



Cumbria
**Police, Fire and
Crime Panel**

Annual Report 2025-26





Foreword from the Chair

As Chair of the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel, I am pleased to introduce the Panel's Annual Report for 2025-2026.

Throughout the year we continued to support and scrutinise the work of the Commissioner. In addition to our regular meetings, we attended a 'showcase' event held by the Constabulary in October 2025 which included a tour and demonstration of the CCTV Command and Control Room at Police Headquarters, incorporating drones and body worn cameras. We had detailed discussions and demonstrations of how these advancing technologies are enhancing operational effectiveness, with Cumbria positioned as a national leader in this field. In February 2026, we held a Confirmation Hearing for the position of Chief Constable.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Panel over the last year for their commitment and contributions, and to the Commissioner and his staff for the co-operative and proactive approach to the Panel's work.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Pickstone". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Tim Pickstone
Chair, Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel



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Role of the Panel

Police and Crime Panels were established in England in 2012 to provide a check and balance function in relation to the function of the newly introduced Police and Crime Commissioners. The remit of the Panel includes reviewing and scrutinising the decisions and actions of the Commissioner in connection with the discharge of the Commissioner's functions. The Panel have oversight of some of the Commissioner's key documents, reports and decisions and can require them to provide information or answer any questions that the Panel considers necessary to carry out its own functions.

With the advent of local government reorganisation in Cumbria on 1st April 2023, transfer of governance for the Fire and Rescue Service was included in the Commissioner's responsibilities. The remit of the Panel was extended to become the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel to reflect the widening of its scrutiny and support functions.

The Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) has responsibility for setting the direction, objectives and budgets of Cumbria Constabulary and Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service, and for holding the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to account.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) is ultimately accountable to the public. Outside of the four-yearly election cycle, the Panel continues to provide the key scrutiny and accountability mechanism for the decisions and activities undertaken by the PFCC. The role of the Panel is to scrutinise and support the performance of the Commissioner and specifically to conduct the following statutory functions (as set out in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011):

- To review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's proposed level of Council Tax precept for policing and fire. The Panel has a power of veto for the Commissioner's first precept proposal.
- To review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan.
- To review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Annual Report for Police and Crime and Fire and Rescue.
- To review and make recommendations on proposed senior appointments in the Commissioner's Office, including the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer (in addition to some other senior roles). The Panel has the power to veto proposed appointments for the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer.
- To consider non-criminal complaints made against the Commissioner.



Membership

The Panel is a joint committee and comprises ten elected members (five from Westmorland and Furness Council, five from Cumberland Council) and two co-opted independent members. Westmorland and Furness Council provides support to the Panel on behalf of both councils.

Membership during 2025-26:

Cllr Tim Pickstone (Chair)	Cumberland Council
Cllr Bill McEwan (Vice Chair)	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Janet Battye	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Judith Derbyshire	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Helen Irving	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Bob Kelly	Cumberland Council
Jonathan Little	Independent Co-optee
Cllr John Mallinson	Cumberland Council
Cllr Carni McCarron-Holmes	Cumberland Council
Fiona Musgrave	Independent Co-optee
Cllr Matt Severn	Westmorland and Furness Council
Cllr Gillian Troughton	Cumberland Council



Panel Activity during 2025-2026

The Panel held five formal meetings during 2025-2026. The meetings were open to the public and supported delivery of the Panel's statutory responsibilities. The agendas and minutes for the Panel's meetings can be viewed on the Westmorland and Furness Committee pages: [Browse meetings - Police, Fire and Crime Panel | Westmorland and Furness Council](#)

Summary of Activity

April 2025

- **PFCP Meeting:**
 - **Reviewed progress** against the following priorities in the **Police, Fire and Crime Plan 2025-29:**
 - Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities
 - Making Best Use of Our Resources
 - **Monitoring budgets:** OPFCC, Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Service

July 2025

- **PFCP Meeting:**
 - Overview of commissioned service: 1-CLIC
 - **Reviewed progress** against public priority: **Addressing anti-social behaviour**
 - **Panel reviewed:**
 - **PFCC's Annual Report 2024-25**
 - **Agreed its own Police, Fire and Crime Annual Report 2024-25**
 - **Monitoring budgets:** OPFCC, Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Service

