

Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26

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Foreword

Once again, Overview and Scrutiny Members have demonstrated their commitment to the scrutiny protocol and process playing a vital and constructive role in shaping the direction and performance of the Council. This Annual Report highlights the breadth of their work and the positive contribution made in strengthening accountability, transparency and service delivery.

I would like to express my gratitude to all Scrutiny Members for the diligence and professionalism they bring to their role. Their determination to hold decision-makers to account while striving for the best possible outcomes for our council and communities is fundamental to effective local governance. I also wish to thank the Cabinet Members, officers and partner organisations who have attended and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Your openness, expertise and engagement are essential to driving improvement and achieving best value.

Policy and Scrutiny Advisors and Democratic Services have played a crucial role in supporting our scrutiny committees by providing insights, data, evidence, sound advice, and facilitating and recording our meetings. We have been lucky that our officer support increased this year and that has been worthwhile and appreciated.

This year, the Council also benefited from valuable external insight through a Corporate Peer Challenge. Scrutiny was recognised as a process that adds demonstrable value and supports Westmorland and Furness Council in making better decisions.

In January 2026 the Council received its second call-in. Drawing on learning from the previous experience, processes were refined and applied effectively.

We remain committed to reviewing each challenge constructively guaranteeing that our scrutiny arrangements evolve and reflect best practice.

Public representation and participation remain important areas for development and will be a focus in the year ahead. Strengthening public engagement will help bridge the gap between residents and the Council ensuring that policies are informed by, and accountable to, the communities they serve.

This report reflects a year of meaningful scrutiny, collaborative working and continued progress and is a testament to this essential role.

Cllr Beverly Morgan

Chair, W&F Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose

This report details the work of the Westmorland & Furness Overview and Scrutiny Committees between April 2025 and March 2026. 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.

It also highlights 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.

What is Overview and Scrutiny

Public scrutiny is the way in which the decision makers in the Westmorland & Furness area can be held to account, which helps protect the public interest and 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 and support effective delivery.

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 has additional Committees that focus on outcomes and services for specific service areas. 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. The Scrutiny Committees and Panels are:

- 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 – Hosted on behalf of Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland Councils.

Overview and Scrutiny roles and responsibilities

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 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.
- Make recommendations to the Cabinet and/or appropriate Committees and/or Council arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Responsibilities

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 responsibilities

The role of the Panel is to scrutinise and support the work of the Commissioner and is one of the key checks and balances in relation to monitoring their performance. The Commissioner decides how funding related to policing and crime reduction is allocated, and in consultation with the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer, sets the strategic direction and objectives of the Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service through the Police, Fire and Crime Plan.

The Panel scrutinises the delivery of the Commissioner's Police, Fire and Crime Plan 2025-29 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.
- Reviewing and scrutinising the Commissioner's annual report.
- Reviewing and scrutinising the Commissioner's decisions and actions.

Scrutiny Chair's Reflections

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The purpose of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to ensure that executive decisions made by Cabinet on behalf of the council were transparent, accountable and inclusive. We held Cabinet to account for decisions that affected our communities through a process of review and recommendations and looked at matters of importance to Westmorland and Furness.

This year the Committee focused on key strategic priorities including:

- Devolution and the Cumbria Combined Authority
- Transformation
- Budget Consultation and Proposals
- Enabling Strategies covering Customer, ICT and People
- Performance and Risk
- Economic Strategy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Through robust democratic checks and balances the Committee has contributed to informed decision-making and continuous improvement across these critical areas and will continue to do so next year.

On behalf of Corporate O&S I have also built a working relationship with the Chair of Audit and Governance, the Leader of the Council and the Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer. We have been working together to identify cross-committee issues that can be addressed collectively. This year our focus has been on risk and our different roles and approaches to managing risk. We have shared knowledge and best practice to improve the overall effectiveness of the council.

Our Scrutiny Committee members have demonstrated a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience and worked well together for the benefit of the council and our residents. The recommendations they made were well thought out, evidence-led, effective and fair and I would like to thank them for their time and efforts in making the council more accountable and transparent.

Cllr Beverly Morgan

Chair - Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Adults Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to strengthen and define its role, focusing on how we scrutinise, how we engage, and how we support improved health outcomes for residents. This year has seen a particular emphasis on enhancing the effectiveness, visibility and impact of our scrutiny activity.

