

Report Title:	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2025/2026 and Work Programme for 2026/2027		
Report to:	Council	Date:	8 th July 2026
Report of:	Executive and Democratic Services Officer	Cabinet Portfolio:	Environment and Corporate Services
Cabinet Lead Member:	Councillor Adrian Lythgoe	Wards Affected:	All
Key Decision:	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> General Exception	<input type="checkbox"/> Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Integrated Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
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Valley Plan Priorities	Thriving Local Economy: This involves securing new inward investment, creating a sustainable economy, matching local skills with future job opportunities, and supporting town centres as unique destinations.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	High Quality Environment: This includes having a "clean and green" local environment, reducing the borough's carbon footprint, improving waste and recycling rates, and delivering new homes with a good mix of housing tenures.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Healthy & Proud Communities: This priority focuses on improving the health and physical/mental wellbeing of residents, reducing health inequalities, ensuring access to better leisure facilities and health services, and fostering a sense of pride in the community.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Effective & Efficient Council: The aim is to provide good quality and responsive services, embrace new technology, be a financially sustainable council with a commercial outlook, and ensure sound governance.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Annual Report informs of the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2025/2026 and section 5 highlights how scrutiny has made a difference.
- 1.2 The Work Programme at section 9 details the proposed scrutiny items for 2026/2027.
- 1.3 The report was submitted to the Corporate Management Team to provide input on proposed agenda items and associated timescales for planned work. It was recommended that a Task and Finish Group for recycling be included in the Work Programme.
- 1.4 A consultation meeting took place with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It is recommended that when quarterly reports are on the agenda, the Chair and Vice Chair will agree on a specific topic with red RAG status for the committee to focus on and will invite the relevant officer to attend the meeting. These sessions will not be in public, similar to a task and finish review, to allow Members to explore the issues in detail.
- 1.5 The report and work programme were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15th June 2026. The committee made a recommendation for Council approval.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council approve the Annual Report 2025/26 and Work Programme 2026/27.

3. BACKGROUND AND REASON FOR THE DECISION

3.1 The Annual Report and Work Programme are required to be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and agreed at Full Council each year.

4. RISK

4.1 There are no significant risks directly arising from this report. However, the following potential risks should be noted:

- **Delivery Risk:** Changes in resources or emerging issues may impact the ability to deliver the agreed Overview and Scrutiny work programme in full.
- **Effectiveness of Scrutiny:** If priorities are not well-defined, the impact and effectiveness of scrutiny may be reduced.
- **Service Impact:** Insufficient scrutiny of key services or decisions could lead to missed opportunities to identify performance issues or improvements.
- **Governance Risk:** Changes in priorities or external factors (including, but not limited to, local government reorganisation) may affect the continuity of scrutiny activity.

These risks can be mitigated through regular review of the Work Programme and effective member/officer engagement.

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER COMMENTS (FINANCE)

5.1 All work must be contained within existing budgets and resources.

6. MONITORING OFFICER COMMENTS (LEGAL)

6.1 The committee is required to produce an Annual Report for Full Council.

7. INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

7.1 No integrated impact assessment is required.

8. POLICY/STRATEGY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no specific policy and equalities implications. All work undertaken by the committee will have regard to equalities and follow Council policy.

9. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no immediate implications arising from this report. However, potential local government reorganisation in Lancashire may impact future Overview and Scrutiny arrangements.

The Council should ensure its scrutiny function remains flexible to adapt to any changes in governance structures, partnership working, and resource requirements. Ongoing work programmes should be managed to allow for continuity or transition into any new arrangements.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 There are no background papers.

Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025-26

Rossendale Borough Council



Foreword by Overview and Scrutiny Chair

Councillor Samara Barnes



The Overview and Scrutiny function plays a vital role in ensuring that Council services—and those delivered in partnership—are effective, transparent, and continuously improving for the benefit of our communities.

Throughout 2025/26, the Committee has continued to provide both support and constructive challenge to the Cabinet, acting as a critical friend in the development and review of policy.

By engaging early in the decision-making process, we have helped to strengthen policies, improve outcomes, and ensure robust governance across the Council.

This year has seen a more focused and efficient approach to our work programme. The use of briefing notes and pre-meeting circulation of reports has enabled members to dedicate more time to key strategic issues. Additional member briefings have also supported councillors in developing a deeper understanding of complex topics, enhancing the quality of scrutiny.

Our Task and Finish work has been particularly impactful, the Temporary Accommodation review has delivered practical, evidence-based recommendations to address increasing service pressures and improve outcomes for residents.

The Committee remains committed to continuous improvement. Members keep up to date with training to further develop their skills and ensure that scrutiny continues to add value and adapt to emerging challenges.

