Cumberland Council

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025-2026

cumberland.gov.uk

Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report outlines the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees during 2025–26 and looks ahead to scrutiny activity in 2026–27.

This report includes reflections from the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the third year of the function within Cumberland Council, as the council continues its transition and transformation following Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). It also provides a summary of scrutiny activity over the past year and highlights the positive impacts this work has had on the council's policy development, commissioning, and service delivery.

Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny is a key process that helps ensure the decisions taken by the Council reflect the needs and priorities of communities across Cumberland. Scrutiny is carried out by councillors who understand and champion the concerns of the people who elected them, helping to connect decision-makers with local communities.

Overview and Scrutiny provides the opportunity to consider the wider implications of decisions, support policy development, and create space to reflect on the Council's overall strategic direction.

Decisions within the Council are made by the Council's Executive (its political leadership), by Full Council (all councillors) and by council officers.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees are made up of non-Executive councillors, who work collaboratively across political groups to influence key policy development, understand why decisions are taken, and examine how the Council is performing in order to secure the best possible outcomes for Cumberland and its residents.

While Overview and Scrutiny Committees do not have formal decision-making powers, their role is to challenge, make recommendations, and constructively influence decision-makers, ensuring accountability and improved outcomes.

Overview and Scrutiny in Cumberland Council

Cumberland Council has four Overview and Scrutiny Committees, each focuses on different areas of council responsibility:

- Business and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Each committee has eight members and meets six times a year.

Annually, the scrutiny work programme is developed to reflect the Council Plan priorities and functions which fall within each Committee's remit. The process for developing the council's Overview and Scrutiny work programmes is consultative and comprehensive.

Initially, proposals are influenced by legislation, plans and strategies, performance reports and include engagement with the Executive, partners, officers, and other stakeholders.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees decide which areas they wish to scrutinise. This may arise following representations by members of the public about a particular matter; be an issue identified by councillors themselves; or follow on from reports or performance assessments on the council's activities.

The Council has an **Executive and Scrutiny Protocol** in place that sets out expectations about how Overview and Scrutiny Members and Executive Members work constructively together to support good quality and well-evidenced decision-making.

During 2025/26, Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and Executive Members jointly reviewed how the protocol was working and how it could be further strengthened. Following this work a revised protocol has been agreed and implementation is underway. This includes better mechanisms for making robust Overview and Scrutiny recommendations to the Executive, more consistent Executive Member attendance at Overview and Scrutiny meetings, and more regular engagement between Overview and Scrutiny Chairs and the Executive.

The Overview and Scrutiny process provides an opportunity for members of the public and local communities to input their views on any issue. Meetings are open to the public to attend with dates, agendas, papers, and minutes are published on the council website - **Cumberland Council Scrutiny meetings**.

Overview and Scrutiny activity during 2025-26

Summary

During 2025–26, Overview and Scrutiny made significant contributions to strengthening key council strategies across health and wellbeing, early help, economic growth, housing, and social care, ensuring decisions were grounded in evidence and community need. Committees provided rigorous challenge on financial sustainability, transformation delivery and workforce resilience, while site visits and partnership engagement deepened Members' understanding of lived experience and service pressures. This activity led to clearer strategies, improved oversight of major programmes, and better outcomes for Cumberland's residents.

Scrutiny Activity Highlights

Strengthening Financial Accountability and Transformation Oversight

Scrutiny challenged the quality and timing of financial reporting - particularly the impact of legacy IT systems - and secured improved transparency through dedicated workshops with Finance and Executive Members. This enabled clearer understanding of budget pressures, informed the new Strategic Planning Framework, and ensured more robust oversight of the £9.6m "Our Future Cumberland" transformation programme.

Influencing the Digital and ICT Strategy

The Business & Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) shaped the draft Digital and ICT Strategy by recommending stronger priorities, digital inclusion measures for residents, and improved engagement between ICT and service leads. Members' feedback directly informed the next iteration of the strategy and strengthened alignment between transformation and service delivery.

