

## **COUNCIL**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Council held on Thursday, 22 February 2024 at 10.00 am at Council Chamber, County Hall, Kendal

### **PRESENT:**

Cllr M Severn (Chair)

Cllr T Assouad	Cllr L Hall
Cllr C Atkinson	Cllr M Hanley
Cllr R Audland	Cllr E Hennessy
Cllr L Baker	Cllr H Hodgson
Cllr J Battye	Cllr N Hughes
Cllr S Bavin	Cllr V Hughes
Cllr P Bell	Cllr A Husband
Cllr T Biggins	Cllr H Irving
Cllr J Boak	Cllr A Jarvis
Cllr M Brereton	Cllr D Jones
Cllr D Brook	Cllr H Ladhams
Cllr J Brook	Cllr N McCall
Cllr A Burns	Cllr B McEwan
Cllr T Callister	Cllr I Mitchell
Cllr H Carrick	Cllr B Morgan
Cllr D Cassidy	Cllr J Murphy
Cllr F Cassidy	Cllr J Murray
Cllr H Chaffey	Cllr S Pender
Cllr A Coles	Cllr N Phillips
Cllr A Connell	Cllr D Rathbone
Cllr B Cooper	Cllr M Robinson
Cllr J Cornthwaite	Cllr M Rudhall
Cllr J Derbyshire	Cllr S Sanderson
Cllr P Dew	Cllr B Shirley
Cllr P Dixon	Cllr G Simpkins
Cllr J Drake	Cllr V Taylor
Cllr D Edwards	Cllr P Thornton
Cllr S Evans	Cllr R Worthington
Cllr M Eyles	

### **Also in Attendance:**

Ms B Beardwell	Deputy Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer
Mrs J Currie	Democratic Services
Ms P Duke	Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer)
Mr J Huck	Democratic Services
Ms A Jones	Director of Thriving Places
Ms L Jones	Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer
Ms S Plum	Chief Executive, Westmorland & Furness Council
Mr P Robinson	Director of Enabler Services
Ms K Stephens	Director of Public Health
Mr M Vasic	Director of Children's Services

### 73 Roll Call and Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Archibald, Clark, Filmore and Jama.

### 74 Declarations of Interest/Dispensations

Cllr Audland declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item No 8 – 2025/25 Budget Proposals, as he owned an empty property. He would leave the room during the vote on recommendation 2.6 of the report.

Cllr Taylor declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item No 8 – 2025/25 Budget Proposals, as she owns a second home in the Kirkby Stephen area. She would leave the room during the vote on recommendation 2.4 of the report.

The Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer informed Council that the following Standard Dispensations (in Part 4 Section 1 of the Council's Constitution, Appendix B Table 3) relate to Agenda Item No 7 Members allowance scheme and report of the IRP to allow members to take part in the budget meeting:

- The functions of your authority in respect of an allowance or payment made under sections 22 (5) , 24(4) and 173 to 176 of the Local Government Act 1972 , an allowance or pension under section 18 of the Local Government Act 1989 or an allowance or payment under section 100 of the Local Government Act 2000.

The following Standard Dispensations (in Part 4 Section 1 of the Council's Constitution, Appendix B Table 3) relate to Agenda Item Nos 8 (2024/25 Budget Proposals) and 9 (2024/25 Council Tax Setting) to allow members to take part in the budget meeting:

(1) Standard Dispensations 2(a) and 2(f)

[That is, that members will not be regarded as having a prejudicial interest in any business where that business relates to:

- “2a) *the housing functions of your authority where you hold a tenancy or lease with your authority, provided that you do not have arrears of rent with your authority of more than two months, and provided that those functions do not relate particularly to your tenancy or lease;*” and
- “2f) *the setting of the authority's council tax requirement, council tax, levy or a precept under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (except that this dispensation does not apply if you are two months or more in arrears with their Council Tax you must declare this to the meeting and must not vote on budget recommendations, as to do otherwise can be a criminal offence).”]*

Further the following Standard Dispensations (in Part 4 Section 1 of the Council's Constitution, Appendix B Table 2) relate to Agenda Item Nos 8 (2024/25 Budget Proposals) and 9 (2024/25 Council Tax Setting) to allow members to take part in the budget meeting:

## Standard dispensations

You will not be regarded as having a prejudicial interest in any business of the authority in respect of other registrable interests.

1 (a) where the business relates to another authority of which you are also a member.

In addition, the following Dispensations are agreed by the Monitoring Officer under Part 2 Section 6 of the Council's Constitution, Officer Scheme of Delegation, paragraph 3.10.21, for this Council meeting, to allow members to take part in the budget meeting:

- (1) A dispensation for Cllr Audland and V Taylor relating to Agenda Item Nos. 8 (2024/25 Budget Proposals) recommendations 2.4 (Cllr Taylor) and 2.6 (Cllr Audland) and Agenda Item No. 9 (2024/25 Council Tax Setting) to remain in the room/meeting for the discussion on those items and to speak provided that those members leave the room / meeting for the vote on those recommendations concerning second homes and empty homes.

## **75 Exclusion of Press and Public**

**RESOLVED,** that the press and public be not excluded from consideration of any items of business on the agenda today.

## **76 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED,** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2023 be agreed with the following amendment:-

On Minute No 66 – Capital Programme Page 17 – 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph amend to read 'Cllr Dew commented that the cost for the refurbishment of Voreda House had doubled in two years from £4.13M to £8.3M despite being informed in March 2023 that the total cost would be no more than £4.56m, and that this could not be attributed to inflation, Brexit, Covid or the conflict in Ukraine, as per the Cabinet Member's earlier answer. He asked for an explanation of the discrepancy and an explanation as to why local councillors had not been kept informed.'

On Minute No 64 – Questions by Members Page 14 paragraph 9 there was a misspelling of 'Green Arms'. Change spelling to 'Green Haume'.

## **77 Announcements**

Members have already received details of the engagements that I have undertaken since the previous Council meeting. These have been circulated by email.

The Chairman informed members of the sad passing of past members Mary Wane OBE – County Councillor from c1984-1997, Vivienne Rees BEM – SLDC Councillor 2006-2019, and Leith Hallatsch, Mayor of Windermere and Bowness.

Last month, on 27 January, marked Holocaust Memorial Day. Holocaust Memorial Day was a time to remember the millions of people who had been murdered or whose lives had been changed beyond recognition during the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution and in subsequent genocides.

Over that weekend, the town halls in Barrow, Kendal and Penrith were lit up in purple to commemorate all those affected by genocide. Several of the libraries also marked this important day with displays and activities.

