

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2025/2026

Each year Pendle Council appoints an Executive in the form of a Leader and a cabinet to take decisions within the policy and budget framework. It also appoints an Overview and Scrutiny Committee of non-Executive elected members to monitor those decisions and produce recommendations on future policy. The role of a scrutiny member involves reviewing and scrutinising the whole range of the Council's functions and responsibilities including those delivered in partnership with other agencies and organisations.

The 2025/2026 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.

The sections below summarise the Committee's main areas of work and the issues considered during 2025/26.

- **Review of the Corporate Plan 2023-27 and Action Plan 2025-27**

Our year began with a special meeting of the Committee to look at the Council's Corporate Plan and Action Plan.

In response to a request from Council, the documents had been reviewed by officers and a number of changes were proposed. Our job was to scrutinise and assess the draft changes and provide feedback and recommendations to the Executive and Council.

As this is a key strategic document, along with the Constitution and Local Plan, it was important to get this right. By not considering or adopting the updated plans, the Council could have been at risk of not achieving its priorities and not being prepared for the potential implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

We received a full briefing of all the proposed changes, along with the reasoning behind each of the proposals.

Having considered all the information provided and being satisfied with the answers to our questions, we were happy with the suggested changes.

We therefore recommended that the Executive accept and adopt the suggested changes to the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 and its corresponding action plan and agree the priority actions, for approval by Council.

At the Annual Council meeting on 15th May 2025, the changes were approved and adopted. The new Plan (now called the Council Plan) and key actions can be viewed on the Council's website via the following link –

https://www.pendle.gov.uk/info/20011/council_and_councillors/642/council_plan

We are pleased to have helped secure approval of an updated Council Plan and action plan, giving the Council a clearer strategic framework for delivery and preparation for Local Government Reorganisation.

- **Policies and Strategies**

Over the course of the year we were consulted on the following policies and strategies. In each

case our comments and recommendations were referred to Council for consideration.

- Customer and Digital Strategy 2025-2028
- ICT Strategy
- Safeguarding Policy 2025-2028
- Equality and Diversity Policy 2025-2028
- Street Naming and Numbering Policy

- The **Customer and Digital, and ICT Strategies** had been developed together, with the ICT Strategy designed to work in the back-end to support the service to the customer at the front-end.

We recommended that both of the Strategies be agreed but asked that some further details be included in both. With regard to the Customer and Digital Strategy we asked that details on the findings of the customer engagement survey in relation to website use; headlines on staff findings; and recognition of the ICT Strategy 2025-2028 when referencing staff skills be added.

We also took the view that the ICT Strategy should include direct and accurate referencing to the Council Plan.

I'm happy to report that Council agreed with our view and approved both strategies, including our recommendations.

- In addition to recommending that the **Safeguarding Policy** be agreed, we asked that the introduction of compulsory basic DBS checks for Elected Members be explored. We also asked for clarification to be sought on whether all taxi drivers licensed outside the Borough, but operating in Pendle, have undergone appropriate safeguarding training and DBS checks.

The Council supported all our recommendations and appropriate action has been taken in relation to our requests.

As a result, we are now confident that taxi drivers licensed outside the Borough have undergone appropriate safeguarding training and DBS checks.

In exploring the possibility of introducing compulsory basic DBS checks for Elected Members it was established that there is no legal requirement to do so and that we, as a council, have no power to ensure councillors are DBS checked. However, this may differ at unitary authorities with social services functions.

The issue was discussed at a District Safeguarding Leads meeting and the consensus among other districts was that responsibility for carrying out DBS checks should rest with the political groups and be incorporated into their candidate vetting processes.

- The Council's **Equality and Diversity Policy** sets out the Council's vision and approach to ensuring equitable access to services, opportunities, and participation for all residents and partners. Although not a legal requirement, the Council has also included an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process to assess the impact of its policies, practices and decision making in equality.

As a Committee we suggested some amendments to the Policy and EIA. These were incorporated and adoption of the Policy was agreed by Council at its meeting on 25th September 2025.

- The **Street Naming and Numbering Policy** was presented to the Committee in July 2025.

We heard that the Council has statutory functions for the naming of streets within the Borough, and for the numbering of houses and other buildings, but has not previously adopted a formal policy. The prime objective in naming streets and numbering buildings is to facilitate easy identification of premises by the emergency services, postal and delivery services, and general visitors to the area.

We learnt of the benefits in adopting a clear and consistent policy and, due to increased demand in recent years, the need to introduce fees to cover the Council's costs in administering the work.

We felt that a proposal to set a fee of £200 for the naming of a new road was too low in comparison to the charges made by other local authorities and therefore recommended that this should be set at £300.

This was agreed by Council at its meeting on 25th September.

- **Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA)**

At our July 2025 meeting we participated in a consultation on the 2025 draft Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (PNA) being carried out by the Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs).

The PNA described the needs of the citizens of the area for pharmacy services and included information on:

- pharmacies across each HWB area and the services they provide
- maps of providers of pharmaceutical services across each HWB area
- pharmaceutical contractors in neighbouring HWB areas
- potential gaps in provision and likely future needs for the population of each HWB area
- opportunities for existing pharmacies to provide local public health services

Our primary observation was that the data was not broken down to Electoral Ward level so we felt that we could only provide a more generalist, rather than specific response about the Pendle Borough Council area. That said, we did have several comments/observations.

Our full response can be found in the minutes of the meeting at the following link – https://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3455/overview_and_scrutiny_committee

- **Review of Council Constitution**

Following a constitutional review carried out by council officers, we were invited to consider the findings and make recommendations to Council.

