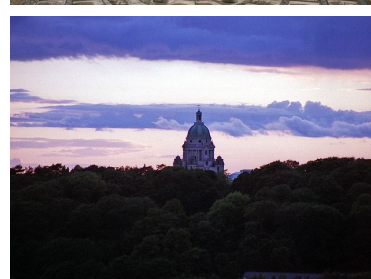


OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

ANNUAL REPORT 2024/5



Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has overall responsibility for the performance of all Scrutiny functions (under the Local Government Act 2000) on behalf of the City Council.

Budget and Performance Panel

The Budget and Performance Panel has specific responsibility for providing overview and scrutiny to issues regarding the City Council's performance, budget and financial issues.

Holding Cabinet Members to Account

Overview and Scrutiny Members continue to hold Cabinet Members to account. This takes place through the Call-in process and considering items of business at scrutiny meetings and also through arranging for Cabinet Members to come to meetings to discuss issues and developments within Cabinet portfolios.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

Each year a Community Safety meeting is arranged. This meeting took place in November 2024.

This year the Chair welcomed Sergeant Lindsay Brown, Lancashire Constabulary, Alex Kinch, the Council's Chief Officer - People and Policy and the Kirsty Banks-Lyon, the Resilience and Community Safety Officer, to the meeting.



The Committee was given an update on current projects being undertaken by the Lancaster District Community Safety Partnership (CSP), the future developments for 2024/2025 and how the current priorities were being tackled with joint working by the partners of the CSP.

The current priorities for Lancaster CSP were;

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Violence
- Road Safety and
- Suicide Prevention.

Lancaster District Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO's) had been renewed in October 2024 and were valid until October 2027.



As part of a district wide consultation other issues had been raised regarding the use of E-Scooters and E-bikes and this would form part of a further consultation in early 2025.

It was reported that the Lancaster District continued to be a safe place in which to live, work and explore. Members asked a number of questions regarding the CSP's work.

It was suggested that it would be useful if the Committee was given regular updates from the CSP throughout the year.



SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

The Committee received a number of reports throughout the year on the Scrutiny Protocol. The most recent being at the meeting in April 2025.

At the meeting the Committee was asked to consider the introduction of a Cabinet – Scrutiny Protocol.

Similar arrangements are in place in other authorities with the aim of assisting both Cabinet and Scrutiny to work together more effectively for the good of the district.

At a meeting, held in September 2023, the Committee was provided with a report and a copy of the Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities. After considering the report the Committee has agreed the following:

- (1) That the Pre-Scrutiny Champion meets informally with Democratic Support Officers to consider the Forthcoming Key Decisions on a regular basis.
- (2) That the Committee consider a draft Protocol in the new Municipal Year.

Due to a change in Cabinet Member, this had taken a little longer than anticipated, however the current Cabinet Member with particular responsibility for Corporate Services, Councillor Maddocks, attended the meeting of this Committee in January 2025 to provide an update and receive comments from the Committee regarding elements they would wish to see in the protocol.

At that meeting, the Committee put forward the following requests to the Cabinet Member:

- That Cabinet papers are circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the

same time as for Cabinet before Cabinet briefings. If the Committee wish to receive a briefing on any of the Cabinet items, this would be requested and arranged before the Cabinet meeting the following week to allow any comments or concerns to be shared with Cabinet. This replaced the request for briefings for every Cabinet meeting for the Committee in order to save officer time and resources. This involves the building in of safeguards to mitigate risks around the sharing of sensitive information with Scrutiny members.

- That a list of key initiatives for the forthcoming 12 months be shared with both Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (as opposed to a list of forthcoming Key Decisions for the next 12 months).
- That, as part of the consultation process, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be consulted on all major projects as a matter of course to enable pre-decision scrutiny.

The Committee was provided with a draft Protocol which addressed the first point. The second and third points above are not covered in the protocol.

Regarding the list of key initiatives for the forthcoming twelve months, Councillor Maddocks advised that Cabinet had recently met to discuss priorities and work initiatives and updated the Committee in this regard.

