

Carlisle Parish Councils Association

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Carlisle Parish Councils Association held virtually on 1st September 2020 at 7.00pm.

Present:

Name	Parish Council
Mike Higginbotham	Chair CPCA & Wetheral PC
Bryan Craig	CPCA Vice Chair & Dalston PC
Trevor Allison	CPCA Exec & Cummersdale PC
William Bundred	CPCA Exec & Kirkandrews on Esk
William Little	CPCA Exec & Orton PC
Keith Mckintosh	CPCA Exec & Cummersdale PC
Julia Dobson	Wetheral Parish Council
Roger Dobson	Cumwhitton Parish Council
Barry Earp	Wetheral Parish Council
Tom Greenwood	Beaumont Parish Council
Stephen Higgs	Wetheral Parish Council
Ray Hinton	Farlam Parish Council
Patricia Macdonald	Orton Parish Council
Nick Phillips	Hayton Parish Council
Sean Reed	St Cuthberts Without Parish Council

In attendance Sonia Hutchinson (Parish Development Officer).

Mike Higginbotham (Chairman) welcomed all those present to the CPCA AGM 2021 and explained that the business section of the meeting would take place after the guest speakers in Part 2 of the meeting. Mike Higginbotham welcomed Jason Gooding, Chief Executive Carlisle City Council and John Mallinson, Leader Carlisle City Council to give their views on Local Government Re-organisation.

Part 1

Attached as appendix 1 is a summary of the guest speakers' presentations, together with any questions raised and the responses provided.

Part 2

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from

Ann Byers	Dalston Parish Council
Anne Jordan	Irthington Parish Council
Mike Ridley	CPCA Exec & Irthington Parish Council
Allison Riddell	Irthington Parish Council

2. Minutes of the last AGM held on 9th September 2020.

The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

3. Matters Arising

None reported.

4. Chairman's Report

Mike Higginbotham asked for confirmation that everyone had got a copy of the Chairmans report which was circulated with the agenda. It was noted that everyone had received the report.

5. Treasurer's Report

Sonia Hutchinson explained that the current balance as at 31st July is £629.46 and that there has been no expenditure or income received in year.

6. Election of Officers

Mike Higginbotham was nominated and duly re-elected as Chairman and Bryan Craig was nominated and duly re-elected as Vice-Chairman.

7. Election of Representatives to the CPCA Executive Committee

The remaining existing members of the CPCA Executive Committee were also duly re-elected. The members are William Bundred, William Little, Keith McIntosh, Mike Ridley and Trevor Allison.

8. Election of Representatives to the CALC Executive

Mike Higginbotham, Wetheral PC and Bryan Craig, Dalston PC were re-elected as the representatives on the CALC Executive Committee.

9. Date of the next CPCA Executive meeting

To be confirmed, agreed that S. Hutchinson will arrange for 3 months-time unless she feels it necessary to call an earlier meeting in light of Local Government Re-organisation.

DRAFT

Appendix 1

A summary of the presentations from Jason Gooding and John Mallinson plus questions and answers.

Jason Gooding

The Secretary of state decision is to seek to implement two unitary authorities on the footprint of Cumbria, West comprising Carlisle Allerdale and Copeland, this is not a merger of these councils but the abolition of all seven existing local authorities and the creation of two new unitary authorities, the other new one is called East Cumbria based on Eden, South Lakes and Barrow footprints.

Good news for parish councils with regards to the importance of parish councils and an expectation from government that parish councils do more in their areas in the context of bigger unitary authorities.

Next step the Secretary of state has to lay before parliament a Structural Change Order which will include a number of important provisions that will affect what the current authorities do over the next few months, the first of these important provisions is to set a date, the first Thursday in May next year, when there will be elections to shadow unitary authorities.

Really important new elections for new temporary wards – councillors will serve for 5 years In May 2022 they will be elected as shadow councillors until 1st April 2023(vesting date) when they will become new members of new unitary authorities for 4 years until 2027.

What will wards look like - 46 new wards in West and 38 in East Cumbria. Government view is that there should be an appropriate number of councillors to cover the wards, other new unitary authorities' number of councillors have been based on one councillor per 5000 population, equates to approximately 55 for West Unitary Authority, current leaders launching an argument for more councillors because of sparsity and rurality of the geographical footprint.

