



Westmorland
& Furness
Council

Annual Report 2025/26

Foreword

Welcome to the Westmorland and Furness Council 2025/26 Annual Report. This provides a yearly update on our service delivery and achievements.

The last year has been one of sustained delivery, clear progress and growing impact for communities across Westmorland and Furness. Our Annual Report sets out how we have continued to deliver the priorities in our Council Plan 2023–28. We have done this through our ten Council Plan Delivery Framework missions. These translate ambition into action, across a wide range of services.

Over the past year, we have continued to develop as an organisation. We have strengthened how we work and focused on delivering for our communities. Our attention has been on embedding effective ways of working, building strong partnerships and ensuring our services are well placed, to meet both current and future needs across Westmorland and Furness.

From large scale programmes and building projects to the everyday services that residents rely on, this report highlights the dedication, professionalism and commitment of our staff and elected councillors. This work, often delivered in a challenging financial environment, continues to make a meaningful difference to people's lives and to the places we call home.

Looking ahead, we remain ambitious for Westmorland and Furness. We will continue to build on what has been achieved, respond to emerging challenges and opportunities, and work together with our partners and communities to ensure our area remains a great place to live, work and thrive.

Councillor Jonathan Brook

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Introducing our Annual Report

Westmorland and Furness Council continues to grow and mature as an organisation and remains firmly committed to the priorities set out in our Council Plan 2023–28 and the supporting 10 missions within our Council Plan Delivery Framework, which guide how we deliver meaningful outcomes for our communities.

Since 2023, our 10 Council Plan Delivery Missions have provided a clear and consistent framework for turning our Council Plan vision and priorities into real outcomes for our communities. These missions remain central to how we plan, deliver and measure our work, helping us stay focused, coordinated and ambitious.

Across the organisation, our workforce provides a broad range of vital services including digital and customer services, waste and recycling, community safety, transport, and environmental management. Their commitment helps Westmorland and Furness to be a great place to live, work and thrive.

Over the past year, we have prioritised consistent improvement and working alongside our communities to provide effective and sustainable services.

Looking forward, we will build on the progress we have made so far, sharpening and elevating our approach so we can continue to meet the needs of our area both now and in the future.

Our Achievements in 2025/26

This report sets out our progress during 2025/26 in delivering our 10 missions, drawing on both case studies and our quarterly corporate performance data for each mission. These measures provide a consistent approach to tracking progress across our services, helping to identify where things have worked well and where additional focus has been needed.

By combining performance data with real examples of delivery, the report presents a clear picture of the difference the council is making for residents, communities and local places. The case studies bring to life the positive impact of our work, while the performance data ensures we remain open, accountable and transparent about how we are delivering against our vision and missions.

1. Communities
2. Environment
3. Growth
4. Connections
5. Homes
6. Learning
7. Care
8. Health and Wellbeing
9. Culture
10. Effective Services

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.

Armed forces partnerships

We continue, with a growing network of partners, to develop our work in recognising the value of serving personnel, veterans, Reserve Forces and military families and honour our commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant which we signed in 2023.

The Westmorland and Furness Armed Forces Board delivers an annual action plan, key highlights in 2025/26 included a first community collaboration event which brought together veterans, serving personnel, families, charities, employers and public services – all united in making a difference.

New partnerships include working with the charity SSAFA to provide dedicated support for the Armed Forces community across the Westmorland and Furness Council area and a collaboration between the council, Defence Medical Welfare Service and University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust to deliver co-ordinated welfare support for Armed Forces families, including emotional, practical, housing and financial advice.

The council also successfully achieved the revalidation of the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme's Gold Award. This prestigious award is the highest badge of honour for employers who demonstrate outstanding support for veterans, reservists, Cadet Force Adult Volunteers, and military families.

Young people shaped place that transforms their lives

Over the last 12 months teams from across the council worked on a project to give sometimes vulnerable young people in Barrow a youth facility that truly meets their wishes as well as needs.

Drop Zone Youth Projects provides alternative education provision for young people who struggle in school, youth work and mental health support as well as organising Furness Youth Pride each year.

With a grant of £641,000 we have reworked Lakeland House on Abbey Road into a youth hub delivering life skills for young people. Young people who use Drop Zone, like Molly, were involved in shaping this work every step of the way.

Molly said: "It looks a lot better than it did, a lot newer and brighter. They gave us options of things like a pool table and colours so we could choose."

Cath Corkill, the CEO of Drop Zone, said this was the only way to undertake the work: “The young people that access our service are the most important people in the world, they have to have some ownership.”

New Public Space Protection Orders Introduced

The council and police are promoting a clear message of ‘leave no trace’ for people visiting the area.

New Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) have been brought in to give the council and police a practical tool to step in to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Following a public consultation on behalf of landowners, 12 new PSPOs are now in force at tourist ‘hotspots’ in the heart of the Lake District, including areas around the lakes at Coniston, Blea Tarn, Ullswater and Windermere.

The orders have been introduced in response to concerns raised by landowners and residents who called for action to tackle problems with anti-social behaviour linked to unauthorised camping, motorhome use, wildfires, barbecues and littering, all of which can cause significant harm to the environment.

The council and police have conducted joint patrols encouraging people to enjoy the area responsibly and, where needed, have been able to use the orders to address anti-social behaviour linked to camping and the inappropriate use of motorhomes, as well as environmental damage caused by littering, fires and barbecues.

The orders will not affect those enjoying the area responsibly and leaving no trace of their visit, or genuine wild campers who stay overnight in remote areas, above the highest fell away from roads and settlements.

Those found breaching an order by causing anti-social behaviour or environmental damage could be hit with a Fixed Penalty Notice.

Winning the Withnall Partnership Award at this year’s RSPCA PawPrints Awards

Our public protection and commercial services teams won the inaugural Withnall Partnership Award at this year’s RSPCA PawPrints Awards, in recognition of the council’s pioneering partnership work with the RSPCA in support of animal welfare at Appleby Horse Fair. We developed a UK-first approach to delegate authority to qualified RSPCA officers so they could act quickly when animal welfare concerns were identified. The changes were developed with the active support of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Community Power helps improve parks and playgrounds

The council continues to work with and alongside local communities to improve parks and playgrounds.

In Penrith a new Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) has been opened at Carleton Park, including an anti-slip tarmac surface with basketball hoops, football goals, benches and line markings for football, basketball, hockey, and handball.