I would like to thank all Committee members for their dedication and contributions over the past year. I also extend my thanks to officers and external partners for their support, expertise, and willingness to engage with the scrutiny process. Their input is essential in helping us deliver effective and meaningful scrutiny for the people of Rossendale.

Message from the Lead Member

Councillor Adrian Lythgoe



The Overview and Scrutiny process ensures that both Council services and those services of its partners, are delivered in an appropriate way and encourages further development and improvements for members of the local community who access these services.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee continues to support and challenge the Cabinet and provides assurance in respect of policy development and review, acting as a 'critical friend'.

Whilst Cabinet members regularly attend the committee meetings, the updates to Cabinet from the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny have kept Lead Members fully briefed on the work being undertaken. This assists our work in capturing suggestions for further improvement of public services.

Both councillors and officers continue to work together to ensure the best provision of services for the people of Rossendale.

Annual Report 2025/2026

1. **Background**

- 1.1 Overview and scrutiny is a way of achieving open and democratic accountability for the provision of public services. Local authorities operating an Executive Leader and Cabinet Model have an overview and scrutiny function which is carried out by non-Cabinet members who act as a critical friend to the Cabinet to hold them to account. In Rossendale the committee is politically balanced and made up of 7 councillors and one co-opted member. Overview and Scrutiny is not a decision-making committee, but is there to monitor and influence those that are, i.e. the Cabinet. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee report their work back to the Cabinet who then decide whether recommendations will be accepted, and if not, explain their reasons for their decision.
- 1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a role in performance monitoring, and also policy development and review. The committee also undertakes more in-depth reviews by establishing task and finish groups. These are usually comprised of five politically balanced councillors (non-Cabinet members), who review specific issues and make recommendations for change and improvements, for example, in policy or service provisions. Task and finish groups are limited to a

maximum of two operating at any one time to ensure there are sufficient resources to undertake an effective review.

- 1.3 Overview and scrutiny is not a mechanism for the investigation or settlement of individual complaints, as the Council has a separate complaints/member enquiry process for this. Nor can the committee look at individual planning or licensing decisions.
- 1.4 The committee welcomes suggestions for investigation and suggestions can be put forward at any time. Any suggestions received are considered as part of the work planning process for the Annual Work Programme.
- 1.5 The Council continues to work in line with statutory guidance and the Constitution, and where possible the chair, vice-chair and relevant officers attend North West Employers' Scrutiny Networks to keep up to date on the latest developments in scrutiny.

2. Internal scrutiny

Policy scrutiny

2.1 Pre-decision

During 2025/26 the committee was consulted on a variety of strategies, policies and plans. Feedback and recommendations were sought on the following prior to a decision being made or prior to further development:

- Rossendale Playing Pitch Strategy – Stage E Update.
- Consultation on Supplementary Planning Guidance Document for Houses in Multiple Occupation.
- The Betters Lives Strategy.
- The Alterations and Extensions to Residential Properties Draft Supplementary Planning Document.

Performance scrutiny

2.2 Quarterly Performance Reports

The committee continued to monitor quarterly performance reports (which incorporate the quarterly update on the use of RIPA). If required, the committee can call a relevant senior officer to the committee meeting to answer questions and provide further clarification, or matters can be scrutinised in more depth through the Performance Management Task and Finish Group and fed

back to the next committee. During 2024/25 the Head of People and Policy provided the quarterly updates to the committee and provided further clarification where requested.

2.3 **Performance reviews and ongoing monitoring**

The committee received a variety of performance updates during 2025/26 with some items being part of the work programme and some being brought to Overview and Scrutiny for a specific reason for discussion. This internal review and monitoring activity included:

- **Annual Equality Workforce Profile** – this item is required to be reported to the committee on an annual basis to review the Council's workforce profile.
- **Local Government Ombudsman Annual Letter and Council Feedback Update** – this item is required to be reported to the committee on an annual basis and reviews the annual breakdown of formal complaints and compliments.

3. **External scrutiny**

The committee received a number of presentations and updates from external organisations, which are summarised as follows:

3.1 **Lancashire Constabulary**

As set out in the Overview and Scrutiny terms of reference, the committee acts as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee under the requirements of the Police and Justice Act and related statutory guidance from the Home Office. Lancashire Constabulary attend the committee each year to give a update to the Committee. Inspector Plummer attended in January 2026 to provide the annual update and answered questions from committee members.

3.2 **Citizens Advice**

In January 2026, Citizens Advice (East Lancashire) provided an update for members on their work and range of services offered. They informed how they were funded and expressed their gratitude to the Council for their continued support. They also reported on their key outcomes and achievements over the last 12 months as well the pressures.

