

Public Document Pack

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCOTTISH COUNCIL held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells on Tuesday, 25 September, 2018 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors D. Parker (Convener), S. Aitchison, A. Anderson, H. Anderson, K. Chapman, G. Edgar, J. A. Fullarton, J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, S. Haslam, E. Jardine, H. Laing, W. McAteer, T. Miers, D. Moffat, S. Mountford, Penman, C. Ramage, N. Richards, E. Robson, M. Rowley, H. Scott, S. Scott, E. Small, R. Tatler, E. Thornton-Nicol, G. Turnbull, T. Weatherston

Apologies:- Councillors J. Brown, S. Bell, K. Drum, S. Marshall, D. Paterson

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Executive Director (P Barr), Executive Director (R Dickson), Service Director Customer and Communities, Service Director HR, Service Director Regulatory Services, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Social Work Officer, Chief Officer Health & Social Care Integration, Clerk to the Council

1. **CONVENER'S REMARKS.**

The Convener congratulated Tracey Biggs, Galashiels Academy School Canteen Manager, on winning the Scottish School Cook of the Year and re-presented her trophy.

DECISION

AGREED to endorse the comments of the Convener.

2. **MINUTE**

The Minute of the Meeting held on 30 August 2018 was considered.

DECISION

AGREED that the Minute be approved and signed by the Convener.

3. **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the following Committees had been circulated:-

Executive	21 August 2018
Audit & Scrutiny	23 August 2018
Innerleithen Common Good Fund	23 August 2018
Lauder Common Good Fund	27 August 2018
Peebles Common Good Fund	29 August 2018
Planning & Building Standards	3 September 2018
Executive	4 September 2018
Galashiels Common Good Fund	12 September 2018
Selkirk Common Good Fund	12 September 2018
Jedburgh Common Good Fund	12 September 2018
Kelso Common Good Fund	12 September 2018

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes listed above.

4. **OUR SERVICE FOR YOU: SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S STRATEGY FOR OUR CUSTOMERS 2018-2023**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Customer and Communities proposing a new Customer Strategy for Scottish Borders Council for the period 2018 – 2023 which re-focused Scottish Borders Council's (SBC) approach to

designing and delivering services, putting the customer at the heart of what the Council did and making the most of current and emerging digital technology. For a variety of reasons, including changing customer expectations, reducing resources, increasing demand for services and developments and investment in digital technology, the need had been identified for a new strategic approach to dealing with customers across SBC services. In a large rural area, and across a large organisation, there were a number of challenges to overcome including changing the way customers contacted SBC, improving and streamlining business processes and ensuring consistently excellent customer care across all services. There were also some cultural challenges within SBC due to, for example, departmental “silo” structures. Against the context of SBC’s new Corporate Plan (Our Plan and your part in it) and the #yourpart campaign that underpinned it, SBC had now developed a new customer strategy that put the customer at the heart of service design and delivery, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report. It articulated SBC’s vision for the future, how it would be delivered and how SBC would measure success, including gathering customer views on satisfaction and measuring how customers contacted and interacted with SBC, and how this changed over time. As technology would play a key part in SBC’s future customer facing arrangements, SBC had established a Digital Customer Steering Group (DCSG) as part of the Digital Transformation Programme, chaired by the Service Director, Customer and Communities. Although established to ensure that both staff and communities had the skills necessary to maximise the investment that SBC was making in digital technology, DCSG had the membership to ensure it could oversee the implementation of the new Customer Strategy. Members generally welcomed the report but emphasised the need to cater for those who could not engage electronically.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Customer Strategy as contained in Appendix 1 to the report.

5. BARCLAY REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION - CONSULTATION RESPONSE

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer seeking approval for the draft response to ‘Barclay Implementation: A consultation on non-domestic rates reform’. The report explained that the Consultation raised a number of issues, which might affect the business of and resources available to the Council. Most significantly, the consultation proposed moving from 5 yearly revaluations for non-domestic rates to 3 yearly revaluations from 2022, and charging rates on ‘commercial activity on current exempt parks and Local Authority land vested in recreation at the same level as similar activity elsewhere’. The Consultation was appended to the Report as Appendix A and the Scottish Borders Council response had been prepared which addressed these and the other proposals contained within the Consultation. The Consultation Response was appended to the report at Appendix B. Member agreed to support the proposed response.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the draft Consultation response contained in Appendix B to the report.

6. SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL FINAL REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS 2017/18

There had been circulated copies of a report by Audit Scotland, the Council’s Auditors, together with a report by the Chief Financial Officer and a copy of the Annual Accounts 2017/18. The Chief Financial Officer’s report explained that this was the second year of Audit Scotland undertaking the external audit of the Council’s Annual Accounts. They also covered the Council’s related charities but KPMG continued to provide the external audit of SB Cares, SB Supports and Bridge Homes. KPMG had concluded their audit and had raised no issues. Audit Scotland had now completed the audit of the Council’s 2017/18 Annual Accounts and had provided an unqualified independent audit opinion. The Annual Audit Report summarised Audit Scotland’s conclusions, including:

- An unqualified audit opinion

- They concurred with management's accounting treatment and judgements;
- They concluded positively in respect of financial management, financial sustainability, governance and transparency and value for money.

Audit Scotland had identified eight recommendations requiring action and these had been accepted by management and would be enacted within the agreed timescales. As required under the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014, the audited Annual Accounts for Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Borders Council's Pension Fund, SBC Common Good Funds, the SBC Charitable Trusts, Bridge Homes LLP, SB Support and SB Cares - copies of which had also been circulated - had been presented to the Audit & Scrutiny Committee the day before and no issues had been raised. Mr Robertson answered Members' questions on Brexit and the Pensions Fund.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the following audited accounts:-

- (a) **the Scottish Borders Council's audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (b) **the Scottish Borders Council Common Good Funds' (Charity SC031538) audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (c) **the SBC Welfare Trust (Charity SC044765) audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (d) **the SBC Education Trust (Charity SC044762) audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (e) **the SBC Community Enhancement Trust (Charity SC044764) audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (f) **the Ormiston Trust for Institute Fund (Charity SC019162) audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (g) **the Scottish Borders Council Charity Funds' (Charity SC043896) audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (h) **the Bridge Homes LLP audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (i) **the SB Supports audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018;**
- (j) **the SB Cares audited Annual Accounts for the year to the 31 March 2018; and**
- (k) **the Scottish Borders Council's Pension Fund audited Annual Accounts for the year to 31 March 2018.**

7. ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2017/18

With reference to paragraph 13 of the Minute of 21 December 2017, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer presenting the annual treasury management activities undertaken during the 2017/18 financial year. The report explained that the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management in the Public Services (the Code) required an annual report on treasury management to be submitted to Council following the end of each financial year. This report highlighted the Council's treasury activity undertaken in the year ended 31 March 2018 and the performance of the Treasury function. Appendix 1 contained the annual report of treasury management activities for 2017/18 and provided an analysis of performance against targets set in relation to Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators. The performance comparisons reported were based on the revised indicators agreed as part of the mid-

year report approved on 21 December 2017. The Appendix showed the Council's borrowing requirement to fund the capital investment undertaken during 2017/18, how much the Council actually borrowed against the sums budgeted and the level of external debt within approved limits. During the year the Council had again, where possible, deferred borrowing using surplus cash rather than undertaking new borrowing. However, the Council did undertake short term borrowing for cash flow purposes and additional long term borrowing for capital purposes during the year, amounting to £5m and £10m respectively. Treasury management activity for the year had been undertaken in compliance with approved policy and the Code. The Council remained under-borrowed against its Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) at 31 March 2018.

DECISION

NOTED that treasury management activity in the year to 31 March 2018 was carried out in compliance with the approved Treasury Management Strategy and Policy as detailed in the report.

8. SESPLAN GOVERNANCE RATIFICATION

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services seeking ratification of proposed changes to the SESplan governance arrangements. The report explained that the revised SESplan governance arrangements which were proposed followed an internal audit by Fife Council in March 2018 of the existing Governance arrangements. The audit made five recommendations, three of which required amendments to the SESplan Constitution and Financial Rules. These related to the organisation's complaints procedure, the timing of budget approvals by the Joint Committee and Member Authorities, and the procedure for submitting financial monitoring reports.

