

COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 1 DECEMBER 2011

Present: Councillors: John Jackson (Mayor); David Banks; John Bowman; Jackie Bowman; George Clements; Peter Connolly; Karl Connor; Brian Dixon; Margarita Docherty; Jon Downie; Eileen Eastwood; Geoffrey Garrity; Fred Gleaves; Phil Greateorex; Stephen Haraldsen; Reg Heathcote; Ian Hill; Keith Hitchen; Lena Hogg; Allan Holliday; Joan Hully; Alan Jacob; Michael McVeigh; David Moore; Alistair Norwood; Jack Park; Sam Pollen; David Riley; Robert Salkeld; Gilbert Scurrah; William Southward; Peter Stephenson; Gillian Troughton; Peter Tyson; Jeanette Williams; Norman Williams; Elaine Woodburn; Carole Woodman; Henry Wormstrup

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Geoffrey Blackwell; Hugh Branney; Yvonne Clarkson; Anne Faichney; John Fallows; John Kane; Peter Kane; Dave Smith; Graham Sunderland; Paul Whalley; Doug Wilson; Felicity Wilson.

C 62 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 13 October 2011 were signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

C 63 Declarations of Interests

Councillors Elaine Woodburn, David Moore, Allan Holliday, Henry Wormstrup, and Keith Hitchen declared personal interests in Agenda Item 8 Executive Report – MRWS due to being members of the partnership;

Councillor Sam Pollen declared a Personal Interest in Agenda item 8 Executive Report – Nuclear Newbuild and MRWS due to being employed at Sellafield;

Councillors Peter Stephenson and Henry Wormstrup declared Personal and Prejudicial Interests in Agenda Item 8 Service Charge due to being a tenant and left the meeting during issues relating to this item.

Councillor Fee Wilson declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 8 – Lighthouse Project due to being a Director of the Lighthouse

Councillor John Bowman declared a Personal Interest in Councillor Questions on issues relating to Woodlands Care Home due to being an attendee of the Woodlands Support Group

C 64 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor referred to the various engagements he had fulfilled since the last meeting of the Council.

C 65 Petitions

There were no petitions under Procedure Rule 19

C 66 Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions from members of the Public

C 66 Questions from Members of the Council under Procedure Rule 13.1

Written notice of the following questions had been given under Procedure Rule 13.1:

Councillor Jackie Bowman asked the following question, to the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration

“The award of a £5.5m grant from the Regional Growth Fund towards delivering the Britain's Energy Coast programme was a significant achievement. Can the portfolio holder for Regeneration please identify to us how these funds will be used to deliver economic renewal in Copeland?”

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Phil Greatorex replied as follows:

“Mr Mayor, Britain's Energy Coast has been awarded £5,580,000 from the Regional Growth Fund subject to a process of due diligence. The funding will be available in the form of grant aid to businesses to foster employment creation through investment.

The grant aid will generate it is anticipated in excess of £37,200,000 of private sector investment.

The basis of the application is that it will directly create 450 new jobs and directly safeguard a further 627 jobs.

Specifically the programme will fund Investment for maximising energy opportunities – supporting investment in businesses to develop new products and business services in the nuclear and renewable energy supply chains

But also contribute in Investment in manufacturing and processing diversification – supporting investment by businesses to diversify from their dependence on the nuclear sector, creating a more diverse and sustainable industrial base.

In addition, Mr Mayor, the funding will secure the viability and future of local industrial plants at risk and encourage parent companies to invest in West Cumbria.

The key thing now is for businesses in Copeland to come forward with their proposals so that they can apply for this funding.

To finish off Mr Mayor whilst Government Local Industry Financial Awards of a few million are very welcome and should be celebrated, as a Council we do need to focus on turning social economic outcomes into our £45 billion nuclear decommissioning public expenditure programme as well as embracing new nuclear and non-nuclear opportunities.

Indeed Mr Mayor in the absence of a credible national policy on economic growth the Tory Government is now being urged by the industrial communities alliance and academics such as Professor Carol Williams of Manchester University to exploit public expenditure programmes to drive economic renewal.

And lastly Mr Mayor we need to do the same in Copeland. Although the NDA have largely ignored letters from the Chief Executive and myself to take things forward on this important issue, we must insist that it takes the socio economic outcomes into its decision making process that underpins its delivery strategies with both pride its own behaviour and that of its contractors. Thank you Mr Mayor."

