
Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26

This report provides an overview of scrutiny activity at the County Council and the work of the five scrutiny committees between April 2025 and March 2026 to enable an assessment of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function. It also sets out plans for scrutiny in 2026/27.

Scrutiny at West Sussex County Council

The purpose of scrutiny is to hold the Executive to account – to comment on proposals before decisions are taken, to input into policy development and to monitor performance against corporate priorities. During 2025/26, 46 of the 70 county councillors sat on one or more scrutiny committees.

The Council aims to reflect nationally recognised principles for good scrutiny, set out in [statutory guidance](#):

- provides constructive “critical friend” challenge
- amplifies the voice and concerns of the public
- led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drives improvement in public services

Information on [Scrutiny at the Council](#) is on its website. For details on membership, areas of responsibility, meeting dates, agendas and minutes, use the links below:

- Children and Young People’s Services Scrutiny Committee ([CYPSSC](#))
- Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee ([CHESC](#))
- Fire and Rescue Service Scrutiny Committee ([FRSSC](#))
- Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee ([HASC](#))
- Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee ([PFSC](#))

The scrutiny year at a glance

24 committee meetings held	69 topics scrutinised	4,262 views of committee meeting webcasts	3 task and finish groups for in-depth scrutiny	80 hours in committee meetings & task and finish groups
11% of topics on key decision preview	6% of topics on policy development	7% of topics monitoring the budget	40% of topics monitoring performance	21% of HASC work on health scrutiny (NHS)

2025/26 Overview

69 topics were scrutinised during 2025/26, excluding items relating to committee business such as appointments and work programme planning. Since 2022/23, all scrutiny work programme topics have been categorised to track the balance between **key decision preview**, **policy development** and **performance monitoring**, as well as other work. The table below sets out the main categories of scrutiny activity, apart from scrutiny of NHS services carried out by HASC – which amounted to 21% of its activity during the year (compared with 38% in 2024/25 and 33% in 2023/24).

	CYPSSC	CHESC	FRSSC	HASC	PFSC	Total
Key decision preview	3	3	2	3	0	11 (16%)
Policy development	2	0	2	0	2	6 (9%)
Quarterly scrutiny of the Performance and Resources Report (PRR)	4	4	4	4	4	20 (29%)
Service specific performance	4	5	0	1	10	20 (29%)
Improvement programme monitoring	0	0	0	2	0	2 (3%)
Budget scrutiny	1	1	1	1	3	7 (10%)

Most areas remain constant when compared to previous years. Compared with scrutiny activity carried out in 2024/25, areas of difference are:

- A decrease in input into policy development, from 11% to 9%.
- An increase in in key decision preview from 8% to 16%.

As part of their end of year review, scrutiny committee chairmen reflected on the balance of scrutiny activity undertaken throughout the year. They concluded that the work programmes appropriately reflected the issues and challenges facing the Council and that committees had effectively prioritised topics. Additional observations from the Chairmen included:

- That as the Local Government Reorganisation programme progresses, its impact on Council business may affect the balance and focus of scrutiny work programmes in future years.
- The quality of scrutiny activity during the year was considered robust, proportionate and constructive. Chairmen emphasised the importance of each committee continuing to monitor and maintain an appropriate balance within their individual work programmes.

- Relationships between members and officers were highlighted as positive, with chairmen noting a very consensual and collaborative approach to scrutiny work.
- Scrutiny processes were viewed as thorough and transparent, contributing to effective challenge and assurance.

Update on areas for development identified in 2024/25

1) Continuing to provide robust scrutiny of the Council's budget plans

- All scrutiny committees carry out scrutiny of budget plans relating to the portfolios they scrutinise. PFSC takes an overarching role in scrutinising budget plans, including through regular monitoring of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The Council Plan and Budget for 2026/27 were scrutinised prior to approval by the County Council in February 2026. Three informal all-member sessions were held during the year to ensure all councillors were engaged and had opportunity to input into the development of the Plan and Budget at an early stage. This supports the scrutiny process, with output from these sessions informing scrutiny by PFSC, which reported its conclusions to the Cabinet. Feedback from councillors on the process was very positive, suggesting it had enabled timely and valuable engagement; that they felt more involved in the process and that their comments had more impact.