Secretary of State will determine a temporary warding pattern for the new authority so that elections can be held in 8 months-time. CEOs have been informed by HMCLG that the approximate number of councillors is more important than electoral balance so initially whatever the sec of state decides the aim for May 2022 will be to get an appropriate number of councillors elected that approximately equate to the right political balance so new unitary authorities can be up and running in May 2022.

Before the 2027 elections the boundary commission will review and establish the correct warding patterns that will determine the new wards for the unitary authorities.

Status STC belongs to Secretary of State he has responsibility for writing it and laying before parliament it can't be amended by parliament only agreed or not agreed. He has no legal obligation to consult with the current principal authorities he can ask for their views on such things as temporary warding, number of councillors etc. but he doesn't have to take those views into account. SCO will also include the names of the new authorities' possible front

runners are West unitary may be called Cumberland, East unitary may be called Westmorland and Furness. Other issues to be considered in the SCO will be the setting up of joint committees and transition team to set up new structures in new authorities but SCO will only be agreed by Parliament in March 2022.

Once shadow authorities are elected in May, they will have the power, and current principal authorities will continue to deliver services but will not be able to start new large projects during 2022.

From Vesting day, 1st April 2023 new councils will be wholly responsible for delivering services the old councils will cease from that date. Vesting Day is a beginning all services will not be transformed by that date the top priority is to have in place safe and legal arrangements to deliver public services. For some services such as existing corporate district services they may be delivered right across the patch from Vesting Day such as HR or Finance but services with contracts or in house services such as waste collection it will take longer to amalgamate those services. Also new unitaries will not be in a position to deliver CCC services differently by Vesting Day solutions will be configured and defined during 2022 2023 when members have been elected. Options for delivering these services could include joint committees, Combined authorities or disintegration of services which will have to be determined by the new authorities. On Vesting Day new authorities will have members, a leader, a cabinet and an executive model, then they have to make good on the promise to transform and improve services as a result of LGR. A Transition Group has been set up and led by CCC CEO Gill Steward, she will only be involved during the transition and chairs the transition team. Currently the team have two tasks firstly to provide an opinion on the SCO with regards to what the team think about warding, names and joint committees etc. and secondly to get together the resources necessary to get cracking on the transition programme management office programme managers project officers business analysts to start the work on restructuring not looking at the delivery of the services, but bringing together information on finance, performance, IT services etc.

Transition programme management office to be established as soon as possible to get on with the business of getting services in shape and so that services can be delivered legally on 1st April 2023.

Decision that has been made good for Carlisle and West Cumbria but there is a question about East and West which is whether they should be supported by a combined authority as there are some concerns about an economic imbalance in the sizes of the new authorities and could that imbalance be addressed by a Combined Authority providing some strategic governance across the old footprint of Cumbria.

What will it mean for parish councils? That will be up to the newly elected members of the new authorities, for example will there be locality working, joint committees will parish councils enjoy an enhanced level of support etc. It will be a while before there are definitive answers to such questions as what is the appetite for the devolution of resources / services to parish councils? Or is it about devolving influence to parish councils to direct resources commissioned by a unitary authority.

John Mallinson - Shall we take questions.

Mike Higginbotham - It would be nice to hear your view John on the good and bad points

John Mallinson - Fundamentally I am quite clear not option I wanted however I do think it will work and have been for 25 years an advocate that Cumbria was too geographically large and too different to work as one cohesive unit. I hope to be a fully participative member in the build up to the new authority and I would hope to serve on the new authority and will have to consult the electorate about that. I am very proud to be the Leader of Carlisle City Council and believe that Carlisle City Council is very robust it has an enormous strength from the asset base built up from the prudence of our forefathers, we are the only City in the county with west coast mainline, the M6, an airport, museum and nice cathedral and I expect Carlisle to remain the county town. I think we should push MPs for better transport links especially A595 which would be beneficial for the NHS and we will have a big interest in the nuclear industry. I have good working relationships across Carlisle and West Cumbria and I am enthusiastic about the future, I think this can work and it will work but we will still have one single authority running from Sleabeck to Millom which is a very huge geographical area which may require locality working. I think pcs have an enormous amount to play my message to you is please step up and take on the responsibility. I think excellent future for parish councils especially those prepared to step up to the challenge.

Questions

1. Roger Dobson – Cumwhitton PC

I have been working with several parish councils at varying stages of development and have expressed my view that PCs are going to be more important, all my experience of delayering suggests that responsibility is likely to be pushed down. How can we prepare parish councils for the responsibilities that should rightly be going their way and how can we encourage them to become more democratic as not many contested elections in parish councils?