The following key points were noted from the update:

- Over the last 12 months, the Council funding has helped support over 2,400 Rossendale households, with over 8,000 issues being related to charitable payments and foodbanks.
- Citizens Advice and the Council worked in partnership to provide a targeted advice service through the Household Support Fund, to households experiencing financial hardship and distributed emergency food vouchers, to reduce the pressure on the local foodbanks.

- Citizens Advice has helped maximise the income for the residents that require the help generating financial outcomes of over £1.65 million including benefits, debt rescheduling and energy savings. Generating over £910,000 income through extra benefits and grants. Writing off and rescheduling debts of £560,000 and other financial gain such as energy savings and budget improvements of £198,000.
- For every £1 spent on the service by the Council, residents benefited by £40.

3.3 **Leisure**

In June 2025 the Chief Executive of Rossendale Leisure Trust (RLT), Samantha Sandford, provided an annual update to the committee and highlighted key achievements as well as the planned ongoing work throughout the year. Members appreciated the improved data and benchmarking information available. It was good to see continual improvements, growth and engagement increasing.

4. **Task and Finish Group work in 2025/2026**

4.1 **Temporary Accommodation**

The Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group was established in September 2025 to review increasing pressures on temporary accommodation in Rossendale and to identify practical steps to improve outcomes for residents.

The Group considered the Council's Housing Strategy 2023–2027, including the Prevention of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, Housing Options Service, and Bed and Breakfast Elimination Plan. Despite these measures, rising demand highlighted the need for further scrutiny and targeted action.

Through its work, the Group examined current provision and challenges, developing a set of practical, evidence-based recommendations aimed at reducing both the number of households requiring temporary accommodation and the length of time spent in it. A key focus was minimising out-of-borough placements to maintain residents' access to local communities and support networks.

The recommendations include increasing the supply of affordable housing, bringing empty homes back into use, strengthening early intervention and prevention activity, and exploring improvements linked to Housing Benefit rates and supported accommodation models such as the Revive Hub.

These recommendations provide a framework for sustainable, long-term improvement and have been put forward to support the Council's priorities within the Valley Plan 2025–2029, contributing to improved outcomes for residents and more effective service delivery.

5. How has scrutiny made a difference?

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny continues to perform the important function of holding the executive (the Cabinet) to account, carrying out task and finish work and reviewing policies and strategies before implementation. For 2025/26 the following is worth noting:

5.2 Quarterly performance monitoring:

- Quarter 4 2024/25 – discussions focussed on Disabled Funding Grant (DFG) approval figures, the Councils recycling target and recruitment in the Environmental Services Team. As a result of the discussions, several actions were recommended and actioned as follows:
 - Explore shared working with other authorities in relation to the Environmental Health department.
- Quarter 1 2025/26 – discussions focussed on staffing issues within the Environmental Health department and the red RAG status of the response times for Freedom of Information requests and enquiries.

As a result of the discussions, several actions were recommended and actioned as follows:

- Management reinforced the process for responding to FOI requests in a timely manner and issued reminders to officers to ensure compliance with timescales.
- Quarter 2 2025/26 – discussions focussed on recruitment pressures in the Environmental Health team, managing of Freedom of Information requests, data from the Residents Survey, street sweepers and works on Deardengate, Haslingden. As a result of the discussions, several actions were recommended and actioned as follows:
 - The vehicle repair schedule within Operations was revised to prioritise the repair of the street sweeper, addressing complaints relating to the town centres cleanliness.
- Quarter 3 2025/26 – discussions focussed on Bacup Market, the development of the Bingo Hall, fly tipping, freedom of information requests and the results from the Residents Survey.

5.3 Policy development:

The committee was consulted and provided feedback on policies before they were approved by Full Council or Cabinet and this included the annual budget reports. The following policies were revised prior to approval following recommendations made by the committee:

Debt Management Policy Sundry Debt - the committee recommended the following and subsequent changes were made prior to Cabinet approval:

- In relation to vulnerable persons, include a framework for consistent decision-making and recording of adjustments.

6 2026/2027 Work Programme

6.1 Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is required to produce and agree an Annual Work Programme which sets out the expected work to be carried out in the coming year.

As well as outlining the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the programme should also identify proposed work to be undertaken by task and finish groups, of which there can be two running at any one time.

6.2 Cabinet involvement

As well as being able to make work programme suggestions, Cabinet has previously resolved that Council grant recipients provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on their work. Citizens Advice have continued to provide updates to the committee annually.

6.3 Standing agenda items

The Council's Constitution outlines the items Overview and Scrutiny considers on a regular basis. In addition, Overview and Scrutiny can look at other non-key decisions/updates as required. The items outlined in the Constitution are detailed below:

6.4 Routine monitoring of the performance of the Council

To review on a quarterly basis the Performance Report and invite officers of the Council to attend a future meeting if their service area is under-achieving on its target. Alternatively, if a service area is falling behind on their targets, the Performance Management Task and Finish Group may be re-convened to look into the matter.

