

Executive Report to Full Council – 20 June 2013

Strategic Leadership and Nuclear Policy Portfolio – Councillor Elaine Woodburn

Meeting with the Chair of LGA

The Chief Executive and I attended a meeting with the chair of the LGA Sir Merrick Cockell at which the latest financial outlook for the sector was discussed. There are estimated to be 86 councils at a financial tipping point following the latest settlement highlighting the cuts this follows on from previous LGA work on the graph of doom.

The treasury also recently announced that it had reached a settlement with 7 government departments including DCLG raising the prospect of new cuts to funding for local services in 2014/15

How this will translate to the position for local councils is not yet known. The full announcement is expected on 26th June 2013.

We also took the opportunity to invite Sir Merrick to visit Copeland for more detailed discussions on our particular challenges.

Nuclear

MRWS

Following consultation with Executive members, members who represented the Council on the MRWS partnership, and after a workshop session open to all members, a paper has been prepared and submitted to DECC in response to a call for evidence on the effectiveness of the MRWS process which lead up to the decisions of Copeland, Allerdale and Cumbria in January 2013. The document was submitted on 10th June 2013. Responses will inform a formal consultation process over GDF and a process for potential site assessment and selection later this year.

Sellafield Ltd

The Treasury has issued a response to the report of the Public Accounts Committee on the operations of Sellafield Limited – “Managing Risk at Sellafield”. The Treasury accepts the findings and recommendation of the PAC with little debate. A report will be presented to the next available session of SNEB to provide members with an analysis of the findings of this process and any possible consequences for the Council.

Finance and HR Portfolio – Councillor Gillian Troughton

Property

The term contract for our building maintenance programme for 2013 – 2016 is being tendered. The contract strategy was agreed by Executive at its meeting on 28th May 2013. The works will be divided into three lots:

- (a) Building works;
- (b) Electrical installation works; and
- (c) Mechanical engineering installation works.

In respect of each lot or type of works there will be three types of service required:

- (i) Planned maintenance works;
- (ii) Minor works; and
- (ii) Reactive maintenance works.

Companies are able to bid for 1,2 or 3 lots. The advert went out on the 13th June for interested companies to submit and complete a Pre qualification questionnaire by 29th July 2013. This will be evaluated and a shortlist of 6 contractors per lot invited to tender in August. The new arrangements will commence on 1st December 2013.

Transition and Performance Portfolio – Councillor Allan Holliday

Customer Services

Over the last 2 months Copeland Direct has dealt with 10,500 calls and work flowed 247 Council Tax direct debits. Over the course of the this year we will be looking at ways to make it even easier for customers to set up council tax direct debits as we recognise that for some of our customers this will be the most convenient way for them to pay council tax. It is also the most cost effective way for the Council to collect council tax. At a time when we are trying to drive down revenue costs, this may be one way to help to do this whilst meeting customer expectations. Currently 55% of our customers pay by direct debit.

Work has also continued with our Environmental Health Team to ensure that Copeland Direct can deal with the maximum number of routine customer enquiries on behalf of the Environmental Health Team. This work has been a joint project and has helped the Team move to Moresby Depot as part of delivering the Council's wider accommodation strategy.

Policy and Transformation

Work is progressing steadily on the phase 1 of the Change Programme Plan which has included dealing with known and immediate issues and commitments. The new website has

been launched and has seen an increase in the number of visitors. Other work is underway with regard to the number and type of printers used within the Council in order to drive down costs associated with running the Council. As part of our approach to enabling customers to self-serve more, we are working towards making kiosks available for customers to use in offices which receive a high number of visitors. This will help reduce queue times and help customers access more information and services on-line in an environment where they can receive help and support should they need it.

Community Planning Portfolio – Councillor George Clements

Planning Policy

The public hearing part of the examination into the Core Strategy and Development Management Policy DPD took place over the 9th and 10th April. The fact that the examination took less than two days reflects preparation by officers and members of the LDF Working Party. The Inspector raised a number of issues, largely seeking to provide absolute consistency with the National Planning Policy Framework. The Inspector did not raise particular issue with the changes but suggested that they did represent major modification for the purpose of this process, which required a further period of consultation, which concluded on 10th June 2013. At the time of preparation of this report 3 further comments have been received. These will be considered and the Inspector advised to enable continued consideration of the soundness of the plan. It remains the view of officers that will continue to be possible to provide members with the opportunity to confirm adoption of the plan in September/October this year.

