

WAF Cabinet Meeting at Alston, 22.4.25.

Report by Michael Hanley.

1. Leader's Statement

Westmorland and Furness Council (WAFC) recently received an award for green and sustainable energy.

2. Questions to Cabinet Members

M Hanley (MH, WAF Councillor): Listed six areas of concern that are important for Alston Moor. There may be others. They are: a bus service from Alston to Penrith, a cash machine, youth provision including the youth club, employment, affordable housing and the continuing development of High Mill.

Other councillors updated MH that The Spar has replaced the ATM at that location, but is not operational yet.

J Brook (JB, Leader of WAFC): We will receive questions after the main cabinet meeting.

3. Devolution Update

This is continuing. When we devolve, we will have more powers including increasing employment, planning, the environment and transport. The public consultation which ran for eight weeks has been completed.

4. Digital Ambitions

P Thornton (PT, Highways Portfolio): We do not want to have a council that is only available on line. This would preclude certain residents. You should always be able to talk to someone on the phone or visit someone at the local office.

5. Affordable Planning Grant Policy

J Derbyshire (JD, Housing Portfolio): Discussed changes to this policy to keep it up to date.

A Jarvis (AJ, Finance Portfolio): We have an issue with Affordable Housing, the grant will never be a solution though it will help. We have put an additional £1 million extra into the fund. This might help an additional 20 families (with 20 more affordable houses).

6. Warm Homes Local Grant

This fund has been awarded £11.8 million until March 28. There are two contracts for delivery.

V Taylor (VT, Communities Portfolio): It's great that our housing stock is going to be improved. Housing that is being built now should be future-proofed (with adequate insulation and sustainable heating).

7. EV Charging Strategy Part 2.

PT: The driver of this is the LEVI (Local EV Initiative) scheme. From 2035, the only new cars available to purchase will be electric. This is only 10 years away. 30% (35k) of WAF homes don't have off-road parking (having a driveway enables operation of a home EV charger which is much cheaper to run than using public chargers). There will be a rapid increase in demand for EV chargers. The scheme has been granted £3.9 million to increase EV chargers.

Target: 60% of properties be within 3 minutes walk of an EV charger.

There will be 9000 on-street charge points. These will be very important for the tourist market.

G Archibald (GA, Climate and Environment Portfolio): By 2027 there will be 500 new EV chargers. We need to show leadership as moving to Net Zero is a central principle of this council.

VT: (As an electric car driver), she discussed the problem of defunct and broken chargers due to

lack of maintenance.

PT: Yes, we are negotiating with providers that they will maintain these EV chargers, both slow and fast chargers.

AJ: Technology is changing very quickly. The range of electric cars today is much greater than ten years ago. We need to regularly review the plan. We need to make sure that the strategy doesn't become out of date.

PT: Our strategy is very much in line with government strategy.

J Murray (JM, Transport Portfolio): People with driveways will be able to charge their cars cheaply. My neighbours who don't have driveways are cynical about the situation as they will not be able to charge their EVs at a cheap rate.

8. Local Flood Risk Management Strategy

GA: The Environment Agency predicts an increase in rainfall of 30-40% in the next few years. This will be a very serious problem. It is going to affect Cumbria seriously. Discussed the strategy.

9. Marina Village Residential Opportunity.

VT: This is one of the largest housing developments. It involves designing a new neighbourhood. It will be in the centre of Barrow with 800 new homes. £24.8 million has been given to develop this site. Things to consider: rising sea levels, health provision for 800 more families (GP services).

10. Marina Village Procurement

VT: Discussed the appointment of the developer.

JB: People in Barrow are desperate to see this progressing.

11. Apprenticeship Training

J Battye (JBa, Childrens Portfolio): We have had 290 applicants.

PT: Discussed the fact that a lot of the council workforce are nearing retirement and it is important to train new workers.

JB: Certain types of workers are difficult to recruit. It is important that we grow our own.

End of Cabinet Meeting.

Meeting with Alston Moor Parish Council.

1. Discussion about previous Cabinet Meeting in Alston.

P Bell (PB, Health Portfolio): There has been no progress with the Grisedale Croft flats and Alston Community Hospital. This is not due to a lack of willingness on our part.

E Grew (EG, AMPC): I recently spoke to an ICB (Integrated Care Board, in charge of local health services) member. It is all about money. It was agreed that hospital rooms could be rented out. They are waiting for money promised from the government.

PB: Discussed possible Intermediate and Respite Care.

EG: That would be something that Alston Moor people would really go for.

PB: We have two buildings to talk about. In the south (of WAF area), we have demonstrated that money can be saved in intermediate care.

A Martin (AM, AMPC): When we have a power cut, the hospital still has power from a generator but we are not allowed to use it.

JBa: Discussed school transport. The minibus taking students to Durham will need to be

continued (and supported). The bursary scheme will be open for applications from August. There is also a scheme to transport students to William Howard Secondary School, which is in the Cumberland Council area. The current contract is in place until 2026, when it will have to be reconsidered.

