

Executive Report to Full Council – 12 September 2013

Leader – Councillor Elaine Woodburn

This Executive report for Full Council has deliberately been kept to a minimum to ensure adequate time is given to the main agenda items

Nuclear Issues

A meeting with Baroness Verma Junior Minister for DECC and Michael Fallon, Minister for Business and Enterprise took place recently where the main area of conversation was the impact on the Government's retention of business rates scheme, due to the adverse effect of the rates appeal by Sellafield

Managing Waste

Consideration of the best approach to siting a geological disposal facility continues with DECC appraisal of responses to the call for comment on lessons learned from the MRWS process. DECC has previously advised of the intention to consult over a revised process in the autumn. The Cumbria LEP has discussed and commented on the process. A letter to the Secretary of State at DECC reiterates the significance of the energy sector to the Cumbrian economy and economic activity in West Cumbria in particular. As soon as the consultation is launched all members will be given the opportunity to feed in their views before a final response is made.

CORE (Cumbrians Opposed to a Radioactive Environment) - Radioactive Particles on West Cumbrian Beaches - the case for the provision of signs to advise the public

A request has been received to make sure members are aware of this publication which is advocating the placement of signs along our beaches warning users of radioactive particles – copies will be available in the member's room. The document reflects similar received in the past. In these cases the Council is dependent on the expertise of others, namely the Environment Agency and Public Health England (formerly the Health Protection Agency) to determine the potential need for the Council to any action which might be required. Should such advice result in the need for the Council to make a decision about signage, an appropriate report would be prepared for consideration.

Finance and HR Portfolio – Councillor Gillian Troughton

Human Resources

Our attendance performance records show that July has shown a decrease in the number of days absent from June (some 38.5 days less than June figures). This is encouraging, especially when the employees are continuously concerned about their future, due to the

government cuts and we will be monitoring it closely throughout the year to ensure this continues.

As members will recall we have agreed to the sharing of a HR Manager with Allerdale and Interviews are now complete and an offer has been made to an individual for the post.

Finance

The Statutory Accounts were completed to the statutory deadline and the audit is now underway.

Revenue & Benefits

The Benefit Cap was implemented nationally on 15th July. So far we have 4 cases and are expecting to be notified of 14 in total by mid-August.

Next Mail was introduced across the 3 shared service sites at the end of July. Introducing Next Mail across the Partnership will reduce the time spent by Team Leaders distributing documents for processing and improve the efficiency of resource allocation amongst the three operational sites. It is anticipated that this will lead to better consistency and comparable performance levels across the service.

Data is currently being produced and analysed to assess the financial impact of the changes introduced to Council Tax discounts and the impact of the new Council Tax Reduction scheme introduced on 1st April 2013, to feed into a review of the scheme for 2014/15.

Discussions are on-going with the other Cumbrian authorities to analyse the potential benefits of Pooling for Business Rates. The deadline for the submission to DLG is the end of October, though whether Copeland is included will depend on the outcome of our discussions with Government re the Sellafield impact.

Contracts & Property

The Council has recently undergone a programme of surplus land disposals. Out of the 10 land parcels marketed, four of the smaller land parcels were sold confirming that the market is still depressed for larger housing developments.

The Fixed Term Maintenance Contract has now gone out to Tender, Mechanical, Electrical, and Building. This is the single largest Value Contract the Council holds of approximately 3.6 million; the invitation to tender went out in the last week of August.

Democratic Services

Current priorities for the elections team are the 2013 postal vote refresh for 501 electors, and preparation for the 2013 canvass starting in October. Longer term plans are for introduction of Individual Elector Registration in summer 2014, replacing household-based registration

Community Planning Portfolio – Councillor George Clements

Planning Policy

The Core Strategy Examination continues, the Inspector carried out a short consultation with interested parties on the potential implications of the recently published CLG Planning Practice Guidance on Renewable and Low Carbon Energy. (This includes national planning advice on wind turbines and other renewable energy related development and was therefore considered particularly relevant to policy in Copeland). This consultation ended on Friday 16th August. The Inspector will now consider the small number of responses given and finalise his report which is now expected in mid to late September. This will delay the expected progress towards adoption but once we receive the Inspector's Report we will make the necessary changes and produce the final Core Strategy and Development Management Policies document, which will be presented to a meeting of the LDF Working Party for approval. This is likely to be in mid to late October. Once approved the plan will be presented to Full Council in December for adoption.

