

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
2 NOVEMBER 2017
APPENDIX 1

Questions from Councillor Moffat

1. To Executive Member for Children & Young People

The Greenlaw Parent Council have raised concerns regarding the disrepair of the school windows which don't open properly and have a substantial amount of wood rot. I believe that this issue has been ongoing for around 7 years and that there have been visits from previous Executive Members, local MPs etc. Surely this should now be deemed as a priority for replacement. Can the Executive Member please advise when action will be taken to replace these windows which must be detrimental to the safety of the children and result in increased heating costs?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

There is an extensive, planned, assessed and ongoing rolling programme for window replacement across the school estate.

It has been noted that the windows in this school are in poor condition and as a result, Greenlaw is on the window replacement programme for 2018/19 school session.

To the Executive Member for Roads & Infrastructure

2. Parents in Duns have raised concerns regarding children's safety when crossing the A6105 between Berwickshire High School and the new Duns Primary School. There are controlled crossings outside Eyemouth High School and the new Kelso High School and also on the A6105 in Earlston. Can the Executive Member advise if there are plans to install a similar crossing in Duns between the two schools?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

At this time there are no plans to provide a light controlled crossing (Puffin) on the A6105 in Duns. National criteria on the provision of light controlled crossings is based on vehicle numbers and pedestrian crossing numbers to determine if there is available time gaps to allow safe crossing. The situation at Duns, even taking into account those using the swimming pool through the day, falls considerably short of what would be required to justify a light controlled crossing.

During the planning process for the primary school moving, the traffic and road safety section considered a crossing point for the primary school and it was agreed that a build out (to narrow the crossing width) in conjunction with the school crossing patrol would be the most appropriate solution. This was in consultation with the local community who were keen to retain the school crossing patrol. In addition, and in agreement with the school & parents the boardwalk to the school was extended to allow an off road route away from the A6105.

Selkirk High School and Jedburgh Grammar, both on trunk roads do not have puffin crossings - nor do Gala Academy or Peebles High Schools.

Supplementary

Councillor Moffat was surprised that the numbers did not warrant a crossing and asked if a traffic counter could be used at the site. Councillor Edgar advised that this information had already been gathered by officers and had ascertained that the criteria for a crossing had not been met.

3. Can the Executive Member advise what authority does the Council have to cut back private hedges which are either causing problems for sight lines at road junctions or overgrowing onto paths/pavements and causing difficulties for those using such paths for example wheelchair users of those with pushchairs?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

While the Council does have the authority to trim private hedges, preferred good practice is for an owner to be served a notice and given the opportunity to carry out the works themselves, at their own cost, within a reasonable defined period of time.

If this does not occur, then the Council may decide to carry out the works and try to recover any reasonable costs for doing so.

Supplementary

Councillor Moffat asked what distance the Council could cut back a hedge at a road junction to improve visibility and what was the position regarding hedges which were leaning out over a pavement. Councillor Edgar emphasised that the responsibility for cutting back private hedges lay with the owner but officers would be able to help with the details regarding distances.

4. A resident in Duns complained to the Council regarding water run-off onto Duns/Grantshouse Road covering it in mud and gravel making it unsafe on various bends. The resident travels this road daily to Torness on his motorcycle and although he did receive an acknowledgement he has had no further contact and the road was never swept clear of the mud and gravel. Does the Executive Member not think that more should have been done in this case for the safety of road users and to send a proper reply in due course?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

This matter was raised earlier in the summer following a flash flood over the previous weekend. The road in question was inspected that week and it was identified that "*some gravel deposits etc were present in some areas but quite minimal in others*"

A list of sweeping locations was drawn up with work to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity but due to limited staff resources and competing priorities this work did take longer than originally intended but the work was carried out.

While it is always the intention of the Department to reply to enquiries of this nature, on occasion the number of such requests and any parallel lack of resource can cause delays.

For clarity, it should be noted that "mud on the road" from farm traffic etc is an issue for the Police to enforce. If, on the other hand, the main issue is surface water being discharged to the road, then that would be an issue for the landowner to manage, albeit the Council can serve notice on them to do so.

