

Westmorland and Furness Council 21.9.23

Chair: M S Severn

Report by Michael Hanley.

1. Public Participation

(a) Mr Studholme: Said he had carried out a feasibility study for a Kendal Leisure Centre in the late 1970s. He had wanted to create a 400 metre synthetic athletics track. Other areas had had synthetic tracks for many years. There will be a soccer pitch in the middle. The site is now a touring caravan site.

Margaret Bell: This development would have to be on the local plan. I ask you to include this facility in the next local plan. A track would contribute to local health and bring in visitors. When Kendal Athletics Club meets on Tuesday nights, we have no lights. There is nothing for the throwers and jumpers. We hold our own fixtures at either Blackburn or Blackpool. We need to give our young people the opportunity to shine.

J Brook (JB, Leader): WAFC will be starting to develop a Sports and Leisure Policy. We will welcome all local clubs to be part of this work. There is no requirement for a track in the current Local Plan. We will be developing a new Local Plan for the whole area.

(b) Jonathan Davies (JD, Clifton parish councillor): Asked about transparency of financial dealings of WAFC. To date the council has failed to publish any financial information.

JB: We are committed to providing open and transparent information. We have operated multiple payment systems for the first six months. The payments have been prepared for publication. There has been a delay due to technical issues. April figures have been published on the WAFC website.

JD: Asked about a specific payment.

JB: I have no knowledge about that and will provide you with a written answer.

2. Announcements

JB: We are less than six months old. There is a lot going on behind the scenes. We have seen how things can go spectacularly wrong as in Birmingham Council. There is an existing scheme for a two megawatt solar farm near Barrow. There has been a whole raft of training opportunities for councillors. There is an important training session on Race and Equality on the 2nd of October.

P Thornton (PT, LD): We have had a lot of wet weather. Our staff were out dealing with floods and fallen trees. We are grateful to our staff. Blocked drains contribute to flooding and flooding can block drains, chicken and egg. We have 74,000 drains and we do try to keep them all clear. We rely on residents to let us know when the drains become blocked. We have an obligation to unblock any drain, if it is blocked with gravel or leaves it will be cleared hopefully within a week. Help us clear these rains before it rains.

3. Minutes of Cabinet Meetings

E Hennessy (EH, LD): Asked about climate action plans and contracts.

G Archibald (GA, LD): This week the BBC reported that the dreadful flooding in Syria, Greece and Turkey were exacerbated by climate change. In this country there were 3000 excess deaths due

to heat. Then we had an announcement on the cutting back on zero-carbon targets from Rishi Sunak. This is disgraceful. I have grandchildren, it is their future. In WAFC we are determined to push ahead, we will produce part two of the action plan. We are looking at installing EV charging points, building solar farms and planting trees. We have partnerships (with other companies) to do things now. We have had bids for grants from a fund of £1.5 million. We want to be able to support all of them but most.

P Dew (PD, C): Asked about the cabinet minutes of June, He referred to footway lighting. When will WAFC bring in its own policy regarding footway lighting. He referred to a grant policy and to fairness across the area (a lot of parish councils in the Eden area had been encouraged to take on responsibility for various parish infrastructure (“assets”) such as street lights by the Conservative-run council prior to 2019).

PT: District councils didn't have a fully developed policy. It's about consistency, sometimes it's difficult to find the reasons for disparity. Finding out who owns the lights can be difficult. If the district council gave the commitment, we will continue this, if they said they would maintain it (the light). We will clarify this but it won't be by Christmas. If a light is out, we will find ways of turning it on. If you can't get any clarity please email me and I will try and sort it out.

W. McEwan (WME, L): Asked about the bus discount scheme for young people. A resident made enquiries to me. There is no information about this in Barrow Library.

N Hughes (NH, LD): The A2B card (for discount bus travel for young people) has a fund of £70k. It is an extension of a previous scheme operated by South Lakes District Council. I am sorry that the information is not available at Barrow Library. There is a current £2 cap. Take-up is not great at the moment but will hopefully improve.

N. Phillips (NP, C): Asked about climate change targets and private companies (partners).

GA: We need partners to hit these targets. 95% of peat has been degraded. There is an urgent need to find ways to restore peat. It is a significant absorber of carbon dioxide. Our rivers are a disgrace, one of the local rivers is in the top ten of the most polluted rivers in England. We need partners to progress quickly. The task in front of us is enormous.

J Drake (JD, LD): Asked about the Capital Programme and will the council re-open Ulverston Library and bring it up to standard?

JB: Ulverston library is important in that area. The pop-up library is now up and running. There has been progress with library services in Ulverston.

M Brereton (MB, C): Asked about the Road Improvement Scheme in his area (A590 main road to Barrow).