Councillor Geoff Garrity asked the following question to the Leader of the Council

"I know the OSC are carrying out a scrutiny of the County Council's decision to move the Fire control centre to Warrington, though I fear the opportunity to change their decision might be too late, but I think this change could cost lives, therefore could the Leader ensure our serious concerns are fed back to the County?"

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Elaine Woodburn replied as follows:

"Thank you Mr Mayor. I met with a representative from the fire brigades union with Councillor David Moore recently which actually meant that that would help inform OSC, and I don't think there's any Councillor in this room who doesn't share exactly the same concerns.

What I find more difficult to stomach is that the same Cumbria County Council not too many years ago lobbied Government and fought the case to make sure that they retained a local fire control centre and it said and I will quote "Lives would be lost if local fire control centre is lost" and that they wanted to set up a single Cumbrian control centre for fire, police and ambulance service. And I don't think that this was an option that's been investigated this time around, so I'm not sure what has changed in this few years. A few years ago they recognised how much local knowledge made a big difference and that's why they wanted to keep it local. They accused the Government of no consultation, again which is something which they have just carried out themselves or even not done themselves as I should say. I'm lead to believe by the people we spoke to, they didn't consult those who know the most about the service and that is the control room operators themselves. Now they're the experts they know exactly what their job is to not consult them when making such a major decision is unforgivable. We now have Localism Act which is about enhancing the opportunities for local communities to make their own decisions. I think that in some ways the County is completely ignoring what localism is meant to do. I think they have forgotten what their priorities should be and it is our job to remind them of that and what that is and that is that their priorities should be representing the people of Cumbria. We all know and I think we all understand that we've had large financial cuts so we know that savings should have to be made. But I don't think that savings should have

to override the safety of the local community and it is very questionable whether we will continue to receive the same high level of service we get now. So I know Copeland Councillors and OSC Members are carrying out our further investigations and have invited the decision makers to come in and I await the results of that"

Councillor Sam Pollen asked the following question of the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration on behalf of Councillor John Kane

"We have read recently about youth unemployment throughout the country. Could the Portfolio Holder tell us what Copeland's Youth Unemployment figures are?"

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Phil Greatorex replied as follows:

"Thank you Mr Mayor. The national figures of over 1 million young people aged 16 – 24 year olds categorised as not in education employment or training is truly awful and whilst the local situation is not quite as bad I have to report back to Council that we now have 645 young persons, that's 9.1% of aged 16-24, claiming Job Seekers Allowance. This figure represents a 29% increase, and if we want to avoid creating a lost generation of youngsters here on our own back door step then we will need to establish the training skills and apprenticeship programmes in order to get young people to capitalise on the economic renaissance that we fully expect over the next decade."

Councillor Joan Hully asked the following question of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources:

"In light of the recent announcements regarding the financial crisis facing West Cumberland Hospital could the Leader/Portfolio Holder please seek immediate assurances.

To ensure that:

Services will not be lost;
Jobs will not be lost; and
Wards will not be closed"

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Gillian Troughton replied as follows:

" Thank you Mr Mayor the recent BBC Inside Out programme, reporting concerns from both nursing and medical staff, and the leaked internal memo, reporting the worsening financial situation within the Trust, are both very concerning.

But on 26th October a cross-party group from this Council met with the Chief Executive, Neil Goodwin, and sought information regarding current service delivery as it was then, progression with new build and Foundation Trust merger, and the effects on future services in West Cumbria. Dr Goodwin reassured us that the recent problems with late cancelled operations and extensive waits had been resolved. He also stated that there were no plans to reduce services

further, and that the trust merger process would categorically not affect the level of services delivered from West Cumberland Hospital.

I was passed a copy of the memo a fortnight later, on 11th November. It is not dated but the information within it must have been known, at least in principle, to Dr Goodwin when he met with us.

The memo outlines a remedial programme effective from 1st December (today) to include:-

1. Ward closures to increase more efficient use of capacity
2. Theatre productivity programme to address the 10% inefficiency in theatre usage
3. Cessation of all locum consultant staff/reducing consultant PA payments and job plan variability, which is where they are paid to work extra hours to cover non-existent colleagues
4. Cessation of short-term staff contracts
5. Further reductions in corporate management

It is concerning that reassurances that we received from Dr Goodwin to elected members of this Council were directly contradicted by him to his staff within such a short period of time. This is particularly pertinent as he was not only delivering reassurance on the short term, but about the longer term position post new build and post trust merger. Such a change in advice must cast doubt on the value of his opinion to us.

