to share their insight on other issues which may have a particular impact on the council's strategic or operational approach.

Several examples are provided in this report to illustrate the type of work Scrutiny is involved in outside the formal Committee meetings.

Council Plan Delivery Framework and Performance Management Framework

Over the Spring and Summer in 2023 the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held a number of sessions on the developing Draft Council Plan Delivery Framework. Members provided feedback and proposed a number of changes both to the way the information in the Delivery Framework was presented as well as the substance of the content. This feedback was reflected in changes across the Strategic Delivery Themes and most notably in defining what success looks like within each of the Themes.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Members are continuing this work with the annual refresh of the Council Plan Delivery Framework, and it is anticipated to be a regular feature of their work programme.

The Committee has taken a similar approach to the development of the Performance Management Framework, providing feedback through online and in person sessions on the performance metrics included in the Framework and its structure.

Foundational Strategies

Scrutiny Members have taken the opportunity to inform the development of these three key foundational strategies for Westmorland & Furness Council – the People Plan, ICT Strategy and Customer Strategy. This has ensured the strategies are well informed and have taken a wide range of perspectives into account as part of their development prior to Cabinet considering them.

Early views were sought from Scrutiny in Autumn and Winter 2023 about the general direction of travel and key issues which needed to be considered in developing each of the strategies. Further engagement with invitations to all members and a wide range of other stakeholders has since taken place and supplemented the views Members shared at the end of last year.

Assistive Technology

The Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a review of assistive technology provision in November 2023. The Committee identified the opportunities to improve and transform services through the increased adoption of assistive technologies and the importance of considering the current and planned use of assistive technology by Westmorland & Furness Adult Social Care in conjunction with Health partners.

The aim of the Scrutiny Review Group is to provide overview and scrutiny of:

- Current usage of assistive technology and provide objective feedback from the end users of these technologies. The current contract with independent provider comes to end in June 2025 so it is timely to look at what the next contract should focus on.
- Planned usage of new and innovative assistive technologies and how this has been informed by experiences of other local authorities, looking at the Virtual Care Pilot and how this has built on the experiences in other areas. In addition to highlight any existing research that could be utilised.

A Task and Finish Group, with its membership drawn from the Committee, has worked with the Director of Adult Social Care and her team through a number of workshop sessions and will be providing specific recommendations on the proposed shape and scope of the future contract in June 2024.

Mental Health Support for School Age Children

The Children, Young People and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee commissioned a piece of work in Autumn 2023 to map the mental health support available to School Age Children.

The focus was on local challenges and / or council specific issues, rather than replicating work on broader children's and mental health issues already being considered by other partners such as the Integrated Care Boards, or nationally. It focused in particular on the specific local landscape of children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health and support, with a focus on prevention and early intervention, and Westmorland & Furness Council's role in it, rather than issues outside of the council's control, for example capacity issues and delays in CAMHS.

Addressing and reversing trends in mental health issues, funding and expanding all levels of support and resolving the issues caused by local health structures are all difficult, complex issues that are not within the gift of the Committee. However, the Committee agreed a set of recommendations in February 2024 where the council could usefully explore the specific local context in more detail with a view to identify actions the council could take to improve support across Westmorland & Furness.

Scrutiny's Engagement in Strategic Planning

Scrutiny Members received a presentation from the Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) on the Council's 2024/25 Strategic and Budget Planning process and consultation, which outlined the current position and the proposals for delivery of a balanced budget for 2024/25 at their meeting on 12 January 2024. Scrutiny Members discussed the proposals and provided feedback which was considered by Cabinet on 13 February 2024 when forming their Budget Proposal recommendations to Full Council.

Looking Ahead

All Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are dedicated to providing an impactful overview and scrutiny function to ensure effective services for all communities within the Westmorland & Furness area.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee reaffirmed this commitment by endorsing a Scrutiny Development Plan to ensure the scrutiny function is delivering what is needed by the council, its Partners and most importantly its communities.

Scrutiny Development Plan

The Scrutiny Development Plan will focus on four key themes:

Quality Scrutiny

- Ensuring a consistent approach across all overview and scrutiny committees, with a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities by Councillors and Officers
- Undertaking an annual reflective review of scrutiny activity to ensure best use of time and resources
- Plan and develop scrutiny work programmes to ensure adequate time to prepare and engage on scrutiny items and to work with the council's Audit and Assurance Committee to avoid duplication
- Build on best practice by being part of regional and national groups supporting overview and scrutiny activity

Supporting Officers

- Training and awareness sessions to be created for officers to ensure the purpose and value of scrutiny is fully understood and utilised
- Sharing findings from the annual scrutiny reflective review with Directorate Management Teams to support the development of scrutiny work programmes

Public Voice

- Explore ways to engage with a wider audience to inform scrutiny work programmes, identify issues or concerns, and to ensure the voice of our communities is heard
- Implement a 'public call for evidence' approach to our focused Scrutiny Reviews (Task and Finish groups) to include a wider set of views
- Create an expectation for all scrutiny reports to detail how service areas or organisations have engaged with stakeholders in the development or delivery of their service

Public Profile

- Create a quarterly scrutiny newsletter for Councillors, staff and our communities, highlighting the work of the overview and scrutiny committees and providing information on how they can get involved
- Create a Scrutiny Annual Report and regular updates to council to provide a full view of the work of all of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

- Work with local media to highlight the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees

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