Improving Workforce and Wellbeing Approaches

Through repeated scrutiny of sickness absence trends, Members highlighted the need for consistent management practice, improved training, and stronger promotion of wellbeing support. This scrutiny led to the development of clearer targets and better data reporting to support long-term workforce resilience.

Housing Strategy 2025–2039: Strengthening Vision and Local Engagement

Scrutiny of the draft Housing Strategy resulted in recommendations for enhanced engagement with local businesses and a clearer focus on housing for young people. These contributions improved the strategy's alignment with community needs and strengthened the Council's long-term housing ambitions.

In-Depth Reviews

Building Control Review - Working Group

A working group was established by the Place Committee OSC in November 2025 to review Building Control performance. The group identified improvements already underway, evaluated recruitment and retention challenges, and set a six-month follow-up to ensure progress continued—demonstrating proactive, evidence-led scrutiny of a critical statutory service.

Working with Partners

Strengthening Health Partnerships Through Contract Scrutiny

The Health OSC engaged in pre-decision scrutiny of the 0 - 19 Healthy Child Programme, shaping expectations for a new provider. Post-award, Members scrutinised early performance of the new NHS partner (Harrogate NHS Foundation Trust), confirming significant improvement and maintaining a schedule for continued monitoring.

Mental Health Services: Multi-Agency Insight and Assurance

Scrutiny worked closely with Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Trust to understand the impact of service changes following the closure of the Yewdale ward. Members visited the Carleton Clinic and met frontline clinicians, gaining real insight into inpatient provision and ensuring service reconfiguration continues to reflect patient needs.

Protecting the Patient Voice - National Policy Challenge

The Health OSC wrote to the Secretary of State and all Cumberland MPs to raise concerns about proposals to abolish Healthwatch. This intervention emphasised the importance of patient experience in effective local health scrutiny and demonstrated the Committee's advocacy on behalf of residents.

Site Visits and Lived-Experience Insight

SEND and Special School Pressures

A visit to James Rennie School gave Members valuable first-hand insight into the increasing complexity of need, growing pressures on space, and the impact of tribunals on families. This understanding directly informed the formal scrutiny of SEND sufficiency and raised further concerns about the capacity to progress this critical agenda.

Adult Social Care Visits: Embedding Lived Experience

The People OSC undertook visits to Workington Day Opportunities Centre, and The Gables Care Home. These visits deepened Members' understanding of daily practice and strengthened oversight of the Achieving Excellence Plan.

Hospital Service Insight - West Cumberland Infirmary Visit

Members of the Health OSC visited West Cumberland Infirmary to meet staff on several wards, hear directly about operational pressures, and observe the Elective Care Hub. The visit provided critical evidence for ongoing scrutiny of hospital performance and service redesign.

Scrutiny in numbers



Committee meetings held across four Committees



Site visits



Multiple informal workshops, and joint sessions with partners



Reports and presentations scrutinised

Chairs' Reflections

Overview and Scrutiny plays an important role in delivering excellent public services and in addressing challenges facing residents and communities across Cumberland, and the Council. Committee members are empowered to offer critical constructive challenge and operate independently, engaging early in policy development on key issues and offering the Executive recommendations and challenge that provoke discussion.

In this section, the Chair of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee outlines the work of the committee over the last year and provide their reflections on the positive impacts made and the emerging focus for their committees over the coming months and years.



Councillor Joseph Ghayouba, Chair of Business and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This year has been a pivotal one for the Business and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as the organisation moves further into transformation while continuing to address significant financial and operational challenges. Building upon last year, the Committee's work has focused on strengthening accountability, improving the timing and quality of financial information, and ensuring that transformation activity is both realistic and deliverable.