The council worked with Penrith Town Council to support the community-led Carleton Park Recreation Committee to turn their vision into a reality.

Funding was secured from Westmorland and Furness Council's 0–19 Fund and Community Fund, as well as from Penrith Town Council, Penrith Lottery, Cumbria Waste Management Environment Trust and the Hadfield Trust.

A new play unit has also been installed at the council's children's play area at Castletown, Penrith.

Funding came from Penrith Town Council, with Westmorland and Furness Council managing the project, commissioning the new equipment and arranging installation.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	2025/26 Status
Number of voluntary, community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector groups supported	13	n/a	186	n/a	154	n/a	n/a
Anti-Social Behaviour – 12 month rolling rate	6.7	14.8	6.2	14.8	4.7	14.8	Within 5% of target
All Crime – monthly rate	69.0	68.2	68.9	68.2	67.9	68.2	Within 5% of target
Number of Social Enterprise start-ups	0.0	3.0	16.0	6.0	16.0	9.0	Within 5% of target

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.

Multi Award winning Net Zero strategies and plans

We gained national recognition for our ambitious decarbonisation management strategies, securing five award wins and seven finalist positions across major UK green energy and sustainability awards. Our innovative approach has been highlighted through multiple shortlistings at the UK Green Business Awards, where we were named winner in two categories for projects including the building of the year for the retrofit of Voreda House and net zero strategy of the year.

Further acclaim followed with a win at the 2025 Green Energy Awards and again at the ADEPT Awards for our public sector net zero transformation work. Our submission showcased progress made during the first year of the five-year carbon management strategy, outlining achievements on our pathway to becoming carbon net zero by 2037.

A further APSE Energy Award win in 2026 for work to improve clean energy across our buildings, reflects our growing reputation as a leader in sustainable innovation, demonstrating strong public sector commitment to energy transformation and long-term climate action.

Launch of Fleet Decarbonisation and Replacement Strategy

We developed and launched our Fleet Decarbonisation and Replacement Strategy 2025–2035, setting out a clear plan to transition our 390-vehicle fleet toward net zero.

The strategy prepares the authority for upcoming national deadlines to phase out petrol and diesel vehicles and targets a 74% reduction in emissions. Currently, the fleet produces emissions equivalent to around 1,400 cars, with most generated by heavy goods and light commercial vehicles.

The strategy identifies battery electric vehicles and Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil as the most viable technologies for large-scale deployment. Early milestones include introducing 90 electric cars and vans, electric refuse vehicles and minibuses, followed by a wider shift to renewable fuels for larger vehicles.

The plan aligns with our wider climate commitments, reinforcing our ambition to deliver a cleaner, more sustainable future for residents.

Launch of Sustainable Buildings Strategy

We agreed our Sustainable Building Strategy that will guide how council buildings and maintained schools are refurbished and constructed in the future. The strategy introduces clear sustainability and energy reduction requirements for all projects, supporting the council's ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions for Scope 1 and 2 by 2037.

Building on the Carbon Management Strategy 2024–2029, the new approach targets emissions from heating and electricity use across schools, offices and care homes, which previously accounted for a significant share of the council's carbon footprint. Key priorities include reducing heat loss, phasing out natural gas heating, installing more efficient systems and increasing renewable energy generation, such as solar panels on suitable sites.

£1.75m PSDS funding for decarbonisation projects at four main buildings

We secured £1.75 million in new funding to decarbonise four major buildings. The award, secured through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme for 2024/25, supports upgrades at Kendal Leisure Centre, Appleby Leisure Centre, Kendal Market and South Lakeland House.

Planned works include replacing gas boilers with air source heat pumps, installing rooftop solar panels, improving insulation and adding a pool cover at Kendal Leisure Centre. With the council match funding boiler replacements, the total investment exceeds £2 million.

The projects are expected to save 343.2 tonnes of carbon emissions annually and build on previous successful funding bids supporting low carbon improvements across council buildings and schools.

New Waste Collection

This year we agreed plans to harmonise the way we collect waste and recycling from 117,000 households across one of the largest and most rural unitary local authority areas in the country, covering a geographic area of 1,500 square miles. This major programme will start in 2026 and includes the roll-out of wheelie bins for kerbside recycling collections and harmonised charging for garden waste collections. The new-look services were developed following feedback from 7,300 community consultation responses and have been designed to support residents to reduce waste, recycle and reuse more, and achieve cost and carbon efficiencies and protect the environment.

Launching the Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The Cumbria's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) was launched this year. The strategy has been led by Westmorland and Furness Council, working in close partnership with Cumberland Council, the Lake District National Park Authority, the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, and Natural England. The LNRS sets out priorities for restoring biodiversity across the county, bringing together existing environmental data, established local and national strategies, and, crucially, incorporating local knowledge and expertise to ensure that actions for nature recovery deliver the greatest possible positive impact for Cumbria's distinctive landscapes and wildlife.

New Nature Strategy

This year marked a significant step forward in protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity across Westmorland and Furness through the approval of our new Nature Strategy. The Nature Strategy sets out a clear plan to halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity and ensure nature recovery is embedded in every aspect of council operations. The programme of actions includes enhancing biodiversity across council-owned land such as parks, open spaces, and cemeteries, supporting community-led nature projects and green initiatives and working with local partners and organisations to create connected habitats that enable native species to flourish.

One Tree per Resident: Communities Come Together to Plant Over 58,000 Trees

Over the past year, more than 58,000 free tree saplings have been distributed to communities across Westmorland and Furness as part of the Council's One Tree per Resident (OTpR) project. Five community collection events took place throughout January and February in Kendal, Penrith, Appleby, Windermere and Barrow, welcoming schools, landowners, community groups, town and parish councils, and local residents.

This latest phase of OTpR delivered free tree and hedge packs through the Council's Free Trees for Residents scheme, designed to encourage community participation and create a lasting legacy by boosting tree and hedgerow cover across the area. The scheme was designed to be accessible to everyone—supporting renters who needed trees suitable for pots, schools seeking opportunities for outdoor learning, and landowners creating new habitat corridors.

Many of the saplings will support inspiring local projects from wildlife havens and hedgehog sanctuaries to the restoration of pockets of ancient woodland – each tree contributing meaningfully to nature recovery.