Development Management

More permitted development rights have been introduced to enable greater flexibility in changes of use – most significant of these for the Council is likely to relate to the size of buildings where some changes of use will be permitted without the need for a specific planning permission, and greater flexibility to introduce retail and similar commercial uses without the need for permission.

The success of the Development Management team in maintaining a high level of performance when determining applications for planning permission for major development has been recognised. It will be increasingly challenging to maintain performance levels, as a relatively small number of complex applications, which require more detailed scrutiny, or where external bodies are unable to provide necessary information, can change the proportion of applications determined within statutory time limits. This becomes increasingly important as the DCLG introduces powers to designate poorly performing authorities and place their decision making powers for some planning applications with the Planning Inspectorate.

Proposed wind turbines – Weddicar Rigg

The Inquiry into proposed wind turbines at Weddicar Rigg took place in July. The appellants submitted an application for a partial award of costs, but there is some confidence that Counsel and consultants representing the Council were able to put forward an evidence case to support members' decision to refuse, at least sufficient to limit scope for an award of costs against the Council. The expected date for a decision is now November 2013.

As noted above new, national guidance has been released - Planning practice guidance for renewable energy – refers to a range of different renewable energy related development but is particularly pertinent for this Council in its guidance relating to wind turbines. It is

considered that guidance is reflected in the existing approach and practice already applied by the Council. A report providing great detail is to be tabled with Planning Panel and Strategic Nuclear and Energy Board. It is hoped to arrange a workshop event, in conjunction with CALC, in the near future to enable further discussion and consideration of planning issues relating to wind turbines.

Community Regeneration Portfolio – Councillor Hugh Branney

Quality at the Beacon

After being recently assessed by Visit England under the Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme, The Beacon continues to offer its visitors ‘high standards of customer service’ and has once again attained Quality Assured Visitor Attraction Status. The Beacon was visited by a mystery shopper at the end of July and was assessed against many quality benchmarks. The assessor described The Beacon as a “comprehensive museum which provides a memorable and enjoyable experience for a wide audience”. Of The Beacon’s current blockbuster exhibitions “Ice Age – Life After Dinosaurs” and “Shark! Myths & Reality”, she said “The temporary exhibitions were to a very high standard and seen to be enjoyed by visitors”.

Visitor Numbers

During the School holidays this year, 2013, the Beacon visitor numbers have been over 11,000, 50% more visitors than the summer period last year. In terms of paying visitors, this has doubled in 2013 summer holidays compared to 2012 summer holidays.

Volunteers

The Beacon has been appreciative of the support of its many volunteers over the busy summer period; 6 from Copeland Council, 4 members of the community and at least 34 from Sellafield. Volunteer feedback about the exhibitions has been very positive with some offering to volunteer further.

Copeland Work & Skills Partnership

Members of Copeland’s Work & Skills Partnership are developing a set of key measures and projects to help address issues arising from the Work Programme and the impact of Welfare Reform. The Partnership is taking forward proposals under Employability to provide basic work experience; intensive Information, Advice and Guidance and improved digital access – delivery will concentrate on enhancing and adding to current services and providers to plug key gaps. In addition, the Partnership has identified the need to improve Employer Engagement, specifically through DWP.

Derelict and Dilapidated Buildings Programme

Our derelict and dilapidated buildings programme continues to target key eyesore buildings in the borough and maintains a rolling programme over the next 12 months. Actions

continue on priority buildings, the most high profile at present being the former Bus Depot in Whitehaven.

Coastal Regeneration and Destination Management

The focus at present is to pull together a Whitehaven application to the Coastal Communities Fund seeking £1m to achieve the outcome of “Coastal communities experiencing regeneration and economic growth through projects that directly or indirectly create sustainable jobs and safeguard existing jobs”. The bid will seek to strengthen harbour linkages to ensure the economic vitality of the town. Visitors will be encouraged to visit both the harbour and the town centre and priority will be given to attract inward investment from businesses wishing to locate to the town. Ideas in the pipeline currently look at strengthening the connection with the C2C; strengthening business opportunities and strengthening the cultural offer.

Work continues on the coastal programme, to improve signage and interpretation along the coast and support key community-led projects including Silecroft visitor hub.