He then informed Council that earlier this month, National Apprenticeship Week was celebrated. Apprentices were an invaluable assets to this Council and brought huge benefits to many of our teams and services. Many of the apprentices attended the celebration event on the 9 February which recognised the contribution they made to local authority services across Cumbria.

The Chairman then shared great news regarding the Dock Museum, which had been nominated for two Visit England awards. Following a recent visit from a mystery shopper on behalf of Visit England, the Dock Museum in Barrow-in-Furness received a fantastic score rating of 89% and nominations in both the 'Hidden Gem' and 'Welcome' categories.

The Dock Museum has also won a further award from Going Places UK, voted for by visitors.

As spring was approaching the Chairman reflected on what had been a very busy winter for the Council in its first year – with multiple storms and several Major Incidents. On behalf of members he thanked all the staff who worked tirelessly to make sure the residents, customers and communities were as safe as possible.

The Leader of the Council made a statement about the amount of work that had had to be done recently in relation to disaggregation of services, the Local Enterprise Partnership and also Team Barrow, This had proved to be much more than anticipated and he thanked officers for the work they had been doing to ensure this happened whilst also maintaining 'business as usual'.

He also thanked all members of the council for their commitment of time, skills and energy to the first year of the life of Westmorland and Furness Council. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills then made a statement about Children's Services in Westmorland and Furness.

Family Hubs had taken another leap forward this week as we opened our second Family Hub facility, this time in Dalton. It was great to see so many people from the local community join us to mark the occasion and begin to engage with the Family Hub.

As they establish themselves further, Family Hubs would become important places and spaces where we can work together to make a difference and support children, young people, and families.

She had visited the construction site of the major £6m project to expand Sandgate School for children with Special Educational Needs in Kendal which was also making significant progress, with the recent completion of the steel framework for the building. Five months into the project, the structure and layout for the four

additional classrooms, new sports hall, changing rooms and additional facilities had now been erected, with construction works anticipated to be completed by Autumn 2024.

She also updated on the proposal to expand the existing school building of Beaconside Church of England Primary School in Penrith. The four week representation period will close on 3 March for this.

She thanked the cared for children and Promise Ambassadors for the work they've put in to create their new short film called "Home." She had recently attended the launch of the film which was based on their feelings, words and artwork as they explored the idea of 'home' when coming into foster care.

She ended by urging the young people of Westmorland and Furness to stand in this year's UK Youth Parliament elections for young people aged between 11 and 18 years of age.

## **78 Minutes of the Cabinet**

### **(1) Cabinet Minutes 12 December 2023**

Council received the Minutes of Cabinet on 12 December. No comments were made.

### **(2) Cabinet Minutes 23 January 2024**

Council received the Minutes of Cabinet on 12 December. No comments were made

### **(3) Cabinet Minutes 13 February**

On Minute No 126 – 2024/25 Budget Proposals Cllr Dew referred to Resolution 1 where it referenced that Cabinet had taken into account the findings mentioned on Page 142 about the proposal to apply an average inflationary uplift of 6.7% on the council's discretionary fees and charges - only 25% of the respondents agreed with the proposal and 48% disagreed but yet Cabinet approved the uplift without any apparent debate on this. He asked how the responses to the consultation were considered.

The Cabinet Member for Finance responded to say that Cabinet did consider the responses to the consultation, and he would say more about this in his presentation of the Budget report. Although the proposed changes did fail to maintain the speed of changes to inflation rates this was unavoidable.

## **79 Members' Allowances Scheme 2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28 - Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel**

The Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) presented a detailed report in respect of a Members Allowance Scheme for 2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Under the provisions of the Members' Allowances Regulations the Council was required to make a Scheme ('Members' Allowances Scheme') for the payment of

Members' Allowances each year. A Members' Allowances Scheme needed to make provision for Basic Allowances, Special Responsibility Allowances ('SRA's'), Dependents' Carers' Allowances, Travelling and Subsistence Allowances and Co-optees Allowances.

During the course of their consideration of the new Members' Allowances Scheme for 2023/24 a significant amount of work was undertaken by the IRP concerning an appropriate level of the Basic Allowance for Councillors in the new Council, which was fair and reasonable and adequately reflected and compensated members for their commitment and time spent on Council business.

A benchmarking exercise with comparator Councils, was carried out along with a questionnaire circulated to all Members, and an invitation to all Members to address them as to the new Members' Allowances Scheme.

In making their recommendations on a new Members' Allowances Scheme for 2023/24 it had been recognised by the IRP that the level of SRA's for the new Council was a particular area of some difficulty as neither the IRP nor Members or Officers had the benefit of how the governance structure of the new Council would operate in practice, and the demands of the roles in the new Council regarding which an SRA was payable. It was therefore considered by the IRP that in setting a Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25 there should be a review of their initial assumptions regarding the levels of SRA's in the light of experience.

In approving the Members Allowances' Scheme for 2023-24 Council had recognised the difficulty the IRP had in setting SRA's ahead of vesting day, noting the absence of comparisons of SRA's with other similar authorities, which it believed were necessary for the reassurance for both Members and the general public. Council consequently resolved that the IRP should collect the necessary evidence and report back to the Council within nine months;

The IRP was provided with information to assist them in their review. That included information on the brief of Executive Members, including numbers and locations of Cabinet meetings, formal Cabinet Member/ Director meetings, projects linked to individual portfolio areas, Committee and Outside Body Appointments and other Executive Member commitments, and information on Non-Executive Committee meetings.

13 Members had responded to the survey, a particular theme being that the present levels of SRA's for Executive Members did not adequately reflect the responsibilities and commitments of the role, and travel time between meetings. Written representation were received from three Members. In addition six Members addressed the IRP in person.

The opinion of the IRP was that the present level of SRA's payable to Executive Members did not properly reflect the responsibilities and commitments of the role, and that consequently they should be amended by way of an adjustment to the multiplier applicable to the roles of Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader and other Executive Members, and that going forward the Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25 should be amended so as to reflect the recommended revised multipliers.

The IRP did not consider they had sufficient information at this time to make any recommendations as to amendment of the multipliers relating to SRA's payable to Committee Chairs and other allowances under the Members' Allowances Scheme.

In addition the IRP were supportive of the Council adopting an index for the annual adjustment of allowances payable under the Members' Allowances Scheme. The IRP were of the view that an appropriate index would be that applicable to staff on spine point 44, which in 2023/24 had equated to an annual increase of 3.88%.