We looked at proposed changes to specific sections of Part 2 and Part 4 of the Constitution, which included amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules.

We did a thorough job by considering each change separately and looking at the rationale and evidence for each proposal. Some of the changes brought clarity to certain elements and made the decision-making process more efficient. Others were a matter of law. They also brought Pendle in line with other local authorities and therefore contributed to the preparation for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

We were happy to support a proposal that training on how to make lawful decisions in relation to planning applications be made mandatory, as is the case with licensing matters. This would lower, as far as possible, the risk of challenges to those decisions.

In response to one of the proposals, to change the start and end time of meetings, we agreed that it would help to get the view of all Councillors. Therefore, in advance of the Council meeting, we carried out a survey of all Councillors.

The results were reported to Council and the majority view was supported. This means that, with effect from 16th October 2025, the start time of meetings has changed to 6.30 p.m. (from 7.00 p.m.) and the time at which a meeting must adjourn (unless the majority of members present vote for the meeting to continue) has changed to 10.00 p.m. (from 11.00 p.m.).

• **Littering/Fly-Tipping**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee first looked at the topic of littering and fly-tipping in 2024/25. We were aware that dog fouling and littering was an ongoing concern for the residents of Pendle, with some feeling that not enough was being done to address the problem. The focus of the review at that time was to look at why there had been very few Fixed Penalty Notices issued to those committing an offence and how this could be improved.

We were aware of an internal review of enforcement activities that had taken place in 2023 and learnt that, as a result, a revised Operational Services Enforcement Policy had been agreed, which was designed to provide an effective enforcement service.

Although a worthy policy, which covered the enforcement of dog fouling and littering, we knew that littering and fly-tipping continued to be a problem in the Borough. We therefore agreed to continue working on the topic in 2025/26 but with a change of focus.

This year we have reviewed the way in which key messages around littering/fly-tipping have previously been delivered and have assessed what has or has not worked well.

At our meeting in September 2025, we were presented with a detailed report which provided information on the most recent communication campaigns at that time and their effectiveness, along with details of campaigns across the country.

We also had a few suggestions of our own, including –

- School visits/assemblies, possibly with a refuse vehicle and making use of Keep Britain Tidy (KBT) materials.
- Social media reels (e.g. showing snippets of the Operational Services Team at work).
- Increasing the number of fines issued and publicising the enforcement action.
- Publicising a fly-tipping scene.
- Encouraging people to adopt their local area.
- Promoting those that were doing good for the area and the community.

We learnt that work was ongoing in relation to some of these proposals, which included working with other agencies and volunteer groups and providing equipment where needed. Regrettably, there was no longer staff capacity to attend school assemblies and take vehicles to schools. However, we did learn that a manufacturer of refuse collection vehicles had created a mobile classroom which they take to events to promote behaviour change messages. Pendle has approached Lancashire County Council (LCC) for their interest.

Other suggested options are being pursued where possible.

- **Empty/Blighted Homes**

The Committee's review of empty/blighted homes is one that was put on hold in 2024/25 pending the appointment of a new Empty Homes Officer.

We chose this review as a large number of derelict/neglected/uninhabited properties had been identified, which are a blight on the area.

Our aim was to understand the current process for dealing with empty/blighted homes in Pendle and consider whether any changes could better deliver on the Council's priorities.

Our work began in November 2025 following the appointment of the Empty Homes Officer.

At this first meeting we received information on how the current process works including details on the definition of an empty home; the reasons why properties become and remain empty; the challenges presented by empty homes; how empty properties are brought back into use; and the enforcement options available to the Council.

We also received information on Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs), enforced sale, and Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs).

We learnt that blighted homes present a different challenge to those that are empty, as various factors have to be taken into account, such as vulnerability and/or social/community issues for which other organisations may be involved.

As with all of our reviews, we had plenty of questions for the officers, most of which were answered at that first meeting. Others had to be taken away to gather further information, which was presented to us at a second meeting of the Committee.

As part of the review we were invited to scrutinise and assess an Enforced Sale Policy and Procedure (ESP) for bringing vacant properties back into use. At the time, the Council did not have such an approved policy and procedure in place.

We were happy to see that the Policy and Procedure provided a clear statement and process for dealing with long-term empty properties where charges had been levied against the property and all other options had been considered, and welcomed the introduction of the ESP.

As usual, we made a number of comments and suggestions and asked that these be taken into account when finalising the document. Full details can be found in the minutes of the meeting at the following link –

https://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3514/overview_and_scrutiny_committee

We also commented on a draft Empty Homes Strategy. It was our view that the opening sections

of the draft strategy as presented were better suited as an introduction and scene setting document, rather than being part of the strategy itself. This formed part of our recommendation to the Executive but, unfortunately, the Executive did not agree. The Strategy was approved as submitted.

- **Pendle Community Safety Partnership**

Our final meeting of the year was dedicated to looking at the work being undertaken by the Pendle Community Safety Partnership (CSP). This was carried out in our role as the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee.

As part of our review, we received a detailed report and welcomed representatives of the Partnership to our meeting who answered many questions from the Committee.

Overall we are very satisfied with the work being carried out by the Pendle CSP and feel that this should be publicised more.

We have therefore asked that the Partnership promotes its Strategy and achievements to the wider public.

As a starting point, we would encourage people to look at the report that we considered at our meeting, along with the minutes, which can be viewed on the Council's website through the following link -

https://www.pendle.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3543/overview_and_scrutiny_committee

Councillor Chris Church
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/2026