

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

The 2024/2025 Overview and Scrutiny Committee was a politically balanced committee of nine members. Working together, we developed a work programme on issues that related to the Council's priorities where we believed that a scrutiny review could make a difference.

Our work involved looking at some of the Council services to help identify potential areas for improved efficiency and effectiveness. We also considered options for introducing more accountability for our conduct, along with our fellow Councillors, at the Council's meetings.

Below are details of the work carried out by Overview and Scrutiny members in 2024/25.

- **Bulky Household Waste Collection**

We included a review of bulky household waste collection in our work programme as the free unlimited service for the collection of domestic bulky household items provided by the Council at the time was considered to be unsustainable.

The review was carried out by a Task and Finish Group who began its work by comparing the policies within Pendle and the surrounding areas. The information showed that, across Lancashire, Pendle was the only local authority to provide a free unlimited service.

Our findings showed that the average charge across District and Unitary Authorities within Lancashire was £14.92 per collection. In contrast, Pendle paid £9 per collection to a subcontractor. With an average of 377 collections completed each week of July and August 2024, the weekly cost was calculated at £3,393. It was clear that continuing at this level was unsustainable for the Council.

We considered the potential for an increase in fly-tipping should the Council choose to implement a charge, but the evidence led us to think it would not be the case. Even with the free service, Pendle was the second highest in the country for cases of fly-tipping. When comparing figures from other authorities, those that charged for collections had less fly-tipping.

We also considered the positive environmental impacts that could be brought about with a change to the service.

Taking all the evidence into account, we recommended that a stepped charging mechanism for bulky household waste collections be introduced, with a concession for those in receipt of housing or council tax benefits.

Sadly, the recommendations were not accepted by Council, however, a cap on free bulky waste collections of no more than eight items a year was agreed.

- **Replacement Waste Containers**

The same Task and Finish Group also carried out a review of replacement waste containers. The provision of a free replacement wheeled bin on request was another service that was considered to be unsustainable.

As with bulky household waste collection, the Group compared Pendle's policy with those of the surrounding areas. It was found that, across Lancashire, Pendle remained one of only two local authorities that provided a free replacement waste container delivery service.

At the time, the Council completed on average over 200 deliveries and exchanges of wheeled bins each week. It was estimated that the full cost to the Council for purchasing and delivering replacement containers in 2024/25 would be in the region of £234,329, another cost that was unsustainable.

In considering whether to recommend the introduction of a charge we identified potential benefits, whilst also recognising that there may be some disadvantages. Various potential charging options were considered. We also considered a suggested alternative of communal bins to address bin storage capacity issues, however the evidence showed that this was not a viable option.

In the end we agreed that the provision of a free replacement wheeled bin on request was not sustainable and recommended a number of charging options, again with a concession for those in receipt of housing or council tax benefits.

In similarity to the earlier review on bulky household waste collection, our recommendations were not accepted by Council and instead, a cap on free replacement wheelie bins of no more than one a year was agreed.

- **Mechanical Street Cleansing (Compact Sweepers)**

We chose to include a review of mechanical street cleansing (compact sweepers) in our work programme as it had been identified that the compact mechanical street cleansing schedule at that time may benefit from a change.

We discovered that the schedule followed the refuse and recycling collections however, it had been identified that some areas of the Borough had a greater need for resources than others. Our job was to consider whether an amendment could make the service more efficient and reduce service costs.

After receiving detailed information on the vehicle fleet and cleansing schedule we considered ways in which service costs could be reduced, and possible amendments, in response to the changing operational environment and the needs of residents.

We agreed that a proposal to reduce the mechanical street cleansing resource by two vehicles and to redeploy the drivers of those vehicles to litterpick the areas of need would lead to a more effective and efficient service and therefore put this forward as a recommendation.

Unfortunately, Council did not share our view and did not support our recommendations.

- **Pendle Community Safety Partnership (CSP)**

In its role as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee continued its review of the Pendle Community Safety Partnership (CSP), which had been carried forward from 2023/24.

We learnt that single district CSPs, such as the one at Pendle, may not be sustainable, even in the short term, due to the significant resources required to facilitate a separate CSP. Proposed changes meant that there would be greater accountability of CSPs to the Police and Crime

Commissioner which would impact on district councils as both a Responsible Authority and facilitators of CSPs. We therefore agreed to consider whether it would be beneficial for the Council to join the wider Pennine Community Safety Partnership.

To help with the decision, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I attended a meeting of the Pennine CSP to observe the proceedings and then reported back on my experience to the rest of the Team. Although I did recognise that there were benefits to representatives from all areas meeting as a single unit, I did notice that many of the matters discussed were very local, with people in each area having specific knowledge. I therefore had concerns that some of this would be lost if brought into the wider group.

My points were acknowledged but it was explained that, should the Council join the Pennine CSP, local focus could continue. The statutory functions would move to the Pennine CSP which would ease the pressure on local resources. Resources across the patch could be shared and it would allow access to funding opportunities, along with knowledge and expertise.