After reviewing the relevant data the IRP had made the following recommendations:

- That the Multiplier for the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Leader of the Council be amended to 2 x Basic Allowance.
- That the Multiplier for the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Deputy Leader be amended to 1.2 x Basic Allowance.
- That the Multiplier for the Special Responsibility Allowance for other Cabinet Members be amended to 1 x Basic Allowance.
- That the above adjustments should be applied in the Members' Allowances Scheme 2024/25.
- That the Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances payable to Members be increased from 2024/25 in line with the Pay Award (if any) for staff on spine point 44, and thereafter annually for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Cllr Carrick asked for clarification on the difference between an allowance and a reimbursement. Mr Jones agreed to review the interpretation of the rules and regulations.

Cllr Shirley asked whether in hindsight 12 December was the best time to send the questionnaire to Members. Mr Jones agreed to share the feedback with Panel Members.

Cllr Cornthwaite asked a question on the timeframe of the Members Allowance Scheme. Mr Jones commented that the Panel were keen to have an annual uplift in place for four years.

Cllr Dixon proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Cllr Murray.

Cllr Morgan made a statement on behalf of the Labour Group and asked that an additional recommendation be included that all Member's Allowances were reviewed and the IRP be reconvened to report back on further recommendations to the June Council meeting for all allowances.

The Leader suggested that the meeting be adjourned to allow the proposer and seconder of the motion to consider the amendment.

The meeting adjourned at 10.45am and reconvened at 11.00 am.

The Monitoring Officer read out the additional recommendation:-

A review of Basic Allowances and the remaining SRA's be brought back to the June Council meeting.

Cllr Shirley asked if it would be possible to vote on each recommendation separately and the Chief Monitoring Officer confirmed this was possible.

The individual recommendations were then put to a vote, with voting as follows:

Recommendation 1 – 52 for, 4 against, 0 abstentions

Recommendation 2 – 46 for, 9 against, 1 abstention, and the rest voting for

Recommendation 3 – 54 for, 2 abstentions and rest voting for

Recommendation 4 – unanimous

Recommendation 5 – unanimous

It was therefore, **RESOLVED**, that Council;

- (1) approves the amendment to the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA's) for Executive Members in accordance with the recommendations of the IRP;
- (2) approves a Members' Allowances Scheme for 2024/25, 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28, whereby Basic Allowances and SRA's payable to Members (including any amendment to SRA's for Executive Members consequential upon agreement by the Council of recommendation 2.1 above) were adjusted from 1 April 2024, and thereafter annually in line with the Pay Award (if any) for staff on salary scale point 44 of the Westmorland and Furness Council pay scale;
- (3) agrees that any other allowances payable to Members' and any other persons holding positions required by law under legislation not part of the Members' Allowances Regulations should be adjusted by the same adjustment of allowances (if any) as under the Members' Allowances Scheme;
- (4) agrees that subject to any further recommendations of the IRP prior to this date that the Members Allowances' Scheme should be reviewed again in four years; and
- (5) agrees that a review of Basic Allowances and the remaining SRA's be brought back to the June Council meeting.

## 80 **2024/25 Budget Proposals**

Cllr V Hughes left the meeting at this point.

The Cabinet Member for Finance presented the 2024/25 Budget for Westmorland & Furness Council and the associated Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme. He was proud to be presenting this, and took members through the proposals.

As a Council Westmorland and Furness was not yet a year old, and this was the first budget that had been completed with a full leadership team. It represented



the next step in the council's progress to being both financially stable and delivering upon both our Council Plan and manifesto priorities.

He thanked all of the Finance Officers and the wider Leadership Team that had worked to make this budget a reality.

He outlined the background and key themes to the budget, and then moved the recommendations.

The budget had been set with the council facing the highest inflation that the Country had seen for over 40 years. Although inflation was now subsiding, prices across the economy were more than 20% higher than only three years ago. The pressure of this inflation, and the knock on impacts on salaries and demand for services directly affected all local Councils.

The council also continued to face adverse demographic pressures, with an older-than average population, and the numbers over retirement age were growing rapidly.

Similarly, the pressures on Children's Services, particularly the spiralling pressure from SEND/home-to-school transport, which was an issue for councils across the nation.

This budget was coming after 14 years of austerity. Local Authority Core Spending Power was still way below the level of 2010 despite the increases in demands.

It was no surprise that the financial crisis that local authorities were encountering came after significant reductions in local authorities' spending power which had itself coincided with increasing demand for the services and inflationary pressures driving up costs. Ultimately, the levels of funding available to local authorities, through council tax, retained business rates, and government grants had not kept pace with these pressures.

Recently five councils had declared Section 114 notices, with others requesting assistance from government. Many local authorities were in a dire financial position but the Cabinet Member reassured members that Westmorland and Furness Council was not one of them.

The Cabinet Member outlined a clear path for the council that delivered both on financial sustainability and on delivering for its residents. The budget could be summarised in three clear themes.

- The first theme was continue the job of integration and stabilisation after LGR. This council was only 10 months old, and the process of reorganisation had probably been even more difficult than was expected. A number of areas had been identified that required further investment, and the Cabinet Member highlighted some of these specifically:
  - Ensuring that we are putting in the necessary additional spend for areas under most pressure – particularly Children's & Adult Social Care.

- The pressures on SEND/home-to-school transport alone requiring £2m more budget next year.
  - We have included additional budgets for areas that had suffered most from disaggregation, including some of those areas being disaggregated since vesting (sections 3.97-3.98). We needed to ensure that these services were both structured and funded in a way that was sustainable.
  - We had also identified a number of areas that were under-invested in legacy authorities. This was most notable in maintenance expenditure for corporate assets.
- The second key theme was the need to drive improvements and efficiencies across the Council. This budget contained around £10m of savings – over half of which were permanent. It was now critical that the Council identified and then delivered the savings that were required to close the financial gaps over the next five years. This meant that it needed to consider fundamental change to the way it operated and delivered services.
    - Additional funding for the change programme was included – in particular to support the Pay & Reward review, to develop the new Local Plan and to improve the experience of residents dealing with the council.
    - change programmes in both Adults’ and Children’s services to reduce long-term pressures through earlier intervention and support.
    - increasing resourcing in those areas that could be bottlenecks– particularly HR/OD and Legal
    - a £3m budget in 24/5 for new transformation projects that would be released based on business cases.

The Cabinet Member emphasised efficiency and savings were not about cutting services. The aim was to improve delivery for communities and residents.

- The third key theme was progressing to deliver the manifesto and Council Plan commitments. It was not possible to do everything at once, but this budget made significant strides towards delivering on the council’s ambitions. In particular, this year’s budget included further investment in Climate & Natural Environment along with £10m of capital investment for decarbonising the estate; Permanent investment in Bus Travel/Subsidies, and continuing to support those most in need. Not only keeping the generous Council Tax reduction scheme but increasing Discretionary Housing Fund.

