

Westmorland and Furness Council 9.5.24

Report by Michael Hanley

1. Matt Severn appointed chair.

2. Leader's Announcements.

J Brook (JB, LD): We had a significant challenge last April- to deliver improvement. We agreed our council plan. We followed this up with the Council Delivery Framework. This has already had an impact on schools and roads. There will be £200 million investment over 16 years in Barrow. This was as a result from pressure from the council. There will be improvement to road and rail. All our communities matter. We have created locality boards. We need to prioritise our activities. We have made very good progress. Our programme will help "Better for Less" (in our services).

P Thornton (PT, LD): I have good news: winter is over! The gritters have been put away until October.

V Taylor (VT, LD): I would like to draw your attention to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan. I am proud that the council is prioritising EDI. We have to tackle inequality in health, education and employment.

P Bell: Discussed the problems of having two ICBs in our area. We need to support disabled people and the long-term sick back to work.

S Sanderson (SS, LD): We have been successful in getting permission for a new special school. It will be only one of two in the North-West.

3. Minutes of Cabinet

Questions

B McEwan (BMC, L): Discussed the money coming to Barrow and the need to improve the A590 (main road to Barrow which has various bottle-necks). We need to push this. We need the infrastructure.

JB: The A590 is a vital route. We have had presentations from Highways England at cabinet. I will add my full weight to this.

P Dew (PD, C): Discussed the overspend on Highways and the budget for the locality boards (inadequate). When will this be reviewed?

A Jarvis (AJ, LD, Finance Portfolio Holder): The overspend in Highways was due to winter maintenance. There will be a review of locality boards in the next few months.

F Cassidy (FC, L): Asked about the impending closure of North Walney Primary School. Last year there were reducing numbers and it reached a critical point. Can it be confirmed that there is no plan to sell the site for unaffordable housing.

SS: I would endorse what you said. We will keep you informed. There is no plan to convert it into housing.

A Burns (AB, L): Asked about the sale of Cumbria Holdings (waste disposal company) for £7 million.

AJ: It was not right that we should spend this on day to day activities. We have put it into a reserve fund, to be spent on things that would help in the long run.

N Phillips (NP, C): Asked about the LEP (Local Enterprise Partnerships. The government. ceased funding LEPs in April 24 and were to be absorbed into local authorities. There were 38 LEPs in England which created 180k jobs and helped build 100k new homes, according to the LEP home page) and devolution.

JB: We are setting up an Economics Board for the whole of Cumbria which will take the place of

the LEP. Any more devolution will come after this. We have not had any formal discussion.

PD: Asked about the drive to Net Zero. Can you assure me that we won't go down a rabbit hole with regard to this?

AJ: One element of what we have to consider is the environment. We will adopt rigorous decision making with regard to this. If we invest a lot of money in an area, we expect a good return.

V. Hughes (VH, LD): Asked about rough sleeping.

J Derbyshire (JD, Housing Portfolio Holder, LD): We had a consultation on this. The Royal British Legion contributed. Veterans and families have been considered.

AB: The outcome for our children hasn't changed in Barrow. We have to do something for our children living in poverty, for example Universal School Meals. If every child is receiving a free school meal, this avoids stigma. This helps educational outcomes.

AJ: That's a very specific issue. We will consider what is appropriate with school meals.

M Brereton (MB, C): We need to look for value for money.

NP: Talked about the lack of council staff to answer complaints. A resident in his area wanted to challenge a parking fine but could not speak directly to anyone from the council on the phone. He could only use email.

JB: The interface between the council and the public is important. The intention is that we are open and accessible.

4. Cabinet Members

JB: We have a new deputy leader in Andrew Jarvis. Discussed other members of the cabinet.

5. Holehird Trust

AJ: This trust was established in 1964. Mr Groves transferred his estate to Westmorland County Council. The trust provides housing, sickness benefit and educational help to local people. The main asset is Holehird Mansion. There is a possibility of selling this which is being explored. Four councillors have been appointed as trustees. The council will no longer be involved in the administration of the trust.

PD: This has come about because of the sale of the mansion. We have a buyer.