PT: Admitted it is a dangerous bit of road. The government needs to fully fund this stretch of road. We hope that all the attention we are getting for Barrow will bring improvement. If you have any contacts in government, tell them we need the money (speaking to Councillor Brereton, who is a Conservative councillor).

H. Irving (HI, C): Discussed Ulverston Library, how long will it take to re-open?

J Murphy (JM, L): Discussed Barrow Library and said it is the most used library in the county.

JB: I will send a written reply.

C Atkinson (CA, C): Asked about the sale of council properties.

PT: We have a commitment to deliver services, that doesn't extend to keeping buildings. The answer to your questions are all in the policy. We have too many buildings, we can't afford to keep them all going. Services are what we are about.

MB: Asked about a recent school bus contract and the policies to prevent negative impact where commercial providers withdraw services on a whim.

L Jones (LJ, Monitoring Officer): Referred to the need to give notice of questions prior to the meeting. The chair has been very lenient so far.

NH: I will give a fuller written reply. I am surprised that you are worried by competition, given you are a Tory. You should welcome that a commercial service has been introduced. Community

groups often have stepped into the breach. All bus companies have a part to play.

J Battye (J Ba, LD): Asked about the process of applying for the 20 mph limit. She had been asked by various parish councils.

PT: In Wales there has been a huge outcry but a big percentage are pro. When I was a county councillor we had people asking for a 20 mph limit in their villages. We had to explain why we couldn't, but that advice has changed. The first step is for parish councils to ask us. The next step would be a public consultation. The advice from the Department for Transport is that we would need to have buffer zones: 40-30-20 mph.

PD: The A66 is a £1.2 billion project. He asked about the impact on local areas. National Highways deny it will have any impact.

PT: I know the issues there. Recently there was a closure of the A66 and the effect on Kirkby Stephen wasn't as great as expected.

H Carrick (HC, C): Asked about affordable homes. Talked about The Egg Packing project at Lazonby. This is the conversion of buildings to affordable units. The Affordable Housing Grant was deferred this year. The project is now in jeopardy. Could the cabinet ensure that this project is supported?

JB: We are committed to deliver affordable housing. I don't know the detail of this project. We will endeavour to get up to speed with this project.

A Burns (AB, L) Discussed the funding of roads as being down to 80% population and 20% road length. She said this always disadvantaged Barrow which has the highest population with the shortest roads, so roads get heavily used (current allocation: Barrow: £230k, Eden: £250k, South Lakeland: £419k.

Total investment: £3.25 million.

Biodiversity Boost: £440k, Climate and Environment Fund: £500k, A2B Card (discount travel for young people): £70k, Youth Training and Travel Bursary: £500k, 20 mph Zones: £300k, Welfare support top up fund (to alleviate poverty): £500k, Supporting families: £300k, Occupational Therapy equipment: £80k, Virtual care pilot (telephone technology to support mainly elderly in their homes): £80k, Culture Recovery Fund (help venues and organisations post Covid): £250k, Trauma informed practice development (help people post trauma): £80k, Local sustainable travel: £150k. Also £900k to local sustainable travel (transport schemes, footpaths, cycle-paths and community transport) and £300k to Strong and Connected Communities run by locality boards.

NH: This fund is to prime schemes for the locality boards to improve transport. We are not going to change the formula. It is only until the end of this financial year.

4. Youth Justice Plan

S Sanderson (SS, LD): We have a statutory duty to provide this service. We now have our own Youth Justice Service. The plan sets out the future aims and objectives.

PD: This is an excellent report.

WMcE: Referred to the use of Tyne and Wear Psychology Services, why not local services?

SS: I will make enquiries.

MB: Could we have reports like this as stand-alone more in advance and not prior to full council meetings.

M Severn (MS, Chair, LD): We only discussed this in cabinet last week and it has come out as quickly as possible.

HC: Pointed out that Cumbria Constabulary contribution to the service has decreased ...why?

MS: I can bring that question to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

A Jarvis (AJ, LD): This reflects the complexity of the disaggregation work.

JBa: I am really pleased that we have a Youth Justice Service. Partnership between police, probation, social services and health. It will reduce reoffending, helping young people to never do it again.

Vote: To receive the plan: unanimous in favour.

5. WAFC Plan Delivery Framework.

JB: Here we have set out our ambitions. This describes how we will succeed in the aims: climate, levelling up and housing crisis. Achieving everything will not be easy. Collaboration with our partners and communities will be essential. We will be focused on action and delivery.

D Brook (DB, L): This reminded me of a plan we wrote in Barrow a few years ago. Its not all about roads, a lot about people. If we can deliver on this, it will be great.

NP: It doesn't mention the Local Government Reform we have been through. Will there be an opportunity for further devolution?

JB: A lot of the transformation will be in the medium to long term. There are budget pressures and we will have to look at how we will deliver services.