The budget included a proposal for maintaining the Locality Board budgets from 2023-4 and adding additional funding of £100k for each Locality Board for work on Community Planning.

There was new investment in Community Power to unleash the potential of our brilliant communities, along with increased spend on rights-of-way.

The proposals also included measures for tackling the housing issue to incentivise the supply of permanent homes, along with £7m investment in the capital programme for affordable homes on top of the spend on Council Houses and the major investment at Marina Village.

The Cabinet Member was asking Council to agree a number of key measures, including:

- Council Tax to be increased by 2.99%, with a further 2% increase for the Adult Social Care Levy. This total increase of 4.99% was in line with the Government's assumption on the council's Core Spending Power. The vast majority of other councils in the country would also be increasing Council Tax by this amount;
- Bringing forward the empty homes premium from two years, to one. The maximum charge would be increase to 400% of the Council Tax once a home was empty for 10 years, to apply from 1 April.;
- Following the assent of the Levelling Up Act the council would charge a 100% premium on second homes from 1 April 2025. This was a year later than we originally planned, but we need to revise the date to comply with the final wording of the Act;
- Fees and charges would be increased in line with inflation, consistent with council policy. On average fees and charges would increase by 6.7% based on September's CPI.

The Cabinet Member then took members through the feedback to the consultation, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report.

Members would note that the primary objection was to the scale of the increase in fees & charges and that this was above the current inflation rate. However, it was inevitable that the changes lag the reported inflation rate. He emphasised that September's CPI was widely used across government including for State Pensions and working age benefits.

Residents were broadly split in their views on Council Tax increases. The Council needed to recognise that increases in Council Tax had lagged inflation (and our costs) in recent years. However, the Cabinet Member was convinced that the level of increases proposed were appropriate and prudent given the financial situation being faced.

When Cabinet met in December, the Cabinet Member outlined that there was a projected budget deficit of £5m for 2024/5. Since then it had been possible to close this gap through a combination of the additional funding announced by the government and the inclusion of some additional savings. However, this still meant that about £12m of reserves would be required.

The Cabinet Member was content that this left the reserves in a satisfactory position at the year-end. The Section 151 officer was also content with the reserve position. However, he stated that the Council could not continue to rely on reserves. The MTFP showed gaps in future years of between £8m and £12.5m.

The Cabinet Member made some brief comments about Capital Expenditure. During this year a thorough review of all major capital projects had been undertaken, The Capital Programme had also been reviewed as part of the Q3 monitoring, which had resulted in a number of adjustments being proposed. The details for these could be found in Appendix 7 and Appendix 8 of the report.

The 2024/5 capital plan showed a bold array of projects that would benefit residents across the whole council area. Projects such as, completing Grange Lido and Voreda House; commissioning a solar farm and decarbonising our buildings; adding to our school's capacity and properly investing in maintenance; nearly £23m spend on highways; and well over £25m investment in a wide range of projects in Barrow.

Before moving to the recommendations the Cabinet Member highlighted the Pay Policy Statement for 2024-25 set out in Appendix 6. This provided transparency with regards to the Council's approach to setting pay for our employees. This was agreed by Staffing Committee last week.

Finally, the Cabinet Member highlighted to members that Appendix 9 included the Equality Impact Assessment which was important, as the Council had a duty to consider the implication of our Budget proposals upon people covered by the Equality Act 2010. The EIA specifically addresses this with respect to Council Tax, Fees & Charges and Council Rents.

The Cabinet Member then took members through the recommendations in the report and moved them. The recommendations were seconded by Cllr J Brook.

Cllr Brook endorsed the comments made by Cllr Jarvis and said this was a budget for the communities, retaining front line services and creating real room to do more. This budget would enable improved services for future years.

The Leader of the Labour Group commented that after many years of budget cuts and constant changes to funding and he hoped the optimism of the administration was correct, and that services would be improved in the future.

The Leader of the Conservative Group said that although the budget presented today may well be balanced in financial terms, she did not feel the political priorities that it supported were balanced.

As a new authority, she hoped that at the end of the Council's first full year this budget would be constructed to support the transformation of Council activities and start to deliver the benefits promised, and it would better reflect the capacity limitations of this Council.

She was disappointed that, with limited staffing and a restricted budget, the administration was not focussing its efforts on those activities that would have the most tangible positive impact on residents. Instead, the focus was on 'climate', an area which was not a statutory council duty.

Cllr Carrick understood that it was always going to be difficult to harmonise the activities and data from four legacy councils and that this was still being rationalised. Fundamental policies were needed for this authority to operate effectively and were still being developed.

The Leader of the Conservative Group did not feel that the focus should be on achieving net zero locally at a pace that exceeded that of our national government, whose target date for the country remained by 2050. She wondered if this was an acceptable financial burden on tax payers.

She suggested an alternative approach to addressing the real and sometimes catastrophic impact that climate change had on the everyday lives of the residents of Westmorland and Furness, which was to invest in additional capacity, potentially through an externally commissioned service, to carry out the annual maintenance programme of gulley cleansing across the entire council area. This would enable the highways teams to have more capacity to focus on other issues, such as those raised through the HIAMS system in a timely manner, as well as responding to extreme weather events.

She asked that Cabinet give the proposal genuine consideration.

Cllr Boak commented that it was great to see the work that was taking place on the Grange Lido and flood alleviation work on Windermere Road. The new bus service in Grange was also greatly appreciated.

Cllr Dew congratulated the Cabinet Member on his proposed budget, which was a huge undertaking. However, he felt that Invest to Save schemes would be beneficial in helping the Council to balance budgets going forward. He supported the suggestion from Cllr Carrick about gully cleansing.

He was concerned at the costs proposed in the budget for the development of Local Plans and wondered if this was actually value for money.

He wondered why there was a discrepancy of around £4m between the figures for the earmarked reserves in the Medium Term Financial Plan document and the figures quoted in the covering report. He also felt there was a lack of detail for members to scrutinise the budgets thoroughly.

Cllr Battye said she was impressed with the approach of the Cabinet, the Cabinet Member for Finance and also the officers for the way the development of the budget had been carried out.

She thanked the Cabinet Member and the Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) for the budget sessions they had held at Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

She did not agree with the comments made by the Leader of the Conservative Group about climate change, this was very important for the future generations and needed to be tackled now.

She welcomed the proposals for locality board budgets, extra council tax on second/empty homes, recruitment plans for social care, and co-production.

Cllr Dew thanked the Cabinet Member and Director for the overview and scrutiny session which he had found very useful.

He commented that he did not feel that the transformation plans for Westmorland and Furness Council were very ambitious and that Cumberland Council appeared to have a more ambitious programme.