6. WAFC Plan Delivery Framework

Summary:

Environment: Solar farm in Barrow area (Sandscale Park) due to have begun construction in April 24. It will generate 2 megawatts, enough to power 730 homes.

Homes: £5.5 million from Cumbria LEP to build 808 new homes at Marina Village, Barrow.

Investment in education, children (Family Hubs, Youth Justice Plan).

Adults: Intermediate care beds, Virtual Care pilot (supporting care remotely), improved occupational therapy service.

Health and Wellbeing: New survey, improvements to parks and sports facilities.

Culture: £6.8 million restoration of Grange Lido and Promenade. Redesigned Kendal Library.

Environment: Tree planting, unified waste service, £4.5 million spend on electric vehicle infrastructure from the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) Capability Fund (from central government).

Decarbonisation: £2 million for WAFC estate and fleet.

Nature recovery: Planting for pollinators. Flood resilience.

Connections: A66 upgrade. Improve A590 (to Barrow). £30 million resurfacing programme.

Improve local bus services: £1.7 million Bus Service Improvement Plan funding local bus

operators to reinstate and maintain lost routes.

Homes: Grant funding to developers to build more affordable homes. Marina Village. Reduce the number of long term empty homes to make them available to local people.

Learning: Improve support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. £500k for post-16 school transport (including from Alston).

JB: This sets out what we will deliver.

MH: Referred to the section on Electric Vehicles. I have trying to help a resident in the Alston and Fellside area. He does not have off-road parking and he wants to buy an electric car. He has told me that if he charged his car with his domestic electricity supply it would cost a tenth of the price of using a public EV charger. There is a company who can install a conduit under the pavement in front of his house which he would pay for. I have been trying to get permission from the council for the last 2-3 months. Both Durham and Nottinghamshire Councils have approved this company. About one third of car owners do not have off-road parking, so there are probably lots of other people who are delaying buying an electric car because of this. Why has it taken so long?

PT: You are in luck! Just today we are starting a trial of the various methods to get around this problem. We will know the results by September or October. If you give me his contact details we can include him in the trial.

MH: Can't you go on Nottinghamshire's assessment?

PT: We will be doing our own.

N Hughes (NH, LD): EVs still have the potential to cause congestion. Ultimately we want as much public transport and active transport (walking and cycling) as we can get. We need sustainable long term funding from central government.

H Carrick (HC, C): I would like there to be more ways of measuring what we have achieved.

AJ: This document emphasises the 10 strategy themes: Communities, Environment, Growth, Connections, Homes, Learning, Care, Health and Wellbeing, Culture and Effective Services.

7. Nature and Biodiversity Plan (Part1)

G Archibald (GA, LD): It's taken two years. There has been a lot of cross party effort. Since 1970 the population of all species has decreased by 19%. One sixth of species are in danger of being lost: red squirrels, pine martens, turtle doves etc. The population of hedgehogs has fallen from 60 million to 1 million in our lifetime. We could be moving into the 6th mass extinction. We have fantastic assets here in WAF and we can build on that. We can show our young people that there is hope. This report is the first part of an action plan. The government has appointed us to do a nature recovery strategy. Part 2 will be how will we implement it. Biodiversity loss is different from climate change. Some people will say what does it matter? It gives us the air we breath, the environment etc.

T Assouad (TA, L): I couldn't find a reference to coastal erosion. That will affect the nature reserve on Walney Island.

MR: Discussed AONB/National Landscape. Farming has changed with meadow and hedge planting.

J Filmore (JF, Green Party): Discussed CAfS (Cumbria Action for Sustainability). They need to be mentioned.

GA: Coastal erosion is a major concern to us. Also the natter toad is a danger.

8. Delegation of the non-executive functions for public rights of way to the Lake District National Park.

PT: Footpaths are hugely important. The footpath network in WAF is longer than the road network.

We are responsible for the access, not the surface.

HC: This cost £85k in the first year.

9. Standards Committee Report

Discussed reports of complaints concerning parish councils. We need to make sure that parish councillors get proper training.

10. Scrutiny Annual Report

B Morgan (BM, L): It's been a busy year for scrutiny. Our next step is to develop a scrutiny protocol. There will be a workshop for councillors on 15.5.24.