October 2025

- **PFCP Meeting:**
 - **Reviewed progress** of Fire and Rescue Service against the following priorities in the **Police, Fire and Crime Plan 2025-29:**
 - Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities
 - Focusing on Prevention to Protect Cumbria
 - Overview of commissioned service: Victims Support Services
 - **Monitoring budgets:** OPFCC, Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Service
- Informal **Constabulary showcase** event at Constabulary Headquarters including tour and demonstrations in latest technology.

January 2026

- **Informal online briefing:**
 - Briefing on OPFCC, Constabulary & Fire and Rescue Service budgets, capital programmes & proposed precept levels
- **PFCP Meeting:**
 - **Budgets and precepts formally presented and agreed**

February 2026

- **PFCP Meeting:**
 - **Approval** of new **Chief Constable** after **Confirmation Hearing**

Delivering the statutory functions of the Panel

Review the Commissioner's proposed Police and Fire and Rescue Council Tax precept

Policing Precept

At the 30th January 2026 meeting of the Panel, the Commissioner proposed an increase in the policing precept of 4.61%. This was an increase of £14.94 per annum for a Band D property taking the total Police element of the precept at Band D to £338.94.

He stated that the contribution was essential to sustaining a high-quality police service for Cumbria, as recognised by HMICFRS, and to further strengthen visible policing across Cumbria. The proposed increase amounted to 29 pence per week for a Band D household. He assured the Panel that he had robust governance and scrutiny arrangements in place to hold the Chief Constable and the Constabulary to account for how public funds were spent, ensuring resources were directed towards the priorities that mattered most to our communities. He would continue to provide appropriate challenge and scrutiny on behalf of the residents of Cumbria.

The Panel asked a number of questions around funding for neighbourhood policing, the Government's fair funding deal, partnership working, pay awards, grants, personal safety for those in public office (and in the pre-election period) and fleet vehicles.

The Panel noted that during the public consultation of the proposed precept level, 61% (of 801 people who responded) had supported the proposals. After consideration of all the points, the Panel agreed to support the precept proposal.

During the year, Panel members received regular monitoring reports and information in relation to the budgets of the Commissioner and the Constabulary.



Fire and Rescue Service Precept

At the 30th January 2026 meeting, the Commissioner outlined the budget setting process which was challenging due to reduced central government funding and wider financial pressures. The delays in the Local Government Finance Settlement added to these pressures. The Commissioner proposed an increase in the fire and rescue precept of 5.04%. This was an increase of £4.95 per annum for a Band D property taking the total Fire and Rescue Service element of the precept at Band D to £103.14. Even with the proposed increase, there would remain a funding gap of just over £1.5 million which would be managed through a combination of recurring savings and limited use of reserves. The aim is to restore reserves to sustainable levels within two years.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the growing operational pressures which could pose risks to firefighter and public safety. One of the key major operational priorities was a second fire appliance in Barrow-In-Furness, driven by the town growth and increased BAE Systems activity (of national importance), raising demand and risk. The Chief Fire Officer emphasised the critical nature of the £4.95 council tax increase to maintain service resilience, protect fire fighter safety and meet its statutory duties.

The Commissioner assured the Panel and gave details of the processes that had been put in place in order for him to hold the Chief Fire Officer and Fire and Rescue Service to account in how they spend taxpayers' money, on behalf of the residents of Cumbria.

The Commissioner assured the Panel that robust governance arrangements were in place to ensure the delivery of the required savings. The Service had already undertaken extensive work to identify savings across the organisation.

The Panel asked questions which included topics such as potential external funding sources, costs and resources relating to appliances and the fleet.

The Panel noted that during the public consultation of the proposed precept level, 58% (of 321 people who responded) had supported the proposals. After consideration of all the points, the Panel agreed to support the precept proposal.

A number of recent major incidents had occurred within Cumbria which required extensive resource requirements from the Fire and Rescue Service. Members of the Panel formally thanked the Service for their attendance and efforts.