This latest scheme takes our total so far to over 110,000 trees and hedgerows planted, bringing us closer to our ambitious target of 250,000 - the equivalent of one tree or one metre of hedgerow per resident in Westmorland and Furness.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	2025/26 Status
Number of trees and hedgerows planted	25K	11K	32K	22K	36K	33K	Within 5% of target
Number of hectares of peat restored through Peat Partnership	25.0	25.0	50.0	50.0	75.0	75.0	Within 5% of target
Carbon emissions of Council operations	8.0	n/a	8.0	n/a	8.0	n/a	n/a
Number of private homes improved through energy efficiency initiatives	0.0	n/a	0.0	n/a	40.0	40.0	Within 5% of target
% of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting	55.9	20.0	57.6	20.0	48.0	20.0	Within 5% of target
Kg of residual waste per household (incl street bins and sweeping)	100.5	175	103.6	175	112.3	175.0	Within 5% of target

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.

Economic Growth Strategy agreed

This year we approved a new Inclusive and Green Economic Growth Strategy to improve economic conditions for inclusive and sustainable growth.

The 10-year strategy aligns with local, regional, and national strategies, providing a local response and contribution to the delivery of the overarching Cumbria Economic Strategy and the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy, particularly through the presence in Westmorland and Furness of nationally significant sectors such as advanced manufacturing, clean energy and defence.

Having agreed to the Government's devolution proposals, there is also opportunity through the new strategic authority in Cumbria to guide and target investment to meet local needs and priorities.

Westmorland and Furness is defined by leading edge industrial strengths, a distinct rural and natural capital offer, and strong community spirit upon which the economy can further build and innovate. The area makes a significant and growing contribution to the economy of the UK, generating over £6bn of Gross Value Added (GVA) each year.

The new strategy has been co-developed with our communities, businesses and partners, and it has at its core a commitment to ensure every resident – regardless of background or circumstance – can access opportunity, live well, and contribute to a flourishing local economy.

The strategy is about supporting our businesses to grow, innovate and lead in sectors of national and international significance and it is about investing in our places – making them more connected, more vibrant and more resilient.

Development partner appointed for Marina Village

The council has appointed a strategic development partner for Marina Village, a major milestone in plans to create a new neighbourhood with 1,350 new homes, a nature conservation area and new public open spaces in Barrow.

Marina Village is a vital part of Barrow's plans for the future, bringing new homes close to education, major employers and local shops and businesses. This will help to strengthen and support economic growth and perceptions of Barrow as a place to live, all key ambitions

of the Team Barrow partnership between the council, BAE Systems and national government.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	202526 Status
Total Gross Value Added (GVA) per filled job	61K	66K	61K	66K	61K	66K	5-10% off target
% of the workforce with qualifications	92.3	93.2	92.3	93.2	92.3	93.2	Within 5% of target
Claimant rate of Universal Credit by those looking for employment	2.6	5.3	2.5	5.1	2.4	4.9	Within 5% of target
% of Full Plan applications given decision within 5 weeks of submission/validation or before the mutually agreed extended time period	100	100	99.0	100	100	100	Within 5% of target
% of Major Planning Applications determined within 13 weeks	100	60.0	90.9	60.0	100	60	Within 5% of target
% of Minor Planning Applications determined within 8 weeks	92.0	70.0	94.7	70.0	88.7	70.0	Within 5% of target
Number of businesses supported through business support programmes	0.0	269	75.0	269	174	269	More than 10% off target

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.

New 20mph Speed Limits

A total of 44 community-backed 20mph speed limits have now been approved to improve road safety across Westmorland and Furness, made possible by £300,000 investment from the council's Priority Investment Fund.

Introducing 20mph speed limits in response to requests from parish and town councils has been one of the council's key priorities to promote safer roads, reduce vehicle noise and enhance the environment for walking and cycling.

20mph limits have only been introduced where significant community support for the proposed schemes could be evidenced. Nearly 5,500 responses have been received in two rounds of community consultation as local residents helped shape the 20mph scheme proposals.

Following this statutory consultation, local councillors on Eden, Furness and South Lakeland locality boards only approved the schemes where it could be clearly demonstrated that residents backed the proposals and any proposed schemes that did not receive clear support from residents have not been taken forward.

New schemes being developed to promote Active Travel

Two new projects are being worked on to make it easier for people to walk, wheel or cycle for everyday local journeys.

In Penrith, funding has been secured to improve pedestrian access to the town centre and make safety improvements to a well-known double mini-roundabout junction at the top of Sandgate/bottom of Fell Lane.

The project aims to enhance safety for all road users, including those walking or wheeling, particularly children and parents going to and from Beaconside Primary School and the nursery at Penrith Pre-School.

Designs are being worked on and will be subject to public consultation this year.

In Grasmere, a consultation has just concluded on initial design proposals for a new 'active travel' scheme in the heart of the Lake District.

The Grasmere to Dunmail Raise project, being delivered by Westmorland and Furness Council, will link to two other new routes which when joined together will aim to create a

well-connected route for people to walk, wheel and cycle from Grasmere to Thirlmere and onward to Keswick, enhancing the visitor offer, attracting more people to the Lake District National Park and supporting low-carbon tourism.

The Grasmere to Dunmail Raise section will see a new cycle track and footway along parts of the A591, as well as improved surfaces and signage on rural roads north of Grasmere village. Within the village itself, 'shared spaces' - carefully designed to fit with the character of the area - will aim to make it safer for cyclists and pedestrians.

16-19 Education Travel Bursary programme

We have remained committed to supporting young people with transport costs to access education and training through our 16-19 Education Travel Bursary programme. Transport plays a vital role in providing access to education and skills, particularly in rural locations and the fund is designed to help reduce the financial burden on young people who need to travel to attend school, college, or training. It can be used for transport such as bus, train, taxis, fuel costs for private transport or bicycle.

New Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2026-2030

We launched the new Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2026–2030, setting out a bold plan to deliver world-class digital connectivity and support for Cumbria's £12 billion economy. The strategy aims to support delivery of gigabit-capable broadband, improved mobile coverage, and 5G innovation opportunities with the aim that no one and no place in Cumbria is left behind. A major milestone was reached at the end of 2025, with 80 per cent of properties in Cumbria now having access to gigabit-capable broadband

Pothole reduction and Surface Dressing Programme

We carried out a £3.3 million surface dressing programme to reduce potholes on 53 roads in Westmorland and Furness. Surface dressing significantly extends the lifespan of a road by sealing the surface to prevent water from seeping in. It protects treated roads from freezing and wet winter weather, the leading cause of road damage across the area. The surface dressing programme was one part of a £37.7 million investment plan in highways assets last year, including pothole repairs, resurfacing of roads and maintenance and repairs of gullies, footways and cycleways, bridges and retaining walls.

