

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber,
Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells,
TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 31 January, 2017 at
10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman – Economic Development Business), D. Parker, (Chairman - Other Business)(from para 4), C. Bhatia, J. Brown, M. J. Cook, V. Davidson (from para 1.2), G. Edgar, J. Mitchell, D. Moffat, D. Paterson, F. Renton, R. Smith.

Apologies:- Councillor S. Aitchison

Also present:- Councillors I. Gillespie, W. McAteer, S. Marshall.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive – People, Depute Chief Executive – Place, Corporate Transformation and Services Director, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Officer Economic Development, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present: Mr J. Clark (Chamber of Commerce), Mr G. Henderson (Federation of Small Businesses).

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Bell chaired the meeting for consideration of the Economic Development business.

MEMBER

Councillor Davidson joined the meeting during consideration of the following item of business.

1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

- 1.1 With reference to paragraph 1 of the Minute of 1 November 2016, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note providing an update on recent Economic Development activities. The Chief Officer Economic Development, Bryan McGrath, summarised the main points. With regard to business activity during the quarter, the Business Gateway team had assisted 46 business start-ups, of which 5 had the potential to be high growth. In response to a question about the location of the business start-ups Mr McGrath confirmed that the figures were taken from across the Borders. However he agreed to provide an analysis of locations for Members. The Scottish Borders Business Fund had received 10 applications and approved 8 grants valued at £26,099 supporting projects with a value of £67,475. These projects were forecast to create 12 jobs with an estimated forecast economic impact of £333,837 GVA. The update referred to a development in support of tourism, the Midlothian and Borders Tourism Action Group (MBTAG) project, which was launched on 17 January 2017 at Thirlestane Castle and which had secured over £400k from Scottish Enterprise and Railway Blueprint to deliver tourism business-to-business activity over a two year period.
- 1.2 In terms of European funding, the UK and Scottish Governments had confirmed that applicants whose grant funding was agreed and contracted before the point of 'Brexit'

would be able to complete their projects, even if the work was scheduled to take place after leaving the EU. The LEADER Local Action Group approved grant funding of £242k in 2016, including 4 community projects, 1 farm diversification and 2 rural business developments. 11 applications had been made to the Local Action Group for consideration in January 2017 and the next application deadline for LEADER funding was 28 February 2017. The Council had been successful in applying to the Scottish Government for a financial allocation from the European Social Fund. Up to £591k grant was available for an Employability Programme valued at £1.4m. In response to a question, Mr McGrath advised that this support, led by the Council's Employment Support Service, would be targeted to those individuals with more than one barrier to employment access. There would also be a Challenge Fund through which funding would be provided to the third sector to provide support across the Borders.

- 1.3 With reference to paragraph 3 of the Executive Committee Minute of 4 October 2016, Mr McGrath went on to focus his update on Town Centre Regeneration. He referred in particular to the development of a Town Centre Resilience Index for use in prioritising town centre interventions and investments. After receiving feedback following the meeting in October, the Town Centre Matrix and Index document had been revised and this was circulated at the meeting. The Matrix had been constructed, pulling together a range of measures that were relevant to assessing the general 'health' of towns in the Scottish Borders with a population of 2000 or more. From the Matrix, a Town Centre Index (TCI) had been created, with towns ranked according to potential need. Members discussed the data provided and received answers to their questions. In relation to smaller settlements which were not included in the analysis, Mr McGrath confirmed that the Council would also provide advice where requested to community groups in these areas who were looking at regeneration projects. Clarification was requested around the detail behind the figures, in particular the relationship between retail units and vacancy rates and how this was reflected in the Index arrived at for each town. It was agreed that some commentary to accompany the data would be helpful to give an explanation of the context by which it was considered. There was further discussion about the ranking of towns within the Scottish Borders, based on the overall score, with the observation made that the level of resilience was not necessarily related to town centre intervention and the level of public investment. Mr Henderson explained that, following research carried out on Town Centres, the Federation of Small Businesses would be publishing a report shortly which would show a direct inverse correlation between the proportion of social housing tenure within a town, level of education, and the number of self-employed businesses. He pointed out that it was practically impossible for applicants, who did not own their own property, to run businesses as they were unable to secure loans. Members accepted that work was required to explore the factors behind the data. It was also suggested that an indication of the level and direction of public sector investment for each town, within the Matrix, may be of value to evaluate its effectiveness and to inform future decision-making.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the update.**
- (b) AGREED that the Chief Officer Economic Development:-**
 - (i) provides an analysis of the location of the 46 business start-ups assisted by the Business Gateway in the last quarter; and**
 - (ii) reviewed the presentation of the data in the Town Centre Matrix and Town Centre Index document in the light of Members' comments above.**

