

BOROUGH OF BARROW-IN-FURNESS

AN EXTRAORDINARY VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL of this Borough was held at 5.30 pm. on Thursday the 8th day of December, 2020.

PRESENT:- Councillor Hamilton (Mayor in the Chair) and Councillors Assouad, Barlow, Biggins, Blezard, Brook, Burley, Burns, Callister, Cassidy, D. Edwards, H. Edwards, Gawne, Hall, Husband, Johnston, McClure, McEwan, McLeavy, Maddox, Mooney, Morgan, Nott, Pemberton, Preston, Roberts, Robson, Ronson, Seward, Shirley, C. Thomson, M. A. Thomson and Wall.

Officers Present:- Sam Plum (Chief Executive), Steph Cordon (Director of People and Place), Susan Roberts (Director of Resources), Debbie Storr (Head of Legal and Governance & Monitoring Officer), Jon Huck (Democratic Services Manager) and Paula Westwood (Democratic Services Officer - Member Support).

66 Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence had been received.

67 Declarations of Interest and Dispensations

The Mayor reminded members of the briefing note previously circulated by the Monitoring Officer on declarations of interest, and the dispensation which had been granted to all members with regard to allowances in respect of matters relating to local government reform and devolution. Councillors Burns, Cassidy, Gawne, Hamilton, McEwan and Wall declared an Other Registrable Interest in Agenda Item No. 6 – Local Government Reform – Proposal for Bay Area Unitary Authority (Minute No. 70) as they also served as Members on Cumbria County Council.

Councillor Maddox declared an Other Registrable Interest in Agenda Item No. 6 – Local Government Reform – Proposal for Bay Area Unitary Authority (Minute No. 70) as she also served as a Member on Dalton with Newton Town Council where this matter had been discussed.

Councillor Shirley declared an Other Registrable Interest in Agenda Item No. 6 – Local Government Reform – Proposal for the Bay Area Unitary Authority (Minute No. 70) as he also served as a Member on Cumbria County Council and was in paid employment working for the MP for Barrow and Furness.

68 Public Participation

Question and Representations by the Public

Mr Stuart Hartley addressed the Council, with particular reference to a number of issues of unbalanced representation in relation to the proposals for the Bay Unitary Authority. Mr Hartley felt that the proposals had not been widely advertised (possibly due to Covid) and that there had been no collaboration with Cumbria County Council. He considered the information online and within the survey to be biased with leading questions. He stated that there had been a lack of involvement with Millom, Bootle and the Duddon Estuary. He made reference to the future industry of the area and questioned if there had been any ideas or investigation in relation to hydrogen.

Mr Hartley considered that this area had a good infrastructure for hydrogen and the creation of green energy. He also raised concerns of disconnect with the title of Cumbria and the Lake District which he considered could have an adverse effect on the desire of people wishing to purchase new build properties in the area.

The Mayor thanked Mr Hartley for his attendance and advised him that he could continue to watch the meeting via the YouTube livestream if he wished. The Leader of the Council added that for any questions not answered during the debate on Agenda Item No. 6, she would provide a written response to Mr Hartley.

69 Announcements

There were no announcements from the Chairman, Leader or Head of Paid Service.

70 Local Government Reform - Proposal for the Bay Area Unitary Authority

The Chief Executive had submitted a report further to the decision of Council at its meeting on 5th November, 2020 to submit an outline proposal for a Bay Area Unitary Authority; the report brought back the full proposal for approval.

If approved the Councils would present the full proposal to Government demonstrating how a Unitary Council would be an effective driver of economic, social and environmental benefits for the area's residents, businesses and visitors, realise the strategic potential of the area and enable transformation of public services.

The Leader of the Council placed on record her thanks to P.A. Consulting and to Officers and Members involved in preparing the proposals, as well as Stakeholders and the public who had taken part in the survey.

The Leader advised that since publishing the Bay proposal, correspondence had been received in the last 24 hours from Cumbria County Council and the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner which had been circulated to Members.

The Bay proposal was a result of significant detailed work by the Consultant team, Officers and Members and was based upon a clear understanding of the legislative requirements of Local Government reorganisation.

All of this work had been undertaken within the very tight timescale set by the invitation. Submission of the Bay proposal was a milestone on the journey and more detailed work would be required.

Members had been reminded that the invitation had specified that Type C proposals would be eligible, thus the specific opportunity for presenting a proposal which crossed a County boundary had been recognised by the Secretary of State.

As set out in the proposal, the Councils have engaged with strategic Stakeholders, including the Police and Crime Commissioner's Chief Constables and Fire and Rescue Authorities, through meeting with representatives put forward by them. The Bay proposal makes reference to those meetings and the issues raised which have shaped the proposal to date.

The Bay proposal recognises that there are complexities to be addressed. It also recognises that there are options available to the Secretary of State to consider changes to boundaries and further consideration in the context of the forthcoming

Local Recovery and Devolution White Paper and intention to build on the Government ambition for a radical transformation of how the Police and Fire and Rescue Services work together. The Council had been clear in their offer to continue to work collaboratively with these bodies as the proposal progresses.