A recurring theme has again been the need for timely and consistent budget reporting, which has been hindered by the continued reliance on multiple legacy IT systems. This complexity places pressure on the finance team and impacts the Committee's ability to influence decisions proactively - something highlighted throughout the year in our monitoring of quarterly financial updates. The Committee requested multiple workshops and informal sessions with finance and portfolio holders to improve transparency, understanding and forward planning, including work on the budget timeline, savings assumptions, and the new Strategic Planning Framework.

We also maintained close oversight of the Asset Disposal Strategy, recognising its importance to the Council's financial sustainability and its link to the delivery of Exceptional Financial Support. Progress has been slower than the Committee would have liked, due to the scale of work needed to produce an accurate asset register and the legacy system constraints. Throughout the year, the Committee sought updates, requested circulation of the most up to date asset lists, and stressed the importance of improved policy clarity - including recommending changes to thresholds requiring Full Council involvement in major disposals.

The Committee continued to track the transformation programme, with a particular focus on digital and ICT capability because it underpins everything in the council, including transformation. Members gave detailed feedback on the draft Digital and ICT Strategy, emphasising the need for clearer priorities, improved inclusion for residents who struggle with digital access, and strengthened engagement between ICT and service leads. Several requests were made for informal sessions with senior staff to improve understanding and shape future iterations of the strategy.

Workforce issues have again been a prominent area of scrutiny. The Committee examined sickness absence trends twice during the year and requested follow up reports, further data, and clarity of measurement. Members also explored the feasibility of aspirational sickness reduction targets through to 2028, highlighting the need for training, consistent management practice, and better promotion of wellbeing support. Recruitment and retention challenges continued to affect key services - particularly Building Control - and Members sought assurances about the impact of agency use, the delivery of improvements, and the role of apprenticeships. Our concerns about building control resulted in a recommendation for Place Scrutiny to take a closer look.

Throughout the year, scrutiny has also challenged performance across a range of corporate services — including procurement, benefits processing, FOI (Freedom of Information) request handling, and resilience. Members requested further data where reports lacked clarity and arranged informal briefings on the Healthy Child Programme, Building Control, Our Future Cumberland, contract management and Children's Services budget pressures.

Looking ahead, our work programme for the year to come has been decided with a key area of focus being the "Our Future Cumberland" transformation which accounts for £9.6m of savings this is a really significant activity and one which the Council cannot afford to get wrong.

The Committee recognises that next year will be critical with devolution approaching and ongoing financial pressures, we have to deliver the transformation. Scrutiny will continue to champion early engagement, improved sequencing of reports, and open discussion between officers, Executive Members and the Committee. We will also maintain a close focus on how the Council addresses budget sustainability, embeds digital modernisation and manages workforce challenges.

I would like to thank Members of the Committee for their thoughtful and constructive challenge over the past year, and to acknowledge the officers who have supported our work - particularly where emerging issues required additional briefings or workshops. As we enter 2026–27 with a very challenging multiyear government settlement - the Committee remains committed to being a strong, evidence led and forward looking critical friend. We will continue to support rigorous scrutiny, strengthen transparency, and help ensure that the organisation is financially resilient and equipped to deliver effective services for the residents of Cumberland.

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2025-26 include:

- ICT Strategy and Digital Transformation sessions and informal briefings.
- Q3 2024/25 Budget Monitoring Report and multiple financial workshops.
- Assets and Disposals Update, including confidential disposals list and policy development work.
- Corporate Performance Reports for Q4 2024/25, Q1 2025/26, Q2 2025/26 and Q3 2025/26.
- Sickness Absence and Attendance Management, including follow up reporting requests.
- Strategic Finance Planning Timeline and budget development process.
- Recruitment, retention and workforce briefings, including task & finish follow up items.
- Outside Bodies Review and associated recommendations.
- Strategic Commissioning Framework and Corporate Complaints Review.
- Performance Report (Q2) and crosscutting issues including FOI, Building Control, school attendance and Children's Services budget.
- Budget Monitoring (Q3), Committee Updates and Work Programme reviews (March 2026).



