

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 5th December, 2017 at 10.00 am

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Present:- Councillors M Rowley (Chairman), S Aitchison (from para 2), G Edgar, S Haslam, C Hamilton, E Jardine, W McAteer, T Miers, S Mountford, G Turnbull, T Weatherston; Mr J Clark.

Apologies Mr G Henderson (Federation of Small Businesses).

Also present:- Councillor H Scott

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Executive Director (R Dickson), Chief Financial Officer, Chief Officer Economic Development, Principal Officer Regeneration, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer ( J Turnbull).

## 1. **MINUTE**

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 21 November 2017 had been circulated.

## **DECISION**

**APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.**

## **MEMBER**

Councillor Aitchison joined the meeting following consideration of the above item.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS**

## 2. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE**

- 2.1 With reference to paragraph 1 of the Minute of 19 September 2017, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note providing an update on recent Economic Development activities. The Chief Officer Economic Development, Mr McGrath, summarised the main points. With regard to business activity during the quarter, the first Scottish Borders Business Conference was held in October 2017 with 140 businesses attending. Following the event, there had been 12 requests from businesses to work with Business Gateway. In terms of Regeneration, a Jedburgh Marketing/Tourism business group had been established to help improve and promote the town centre. The Group was progressing the development of a town website, new visitor leaflets, pop-up displays for empty shops and town entry signage. Two applications had been submitted for a Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Fund 2017 from Regenerating Galashiels – Great Tapestry of Scotland, and Eastgate Theatre Extension & Refurbishment, Peebles. Notification would be given to applicants of funding recommendations by the end of February 2018. The Tweed Valley Tourism Consortium had been successful in securing Scottish Government Seedcorn funding for the development of a Tweed Valley Tourism Business Improvement District.
- 2.2 Under the Tourism and Events section of the update, Mr McGrath advised that the Cabinet Secretary, Fiona Hyslop, had met with the Scottish Borders Tourism Partnership. Included in discussions were opportunities around the Tapestry and the vision for future

tourism growth. With regard to Funding, Mr McGrath clarified that European funding continued to be available through the Scottish Borders LEADER and European Maritime Fisheries Fund 2014-2020 programmes. The LEADER Local Action Group had approved grant funding of £1.62m in 2017. Up to 10 applications were expected for consideration in January 2018. The Forth Fisheries Local Action Group had recommended six projects to Marine Scotland, committing £264k of funding. In terms of Property and Projects, Mr McGrath advised that work had commenced at the Galalaw Business Park with completion scheduled for summer 2019. To conclude, Mr McGrath advised that under the Low Carbon Economic Strategy, 30 businesses had been referred to Resource Efficient Scotland. The businesses were at various stages in the assessment process from initial request to audit completion and implementation.

- 2.3 Members requested clarification around the detail behind the figures supplied; Mr McGrath responded that with regard to Business Gateway he did not have the exact number of referrals from intermediaries (e.g. bank managers, accountants) but this was considered an effective way of working as they were able to highlight to businesses the advantages and services of Business Gateway. The economic impact of the Scottish Borders Business Fund and Business Loan Fund was calculated using the overall spend of each project and applying a multiplier, grants were always of a smaller amount. The spectator figures for the Tour of Britain Cycling event had been supplied by the organisers, using a methodology standard to all their events. With regard to bank closures, Mr McGrath advised that planning officers recognised the impact on town centres and this would be reflected in the Main Issues Report (MIR) and Local Development Plan. In respect of digital connectivity and the additional funding announced by Scottish Government, the Chairman advised that this would not be directly provided, but was a fund in which local authorities could bid. Officers would be presenting a report in January 2018 to the Executive Committee with further information on the position of the Borders with regard to broadband coverage.

## **DECISION**

**NOTED the update.**

## **3. VISIT SCOTLAND ICENTRE UPDATE**

- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director providing an update to Members on how VisitScotland was responding to changes in the way visitors accessed information and made holiday decisions and, in turn, how this was impacting on the performance of the manned visitor information service in the Scottish Borders. The report explained that VisitScotland currently operated and managed three VisitScotland iCentres in the Scottish Borders, providing face to face information services, including an accommodation and ticketing service. The VisitScotland iCentres were partially funded via an annual Minute of Agreement (MOA) between Scottish Borders Council and VisitScotland. Visitors were accessing information from a wide range of sources when they were in Scotland. Trends indicated that online usage for visitor information and booking would continue to rise. In line with this trend, Scottish Borders VisitScotland iCentres had experienced a general decline in footfall in recent years while there had been a significant rise in website visits and digital referrals to Scottish Borders businesses. Recognising the change in consumer behaviour and demand, VisitScotland had announced a new strategy for the provision of tourism information and the overall customer experience, looking at the best way to ensure that information was delivered to more people in more places using the channels that visitors used the most. The new strategy would be implemented over a two year period and would include: A new regional hub, a new partnership with Live Borders and an increase in the number of VisitScotland Information Partners (VIP Programme). Mr McGrath clarified that officers would work with VisitScotland to identify options and the location for the new regional hub, a further report would be presented to Executive Committee in 2018 providing recommendations.
- 3.2 In the ensuing discussion, Councillor Edgar advised that SEStran would supply interactive screens and the first year's maintenance for sites across the Borders.

