

Shadow Authority for Westmoreland and Furness Council 19.12.22

Report by Michael Hanley.

1. Chair's Announcements

Jonathan Brook (JB, Leader, LD): We are making good progress regarding the new council.

2. Independent Remuneration Panel Report.

Paul Jones, chair of the panel spoke. Allowances are set at 50% of the live year. (£6k for shadow year and £12k per annum from April 23.) Leader: £21k per annum (initially shadow year was going to be 50%, but due to the volume of work, this has been increased to regular remuneration of £21k per annum). Also the deputy leader will receive £11.22k per annum (100%) and chair of the council will receive £4.88k per annum).

P Dixon (PDix, LD): I would like to thank those councillors with special responsibilities for all the extra work they have done.

Phil Dew (PD, C): Appendix 1 makes the comment that there was no representations from the Conservative Group. This group had no objections to the original proposals. Most of the work has been done by the officers.

Anne Burns (AB, L): PD suggested that councillors had no input into this and it was all the work of the officers. We look at the whole range, the officers don't make decisions, they are there to give advice and guidance. I think its petty to make these comments.

A Jarvis (AJ, LD): I agree with Cllr Burns. The decisions are at the end of a long process. I have been spending 20-30 hours per week on WAFC work. I would like the report to have more comparators (of what other similar council are paying their councillors).

JB: The comments just made demonstrate a lack of awareness of the workload undertaken by various councillors.

T Callister (TC, L): I would concur with what the leader said. Cllr Dew doesn't appear to understand

the workings of the council and chooses to use misleading rhetoric.

PDix: What Cllr Dew said was entirely disingenuous. I would encourage councillors who have done well, to give their remuneration to a charity.

Vote: For: unanimous.

3. Appointment of Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer.

JB: The Senior Appointments Committee has agreed to appoint Linda Jones to this post. The recruitment process was vigorous.

H Carrick (HC, C, leader of the Conservative Group): If she is appointed before 1.4.23 will her salary come out of the implementation fund?

Paul Sutton (officer): Yes.

Vote: For: unanimous.

4. Adoption of Westmoreland and Furness Plan.

JB: This is our first council plan. Lots of work has gone into it. It shows how we will support our communities. It highlights why this area is such a great place to live and work. Also it highlights

climate change and loss of biodiversity. We seek to be inclusive of everyone. We will have to work with communities, parishes and the Third Sector. We will be ecologically aware. We will have to revisit it as we go through the life of the council. We need to keep our residents and parish councillors informed about how we will work together. There will be financial difficulties. The organisation is involved in the employment of about 9000 people. We will make sure that our services are more joined up and operate efficiently. We need to empower our workforce to make decisions in a customer-beneficial way. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. We will create a dynamic council that will deliver first class services.

H Hodgson (HH, LD): Thank you for the plan.

Other Councillor: Referred to contributions from young people including Cumbria Youth Parliament.

N Phillips: Asked about the Climate Impact Assessment which was discussed in September 22. As a councillor I don't have enough information to make a decision. When will we see the KPIs (Key Performance Indices)?

JB: The plan is a high level plan, as we go through, more detail will emerge. We in the cabinet, are not in possession of all the information.

TC: I think its appropriate to thank all those involved with producing this document.

PD: I think the document fails. The original draft was so vague. The current plan is the same. I could describe it as utopian. The plan needs to be realistic and achievable. One of the comments from the Youth Council was to make the plan more realistic. The priorities should prioritise but they don't, they include everything. The decision making process will be tortuous and very long. One unintended consequence could be higher house prices. I would like to make a comment about the intention to achieve carbon-zero by 2037. That investment will have no impact on the climate. Can we be a bit more realistic and pragmatic?

M Brereton (MB C): I am interested in the comparators: life expectancy and house prices. We shouldn't lose sight of the glaring inequalities. There is a lot of hard work to do with levelling up across the three previous council areas.

V Hughes (VH, LD): I am very positive about this. I like the way it talks about the challenges. We have to get started somewhere. Cllr Archibald (not present) would talk about what we can do about climate change and loss of diversity. I don't agree with Cllr Dew that this is not achievable.

AB: We have to look at the positives. We want to support our young and old residents. We want to support measures to combat climate change. We have a Health and Wellbeing Board that supports people with inequalities. It is a working document. I think it is a good first step.

B Shirley (BS, C): Thank you to all those who put this plan together. It is our role to scrutinise this document. The leader (JB) deserves recognition for getting out of Kendal and meeting business people in Barrow. We should have more focus on Barrow. There is a lot of focus on the National Park in the document. There will possibly another 2000 jobs in the Barrow area in the next year.

A Connell (AC, LD): To call it unrealistic is unrealistic. Decisions and policies can be measured against it.

HC: It is a huge milestone to produce this at this stage. It is very positive. The visions and values are spot on. The authority is not going to be able to deliver everything so there has to be prioritisation. There is a need to rebuild trust in local authorities. My caution is that we need to be able to manage the expectations of our stake-holders.

S Sanderson (SS, LD): One of the implications of what has been said is that this is the product of officers. It is a high level document. It's looking at the transition of four councils into one. The big thing will be the delivery of the plan. Linked to that will be performance indications. It is challenging to put together a document that will guide us over the next five years. It is not down to a group of officers in a cupboard writing it.

JB: Councillor Dew, I note your concerns. There has been a considerable change from the first to the second document. We have taken on board lots of feedback. When we go through the next

year and look back at the budget, there will be difficult decisions. There will be other documents such as a Delivery Plan. Manufacturing is important in Barrow. I recently spent some time there including time with the senior management of BAE. BAE has an opportunity of driving forward the whole economy of that area. Barrow has the opportunity of a significant renaissance along with the new town council (Barrow Town Council).

Vote: For: unanimous.

5. Questions from Members.

J Murray (JM, LD): What is the Leader's view of the proposed new coal mine?

JB: The decision has damaged our reputation as a climate change champion. We would want to dissociate ourselves from the decision. We have to rapidly phase out fossil fuels and should be looking to create green sustainable jobs. We, as a council, will be focussed on this.

PD: On the 9th of December there was a meeting of the cabinet, 80% of the staff (of the council) knew where they will be (which jobs they will be transferred to after the new council starts operating). There are some who are uncertain about their jobs. A deficit of £19 million was indicated. How will you manage this?

JB: All staff will be notified at the earliest opportunity. The staff who haven't been informed are a members of smaller teams where it is more difficult to disaggregate (find them new posts).

S Plum (Interim Head of Paid Service): So far 88% of staff have been informed and allocated and will keep their jobs.

AJ: There is a gap of £19 million based on a broad assumption of government funding. The government will allow a larger increase in council tax. We are waiting for the local government settlement (from government). Our ambition is to improve services, not cut them.

BS: Asked about the Abbey Care Home (in Staveley, near Kendal, which is threatened with closure).

JB: This causes concern to the people of Staveley. It's had a long history. It's currently within the remit of the County Council to make those decisions. We will have a briefing at tomorrow's Cabinet meeting. After the meeting, we will make a statement as to how to go forward.

End of meeting.