However Dr Goodwin is due to meet with all elected representatives of this Council on 13th December, this will be an opportunity to collectively seek these reassurances and ask for the evidence that services are being protected and that jobs and savings are not being made at the expense of patient services."

Councillor Sam Pollen asked the following question of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning:

"In light of the recent announcements regarding Government Cuts to the Police Force could the Leader/Portfolio holder please seek immediate assurances.

To ensure that:

Front line services in Copeland will not be lost and that the Police Stations in Egremont; Cleator Moor; Millom and Whitehaven will not be closed."

Councillor George Clements replied as follows: -

"Thank you Mr Mayor, I know this is a question you have asked if not at the last Council then the one before and it's taken us quite a while to get a statement from the Police Authority on it to give us more detail. I have got the statement so I'll read out the statement.

"The Constabulary response to identifying and realising the necessary budget savings (approx. 20%).

Last year West Cumbria developed a new model of policing across both Copeland and Allerdale that sought to minimise the impact of the budgetary cuts that reduced the front line numbers of officers resulting in the previously communicated reduction of Neighbourhood Policing Teams from 7 to 3 that's across West Cumbria and for Copeland this meant one NPT for the whole Borough area. West Cumbria area has seen its overall officer numbers fall by 35, the productivity benefits that we identified by working to a simple 'mantra' of "small teams well led - delivering efficient and effective policing" we also make use of new technologies that support our new policing style.

The new policing style is not reliant on buildings and physical structures and now provides the equipment that means we can respond to calls for service in the main whilst out on patrol in our communities and in most regards by personal visit to the caller. This maximises our time out and about in our community and ensures we remain on patrol rather than returning to stations just to use the IT systems.

This new approach as I have said provides opportunities to cover the gaps created by cuts through increased productivity and also offers up other opportunities to the Police Authority regarding the utilisation of our estate.

Whilst I cannot go in to specific detail at this time I can say that options to be considered all include maintaining a physical presence in Egremont and the other areas."

Councillor Lena Hogg asked the following question to the Portfolio for Housing and Planning:

"Under the new Welfare Benefit Reforms, and particularly the proposals around under occupation – could the Portfolio Holder explain how it would work and what the consequences would be?"

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor George Clements replied as follows:

"Thank you Mr Mayor this is an important question this one because although the reforms haven't received Royal assent yet but there will be no doubt in the future.

The proposals are in the Welfare Reform Bill which is still in the Committee stage in Parliament and therefore subject to further amendment. Under-occupation is still up for further amendment. As I said it does not apply to people of state retirement age. It is hoped that there will be extensions for people on disability living allowance, working tax credit and war widows allowance but at this present moment in time it's very unclear if that's going to go through.

Single people and couples without dependents would be assessed to need a one bedroom home. Parents with one child would be assessed to need a two bedroom home.

The Bill sets a 15% housing benefit deduction if under-occupying by one bedroom and a 23% deduction if under-occupying two or more rooms. There has been lobbying to the effect that the deduction should only apply to people who under-occupy by two or more rooms but to date the Government have resisted such argument. Transitional arrangements are expected to protect existing claimants but new claimants will be subject to the deductions when they take effect.

We don't know for certain when they will take effect because the Bill is yet to receive Royal Assent. However, it is clear that Government intends to abolish Housing Benefit by April 2013 and replace it with a Housing Costs Element in Universal Credit (UC).

You did ask about consequences and I will list some:

Households with one or more spare bedroom and dependent on housing benefit will fall short in rent unless they make up payments from other benefit sources or in other ways like taking in lodgers. Local authorities' homelessness prevention services will become even more important than they are at the moment.

Greater demand may be made through Cumbria Choice, the lettings system, from people seeking smaller homes. Social landlords will need to develop strategies to facilitate a reduction in under-occupation and an increase in supply of smaller re-lets.

Smaller homes, including one bedroom homes, will need to be developed in newbuild affordable housing programmes or through conversion of existing stock.

