

Westmorland and Furness Council 11.7.24

Report by Michael Hanley.

1. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (9.5.24)

A Burns (AB, L): Queried what Cllr A Jarvis had said about money going to Barrow and money going to Grange Lido. This was amended in the minutes.

2. Public Participation

J Davies: WAFRC has been in operation for more than one year. One of its statutory duties is to be financially transparent. This is the second year and it is still not complying. Accounts have not been published. Councillors are wanting more money for themselves but are not accountable with regard to their financial obligation.

A Jarvis (AJ, Finance Portfolio Holder, LD): I previously responded to another query of yours on financial transparency. We hope to be able to deliver the information in the next week. Disaggregation of the financial team from Cumberland Council is due in the next 12 months. We will have more control then.

3. Announcements

M Severn (MS, Chair, LD): Thanked all the council staff who were involved with election. There is to be an Adult Social Care Listening Event in Barrow.

J Brook (JB, Leader, LD): A huge amount of work occurs behind the scenes during an election. Thank you to all the council staff involved. I also extend a warm welcome to our new MPs. They are all working to the same goal. I have written to them. I also want to thank all the businesses who took part in our annual business survey. This will inform our future economic strategy. This confirms our desire to work with our businesses. Enterprise Cumbria was launched last week, promoting business in Cumbria.

P Thornton (PT, Highways Portfolio, LD): Discussed half joint bridges. They were very popular in the 60s and 70s. They were built on motorways (eg the M6 at the Lune Gorge). We have five of these bridges. In the last 20 years there has been two high profile collapses, one in Canada and the other in Italy. The failure is usually sudden, you don't get the usual warning cracks. We have brought in weight limits on two of these bridges. Recently we were advised to close another two (in the Kendal area). They were closed a few weeks ago and this has caused problems for motorists. We are proceeding to examine the options.

V Taylor (VT, LD): The Dock Museum in Barrow was highly commended and won an award from Cumbria Tourism. We will be launching a leisure strategy consultation. Discussed the upcoming local plan. It is important that local people and parish councils feed into this. I would like to commend the councillors across the chamber (the Labour Group) for the speed that the new government will accelerate changes to the planning rules.

S Sanderson (SS, LD): Discussed summer schools holiday programme. This provides a wide range of activities and young people attending receive a warm nourishing meal.

4. Minutes of Cabinet Meeting

This took place in Alston on the 4th of June,

M. Hanley (MH, L): Both local WAF councillors Mary Robinson and MH were unable to attend. Both were notified of the meeting three weeks prior. Could there be more notice the next time as

it is important that local WAF councillors be able to attend when the cabinet visits smaller venues.

JD: Alston Moor PC have asked us back so we plan to return next year, so you will get more notice. Alston Moor was the first location outside the usual ones of Barrow, Kendal and Penrith.

P Dew (PD, C): Referred to criticism by the chair of the Lakes Parish Council, Andrew Biggs. This mainly focused on the state of the roads: potholes, collapsed roads etc. He commended PT for always giving his full attention to his role in Highways and he is fully committed to what he does.

J Battye (JB, LD): I want to make sure placements of children are suitable (part of the document described the establishment of a regional adoption agency. It is hoped that the speed of the process will be improved).

PT: We have 146 parishes. We do our best to get around all of them. Our roads are the distance to the North Pole plus 10 miles. I think our teams do a great job. We spend £20 million: all the bridges, gullies, street lights and roads we have to maintain.

B Shirley (BS, C): Asked about council-owned assets. He is concerned about the delay in getting things done.

AJ: I will look into this.

H Carrick (HC, C): Asked about the mothballing of the county offices (County Hall, Kendal). If the costs are so high why are we continuing to use this building until September.

PT: Its not saying it's unsafe to continue to occupy this building until September. Very few businesses are operating in the same building as they were in 1936. We want to be a three centre council rather than a one centre council. We have the Town Hall in Kendal. The Carlisle office is a bit of a red herring. In the long term there will only be three centres.

C Atkinson (CA, C): Asked about Voreda House and when will the costs be published. The council tax payers have shown their anger as the cost of this has risen from four to eight million pounds.

AJ: Voreda House has just opened. We should be proud. Costs were higher than expected. I will give you a written report.

A Burns (AB, L): Asked about schools not meeting health and safety standards. How many are there and what happens when the school becomes a trust. What responsibilities have we?

AJ: That is a complex question. I will ask the officers to give you a written response.