Regarding Overview and Scrutiny being consulted on all major projects, the Committee was advised that project boards are set up for all major projects and Scrutiny members make up the memberships.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PLANNING PEER REVIEW CHALLENGE – UPDATE

At the September meeting the Committee received its fourth update report following Lancaster City Council's Peer Challenge in November 2022 that had been requested by the City Council and co-ordinated by the Local Government Association (LGA), working with the national Planning Advisory Service.

It was reported that during 2024 progress in most of the outstanding workstreams had continued and concluded however some workstreams had been superseded by the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge. Members were advised that immediately prior to the previous Update Report, the Planning Advisory Service Team revisited Lancaster to assess the progress the Council had made. The formal feedback was generally positive with comments being on a comprehensive action plan being developed and significant progress being made across all of the recommendations. The Committee considered the outstanding issues and how the Committee would review the final few workstreams.

HEALTH SCRUTINY

At May's meeting of the Committee Karen Kyle, Integrated Care Director and Heather Woodhouse, Integrated Place Leader - North Lancashire provided a presentation regarding the Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB - Current Model of the Healthcare System.

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions regarding GP practices and their Governance arrangements, Health Watch, information on health events, n-compass – providing a wide range of advice and a wide range of specialist support services designed to help carers, corporate services being centralised, the need to explore variances of need in different areas, channels of communication and increased collaboration. It was noted that

the ambition was to have details of the whole system flow by the end of March 2025.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Karen Kyle and Heather Woodhouse for their informative presentation and requested that the Committee be informed of various developments, set out in the presentation slides, at a meeting of the Committee to be scheduled for May 2025.

ALLOTMENT REVIEW

At the November 2024 meeting the Committee welcomed Will Griffith, Chief Officer - Environment and Place and Anna Clayton and Deborah Simmonds from Food Futures – LESS, to the meeting. A presentation was provided on the recent Review of the district's allotments.

The review had been funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and had reviewed the 24 allotment sites in the District of which the City Council owned 15, with 980 plots over the 24 sites. An online questionnaire had been used to gain feedback from plot holders, committee members/management and also those on waiting lists for an allotment along with site visits, interviews, focus groups and community events. The outcome of the review was a great appreciation of allotments and the value they hold for those who have one in terms of wellbeing and mental health benefits. There was a common theme emerging from the review which was the lack of funds for maintenance on the City Council owned allotments.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee welcomed the report, noted the recommendations and urges exploration of the different models of allotments to encourage the district's allotments to come together to work in a more co-operative manner and independently.



DRAFT CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT POLICY

At the February 2025 meeting the Committee welcomed Will Griffith, Chief Officer – Environment and Place.

The Committee received an overview of the Draft Corporate Enforcement Policy which had recently been updated. It was reported that the policy was an overarching policy which applied to all the Council's Services that have enforcement duties.

Members were advised that, in deciding on the most appropriate course of action, officers would have regard to the principles set out in the Enforcement Policy and the need to maintain a balance between enforcement and other activities, including inspection, advice and education. This would also be conducted in a manner which was proportionate, accountable, consistent and transparent.

The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the draft Policy and it was suggested that it would be useful to have links to the individual service enforcement policies provided on the internet in this overarching draft Policy.

BUSINESS SUPPORT AND ECONOMIC STRATEGY UPDATE

Also at the February 2025 meeting the Jonathan Noad, Chief Officer – Sustainable Growth gave the Committee an update on the City Council's Economic Development function.

The Economic Development function of the City Council has changed considerably over the past two years as the service moved from a centrally funded model to being funded externally. In October 2023 the old Economic Development service was replaced by a new Busi-

ness Support service focusing on a UKSPF funded project.

This current programme was due to end in March 2025 but there was a potential extension to March 2026 in discussion.

As part of the programme the City Council had secured funding to provide a Business and Skills Support Service which included the employment of an Economy and Skills Manager and 2 Project Officers.