Nationally and locally, this has been a year of considerable change across the health and care system. The introduction of the NHS's new 10-year plan with its shift toward prevention, digital innovation and community-based care alongside the abolition of NHS England, reduced capacity in Integrated Care Boards, and ongoing financial pressures on NHS Trusts. These system pressures have increased the need for deeper scrutiny of how adult health and care services are planned and delivered across Westmorland and Furness. We anticipate further updates by NHS partners in 2026.

In response to a rapidly changing landscape, the Committee has worked to move away from receiving reports and presentations towards more early engagement. This has allowed us to offer timely, proactive challenge and help shape decisions ensuring the local NHS and Adult Social Care Services work together with the committee to put better measures in place to communicate a number of key clinical service reconfigurations to the committee, and ultimately the public.

These have included:

- Ongoing bed reconfigurations at local hospitals
- The introduction of, and future roll out of, a new Wellness Model
- Proposed changes to the future provision of Orthodontic Services
- Early and ongoing engagement and committee input into Promoting Independence and Wellbeing Programme

The Committee has also drawn on insights from Westmorland & Furness Council's own strategic developments, including the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which reflect our commitment as an ambitious and forward-looking authority.

We continue to build relationships with our Integrated Care Boards Lancashire & South Cumbria, and North East & North Cumbria, and to work constructively with the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Committee members continue to develop their understanding of the complex and evolving adult health and social care landscape through effective challenge and questioning.

Across all this work, our goal remains clear: to act as a critical friend; to ask the difficult questions; to ensure transparency and accountability; and ultimately, to help secure better health and wellbeing outcomes for all residents of Westmorland and Furness.

Cllr Dyan Jones

Chair, Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Children, Young people and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Throughout 2025, the Committee has met regularly, scrutinising a wide range of matters affecting children, young people and families across Westmorland and Furness, and seeking to act as a genuine “critical friend” to the Executive.

A key focus has been on Children’s Services performance. Members welcomed the positive ILACS inspection outcome in April 2024, which rated the authority “Good” overall, and have continued to monitor performance to ensure standards are maintained. The Local Area SEND Inspection in February 2025 was a significant area of scrutiny. While inspectors identified inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, the Committee noted the progress made since 2019 and examined the revised Continuing Improvement Plan, which it will continue to monitor.

SEND has remained one of the most challenging areas of work for the Committee. Members scrutinised the increase in Education, Health and Care Plans, the pressures this places on services, and the financial challenges in the High Needs Block. The Committee welcomed ongoing work to improve the neurodiversity pathway and access to Speech and Language Therapy, as well as activity supported through the Delivering Better Value programme.

The development of the Family Help strategy and the expansion of Family Hubs have been another key area. Members were encouraged by early indicators showing reduced referrals to statutory services where Hubs are in place and sought assurance on progress in areas where the model is still developing. The Committee will visit the Greengate Family Hub in April 2026.

The Committee also considered national Children’s Social Care Reform, scrutinising the council’s approach to Family Help, Multi-Agency Child Protection and lead practitioner roles. Members endorsed the council’s intention to build on strong existing practice as part of wider transformation.

Other areas of scrutiny have included looked-after children, fostering and corporate parenting. Members received updates on the Virtual School, Life Story work, and residential and fostering services, and discussed future arrangements for bringing these services in house. The Committee also reviewed the Sufficiency Strategy and explored ways to strengthen the voice of care-experienced young people.

Looking ahead, the Committee will continue to focus on SEND provision, the rollout of Family Hubs and the implementation of Children’s Social Care Reform. It is committed to ensuring the experiences of children, young people and families inform its work and will explore opportunities to involve care-experienced young people more directly in corporate parenting oversight.

Cllr Ben Shirley

Chair, Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee

Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Over the past year, the Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered a wide range of important issues affecting residents across Westmorland and Furness, including climate adaptation, waste management, highways, flood risk and community resilience, nature and biodiversity, parking and community safety. In doing so, the Committee has focused on where it can add most value: identifying gaps, challenging proposals where necessary, and helping to ensure that decisions are better informed and more responsive to the needs of communities.

Scrutiny is often most effective when it adds value early, and I am proud that the Committee has increasingly contributed at formative stages of policy and service development, helping to strengthen proposals before decisions are taken. This has included ongoing work on climate adaptation, waste management, highways, community safety, parking, public engagement on the future of Coronation Hall, flood risk reduction and community resilience, and nature and biodiversity. In each case, Members have focused on clarity of purpose, meaningful engagement with residents and communities, and the need for realistic and deliverable action.