DECISION

AGREED to ratify the revised SESplan Governance arrangements set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

9. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Haslam, seconded by Councillor Mountford, moved that Councillor Carol Hamilton be appointed to the Pension Fund Committee and this was unanimously approved.

DECISION

AGREED to appoint Councillor Carol Hamilton to the Pension Fund Committee.

10. A PROPOSAL FOR A SINGLE PUBLIC AUTHORITY IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive seeking approval for the 'Proposal for a Single Public Authority in the Scottish Borders', as detailed in the appendix to the report, and its submission to the Local Governance Review jointly announced by Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in December 2017. The report explained that with the aim of driving a step change in outcomes for the citizens and communities of the Scottish Borders, the proposal advanced a vision for a single service delivery vehicle, encompassing the Council and NHS Borders in the first instance. The proposal also examined intermediate practical steps which might be taken to progress this model, and considered how citizens and communities could have 'more say about how public services in their area were run.' In response to concerns that there had been no discussion with Members in advance of this report being presented to Council, the Chief Executive advised that there had been numerous conversations over months with senior Councillors and partners, and the draft response had been taken to a Members Sounding Board meeting on 29 August 2018, with Members asked to discuss it confidentially within their Groups. The Chief Executive then clarified that this was only a proposal to be explored, not a decision to create a single public authority, but a response to a Government consultation, which may or may not lead to this being considered further. Members discussed the proposal at length with a

number of views both for and against the proposal being expressed, along with further options for consideration.

VOTE

Councillor Haslam, seconded by Councillor Aitchison, moved that the Council:-

- (a) Agrees that the document 'A Proposal for a Single Public Authority in the Scottish Borders' (Appendix A) should be submitted to the Local Governance Review.*
- (b) Further agrees that:-*
 - (i) The Members Political Sounding Board shall continue to work with Officers in developing the Proposal for Single Public Authority in the Scottish Borders, including how best to engage and consult with the public of the Scottish Borders and other stakeholders and in considering other proposals which emerge during engagement and consultation on the Proposal; and*
 - (ii) The Members Political Sounding Board shall provide regular feedback to Elected Members.*

Councillor H. Anderson, seconded by Councillor Moffat, moved as an amendment that the wording of the synopsis of the submission be replaced with "this paper considers the potential formation of a single public authority as one possible means of delivering a step change in outcomes for citizens and communities of the Scottish Borders. This paper seeks permission to commence initial consultation with elected members and stakeholders and to ensure these consultations also explore and evaluate alternative approaches, such as a lead agency model or enhanced IJB option, to enable the robustness of the single public authority option to be fully tested."

Councillor Robson, seconded by Councillor Chapman, moved as a further amendment "that this Council notes the draft submission to the Scottish Government Consultation, finds the draft defective in conclusion, content and style and therefore not appropriate to submit to the Scottish Government, recognises that an extended deadline has already been granted by the Scottish Government to allow Scottish Borders Council to submit its response and therefore calls for a representative of all party groups to meet at 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 26th October 2018 to change and redraft the submission with delegated authority to approve the final version thereof to be sent timeously to the Scottish Government."

Councillor Chapman, seconded by Councillor A. Anderson, moved that the votes be taken by roll call and this was unanimously approved.

The Clerk to the Council advised that in terms of Standing Order 42 a vote would firstly be taken between Councillor Haslam's Motion and Councillor Robson's amendment, being the direct negative. If Councillor Robson's amendment succeeded there would be no further vote. However, if Councillor Haslam's Motion was successful then a vote between that Motion and Councillor H. Anderson's amendment would then be taken.