2) Continue to monitor service improvement plans and the outcomes of any external inspections

- CYPSSC has continued to monitor service improvement plans for both children's social care and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) through the review of proposed new strategies to address improvement in these areas. This includes the SEND Strategy and the Ending Discrimination for Care Experienced Strategy. The Committee has also monitored service through the quarterly PRR and through service specific reports to assess progress and the preparedness for future inspections.
- HASC continued its scrutiny of the two-year Adult Social Care Improvement Programme, focusing on key workstreams and monitoring progress to ensure the service was fully prepared for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection, which took place in August 2025.

3) Continue to ensure all scrutiny members to own and are part of work programme planning

- Committees' work programmes are reviewed at every meeting. The Forward Plan of Key Decisions is also reviewed at all meetings, enabling all members to identify proposals for preview.
- All committees other than FRSSC have a cross-party business planning group (BPG) to carry out work programme planning. BPG agendas and actions are circulated to all committee members, to enable them to feed into business planning. For FRSSC, the whole committee carries out this task.

4) Effective prioritisation of committee business to ensure shorter agendas, enabling robust scrutiny and avoiding meetings over-running

- A 'focus for scrutiny' is identified at the earliest stage when identifying topics for scrutiny work, to identify the objectives and desired outcomes for scrutiny.

All committee reports include this focus as well as key lines of enquiry to assist members' preparation and questioning.

- Most scrutiny committee meetings have been scheduled to run for less than half a day.
- Feedback from scrutiny committees suggests prioritisation remains an issue for ongoing monitoring as part of the work programme planning process, with some meetings overrunning or having too many items to enable effective input.
- All committees continued to develop alternative ways of working, one example was through the use of "bite-sized" briefings to share information with members in an informal setting where full formal scrutiny was not required. This approach helped improve member understanding and engagement, and the briefing for CHESC on Community Cohesion was identified by members as particularly valuable.

5) Clarify the purpose and value of pre-meetings, with the aim of increasing attendance at these

- End of year feedback indicated that pre-meetings were effective and well-regarded by those who attended, however overall attendance continued to be low. Scrutiny chairmen continue to monitor this and share learning/best practice.

6) Ensure the governance procedures relating to scrutiny are clearly described and communicated

- A new Member Guide to Governance has been developed, overseen by the Member Development Group. This is available via the Mine (the members' intranet) and sets out all key governance information and guidance for members in one place, including on scrutiny, and has been promoted to all members.

7) Ensure clarity on the outcomes/conclusions of topics scrutinised and any next steps to be taken

- Committee chairmen sum up the outcomes/conclusions of the debate at the end of each agenda item and seek agreement from the committee that they agree with the summary. This ensures all committee members (and the public/press) have clarity on the outcome of the discussion and an opportunity to comment on the outcomes recorded before the item is concluded. This summation also informs the "recommendations tracker" which records all outcomes and responses for presentation at the next committee meeting. This ensures committees are kept up-to-date on actions taken in response to any conclusions/recommendations made.

8) Engagement in the local government reorganisation or devolution programmes as and when appropriate

- Continued engagement in this process will remain a priority for scrutiny going forward. Member engagement has been through full County Council, regular informal briefings, a member working group and Electoral Review Panel.

Scrutiny impact and value to the Council's business

Key aspects of scrutiny activity in 2025/26 are set out below, based on the four overarching objectives for effective scrutiny agreed by the County Council in 2019.