It has been especially gratifying to see a change of approach when it comes to consultation and, in particular, pre-consultation engagement with communities, following recommendations made after the October 2024 call-in relating to Ulverston Library. The Committee was clear that the Council needed to strengthen its approach so that communities are engaged earlier, more openly and in a way that does not appear to present a settled view from the outset. It is encouraging that progress has since been made, with the Council using more imaginative and inclusive methods to reach communities at an earlier stage and improve confidence in the openness of decision-making.

On waste management, the Committee has worked with Cabinet and officers on the Waste Change Programme over a sustained period. Our contribution has consistently emphasised the importance of flexibility, clear communication and visible implementation planning. We have been clear that change of this scale must be accompanied by strong public engagement and a clear understanding for residents of what is happening, when, and why. This is an area where the Committee has combined strategic oversight with practical concern for resident experience, and our site visits to waste facilities have further strengthened Members' understanding of operational realities.¹¹

The Committee's work on the Climate Adaptation Strategy was a particularly important example of scrutiny adding value at the right point. Members were clear that this vital piece of work was not yet ready and was not approaching a fully formed stage. We felt that further development was needed, particularly to ensure stronger ownership, fuller engagement and a clearer understanding of the risks, opportunities and partnerships involved. That challenge helped lead to a rethink of the strategy and its timetable, with a broader approach to engagement and co-development emerging as a result.

Alongside this, the Committee has maintained an ongoing watching brief on nature and biodiversity. The excellent work of officers has meant that, in some cases, the level of input required from scrutiny has been relatively limited, but it remains vital that the Committee keeps tabs on progress in this area. Members have supported the ambition of the emerging strategy, including its emphasis on biodiversity net gain, partnership working, and embedding nature and biodiversity considerations into the day-to-day work of the Council and its communities.

Flood risk reduction and community resilience have also been areas of significant importance to the Committee. Members have been clear that the Council should be doing more in terms of communications and interaction with parish councils and community groups. We have stressed that the Council should be a central point of well-maintained, current and accessible information, and that this is an area where we have not yet been where we need to be. It is not sufficient simply to say that responsibility sits at a parish or community level. The Council has an important role in convening, informing and supporting communities, and this remains an area where further work is needed.

The Committee has also maintained strong oversight of delivery in other important areas, including highways performance and the work of the Community Safety Partnership. In these areas, Members have looked not only at headline performance, but at how the Council and its partners demonstrate impact, provide assurance and communicate clearly with Members and residents. This has included requests for clearer performance information, better oversight tools and more meaningful measures of success.

We have managed our work programme to focus on the issues that matter most to our communities, and Scrutiny Members have demonstrated commitment, diligence and a genuine desire to improve outcomes for the people of Westmorland and Furness. Looking ahead, we need to sharpen our focus further on value for money, particularly in light of the budgetary constraints that are likely to apply in the coming years. It has rightly been raised that scrutiny does not yet have enough visibility of the financial strategy that sits behind some decision making, and this is an area where stronger insight and earlier engagement will be important.

I would like to thank all Members and officers who have supported the work of the Committee. Through collaborative and constructive scrutiny, we are helping to shape a Council that listens, learns and delivers, while continuing to challenge where more needs to be done.

Cllr Eamonn Hennessey

Chair, Communities and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee brings together councillors from Westmorland & Furness Council and Cumberland Council. The role of Chair, along with responsibility for hosting meetings, rotates between the two councils every six months, and I have had the privilege of serving as Chair for the first six-month period.

Over the past year, Scrutiny Members have given their time and energy to making sure Overview and Scrutiny for hosted services continues to play an important role in shaping a Council we can all be proud of. I would like to thank Scrutiny Members from both councils for their commitment and enthusiasm in holding the Joint Executive Committee to account for how services are disaggregated, designed and delivered, always working to achieve the best outcomes for our communities.

As well as providing oversight, Scrutiny Members have also helped shape strategy and policy, using their knowledge and experience to strengthen new ideas, and services across the Council. Over the year scrutiny officer support has increased, which has had a positive effect. We thank the Cabinet for making this happen.