Councillor Carni McCarron-Holmes, Chair of Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The past year has been an important one for scrutiny as we continue to embed our role in the third year of this council. Throughout 2025 and 2026, the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to strengthen its influence on shaping the Council's future plans and policies, while maintaining a clear focus on the delivery, quality, and impact of services for communities across Cumberland. Scrutiny is making a significant and constructive impact on the development of the Council's plans and its focus on the delivery of services.

The Committee has a broad remit, covering economic growth, communities, housing, transport, the environment, local regeneration, and community wellbeing. Each of these areas has direct consequences for the lives and wellbeing of residents, and we have prioritised our work where we can make the most meaningful difference to our local communities.

Our attention has focused on the major policy areas and service developments that shape the long-term prosperity, resilience and health of Cumberland's communities. Over the past year, we have played a key role in shaping emerging policy, including early and sustained engagement with the development of the Cumberland Economic Strategy. The Committee emphasised the need for inclusive growth, community wealth building, and strengthened local infrastructure, as essential components of a strong local economy. Members highlighted how improved connectivity supports access to good employment, skills, education, training, and essential services.

The Committee has scrutinised a range of areas including housing, waste services, and community safety. This has included the scrutiny of waste services changes, their implementation and continue to monitor the impact on residents. The Committee provided scrutiny to the progress of delivering the Council's Active Wellbeing Strategic Framework, and engagement in the development of new contracting arrangements for leisure services across Cumberland.

The Committee has also continued to scrutinise regeneration activity and the St Cuthbert's Garden Village project, ensuring that such initiatives meet the needs and wellbeing of residents, strengthen the local economy, and support continued development.

The Committee has engaged with the development of Cumberland's Housing Strategy 2025 -2039. The Committee scrutinised the draft aims, priorities and objectives, actions following a review of the housing market position and explored the outcomes of the public consultation. The Committee suggested there should be further engagement

with local businesses and a clear vision for housing provision for young people should be included in the strategy.

The Committee has additionally explored how retention and recruitment is impacting the Council's delivery of services in several areas within the remit of Place Overview and Scrutiny. The Committee has scrutinised the actions in place to ensure that the Council has the resources in place to effectively deliver its services to residents of Cumberland. The Committee has explored, in detail, the impact that national challenges in recruitment and retention in respect of Building Control professionals have had on delivery of building control services.

The Committee has supported the measures being put in place so far to address these issues and will continue to provide focus and feedback to ensure that the planned actions result in improved service delivery.

Across all our work, the Committee remains committed to evidence-led scrutiny. We recognise the importance of good quality information and, where appropriate, relevant witnesses to ensure that we develop a well-rounded and accurate understanding of the topics we consider.

As we move ahead housing, transport, workforce capacity, economic growth, environmental resilience, and the work of community panels will feature strongly in our committee work programme.

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2025-26 include:

- Community Panels.
- Cumberland Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2039.
- St. Cuthbert's Garden Village Local Plan Regulation 19 Draft.
- Community Safety.
- Climate and Nature Strategy.
- Active Travel.
- Housing Strategy.
- Climate Assembly Principles and Recommendations.
- Borderlands Place Programme update.
- Cumberland Economic Strategy.
- Leisure Review and Strategy update.
- Lake District National Park Plan.
- Waste collections.
- St. Cuthbert's Garden Village Delivery options vehicle.



Councillor Helen Davison, Chair of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This year, the Committee's work has been shaped by the simultaneous major transformation programmes across adults and children's services, two significant external inspections, and the ongoing rising demand for services alongside major financial pressures and recruitment challenges. National policy uncertainties have added to the need for a flexible approach to work planning. Picking up ambitions from last year, the Committee trialled a Portfolio Holder session focusing on their role and priorities and started regular site visits to bring policy to life and enhance understanding of the lived experience of people accessing council services. The Committee also strengthened scrutiny practice through clearer expectations for officers to identify where scrutiny could add value, member development and informal briefings to provide appropriate background to topics.