During the year, Panel members received regular monitoring reports and information in relation to the budgets of the Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Service.



Review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Police and Crime Plan and Fire and Rescue Plan

The Commissioner's Police Fire and Crime Plan covers the period 2025-29. There are five priority areas:

- Putting People First
- Providing Visible and Accessible Services
- Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities
- Focusing on Prevention to Protect Cumbria
- Making Best Use of Resources

The Panel continued to review the work over the reporting period through the Commissioner's Annual Report and by requesting updates on progress against the five priority areas in the Plan. Progress was reviewed against the following priorities:

Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities

The PFCC presented a report providing updates on activity primarily through the Safer Cumbria Partnership and delivery of the Serious Violence Duty. The priority is delivered through a partnership-led, prevention-focused model combining targeted funding, early intervention, victim support and data-led policing. He reported that the Safer Cumbria Partnership had recently been restructured to include senior leaders to strengthen strategic oversight. Delivery of the Serious Violence Duty was supported through the Serious Violence Response Strategy based on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Priority intervention areas were alcohol and drugs (as drivers of violence), violence against women and girls, and children and young people with early intervention programmes. The PFCC has a statutory duty to commission victim support services and provided assurances of strong contract management and performance monitoring. To support this, during the year the Panel received a presentation from a provider of Victim Support Services detailing the work of the service provided.

Making Best Use of Our Resources

The PFCC presented a report providing a snapshot of progress to date, with an emphasis on efficiency, collaboration and improved effectiveness to better protect communities. Progress had been made on increasing collaboration between police and fire services, particularly in back-office functions which meant that professional expertise could be shared, and standards could be maintained consistently. Areas looked at so far included estate and asset management, improving estate condition and facilities. Areas planned for the year ahead included procurement, payroll and legal services. The PFCC detailed how he had established a robust accountability framework across both police and fire with the creation of a joint governance board called "Working Together" which he chaired, and included the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer, with the purpose of driving collaboration and efficiency programmes.

Protecting Vulnerable People and Communities and Focusing on Prevention to Protect Cumbria

At the October meeting, the Panel focused on the Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service and the PFCC in his role as Cumbria Fire Authority. The PFCC reported how Cumbria Fire and Rescue was making a significant preventative impact, characterised by high-volume, targeted prevention work targeted at those most at risk which put the force in the top quartile nationally. There was also strong community engagement and targeted interventions following two major incidents in Cumbria in which the Fire Service had played a major role. Good progress had been made in protection activities, with strong performance in planning and licensing applications being completed within statutory timeframes. The service had undertaken a lot of work with businesses to improve compliance with fire safety legislation and enforcement action had been taken where necessary. With regards to working with communities and partners, the PFCC reported extensive multi-agency working across the two local authorities, emergency services, national park authority

and community groups. He highlighted the example of the Cumbria Water Safety Partnership to identify high risk locations (particularly in the Lake District) and delivering targeted campaigns such as the 'Float to Live' initiative.

Providing Visible and Accessible Services

During the calendar year, the Panel had the opportunity to visit both Fire & Rescue Service headquarters and Constabulary headquarters. Both visits included tours of the facilities, demonstrations and the opportunity to speak first hand with police and fire officers regarding their work and the duties they undertake. Officers from both fire and the police detailed the prevention and protection work they undertake and working in the community with people and businesses across the county.

The Panel will continue to review progress against at least one priority per public meeting going forward into 2026-27.

Review and make recommendations on the Commissioner's draft Annual Report for Police and Crime and Fire and Rescue

The Panel scrutinised the Commissioner's first Annual Report (2024-2025) summarising progress against the Police, Fire and Crime Plan 2025-2029. In line with the Police and Social Responsibility Act (2011), the report covered detail on how he had carried out his statutory functions such as setting the budget, developing a Police, Fire and Crime Plan and holding the Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer to account.