The Committee's work programme is designed to review future service disaggregation and ensure the best possible outcomes for local residents. In 2025/26, the Committee has looked at a number of important topics, including:

- Strong Local Resilience Forum
- HR Occupational Team
- Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy
- Residential, Edge of Care, Emotional Health, Well Being Service and Fostering Service
- County ICT
- Active Cumbria
- Combined Authority Constitution

Moving forward, circumstances have changed with Westmorland & Furness Council and Cumberland Council agreeing to form the Cumbria Combined Authority. Once the Combined Authority is formally established, it will have its own Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. There are still important long term hosted services that have yet to be disaggregated, and it is not yet clear which body will be responsible for scrutinising these services in the future.

I would like to commend officers for their work on the disaggregation of services considering not only the number of services which have already been disaggregated but also the number which have been disaggregated ahead of schedule.

Cllr Mark Rudhall Chair

Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel

The Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCCP) 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 (PFCC). 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. As part of its statutory functions, several standing items are routinely considered at each meeting, including scrutiny of the PFCC, Constabulary, and Fire & Rescue Service budgets, updates on complaints, and review of the PFCCP work programme.

This year, the Panel has adopted an approach of reviewing progress against at least one of the PFCC's Police, Fire and Crime Plan priorities at each meeting, alongside one additional topic or commissioned service, in order to hold the Commissioner to account.

In April we reviewed progress against the priorities 'Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities' and 'Making Best Use of Our Resources'. The first included updates on activity through the Safer Cumbria Partnership and delivery of the Serious Violence Duty. Regarding the latter, the PFCC reported on progress made and plans for achieving efficiencies, including blue-light collaboration initiatives for estates and back-office functions.

In July we received a presentation on one of the PFCC's commissioned perpetrator initiatives, 1CLIC, an integrated partnership approach between Cumbria Constabulary and The Well Communities in Barrow and Carlisle. 1CLIC targets individuals identified as vulnerable and/or at risk of being victimised or criminalised through 'County Lines', acting as a gateway for County Lines groups to operate in the community. During the PFCC's consultation on his Police, Fire and Crime Plan, antisocial behaviour was highlighted as the biggest concern amongst the public. The Panel requested an update and assurances on how the PFCC, Cumbria Constabulary and Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service were addressing antisocial behaviour across the county. At this meeting, the Panel also scrutinised the PFCC's first Annual report since taking up post in May 2024 and agreed our own Annual Report.

At our October meeting, we focused on the Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service and its delivery against the Police, Fire and Crime Plan priorities 'Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities' and 'Focusing on Prevention to Protect Cumbria'. This included home safety visits, working with partners and communities impacted by fire events, youth engagement and education. With regards to the PFCC's commissioned services, we received a presentation on Victim Support Services.

The Panel attended a Cumbria Constabulary 'showcase' event during October which included a tour and demonstration of the CCTV Command and Control Room at Police Headquarters, incorporating drones and body worn cameras. We had detailed discussions and demonstrations of how these advancing technologies are enhancing operational effectiveness, with Cumbria positioned as a national leader in this field.

In January we scrutinised the OPFCC, Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service budgets and endorsed the PFCC's precept proposals for provision of these services. In February we also conducted a Confirmation Hearing for the new Chief Constable for Cumbria.

During this reporting period, we learnt that the powers of the PFCC will be transferred to a Mayor in May 2027 following the establishment of a Cumbria Combined Authority in 2026. Late last year we also received confirmation in the Policing Reform White Paper that the intention is to abolish Police, Fire and Crime Panels in 2028. As a Panel we continue to monitor these developments and will respond accordingly, updating our workplan as necessary.

The PFCP continues to maintain a productive and constructive relationship with the PFCC and his office and will continue to fulfil our role as 'critical friend'. Looking forward we will receive a report from the PFCC detailing how he and the Fire & Rescue Service plan to address the recommendations arising from the most recent His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection. We will review the PFCC's Annual Report and receive performance updates on both the Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service. Later in 2026, we will examine progress by the PFCC on Estates and other areas reported on previously under the 'Making Best Use of Our Resources' priority.

Cllr Bill McEwan

Vice Chair, Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel

Scrutiny Highlights

Call In- Award of Contract

In January 2026 members of the Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee were required to consider details of the Call In of an Officer Key Decision on the Award of a Care Contract.