25 Bus Routes Extended

Approval has been given to investigate the extension of 25 bus routes introduced or improved with the help of council financial support over the last two years, and also to investigate the introduction of up to seven new bus services across Westmorland and Furness, using £1.7 million worth of UK Government Local Authority Bus Grant funding.

The plan means that from spring 2026, communities will continue to benefit from bus services that provide access to employment, education and essential services.

It is estimated that the supported bus services will generate approximately 218,000 passenger journeys each year and reduction in car usage of up to 65,000 journeys per year, contributing to wider sustainability and environmental objectives.

The Westmorland and Furness Way

This year we announced the development of a new 120-mile long-distance walking route celebrating the geography of Westmorland and Furness. The Westmorland and Furness Way, which will link Alston in the north and Furness Abbey in the south, is scheduled to launch in Autumn 2026. The first phases of a new walking, wheeling and cycling scheme along Abbey Road in Barrow has been completed and initial designs have been drawn up and consulted on for a new 'active travel' route at Grasmere, to make it safer and easier to walk, wheel and cycle, enhancing the visitor offer, attracting more people to the Lake District National Park and supporting low-carbon tourism.

Opening of a new road bridge at Grizebeck

We have reached a major milestone in the £23.3 million A595 improvement scheme with the new road bridge at Grizebeck officially open. The Department for Transport-funded scheme – which is due to complete in 2026 - is being delivered by the council and is creating a new 0.8-mile single carriageway between Chapels and Grizebeck village, designed to improve safety, journey times and resilience along one of Cumbria's key transport routes.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	2025/26 Status
Number of potholes filled	8K	6K	14K	6K	18.4K	18.7K	Within 5% of target
% of A roads in a green/amber condition	96.2	96.0	95.5	96.0	95.5	96.0	Within 5% of target
Number of passengers using bus services supported by the Council	27K	n/a	31K	n/a	42K	n/a	n/a
% of B & C roads in a green/amber condition	89.5	90.0	88.7	90.0	88.7	90.0	Within 5% of target

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.

Recognition of strengths by The Regulator of Social Housing

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) has recognised strengths in the council's Housing Landlord service and a culture of 'putting tenants first', awarding the service the second highest rating following an inspection. The council manages 2,561 homes that it owns, mainly in the Furness area.

Inspectors observed meetings, spoke with tenants, councillors and staff and reviewed documents and procedures and concluded the council's Housing Landlord service meets the regulatory standards overall with no serious failings.

The RSH report also noted a number of strengths, including a culture of putting tenants first, listening to feedback and providing engagement opportunities, all homes meet the Decent Homes Standard and the repairs service provided by the council is 'effective, efficient and timely'.

New Tenant Engagement Strategy

Over the past 12 months we developed a new Tenant Engagement Strategy, setting out ways council housing tenants will have more chances to influence decisions about repairs, maintenance, and any changes to policies. Tenants have been invited to share their views to help shape the strategy, which includes commitments to ensuring services are made easier to use, fairer, and more inclusive.

Financial support for residents to sustain their homes

Over the past year, the council has awarded more than 300 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), providing a total of £254,000 in additional financial support to residents facing housing-related hardship. These awards play a vital role in helping people remain securely housed during periods of financial strain, preventing homelessness and promoting stability within our communities.

DHPs have enabled residents to manage shortfalls between their rent and Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, meet unexpected housing costs, and navigate challenging life events without the added worry of housing insecurity. Many households supported through DHPs were experiencing temporary financial difficulties, including job changes, health-related issues, or the impacts of rising living costs. This support ensured they could stay in their homes while working towards longer-term financial resilience.

The benefits of these awards extend beyond immediate financial relief. By helping residents to sustain tenancies, DHPs reduce the risk of homelessness, ease pressure on local services, and contribute to stronger, more stable neighbourhoods. Importantly, they provide peace of mind at moments when individuals and families need it most.

Warm Homes: Local Grant – improving energy efficiency across our communities

The Warm Homes: Local Grant programme continues to support residents by improving the energy performance of privately owned homes, helping households reduce energy bills while contributing to local carbon-reduction goals.

Westmorland and Furness Council, working alongside Cumberland Council, was initially awarded £1.9 million from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to upgrade housing across Cumbria. Following a successful first phase, a further £0.49 million was secured to extend delivery in the first year.

So far, 81 homes in Westmorland and Furness have benefited from improvements, forming part of 158 upgraded properties across Cumbria. The programme has focused on practical measures such as loft insulation and solar photovoltaic (PV) installations.

These upgrades are already making a meaningful difference. On average, each home is expected to save around £442 a year on energy bills and reduce carbon emissions by 0.98 tonnes, supporting both household budgets and wider environmental ambitions.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
% of council tenant satisfaction with overall service provided by the council	80.0	70	80.0	70.0	80.0	70.0	Within 5% of target
% of social housing properties that meet the Decent Homes Standard	100	100	100	100	100	100	Within 5% of target

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
% of successful homelessness prevention outcomes	50.0	65.0	54.1	51.0	45.3	51.0	More than 10% off target
% of successful homelessness relief outcomes	43.8	32.0	38.3	32.0	39.6	32.0	Within 5% of target
Number of households in temporary accommodation	102	132	108	132	112	132	Within 5% of target
Number of nights in temporary accommodation	2.8K	5.5K	2.7K	5.5K	5.4K	5.5K	Within 5% of target

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.

Investing in Schools

We continue to invest in modern, sustainable and inclusive learning environments across the area, with significant improvement works either complete or underway at schools across the area.

At Channelside alternative provision in Barrow, upgrades support the expansion of specialist delivery and improved facilities for pupils. Kendal's Sandgate School, which provides education for children and young people with SEND, has benefitted from enhancements designed to increase capacity and improve accessibility, ensuring the school can continue meeting growing demand.