B Morgan (BM, L): Discussed how she would explain the delivery framework to one of her residents. This clearly articulates what the council wants to do. Scrutiny councillors bring a different view and their input has improved the document.

PD: Referred to Community section concerning developing power. Communities experienced this with devolvement of assets (lights etc). Taking on the street lights and toilets is an expensive undertaking. If WAFC offloads responsibilities to parish councils, they will just have to put up the precepts.

JB: This is carefully worded. Some things are easy to devolve. We will be working with our locality boards, I have met various parish councils and it is clear that one size does not fit all.

AB: Its a well presented document. She referred to the housing section and welcomed this. We have families living in damp homes and really bad conditions. I am really pleased that you talked about working with our communities. Barrow's needs are different from other areas.

HC: I welcome the framework and particularly what we aim to deliver this year. We need to have a performance framework.

WMcE: I have been working with a young woman living in a very damp property. The landlord has covered the damp walls with plastic cladding.

P Dixon (PDi, LD): There are 6000 families on the waiting list. Is this the number for the whole area or just for South Lakeland?

MS: We will have to get back to you.

6. Appointment of 3 Political Assistants (to advise the 3 main parties): Liberal Democrat: 55%, Labour: 23%, Conservative: 17%. Vote: unanimous in favour.

7. Constitution of Lake Administration Committee

AJ: Discussed the history of the ownership of the bed of Lake Windermere. With LGR SLDC ownership passed to WAFC.

LJ: There have been a lot of constitutional amendments. When we see things that need updating, we update them.

PD: Windermere PC has representatives on this committee but the PCs on the western side are not represented. We should have a more holistic view in the future.

Vote: Unanimous in favour.

8. Local Code of Corporate Governance

AJ: Governance is critically important, as are sound and clear decision making and accountability. We have to produce a governance report alongside accounts.

BM: Referred to different parts of the document including effective scrutiny function.

NH: Talked about involving our residents as much as possible in the work of the council. The public really want to know that their views are being taken seriously.

9. Constitutional Amendment Report

AJ: Amendments to be made concerning the Corporate Parenting Board, contract procedural rules relating to land and property, neighbourhood planning and Community Asset Transfer Policy. There will be a Community Asset Transfer Group.

Vote: unanimous in favour.

10. Appointment of Deputy Election Registration Officer

AB: Discussed government gerrymandering of voter ID. Can we, as a council, produce a leaflet to advise residents what they can produce for voter ID?

Vote: unanimous in favour.

11. Temporary Appointment of Councillors to Natland PC.

AJ: Natland OC has only 2 members. Councillors J Brook and D Rathbone were appointed as temporary councillors until the vacant places have been filled.

12. Urgency Report

Parkview Gardens Care Home's roof is leaking and urgently needs a new roof.

Vote: unanimous in favour.

13. Railway Ticket-office Closures

JBa: Proposed that train ticket-offices should be kept open. In the last year 220k tickets were bought at Barrow Train Station. An adviser on the platform is not good enough a service. Train companies are proposing to close up to 1000 train station ticket offices. Not everyone is able to use the ticket machines. Closure will disproportionately affect the elderly, the disabled and people with literacy problems. We need to write to the government to express our opposition. W Clark (WC, LD who is severely disabled): It is essential to keep our ticket offices open. There will be impact on the tourist industry if this goes ahead.

F Cassidy (FC, L): The Labour Group fully supports this motion. It is planned that Ulverston and Grange ticket offices will close. Barrow may fall victim in the future. These deeply unpopular moves are an example of Tory cuts. It has already caused jitters in those of us who are not tech savvy. Ulverston ticket offices will only be open two hours per day.

A Connell (AC, LD): In August 2022 we addressed a letter to the Secretary of State for Transport. We put a petition up in Appleby and after a few months there were 1300 signatures. We sent it off to to secretary of state and got polite replies. The ticket offices are especially important for occasional users.

AJ: Discussed reduced hours at Windermere Station. This is clearly about cost saving for private railways. We have the most expensive fares in Europe and the worse service.

NH: This issue shows how completely out of touch this government is. This is a government that

is determined to run the country into the ground. Botched Brexit, crazy Australian trade deal undermining local farms and continuing to allow severe pollution of rivers and lakes and our schools are collapsing. This closure of ticket offices is something that the people are coming together on.

J Filmore (JF, G): Discussed the two hours per day for Ulverston ticket office. This is inadequate for disabled people, as they only have two hours to get assistance.

DR: Its good that we have consensus. Do we want people to use the railways?

WAFC will write to Mark Harper, Minister for Transport about the council's opposition to closure of train station ticket offices.

14. Conniston Water

S Pender (SP, LD): Discussed water quality at Conniston Water and the setting up of a bathing area. Conniston PC have become involved. We are working with United Utilities to improve water quality. They have added this asset improvement to their projects.

Motion: WAFC supports the application for a designated swimming area on Conniston.