

Westmorland and Furness Full Council Meeting 7.5.25

1. Cllr Doug Rathbone (DR, LD) was elected chair.

2. Cllr Mark Rudhall was elected vice-chair.

3. Announcements

J Brooke (JB, LD): WAFC has been shortlisted for various national awards in Childrens' Services, Net Zero, Diversity Inclusion, Digital Careers, a system to monitor winter gritting, transforming energy production (Barrow solar farm). We can rightly be proud of these successes.

H Chaffey (HC, LD): The Communications team won the In-House PR Team of the Year.

J Murray (JM, LD): Discussed his recent diagnosis of third stage cancer of the prostate. He encouraged men who are offered the PSA test to take it.

P Bell (PB, LD): The CQC site visit (to Adult Social Services) will start on 23.6.25. Discussed the reshaping of Adult Social Services over the last two years. The CQC will be very interested in how we are trying to improve the service.

J Derbyshire (JD, LD): Discussed the Empty Houses strategy. There are now three Empty House Officers, one for each area. There will be an empty homes list and officers will liaise with owners. Properties may need work to get them suitable for renting or sale. The Warm Homes Grant has £11.8 million to be spent over the next three years. This is to increase the warmth of homes and will target households on low incomes and benefits. There is also the Social Housing Fund (£7 million) and WAFC will work with the various local housing associations.

4. Cabinet Meeting

D Edwards (DE, C): Asked about litter on the edge of the A590 (road to Barrow).

JB: We are working with Highways England. WAFC has responsibility for the verges. Officers are working on a programme of work. There is suspicion that this litter is coming off the back of other agency lorries.

J Drake (JD, L): Asked about the repair of Ulverston Market Hall.

A Jarvis (AJ, LD): I don't know. I will send a written response.

5 Questions from Members.

E Hennessy (EH, LD): Asked that this council remains committed to environmental goals in view of Reform's recent success.

AJ: The biggest expense in this area is the Warm Homes Grant. We have invested in the solar farm, heat pumps at public buildings, this reduces emissions but also reduces costs and saves money.

A Burns (AB, L): I know that there has been a reduction in staff who monitor litter in Barrow but this was denied.

JB: I will ask officers to provide a definitive answer.

H Irving (HI, C): Asked why Ulverston is not one of the locations for cabinet meetings.

Reply: This will be looked into.

6. Devolution

JB: The government is looking at WAFC's responses. The public consultation has run for 8 weeks. If the government accepts the application there will be an election for mayor in May 2026.

The mayor will be shared with Cumberland Council.

7. Electoral Review

The Local Government Boundary Commission has been looking at WAFC. Changes to the boundary between Penrith North and Penrith South have not been supported. There are no changes to Alston and Fellside apart from the name change to Alston Moor and Fellside.

8. Annual Report

JB: Discussed achievements: solar farm near Barrow, Voreda House, 20 mph scheme, delivery of enhanced bus service, improvements at Sandgate Primary School. Ofsted assesment gave “good” grade. The Health and Wellbeing Board has a 10 year plan to improve health. Also there is a 10 year plan to improve Arts and Culture.

PB: I am especially proud of our Intermediate Care Bed Service. This allows patients to leave hospital earlier which reduces bed blocking in hospitals.

J Battye (JBa, LD): We have very few students who are permanently excluded from school and a high percentage of 16-17 year olds still in school (target: 90%, actual: 97.5%).

P Thornton (PT, LD): £150 million is being spent to improve digital connectivity and provide 5G (fibre internet connection via Fibrus) and 5G.

JM: Pointed out the increased usage of bus services since the improvements in the schedules last year (increased from 6300 journeys to 20,000 over 9 months).

8. Council Annual Plan

JB: We are keeping Sustainability as a central tenet. We are developing a new waste collection system and will encourage residents to avoid littering. We plan to increase housing in our area.

N Philips (NP, C): The single waste service will be welcomed (each former district council area has different waste collection services).