Roll Call Vote 1

Cllr Haslam's Motion

Councillor Aitchison
Councillor Edgar
Councillor Fullarton
Councillor Greenwell
Councillor C. Hamilton
Councillor S. Hamilton
Councillor Haslam

Councillor Robson's Amendment

Councillor A. Anderson
Councillor H. Anderson
Councillor Chapman
Councillor Laing
Councillor McAteer
Councillor Moffat
Councillor Penman

Abstention

Councillor H. Scott

Councillor Jardine
Councillor Miers
Councillor Mountford
Councillor Parker
Councillor Richards
Councillor Rowley
Councillor S. Scott
Councillor Small
Councillor Tatler
Councillor Turnbull
Councillor Weatherston

Councillor Ramage
Councillor Robson
Councillor Thornton-Nicol

The Motion was accordingly carried by 18 votes to 10 so a second vote was held as follows:-

Roll Call Vote 2

Cllr Haslam's Motion

Councillor Aitchison
Councillor Edgar
Councillor Fullarton
Councillor Greenwell
Councillor C. Hamilton
Councillor S. Hamilton
Councillor Haslam
Councillor Jardine
Councillor Miers
Councillor Mountford
Councillor Parker
Councillor Richards
Councillor Rowley
Councillor S. Scott
Councillor Small
Councillor Tatler
Councillor Turnbull
Councillor Weatherston

Councillor H. Anderson's Amendment

Councillor A. Anderson
Councillor H. Anderson
Councillor Chapman
Councillor Laing
Councillor McAteer
Councillor Moffat
Councillor Penman
Councillor Ramage
Councillor Robson
Councillor H. Scott
Councillor Thornton-Nicol

The Motion was accordingly carried by 18 votes to 11.

DECISION

DECIDED that:-

- (a) the document 'A Proposal for a Single Public Authority in the Scottish Borders' (Appendix A to the report) should be submitted to the Local Governance Review;**
- (b) the Members Political Sounding Board would continue to work with Officers in developing the Proposal for Single Public Authority in the Scottish Borders, including how best to engage and consult with the public of the Scottish Borders and other stakeholders and in considering other proposals which emerged during engagement and consultation on the Proposal; and**
- (c) the Members Political Sounding Board would provide regular feedback to Elected Members.**

11. BORDERLANDS INCLUSIVE GROWTH DEAL

With reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of 30 August 2018, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director (Mr R. Dickson) setting out the next steps in developing a Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal proposition. It sought agreement to

submit the Deal documentation to the UK and Scottish Governments as a basis for negotiations in order to secure funding that will support economic growth across the Borderlands region. Alongside four partner Councils, the Council had been progressing work on the development of a Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal proposition. This work had involved close liaison with both UK and Scottish Governments in order to develop a small number of strategic programmes and projects. It would be essential that these programmes and projects complemented the South of Scotland Enterprise Agency proposals and support the inclusive growth agenda. A Deal overview document and associated strategic outline business cases had now been drafted and it was proposed that they were submitted to the UK and Scottish Governments by the end of September 2018. Following submission of the Deal documentation, there was expected to be a period of negotiation with UK and Scottish Governments. At this stage, there was no guarantee that a Deal would be agreed and therefore the financial information relating to the Deal was being treated as confidential by all the partners until such time as there was greater financial certainty in relation to the negotiations. Members expressed appreciation for the work carried out by officers and supported the proposals.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) **to approve the submission of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal proposal to UK and Scottish Governments from Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council;**
- (b) **to note the ongoing arrangements and need for continued negotiation with both UK and Scottish Governments;**
- (c) **that Dumfries and Galloway Council would be the accountable body for the Scottish authorities and noted that Northumberland County Council would be the accountable body for the Deal on behalf of the English authorities; and**
- (d) **that further reports updating Members on the progress of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal negotiations, and making any necessary decisions, would be presented to the Council at appropriate times.**

12. OPEN QUESTIONS

The questions submitted by Councillors Penman, Ramage, H. Anderson and Laing were answered.

DECISION

NOTED the replies as detailed in Appendix I to this Minute.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Convener was of the opinion that the item dealt with in the following paragraph should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to make an early decision.

14. CHAMPION FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY

The Convener advised that it was proposed to appoint Councillor Thornton-Nicol as the Champion for the Deaf Community and this was unanimously agreed.

DECISION

AGREED to appoint Councillor Thornton-Nicol as the Champion for the Deaf Community.