Adult Social Care and Housing (ASCH) underwent its Care Quality Commission assessment visit in June, with findings eventually published in January and it coming to the Committee in March. Despite concerns about the score and lack of triangulation in the CQC assessment (with the process nationally acknowledged as problematic), it was felt that, given this assessment was early in the life of the new authority, "requiring improvement" is a realistic base to be building from. The Achieving Excellence Plan is already progressing this work. CQC recommendations will inform future scrutiny sessions. Meanwhile scrutiny has already fed into Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work and coproduction activity, with Members welcoming efforts to coproduce services with diverse communities, while seeking assurance that rural communities will not be left behind and on the capacity to sustainably embed this mode of working into ASCH working practices. The Committee has received regular updates on implementing Technology Enabled Care (TEC), recognising this as a key to transformation of ASCH and keeping more people in their homes for longer as they age. Members have an opportunity to attend an Expo in Spring 2026, to provide more practical understanding of the opportunities TEC provides.

The SEND Local Area Inspection reported significant progress since 2019, though challenges remain around high numbers of outstanding education, health and care plans (EHCPs), workforce shortages, increasing complexity of need, mainstream inclusion pressures, demand for specialist places and rising number of children educated otherwise than at school (EOTAS) and home educated.

The benefit of site visits is highlighted by work arising from the Committee's visit to James Rennie School which identified growing demand, space constraints, the impact of increasing complexity, tribunal pressures on families and the need for longterm capital investment in school places. Keen to understand this more, the Committee had an informal session on SEND and sufficiency with this then being formally scrutinised in March. Concerns raised about capacity to move this critical agenda forward without short term revenue funding prompted recommendations to bring the Committee's concerns to Executive, and for the Committee to better understand Children's Services financing.

The Committee have also scrutinised the significant children's services reforms, including the Families First Partnership Programme and development of Family Hubs. Members recognised the ambition of an integrated "one front door" approach while raising concerns about pressures on senior staff, wellbeing, workloads, and schools' capacity to support new expectations. Ongoing monitoring was requested to ensure reforms remain deliverable.

Scrutiny of Home to School Transport addressed rising demand and financial pressures, with Members recommending closer alignment with Highways, improved communication with families, and wider Member briefings, which took place over March 2026. The Committee also scrutinised the annual Youth Justice Plan, as part of its consultation process, raising concerns about racially motivated incidents involving young people and requesting future updates.

Informal learning and joint work have been a strong feature of the year. As well as the James Rennie visit, Members visited the Family Hub on the Harbour, Workington Day Opportunities Centre and The Gables Care Home. Joint scrutiny on accommodation pathways for young people emphasised the need for closer alignment between housing, homelessness services, and children's services. As chair, I attended the inaugural Armed Forces Covenant meeting which helped put the Committees' role in scrutinising this area into context of the range of support available to veterans in the area.

Looking forward, key will be ensuring that the experience of those using our services remains front and centre of the Committee's work. With this in mind priorities are currently SEND sufficiency and the impact of the School's White paper (Every Child Achieving and Thriving), engaging with the budget process for areas within the Committee's remit and ongoing scrutiny of the transformation programmes, including ASCH's Achieving Excellence Plan. Scrutiny's role in considering the most strategically important and challenging issues for ASCH, highlighted by the CQC, will be important to keep at the forefront of work-planning. Further developing the Portfolio Holder question sessions, improved collaboration with other Scrutiny Committees, and identifying coopted representatives for the Committee remain as important actions.

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2025-26 include:

- Adult Social Care CQC Inspection, Preparation and Improvement Plan.
- SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Sufficiency Update.
- Technology Enabled Care (TEC) informal briefings.
- Home to School Travel.
- Co-production in Adult Social Care.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in Adult Social Care.
- Children's Services Reform Plans and progress.
- SEND Inspection update and Plan.
- Accommodation Pathways for Young People Joint Scrutiny Session.
- Youth Justice Plan Consultation.
- Armed Forces Covenant Partnership Meeting.
- CQC Assessment Inspection interview with Peoples OS Chair.