Influencing policy ideas or proposals before they are developed

- a) PFSC reviewed the refreshed **Asset Management Strategy**, including the land use policy, in March 2026. It recognised the Strategy would need to be further updated following the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation and that it will become the responsibility of any new unitary authority/ies to determine the appropriate Strategy going forward.
- b) PFSC also reviewed the use of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** by the Council, given its importance as a tool to potentially improve efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation. Members recognised that officer responsibility and clear governance arrangements are necessary. The importance of carefully managing the security and corporate risks around the use of AI was stressed.
- a) An important part of effective decision-making is the **call-in process**, through which councillors can request that proposed decisions be scrutinised before implementation. There were two requests for decisions to be called-in during 2025/26, both of which were accepted for further consideration by scrutiny. The first related to the closure of New Tyne Care Home. While the original decision was upheld, HASC received assurance that all views had been fully considered. The second call-in concerned the introduction of the Travel Assistance Policy for 19–25 year-olds, this decision was supported by CYPSSC, subject to some amendments to the policy wording. The low number of requests for call-in may be an indication that the scrutiny process is working well, with the most significant/impactful proposals being programmed in for scrutiny ahead of decision.
- c) Following a programme of work on **mental health**, including an evidence gathering session involving CYPSSC and HASC members, HASC subsequently led a dedicated scrutiny session on this to understand progress in meeting residents' needs. Feedback from partner organisations was very positive; they reported that the request from scrutiny required multiple agencies to collaborate in order to compile the necessary information. This process has helped to strengthen relationships and foster more effective partnership working.
- d) HASC undertook scrutiny of the refreshed **Adult Social Care Strategy** ahead of the Cabinet Member for Adult Services' decision. The Committee gave its strong backing to the strategy and set clear expectations for its future delivery, calling for a sharpened focus on support for carers, deeper joint working across systems, and meaningful improvements in end of life care.
- e) CYPSSC convened an informal Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (TFG) in November 2025 to provide early input into the draft **SEND Strategy 2026 – 2030** and to assess the feedback from the public consultation. The TFG supported the focus on inclusion and agreed that the Strategy should not await the outcome of the SEND White Paper and should remain agile to respond to any changes. The TFG also provided feedback on the language used within the strategy to ensure it was user friendly for parents and carers. These recommendations were reflected within the final Strategy that was considered by CYPSSC in February 2026 ahead of a final Cabinet decision to approve the Strategy in March.

- f) CYPSSC scrutinised the proposed approach to **Primary School Place Planning** using the discussion to shape policy thinking before options were finalised. The Committee tested the range of options available to schools and emphasised the importance of early engagement with parents, carers and communities of any proposed changes. It also sought assurance that support for school leaders would be prioritised. This early engagement helped ensure that future place planning arrangements were robust, flexible and community focused.
- g) CHESC considered the focus and approach proposed for the work of **Prevention Panels** in West Sussex, aimed at reducing violence and anti-social behaviour, West Sussex having been selected as one of the local authority areas to pilot and develop this approach over a two-year period. While noting the ambitious nature of the programme, members were reassured that it will be built upon the solid foundation of existing processes, procedures and partnerships, and a parallel Government project on Youth Hubs.

Spending time on matters critical to service outcomes

- a) FRSSC had early input into the **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Annual Statement of Assurance**, which sets out how we can show whether an efficient and effective fire service is provided to the residents and visitors of West Sussex ahead of this being approved by Cabinet.
- b) HASC held **NHS providers** to account for plans impacting on local residents, including changes to the opening hours for the Crawley Urgent Treatment Centre and the closure of Zachery Merton community hospital in Rustington. The Committee highlighted the concerns of the public and sought assurance that changes were communicated well, had good rationale and assessed the impact on patients. HASC scrutinised **NHS service delivery**, with a dedicated session on winter planning that tested the system's ability to meet current and future demand. As a result, the committee secured assurances that communication with patients and families would be strengthened and that effective joint working with the Council, particularly around discharge pathways, was in place to support timely and safe discharges.
- b) PFSC scrutinised a number of large **property developments** during 2025/26 and also the progress made through the **Property Joint Venture**. These developments are important in terms of how the Council uses its assets to generate additional resources for the Council.
- c) PFSC continued to review and monitor the progress in implementing the Council's replacement business management system, the **Oracle Fusion Programme**. This Programme is crucial to the continuing efficiency and effectiveness of the Finance, Procurement and HR systems within the Council so is key in ensuring that the Council's resources are used effectively. The Committee scrutinised the Programme at each of its meetings to ensure it remained on-track in both budget and timescale to ensure successful implementation. Cabinet Members and senior officers have welcomed the continuing oversight provided by the committee and consider this a success of the scrutiny process at the Council.
- d) CYPSSC scrutinised, and helped shape the development of, a **West Sussex Young People's Leisure-time Activities Strategy** which included reviewing the outcome of a needs assessment that had been carried out to understand the local picture of these activities. The Committee welcomed the diverse and inclusive nature of the needs assessment and the co-production with young people and highlighted the importance of engagement with key partners in the development

of any strategy and the importance of raising awareness and promotion of activities available to young people. Members also highlighted the importance of providing a sense of safety and belonging for young people.