15. PRIVATE BUSINESS DECISION

AGREED under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in Appendix II to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 6, 8 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

16. **MINUTE**

The private section of the Council Minute of 30 August 2018 was approved.

17. **COMMITTEE MINUTE**

The private sections of the Committee Minutes as detailed in paragraph 3 of this Minute were approved.

18. **BORDERLANDS INCLUSIVE GROWTH DEAL**

Members noted the confidential proposal document.

The meeting concluded at 12.20 pm

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
25 SEPTEMBER 2018
APPENDIX I**

OPEN QUESTIONS

Question from Councillor Penman

To Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

With the new HMRC initiative Making Tax Digital (MTD) starting for VAT registered businesses from April 2019, the current HMRC online tax return services will be withdrawn for those within the scope of the MTD rules and businesses will be required to use a functional compatible software product to submit their returns to HMRC, most of which are cloud based accounting software programs and rely on a broadband connection.

However, according to a study by Ipsos MORI for HM Revenue and Customs, one in five firms are worried that inadequate broadband will prevent them complying with MTD obligations.

This backed up by the findings of recent research by Cambridge Broadband Networks, which revealed that almost half of the UK's business broadband customers are not getting the speeds their provider had promised.

How are we going to help our local businesses in rural areas where broadband connection is currently so poor some businesses are having to travel six miles into a village to send an email. What are our plans to assist these businesses meet their legal requirements?

Reply from Councillor Rowley

I share the Councillor's concerns. There are two distinct issues here. Firstly we know that we have inadequate broadband provision across many parts of the Borders. This is especially true in rural areas; but there is not a universal high speed provision in every town either. The Scottish Government is committed, through its R100 programme, to 100% coverage with download speeds of 30Mbps by 2021; that is two years after the requirement for businesses to meet the new HMRC requirement.

Secondly there is an issue in respect of how aware businesses are of the existing broadband provision, how that can best be utilised and specifically the response required by businesses to the changes being implemented by HMRC.

Business Gateway Advisors are already working with their clients to raise awareness of the changes HMRC are making and have asked for a national provision of training courses in respect of this; that is being considered. The experience with GDPR earlier this year suggests businesses will be slow to realise the implications the changes have with advice and training being required later this year and peaking in the period January to March 2019.

The South of Scotland Economic Partnership met with BT and Openreach earlier this year and raised concerns about both available download speeds and broadband coverage; along with the Council they will continue to lobby hard for improved services across the South of Scotland. However, where provision exists the take up of the available broadband services has been low. That suggests that more requires to be done to support businesses in exploiting the available broadband provision to boost their productivity and profitability. The Partnership is considering how best to address this issue of take up and utilisation. I anticipate they will make announcements in respect of this shortly.

Question from Councillor Ramage

To Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

As a teacher I benefitted greatly from EU funding and in particular Leader and Leader +. Can you advise how much funding has come to the Borders and how many people in our area have benefitted?

Reply from Councillor Rowley

In the time available officers have been able to draw data together for the period 2000 to date covering 3 LEADER programmes administered by Scottish Borders Council. Prior to 2000, 2 programmes of LEADER ran under the administration of Scottish Borders Enterprise.

Under the 3 LEADER programmes managed by the Council, expenditure in the Borders has totalled £7.4M to date. Including individuals trained, young people assisted and others recorded as gaining from the projects 65,000 people have benefitted from the projects funded through these programmes. There is of course a wider benefit across the communities gained from the projects; it is not possible to calculate a figure for this wider benefit.

There is no doubt that these EU funded programmes have played an important part in developing and enhancing a wide range of initiatives across our area.

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage asked what specific steps had been taken to mitigate the loss of this funding and would it be considered by the Brexit Response Team? Councillor Rowley advised that he was not in a position to answer whether the Brexit Response Team had considered European Funding but as advised by the Chief Executive earlier in the meeting, a report would come to Council in due course. Councillor Rowley was happy to engage in discussions once there was greater clarity. However, he did point out that the UK was a net contributor to Europe and these funds came from tax payers, so there would be opportunities for local schemes in the future.