The Annual Report highlighted some key achievements, such as the strengthening of neighbourhood policing through securing £1.68 million funding and launching a Neighbourhood Policing Pledge, reducing anti-social behaviour by 35% in hotspot areas as part of Operation Enhance and investing £128,000 in community projects to prevent crime, and investing £3.4 million into commissioned services for victims of crime. The Annual Report detailed Fire & Rescue Service improvements through secured additional funding of £1 million from the Home Office and investments in equipment, technology and estate improvements. In terms of finance and governance, the report highlighted the Police budget deficit had been reduced by £5 million (from £16 million) over the period and the ongoing savings programmes to improve long-term financial sustainability. Accountability frameworks for both the Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service had been strengthened. There was greater collaboration through the Safer Cumbria Partnership and more coordinated approach to the Serious Violence Duty and community safety.

The Panel raised questions around reductions in anti-social behaviour, recruitment challenges for the services, savings and financial plans and the 'Right Care, Right Person' initiative.

To review and make recommendations on proposed senior appointments in the Commissioner's Office

In February 2026, the Panel held a public Confirmation Hearing for the proposed appointment of a Chief Constable. A report was considered by the Panel from the Commissioner detailing the criteria that was used to assess the suitability of the candidates for the role, how the preferred candidate had satisfied the criteria, and the terms and conditions on which the preferred candidate was to be appointed. In its duty to ensure that the proposed candidate was suitable for the Chief Constable position, the Panel asked questions of the candidate relating to professional competence and operational independence which enabled the Panel to evaluate the candidate's suitability for the roles.

Following the Confirmation Hearing, the Panel unanimously agreed to recommend to the Commissioner to appoint Darren Martland to the position of Chief Constable for Cumbria.

To consider non-criminal complaints made against the Commissioner

Prior to 1st April 2023, the Cumbria Police and Crime Panel had in place a robust complaints process which had been created following extensive work by Officers and Members. The procedure incorporated a complaints process, complaints protocol, habitual and vexatious complaints protocol, complaints form and complaints flow chart. In June 2023, the new Police, Fire and Crime Panel agreed to formally adopt the complaints procedure.

During 2025-26, the Panel received regular reports which detailed the number of complaints and what action had been taken in respect of the complaints. One formal complaint was made during this reporting period which was informally resolved.

Additional activities of the Panel

In addition to the formal meetings, the Panel also:

- Held an informal budget briefing session with the Commissioner and his team in advance of considering the PFCC's budget and council tax precept proposals.
- Had a tour of Constabulary Headquarters with the Panel able to meet Police staff and receive demonstrations of equipment and operations, as well as experience some of the interactive community engagement work the service undertake in schools and the community.
- Has continued to engage with the National Association of Police, Fire and Crime Panels attending meetings and networking sessions.

Home Office Grant Funding

As host authority, Westmorland and Furness Council receives financial support through an annual grant from the Home Office to support administration of the Cumbria Police, Fire and Crime Panel. This grant covers the costs of administration (including, support staff, specialist advice, recruitment of independent members, printing and postage) and Panel member expenses (including training, independent member allowances, national conference). The grant claim for 2025-26 was £64,340.

The Panel's grant claim for 2025-26 was considered by Westmorland and Furness Council's Internal Audit service as part of the financial management assurance framework and was submitted to the Home Office for approval in June 2026.

Forward Look

During this reporting period, we learnt that the powers of the PFCC will be transferred to a Mayor in May 2027 following the establishment of a Cumbria Combined Authority in 2026. In 2025, we also received confirmation in the Policing Reform White Paper that the intention is to abolish Police, Fire and Crime Panels in 2028. As a Panel we continue to monitor these developments and will respond accordingly, updating our workplan as necessary.

The PFCC continues to maintain a productive and constructive relationship with the PFCC and his office and will continue to fulfil our role as 'critical friend'. Looking forward, we will receive a report from the PFCC detailing how he and the Fire & Rescue Service plan to address the recommendations arising from the most recent His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection. We will review the PFCC's Annual Report and receive performance updates on both the Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Service. Later in 2026, we will examine progress by the PFCC on Estates and other areas reported on previously under the 'Making Best Use of Our Resources' priority.

