

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2.12.21.

Present: Chair: Joan Raine, Councillors: Darell Smith, Gordon Nicholson, Debra Wicks, Mike Eyles, Doug Lawson, Gordon Simkins, David Ryland, Michael Hanley, Mary Robinson.
Officer: Fergus Mc Morrow (Assistan Director of Development), Amanda Yellowley

1. Questions from the Public

The first question concerned the devolution of assets. EDC had sent a badly drafted questionnaire (from the Devolution of Assets Task and Finish Group) asking for a reply within ten days. Many PCs would not have time to reply in time because they would not have a meeting in that time period. Why is devolution of assets treated with such low priority?

Joan Raine (JR): We will send you a written answer.

2. Portfolio Holder Questions and Answers. Mary Robinson

Mary Robinson (MR): Prior to Covid, which has slowed us down, £600k has been given out in recent months to local businesses. Supporting local businesses has taken up most of the staff's time. We have been working with LEP. The focus was mainly on Penrith. Kirkby Stephen, Appleby and Alston also need support. An economic development framework has gone to the executive. We have £10 million and we have to focus on what we can deliver. We have rejoined the Cumbria Chamber of Commerce. We had the Eden Tourism Conference this week. We were asked to extend this conference to the whole of Cumbria but we couldn't. We have done a lot of work with Carlisle on a rural economy project. We will be looking to the south of Cumbria in the future due to LGR. Eden has been leading on this. Decarbonisation is very important to farming. We have problems with processing local meat. Most of it has to go out of county for butchering and processing. A shortage of butchers and abattoir workers is a problem. We are looking at a heritage centre in Appleby. We need to support businesses in Alston and Kirkby Stephen. The night time culture in Penrith is not very good, which is one reason why we are having difficulty in attracting younger people to Penrith.

JR: Did you work with Nestle? They have been asking farmers to plant more hedgerows to reduce the carbon footprint and knock the stone walls down.

MR: I will take that back. A lot is happening with big business trying to reduce their carbon footprint.

Gordon Nicholson (GN): You have described a lot of activity. How many new jobs and apprenticeships have been created and what is the turnover and profitability of the companies?

MR: A lot of these projects have not started. I can tell you how many jobs we have managed to keep.

Fergus Mc Morrow (FMcM): We will not be able to get a lot of that information.

GN: Surely, having made the investment, its important to find out the result.

MR: We were one of the highest furloughed areas in the country. We haven't seen the staff being made redundant.

GN: There is an absence of any targets in the corporate plan. Its easy to come and talk but you need to quantify the outputs.

Mike Eyles (ME): You mentioned meat going out of Cumbria. Pig farmers are having to kill their own pigs, is this happening locally?

MR: This weekend an abattoir in south Cumbria had no power. This delayed them getting the meat into the shops. They had to get a generator in. We dont have enough abattoirs in the county. Some goes to Harrogate and then back to Morrisons. The problem is getting people to work in them. The average age of a Cumbrian farmer is 58 and a lot are retiring.

ME: Is there anything that the council can do to encourage a wider service to the farming community?

David Ryland (DR): I hope the council will adhere to non-halal as regards to meat processing.

3. Corporate Performance. Amanda Yellowley (AY) Assistant Director, Customers and Performance.

DR: Do you know how much carbon is being emitted in the district? What is the council trying to achieve?

AY: We are down to one member in that department and I will find out.

Doug Banks (DB): When you recycle IT equipment will any of it be sent to schools?

AY: I dont know.

JR: What is the "We are Team", mentioned in the Arts and Culture section of the report?

AY: This is a new group, to do with organising arts events.

DB: Any progress in new homes?

FMcM: There is a lot of monitoring and review going on. I could find out more detail for you.

JR: Is there any recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee?

DR: The executive should focus on the Planning Department who are falling behind.

FMcM: We are producing a plan. The service has been falling behind due to lack of resources.

Debra Wicks (DW): Its comforting to know that you are dealing with it.

FMcM: The performance of the Planning Department is really very good and its ahead of the national average. There has been a 30% increase in planning applications in the last year. We have recently successfully recruited two new town planners. I hope to be able to retain our good performance.

4. Devolution of Assets Task and Finish Group.

JR: We were running behind with this task and finish group. One feeling was that we had to confer with the parish councils. I didn't know that EALC (Eden Association of Local Councils) had sent out a questionnaire. There has been a lack of communication somewhere. It is really disappointing that this happened and it looked like we got egg on our face.

MR: That didn't happen via the executive.

JR: Very few PCs responded to it. Members Support didn't tell us this was happening.

GN: I made some enquiries into this. There was a presentation to parish and town councils. There may have been a question from someone at that meeting. Subsequently EALC made some enquiries and they were told that all the assets would be taken into the new authority. From that some parish council clerks think that the Task and Finish Group would serve no purpose as the new authority will make up its mind what to do. One of the main aims of the TFG is to clear up what is happening. A number of PCs have decided they want dark skies and therefore will have no lights.

MR: Whatever is left in Eden will go to the new authority.

JR: I was astonished with the email from Penrith Town Council which said that a lot of the other clerks had been getting the Penrith town clerk's advice.

Doug Lawson (former Penrith mayor): The Penrith town clerk is very well versed and the clerks defer to her. I have heard that a lot of the clerks are not going to move on the assets until the new authority comes.

JR: The parish councils pay a subscription to CALC (Cumbria Association of Local Councils).

MR: We support CALC and the PCs pay subscriptions.

GN: I understand that the money for footway lighting is no longer there.

MR: We will be setting a new budget for 2021-22. We have to sort out this mess out before we

leave.

Darrel Smith: Are there any other plans to reach out to the parish councils?

DB: This has been going on since 2014 and some PCs still haven't made up their minds.

5. Any Other Items.

MR: I had wanted to discuss Councillor Hanley's report from the Cumbria Health Scrutiny Committee from October, but it wasn't put on the agenda. I circulated the report and hope you read it.

Michael Hanley: There is another Health Scrutiny Committee meeting next Tuesday and I will write a report and send it to this committee.

JR: It will be put on the agenda for the next meeting.