Beaconside School in Penrith is undergoing a major extension to create additional classrooms and expand specialist SEND provision, increasing overall capacity and supporting the needs of a growing community. These projects form part of the council's wider commitment to improving educational infrastructure, ensuring schools are equipped for future growth and able to deliver high quality learning environments. The investment reflects a long-term strategy to enhance facilities, support inclusion and meet rising pupil numbers across the region.

Improved School Attendance Across Westmorland and Furness

School attendance increased to 93.6% for the academic year 2024-2025, up from 90.4% the previous year.

In August 2024, we introduced a new attendance policy and practical toolkit, aligned with the national statutory guidance *Working Together to Improve School Attendance*. This strengthened, consistent approach has helped schools refine their processes and focus on early support.

Every school in Westmorland and Furness benefits from a named Attendance Support Officer, who works closely with staff and families to identify concerns and explore all available support.

We know that every day in school matters. Strong attendance is closely linked to achievement, with pupils attending over 94% more likely to achieve higher GCSE grades. By continuing to work in partnership with families and schools, we remain committed to giving every child the best possible opportunities for their future.

£5m investment in school maintenance

We have delivered our most ambitious programme of school maintenance to date, with £4.8 million of improvements to learning environments across the area. This represents the largest investment since the council was formed and reflects a strengthened annual budget of just under £5 million to ensure school buildings remain safe, secure and fit for the future.

More than £700,000 of upgrades were completed during the first quarter of the financial year, with a further £3.1 million delivered through 16 major projects over the summer. The work included essential fire safety improvements, electrical rewiring, asbestos removal and structural repairs, alongside modernisation measures such as triple glazed windows, roofing upgrades and enhanced drainage systems.

In total, projects have been delivered in 20 schools, supporting safer, greener and more energy efficient facilities. We are also progressing wider assessments and decarbonisation planning across all schools, underlining its long-term commitment to high quality, sustainable education spaces for pupils and staff.

Ofsted Praise Adult Learning Services

Ofsted inspectors have praised Adult Learning Services, rating two areas of the service as 'outstanding', with all other areas 'good'. The overall effectiveness rating was 'good'. The new report demonstrates notable improvements in areas of the service over a previous inspection seven years ago. Managed by Westmorland and Furness Council, the Adult Learning Service provides programmes in Barrow, Penrith, Kendal, Carlisle, Whitehaven and Workington, aligned to meet the needs of these communities to help learners develop core English, maths and digital skills, enhance their CV, or improve their health and wellbeing. Many of the courses are entirely free or subsidised and learning is flexible, with courses delivered both face-to-face and online, so learners can choose the route that's right for them.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
% of sessions attended by all pupils (Year on Year Attendance)	92.7	n/a	94.5	93.1	94.6	93.4	Within 5% of target
% of pupils achieving a good level of development at Early Years Foundation	64.9	67.7	67.4	67.7	67.4	68.3	Within 5% of target
% of pupils achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined at Key Stage 2	58.1	60.6	57.1	62.2	58.0	62.3	5-10% off target
% of pupils attaining GCSE levels 4-9 in English and Mathematics at Key stage 4	65.9	65.0	65.9	65.0	62.4	64.5	Within 5% of target
% of pupils attaining GCSE levels 5-9 in English and Mathematics at KS4	43.4	n/a	43.4	45.2	42.0	45.2	5-10% off target
Average Point Score per level 3 qualification entry (includes A level, Academic, Applied, Technical)	31.8	34.4	31.8	32.8	31.8	32.8	Within 5% of target

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
Adult Education enrolments on the digital curriculum from vulnerable and older adult resident in isolated areas	578	630	133	300	816	500	Within 5% of target
% of pupils receiving a permanent exclusion	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	Within 5% of target

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.

W&F commit to being the very best Child Friendly Community

In October 2025 we made a commitment to making the whole area 'child friendly' and making it one of the very best places for children and young people to grow up in.

It's a whole-council commitment to prioritising the rights, needs, and well-being of children, ensuring they grow up in safe, supportive environments that encourage and value their participation.

In early 2026 as part of this initiative, we launched a new search -seeking out young people between 11-18 who can help turn this vision into reality and a project grounded in what young people want and need. Helping our area become a shining example of a Child Friendly Community.

'50 Things to Do Before You're 5' launched to support families across Westmorland and Furness

To support early development, in February 2026 we launched a new early years resource aimed at helping families enjoy simple, meaningful activities that support children's development. The '50 Things to Do Before You're 5' project brought together a range of free or low-cost ideas designed to encourage play, exploration, and quality family time.

The ideas focussed on everyday moments that can sometimes be lost in the busyness of modern life — from outdoor adventures and sensory play to creative activities that help children learn through experience.

This initiative was all about celebrating the simple joys of childhood and it plays a vital role in children's development. It was, and is, a fantastic way to support families in making the most of those early years.

A night to remember. The Prom project at Family Hub Walney.

This year our team at Walney Family Hub were so happy to welcome local young women and their families to their prom event. Each girl that attended said "yes to the dress": they left beaming and over the moon with their new dresses, and the Hub had a stunning balloon arch and backdrop, to make the space feel so special.

The team said: 'We're incredibly grateful to our wider community for donating such a beautiful range of dresses, which were all in immaculate condition and some brand new. Your generosity made a real difference. We can't wait to host this event again and already have some exciting ideas to make it even bigger and better!'

The team will be running another event in the future, if you want to help out or have a business that would like to donate a dress in the future, please contact barrowfamilyhubs@cumbria.gov.uk

Family Matters service, Penrith.

We have remained committed to ensuring both young people and adults in Westmorland and Furness are supported, based at the Family Hub at Penrith, our Family Matters service offers a safe space for families to speak alongside a family therapist-in-training, about any topic that's important to them. This could include worries about going to school, work, sleep, anxiety, behavioural concerns or maybe something different that affects their family.

Families can contact the Family Hub in Penrith or go for an initial chat about what they need, and a session will be arranged with one of the therapists-in-training. Everyone is welcome - children, parents, carers, grandparents & stepparents – (groups of up to 4 people.) Sessions last up to an hour, and follow-ups are available if needed. 15 families have so far taken up the service, and we have 55 Family Help practitioners who have attended a 5-day systemic training programme and nine people have completed a 10-day training which is equivalent to the foundation year of a four-year master's programme in systemic therapy. We are one of six local authorities taking part in this national pilot programme, commissioned by the Department for Education, to work with families who need therapeutic support. To enquire about the Family Matters service, visit the Family Hub at The Regent, Old London Road, Penrith or email: edenfamilyhubs@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk T: 01768 899 901

Improving Early Years Outcomes and new Best Start in Life Strategy

There continues to be a positive upward trend in the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) across Westmorland and Furness. In 2025, outcomes increased by 2.5% compared with 2024. This reflects sustained improvement and a strong direction of travel.