A Bondi (AB, AMPC): Discussed young students going to Carlisle.

JB: I will take that on board.

R Miller (RM, AMPC): Discussed problems around his son going to Newton Rigg (Penrith).

JB: Have you been talking to the Home School Transport Team?

VT: This has been a long term problem. Children in this area do not have the same access to education as everyone else does in the rest of Cumbria.

JB: We are not getting the funding for this.

RM: When the Durham situation occurred (opportunity to go to a school in Durham for years 12 and 13) a lot went from Weardale (students from the Weardale Valley who had attended Alston's Samuel King Secondary School, which only educates students up to GCSE/ Year 11 level). Now there are only 4-5 going (to Durham) from Alston Moor. Most would prefer to go to Penrith or Carlisle.

C Thompson (CT, Clerk, AMPC): Discussed the lack of funding for children going to William Howard School (Brampton). My daughter had special needs and we still did not get funding, despite being advised to send her to Brampton which could cater for her needs.

EG: I know a family whose son has special needs. The father has to take this child to school everyday.

JM: Regarding buses, sadly there isn't one (Alston to Penrith). Last year the tender that came back was too expensive. It is a one year grant fund. We would need to have 25-30 passengers per trip (to make it viable). A problem is the company getting their bus to Alston (apart from Wright Brothers Bus Company which is based in Nenthead).

MH: Discussed whether Alston Moor Community Transport might provide a solution to the transport problem. One of the projects pursued by Alston and Fellside Place Action Group was to look at an electric car hiring scheme. There is a very successful group based south of Gateshead in Blackhall Mill. This is the Derwent Valley Car Club which has 6 Nissan Leaf cars which can be hired at low cost by club members. The PAG has looked at setting up a similar scheme for Alston Moor. The money set aside for the Alston to Penrith bus service was £80,000. This would have gone a long way to establishing an electric minibus service, along the lines of the current Fell Runner Bus Service.

AB: Involving Community Transport and a Fellrunner model may be the only way forward. It takes a while before people get used to new services. It may be very expensive, but we are very deprived.

VT: I have had a dream, an EV to do the morning run for the kids going to school. The service (Alston to Penrith) will never be commercially viable. It might need a community solution.

AM: A lot of people travel to Penrith in their cars for work. It takes time for a new bus service to establish.

CT: The Carlisle service only runs during term time, not during holidays. The lack of a bus service to Carlisle and Penrith increases unemployment in Alston.

AJ: We have the most sparsely populated area in England. In November we lost £6.3 million from the Rural Services Delivery Grant. This money has been given to urban areas. If we had this £6 million we could have planned more services.

GA: Suggested a consultation to look at the problems of rural transport.

JB: Suggested having a Rural Transport Summit.

PT: Discussed ownership of the Nenthead fountain and who owns it. You (AMPC) own it, we have sorted that out.

It was pointed out that AMPC doesn't own the fountain, but have taken responsibility for it.

JD: In Greystoke they have one minibus per week (Greystoke to Penrith). It takes up to a year for a new service. Tourists use the service to get to Greystoke. Last time you talked about the increase in holiday lets in Alston Moor. There is a planning bill and you could lobby the government. CALC may want to get involved with lobbying. There aren't many affordable housing units coming through (for Alston Moor). Eden Housing Association is keen to increase rural housing. You (Alston and Fellside PAG) are looking at a Housing Needs Survey. With empty homes, we are trying to get them back into use.

AM: I think we need a marketing campaign to see if farmers want to become involved.

A Robertson (AR, AMPC): We have problems with absentee landlords on Front Street, who let their properties deteriorate. The population of Alston Moor has been about 2100 since the 1930s, with 1200 in Alston itself.

S Castle-Clarke (SCC, Ousby PC): We have the same issues down in the villages of Fellside. . I would like to thank WAFC for starting PAGs, it brings various small communities together to share ideas without the fear of losing their community identities. I think that PAGs should be rolled out to communities in South Lakeland and Furness areas (PAGs are only operating in the Eden area and not in South Lakes or Barrow localities).

AB: Discussed road closures without any notice.

PT: I can only apologise, that shouldn't happen. We now have our own Streets Work Officer. We need to improve the signage.

AM: What's not mentioned is lighting, that you will take this back will make a huge difference to Alston Moor. We wrote to you last year after the last meeting here in Alston. We eventually got a minimum reply. Please give us more feedback this time.

N Wright (Eden Director of Thriving Communities): That was our fault. I will make sure that we will respond fully and promptly this time.

MH: We have covered all the items that I suggested except High Mill.

Kate Clement (Community Officer for Alston and Fellside): The Economic Development Team have met the people of High Mill in the last few weeks.

JM: With regard to Youth Services, £3,000 was set aside for Alston Youth Services.

End of meeting.