2. SCOTTISH BORDERS ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2023 - UPDATE

- 2.1 With reference to paragraph 14 of the Executive Committee Minute of 9 June 2015, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director seeking approval of the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy – Action Plan Progress report which was attached as an appendix. It was explained that the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023, agreed by Community Planning Partners in 2013, set out the vision, strategic aims and objectives that would provide the focus for the Council and its partners' efforts to ensure sustainable economic growth for the Scottish Borders. The associated Action Plan set out in detail how the Community Planning Partnership would deliver the outcomes identified in the Economic Strategy. Working together through the Community Planning Partnership's Economy and Low Carbon Group, partners had focused on the Action Plan and delivered well, especially considering the limited resources available for some of the actions. The report summarised the progress that had been made, which was good overall, but also noted that there were some areas of concern in relation to the actions. Referred to, in particular, was the imperative to push forward with the provision of plots for employment use and new business space within the Tweedbank area. Mr McGrath answered questions on particular sections of the Action Plan.
- 2.2 With regard to the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband project, which was coming to its final year of delivery, there had been major progress made in installing fibre cabinets. However, although the programme would connect 93.3% of premises in the Borders, much more work was required to address connectivity for the remaining premises. Mobile phone coverage was also an issue which was being addressed. Members discussed at length the issues around Superfast Broadband and mobile phone coverage. A view was expressed that using the target of 93.3% of premises connected as a measure of success was a misrepresentation. The reality was that, even where cabinets were installed many properties, for various reasons but often due to distance from cabinet, still did not see an improvement in broadband speeds. The Corporate Transformation and Services Director advised that he should be in a position to bring a report to the Executive Committee in March 2017, indicating positive implications for the Scottish Borders, on the Scottish Government R100 Programme, set up to address those premises that would not be covered by the current rollout. Reference was also made to the Ettrick and Beyond community-led broadband initiative. It was anticipated that the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy would be reviewed and refreshed during the summer of 2017.

DECISION

(a) NOTED:-

- (i) the positive progress made in relation to the actions in the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy – Action Plan Progress report, set out in the appendix to the report; and**
- (ii) that a report on the R100 Programme would be brought to the Executive Committee in March 2017.**

(b) AGREED that the Action Plan Progress report be presented to the Community Planning Partnership Strategic Board at its next meeting.

3. BREXIT RESPONSE TEAM

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director proposing the establishment of a Brexit Response Team in order to ensure that the Council effectively monitored and responded to the wide range of changes likely to flow from the UK's exit from the European Union. The report summarised the main implications of the UK vote to leave the EU which related to agriculture; access to major funding for economic development; access to the Single Market for trade purposes; and uncertainty of the status of the EU nationals living in the Scottish Borders. A meeting

with Mr Michael Russell, MSP, the Scottish Government Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, had been held on 14 December 2016. The meeting involved local business representatives as well as senior Councillors. It provided a useful opportunity for the Minister to hear the concerns of the Council, as well as the specific concerns of local businesses in the manufacturing, food and drink and agriculture sectors. It was suggested that the Response Team would have a representative from each of the main Council Service areas likely to be affected by Brexit. In order to ensure that data and intelligence on Brexit issues was being shared between Community Planning Partners, it was proposed that the Community Planning Partnership's Economy and Low Carbon Group acted as a coordinating group.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the recent meeting held with the Scottish Government's Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe and local business representatives;**
- (b) AGREED that:-**
 - (i) the Council establish a Brexit Response Team to ensure that it could effectively monitor and respond most effectively to the wide range of changes likely to flow from the UK's exit from the European Union; and**
 - (ii) the Community Planning Partnership's Economy and Low Carbon Project Delivery Team act as a coordinating group for sharing Brexit issues and responses across the Scottish Borders.**

MEMBER

Councillor Parker joined the meeting.