Unusually, on this particular topic, the members of the Committee were not unanimous in their view. A vote on a motion to join the Pennine CSP was lost and no further action was proposed.

- **Executive/Overview and Scrutiny Protocol**

Following advice from the Centre of Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) and best practice we produced an Executive/Overview and Scrutiny Protocol which has been included in the Council's Constitution.

The protocol sets out a broad agreement about the relationship between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and is designed to ensure mutual respect, openness and constructive discussion in the interests of service improvement.

- **Pendle Council Staff Survey**

Our Overview and Scrutiny Committee chose to look at the results of the Pendle Council Staff Survey to gain an insight into the views and feelings of staff at the Council. As Councillors we acknowledge the hard work and commitment from staff members in delivering the Council's services; appreciate the help given to us as members of the Council; and recognise the importance of feeling valued and supported in the workplace.

As can be expected with most surveys, the responses were mixed, with both positive and negative comments. We noted that some next steps had been identified and implemented to help address some of the issues raised.

- **Implementation of the Member Code of Conduct**

After concerns were raised about potential breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members not being addressed appropriately, and about the general conduct of meetings, the Scrutiny Team agreed to look at what improvement measures, if any, could be introduced.

We also agreed to review the hearings process, for dealing with breaches of the Code, after learning that the conduct of recent meetings of the Hearings Panel had not been consistent, particularly around the calling of witnesses and receipt of/access to witness statements.

We learnt that, at the time, Pendle Council had its own Code of Conduct for Members that differed from the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Councillor Code of Conduct, in that it was simpler and shorter. However, the Council's auditors had explicitly recommended that the Council adopt the LGA Model Code, in place of the existing one.

After taking a detailed look at the LGA Model Code and discussing the implications of the requirements of the Code we agreed that the Council should adopt it, in line with the recommendation of the Council's auditors. We acknowledge that, as Councillors we have both an individual and collective responsibility to take decisions fairly, openly and transparently, maintaining high standards and demonstrating good conduct. Adopting the Code demonstrates our commitment to adopting the behaviours and responsibilities expected of us.

We also revised the Hearings Panel Procedure after the evidence presented, and observations made, showed that there were weaknesses in the Procedure. The revised Procedure clearly sets out the process and clarifies the position regarding the calling of witnesses and receipt of/access to witness statements.

At its meeting in March 2025, Council agreed to our proposed changes, with both the revised Hearings Panel Procedure, and the adoption of the new Code of Conduct taking effect from 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

- **Land and Property Asset Management Strategy 2025-2028**

At the invitation of the Executive we provided comments on the Land and Property Asset Management Strategy 2025-2028.

- **Strategic Leisure Review – update**

Following on from work commenced in 2023/24 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update at its January 2025 meeting on progress with the Strategic Leisure Review. We were reminded of the work carried out to that point in seeking to find a sustainable way forward for the provision of leisure facilities in the borough.

We noted the appointment of a new Chief Executive to Pendle Leisure Trust and their active involvement in the process since taking on the role.

The process will continue into 2025/26.

- **Fixed Penalty Notices for Dog Fouling and Littering**

Dog fouling and littering is an ongoing concern for the residents of Pendle, with some feeling that not enough is being done to address the problem, as very few Fixed Penalty Notices are being issued to those committing an offence.

The Scrutiny Team was aware of an internal review of enforcement activities that had taken place in 2023 and as a result, wanted to know of any proposals for carrying out proactive enforcement in relation to dog fouling and littering.

After putting the question to the Executive, we were told of an Operational Services Policy that has been agreed, which is designed to provide an effective enforcement service.

Although a worthy policy, as littering and fly-tipping continues to be a problem in the Borough, we felt that further action was necessary. As the enforcement of dog fouling and littering was covered in the Policy we agreed to change the focus of our work, to review the way in which key messages around littering/fly-tipping have previously been delivered and assess what has or has not worked well.

This work will continue into 2025/26.

- **Empty Homes in Pendle**

When setting our work programme, we agreed to look at developing a strategy for dealing with empty homes in the Borough and look at different options/mechanisms for bringing empty properties back into use.

Before starting our review, we heard that Council was considering whether to budget for a new Empty Homes Officer in 2025/26. The post was approved at the Special Budget Council meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

With this in mind, we thought it best to postpone the review until the new municipal year when we could invite the Empty Homes Officer to a meeting of the Committee.

- **Homelessness**

This year the Scrutiny Team was asked to consider carrying out a review of homelessness, including its causes and options for local solutions.

When considering the request, we noted that the Executive was being asked to determine a way forward in relation to the Council's provision of homelessness temporary accommodation and to agree the Pendle Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030.

It's important that the work of scrutiny does not duplicate that of another body or Committee so we have therefore agreed to carry this topic forward to 2025/26 whilst waiting for the decision of the Executive.

**Councillor Chris Church**  
**Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024/2025**