Our **Best Start in Life Strategy**, launched in April 2026, will build on these improvements and is our commitment to ensuring every child in Westmorland and Furness has the strongest possible foundation for lifelong health, learning and wellbeing.

The first 1001 days and early childhood experiences are critical for a child's development and shape their attachment, emotional regulation, resilience, communication and language, cognition and learning and social development.

This strategy brings together a wide range of partners to build a joined-up, accessible early years system.

We know that some localities in Westmorland and Furness face particular challenges, and the strategy aims to support children and families with the right services at the right time and where it is needed most to help close gaps in child outcomes by the age of five. [Best Start in Life strategy | Westmorland and Furness Council](#)

Working together to support families

Our new Family Help website is a great way to access information and advice all in one place, delivering real benefits for families.

Westmorland and Furness Council teamed up with local health partners and other councils to create a site that is clear, accessible and easy to use.

We worked with families and user groups to develop the Family Help website, underlining our commitment to being a listening council which puts our customers at the heart of what we do.

The result is a mobile-first website that brings everything together in one place – giving parents, carers and young people trusted information on parenting, early years support, health and wellbeing, childcare, the SEND Local Offer and much more. People can also still access the Hubs in person in Eden, South Lakes, Furness. **Find the right help, go to: westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/family-help**

Measuring Performance

Performance Indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
Number of Cared for Children	258	255	258	255	248	255	
Rate of children subject of a Child Protection Plan	166	165	153	165	156	165	
Number of Children within a Children in Need (CIN) Plan	386	370	375	370	356	370	

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
% of Cared for Children living in the same placement for 2+ years	74.2	75	75.5	75.0	72.5	75.0	Within 5% of target
% of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation (any age)	92.1	95	91.3	95	90.4	95.0	5-10% off target
% of Cared for Children in in-house foster placements	46.9	48.0	46.1	48.0	44.4	48.0	5-10% off target
% of Eligible Cared for Children with up-to-date pathways plan	73.7	85.0	70.0	85.0	79.1	85.0	5-10% off target
% of Care Experienced 19–21-year-olds in Education Employment or Training (EET)	64.6	65.0	64.2	65.0	58.7	65.0	More than 10% off target

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.

Council's Adult Social Care work praised in first CQC assessment

In February 2026 our Adult Social Care support was praised for its person-centred approach, support for carers, keeping people safe, and for its pro-active prevention work to support health and wellbeing.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC), in its first assessment of the new council since it was formed in 2023, said the council "had processes and practices in place to support people well. There was good support taking place for people across adult social care and a strong leadership team in place."

It also praised Adult Social Care's productive partnership working with the NHS and the voluntary sector, and its understanding of what needs to improve further. Further developments were needed in areas such as co-production, accommodation for people with complex needs and waiting times.

The CQC assessment took place in June 2025. The council was rated as "Good" in four out of nine areas assessed, with "evidence of some shortfalls" in five areas. The council received the highest possible score within an overall rating band of "Requires Improvement" – meaning the council was just one point out of 100 away from being rated "Good" overall.

The CQC report recognised a great deal of strong, positive practice across Adult Social Care, including:

- Person-centred approach where people feel listened to, understood, and supported.
- Positive and effective support for carers, with timely assessments and good access to help, groups and advice.
- Strong partnership working with NHS Integrated Care Boards, housing, voluntary sector partners and others.
- Proactive prevention work, including our health and wellbeing coaches and community-powered approaches.
- Strong commitment to equity and inclusion, especially around rural communities, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and work with asylum seekers, refugees and Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.
- A stable, improving care market, strong homecare capacity and a valued Shared Lives service.

- Supportive, visible leadership and a positive learning culture.
- Effective safeguarding, with confident multi-agency working.

Giving Daily Aids a new lease of life

In 2025 Adult Social Care worked with residents to give unwanted community equipment a new lease of life.

Residents were asked to return unused daily living aids to prevent them going to waste and help give them new purpose.

The Council held a week-long take-back event in November collecting many unwanted community equipment such as commodes, toilet frames, bed levers, over-bed tables, or shower chairs.

Once collected, all items were cleaned, sanitised, and made ready for reuse - helping those in need while reducing unnecessary waste.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
Number of people currently waiting for a Social Work Assessment & Occupational Therapy assessment	340	n/a	321	n/a	198	n/a	n/a
Rate of adults aged 18-64 whose long-term care needs are met by admission to residential and nursing care homes	17	17	16.5	17	18.0	17.0	5-10% off target
Rate of adults aged 65 and over whose long-term care needs are met by admission to residential and nursing care homes	693.4	700	676.9	700	700.9	700.0	Within 5% of target

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
Number of people who have reduced or no ongoing support needs following a period of reablement (including reablement at home or within an intermediate care setting)	186	n/a	196	n/a	229.0	n/a	n/a
% of Section 42 Safeguarding enquiries where a risk was identified and the reported outcome was that this risk was reduced or removed	75.7	80	69.5	80.0	78.6	80	n/a
% of Care Quality Commission ratings that remain Good as a minimum across all registered services	91.3	100	92.0	100	93.0	100	5-10% off target

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.

Our commitment to helping people stop smoking

Throughout the year our stop smoking services expanded further, we continued to offer more support than ever before to help people quit smoking for good – from Stoptober in October to promoting a wide range of free stop smoking support.

The council has a dedicated Stop Smoking service which offers expert advice and personalised care to help individuals quit smoking and achieve lasting health improvements. The team provides 12 weeks of free Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) – including patches, lozenges and vapes.

For those seeking a non-nicotine approach, Westmorland and Furness Council also provides free access to the highly effective Allen Carr's Easyway online programme.

Allen Carr's Easyway books are also available at all Westmorland and Furness libraries, with eBook and eAudio versions available through the library service's Borrowbox app.

Over five million adults in England still smoke. Smoking causes 75,000 deaths a year, making it the biggest cause of preventable illness and death.