He also had concerns about the cost of care services for dementia care. The proposed percentage increase on the average cost of care for those with dementia was 14% but there was already a 20% budget gap for this service which it appeared was going to be increased further. This was not referenced in either the consultation process or in the Equality Impact Assessment.

Cllr Thornton said that issues with drains and gullies was taken seriously by the highways teams, and once reported staff would investigate and resolve this as soon as possible. He visited parish and town councils regularly to speak about highways and had asked all councillors to report any unresolved issues to him and he would look into these. He reassured council that he received, on average, two complaints per year.

He said successful budgets had three components – a clear vision, financial skills and forward thinking and the proposed budget had all of these. It was the product of a merger of four councils with sound budgets.

Cllr N Hughes felt the proposed budget before council was a productive and well balanced budget which would meet the majority of residents' demands. Although the Cabinet Member for Climate and Biodiversity was not present he would have been emphasising the need to get to net zero as early as possible.

He was delighted to support this budget and particularly the Bus Travel Bursary Scheme which was a permanent investment in bus travel to support young people accessing education and training opportunities..

Cllr Shirley felt it would have been appropriate for the Council to pay tribute to the sovereign council of Barrow for the work undertaken in the establishment of Team Barrow. This would be advantageous to the area and aimed to succeed. He wondered if the administration was fully supportive of this.

With reference to the capital investment and other funding for Team Barrow he felt it would be helpful for members to receive a briefing on how the money would be spent.

Cllr Morgan, speaking at the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the comprehensive answers to the questions raised and the presentation. She reminded members that the role of the OSC does not finish once the budget is agreed. They would continue to scrutinise the services and whether the Council was delivering on its commitments.

Cllr Burns accepted that Westmorland and Furness was in a much better position than many other councils but there was still not enough money to do everything needed to deliver on priorities.

She would like to see more services devolved to local councils. Currently there were 130+ councils on the brink of not being able to balance their budgets, and

with around 300,000 children living with the effects of poverty the councils were still being asked to deliver savings.

Cllr Brereton echoed the support for the work undertaken by the Cabinet Member and Director in producing this budget. In future, he would like to see a cleaner settlement from Government instead of money being allocated from different funding pots.

He also raised the issue of fairness for surcharges on empty homes when the owners were either going through probate or refurbishing properties. He would like to see an extension of the time allowed for this to happen.

Cllr Cooper asked how deliverable the Capital Programme was, and also based on the amount of slippage this year how achievable this would be.

The Cabinet Member responded to the comments.

He was aware of the plight of other authorities facing budget difficulties, especially in light of the lack of Government funding, and savings to be made. He would welcome any additional funding from Government.

With reference to the comments about the amount of money allocated to local plans the Cabinet Member said this was something the council had to do, it was not optional.

The use of reserves had been unavoidable this year and he confirmed that the Section 151 Officer had not raised any concerns with the figures in the proposed budget.

In relation to the cost of dementia services the Cabinet Member agreed to provide a written response.

The Cabinet Member referenced the work undertaken in Barrow by the sovereign council, for which this council was extremely grateful. Westmorland and Furness Council has identified a number of areas for investment and was committed to the area and also to Team Barrow.

With reference to the ask from Cllr Brereton re probate he confirmed that probate was already excluded from requirement to pay second/empty home tax and this would be kept under review.

He welcomed the comments about the need for a clearer funding settlement and also felt Westmorland and Furness and other rural councils had not been fairly treated when it came to funding for services. The cost of providing services was the same whether the location was rural or urban.

With reference to comments about the pace of transformation the Cabinet Member said services needed to be stabilised first before service were transformed. Transformation will be carried out but in a managed way.

Climate change, although not as statutory service was an important issue and needed to be tackled urgently to protect future generations. This council had a path to net zero which could be achieved.

The Chair then reminded members that the meeting could only carry on for three hours without the agreement of members to continue. He proposed a break for 45 minutes for lunch following the conclusion of Item 9 - 2024/25 Council Tax Setting item.

Upon conclusion of the debate and in line with regulations three recorded votes then took place.

Cllr Taylor left the room at this point.

The first one was for recommendation 2.4

<b>Name</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Cllr G Archibald				√
Cllr T Assouad	√			
Cllr C Atkinson			√	
Cllr R Audland	√			
Cllr L Baker	√			
Cllr J Battye	√			
Cllr S Bavin	√			
Cllr P Bell	√			
Cllr T Biggins	√			
Cllr J Boak	√			
Cllr M Brereton	√			
Cllr D Brook	√			
Cllr J Brook	√			
Cllr A Burns	√			
Cllr T Callister	√			
Cllr HF Carrick	√			
Cllr D Cassidy	√			
Cllr F Cassidy	√			
Cllr H Chaffey	√			
Cllr W Clark				√
Cllr A Coles				√
Cllr A Connell	√			
Cllr B Cooper	√			
Cllr J Cornthwaite	√			
Cllr J Derbyshire	√			
Cllr P Dew	√			
Cllr PJ Dixon	√			
Cllr J Drake	√			
Cllr D Edwards	√			
Cllr P Endsor				√
Cllr S Evans	√			
Cllr M Eyles	√			
Cllr J Filmore				√
Cllr L Hall	√			
Cllr KR Hamilton				√
Cllr M Hanley	√			
Cllr EM Hennessy	√			



Cllr HM Hodgson	√			
Cllr N Hughes	√			
Cllr V Hughes				√
Cllr A Husband	√			
Cllr H Irving	√			
Cllr A Jama				√
Cllr A Jarvis	√			
Cllr D Jones	√			
Cllr H Ladhams	√			
Cllr N McCall	√			
Cllr W McEwan	√			
Cllr I Mitchell	√			
Cllr B Morgan	√			
Cllr J Murphy	√			
Cllr J Murray	√			
Cllr S Pender	√			
Cllr N Phillips	√			
Cllr D Rathbone	√			
Cllr M Robinson	√			
Cllr M Rudhall				√
Cllr S Sanderson	√			
Cllr M Severn	√			
Cllr B Shirley	√			
Cllr G Simpkins	√			
Cllr D Taylor				√
Cllr V Taylor				√
Cllr P Thornton	√			
Cllr R Worthington	√			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>

Cllr Taylor returned to the room at this point.

A second recorded vote then took place on recommendation 2.6.

Cllr Audland left the room at this point.