Development Management

Permitted Development Rights – A number of previously reported consultations from the Department of Communities and Local Government have now moved to become legislation. The most notable change is the extension of permitted development rights for residential properties. Passage of the legislation through Parliament has resulted in some unwieldy processes, including a requirement to consult neighbours in cases where development is not considered to need planning permission. This will result in cost to the Council with no related application fee. This has been raised nationally by bodies such as the Local Government Association, who have referred to the additional costs imposed on local planning authorities. In Copeland it is considered that the change, whilst an additional burden, will relate to a relatively small number of cases.

Building Control

Building Control continues to move to operation without paper documents. All submissions are now handled electronically, reducing printing costs considerably. The next stage is to handle more planning related work electronically. This is more complex as a result of volume and range of documentation, and the need to provide for public access, but it is hoped that this can develop the considerable advances in managing building control documentation.

Housing

Assisting and Preventing Homeless People

There has been a 40% increase in the number of people seeking advice on housing issues compared to the first two months of 2012/13. The majority of customers are seeking accommodation. The housing team is working closely with landlords to prevent homelessness wherever possible. All our Housing Team work with very vulnerable clients and we have experienced a heightened level of distress amongst users and residents contacting our services. To this end, all our team have attended a suicide prevention training session so they are aware of what to look for and how to make referrals/provide advice to keep the customer safe. This training session was hosted by Copeland and officers from revs and bens, customer services and CAB also attended.

The length of time people are staying in temporary accommodation has increased slightly in the last quarter. We believe this is an impact of the under occupation welfare reforms as there are fewer one and two bedroom properties available for existing residents and homeless applicants to bid for on Choice Based Lettings. We continue to focus attention on prevention and the use of rent deposits.

The applications for Discretionary Housing Payments are being monitored by both our housing team and Revs and Bens to enable appropriate support and referrals to be made to support individuals and families in need. 107 cases have been processed with 50 grants totaling £12,789 allocated in the first two months. This equates to an average increase in monthly demand of 700%.

Our strategic review of homelessness in Copeland is almost complete and will form the basis of our revised five year homelessness strategy for Copeland which will take us to 2018. The consultation will take place this summer.

Environment Portfolio – Councillor Peter Kane

Drigg Beach Unexploded Shells

After a busy year so far with flooding and snow affecting the Borough our Emergency Planning team were again called into action to deal with a rather different incident. On Saturday 1 June 2013 a member of the public contacted the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) to report a considerable number of ammunition shells washed up on Drigg Beach. The MCA attended and cordoned off approximately one mile of beach until the Royal Naval Bomb Disposal Unit could attend. A controlled explosion to make safe some 100 shells occurred on Monday with around another 100 shells being destroyed on Tuesday afternoon.

The Emergency Planning Team's role was to co-ordinate with the Coastguard to ensure that the area of Beach was not accessible to the public and advise the Communications team to ensure that messages could be transmitted through the media.

Copeland BC Parks and Open Spaces operatives delivered 100 sandbags to Drigg Beach on Tuesday afternoon at the request of the Royal Naval Bomb Disposal Unit to enable them to dig a large hole surrounded by sandbags in which they could detonate the shells in a controlled way. The task to destroy the ordnance was completed by 19:30 on 4 June and all beach restrictions have now been lifted.

The ordnance was from World War II and thought to have been washed up in the Spring tides that have disturbed the seabed. It is well-known that redundant World War II ammunition was dumped at sea in the Solway Firth resulting in material washing up periodically over the years.

Bid for Flood and Coastal Risk Management Funding

We have recently made a submission to the Environment Agency for DEFRA Flood and Coastal Risk Management Grant, for a total of up to £1.35m. The speculative bids have been made for possible projects at Seascale (£850k), St Bees (£250k) and Whitehaven (£300k).

This has been a routine annual process for the Council, but this year's bidding process differs from previous years. In the past bids had been submitted solely for appraisal studies. The appraisal studies would have identified the need for future coastal defence work. A subsequent bid would then be made for support for the actual coastal defence works. For this year's process stand-alone appraisal studies no longer attract DEFRA funding. Instead, at the outset, a speculative bid for funding for both the appraisal and potential coastal defence scheme is submitted. It follows therefore that the appraisal stage of a project may identify coastal defence works cannot be not justified and no further grant funding will be forthcoming.

