

Westmorland and Furness Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 10th August 2022

Title: Preparation of Westmorland and Furness Council Plan

Report from: Councillor Jonathan Brook, Leader of the Council

Report Author: Dan Hudson, Strategy Lead Specialist, South Lakeland District Council

Wards: All

Key Decision: Yes

1.0 Purpose/Summary of report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the steps being taken towards the adoption of a Council Plan for Westmorland and Furness Council. The Council Plan will set out the high level strategic direction for the new authority including vision and priorities

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (1) Note this report
- (2) That any comments be forwarded to Cabinet for their consideration

3.0 Background and Proposals

Why do we need a Council Plan?

- 3.1 There is no statutory requirement for a local authority to have a Council plan or Corporate Plan. However most Councils have some form of over-arching corporate policy document or Council Plan which sets out the Council's vision, values and priorities.
- 3.2 For this reason, Barrow (2020), Eden (2019) and South Lakeland (2021) all have recently updated Council Plans whilst the County Council adopted its current plan in 2018.

- 3.3 A Council Plan is particularly important in the case of Westmorland and Furness (and Cumberland), where a new Council is about to come into being. There is an opportunity to set a long term direction of realising the benefits offered by local government re-organisation by doing things differently. The new Council needs to set budgets, design structures, make decisions on operating models and appoint the right people to the right roles. All of these things need to be guided by vision, direction and priorities so that, in addition to being efficient, safe and legal, the new Council is able to structure and design itself in such a way that enables it to deliver lasting change.

What does a Council Plan cover

- 3.4 This Council plan will be prepared with a great deal of uncertainty around the means of delivery. So it needs to focus on
- **Vision** - how the Council see the District and its people changing in the long term;
 - **Priorities** – the areas to which resource will need to be targeted to deliver the vision;
 - **Values and principles** – the values that will inform how the Council delivers on the vision.
- 3.4 The Council Plan is intended to communicate vision and direction at the highest level. It provides a statement of intent to inform relationships with other stakeholders. It informs prioritisation and organisational design. It covers a significant period of time – normally 5 years and can be regularly reviewed.
- 3.5 The Council Plan is not and cannot be a catalogue of everything the new Council will do. It is **not** about specific projects or services. It is about real-world outcomes. This is particularly the case in current circumstances when resources and structures for delivery are unknown. It can be supplemented by action planning, performance management frameworks and other council plans and strategies. It can give direction to service and departmental plans. Importantly, it can inform commissioning activity – decisions about what the Council does and, importantly, in the context of likely resource pressures and in particular the likelihood of very high social care costs, what it does **not** do.
- 3.6 Importantly the new Council will face significant resource challenges. This means that the plan will have to inform some difficult decisions on priorities and it will not be able to achieve all of its ambitions straight away. However it important that if the benefits of local government re-organisation are to be realised, there needs to be vision, ambition and direction.

How does the Council Plan fit with the Local Government re-organisation

- 3.7 The importance of Council Plans is reflected in the Local Government Reform programme for Westmorland, Furness and Cumberland which deals with those issues relating to Local Government re-organisation which affect both new Councils, primarily those concerned with the division of former County functions. The preparation of a Council Plan is one of the first steps for the new Councils in developing their new visions and separate identity and the new Councils may have very different priorities. The programme and the implementation plan that goes with it seeks to ensure that the preparation of new council plans runs ahead of the development of budgets for the new councils.
- 3.8 Council planning, policy and performance falls within the Corporate and Enabling theme. The theme envisages that, for both authorities, a cabinet paper (this report) explaining process and approach will be prepared in July, engagement will be undertaken in August and draft plans approved in September with a view to final plans being adopted in October. This can then inform policy development, budget planning, transformation planning and the development of an operating model.
- 3.9 The plan will provide a high level framework for functions currently delivered by the County Council such as social care supporting families and vulnerable children and adults, highways and transport, strategic infrastructure and investment, services to support the education system and improve outcomes for children and young people and District functions such as planning, environmental health, housing and recreation and is an opportunity to get some of these to work better together in pursuit of strategic priorities.
- 3.10 Because of the considerable uncertainties and demanding timescales under which the plan is being prepared, it is likely that there will be a need for early review and extensive community conversations in the first year of the new authority.