<b>Name</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Cllr G Archibald				√
Cllr T Assouad	√			
Cllr C Atkinson	√			
Cllr R Audland				√
Cllr L Baker	√			
Cllr J Batty	√			
Cllr S Bavin	√			
Cllr P Bell	√			
Cllr T Biggins	√			
Cllr J Boak	√			
Cllr M Brereton	√			
Cllr D Brook	√			
Cllr J Brook	√			

Cllr A Burns	√			
Cllr T Callister	√			
Cllr HF Carrick	√			
Cllr D Cassidy	√			
Cllr F Cassidy	√			
Cllr H Chaffey	√			
Cllr W Clark				√
Cllr A Coles				√
Cllr A Connell	√			
Cllr B Cooper	√			
Cllr J Cornthwaite	√			
Cllr J Derbyshire	√			
Cllr P Dew	√			
Cllr PJ Dixon	√			
Cllr J Drake	√			
Cllr D Edwards	√			
Cllr P Endsor				√
Cllr S Evans	√			
Cllr M Eyles	√			
Cllr J Filmore				√
Cllr L Hall	√			
Cllr KR Hamilton				√
Cllr M Hanley	√			
Cllr EM Hennessy	√			
Cllr HM Hodgson	√			
Cllr N Hughes	√			
Cllr V Hughes				√
Cllr A Husband	√			
Cllr H Irving	√			
Cllr A Jama				√
Cllr A Jarvis	√			
Cllr D Jones	√			
Cllr H Ladhams	√			
Cllr N McCall	√			
Cllr W McEwan	√			
Cllr I Mitchell	√			
Cllr B Morgan	√			
Cllr J Murphy	√			
Cllr J Murray	√			
Cllr S Pender	√			
Cllr N Phillips	√			
Cllr D Rathbone	√			
Cllr M Robinson	√			
Cllr M Rudhall				√
Cllr S Sanderson	√			
Cllr M Severn	√			
Cllr B Shirley	√			
Cllr G Simpkins	√			
Cllr D Taylor				√
Cllr V Taylor	√			

Cllr P Thornton	√			
Cllr R Worthington	√			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

Cllr Audland returned to the meeting at this point.

A third recorded vote then took place on the rest of the recommendations:

<b>Name</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Cllr G Archibald				√
Cllr T Assouad	√			
Cllr C Atkinson		√		
Cllr R Audland	√			
Cllr L Baker	√			
Cllr J Battye	√			
Cllr S Bavin	√			
Cllr P Bell	√			
Cllr T Biggins	√			
Cllr J Boak	√			
Cllr M Brereton		√		
Cllr D Brook	√			
Cllr J Brook	√			
Cllr A Burns	√			
Cllr T Callister	√			
Cllr HF Carrick		√		
Cllr D Cassidy	√			
Cllr F Cassidy	√			
Cllr H Chaffey	√			
Cllr W Clark				√
Cllr A Coles				√
Cllr A Connell	√			
Cllr B Cooper		√		
Cllr J Cornthwaite	√			
Cllr J Derbyshire	√			
Cllr P Dew			√	
Cllr PJ Dixon	√			
Cllr J Drake	√			
Cllr D Edwards		√		
Cllr P Endsor				√
Cllr S Evans	√			
Cllr M Eyles	√			
Cllr J Filmore				√
Cllr L Hall		√		
Cllr KR Hamilton				√
Cllr M Hanley	√			
Cllr EM Hennessy	√			
Cllr HM Hodgson	√			
Cllr N Hughes	√			
Cllr V Hughes				√
Cllr A Husband	√			

Cllr H Irving		√		
Cllr A Jama				√
Cllr A Jarvis	√			
Cllr D Jones	√			
Cllr H Ladhams	√			
Cllr N McCall	√			
Cllr W McEwan	√			
Cllr I Mitchell	√			
Cllr B Morgan	√			
Cllr J Murphy	√			
Cllr J Murray	√			
Cllr S Pender	√			
Cllr N Phillips			√	
Cllr D Rathbone	√			
Cllr M Robinson	√			
Cllr M Rudhall				√
Cllr S Sanderson	√			
Cllr M Severn	√			
Cllr B Shirley		√		
Cllr G Simpkins	√			
Cllr D Taylor				√
Cllr V Taylor	√			
Cllr P Thornton	√			
Cllr R Worthington		√		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>

**RESOLVED**, that Council

- (1) considers and takes account of the response to the Budget Consultation including Overview & Scrutiny Committee feedback set out in Appendix 2.
- (2) notes the Director of Resources & Section 151 Officer Section 25 Report as at Section 5 including her review of the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the reserves.
- (3) approves a 2.99% increase in the general Council Tax and an additional 2% increase for the Adult Social Care precept for 2024/25 resulting in an overall increase of 4.99%.
- (4) approves charging the empty homes Council Tax premium of 100% after 1 year empty, and 300% after 10 years empty; from the 1 April 2024.
- (5) approves subject to 2.1 and the approval of 2.3 and 2.4 above, approve:
  - a Council Tax requirement of £163.663m which results in a Band D Council Tax of £1,827.76 for Westmorland and Furness Council,

- noting that a separate report on calculating the total 2024/25 Council Tax charges is being presented to Council as part of today's agenda.
- (6) approves the introduction of a 100% Council Tax premium on second homes effective from 1 April 2025.
  - (7) approves the draft Net Revenue Budget requirement of £272.501m for 2024/25 (See Appendix 10) and:
    - A five-year Medium Term Financial Plan 2024-2029 (see Appendix 1).
    - The schools budget for 2024/25 of £215.521m including £80.507m for academies and free schools and other providers.
    - The use of reserves and levels of forecast reserves contained in the Medium Term Financial Plan.
    - The Capital Programme for 2024/25 of £110.507m (set within a six-year programme 2023-2029 of £499.946m) (Appendix 7 and 8).
    - The Locality Board budgets of £2.868m for 2024/25 (Appendix 3).
    - Housing Revenue Account - balanced budget including the use of £0.632m earmarked reserves and a 3.5% increase on dwelling and garage rents (Appendix 4).
    - Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25 (Appendix 5).
    - The Senior Leadership Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 (Appendix 6).
    - Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) for Council Tax charges, fee and charge increases, and the housing and garage rent increases (Appendix 9).
  - (8) approves that the slippage or accelerated position on the Capital Programme at 31 March 2024 is included within the 2024/25 Capital Programme and reviewed as part of Quarter 1 budget monitoring.
  - (9) approves the Strategic Highways and Transport Committee budget of £1.386m revenue and £21.937m capital subject to agreement by Council of the overall budget.
  - (10) approves the Locality Boards revenue budget allocation of £2.868m as set out in Appendix 3, subject to agreement by Council of the overall budget, and the draft guidance in respect of allocations and the limitations of virements.
  - (11) approves the proposed increases in fees and charges (see paragraphs 3.114-3.127). All are in accordance with the Fees and Charges Policy approved by Council in March 2023.
  - (12) approves a delegation to the Director of Thriving Communities in consultation with the Housing & Homelessness Portfolio Holder and Finance Portfolio Holder, to make arrangements to administer any specific grant received for the Household Support Fund in 2024/25.