- e) CHESC scrutinised the Council's strategic response to the **Section 19 flood event reports** arising from followed several major storms and high-tidal events in the winter of 2023/2024. Evidence was heard from the Environment Agency and from the Chairman of the Executive TFG on the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy. Members particularly focused on how well partnership arrangements had worked in practice, and how "actionable" the report recommendations were, with a view to ensuring the lessons learned would be applied to any future flood events.

Meaningful challenge to the performance management of services

- c) All scrutiny committees carry out quarterly performance monitoring in public, through review of the **Performance and Resources Report (PRR)**. The PRR covers performance targets, budget, workforce and corporate risk. It links to the Council Plan's key performance indicators and priorities. Additional information on the capital programme and workforce is included at the request of PFSC. This enables more effective scrutiny of corporate risks relating to capital projects and staff retention, recruitment and absence. Scrutiny committees continued their attention on red/amber KPIs and areas of performance and budget concern in 2025/26 to be more efficient in using committee capacity to add value. The PRR has also proved valuable in identifying issues requiring more **in-depth scrutiny**, most notably around suicide prevention. This led to focused work by the Business Planning Group with the Health and Wellbeing Board, providing assurance that the relevant strategy was actively monitored and overseen. In addition, the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee examined pupil attainment following concerns identified through the relevant performance. As a result, this area of performance is now subject to an annual report to the committee, enabling ongoing oversight and monitoring of progress.
- d) HASC continued to provide early and constructive input into preparations for the **Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of Adult Services**, regularly reviewing self-assessment reports and undertaking deep dives into key areas of the service. This assurance work concluded with the publication of the CQC report on 29 August 2025, which rated Adult Social Care as Good. The CQC report recognised the role of scrutiny, highlighting positive feedback from elected members and noting that adult social care remained a prominent agenda item within committee business, with strong participation from opposition councillors.
- e) FRSSC continued to scrutinise Fire and Rescue Service performance through the **Performance and Assurance Framework**, which is directly aligned with delivery of the strategic commitments set out in the Service's Community Risk Management Plan. Scrutiny reinforced and complemented existing work on on-call firefighter capacity, keeping the issue in focus and ensuring it remained a priority for improvement.
- a) CYPSSC continued to assess the **Educational Attainment** and progress of children and young people attending schools in West Sussex. The Committee assesses how the council is delivering educational outcomes for young people and the progress and impacts of initiatives to improve outcomes for disadvantaged young people and those with SEND in line with the Council Plan performance indicators.

- b) CYPSSC undertook focused scrutiny of services supporting **children reported missing and those at risk of exploitation**, providing clear challenge to performance and assurance arrangements. It examined the use of data on repeat missing episodes and highlighted the importance of prevention, placement stability and early intervention. It also explored the targeted interventions in relation to exploitation and received case studies to further evidence impact of initiatives to demonstrate the continuous improvement of services for vulnerable children.
- c) CHESC considered performance and progress against the **Climate Action and Adaptation Plan**. Members pursued several lines of questioning, including whether the Plan was achievable, the viability of carbon offsetting, work to assist in the adoption of electric vehicles, and to reduce business mileage. The "Net Zero by 2030" ambition on which the Plan is predicated was questioned and members recommended that the Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change review and revisit this target.

Showing the difference scrutiny makes to service outcomes for residents

- a) Access to **dental services** across West Sussex remained on the HASC work programme as an issue of significant concern to residents. In March 2026, the Committee received an update from NHS Sussex. Members considered the progress made against previous recommendations, particularly those taken forward by NHS Sussex through national engagement on dental contract reform. The Committee noted the positive impact of this work, which has contributed to an increase in the availability of NHS dental places across West Sussex.
- b) HASC scrutinised the proposed decision to cease providing residential care services for older people living with dementia at **New Tyne Care Home** in Worthing. The Committee heard directly from UNISON, for assurance that the views and concerns of staff were fully represented. The Committee also considered a petition on the same issue, which further highlighted the experiences and concerns of local residents. The Committee secured agreement for an extended period of representation and engagement so that all perspectives could be properly considered before any final decision was taken. It also examined a related call-in request, ensuring that the issue received comprehensive and transparent scrutiny.
- c) PFSC carried out scrutiny of the **Growth Deals Programme** to ensure these have achieved the outcomes and objectives set. It concluded that these deals are good examples of how the Council works with its partners to ensure residents and businesses benefit from improved localities and co-ordinated plans and works.
- d) CYPSSC scrutinised the progress and outcomes of the **Children and Young People's Plan 2022-2025** which outlines how the County Council works with its partners to ensure young people have the best start in life and can succeed and achieve their potential. The Committee assessed how any learning had been taken into account for the development of a refreshed Children and Young People Plan and raised the importance of having clear action plan in place and wide-reaching communication plan.
- e) CYPSSC considered a call in of the proposed **Travel Assistance Policy for 19-25 year olds with Education, Health and Care Plans**. Whilst supporting the introduction of the Policy, the committee scrutinised the clarity and tone of the policy, suggesting revisions to the language and clearer guidance for young people and families to ensure flexible, person-centred decision making when using the policy.