Westmorland and Furness Council wants to achieve 'smoke-free' status by 2030, with less than 5% of our residents smoking. This is why supporting people to become successful quitters, as well as putting in measures to prevent people from taking up the habit is a priority.

Helping Girls to Access Football

We launched a new partnership with Active Cumbria, Barrow AFC Community Foundation and 12 local schools to tackle barriers to girls playing football allowing them to follow in the boot steps of England Lioness and Euros winner Georgia Stanway, who is from Barrow. The initiative, funded by the council's Community Power programme, includes free exclusive access to astro turf pitches to under-10 years girls' teams.

Health and Wellbeing Team – changing lives for the better

Our Health and Wellbeing Team has expanded its reach, supporting vulnerable residents with personalised coaching that helps people make lasting improvements to their health and resilience.

Between April and December 2025, our Health and Wellbeing Team received 528 referrals from a wide range of partners, including Social Care, Primary Care, Mental Health Services, Education, Housing, VCFSCCE organisations, and Blue Light Services. We also received a further 126 people referring themselves, showing that more people are becoming aware of the support we offer and feel able to reach out.

Our team works closely with some of the most vulnerable people in the community, many of whom struggle to access support elsewhere. We provide health coaching that focuses on helping people make positive, lasting changes in their lives. This isn't about quick fixes; it's about supporting individuals and families to live well in a way that works for them and helping them to achieve their goals.

We take the time to really listen to people to understand their story, what matters to them, and what will actually work in their day today lives. By doing this, we can support changes that last, not just in the short term but for years to come.

Over time, this helps people feel happier, healthier, and more able to cope with life's challenges on their own. It also means less reliance on services and, ultimately, stronger, more resilient communities.

0-19 Growing Healthy Service

This year we strengthened support for children and families through launching the newly commissioned 0-19 Growing Healthy Service, provided by HDFT and delivering our Healthy Child Programme (HCP).

The HCP offers every family a range of support, including developmental reviews, screening, immunisations and information and guidance to support parents/carers, children, and young people to grow, develop and thrive.

The service has gone from strength to strength over the past 12 months, maximising the reach of mandated Healthy Child Programme contacts, supporting improved health outcomes for all children and families and working closely with partners across health, education, and children's services to ensure a joined-up approach.

The service now has a single point of contact for families and professionals for general health and wellbeing advice or support from the 0-19 Growing Healthy Team and can be contacted on T: 03003049039

Families can also download the Growing Healthy 0-19 App on the QR code below or following the steps from [Download Our App | HDFT Childrens Health Service](#)

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
% of adults who are current smokers	11.2	10	11.2	10	9.2	10.0	Within 5% of target
Rate of suicide (persons)	15.1	n/a	14.8	n/a	14.8	n/a	n/a
Rate of deaths from drug misuse	9.9	7.8	9.9	7.8	9.9	7.8	More than 10% off target
% of people receiving coaching support reporting an improvement in their mental health	83	75	73	75	88.0	75.0	Within 5% of target
% of mandated health visitor visits completed within timescales	54.1	85	73.7	85	86.0	85.0	Within 5% of target
% of opiate users that completed drug treatment successfully	5.1	5	5.1	5.0	6.8	5.0	Within 5% of target
Number of active leisure centre memberships	9.9K	9.6K	10K	9.9K	9.9K	10K	Within 5% of target

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.

Launching the Cultural framework

We developed and launched our new Cultural Framework this year, an ambitious five-year vision designed to strengthen arts and culture as key drivers of health, well-being and economic growth. The framework emphasises the pivotal role culture plays in supporting local communities and outlines how the council will harness arts and heritage to improve physical and mental health, tackle issues such as loneliness and isolation, and foster local economic development.

Culture awards applications

The council provided advice and support for a number of towns in Westmorland and Furness bidding for Town of Culture awards.

Bids have been submitted by Ulverston, Penrith, Barrow-in-Furness, Kendal and Kirkby Lonsdale, hoping to secure funding to support cultural programming in a national competition.

The council provided varying levels of advice and support to the town and parish councils that led on the submission of the Town of Culture bids. This support was tailored depending on the approach each community was wanting to take and the role they would like the council to play, and the council was part of strong local working groups where it was able to offer support and advice as required.

There are three categories in the competition depending on the population size of the town. There will be a winner in each category and from these, an overall winner will be selected.

The overall winner will receive £3m for a cultural programme in 2028, and the two other finalists will receive £250,000 each towards their proposals.

Investment projects for Penrith Hall and Ulverston Coronation Hall

We have worked closely with local communities to shape major investment projects for Penrith Town Hall and Ulverston Coronation Hall. Residents, community representatives and creative partners were invited to help co-create future visions for both buildings. Engagement included surveys, drop-ins, workshops and targeted sessions with youth and community groups. Thousands of people have been able to take

part, ensuring local voices have been instrumental in shaping ideas for the future of these key buildings.

New facilities in Barrow Town Hall

Shows and events, a new community café, conferencing facilities and community services including a banking hub have been successfully established in Barrow’s historic town hall as part of arrangements put in place to relocate facilities from the Forum after the venue closed last year.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
Rate of physical visits to library sites	418	n/a	423	n/a	418	n/a	n/a
Number of recorded visitors into Local Authority museums	15.8K	n/a	18.3K	n/a	12.8K	n/a	n/a
Number of attendances at shows, cultural events/activities/shows within Local Authority venues	10.3K	n/a	19.1K	n/a	20K	n/a	n/a
% of births registered within the statutory timescales (within 42 days)	98.0	98.0	97.0	98.0	99.0	98.0	Within 5% of target
% of deaths registered within the statutory timescales (within 5 days of receipt of paperwork)	96.0	95.0	96.0	95.0	95.0	95.0	Within 5% of target

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.

ICT, Digital and Customer Services

We have continued developing user-friendly, caring and accessible services through multiple channels. We have made our website more accessible and relevant, improving how the search engine works and making sure content is up to date and gives people the information they most need.

We are proud of the work we have done to create a much improved and user-friendly website for Family Help, offering help and advice about all things relating to children. And we've made improvements to the information available about our roads as well.

There's been a lot of work done behind the scenes to prepare for further innovations - testing out a chatbot and virtual assistant so we can start to provide these additional ways of dealing with your queries this coming year.