Cllrs Dixon, Rathbone, Callister and Derbysire left the room at this point.

## 81 2024/25 Council Tax Setting

The Cabinet Member for Finance presents the 2024/25 Council Tax Setting Report, which had been determined for 2024/25 based on the dwellings across Westmorland & Furness, the Council Tax Support Scheme, Council Tax discounts, and empty premiums.

The individual components of the Council Tax were approved through the budget setting processes of each preceptor, and the Council Tax required by Westmorland & Furness Council was decided with Agenda Item 8 – 2024./25 Budget Proposals.

Cllr Dixon returned to the meeting at this point.

The calculation and setting of the Council Tax was closely prescribed by legislation, and this report set out the individual components of the calculation and concluded with the formal resolution in accordance with the statutory requirements.

Cllr Rathbone returned to the meeting at this point.

Cllr Derbyshire returned to the meeting at this point.

The preceptors were Westmorland & Furness Council, the Parish and Town Councils, the Police & Crime Commissioner for Cumbria, and the Cumbria Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority.

Cllr Callister returned to the meeting at this point.

The Cabinet Member took members through the report and highlighted the following:

- Council Taxbase
- Council Tax Requirement
- Basic Council Tax Amount
- Other major preceptors

He then moved the recommendations which were seconded by Cllr J Brook.

The Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer informed members that those that had not been present for the whole of the debate could not take part in the recorded vote.

Upon conclusion of the debate a recorded vote took place.

<b>Name</b>	<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstain</b>	<b>Absent</b>
Cllr G Archibald				√
Cllr T Assouad	√			
Cllr C Atkinson		√		
Cllr R Audland	√			
Cllr L Baker	√			
Cllr J Battye	√			
Cllr S Bavin	√			

Cllr P Bell	√			
Cllr T Biggins	√			
Cllr J Boak	√			
Cllr M Brereton	√			
Cllr D Brook	√			
Cllr J Brook	√			
Cllr A Burns	√			
Cllr T Callister				√
Cllr HF Carrick	√			
Cllr D Cassidy	√			
Cllr F Cassidy	√			
Cllr H Chaffey	√			
Cllr W Clark				√
Cllr A Coles	√			
Cllr A Connell	√			
Cllr B Cooper		√		
Cllr J Cornthwaite	√			
Cllr J Derbyshire				√
Cllr P Dew			√	
Cllr PJ Dixon				√
Cllr J Drake	√			
Cllr D Edwards			√	
Cllr P Endsor				√
Cllr S Evans	√			
Cllr M Eyles	√			
Cllr J Filmore				√
Cllr L Hall		√		
Cllr KR Hamilton				√
Cllr M Hanley	√			
Cllr EM Hennessy	√			
Cllr HM Hodgson	√			
Cllr N Hughes	√			
Cllr V Hughes				√
Cllr A Husband	√			
Cllr H Irving	√			
Cllr A Jama				√
Cllr A Jarvis	√			
Cllr D Jones	√			
Cllr H Ladhams	√			
Cllr N McCall	√			
Cllr W McEwan	√			
Cllr I Mitchell	√			
Cllr B Morgan	√			
Cllr J Murphy	√			
Cllr J Murray	√			
Cllr S Pender	√			
Cllr N Phillips	√			
Cllr D Rathbone				√
Cllr M Robinson	√			
Cllr M Rudhall				√

Cllr S Sanderson	√			
Cllr M Severn	√			
Cllr B Shirley	√			
Cllr G Simpkins	√			
Cllr D Taylor				√
Cllr V Taylor	√			
Cllr P Thornton	√			
Cllr R Worthington		√		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

**RESOLVED,** that Council

- (1) notes the Council Taxbase for 2024/25 as 89,542.67;
- (2) approves the formal Council Tax resolutions detailed at Section 4 of this report.

The meeting then broke for lunch at 1pm and reconvened at 1.45pm.

## **82     2023/24 Treasury Management Update Report**

On reconvening a further roll call was taken with 51 members present.

Members considered a report which contained the mid-year Treasury Management position, and was reported to Council to provide an update on the delivery of the Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council on the 7 March 2023.

The Cabinet Member for Finance took members through the report.

Appendix 1 detailed the treasury management activities during the first half of the 2023/24 financial year, and highlighted performance and activities which confirmed all Treasury Management activities undertaken during the period, including adherence to limits with the approved Prudential Indicators, were in compliance with the Annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement agreed by Members of the Shadow Authority in March 2023.

An internal review of the 2023/24 Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) which included the Annual Investment Strategy had been undertaken by the Service. This review had concluded that no amendments were required to the strategy.

As at 30 September 2023, Treasury Management was forecasting to underspend by £6.553m as set out below:

- No new external borrowing had been undertaken in the first six months of 2023/24 with the Council implementing its strategy to offset previously approved borrowing with short term cash reserves rather than incurring borrowing costs on new loans. It was also expected that no further borrowing would be undertaken during the remainder of 2023/24. This strategy had generated £2.886m savings in the year.



- The Council was currently retaining cash balances and had taken the opportunity for the Council to obtain increased rates on its investment of these cash balances. As such, at 30 September 2023, the Council forecast to receive £3.621m more interest than budgeted in 2023/24.
- Other expenditure within the Treasury Management budget was forecast to underspend by £0.046m.

The Cabinet member then moved the recommendations, which were seconded by Cllr Rathbone.

**RESOLVED,** that Council notes the mid-year Treasury Management report.

### **83 Approval of the Statement of Licensing Policy**

Members considered a report from the Director of Public Health which informed them that the Licensing Act 2003 required that the Council published a 'Statement of Licensing Policy', setting out the policies the Council would generally apply when exercising their functions under the Act.

The Cabinet Member for Transport and Environmental Services informed council that legislation required the Statement of Licensing Policy to be published every five years. A consultation had been undertaken between the 1 October 2023 and 31 December 2023.

Section 7 (2) Licensing Act 2023 prohibited the Licensing Committee from setting its own policy. At the Licensing Committee, held on 22 January 2024, members considered the consultation responses and draft Policy and had recommended that Council adopt the Policy from 1 April 2024.

The recommendations were then moved by the Cabinet Member and seconded by Cllr Ladhams and put to a unanimous vote.

**RESOLVED,** that Council adopt the draft Statement of Licensing Policy, as attached at Appendix 1 of the report, from 1 April 2024.