6.4.1 Policy development

- a) To deal with emerging policy and assist the Council in reviewing and developing policy as detailed in the Forward Plan.
- b) Review and scrutinise decisions taken internally by the Cabinet, individual Cabinet members or officers of the Council.

6.4.2 Scrutiny of the Council's budget

To be consulted and make recommendations on the Council's annual budget setting.

6.4.3 Complaints/compliments

- a) To monitor formal complaints received by the Council
- b) To receive information on the number of compliments received for each service area
- c) To monitor Ombudsman enquiries via the annual letter from the Local Government Ombudsman.

6.4.4 Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

To deal with any relevant Councillor Call for Action requests and determine the appropriate course of action.

6.4.5 Call-In

To scrutinise decisions referred under the Council's Call-In Procedure.

6.4.6 Forward Plan

To monitor the Forward Plan and agree those policies to be scrutinised prior to decision by Cabinet/Full Council.

6.4.7 To act as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee

To review local performance and progress against crime indicators.

6.4.8 External/partner scrutiny

To receive information from external organisations and partners whose operations affect the area to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working (with particular emphasis on those who receive funding from the Council).

6.4.9 Leisure scrutiny

To monitor the performance of Rossendale Leisure Trust.

7. Drafting the 2026/27 Work Programme

7.1 The draft work programme in the table below is based on updates requested at previous committees, items identified from the Forward Plan and the standing items outlined in the terms of reference and as summarised in section 9.

7.2 Although the work programme is formally agreed, it may be amended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as required. The table at section 12 sets out the basic agendas and planned reports/updates going to each committee. It is important to ensure that there is room for task and

finish group reports and for any other items or policies, which may be added to the Forward Plan during the year.

7.3 This document was presented to Corporate Management Team on 22nd April 2026 for advice, and comments regarding the items and suggested timescales. Following these consultations the draft work programme for 2026/27 at section 9 has been proposed.

8. Conclusion

8.1 The programme provides members with a clear plan of work and engages with our partners and grant recipients. The work programme is a living document and will be amended throughout the year as necessary.

8.2 Details of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings for 2026/27 can be found on the Committee Schedule on the Council website: [committee schedule](#).

9. Work Programme 2026/27

Date	Topic	Proposed areas in scope	Suggested Approach
Jun	Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report and Work Programme (standing item)	To examine the previous year's progress and review the draft work programme for year ahead.	Report for comment
	Rossendale Leisure Trust Annual Report and Annual Update (external scrutiny) - Confidential	To scrutinise the report against the action plan with a specific focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the partner is improving outcomes for residents e.g. health, leisure, culture • Examining how the 2024/25 plan will be implemented • Performance monitoring against the 2023/24 action plan 	Committee presentation/ report
	Corporate Plan Update (standing item)	To review the annual update with a specific focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific objectives and priorities • Reviewing the action plan and performance monitoring 	Workshop
	Health and Well-being Plan Update (performance scrutiny)	To scrutinise the Rossendale Health and Well-being Plan with a specific focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the plan and community partners are improving health outcomes for residents • Monitoring outcomes against the action plan Constructively challenging the specific health objectives and priorities	Briefing note
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council.	Report for comment
Sep	Quarter 4 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Workforce Profile Report (standing item)	To scrutinise the workforce profile in relation to equalities.	Report for comment
	Ombudsman's Annual Letter Annual Council Complaints Review (standing item)	To scrutinise the Council's performance in dealing with/responding to complaints.	Report for comment
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council.	Report for comment

Nov	Quarter 1 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council.	Report for comment
Jan	Lancashire Constabulary Annual Update (external scrutiny – statutory standing item)	To scrutinise (as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee) the effectiveness of external partners in improving the lives of Rossendale residents with a specific focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the partner is improving outcomes for residents e.g. crime outcomes • How effectively are partners using any council funding (where applicable) • How the council can work more effectively with partners in the future 	Committee Presentation
	Quarter 2 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Citizens Advice Annual Update (external scrutiny)	To scrutinise the effectiveness of external partners in improving the lives of Rossendale residents with a specific focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the partner is improving outcomes for residents e.g. well-being • How effectively are partners using any council funding • How the council can work more effectively with partners in the future 	Briefing note
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council.	Report for comment
Feb	Capital Strategy and Capital Programme 2025/26 (standing item)	To scrutinise the draft Capital Strategy and Capital Programme for 2025/26 with a specific focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation of resources • Planned projects 	Committee report
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council.	Report for comment
Mar	Quarter 3 performance report (standing item)	To scrutinise the performance of the council's services and corporate projects.	Report for comment
	Cabinet and Council reports	Note reports for Cabinet and Full Council.	Report for comment