To the Executive Member for Adult Social Care

5. What is being done to stop bed blocking at the Knoll and other hospitals as a result of people losing care packages or not getting the package to assist going home?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

The Health and Social Care Partnership is exploring ways of helping people to leave hospital when they are clinically fit and able to be assessed for care and support in a community setting. As winter approaches we will add additional care bed resource to our communities to allow this to happen. Our aim will be to support people to leave hospital as soon as possible and be assessed in a place where care can best determine how to meet their needs. In this way we can make best use of the valuable care at home services that are supporting people in their own homes.

6. It has been raised with me by a number of residents that there is a need for a care home in Duns. What if anything is being done by Social Work to encourage care providers to provide a home in Duns?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

We are currently developing an understanding of the housing needs for older people across the Borders for the next years and have included our care homes and care homes with nursing in this approach. We aim to support people in their own homes and communities for as long as possible working in particular to develop extra care housing in the places where people want to live. The good news for Duns is that we are working in partnership with Trust Housing Association and the Scottish Government to build 35 new extra care homes in the Todlaw area. There will be a further 14 amenity homes as part of this development. It is anticipated that these will be ready in 2019/20. Further developments will follow in Galashiels and Hawick.

Question from Councillor Bell

To the Executive Member for Transformation and HR

Many members of the public still think that the Council is scrapping its welfare advice service. I know that is not an accurate representation; but could you clearly state how the Council will – going forward - monitor and ensure both the quality and the speed of response to welfare benefits questions from the Borders public?

Reply from Councillor Mountford

The work of the Welfare Benefits Service is one of a number of service areas that have been fully integrated in to the new Customer Advice & Support service with the dual aim of improving the customer experience whilst delivering efficiencies. The welfare advice currently provided is continuing albeit with some changes to how this will be done.

The implementation of the new organisational structure has only very recently been completed and work is now underway to ensure everyone is aware of the new arrangements.

Going forward the overall service will be supported by a modern digital telephony system and an electronic enquiry and case handling system, which support management reporting and customer satisfaction measurement.

The changes will improve the speed of response from the first point of contact whilst more accurate recording of enquiries, responses and outcomes will be possible including speed of response.

I hope this gives some assurance that by the combination of these changes, as well as the Councils complaints procedure, a more accurate picture of the volume of enquiries, as well as the speed and quality of the response can be provided in the future.

Supplementary

Councillor Bell noted that responses would be measured but asked for assurances that advice would continue to be provided to deal with the roll out of universal credit and if not that the Administration would seek a pause in its implementation. Councillor Mountford acknowledged on a personal level that there were some flaws in Universal Credit. He further advised that he was confident that Council staff would provide first class advice. However, he had no leverage in terms of UK Government Policy.

Question from Councillor Brown

To the Executive Member for Children & Young People

With Regard to the Jedburgh Lifelong Education Campus can the Executive Member guarantee that the sporting and recreation facilities envisaged in the early public meetings can and will be achieved?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

Consistent with our other recent schools, the external sports brief for Jedburgh was 1 synthetic and 2 grass pitches. Through the use of the SportsScotland funding it has been possible to enhance one of the grass pitches to a 3G surface.

Through the design process though it became apparent that for cost reasons it was not possible to include a grass pitch with grass running track on the area of land originally identified to the north of the new school and to the rear of Priors Court. This was due to the levels on the ground. The project team are therefore exploring alterations/improvements to the existing playing fields at Howdenburn Drive to allow grass based sports such as field athletics to be played. Although this playing field is off campus, the distance is considered to be manageable and indeed may be closer than the original proposal for a grass pitch at Priors Court would have been.

However, it is noted that the project has been able to provide a 6 lane x 100m running track within the campus and this is in addition to that shown to the community at the start of the consultation process.

Supplementary

Councillor Brown advised that he was fully behind the development but that there was a need for an urgent meeting between Scottish Borders Council and Jedburgh Sports Hub to ensure there were no delays. Councillor Hamilton advised that she would be happy to attend such a meeting to discuss the matter further.