Question from Councillor H. Anderson

To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

As you aware from your attendance at the recent public meeting in West Linton with over 120 residents, there continues to be a high level of dissatisfaction in West Linton, Carlops and Dolphinton at the complete loss of any public transport provision after 7.35 pm. Can you specify what steps SBC are taking to explore and provide an alternative evening transport provision for this part of Tweeddale West?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

This question relates to the new timetable for service 101 Dumfries – Biggar – Edinburgh (return) which came in to being on 19th August 2018.

Prior to the meeting held in West Linton on 29th August 2018 Council Officers contacted the three main bus companies in the area to see if any arrangement/connection could be put in place using existing services from Penicuik. Borders Buses and Lothian Buses rejected the suggestion of extending existing services beyond Penicuik to West Linton. Stagecoach offered to put back their new 19.35 journey out of Edinburgh to 20.30 Monday-Saturday for a cost of approximately £15,000 per annum or alternatively on Friday and Saturday only for a cost of £5,000 per annum. There was a caveat that the other partners SWestrans/D&G, Midlothian Council and SPT agreed to the change. At the meeting on the 29th August this suggestion was broadly rejected by the attendees. There was no visible support for this option when Councillor Anderson asked attendees to mark a chart if they agreed as the chart remained blank.

At the same meeting Officers suggested that the Community consider a taxi connection. It was explained that a similar arrangement already existed in Midlothian and was a good alternative to a registered local bus service. It was clearly explained that there was no Council budget available for this and the Community would need to raise their own funding of approximately £18,000 per annum. Officers suggested a possible connection with the existing Borders Buses X62 service in Penicuik with connections at 20.30, 21.30 and 22.30. Service options were Monday to Saturday or alternatively Friday and Saturday service only; both options would appear on the tender specification.

Since the meeting Council Officers have put together a tender, created a specification and formatted terms and conditions. That tender went out to the trade week commencing 17th September 2018 and is due back on Wednesday 26th September 2018. Once the tender receipts have been assessed and evaluated the results will be given to West Linton Community Council to distribute.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson advised she was interested in the taxi model that could be trialed for 3 months for a maximum cost of £10k and if no-one used it then it could cease, but asked that the door not be closed on this option. Councillor Edgar advised that the problem with that was the Council had not budget available for such a proposal. A number of groups in other areas had previously been refused funding which would need to be revisited if any funding was identified and given to West Linton.

Question from Councillor Laing

To Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

With 6 months to go, does the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development still hold the view that fishing exports from East Berwickshire will be unaffected by Brexit?

Reply from Councillor Rowley

I am providing this response as a personal one, not drafted by officers, as this is a political matter. Councillor Laing is perhaps mistaken to assume that I do not think exports will be unaffected by Brexit. However, I suggest neither of us yet knows what Brexit will look like so we cannot know what the effects, either negative or even positive, may be. I am concerned about the effects across all of Berwickshire, not just East Berwickshire. For example Farne Salmon employs over 700 people in Duns and is the largest salmon processor in the UK, possibly Europe. Brexit is something I did not want and it will bring both challenges and opportunities. We need to keep an eye on things until we know the direction of travel but this is difficult because things are so fluid at the moment. I have read many Government and SPICe papers containing between 4-6 different scenarios which are ever changing. The Economic Development Group for Eastern Berwickshire will focus on the implications of Brexit once they become clear. Having just returned from a holiday in a Cornish Harbour the fishermen there were clear that they welcomed the approach of full access to our fishing waters. Of Scotland's £79bn exports, £50bn just go over the border and a SPICe report indicates that this is mainly for the domestic market with little going further afield. I remain convinced that the quality of much of Berwickshire's seafood is so high that even with modest tariffs it will still have a strong future. We need to eat more of our local food near to where it is produced and more tourism businesses should be using it to feed their guests to deliver significant economic effects locally. It is important to celebrate our local food."

Supplementary

Councillor Laing asked what plans were in place for the fishing industry for a "No Deal" Brexit. Councillor Rowley restated his previous answer and advised that her concerns would be raised with the Brexit Response Team.

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