The New District – some facts and figures

- 3.11 Westmorland and Furness Council will be just over 2/3 of Cumbria by area. At more than 3,700 sq km, it will be England's third largest unitary authority by area after North Yorkshire and Northumberland. It will be larger than Cornwall or Shropshire and occupies an area larger than Greater London, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands combined.
- 3.12 It will contain England's third highest mountain (Helvellyn), England's highest mountain outside the Lake District (Cross Fell) the three largest lakes in the Lake District (Windermere, Ullswater and Coniston Water) and England's largest island outside the South East

(Walney Island) and around half of its area will be in National Parks and more still will be in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- 3.13 It will be at a crossroads of national transport routes with the M6 and West Coast Main Line running north to south and the A66 running east to west. Other important transport routes are the Lakes Line and A591 – the main route into the central Lake District, the A590 and Furness Line which connect the Furness area to the national route network.
- 3.14 It will have a population of around 225,400. It's largest town is Barrow-in-Furness (55,800 including Walney). Other important settlements are Kendal (29,000), Penrith (15,000), Ulverston (11,000), Dalton in Furness (7,800) and Windermere/Bowness (7,700). Only around 45% live in urban areas. The remainder live in the many small towns, villages and hamlets and in the open countryside.

The District Economy

- 3.15 There are 11,820 businesses in Westmorland and Furness and a work force of around 97,100. Together these add £5.7 billion of gross value to the national economy every year. Of this, £1.4bn derives from (predominantly advanced) manufacturing, much of which is concentrated in the Barrow and Furness areas. Other major contributors are real estate £0.85bn, retail £0.6bn, health £0.5bn and food and accommodation £0.4bn. Westmorland and Furness has a relatively low proportion of public sector workers – 18.3% compared to a national average of 23%.
- 3.16 The District is a predominantly rural District and a major centre of farming and food production with a significant proportion of the Nation's dairy and lamb herds. It is also a world leading visitor economy centred on the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks and has considerable expertise in the rural economy with specialisms in food and farming, land based industries, the green economy and cultural industries.
- 3.17 The District is a centre of world class advanced manufacturing. In the Furness area, based around BAE Systems, a highly skilled work force manufactures some of the most complex and advanced technology in existence. It is at the heart of a manufacturing and marine technology cluster which includes undersea lighting and electronics and offshore energy as well as a thriving port.

Challenges

- 3.18 Analysis of existing Council plans shows that Westmorland and Furness face many challenges – both national and local. It is England's most sparsely populated local authority with 62 people per sq km. This masks local disparities with only 25 per sq km in Eden

but 867 per sq km in Barrow. This presents challenges in terms of sustaining and delivering services to small and widely distributed communities. Sparseness and rurality also present challenges in terms of public transport, connectivity more generally and broadband connectivity.

- 3.19 A further challenge is represented by changes to farm subsidies following the end of the Common Agricultural Policy and the introduction of Environmental Land Management schemes. This will have profound impacts on rural land-use, earnings and an ageing and shrinking work force.
- 3.20 It has an ageing population and a declining workforce. By 2043, if current trends continue, it will have 10,400 fewer people of working age. So it needs to grow its economy, provide housing and employment opportunities to encourage the young to stay and attract young families, skilled people and wealth creators to locate in the District. At the same time there will be an additional 15,000 people of 65 or older. So we need to encourage people to stay active and healthy for longer and promote housing and care options which promote active life.
- 3.21 Westmorland and Furness has some high levels of deprivation and health inequality. 7.9% of the District is amongst the most deprived 10% areas in England (all in the Barrow area) whilst 20% of the District is in the least deprived 30% including nearly 50% of the South Lakeland. Meanwhile hidden deprivation within more affluent areas is also an issue. Parts of Eden and South Lakeland are deprived on some indicators and fuel poverty is a particular and worsening issue.
- 3.22 Health disparities are particularly acute. 17% of the District is amongst the most deprived 10% in health terms and this includes 53% of Barrow whilst nearly 70% of Eden is amongst the 30% least health deprived areas in England. Health and wellbeing is a critical issue and is increasingly being looked at in the widest sense. The linkages with poverty and inequality are obvious but possible priorities such as economic growth, demographic change, climate change, community empowerment all impact on health and wellbeing both now and in the longer term. It is likely that functions which are currently County functions such as Adult Services, Childrens Services and Public Health will be critical to addressing inequality and deprivation issues.
- 3.23 Housing inequality in terms of price, quality and choice is also a major issue across the District. In South Lakeland median house prices are 10.12 times median workplace income – some of the least affordable housing in the North of England. The equivalent figures for Eden is 8.39% and for Barrow 3.79%. In addition the standard and energy efficiency of much of the existing housing stock is an issue giving rise

to rural and urban fuel poverty. This has consequences for young people and families being able to source housing. Particularly in National Parks, housing is under pressure from second homes and holiday lets, with serious consequences for small rural communities.