Councillor John Mallinson, Chair of Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Committee has oversight of all parts of the NHS and the Council's Public Health Directorate. This aligns with the Council's principal commitment to 'put health and well-being at the centre of everything we do'.

The majority of Cumberland is served by the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS): the area in the south of Cumberland surrounding Millom is served by the Lancashire and South Cumbria ICS.

This is the third annual report in the new unitary authority of Cumberland Council. The body of work undertaken by the Committee is now considerable with good working relationships built up by the Committee with NHS Trusts and both of the NHS Care Systems.

The Committee has ensured that it has tracked issues across those three years, looking at service provision, changes in services and specification and monitoring how they have performed over time.

The Committee was greatly concerned with the poor performance of the 'Healthy 0-19 years child services' at the inception of the authority, and engaged in pre decision scrutiny, looking at what the council wanted from a procurement of this important service and what it wanted to prioritise. The council appointed a new NHS partner to deliver this contract, one of the largest providers of this specialised service across the North of England (Harrogate NHS Foundation Trust). The Committee returned to scrutinise the performance of this contract which has improved considerably and has scheduled another update to ensure that the early improvements are maintained and built upon.

The provision of mental health services in west Cumberland has featured in past annual reports. The Committee had first looked at the innovative use of consultant psychiatrists using 'Teams online' to support the standalone unit run by Cumbria, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear NHS Trust at the West Cumberland Infirmary. Then last year, the Committee took a detailed look at the Trusts proposed closure of that ward, the reprovision of services at the Carleton Clinic in Carlisle and the new Hope Haven project in Whitehaven. Following the closure, the Committee undertook a visit to the Carleton Clinic to look at the additional beds created as part of the Yewdale closure plan and met the clinical team running the single sex in-patient secure wards that serve Cumberland residents.

As a result of committee agenda items on North Cumbria Integrated Care, the Committee has undertaken an initial visit to West Cumberland Infirmary at Whitehaven where Councillors met staff on the Copeland Unit, Children's ward, Elderly Care ward, Stroke Rehabilitation unit and the Elective Care Hub. This provided an opportunity to hear from front line staff about what it was like working at the Hospital and provided valuable insight for the Committee. Further visits are planned to the Community Diagnostics Centre at Workington and the Cumberland Infirmary at Carlisle.



The Committee has valued the support of HealthWatch Cumberland. This is currently a statutory service commissioned by the council, with government funding, that engages with residents with a dedicated focus on understanding their needs, experiences and concerns on NHS services and to speak out on their behalf. The government has indicated that Healthwatch will be abolished in its current form with a new patient experience directorate to be created within the Department of Health and Social Care. This will require primary legislation. The Committee has written to the Secretary of State and the 4 Cumberland MPs to express their concern at this and the importance of the patient voice in effective Health Scrutiny.

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2025-26 include:

- NCIC approach to Quality.
- National intervention at South Cumbria and Lancashire ICB.
- Closure of Yewdale Ward.
- Secondary care orthodontics service reconfiguration in Lancashire and South Cumbria.
- Health in Planning.
- Digital Delivery and Estates Plans at North Cumbria Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust.
- Medical Schools in Cumbria - School of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Central Lancashire, and Pears Cumbria School of Medicine.

- Cumberland 0-19 Healthy Child Programme.
- Air Pollution – how the council delivers monitoring and enforcement.
- Water Quality – United Utilities.
- Neuro Divergence and the Councils pilot.
- Neurodiversity and Emotional Wellbeing Service.
- Development of Neighbourhood healthcare and health-and-care services in the context of the 10 year NHS Plan for England.
- Suicide prevention – The big question exercise.

Other Local Scrutiny Activity

Joint Scrutiny and Partnership Working



Joint Scrutiny of Disaggregation and Combined Authority Development

The Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Cumberland and Westmorland & Furness) scrutinised disaggregation progress, the Cumbria Combined Authority governance proposals, and draft constitution. Their recommendations influenced membership structures, governance arrangements and the future approach to cross-county functions.