### **84 Approval of the Statement of Gambling Policy**

Members considered a report from the Director of Public Health which informed them that the Gambling Act 2005 required that the Council published a 'Statement of Gambling Policy', setting out the policies the Council would generally apply when exercising their functions under the Act.

The Cabinet Member for Transport and Environmental Services informed council that legislation required the Statement of Gambling Policy to be published every three years. A consultation had been undertaken between the 1 October 2023 and 31 December 2023.

The Gambling Act 2025 prohibited the Licensing Committee from setting its own policy. At the Licensing Committee, held on 22 January 2024, members considered the consultation responses and draft Policy and had recommended that Council adopt the Policy from 1 April 2024.

The recommendations were then moved by the Cabinet Member and seconded by Cllr Ladhams and put to a unanimous vote.

**RESOLVED,** that Council adopt the draft Statement of Gambling Policy, as attached at Appendix 1 of the report, from 1 April 2024.

## **85 Local Plan Governance**

Members considered a report which sought to set out governance arrangements for the delivery of the new Local Plan for Westmorland and Furness including the establishment of a Local Plan Members Steering Group. The proposed measures in this report were considered by the Constitution Working Group on 12 February 2024, which was in favour of the proposals.

The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Communities and Localities took members through the report.

The proposed measures would:-

- enable decisions relating to the Local Plan to be taken in a timely way which is aligned with the new requirement in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act to prepare a Local Plan in thirty months;
- allow members to be engaged in the plan preparation process in a positive, meaningful and time efficient fashion.
- help to ensure the delivery a timely, up-to-date and exemplary plan to take Westmorland and Furness into the 2030s and beyond.

Cllr F Cassidy left the room at this point.

Westmorland and Furness Council was the Local Planning Authority for the District outside the National Parks. Whilst the local plans only covered half of the District by area, they included 85% of our population. The law required local planning authorities to identify their strategic priorities and have policies to address these in local plans.

The local plan currently consisted of four existing legacy local plans. The task, following local government re-organisation was to prepare a single local plan incorporating the minerals and waste plan for the whole area within 5 years of vesting day.

The new Local Plan would set out the Council's vision for how the area would change over the next 15 years and how that vision would be delivered.

Under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, which received Royal Assent in October 2023, new processes for the preparation of Local Plans were being introduced with the aim of ensuring that plans were prepared within thirty months. Planning authorities would need to make the best use of digital technology to drive improved productivity and efficiency in the plan-making process.

A significant quantity of secondary legislation would be required before authorities could commence plan preparation under the new system. Under the proposals for rollout, new plans, would come forward in tranches with the first tranche (of

around 10 councils) pioneering the new system for whom the thirty months would commence this autumn.

There was a clear opportunity for Westmorland and Furness to be in that first tranche. The national importance of the growth of BAE in Barrow, driven by the Aukus submarine building project would generate housing, place-making and infrastructure needs. Government had ambitions for Barrow to be a new powerhouse for the north with the establishment of Team Barrow. There would be clear advantages in being part of that first tranche.

The Cabinet Member said Westmorland and Furness needed to be prepared and this meant making the most of the resource available.

At the same time, some measures were being progressed ahead of the Local Plan as Supplementary Planning Documents. These included a Design Code for Westmorland and Furness and a Master Plan for Barrow Marina Village. Whilst these would, in the first instance, be supplementary guidance to existing policies, they would help to inform the new local plan.

It was proposed that a Local Plan Members Steering Group be established which would have delegated authority from Cabinet to oversee the preparation of the Local Plan on a day-to-day basis.

The group would be the primary means by which members were engaged in the Local Plan preparation process. The purpose of the board would be to advise the Portfolio Holder on the exercise of their responsibilities on plan preparation, to provide a means by which day to day decisions could be taken and by which recommendations could be made to Cabinet on key decisions relating to the plan. It would also be a means by which members on various committees and boards within the Council were able to inform those groups and seek their feedback and comment.

The group would be chaired by the Portfolio Holder assisted by the Local Plan Programme SRO (Assistant Director Inclusive & Green Growth) supported by the Planning Policy Manager & relevant Local Plan Workstream Leads (see below) (as and when required). It was envisaged that the following would attend;

- The Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Committees and Localities or a nominated deputy;
- The chair of the Strategic Planning Committee or a nominated deputy;
- The chair of the Highways and Transport Strategic Board or a nominated deputy;
- The chair of the Eden Locality Board or a nominated deputy;
- The Chair of the Furness Locality Board or a nominated deputy;
- The Chair of the South Lakeland Locality Board or a nominated deputy;

Draft Terms of Conditions for the group were set out as Appendix 1.

Cllr F Cassidy returned to the meeting at this point.

Cllr Brereton referred to the section which mentions the involvement of members, and commented that there appeared to be no members of the Conservative Group represented. He asked if it was possible to revise the membership of the Steering Group to allow this.

The Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer said there was no legal reason why this could not be done as this Group was not one of the group that had to be politically balanced.

Cllr Brereton proposed that this be agreed.

Cllr Connell suggested perhaps the correct was to reconsider the membership of this Steering Group should be by referral back to the Constitution Review Group. Cllr Brereton accepted this proposal, and the rest of members also supported this.

Cllr Simpkins was concerned that none of the Chairs of the Local Area Planning Committees were included in the membership and he felt this was an oversight and should be reconsidered.

Cllr Murray commented that he was more comfortable with the Chairs of the Locality Boards being members of the Steering Group as the Local Area Planning Committees were much smaller and did not include all the members of the districts.

The Cabinet Member moved the recommendations, including the additional proposed recommendation for CRG to reconsider the membership and these were seconded by Cllr Battye and put to a vote, which was unanimous.

**RESOLVED,** that Council

- (1) agrees to establish a Local Plan Members Steering Group in line with the proposals below.
- (2) agrees that Part 2 – Section 2, Para 4.2.1(c) (i)-(iii) of the Constitution describing the responsibilities of Council be amended so as to delete sub-paragraph (ii), so that it reads as shown below:

‘The Policy Framework is formed of the following:  
(a)....  
(b)....  
(c) Development plan and strategy documents, including:  
  - (i) Local Plan;
  - (ii) ~~Core Strategy and Development Plan (excluding Neighbourhood Plans)~~; and
  - (iii) Minerals and Waste Local Plan’
- (3) agrees that the Monitoring Officer be authorised to amend the Constitution to give effect to recommendation above;
- (4) agrees that the membership of the Steering Group be referred to the Constitution Review Group for review.

**86    Urgent Items**

There were no urgent items of business on this occasion.

The meeting ended at 2.30 pm