Following submissions and responses from both the Call In Members and the response from Senior Officers from the Commissioning and Procurement Team, the committee took the decision to uphold the original decision and allow it to be implemented unimpeded and also to make recommendations:

- a. Recommend that the contract award be made subject to the director obtaining the necessary references and checking the central data base
- b. Implement appropriate contractual key performance indicators and performance management
- c. Recommend there be a review of Localism, social value and community power in procurement and that a report be brought back to Scrutiny or added to the work programme
- d. A report be brought back to Adults and Health Scrutiny on the performance of the contract in 12 months' time
- e. Training session be provided for Members on the Procurement Act 2023

Health and Adults OSC – Promoting Independence and Wellbeing Programme

The committee have been involved since the outset of this large programme of work receiving regular briefing and progress updates, enabling them to provide scrutiny and oversight to the ongoing development of the work. This has included:

- Input into the content of the strategy
- Reviewing the process of co-production
- Oversight of forecasting models and performance data

Corporate OSC – Budget

The Committee considered budget monitoring and financial sustainability issues, providing early scrutiny of financial planning assumptions and pressures. Members examined the relationship between performance, demand pressures and resource allocation, this:

- Reinforced the link between financial decision-making and strategic priorities.
- Supported transparent reporting of financial risks and mitigations.
- Contributed to stronger governance around medium-term financial planning.

Corporate OSC – Performance Monitoring

The Committee received and scrutinised quarterly performance reports, examining progress against the Council Plan Delivery Framework and associated performance indicators.

Members provided detailed challenge on areas of underperformance, seeking clarification on corrective actions, delivery timescales and measurable outcomes. This scrutiny strengthened the focus on performance management and ensured that performance reporting is clearly linked to strategic priorities and resident outcomes, this:

- Improved clarity in performance reporting and action planning.
- Strengthened accountability of senior officers for delivery.
- Enhanced transparency regarding progress against Council Plan objectives.

Children, Young People and Families OSC – Educational Outcomes and Attendance

The Committee examined data relating to educational attainment, attendance and persistent absence, with particular attention to vulnerable cohorts.

Members explored the impact of early intervention and partnership working with schools and academies to address attendance and attainment gaps, this:

- Sharpened focus on persistent absence and targeted intervention.
- Enhanced understanding of educational disparities across the area.
- Encouraged stronger partnership working to improve outcomes.

Children, Young People and Families OSC – SEND and Inclusion

The Committee reviewed performance and improvement activity in relation to SEND services, including Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), timeliness of assessments, sufficiency of specialist provision and parental experience.

Members provided challenge on system pressures and workforce capacity, seeking clarity on improvement milestones and measurable outcomes, this:

- Improved transparency around EHCP timeliness and recovery planning.
- Greater visibility of demand pressures and sufficiency challenges.
- Strengthened focus on inclusion within mainstream education settings.

The Value of Site Visits – Waste Change Programme

In October, Scrutiny Members undertook two site visits to the waste recycling and treatment facilities in Carlisle and Barrow-in-Furness to support their scrutiny of the Waste Change Programme.

Seeing operations first-hand enabled Members to better understand the scale, complexity and practical challenges of the waste programme. Direct engagement with frontline staff and observation of site processes has strengthened Members' ability to provide informed, evidence-based challenge.

The visits demonstrated that effective scrutiny of major transformation programmes can need more than written reports, and that getting out on site helps to get a better understanding operational reality.

Adding Value Early – The Impact of Pre- Decision Scrutiny

Scrutiny is most effective when it influences thinking before decisions are finalised. Over the past year, the C&E Committee has consistently engaged at formative stages of key strategies and policy development, ensuring proposals were strengthened, risks identified, and implementation considerations fully explored before formal decisions were taken.

By working proactively with officers and Cabinet Members, the Committee has helped shape a wide-ranging programme of work, including:

- Climate adaptation planning
- The Waste Change Programme
- Highways Asset Management Strategy
- Public Space Protection Orders
- Parking Review
- Public engagement on the redevelopment of the Coronation Hall
- Nature and Biodiversity Strategy

In each case, the Committee was key to challenging assumptions, testing deliverability, strengthening public engagement approaches and identifying financial, operational and reputational risks. This has improved clarity of objectives, ensured stronger alignment with corporate priorities, and enhanced transparency.

Health and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee Site Visit to Westmorland General Hospital

In March 2026, a number of Members from the committee visited Westmorland General Hospital to see the recently developed Surgical Hub and Community Diagnostic Centre.

Members were welcomed by the Divisional Manager for Surgery and Families Division, before being guided through a patients journey from outpatients (where they are approved for surgery) and then the pre-operative assessment process. Following this Members were then taken to the Surgical Hub to visit the admissions, operating theatres, recovery and discharge facilities, where they had the opportunity to meet members of the clinical team and ask questions.

