

Update on some of the main topics occupying minds of both officers and members at the County Council of 7th November 2022 from Claire Driver

1. Presentation by care leavers: We had an excellent presentation by two of our care leavers to full council last Thursday, talking about the work they have been doing to refresh the promise all Councillors make to our looked after children in our roles as corporate parents. Strengthening and highlighting this crucial role is timely as we move into the new Unitary Authorities next year.
2. Cuts in local radio: The Leader of the Council made a statement and wrote to the Government in opposition to the proposed cuts to local radio which councillors may be aware of, and which would mean the end of Radio Cumbria and any specific local coverage.
3. Postponement of the decision on the coal mine in West Cumbria: Once again this has been kicked into the long grass by the government at the eleventh hour. An impassioned plea was made by the local member to hasten the decision, and out and end to the uncertainty for the local and wider communities in Cumbria.
4. Cost of living crisis support: A new coordination group has been formed(chaired by Colin Cox), bringing together local gov, NHS, 3rd sector, local resilience groups. This group will be in existence throughout the coming winter to make the best use of available resources, and try and avoid duplication. Information and advice can be found on the County Council website at: <https://www.cumbria.gov.uk/costofliving/>
5. Care sector: Huge concerns about the care sector and its ability to cope through the coming winter. We're already working in crisis mode trying to fill vacancies across Cumbria Care, which is already under incredible strain. The closure of a care provider at incredibly short notice placed additional pressure on Cumbria Care, as yet again local government had to step in and prop up the private sector. Although recent announcements by central government seem to suggest that they have allocated funds to support the failing health and care sector, we have yet to see even a penny of this funding distributed.
6. Cost of children's care packages continues to increase, a recent care package for example is costing the council £10k p/w, which is not unusual now. This is a complex topic so for any councillor wishing to find more detail, please refer to page 26 of this month's full council papers, CLA (children Looked After) placements sufficiency Strategy.
7. Financial Strategy - half yearly review: In spite of the relentless financial pressures that the County Council is operating under, we continue to delivery within our financial strategy, thanks in no small part to our excellent finance team. At last week's council meeting the council unanimously agreed to note the successful delivery of the half year financial strategy review. A great deal of previously allocated funding has had to be ring-fenced or re-profiled in light of LGR, meaning that some previously identified projects may not be delivered within this financial year. I have no fine detail on what this might mean for our area, other than to say that the likelihood of getting any new projects identified and delivered is slim to none, unless they are required from a safety point of view.

Cllr. Claire Driver
Cumbria County Councillor, Alston & East Fellside