4. TRADE WASTE FEES AND CHARGES

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Depute Chief Executive – Place proposing that the Council increases its Trade Waste Fees and Charges. The report explained that a review of the Council's current trade waste collection service had been undertaken by Waste Consulting Limited. The review made a number of recommendations including that the current pricing structure required immediate review as the rates charged for some services were considerably below those charged by other Scottish Local Authorities. Further to the review it was recommended that trade waste fee and charges were increased to ensure the Council was making a reasonable charge and recovering its costs in line with the Environmental Protection Act (1990). The recommendations of the review were set out in detail within the report, with a summary of the fees and charges set by Scottish Borders compared with other Scottish Local Authorities shown in Appendix 1 to the report. Appendix 2 to the report detailed the recommended increase in fees and charges which would be phased over two years. The report further proposed that a new post be created to support the implementation and ongoing delivery of the trade waste service. Part of the role would involve supporting traders in driving down the amount of waste produced, while identifying the most appropriate waste services for their business to maximise recycling and diversion in the move towards the Scottish Government's vision of a Zero Waste Society.
- 4.2 In their discussions of the report, Members were concerned at the size of the increase in fees and charges proposed but endorsed the need for the Council to recover its costs. Support was expressed for the proposal to provide advice and guidance to traders in relation to waste management for reasons of efficiency and to minimise landfill. However Mr Henderson, on behalf of the Federation of Small Businesses, expressed alarm at the size of the proposed increases and was concerned about the impact on businesses. In response to his questions the Waste Manager confirmed that similar rural authorities had

been included in the comparison study carried out and that the implications to businesses had been examined. He added that it was not the aim of the Council to make a profit but just to reduce the current subsidy provided and arrive at a cost-recovery position, which it would not do until the end of the second year if the proposed increases were approved. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that the current trade waste service cost £1.2m per annum. In conclusion Members agreed that in consideration of the Council's revenue position and wider financial context, the increases in fees and charges should be supported.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) implement the recommendations of the Trade Waste Review as outlined in section 3 to the report; and**
- (b) increase the fees and charges over a two year period as outlined in sections 4 and 6 in the report.**

URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chairman 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 keep Members informed. The report had been delayed because of the need to have final verification of some of the data contained within it.

5. TOURISM – ECONOMIC IMPACT AND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director providing an update to Members on the economic impact of tourism on the Scottish Borders economy. Mr McGrath explained that in order to track tourism activity in the Scottish Borders, the Council currently received annual data from the Scottish Tourism Economic Assessment Monitor (STEAM). In December 2016 the Council had received the first interim report of the STEAM data for the Scottish Borders covering January – June 2016. Comparing Jan-June 2015 with Jan-June 2016, visitor days in the Scottish Borders had increased by almost 11%, visitor spend was up by 16%, and employment related to tourism had increased by 8%. The rise in tourism activity in the Scottish Borders, both in terms of numbers and economic impact, was substantial, not only when compared to the previous year, but also when compared to other local authority areas in Scotland. Breaking the numbers down further, visitor spend on food and drink had increased by 20%, and on accommodation was 17% higher than the same period in 2015. Visitor days in hotels/B&Bs (serviced accommodation) showed a significant increase, 27% higher than 2015. In fact every tracked category showed positive growth; the first time there had been an increase in all categories in over 10 years. The report went on to highlight that some tourism businesses were missing out on valuable opportunities to market and promote themselves through the VisitScotland.com website. The VisitScotland Growth Fund was also an opportunity for businesses in the Scottish Borders. A VisitScotland Area Activity Summary for the Scottish Borders was attached to the report. Another positive initiative providing opportunities for tourism businesses was the establishment of a new private sector led action group - Midlothian and Borders Tourism Action Group (MBTAG). This would deliver a range of business-to-business development opportunities to the tourism sector. The report raised awareness that 2017 would be the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology and that this presented further opportunities for tourism businesses.

5.2 Members unanimously welcomed the positive news contained within the report. In the ensuing discussion attention was drawn by some Members to particular attractions within their locality which, it was felt, did not feature in current tourist promotional material. The importance of having a highly rated presence on visitor attraction websites was referred

to, it being recognised that there was an increasing public reliance on social media for this dynamic source of information. Mr McGrath agreed to follow up a request for the Council to work with VisitScotland to provide more and improved signage to local tourist attractions. Mr Clark commented on the recent revaluation of rateable values of businesses carried out by the Scottish Assessors Association and possible implications for businesses within the tourist sector. Members concurred with the assumption within the report that, given the timeframe, the most likely source of the rise in tourism activity in the Scottish Borders was the positive impact of the Borders Railway and the realisation of outcomes which had been included in the Business Plan was noted. Members believed that this represented significant evidence to support the opening of Reston station in Berwickshire and to inform the campaign to extend the Borders Railway to Carlisle, thereby bringing economic benefit to the whole of the Borders area.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the positive results of the latest tourism research for the Scottish Borders as set out in Section 4 of the report; and**
- (b) AGREED to promote to local businesses, through Business Gateway and the Area Tourism Partnership, the tourism business opportunities set out in this report.**

ADJOURNEMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11.35 a.m. and reconvened at 11.45 a.m.