Police, Fire & Crime Panel – Assurance on Community Safety

The Panel scrutinised progress against the PFCC's priorities, including serious violence prevention and anti-social behaviour. Through commissioned service reviews, budget scrutiny, and a visit to the Constabulary's CCTV and drone operations hub, Members strengthened accountability and drove improvements across blue-light service.

Joint scrutiny arrangements have also been established between Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council. These cover:

- Joint Scrutiny Committee for Hosted Services.
- Police, Fire and Crime joint scrutiny arrangements.



Councillor Bill Pegram, Joint Chair of Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is made up of Members from Westmorland & Furness and Cumberland Councils. With the Chair and hosting responsibilities rotating between the two councils every six months. For the last six months I have been Chair of Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which has been a good continuation from the work conducted last year. I'm thankful for having the support of my colleagues and officers from both councils to help to support the Committee to conduct effective scrutiny.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme has been structured to help scrutinise future disaggregation to get the best results for our residents. For 2025/26 topics the Committee have covered include:

- HR Occupational Team Disaggregation.
- Update On The Developing Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2026 To 2030.
- County ICT.
- Enterprising Cumbria - Cumbria Economic Growth Strategy.
- Active Cumbria.
- Lessons Learnt - Disaggregation Programme Review.
- Cumbria Combined Authority Governance Proposals & Budget Proposal Principles.

Two of the largest topics covered included a review of the Residential, Edge of Care and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service and Fostering Service and the Cumbria Combined Authority Governance Proposals and Budget Proposal Principles.

Following our October Committee meeting, a Special meeting was held to review the Residential, Edge of Care and Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service and Fostering Service to provide feedback to the Joint Officer Board and Joint Executive Committee to help inform their decision.

Following the agreement of the change of terms of reference for both the Joint Executive Committee and Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee to include scrutinising the creation of Cumbria Combined Authority, the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed and provided feedback on the draft Combined Authority Constitution and Assurance Framework. We also reviewed and provided feedback on the Budget Proposals Principles for the Combined Authority.

Following the discussion on the draft Combined Authority Constitution and Assurance Framework, the following recommendations were made by the Committee:

- That the Cumbria Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee membership consist of 6 Members from each Constituent Council (12 overall).
- That the Cumbria Combined Authority Audit and Governance Committee membership consist of 4 Members from each Constituent Council (8 overall).
- That an Independent Person not be considered as Chair of the Cumbria Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- That an Independent Person be considered as Chair of the Cumbria Combined Authority Audit and Governance Committee.
- That the Independent Remuneration Panels (IRP) of the Constituent Councils be combined into one. And that, when the Cumbria Police and Fire powers transfer to the Combined Authority, their IRP also combines with the other IRPs, so that there would be only one IRP for Cumbria.

It was also noted that, with the functions of Enterprising Cumbria being transferred to the Combined Authority, the Committee's Terms of Reference would need reviewed and updated to reflect the change, as would the work programme.

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.

We are still working on our work programme for 2026/27, especially following the decision made by the Joint Executive Committee on 6 March 2026, but I believe that the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee is up to scrutinising and working together on ensuring Cumbria as a whole receives the best services possible for residents as per our updated Terms of Reference.



Councillor Tim Pickstone, Chair of Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel

The Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel (PFCP) 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 OPFCC, Constabulary, and Fire & Rescue Service budgets, updates on complaints, and review of the PFCP 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 Line 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.

Reports and presentations scrutinised during 2025-26 include:

- Police, Fire and Crime Plan priority – Protecting vulnerable people and communities.
- Police, Fire and Crime Plan priority – Making best use of our resources.
- Commissioned Services - 1CLIC.
- Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel Annual Report 2024/25.
- Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's Annual Report 2024/25.
- Police, Fire and Crime Plan – Public priority - Addressing antisocial behaviour.
- Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service: Focusing on Prevention and Protection (objectives within the Police, Fire and Crime Plan).
- Commissioned Services - Overview of Victim Support.
- Cumbria OPFCC & Constabulary Budget 2026/27 including.
- Proposed Precept Level and Financial Forecasts 2026/27 to 2030/31.
- Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2030/31.