- 3.24 The authorities of Westmorland and Furness are also at the forefront of the challenge of climate change with ambitious carbon reduction targets – areas include promoting a transition to a low carbon economy, adapting to flood risk, promoting carbon sequestration and biodiversity through efficient land-use and promoting zero carbon energy generation.
- 3.25 Towns and villages are at the heart of the new District's identity, its character and the offer to investors, residents and visitors. Many have served the communities around them for centuries. Many have been hit by changing shopping patterns, economic change, the impact of car borne and remote shopping, working patterns and the impact of the pandemic. In some places, the impact of visitor spend has helped to cushion the impacts of these changes. Communities have also been hit by the high cost of housing, the shortage of suitable and affordable housing for local people and competition for a limited supply of housing from second homes and holiday lets. So we need re-imagine our towns for the future.
- 3.26 In a large and diverse District it will be important to empower local communities to use local knowledge to develop local solutions to their issues and to ensure that local areas evolve in ways which reflect their distinctive identities and priorities. There is significant experience in locality based and asset based working in the existing authorities and an opportunity to build on this approach in the new authority.

The Council Plan Preparation Process

- 3.27 An officer level working group from the LGR Policy and Strategy Theme group has been set up to co-ordinate the preparation of a Council Plan for Westmorland and Furness. The group is being led by Dan Hudson of South Lakeland District Council and has representation from the County Council, Barrow Borough Council, SLDC and Eden District Council.
- 3.28 On July 22, Cabinet agreed the following timetable and outcomes for the delivery of a Council Plan for Westmorland and Furness

July 2022

- Cabinet discussions and initial thoughts on the vision and priorities for the new authorities
- Cabinet Paper setting out approach, issues and options (The Cabinet report)

August 2022

- Initial conversations about emerging vision and priorities with key stakeholders
- Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny

September 2022

- Preparation of draft plan
- Consideration by Cabinet
- Equalities impact assessment

October 2022

- Approval of first high-level Council Plan vision and priorities by the Shadow Authority

April 2023

- In first year of new council, commence further community/stakeholder engagement to support development of the strategies and more detailed aims and objectives underpinning the Council Plan vision and priorities

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 Whilst it will not be possible to undertake a major consultation exercise within the constraints of the timetable, conversations with key stakeholders will be undertaken and the intention is that the plan be subject to early review and a full public engagement exercise, planned and resourced by the new authority

5.0 Alternative Options

- 5.1 The shadow authority could decide not to prepare a Council Plan. This would however leave it without an overall direction to inform the development of budgets, structures, operating models, strategies, projects and initiatives. It would also leave it without a basis for commissioning services, projects and initiatives. This in turn will lead to duplication, lack of focus and waste. It would however allow greater flexibility to respond to short term pressures.
- 5.2 The shadow authority could prepare a Council Plan at a later date. This would have the advantage that there would be greater certainty about the new Council in terms of structure, budget, functions and capacity. However this would mean that important decisions on structure, budgets and operating models would not be informed by agreed priorities or strategic direction. The Council Plan is intended to be iterative and can be refined as the shape of the new authority emerges.

6.0 Implications

Financial, Resources and Procurement

6.1.1 The Council Plan does not contain specific proposals at this stage. The assumption is that it is deliverable from available resource but both plan and budget will be revised and more closely aligned in future years.

Human Resources

6.2.1 The Council Plan does not contain specific proposals at this stage. Any workforce implications identified as the plan develops will be fully consulted on as appropriate.

Legal

6.3.1 There is no statutory requirement to prepare a Council Plan.

6.3.2 The Council Plan is identified in Article 15 of the Council's constitution as part of the Council's Policy Framework which the Shadow Authority will be responsible for adopting in preparation of the Westmorland and Furness Authority assuming local government functions and full local authority powers on 1 April 2023. This policy framework and the annual budget are the responsibility of the Shadow Authority

Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment

6.4 Have you completed a Health and Sustainability Impact Assessment? No

6.5 This is a proposal to prepare a Council Plan. Health and Sustainability Assessment is designed into the process and will be undertaken as the substance of the plan emerges.

Equality and Diversity

6.6 Have you completed an Equality Impact Analysis? No

6,7 This is a proposal to prepare a Council Plan. Equality Impact Assessment is designed into the process and will be undertaken as the substance of the plan emerges.

Risk Management	Consequence	Controls required
That the Council plan does not provide a strong enough basis for prioritisation.	Efficiencies are not achieved. The plan does not influence budget and structure	The plan process will be integrated with budget process. The plan will take an iterative approach, including member

Risk Management	Consequence	Controls required
		engagement on priorities
That the plan does not reflect the priorities of the District and its Communities	The plan does not have external credibility with stakeholders and delivery partners	The plan will be subject to conversations with stakeholder and frequent review
That the plan becomes dated	The plan becomes ineffective and loses credibility	The plan will focus on strategic objectives not individual projects, and will be frequently reviewed
That the plan does not reflect the diversity of issues within the District	The plan does not address major issues which are of importance to localities within the District	The plan will draw on existing Council Plans from all Districts and County. Plan is subject to conversations with stakeholders, frequent review

Contact Officers

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Appendices Attached to this Report

Appendix No.	Name of Appendix
None	