- f) CHESC scrutinised the **Crisis and Resilience Fund** (CRF), which replaced the Household Support Fund (HSF), but would continue to be anchored around the successful Community Hub, which was established in March 2020 in response to the pandemic. Members looked closely at what lessons had been learned from HSF and were satisfied that learning would be carried across to CRF.
- g) The **Youth Cabinet** continues to be engaged with scrutiny, with upcoming agenda items for all committees shared with the Youth Cabinet in advance to enable them to input into specific areas of interest that align with their key campaigns and manifestos. Through this engagement, the Youth Cabinet attended HASC in January to provide feedback on the views and experiences of young people of mental health services. The Youth Cabinet have a standing invitation to every CYPSSC meeting to assist in the scrutiny of matters that impact young people and participated in scrutiny by asking questions on items such as the Children and Young People's Plan and had regular attendance throughout the year.

Scrutiny Evaluation 2025/26

Scrutiny committee end of year reviews

Each scrutiny committee held an informal end of year review to consider what had worked well and less well during the year and to identify priorities for future. 21 committee members provided feedback.

Worked well	Areas for improvement
• Pre-meetings were working well • There is good collaboration between Scrutiny and the Cabinet, supported by positive and constructive relationships with key partners such as the NHS • Scrutiny input into the budget and service performance • Performance monitoring through quarterly review of the PRR • Good officer support and some excellent witnesses • Some different ways of working, including the use of informal briefings • Good support from officers, with honest feedback from the service	• Continue to aim to improve attendance at pre-meetings by clarifying their purpose and the value they add. • Better use of Task and Finish Groups to support robust scrutiny • Enhanced training arrangements for co-opted members will ensure they have a clear understanding of their role and can participate effectively • The number of items on agendas can be excessive, which can reduce the effectiveness of debate and challenge. • Use of alternative ways of working, including visits and the involvement of external witnesses where appropriate.

Members also provided feedback on the future induction programme to be provided following the County Council elections in May 2026:

- Training was identified as essential for committee members, with health scrutiny training highlighted as particularly beneficial.
- Additional training should be provided for co-opted members of HASC and CYPSSC.

- Site visits and input from external witnesses are seen as valuable and helpful to members.
- Informal briefings were requested to support members' understanding of items on committee work programmes, particularly the background and history of issues previously considered by the committee.

Priorities for 2026/27

Subject to review by the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee in June 2026, areas for scrutiny development in 2026/27 are set out below. These will be monitored by the scrutiny chairmen.

- To continue providing robust and effective scrutiny of budget proposals and performance monitoring arrangements.
- To maintain ongoing oversight of service improvement plans and to monitor the outcomes of any external inspections.
- To ensure that scrutiny members receive a comprehensive and robust induction.
- To continue clarifying the purpose and value of pre-meetings, with a view to increasing members' attendance and engagement.
- To ensure that informal briefings are utilised where appropriate and that members are provided with sufficient background information and historical context on matters previously considered by the committee.
- To engage in local government reorganisation or devolution programmes, where appropriate and relevant to the committee's remit.
- To ensure that the use of external witnesses and site visits is incorporated into the scrutiny process where this would add value.

Other useful information on scrutiny

- The [scrutiny section](#) of the County Council's website, which includes an [Executive-Scrutiny Protocol](#) and copies of previous years' [scrutiny annual reports](#)
- The Council's Constitution includes the terms of reference for scrutiny committees ([Part 3](#), Scheme of Delegation) and the rules and procedures for scrutiny ([Part 4](#), Standing Orders)
- The national [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) provides a range of useful reports and guidance on scrutiny.

July 2026