Cumbria Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority Budget 2026/27 including:

- Proposed Precept Level and Financial Forecasts 2026/27 to 2030/31.
- Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2030/31.
- Conducted a Confirmation Hearing for the new Chief Constable for Cumbria.

Standing items:

- Cumbria OPFCC & Constabulary Financial Summary (Q3 2024/25, 2024/25 Year End, Q1 2025/26, Q2 2025/26).
- Cumbria Commissioner Fire & Rescue Authority Financial Summary (Q3 2024/25, 2024/25 Year End, Q1 2025/26, Q2 2025/26).
- Complaints Update (to consider non-criminal complaints against the Commissioner).
- Panel Update (including work programme and action log).

Overview and Scrutiny Development

In its third year as a new council, the organisation has continued to navigate significant developments and ongoing challenges. Strengthening the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny has remained a priority, with sustained focus on continuous improvement and the development of Members' scrutiny skills. Over the year, Members have participated in a range of training and development to support this enhancement.

Officers supporting the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have also continued to expand their expertise through network engagement and learning opportunities. This has been accompanied by targeted work to increase awareness and understanding of the role and value of Overview and Scrutiny among senior officers across all directorates. Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have met to review progress in developing the Overview and Scrutiny function and to provide oversight of combined work programmes, supporting alignment and avoiding duplication across governance functions.

Future Planning - Overview and Scrutiny in 2026-27

As Cumberland Council moves into the fourth year of its establishment, Overview and Scrutiny enters a critical phase of maturity. The coming year will be shaped by major transformation programmes, continued financial pressures, a challenging national policy environment, and the development of the Cumbria Combined Authority. Scrutiny will play a central role in ensuring that change is delivered effectively, transparently, and in a way that secures the best possible outcomes for residents and communities.

The 2026/27 scrutiny work programme will continue to align closely with the Council Plan, the Our Future Cumberland transformation programme, and the demands of delivering high quality services within a sustainable financial framework. The committees will prioritise early engagement on key policies, use evidence-driven scrutiny to improve decision-making, and strengthen their collaborative work across the organisation and with external partners.
Key areas of focus will include:

- A Strong Focus on Transformation and Financial Sustainability.
- Housing, Growth and Environmental Resilience.
- Improving Outcomes for Children, Families and Adults.
- Strengthening Health Partnerships and Community Wellbeing.
- Preparing for the Cumbria Combined Authority.
- Strengthening Scrutiny Culture, Skills and Impact.

2026/27 will be a pivotal year for Cumberland Council. As transformation accelerates, budgets tighten and new county-wide governance arrangements take shape, effective scrutiny will be essential to ensuring openness, accountability and good decision-making. Across all committees, scrutiny will continue to provide constructive challenge, strengthen policy development and ensure that the voices of residents, communities and partners inform the future direction of the council. Overview and Scrutiny remains committed to being a powerful, evidence-led and forward-looking force for improvement - helping to shape a confident, sustainable and resident focused Cumberland.

Overview and Scrutiny Team

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny function is supported by the Strategy and Policy Team and the Democratic services team working together to provide Overview and Scrutiny Committees with the support they need.

Each of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees has a named lead officer to provide support to them. These are:

- Business and Resources Scrutiny Committee: Clare Killeen, Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Manager, **Clare.Killeen@Cumberland.gov.uk**
- Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Timothy Godfrey, Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, **Timothy.Godfrey@Cumberland.gov.uk**
- People Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Abigail Roberts, Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, **Abigail.Roberts@Cumberland.gov.uk**
- Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Olly Bulman, Policy and Scrutiny Adviser, **Oliver.Bulman@Cumberland.gov.uk**