People in receipt of housing benefit who expect to keep spare bedrooms for visiting children from former relationships or for grandchildren will be less likely to afford it.

Private landlords may be more reluctant to let homes to people who claim housing benefit."

Councillor Henry Wormstrup asked the following question to the Leader of the Council?

"It's now public knowledge that Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership has received funding from the Growth Fund & Regional Growth Fund and that Britains Energy Coast might have applied to European Rural Development Fund

As the council's representative on both the Cumbria LEP and BEC can the Leader tell us:

What is the total value of this funding and what projects within the District of Copeland will benefit.”

The Leader of the Council replied as follows:

“You are right the Cumbria LEP has received about £4.4 Million from the £500 Million Growing Places Fund and the whole point of the fund is that we support economic growth so we invest in projects that have possibly stalled at this moment in time and then the whole point is that it’s meant to be a revolving fund. It’s fair to say that the LEP has just had the initial discussion about it and I’m guessing that the process will be any project that’s eligible for funding will apply to the LEP and it will be distributed that way but we haven’t announced how we are going to use the fund and it will be distributed that way. But obviously if there are only projects in Copeland we should be making sure that they do apply.

Sadly out of the £30 Billion none is going to be spent in Cumbria it’s touching on improving the Trans Pennine link between Manchester and Leeds and it’s looking to improvements to the M3 but what is strange is that the Government is only putting in about £5 billion in their press release they are saying that the hope the rest of the money to make up the £30 billion will come from Chinese investment and other big business so its quite an aspirational fund and no guarantee. What is more concerning is that of the £5 billion that the Government are putting into it two thirds of that is going to come from the pension fund now that’s made up from the National Association of Pension Funds and the Pension Protection Fund.

The other one is on the ERDF funding. We got some very good information from the Communities Alliance where there is £1 billion with about £300 million targeted for the North West. We are one of the very few areas that has match funding in place that can go forward to ERDF and secure that funding. The difficulty is that the Government seems to have made it so bureaucratic that it’s now taking about 15 months to get through the process.”

Councillor David Riley asked the following question of the Leader of the Council:

“Could the Leader ask Cumbria County Council why they are discriminating against the Catholic children who go to St Benedict’s School by not providing free bus travel? Many children are using the normal service buses and anybody who has seen how busy the roads are at school times will understand that by making the children cross very busy roads this decision is putting children’s lives at risk. The decision is also proving financially difficult for those who have one than one child and having to find in excess of a thousand pounds simply because their children are catholic. I ask simply what can we do to stop this discrimination? “

The Leader of the Council replied as follows:

“ I have tried to work out how this decision has been taken, for it seems to be for financial reasons. I know a lot of Members have raised questions about it because I know of the impacts on Frizingtons and I know it affects Cleator Moor Councillors, and Egremont and a lot of our areas. I did pose some questions to the Leader of the County and the Chief Executive about an hour ago so I haven’t had that much chance to go into detail over them but I’m not sure how a scheme has been devised that penalises parents. You are quite right Councillor Riley if you’ve

ever driven to St Benedicts school or indeed Whitehaven school will see how horrendous the roads are and these are the roads children have to cross because their parents can't afford that £350 bus pass. I know a few people because they cannot afford that are now driving their children to school. So it was bad enough about six months ago trying to get up to the schools now is nearly impossible. I know that they've made some changes to children who live within a three mile are that is allegedly an unsafe walking route but again I can't seem to get to the bottom of that but there are some strange anomalies and I know because my sister's children go to St Benedicts school she pays £350 for a bus pass.

So what are we actually going to do about it, we can ask an OSC to look into it but I actually think that what we need to do more is to ask Cumbria County Council to look at the highway implications of the decisions that they have taken. I think we need to make sure that they get up there and check what the traffic impact is now, check the safety for the children and put in some road safety measures if needed."

Councillor Jackie Bowman asked the following question of the Leader of the Council:

"As recently reported there is a Cumbria County Council consultation on a proposal to close Woodlands Care home at Lillyhall which would result in the closure of the only specialist dementia facility in West Cumbria, something I think is totally unacceptable. The impact of this on the patients and their families will be dreadful and I am asking the Leader if she and the Council will do all they can to stop this proposal."