Following this, a tour of the new Community Diagnostic Centre was then completed with Members being welcomed by the Director of Nursing and Allied Health Professionals from Integrated Community Care Group, who updated them on the range of tests available and how patients can access these as well as getting to view the CT Scanner located in the facility. Again, Members had the opportunity to meet staff and ask questions.

Members fed back that the visit was had been of great interest and highlighting the complexity and operational challenges in delivering safe and effective clinical services for patients. They felt the level of commitment to provide care and support to patients and colleagues was clear, and were all struck by the corporate ambition to provide real and meaningful improvements against the current challenging backdrop of constant cuts and change within the NHS. They particularly enjoyed the opportunity to meet with Clinical staff and Operational Managers and gain insight into these key services as well as hearing about the high levels of patient satisfaction and feedback received.

Scrutiny Development Plan

In response to recommendations arising from peer review and internal reflection, the Committee supported the development of a Scrutiny Development Plan. This included a renewed focus on member development, clearer outcome-focused work programming and enhanced officer support capacity. The Development Plan covers a wide range of areas including:

- Embedding the Scrutiny Protocol, initially through a baseline survey of officers and Members.
- Exploring a new report template incorporating key performance, finance and risk sections.
- Engagement with Senior Leadership Team including Scrutiny training for Managers across the Council
- Wider engagement on setting Scrutiny work programmes with key partners and communities of interest.
- Improving Public Participation in Scrutiny, embedding the Scrutiny Public Engagement Framework agreed by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Spring 2026.
- Establishing a Performance, Finance and Risk Working Group for Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Quality assurance measures, to review how the Scrutiny toolkit and protocol is being applied

Impact:

- Increased effectiveness and confidence of scrutiny members.
- Clearer prioritisation of high-impact scrutiny topics.
- Strengthened overall governance framework of the Council.

Scrutiny's Engagement in Strategic Planning

Budget

Corporate OSC scrutinised the budget proposal on 3 February, which outlined the current position and the proposals for delivering a balanced budget for 2026/27. Scrutiny Members discussed the proposals and provided feedback and recommendations (detailed below) which were considered by Cabinet on 10 February when forming their Budget Proposal recommendations to Full Council.

2026/27: Ongoing scrutiny and monitoring

- Request ongoing engagement with the Committee throughout 2026/27 to:
- Monitor in-year budget performance,
- Track savings delivery and benefits realisation, and maintain visibility of emerging risks.
- Welcome the proposal for a mid-year Medium Term Financial Plan update and request that this be reported to Corporate Overview & Scrutiny.

Longer-term planning

- Request improved visibility and engagement on the development and implementation of the Transformation Plan, given its central role in delivering future savings.
- Seek early engagement with the Committee on the development of the 2027/28 budget proposals, to support timely and informed scrutiny

Transformation Plan

Corporate OSC scrutinised the proposal for the Transformation Plan, the Council's plan for organisational-wide change, on 20 February. Scrutiny Members provided feedback which was incorporated ahead of Cabinet approval in March.

Annual Plan

Corporate OSC scrutinised the proposed Annual Plan, a collection of key activity for delivery in 2026/27 that provides the basis for the Council's Corporate Performance reporting, on the 2 April 2026. Members provided feedback ahead of Cabinet approval in April and Council support in May.

CfGS Annual Conference

Attendance at the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny Annual Conference 2026 on the 12th March 2026 provided a valuable opportunity for the Chair of the Health and Adults

Overview and Scrutiny Committee to engage with peers and sector experts from across the country.

Through a focus on networking and shared learning, Westmorland and Furness was able both to gain insight into emerging approaches to effective scrutiny and to showcase its own arrangements, which were recognised as reflecting best practice. These connections and discussions will help to further strengthen the Council's scrutiny function and support continued improvement.

Looking Ahead

The Council's Scrutiny Committee's will continue to focus on areas where scrutiny can have the greatest impact, including:

- Delivery of transformation programmes
- Financial resilience and budget sustainability
- Cross-cutting strategic priorities
- Ongoing development of effective scrutiny practice

By maintaining a forward-looking and evidence-based approach, the Scrutiny Committee's will continue to play a central role in supporting strong governance and effective decision-making across the Council.

Improving public participation in Scrutiny is a key part of the Scrutiny Development Plan over the coming year with a framework for Public Engagement being implemented to help shape the Scrutiny Work Programme and to involve people and stakeholders in the Scrutiny process.

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