Members were advised that the purpose of the project was to provide a strategic co-ordination, facilitation and enabling role, working in partnership with local businesses, communities and education and skills providers to ensure the delivery of the outputs and outcomes of UKSPF and the City Council. Since October 2023 the project had achieved significant outputs and outcomes.

As the project was nearing its end, discussions were ongoing about an extension to March 2026 alongside the Work Well Programme. The Work Well Programme is an early intervention work and health support and assessment service, providing holistic support to overcome health-related barriers to employment, and a single, joined-up gateway to other support services.

The Committee was advised that the Economic Development Strategy, which was included in the Committee's Work Programme, was currently being drafted. The draft Strategy would be considered by the Committee once it was complete.

Members asked a number of questions regarding Eden, the new Strategic Authority and the need to encourage young entrepreneurs within the district.

OTHER ISSUES CONSIDERED BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

LITTER BIN MONITORING



At the January 2025 meeting the Committee was given an update on bin monitoring. Innovative sensor technology was being introduced which provided real time data collection which enhanced decision making for waste collection routes. This in turn optimised waste management operations reducing waste collection costs.

A trial had taken place in Heysham which had seen collections drop almost 75% which meant operatives could be moved on to other tasks around the district.

The Committee was told that that 519 sensors had been installed in bins to date but unfortunately, almost half the Council's bin stock were not suitable for sensor installation. A capital request was being prepared to replace these bins.

This new technology, which used algorithms to collect data, was being analysed and provided a dashboard of information.

It was suggested it would be useful for the Committee to consider the Dashboard at a future meeting.

FLY TIPPING

Also at the January 2025 meeting the Committee considered Fly Tipping.

Members were reminded of the work that had been undertaken with Keep Britain Tidy to tackle Fly Tipping in the district that had been reported to the Committee at previous meetings.

The Council had worked closely with Keep Britain Tidy to produce a draft Strategy. The Committee noted that, within the district, a large proportion of Fly Tipping reports were concentrated on just 34 streets in 4 wards and these had been targeted by the Keep Britain Tidy Project previously reported.



A Strategy, which was underpinned by an operational action plan, would focus on these high reporting areas and produce Key Performance Indicators to monitor progress.

The Committee also discussed how Fly Tipping had been tackled in the project and how enforcement was not seen to be the solution. Where Fly Tipping was most prevalent, in the most deprived areas of the district, it was felt incentives coupled with education would be a better way forward.

OTHER ISSUES CONSIDERED BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

DILAPIDATED BUILDINGS

In September 2024 the Committee welcomed Councillor David Whitaker to the meeting who had raised the issue of dilapidated buildings with Scrutiny. Councillor Whitaker was invited to speak to the Committee as he had raised this issue and in particular the impact on the West End of Morecambe.

The Committee received an overview of the current enforcement powers the City Council had to deal with dilapidated buildings. These included Town and County Planning Act, a Section 215 Notice, which could be served on the owners of a building to improve the visual amenity of the building and under the Buildings Act, Section 77, 78 and 79 Notices which dealt with buildings that were deemed to be dangerous.

Members went on to discuss how the City Council could tackle this issue in a joint service manner and also the work of the West End Millions scheme. It was felt this should be explored. Subsequently this issue was referred to the Property Assets Working Group to look into further.

