

## **West Cumbria Strategic Forum**

Ninth meeting - Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2012, 13:00 to 15:00pm

Mary Sumner House, 24 Tufton Street

Chair: Baroness Verma, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, DECC

### **Attendees**

Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

Department for Business Innovation and Skill North West (BIS-NW)

Department of Transport (DfT)

Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

Sir Tony Cunningham, MP for Workington

Copeland Borough Council (CBC)

Allerdale Borough Council (ABC)

Cumbria County Council (CCC)

Britain's Energy Coast (BEC)

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Sellafield Limited (SL)

Nuclear Management Partners (NMP)

Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA)

Professor John Fyfe, Independent Advisor (IA)

### **Introduction**

1. This was the ninth meeting of the Ministerial West Cumbria Strategic Forum (WCSF). The Forum presents the opportunity to discuss progress towards a sustainable economy in west Cumbria and how Government can assist west Cumbria in achieving the long-term vision for development.

### **Working together in partnership**

2. The Forum received a presentation from Professor John Fyfe, reemphasising the importance of working together in partnership, and the benefits for Government, west Cumbria and the UK as a whole in terms of business growth objectives, jobs, wealth creation, nuclear opportunities, diversification, innovation, skills, and investment.

### **Managing Radioactive Waste Safely programme update**

3. DECC is working closely with the NDA to address the concerns raised by the Decision Making Bodies prior to a decision on participation in the next stage of the MRWS process. The decision had been deferred to the end of January 2013.
4. The six Cumbrian MPs will be holding a private fact-finding session in early January to hear arguments from all sides on MRWS to be informed on the issues.

### **Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership Business Plan**

5. The Cumbria LEP was established in 2010 and is made up of 13 local partners. The business plan has been developed in consultation with around 2,000 businesses in Cumbria, and other experts including academics. In total there are approximately 29,000 businesses in Cumbria, 85% of which are small businesses.
6. The areas of focus for activity are business, skills, infrastructure, and environment. Developing skills and infrastructure to support growth are a high priority for the LEP. The LEP are working to support partners, bringing together employers to identify activity that will meet business needs.
7. On development over the last 2.5 years, there had been some frustration by the lack of resource that has been made available to the LEP. Government has, however, recently provided resource and the business plan is now being progressed.

### **Britain's Energy Coast – Update on the Economic Blueprint**

8. BEC presented an update on progress with implementation of the Economic Blueprint that was published in June 2012. Links have been made to the LEP business plan to ensure joined up partnership working. The Year 1 implementation plan has been agreed by the BEC Board, and the 5 year plan for 2013-2018 is currently being developed. This will identify where theme champions can be identified to develop particular areas; where the public, private, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector can contribute; and projects that BEC can commission to fill the voids.
9. BEC have identified challenges and opportunities for socio-economic development in west Cumbria. BEC aim to create an environment for innovation and to capitalise on investment; focus on strengths to give competitive advantage; build on expertise and diversify business; and capitalising on global markets through UKTI and exporting Cumbrian expertise to grow business. Reducing fuel poverty is also high on the agenda.

**Action 1: BIS-NW to continue to work with partners in Cumbria to identify business opportunities as a priority.**

### **Opportunities and challenges - providing updates on relevant projects**

#### **a. Memorandum of Agreement**

10. Government officials and partners in Cumbria have been working to update the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) first established in 2004. The principles of the agreement were reaffirmed by Ministers through cabinet correspondence in 2011. The update focuses on how we work together in partnership to deliver the principles of the MoA. The MoA is close to being finalised.

**Action 2: Cumbria County Council to identify any amendments and clarifications to finalise the MoA for signing.**

b. Mineral rights

11. Copeland County Council welcomed the work that Government has been doing to help move forwards the issue with mineral rights, which is proving a barrier to business and development.

**Action 3: Allerdale Borough Council, Copeland County Council, and Cumbria County Council to provide evidence of the extent of the issue with mineral rights.**

**Action 4: BIS-NW to take forward with other Government Departments on receipt of sufficient evidence from CCC, ABC, and CBC.**

c. West Cumberland hospital

12. Concern has been raised by Cumbrian partners that there may be insufficient funds to complete the project. NHS-NW sent a brief explaining that the project was going ahead and that the site was being prepared for the build. However, there was no NHS-NW official present at the Forum to address concerns.

**Action 5: Baroness Verma will write to Ministers in DH to obtain clarification on the status of the project.**

d. Homes and Community Agency liabilities

13. The Homes and Community Agency (HCA) has been working with the local authorities and BEC to prepare a business case to discuss with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) regarding the waiving of clawback arrangements on the ex-Regional Development Agency investments in the property portfolio managed by BEC. A full waiver of the clawbacks requires CLG approval as this is not within HCA delegated authority. Meanwhile HCA lawyers are reviewing the grant funding agreements to see if any steps can be taken in the interim to assist BEC. This will free up funds that BEC have set aside in the event of clawback being instigated.

**Action 6: HCA to continue to work with BEC to take forwards the business case to CLG**

e. Business rates and impacts

14. Business Rates will be retained by local authorities that host nuclear facilities, in the same way as growth in other sectors. From April next year, local government as a whole will keep a share of the business rates collected, together with the growth on that share. The Government is currently considering responses to a technical

consultation on the final design of the scheme, but this will provide a major boost to those authorities who grow their business rates revenues.

15. Concern was raised by Copeland Borough Council that new facilities within existing sites are not included in the business rates retention for local authorities.

**Action 7: DECC to clarify the position on business rate returns**

f. Plutonium reuse

16. In December 2011, the Government published its response to the consultation on the long-term management of UK civil plutonium, which outlined the preferred policy of reuse as Mixed Oxide fuel (MOX). However, the timetable for reuse is some way off as new build in the UK is the only outlet for this fuel, post Fukushima. A document on clearing obstacles to reuse will be published early in 2013.

**Action 8: DECC to keep Cumbrian partners updated on developments**

g. Other energy infrastructure

17. Allerdale Borough Council expressed concern that they are reaching saturation point with the number of wind turbines that have been constructed or being planned for the area. With the national grid infrastructure also planned for Allerdale, there is added concern of the impact on the landscape. The Government target for wind power is for the whole of Cumbria, but when areas of ecological importance such as the Lake District National Park are excluded, this increases the burden in other areas such as Allerdale. The financial cost of appeals to the planning process by developers are becoming increasingly difficult to meet for the local authority.
18. DECC have put out a call for evidence asking for workable ideas and solutions on how developers engage with local communities.

**Action 9: DECC to confirm how the local authorities can provide evidence.**

**Any other business**

19. Baroness Verma thanked participants at the forum for the frank and candid discussion. Government will continue to support West Cumbria development through the forum.