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Parker took the Chair for the remaining business.

6. MINUTE

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 17 January 2017 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

7. OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE PROVISION OF PUBLIC CONVENIENCES ACROSS THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

- 7.1** With reference to paragraph 13 of the Scottish Borders Council Minute of 30 January 2014 and paragraph 8 of the Scottish Borders Council Minute of 11 February 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Neighbourhood Services proposing a strategy for the future provision of Public Conveniences in the Scottish Borders. The strategy was being put forward in order that improvements could be made to facilities and the savings approved by Scottish Borders Council in February 2016 could be achieved. The report explained that in January 2014 the Council approved a review of Neighbourhood Operations Services, including Public Conveniences. In February 2016, savings totalling £211k were specified and approved for Public Conveniences to be delivered during the current and next financial year. These were defined as part of a large range of savings to ensure that SBC met the current financial challenges it faced. The report evaluated a number of options and recommended the best way forward. Officers had collected a range of data and information, both from within the Borders and from other Local Authorities, which was used to inform the options being presented within the report. The recommended option was to charge 30p for use at certain toilets in phase 1, which would provide income of £211k to offset the savings. In parallel officers would engage with local Members and the communities to explore the possibility of developing Comfort Schemes and Community Partnerships. If feasible, a further report would be brought forward on this which would outline plans for phase 2 to deliver a further £100k of

savings. Appendices to the report detailed a financial appraisal of each option presented, alternatives to current public toilets in each settlement within the Borders, should the Comfort Scheme approach be taken forward, a draft agreement for the provision of toilet facilities by a Service Provider and an example of a leaflet promoting the Comfort Scheme in another Local Authority Area. Also attached to the report was an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to the review.

- 7.2 Members discussed the report and received answers to their questions from the Service Director and Neighbourhood Area Manager. There was general agreement with the approach outlined in Option 5 in the report and recognition that charging for access to facilities would also be an opportunity to raise standards. The Neighbourhood Area Manager confirmed that the proposal was to install robust automated cash collection machines and that the kit would be transferrable. However there was some concern that there was insufficient detail in the report to enable a decision to be made. This related to the list of Public Conveniences for which a charge would be made, the accuracy of the list of alternatives to current public toilets which could be approached in relation to Comfort Schemes and an assessment of the type and location of Public Conveniences currently in use. Officers were asked for a provisional list of Public Conveniences for which charging was proposed.

ADJOURNEMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12.10 p.m. and reconvened at 12.20 p.m. to enable the information requested to be provided.

- 7.3 After consideration of the additional information, Members' opinion remained divided.

VOTE

Councillor Paterson, seconded by Councillor Edgar, moved approval of the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Bhatia, seconded by Councillor Parker, moved as an amendment that the report be deferred for provision of further detail and to enable consultation with the public on the proposals.

On a show of hands Members voted as follows:-

*Motion - 7 votes
Amendment - 5 votes*

The motion was accordingly approved.

DECISION DECIDED:-

- (a) to approve the Phase 1 proposal to charge for usage of a number of identified toilet facilities;**
- (b) to approve a charge of 30p per use as detailed in option 5 of Appendix 4 to the report, in respect of the list of Public Conveniences attached as an Appendix to this Minute;**
- (c) that the Service Director Neighbourhood Services engaged with local Members and communities on the longer term provision of toilets and the possibility for Comfort Schemes and Community Partnerships; and**

- (d) that a further report be brought forward outlining recommendations for phase 2, Future Options for the Provision of Public Conveniences across the Scottish Borders.**

The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm

APPENDIX

Executive Committee 31 January 2017 - Item 11

PUBLIC CONVENIENCES FOR WHICH CHARGES ARE PROPOSED UNDER OPTION 5

Eyemouth	Bantry car park
Coldstream	Court house car park
Jedburgh	Lothian Park
St Abbs	Harbour
Galashiels	High Street, car park
Galashiels	Bank Street Gardens
St Boswells	Main Street
Earlston	Bus station
Peebles	School Brae
Lauder	The Avenue
Peebles	Kingsmeadows
Hawick	Howegate
Eyemouth	Harbour (FMA)
Selkirk	Market Place
Innerliethen	Hall Street
Hawick	Volunteer Park
Yarrow Valley	St Marys Loch
Coldingham	Coldingham Sands
Kelso	Shedden Park
Melrose	Abbey Place
Hawick	Common Haugh
Peebles	Eastgate car park
Jedburgh	TIC
Newcastleton	Langholm Street
Duns	Briery Baulk
Kelso	Woodmarker/Horsemarket
Galashiels	Transport Interchange