The proposal had been updated to include the correspondence within its Appendix 1 and reference checked in the body of the proposal accordingly. The updated version had been published on the Council's website today incorporating the change of Page 13, the correspondence referred to and minor amendments to address typographical errors, explain acronyms etc.

The recommendations were moved by the Leader, seconded by the Leader of the Conservative Group and a debate ensued.

Councillor Mooney stated that the proposal was a great document and was very detailed. He had been blown away by the level of consultation with many being in favour of the proposals, particularly in the 18-34 year old age group.

Councillor Hall supported the realistic and affordable proposal which would improve local service delivery across the Bay. He placed on record his thanks to all those involved in preparing an excellent structured proposal in a short timescale. The proposals would create more sustainable Local Government with an empowered local community as a result.

Councillor Pemberton asked if the letter of objection received from the Lancashire Police and Crime Commissioner would affect it. The Chief Executive advised that the proposal did not propose to change Police boundaries. It recognises that there are complexities to be addressed and that there are options available. The Council would work collaboratively with the Police and Fire Authorities going forward.

Councillor M. A. Thomson advised that herself and Councillor Archibald (The Leader of SLDC) had spoken to Peter McCall (Cumbria's Police and Crime Commissioner) who had provided a formal response.

Councillor McLeavy placed on record his thanks to all those involved in preparing an outstanding proposal in a short timescale, which had his fullest support.

Councillor Roberts stated that tremendous effort had gone into preparing the proposal which presented a once in a generation opportunity to change service delivery for the benefit of residents. The proposal presented the opportunities to tackle poverty, deprivation and health inequalities, putting residents at the heart of it. The proposal clearly aligned to the Council's Growing Forward Plan which demonstrated how well aligned our values were to the other Authorities (SLDC and Lancaster). He referenced comments made by the speaker, Mr Hartley, and stated that the proposal addressed possibilities for a Hydrogen Alliance Hub. He added that given the Covid-19 restrictions, lots of work had gone into the public consultation exercise.

Councillor Robson supported the proposal and thanked everyone who had been involved in preparing it. He stated that Local Government Reorganisation had been imposed upon the Council, so the Council could either chose the best direction or deal with what other proposals occurred.

Councillor Shirley thanked Officers and Members for their work on the proposal. He stated that the Unitary Cumbria model had been unpopular but that other models were available. He advised that he had entered into this meeting and the Cumbria County Council meeting with a very open mind. He stated that the proposal did not entirely take in the full University Hospitals Morecambe Bay Trust health footprint as Millom, Haverigg, Bootle and parts of Yorkshire had been excluded. He felt that the survey had been a little one-sided with some leading questions and omissions of the other options on the table. In assessing all of the information, including the additional information circulated today, he did not think he could support the proposal. He added that whatever model the Government and Secretary of State opt for that he would 100% get behind it.

Councillor Callister stated that the proposal was a win win situation for residents in terms of economic and service delivery and placed on record his thanks to all those involved in the preparation of the proposal.

Councillor Blezard, speaking as the Lead Member for Arts, Culture and Leisure stated that the Council shared lots of the same ideas and cultural signifiers with the Bay area. The proposal was exciting for Arts, Culture and Leisure services and would be most welcomed going forward post Covid-19.

Councillor H. Edwards had great pleasure in seconding the proposal. She added that local Councillors are here for local people and that personal politics did not come into it. The proposal presented a logical and intelligent way forward and she placed on record her thanks to all those involved in preparing the proposal. The overwhelming majority of her party Members were in favour of the proposal which had proven local support as well as a good, credible geographical area covering the University Hospitals Morecambe Bay Trust health footprint.

Councillor M. A. Thomson thanked Members for their cross-party support and positive remarks regarding the proposal. She believed the proposal was the best proposal for Barrow which would make two credible and sustainable Unitary Authorities in Cumbria.

It was moved by Councillor M. A. Thomson and seconded by Councillor H. Edwards, a roll call was undertaken; there being 31 for, 1 against and 1 abstention and it was,

RESOLVED:-

1. To approve the full proposal for a Unitary Council for the Bay Area, which had been appended to the report, for submission to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government by 9th December, 2020; and
2. To authorise the Chief Executive and Leader to approve any minor amendments that may arise following consideration by South Lakeland and Lancaster Councils prior to submission.

71 Annual Treasury Management Statement

The Director of Resources had submitted a report presenting a summary of the treasury management activities for 2019-2020 and the associated indicators. All treasury management activities had been transacted in accordance with the approved strategy.

A copy of the Annual Treasury Management Statement 2019-2020 had been appended to the report.

It was moved by Councillor Brook and seconded by Councillor Roberts and it was unanimously,

RESOLVED:- To receive the Annual Treasury Management Statement for 2019-2020.

The meeting closed at 6.22 pm.