The Leader of the Council replied as follows:

"If anyone's actually read the consultation document, it's actually a consultation proposals document for care services in the Allerdale and Distington area. I'm not quite sure when Distington moved out of Copeland but we'll leave that for another day. But what if anybody reads it what it's recommending is that the specialist dementia unit will be in Maryport and Wigton. I question do the County Council know the geographical needs of the area they represent? Because if anybody thinks that they can get to Wigton or Maryport via public transport from anywhere in South Whitehaven I'll be amazed. They may be will be able to get there but it'll take them two days to get back because the bus services as we know are not good and I'm not making light of that I know how difficult it is to have a family member and I know people in here have had family Members who have had an still have dementia and it is not good for anybody but what is particularly more important is the need for the families to keep in contact with the people who need that specialist care.

I note that it's reported today that people with dementia are likely to increase by 80% by 2029 so where will they now go for that specialist help that they need? They cite extra care housing, which is fantastic, but the only example that they put in the document is a specialist unit that's in Barrow which again is no good for us here in Copeland. They say that they want people to stay in their own houses which is great but on the one hand they say that they want people to remain in their own houses, and on the other they've taken away funding from Supporting People.

I don't think that any of us would argue that there is a real need to modernise facilities so I'm not arguing Woodlands should stay open because I don't know enough about it and quite rightly we have an OSC tasked to carry out that work. What we need to make sure is there is a fit for purpose facility for the people of Copeland. They should not have to travel miles to see their family members who are really suffering with illnesses such as this and it doesn't even explain where the specialist staff who give the care and give that commitment what will happen to them. It is essential that we as a Council we feed into the consultation that it's really going to make a big difference to the people we represent and I can only hope that it has the desired outcome and that is that we have a specialist dementia facility close by that is necessary for the people of Copeland."

C 67 Executive Report

The Council received and noted the Executive report.

C 68 Rugby League World Cup

In moving the Executive Report the Leader congratulated the Portfolio Holder, Members and Officers involved in bringing the Rugby World Cup games to Whitehaven.

C 69 MRWS Consultation

In moving the Executive report the Leader reminded Members of the MRWS briefing session being held on the 7th December and stressed the importance that they intend.

C 70 Home Group Service Charge

Arising from the Executive report the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Community Safety undertook to provide a written reply clarifying the position with regard to the statement that tenants on housing benefits would have the gross cutting element of service charge paid for them.

C 71 Affordable Homes

Arising from the Executive report the Portfolio Holder for Housing, Planning and Community Safety undertook to thank all staff involved in achieving affordable homes in Bootle.

C 72 Closure of Frizington Tip

Arising from the Executive report the Portfolio for Environment and Sustainability gave his assurance to continue to lobby Cumbria County Council through the Joint Waste Group to reverse the decision to close Frizington tip or look for new site which would be more accessible to residents further South of the Borough.

C 73 MRWS Consultation

Arising from the executive report and in response to a question from Councillor Keith Hitchen the Leader of the Council undertook to clarify the comment in the executive report that:

“Responses to the consultation will be considered by the partnership and form the basis of its final report and recommends to the three decision making bodies CBC, ABC and CCC” - I believe that in fact that it was agreed by the MRWS partnership that we would not be making recommendations that the final report would be going to the decision making bodies.”

C 74 Domestic Violence

Arising from the Executive report and in response to a question from Councillor Carol Woodman the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning and undertook to ensure that Parish Councils be Informed on what Copeland Borough Council is doing to combat domestic violence sent to all Parish Council.

C 75 Captain Shaws School Bootle

Arising from the Executive report the Portfolio Holder Housing, Planning and Community Safety undertook to make representation to Cumbria County Council opposing the closure of Shaws School Bootle.

C 76 Revenue Budget 2011/12 Virements

Consideration was given to approval of virements over £50 in accordance with financial regulations.

RESOLVED – That a) the virements to the value of £258,751 identified in quarter 2 be approved; and

b) the transfer of £266,874 into a new coastal Management Reserve be approved.

C 77 Report of the Electoral Review Working Party on Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

Consideration was given to a recommendation from the Electoral Review Working Party on proposals of the Boundary Commission for England for revised Parliamentary constituencies in Cumbria.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted and the recommendation from the Electoral Review Working party for an alternative proposal be forwarded to the Boundary Commission as Council’s formal response to the consultation.

The meeting closed at 4.10 PM

Mayor