D Taylor (DT, I): Asked about Borderlands Grant money for Dalton and the replacement of bollards and shopfront enhancement. Will there be funding for this?

PT: I am not sure whether the Borderlands Funds will be relevant to this. I could do a walk-around (of Dalton) with you.

5. Questions from Members

H Chaffey (HC, LD): Asked about the future of local transport with the new government.

N Hughes (NH, Transport Portfolio, LD): £129 million was promised by the outgoing government over 8 years. There is capital funding for improvement of roads. No money was awarded before the election. Rishi Sunak knew that not a penny would be awarded. We have to see whether the new government will award this. Many organisations have their eyes on the local transport fund. We have to wait for an announcement from the new Secretary of State.

BS: Read an email from a local resident concerning the rubbish on her street. She refused to pay her council tax because of this. We have waited for over four weeks for our recycling bins to be collected.

JB: This is a serious matter. It is always unfortunate when things like this happen. I will follow it up. As for paying your council tax, it is a legal duty. If services fall below what is expected, that is not a

reason to not pay your council tax.

DT: Asked about the cemetery in Dalton. It is on a steep hill and the lower gate is always locked. It was shut because of an accident due to a pothole. We need the paths re-tarmacking.

NH: I don't know the detail. All cemeteries should be in good condition. I will get an officer to reply.

6 Members Allowance

Paul Jones (PJ, Chair of Independent Review Panel): Discussed special responsibilities and extended roles of some members. There is a big time commitment and a lot of hard work involved. There should be no financial disadvantage. As a result we recommend an uplift in the basic allowance from £13,000 to £13,500. I think this is fair and reasonable.

(Total members allowance cost 2024-25: £1.125 million. Compared to other councils, WAFC is among the lowest. Basic allowance in Cumberland is £14,500, in North Yorkshire: £17,000. Chairs of various committees receive less in WAFC: Planning Committee: WAFC: £6500, Northumberland: £12,150, Cumberland: £8700.)

BS: Thank you. What are the next steps?

KJ: We will review this whenever it needs to be done.

JB: We need to be able to attract a diverse range of councillors. We may have to revisit this as new committees are formed.

HC: If we approve we will have to concentrate on improving council services. There is an increasing perception that councillors are being rewarded for poor performance.

Vote: All in favour except two abstentions.

7. Council Size Submission

Linda Jones (LJ, Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer): Discussed the process. Currently there are 65 councillors. Average 2845 electors per councillor. The report recommends the council size stays at 65.

AJ: The workload per member is high. We have a wide area and many parish and town councils. Some rural areas have asked for more members. We have discussed whether to have 2 or 3 member wards.

PD: I don't find that size matters. I think that multiple member wards causes problems especially when they are from different parties. There is a problem with confusing residents when you are having meetings (due to your different political perspectives).

M Brereton (MB, C): Discussed allowing officers to decide on 1,2 and 3 member wards.

AJ: The officers will not redraw the map until the electoral commission has given the go-ahead.

J Murray (JM, LD): For the record I would like to say how much fun it has been to share the ward with Councillor Dew.

Vote: Unanimous in favour.

8. Update on Cumbria Pensions Fund

D Rathbone (DR, LD): This is a local government pension fund. It impacts on our balance sheet. There are 65,000 members. It impacts on all of our actions. It is part of the Local Government Pension Scheme. There is a guaranteed minimum income. It provides for 120 different employers: parish and town councils, schools, academies, contractors and subcontractors. £7.3 million is paid out every month to 19,000 pensioners. 84% of these live in Cumbria. The average

is £4600 per year. The assets of the fund are £3.4 billion. The annual return is 7.3% (benchmark: 6.8%).

Investment is made with environment, economy and society in mind. It was agreed to invest in climate opportunities products.

9. Urgent Item

Approval of Absence of a member (Cllr Andy Connell (AC, Appleby and Brough, LD)) It is requested that Cllr Andy Connell be allowed to extend his absence beyond six months. The absence is due to ill health and he is expected to be back at work in September.

MS: Cllr Connell is a dedicated councillor. We would like to see him back in his place.

G Simpkins (GS, LD): Cllr Connell still remains very active with council work.

AB: We would like to wish him all the best.

T Callister (TC, L): Can the council send him a get-well card?

MS: Yes.

MB: We urgently need him back as when we quit county hall we will not have anyone to sing us out.

Next meeting: 26.9.24.