

Full WAF Council Meeting 9.10.25

Report by Michael Hanley

1. Appointment of Chief Executive (to replace Samantha (Sam) Plum)

H Chaffey (HC, LD): Miranda Cannon has been appointed Chief Executive with a salary of £188k per annum. She was executive director of Resources and Transformation at Salford City Council. She was born and raised in Cumbria.

D Brooke (DB, L): I was very impressed with her.

N Phillips (NP, C): Queried the salary. The maximum range for this job in March was £182k.

L Jones (LJ, Chief Legal Officer): We are obliged to update the pay policy every year. The amount reflects inflation.

J Filmore (JF, G): Was it considered whether a young person from the Youth Council could have attended the selection process?

HC: No.

Vote: All in favour except three Conservatives who voted against.

2. One minute silence for former Labour councillor Terry Waite.

3. Minutes of Cabinet meeting 9.9.25

C Atkinson (CA, C): The waste service was sold off to a Manchester company, this was not a positive experience. There are now 60 wagons going to Flusco per day from Scotland. WAF area has become a dumping ground. (Report in this weeks CW Herald: tightening of land fill legislation in Scotland with operator Seletia, who started operating the site three month ago, allowing a huge increase in lorry traffic causing increased noise and odour).

G Archibald (GA, LD): I did not have sight of that question before this meeting. I will give a written answer.

B Shirley (BS,C): Residents in Askam are barricaded out of their homes. Asked about disruptive road works.

P Thornton (PT, LD): Utility companies have the responsibility for the letter drop. In the first half of the year, people complain about pot holes and in the second half they complain about road works.

A Waite (AW, LD): Concerned about the £10 million overspend of the council. What has caused the deficit?

A Jarvis (AJ, LD): At the end of the first quarter the outlook was a deficit of £10 million. This is significantly higher than the previous two years. It's due to Adult and Childrens Social Services. Half is from SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). £4.4 million is Adult Social Care, mainly home care (increased costs in agency staff). We have a new financial officer and he will find mitigations.

4. Questions from Members

A Connell (AC,LD): In August, North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NHS) announced that Eden surgeries (GPs) would no longer take blood and patients would have to travel to Penrith Hospital. The reason is a funding dispute between GP practices and the ICB. Can we facilitate a settlement?

J Brook (JB, Leader, LD): North East and North Cumbria ICB are responsible. We have contacted the ICB with no response yet. We are monitoring the situation. The change followed a dispute

between a small number of GPs and the ICB. The ICB offered an uplift which was not accepted by the GPs. We are continuing to engage with the Local Medical Committee (LMC, who represent local GPs). WAFC will continue to push for a resolution.

AW: A question to Councillor Murray: our (Kirkby Stephen) Saturday bus service is now a commercial one run by Stagecoach. Do you think this model could be followed in other areas.

J Murray (JM, LD): This service is a resounding success. We have got funding with Cumberland Council for more rural groups.

M Brereton (MB, C): Asked about the closure of the post office in Broughton. We are trying to open an alternative. Can I ask Councillor Thornton to help with this?

PT: Yes, I will help.

BS: Asked about road safety on the A595 (from Dalton to Askam) with recent RTAs.

PT: We do have a good team to look at these issues.

CA: WAFC announced £3 million to transform Penrith Town Hall. Has an assessment been made about the effect on Penrith Players and Upfront Gallery? Will there be ongoing funding?

AJ: A consultation is currently underway, where other groups will be consulted. We will look at ongoing funding.

A Burns (AB, L): You mentioned the Home Care budget being dramatically overspent. I am worried about the hospitals putting increased pressure on our services with more patients in the community who need high levels of care.

D Rathbone (DR, LD): You will get a written response.

NP: In Barrow we have road works across many junctions, how do we reduce this?

PT: Road works are a concern all over the area. We have to cooperate with these companies. If we want improvements we can't avoid digging up the road. We do impose fines for various reasons.

B McEwan: Why are they doing all the road works at the same time?

PT: The requests often come in at the same time, some of those might be emergency works and they don't need to get permission. A lot of the reason is broadband (Fibrus).