However, there seemed to have been an issue with Live Borders' connectivity; the Chief Executive advised that she would investigate this matter out-with the meeting. In response to a question regarding the geographic area covered by the Tweed Valley Consortium, Mr McGrath clarified that this covered the Tweeddale to Selkirk area, and the Leader confirmed that the Consortium focussed on mountain-biking. The success of the VIP Programme in Kelso was highlighted and that Kelso could be promoted as a good example for other Border towns.

#### **DECISION:**

- (a) NOTED the changes to information provision in the Scottish Borders made by VisitScotland and welcomed the increased involvement of local tourism businesses in the VisitScotland Information Partners (VIP) Programme in the Scottish Borders.**
- (b) AGREED that a further report with recommendations for the location of the new regional hub for tourism information provision be presented to the Committee in 2018.**

#### **4. SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EVENTS PLAN 2014-2020-UPDATE REPORT**

4.1 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Executive Committee of 1 November 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director presenting an update on the Council's Events Plan 2014-2020. The Council had successfully facilitated and supported the delivery of a wide range of regional, national and international events. This coordinated and targeted approach to promoting events in the Scottish Borders has had a significant impact on the economy, generating an estimated economic impact of almost £6 million in 2017. These events raised the profile and enhanced the reputation of the Scottish Borders and delivered social and community benefits. The regional tourism strategy and action plan highlighted events as a key success factor in attracting more visitors to the area, and encouraging them to do more, spend more and return more often. The updated Events Plan 2014-2020 set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report outlined the approach to prioritising event support activity and highlighted key achievements to date.

4.2 The Principal Officer Regeneration, Ms Julie Hogg, highlighted the main points: Melrose Sevens continued to develop and innovative with a new Universities match which would be expanded in 2018; the success of the Tour of Britain and Tour of the Borders continued to build strength for cycling events; the Borders Book Festival continued to deliver a high profile event; and, the Scottish Borders Heritage Festival's overall economic impact was £1,450,000 with almost 30% from outside the Borders. In response to questions, Ms Hogg advised that with regard to Springwood Park events, the Council worked closely with events' organisers and this would continue. The Executive Director, Mr Dickson, added that the Border Union Agricultural Society had met with Scottish Enterprise representatives to explore longer term opportunities. Members noted that the organisers of the Jim Clark Rally were trying to re-establish the event, but there were a number of challenges to be addressed before this could happen. With regard to the funding of private sector, profit making events, Mr McGrath explained that such events came within the Events Strategy, raised the profile of the Scottish Borders and encouraged return visits. Further, the Chief Executive confirmed that defined outcomes were required for any public funding, with events also delivering a range of benefits; for example, the 2017 Borders Book Festival had given educational sessions which supported the school curriculum. The Council worked with VisitScotland to support new events and encouraged existing events to develop and grow. With regard to visitor accommodation, Ms Hogg advised that officers consistently worked with event organisers to address this issue. Mr Dickson added that there had to be a balance between existing and temporary accommodation and that the Council should explore market demand, occupancy rates and visitors expectations in terms of visitor accommodation.

**DECISION:**

- (a) NOTED the achievements and progress made in relation to the Scottish Borders Council Events Plan 2014 – 2020.**
- (b) AGREED to continue to support the events sector to maximise economic impact and legacy through delivery of the Scottish Borders Council Events Plan 2014-2020.**

**5. HAWICK ACTION PLAN - UPDATE**

With reference to paragraph 10 of the Minute of Scottish Borders Council of 30 March 2017, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director providing a progress report on key activities within the Hawick Action Plan following the last meeting in March 2017. The Hawick Action Plan was structured around three key themes which were identified and agreed by the key stakeholders for the town. The themes were: making Hawick a 'Great Place for Working and Investing'; a 'Great Place for Living and Learning'; and a 'Great Destination to Visit'. There had been significant progress within some of the themes, in particular 'Creating an Environment to Encourage Economic Growth'. The priority actions identified and areas of progress were set out in Appendix 1 to the report. A number of key areas of progress were highlighted within this report. Some of the key areas of progress noted included the Hawick Business Growth project with £3.625million of Scottish Government funding; Relocation of Business Gateway to Tower Mill, Hawick; the completion of Hawick Town Centre Marketing Pilot; the Borders Railway Extension Feasibility Scoping Study report being progressed; progress on the design and consultation of Hawick Flood Protection Scheme; Tourism Marketing activity including completion of a signage audit and commissioning of a marketing company to progress delivery of the marketing action plan; and initial feasibility study research commissioned for a 'Townscape Heritage' programme. In response to a question regarding the occupancy of incubation units, Mr McGrath clarified that Business Gateway had been involved in the type of unit to be created to maximise their relevance to potential businesses.

**DECISION:**

- (a) NOTED the progress made in taking forward key actions within the Hawick Action Plan since March 2017, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**
- (b) AGREED that:**
  - (i) the Executive would support further work with businesses and stakeholders in Hawick in 2018/19 as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report;**
  - (ii) the feasibility studies previously identified for two former textiles mill sites were now targeted at alternative priority buildings, and authority was delegated to the Executive Director to agree these alternative buildings in consultation with the Executive Member for Business & Economic Development and the local Elected Members; and**
  - (iii) the Executive Director would present a further progress report on the Action Plan to Committee by the end of March 2018.**

**6. PRIVATE BUSINESS**

**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 the Appendix to this minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of part 1 of schedule 7A to the Act.**

## **SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS**

### **7. BORDERLANDS INITIATIVE**

The Executive Committee considered a report by the Executive Director setting out progress in taking forward the Borderlands Initiative.

*The meeting concluded at 11.30 am*