TENANT SATISFACTION MEASURES

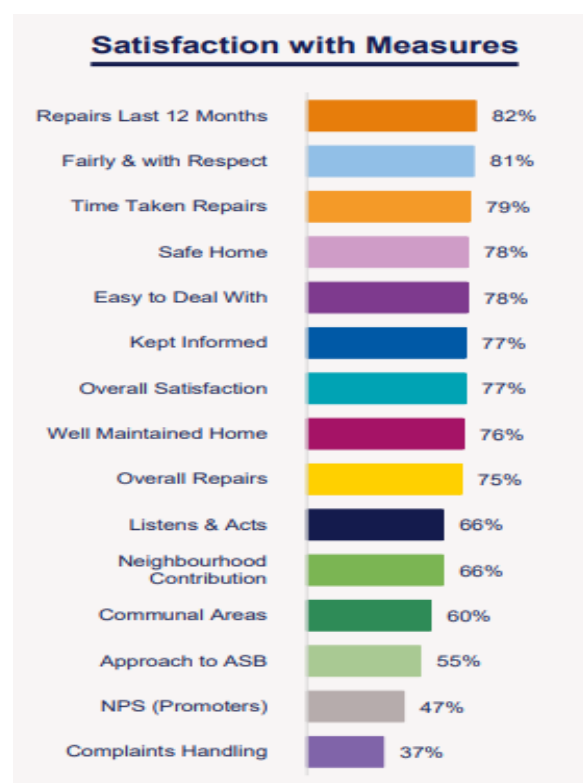
At the January 2025 meeting The Chair welcomed Councillor Caroline Jackson as Leader of the Council and also Cabinet Member with responsibility for Housing and Homelessness, Joanne Wilkinson, the Chief Officer - Housing and Property, and Peter Linsley the Council Housing Manager to the meeting.

Members were reminded that all registered social housing providers were now required to submit and publish data about their performance alongside the outcome of a tenant satisfaction survey each year. This information would be used to assess how housing providers across the UK are performing and to aid robust scrutiny of services.

The Committee considered the results of the recent Tenant Satisfaction Survey that had been undertaken between August and September 2024. The survey revealed that the overall satisfaction rate had improved by 5% now standing at 77% with improvements on all measures being seen. Benchmarking data from the company undertaking the surveys put Lancaster in the top quartile of providers.

It was reported that repairs to Council housing were a key driver of satisfaction and this had improved by 8% from last year as a result of a range of improvements implemented and providing a safe home was up to 78%.

Members were advised that Officers had noted key areas of improvement to focus on over the coming year. These were in relation to communication, complaints handling, communal areas and antisocial behaviour. It was reported that an action plan to address these issues would be produced. It was suggested that this could be considered by the Committee at a future meeting as well as the Complaint Annual Report.



BUDGET AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

Throughout the year the Panel has undertaken scrutiny on various reports including quarterly, Treasury Management Mid-Year Reviews, Outturn and MTFS.

The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance and Resources has attended meetings throughout the year to present reports and answer questions from the Panel. A number of other Cabinet Members attended the two meetings of the Panel regarding the budget, including the Annual Stakeholder meeting in January 2025.

TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) for 2025/26, which included the Annual Investment Strategy, was presented to the Panel in February 2025. The Mid-Year Review had also been submitted for scrutiny to the Panel in December 2024. The Panel considered and noted the Strategy.

BUDGET CONSULTATION

In January 2025 the Panel received a presentation from Councillor Tim Hamilton-Cox, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance and Property. He provided an update on the Council's budget strategy for 2025/26 and financial outlook up to 2029/30. Specifically the report considered Council Tax Proposals for 2025/26. The report put forward a balanced budget for 2025/26 with no need to call on reserves.

However, the forecasts clearly highlighted potential annual and cumulative budget deficits over the next 5 years and the

position the City Council faces. Members asked a number of questions relating to the structural deficit, Heysham Power Station and Council Tax.

Later in January Councillor Hamilton-Cox presented the report to the Annual Stakeholder meeting which allows stakeholder to provide their feedback on the budget proposals.

Members asked a number of questions which Councillor Hamilton-Cox responded to.

The Panel went on to request a report and information to be provided to the Panel regarding any ways being considered and proposals as part of the Fit for the Future project to generate income and realise income, subject to the Chief Officer – Resources/Section 151 Officer liaising with the Chief Executive to ensure that the documentation is available for scrutiny.

STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

In September 2024 and December 2024 the Panel received reports on the Strategic Risk Register/Management.

The Panel considered the risk register and asked questions on a number of specific risks.