Response Jason Gooding

I am really interested in both of those questions and will share my opinions. With regards to preparing PCS for taking on more responsibilities I am really interested in the idea of a mixed economy as I suspect that the outcome pcs want is influence they want to be able to determine things that happen in their area that are in the interest of their communities for example a parish council might say it would really help us if grounds maintenance was delivered in our village in this particular way, we could delegate the budget but I like the idea of a unitary authority that can just flexibly respond to what parishes and communities want to do so that parishes and communities can influence how services are delivered in their communities as a base level option we can design services around your needs, now some parish councils that are bigger and more confident might have other ideas in that they may want to take on particular responsibilities, such as a future Carlisle Town Council if it exists would want to take on bigger responsibility I think there should be a mixed economy but there should be at the very least a responsiveness to

what communities and parish councils want. The second part of your question is related to that if parish councils are seen to have real influence and impact in their communities either directly or indirectly will provoke interest and people will want to be involved and elected to parish councils there will also be two hundred unemployed councillors who want to serve their communities and they will be motivated to join more empowered parish councils.

2. Trevor Allison – Cummersdale PC

At what stage and how is it organised that we could end up with a combined authority and an elected Mayor when will that happen and how will it happen if it does happen?

Response Jason Gooding

The decision to form a combined authority is a decision of the new councils and as part of that decision they may decide to seek a Mayoral combined authority they may seek a discussion with government about a mayoral combined authority deal with some resources and some responsibility would come to Cumbria but that is not a decision for anybody other than the members who are going to be elected to the new unitary authority. Some of the decisions we need to make now on service design will either make it easier or more difficult to have a combined authority in the future for example a service which may be delivered by a combined authority on a county wide footprint is unlikely to be disaggregated now if there is a chance it would need to be reaggregated at a later stage. I suspect that there are a number of county council services which will not be disaggregated before Vesting Day in the interests of them being safely and legally delivered and leaving as many options as possible open for the newly elected members.

Response John Mallinson

The message is quite clear that the best devolution deals are available for those areas with a combined authority and probably with an elected a mayor and as far as the disaggregation argument is concerned in my experience of social care that is where the cost and the risk is for councils and don't think it is possible to disaggregate those types of services into two authorities.

3. Julia Dobson – Wetheral PC

Thank you, Jason and John, for providing a good draft of knowledge I am just looking at parish councils what are your thoughts on allowing parish councils more say in planning issues?

Response Jason Gooding

I can't make commitments for authorities that don't exist and it is constantly disappointing but it is the fact that planning is not as democratic a process as everyone would like it to be, the job of the planning committee and planning officers is to ensure the planning decisions made are compliant with legislation, policy and take enforcement action accordingly and I know that the objections and problems that parish councils raise are

genuine planning issues but I also know that councillors and officers are under pressure from people who just don't like what's proposed and it might not necessarily be a genuine planning reason and that puts us all in a really difficult position. The way the wind is blowing with regards to planning is a predisposition towards granting permission for more development and driving economic growth so I would say that yes I hope a new unitary authority is very mindful of these issues and how it approaches planning in particular I hope it is mindful of how it engages communities in developing policy so that the things that people want are consistent with policy often things can be traced back to if only we had better engaged communities in the development of the policy in the first place we wouldn't be having this problem now and I think that is the critical thing to get right. The risk is that bigger authorities withdraw themselves further away from the needs of local communities so back to the relationship with parish councils generally it is really important that whatever we do is mindful of that otherwise it becomes even more distant than what we have had so far.

Response John Mallinson

There are various models of how things are done with unitary authorities and we have talked about disaggregation but there are examples of unitary authorities that have the planning function which is currently reserved for districts on a more local basis than one single planning authority personally I see that as a positive thing.

4. Barry Earp - Wetheral PC

Some things are a little worrying firstly do you think in the future that there might be parish councils within the urban area, secondly where do you consider the new Head Quarters will be for what might be Cumberland, could it be Carlisle or somewhere down West Cumbria and if that is the case what would we do with the large buildings we have and thirdly does the ceremonial mayor of Carlisle which is the City, continue if we also have a mayor of a combined authority.