5. Creation of Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) in Cumbria.

JB: We are one of six areas in the country chosen by the government to devolve. We have looked at the risks and benefits. At the previous cabinet meeting we voted for devolution.

B Morgan (BM, L): Discussed opportunities and concerns of the Overview Scrutiny Committee. Both councils (WAFC and CC) should have an equal voice. This is one of the most important decisions that this council will make.

JB: Cabinet recognises the risks but powers and funding with strategic decisions being made here rather than in London will make this area thrive. The government will have powers to mandate devolution in the future and the conditions may be less attractive than they are now.

MB: This is going to be a hard sell to our electorate.

DB: This is a big opportunity. All of the Labour Group is supportive of this.

AJ: I have been a sceptic of devolution. I don't like the mayoral model. I have now come to the conclusion that we need to push forward with devolution. The present model of the government is clear.

B McEwan (BME, L): I do support this. How will scrutiny work?

J Murray (JM, LD): Discussed strategic transport authority. Once we are an MCA our voice will be better heard.

H Carrick (HC, C): I am a huge advocate of devolution, what's on offer has potential. We will be the smallest MCA. The funding is per capita so we will receive the least (of any MCA). We don't have the additional capacity to do all this extra work. Our residents are doubtful, we should listen to them.

A Jaba (AJ, I): I am worried about the accountability of the mayor.

NP: Is this the right thing to do? - yes. 66% of the public think this is not the right thing to do and we have to change their minds. By not being an MCA, we probably have missed £50 million over the last five years.

J Filmore (JF, G): Discussed concerns about biodiversity. The government is bribing us with investment and if we say no, we will be left out in the cold.

PT: What people say is that they want better roads. I don't want Cumbria to be a white space on the map.

AB: We will still have the combined authority (WAFC). We will have funding to improve the A590.

M Robinson (MR, I): I have been a local government officer since 1984. We have lost money with every political party. My main concern is with the residents. I am also concerned about the funding and costs. It will be a gamble. Having delivered a housing needs survey for the last three weeks, what they have said is that we have just reorganised and now we are doing it again. They don't want to see a mayor. Will there be sufficient turn-out at the election? For me the residents and their opinions matter. I don't want an expensive reorganisation of the deck chairs and I am not going to support it.

Vote: All voted in favour of MCA except several Conservatives, all Independents and the one Green councillor.

6. Cumbria Pension Fund (CPF)

Discussion about CPF which has 67,000 members (one eighth of the population of Cumbria). Councillors cannot take part in the scheme. Average pension amount is about £5000 per annum. Assets are £3.4 billion.

7. Community Governance Review

AJ: It is recommended that we review the town and parish boundaries, the number of councillors etc. We will establish a cross party working group.

A Connell (AC, LD): This is a necessary exercise that needs to be carried out from time to time.

8. Notices of Motion

SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Funding:

There is deep concern with the failure of successive governments to address the crisis in SEND provision. Councils across the country are grappling with soaring high needs deficits which will exceed £5 billion next year. Over half of local councils will go bankrupt. The deficit for this council for this will be £10 million this year. The government has announced increased funding of 1.1% which is insufficient.

J Drake (JD, L): The current system for SEND is in crisis. The Labour Group has made this issue a top priority. WAFC is among the lowest funded in the country. Best Start Hubs will help. There is a SEND White Paper. Urgent change is needed and reform is on the way.

BS: Councils across the country are wrestling with the increased demand that is unsustainable. I support this motion.

R Worthington (RW, C): Pointed out that transport costs for getting SEND children to school and back home are inordinate (record high of £2.26 billion in 2023-24. Average cost per child in 2025: £8900 per annum)

M Severn (MS, LD): The Conservatives left the school section in a terrible state. I recognise the

difficulty that the current Labour government are in but they have failed to get a grip. The 1.1% uplift was welcome but not near enough. Our children have been on the chopping block of government spending for too long.

AJ: For us it's £10 million but for others its more than £100 million.

Vote: Unanimous in favour.

Support for National "Cadet Forces Day" during Armed Forces Week

NP discussed this: youth cadet services result in enhanced social mobility, improve educational outcomes, support mental and physical wellbeing, build resilience and reduce vulnerability.

Motion was passed.