The Panel requested that the Risk Management Guidance be shared with the Panel and that the effectiveness of the mitigating factors be increased to reduce the likelihood of risk.

CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24—2032/33—CAPITAL STRATEGY

In February 2025 the Panel considered Cabinet's final budget proposals in order that

the Council can approve a General Fund Capital Programme for 2025/26 to 2034/35 and a Capital Strategy 2025/26 as required by regulation.

The report addressed the actions required to complete the budget setting process for its Capital Programme and Capital Strategy. The Panel noted the report.

PRIORITIES AND PROJECTS & PERFORMANCE

Throughout the year the Panel received updates on the delivery of the City Council's priorities and ongoing projects and performance.

The Panel asked a number of questions relating to priorities on saving money via staff vacancies and the impact on existing staff wellbeing, concerns over the HRA Capital Programme for Mainway and income shortfalls at Salt Ayre Leisure Centre.

The Panel also raised questioning on projects regarding HR issues, homelessness, the full fibre network, Williamson Park Café, White Lund Depot, UKSPF and a lack of reporting and the Government's future allocation to the fund.

SHORTFALL OF INCOME AT SALT AYRE LEISURE CENTRE

In February 2025 the Panel welcomed Councillor Peter Jackson, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member with responsibility for Communities, Well-Being and Partnerships, who provided an update on the shortfall of Income at Salt Ayre Leisure Centre. Councillor Jackson was thanked for this attendance.

TASK AND WORKING GROUPS

NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT INFORMAL TASK GROUP

The Neighbourhood Management Informal Task Group had its first meeting in February 2025. As per the Terms of Reference of the Group, agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Group is tasked to;

- Consider how we provide Public Realm and related services in the District and if we are achieving the best with what we have got.
- Investigate the current Public Realm offer - Street scene, street lighting, graffiti – and the County Council/City Council responsibilities.
- Consider the current Public Realm Agreement.

At the first meeting the Group considered the current position of neighbourhood management and the aims of the Group. They went on to discuss the methodology for evidence gathering and the way forward.

The second meeting of the Group was held on 31st March 2025, with the next meeting arranged for May 2025.

PROPERTY ASSETS WORKING GROUP

At the October 2024 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny members agreed to create the Property Assets Working Group. The membership is made up from interested Members of the Committee. Following a presentation provided to the Committee on the Stock Condition Survey the Group is to report back to the Committee on the issues that scrutiny Members require more information on. The first meeting of this Group was on 10th March 2025.

TACKLING OBESITY INFORMAL TASK GROUP

The Tackling Obesity Informal Task Group has been scoped and, with agreement of the Committee, will commence work upon the completion of the Neighbourhood Management Informal Task Group.

PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY

Pre-Scrutiny is the process mainly based on Cabinet reports and the study of the City Council's published 'Key Decisions' contained in the List of Forthcoming Key Decisions. The List is made available at each meeting. With this information the Overview and Scrutiny Committee can select issues that add value and may consider before a decision is taken.

This process can help to add value to decisions at the pre-decision stage, can widen consultation to include Non-Executive Councillors and it can also help to minimise the use of Call-in.

The Committee's Pre-Scrutiny Champion is Councillor Martin Gawith.

Overview and Scrutiny welcomes the opportunity to submit a response during the consultation phase of a decision.

OUTSIDE BODIES

At the request of Council the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has made the following appointments to outside bodies.

Representatives are asked to report back, if necessary, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of these bodies.

OUTSIDE BODY	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEMBERSHIP
Homelessness Forum	Councillor Chris Hanna
Lancaster, Morecambe and District Fairtrade Group	Councillor Abi Mills/from November 2024 Councillor Maria Deery

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Budget and Performance Panel would like to thank the following for their contribution to the Scrutiny process during 2024/25:

- Cabinet Members who have appeared before Overview and Scrutiny bodies;
- Representatives from organisations, which have delivered presentations and provided information to the Committee/Panel this year;
- Officers who have attended meetings and participated in the work of scrutiny.