Response John Mallinson

Where will the Headquarters be, I don't know that decision will be made by the new authority, but I would say that although the two new authorities are going to have in the region of 100 members there will be 1200 staff and wherever the council chooses to meet may just be symbolic and won't be that important as far as building capacity is concerned. There is a clear difference between a ceremonial mayor and an elected mayor and having an elected combined authority mayor won't preclude from having a ceremonial mayor and it might be more than that if Carlisle chooses to have a Town Council which could call itself a City council and Carlisle should decide, and it should not be imposed upon it. I would prefer it if Carlisle did have a Town Council with some powers rather than just a ceremonial mayor.

5. Mike Higginbotham – Wetheral PC

We are moving to a third of councillors what are the workload implications for the people who are kind enough to volunteer.

Response John Mallinson

I do have some concerns about numbers, there is a view that we should go with one per division that's 46 and personally I think that's too small, but I don't think government will let it go much above 50 / 55 with 60 absolute tops with a population of about 5000 per councillor. Yes I think it will be difficult we are going to have to find new ways of working because one thing I am really concerned about is that it's a relatively easy decision for someone like me who isn't working to become a councillor but I really worry about getting younger people interested it must be difficult for them to juggle work, families and public service that is a real issue, we have tried different things at Carlisle City having more meetings in the evening or late afternoon but night meetings will become more difficult with larger areas so the more that can be done on a locality basis within a unitary may be better, but it has been overcome in other areas so there must be a way of doing it.

6. Mike Higginbotham – Wetheral PC

The financial savings, Jason has briefed us on project pump priming with start-up monies but there must be expectations from central government to have long term financial savings otherwise we probably wouldn't be going down this route as fast as looks to be implemented.

Response Jason Gooding

The purpose of LGR is not just to save money the gov is not going to say to Cumbria we have given you LGR now we are going to cut the resources to Cumbria because you are going to be more efficient, the purpose of saving money is to improve service delivery for example by having fewer management heads and therefore being able to divert resources to front line service delivery as a very simple example. The upfront costs of transition are to be met by existing authorities there is no new money coming from government in order to fund transition some of that cost will be repaid over the initial period of the new authorities existence now the gov may give us some flexibility about the start-up costs in that they may allow us to capitalise those costs which would help in terms of being able to get our hands on some money to fund the transition costs but it would not help in my view in terms of the long term sustainability of the local authorities for example Carlisle City council has got approx. 150 million pounds worth of non-operational assets that generate income for the City Council and will continue to do so for a new unitary authority unless we end up selling a proportion of them to fund the transition costs up front so it is going to be a really important consideration for the newly elected shadow authority as to how all that is handled in terms of assets in terms of tax base, transition costs, payback periods which is why it's important that they develop a good solid medium term financial plan within weeks of being elected.

7. Roger Dobson – Cumwhitton PC

Quite a different question, you referred Jason to 1200 employees where are the trade unions in the current situation, what's their response, what talks are you having with them I would expect them to be rather concerned.

Response Jason Gooding

I haven't had any formal discussions with the trade unions yet they will be reassured that most of their membership is going to be fine most of the savings that are going to be made are going to come from principally managerial posts in reduction of numbers but the experience of LGR is this, when people talk about it then people worry that there is going to be lots of disruption lots of redundancies and cost cutting the reality is that as soon as LGR is announced there is a number of staff of over 55 who want to talk about their exit packages, and the challenge is not making the difficult decisions about resources it's about getting enough people to do the jobs that need to be done. And of course, when we establish new authorities then as a general principal TUPE will apply and one of the headaches we will have to deal with in the new authorities will be people doing the same jobs on different contracts and different terms and conditions because they have Tupeed from different authorities. Generally, and I can speak more knowledgeably about employees at the City Council most staff are really comfortable about this and not generally nervous about it and see it as an opportunity to be part of something which is bigger more influential, more joined up across the public service community and they want to be involved in it. A few may be anxious, and I am sure a few members are anxious about it having been used to working for a particular organisation and then that organisation isn't going to exist, this is an unsettling time for many of us but as a general principal I think people, are feeling pretty good about this. The thing I am concerned about generally is actually how county council staff are feeling about this because the headline is that the CC is going to be split down the middle and it will disaster for the county services that does not build confidence among the people who are going to have to deliver this and be subject to the change, I think there will be plenty of work to go round and a huge challenge in improving services and I am looking forward to working with the unions to make that a success because my experience of the trade unions at Carlisle City has been a constructive fruitful relationship and they are up for change if managed in the right way.

Michael Higginbotham - As no further questions I will draw this session to an end and thank our two guest speakers for a superb presentation on behalf of everybody who has tuned in to this Part A.