In terms of the submissions themselves at Seascale and St Bees the issue being raised is coastal erosion. The bid is for projects to ensure that the existing coastal defences will continue to provide the necessary level of protection to both residential and commercial properties. At Whitehaven the issue is coastal flooding, where erosion of south shore could potentially lead to a failure of the harbour wall.

The Environment Agency will now verify the submission from Copeland, before submitting a combined bid for the whole North West region to DEFRA. The Environment Agency is expected to know the outcome of bids in October and formal notification to us is anticipated around January 2014.

Community Regeneration Portfolio – Councillor Hugh Branney

Child Poverty

Unicef says children in the UK are facing a bleaker future under the current Coalition Government. High rates of teenage pregnancy, low rates of young people in education, employment and training place the UK in a poor position. Unicef say it expected to worsen as a result of coalition policy which has seen 26% cuts in young people's budgets across the board in England in 2011-12. The charity's report says "since 2010 downgrading of youth

policy and cuts to local government are having a profound negative effect on young people". The Family and Parenting Institute and the Institute for Fiscal Studies have estimated that 400,000 more children will be living in poverty by 2015/16. (BBC and Guardian 10 April)

Copeland Youth Council

The Youth Council visited Westminster at the beginning of April. 18 members benefitted and enjoyed their tour of parliament, and whilst there they went to see 'Billy Elliot' and enjoyed the sights and sounds of London. Young Cumbria will be working with the Council and the Youth Forums on an alcohol misuse campaign project as the Youth Council and Forums continue to develop projects in line with their priorities set last year.

Copeland Work & Skills Partnership

Members of Copeland's Work & Skills Partnership held a meeting in April to discuss Welfare Reform and opportunities for joint working to address key issues arising from current changes. Local issues were discussed, focusing on the potential address some of the challenges that national changes and local conditions were presenting. The next Partnership was planned to concentrate on key themes and create some joint solutions towards supporting local people into work and training, as well as supporting people coming off the Work Programme.

Copeland Apprenticeship Initiative

The Copeland Apprenticeship Initiative is proving to be an excellent route for Copeland's young people in securing sustainable employment. Since the scheme commenced in March 2011, 18 apprentices have completed their apprenticeship, and of these, 13 (72%) have remained in employment, either with their existing employer or an alternative employer.

Whitehaven THI

Following an intense period of development work, the Regeneration Team has submitted our Stage 2 application to Heritage Lottery Fund for the Whitehaven Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme. The development phase has involved the creation of a proposed schedule of targeted buildings and works, focused on commercial buildings and opportunities for public realm improvements; detailed engagement with local stakeholders and businesses, and skills development through the mini Skills Fair designed to encourage local trades to benefit from the opportunity to broaden their business offer and technical skills. This phase has shown strong interest from building owners across the THI area and created a lot of local involvement from residents and businesses during the public consultation. It has also raised awareness of this unique opportunity to help link one of our most prestigious current commercial developments – Albion Square – with Whitehaven's heritage and historic town centre.

Beacon

Copeland Borough Council and Sellafield Ltd are working through the partnership development issues to produce a 5 year business plan and full partnership agreement for a joint delivery partnership for The Beacon Museum. From 1st June, 2013, Sellafield have a formal license arrangement with us for a project office at The Beacon. We continue to meet as partners to work through exhibitions, education, communications and commercial issues during this transition year. A small Sellafield display to replace the existing exhibition will be installed in June 2013 but a major redevelopment of The Beacon from 6 January, 2014, will see a new permanent display opening to the public next spring.

From 13th July, 2013, until 5th January, 2014, The Beacon will be featuring a blockbuster double bill of exhibitions “Ice Age: Life after Dinosaurs” and “Shark!”. These exhibitions have been possible thanks to external sponsorship funding from national mobile app company, Appetyte, and Copeland’s own Beacon sinking fund. We are extending opening days and hours including a Thursday evening during the summer which will maximise the potential for local people and wider visitors to see these special shows in addition to the permanent Beacon displays. Our partner, Sellafield are assisting with additional staffing support during the summer exhibition.

A new five year Tourism Strategy for West Cumbria

The Council continues to be an active partner and accountable body for the West Cumbria Tourism Partnership. A new strategy is being developed which informs the bid to BEC for continued support for a package of resource to continue the impact of the partnership in developing tourism businesses, marketing the West Coast under the Western Lake District branding and sustaining a range of activities to support local, business and wider visitor economy activity. The West Cumbria Tourism website and social media activity continues to grow and maximise information to visitors.

Both Lowes Court and Millom Discovery Museum are working to maintain their TIC services.