We've taken the time to talk to residents about overcoming barriers to accessing our services; and this approach of listening and testing will continue as we make further improvements to customer experience.

We've rolled out use of our generative AI tool Copilot across the council with training provided to officers and our councillors about how to safely and securely make the most of this time-saving aid. And we've trialled another AI tool which is reducing the time spent on administrative tasks from meetings.

We've also been consolidating and reducing our printing and postage to ensure we are operating in an efficient and cost-effective way.

Workforce development and staff support

We have continued to strengthen staff development, wellbeing and organisational culture, recognising that sustained improvement will be required as the organisation progresses through significant transformation. A key milestone was advancing the migration of all employees onto a single HR and payroll system, improving the reliability and accessibility of workforce data for managers and staff.

Core learning activity continued across services, including refreshed equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and customer care training. Digital capability was enhanced through AI focused learning, building staff confidence in emerging technologies. The Leadership and Management Development Programme moved forward following a pilot phase.

Work started on the new Employee Engagement Framework, supporting more consistent two-way communication and strengthening mechanisms for staff voice. We initiated our cultural review, designed to help identify where further focus is needed to support our desired culture. Efforts to embed our organisational values continued, helping bring them into daily behaviours and interactions.

The relaunch of Staff Network Groups, delivery of a Wellbeing Calendar, progress toward a new Employee Workplace Health Programme and activity linked to our Respect at Work approach further contributed to creating a healthier, safer and more inclusive working environment.

Apprenticeships

We have continued to invest in the future of our workforce by expanding our apprenticeship offer and strengthening opportunities for people of all ages to earn while they learn, gain valuable skills and build rewarding careers in their communities.

Our apprentices bring fresh perspectives, energy and new ideas, helping us to grow our own talent and ensure our services remain innovative and resilient for the future.

In September, we welcomed more than 30 new starters beginning roles across highways, civil engineering, children's services, business administration, project management, finance, digital and other areas. These included apprentices ranging from school leavers to career changers, highlighting the broad range of people who choose apprenticeships with the council.

This year also saw the continued growth of the Westmorland and Furness Early Careers and Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (WE CAAN). The network plays a central role in supporting development, building confidence and giving apprentices the chance to connect, lead projects and shape future opportunities across the organisation.

The council currently has 164 apprentices working across a diverse range of roles, with additional recruitment set to further strengthen our apprenticeship workforce and support our commitment to creating good-value jobs across our communities.

"My apprenticeship has been one of the best decisions I've ever made – the support has been amazing throughout!"

Akazia, Apprentice Associate Project Manager

Legal and Democratic Services

Our Legal and Democratic teams are vital to the work we do across the organisation, providing advice and training to all council services to ensure decisions are safe, lawful and follow council processes. The Legal team has continued to institute and defend proceedings, providing advice on strategic projects and council priorities, on devolution decision making and leading on the constitutional drafting for the Cumbria Combined Authority and other legal work.

The council is committed to embedding good governance and an extensive programme of work has been delivered including the introduction of policies and procedures, the review of the constitution, delivery of training and development for councillors and staff, the completion of the Annual Governance Statement and Action Plan and the development of an Information Governance framework. We have launched new Governance pages for easy access to information and support.

Supporting residents by transforming our Revenues and Benefits service

Over the past year, one of our key areas of focus has been the procurement and start of implementing a new, single Revenues and Benefits software solution. This represents a significant modernisation of our systems and a major step towards improving the way we support residents and streamline our internal processes.

The new solution will bring together multiple separate systems into one integrated platform. By doing so, it will reduce duplication, simplify workflows, and give our staff faster and more reliable access to the information they need. This will help us manage cases more efficiently, improve accuracy, and free up valuable time for staff to focus on supporting residents with more complex needs.

For our residents, the new system will enable smoother interactions, quicker processing times, and clearer, more consistent communication. It will also lay the foundation for improved digital services, giving residents easier ways to manage their accounts and access support when they need it.

Measuring Performance

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
% of Freedom of Information and Environment Information Regulation requests processes within satisfactory timescales	84	90	83	90	86.0	90.0	Within 5% of target
% of complaints responded to within timeframe	85	90	88	90	88.0	90.0	More than 10% off target
Number of days on average to process new claims for Housing Benefit / Council Tax Reduction claims	22.6	25	18.1	25	16.3	25.0	Within 5% of target
% of return per annum over 10 years on Local Government Pension scheme	6	5.8	6.4	6.3	7.1	6.9	Within 5% of target
Number of working days forecast to be lost per Full Time Equivalent due to sickness absence	12.4	15	13.5	15	13.9	15.0	Within 5% of target

Performance indicator	Q1 Actual	Q1 Target	Q2 Actual	Q2 Target	Q3 Actual	Q3 Target	25/26 Status
Number of Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences (RIDDOR) Reportable Health and Safety incidents	7	5	15	10	25.0	15.0	More than 10% off target
Public Sector Network (PSN) transition	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Within 5% of target

Quarterly progress monitoring

Comprehensive details on our performance against all 2025/26 actions to achieve our Council Plan priorities and Delivery Framework missions are available in our Quarterly Corporate Performance reports.

These reports provide updates on each Council Plan Delivery Framework mission, tracking progress through performance indicators and agreed actions. They also highlight key achievements and challenges, enabling us to adapt to changing needs and delivery requirements.

In addition, our Quarterly Corporate Finance reports help us to monitor this performance and remain on track financially. This has been a challenging year, with increasing funding pressures across Children's, Adults' and Place services and the range of measures that have been put in place to support the achievement of a balanced budget for 2025/26.

Looking ahead

We remain committed to delivering services and projects that benefit our communities by advancing our Council Plan priorities through our Council Plan Delivery Framework missions.

Our 2026/27 Annual Plan outlines our key delivery priorities for the year ahead and the steps we will take to deliver our missions, ensuring Westmorland and Furness continues to be a great place to live, work and thrive.

How to stay in touch

We welcome any feedback or comments on our Annual Plan.

You can visit or write to us, we have three offices:

Barrow: Town Hall, Duke Street, Barrow in Furness, Cumbria, LA14 2LD

Kendal (registered office): South Lakeland House, Lowther Street, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 4QD

Penrith: Voreda House, Friargate, Portland Place, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 7QQ

Follow and contact us on social media:

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@WandFCouncil