

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
29 MARCH 2018
APPENDIX I

OPEN QUESTIONS

Question from Councillor Tatler

To Executive Member for Children & Young People

What plans does SBC have to provide adequate supported accommodation for young people?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

Albert Place, Galashiels

SBC have worked in partnership to provide Supported Accommodation in Albert Place, Galashiels. The model created at Albert Place provides 4 self-contained flats dedicated to provide transitional supported housing for young people leaving care.

The Team provide support around:

- (a) Housing options;
- (b) Community integration and outreach work;
- (c) Employability and worklessness; and
- (d) Tenancy support and independent living skills.

Housing Protocol

Following negotiation between SBC Social Work, Housing and Registered Social Landlords, a protocol was signed by all 4 RSLs in the Scottish Borders ending the practice of care leavers having to register as homeless to enable them to bid for tenancies. The protocol also includes a monthly meeting between the Throughcare Aftercare Social Work Team and RSLs to identify suitable accommodation and support from across all options and resources available.

Supported Carers

The Supported Carer Scheme is a registered adult care scheme whose role and remit focuses on providing transitional, family based care for young people who were previously looked after. It is hoped to grow this option for care experienced young people to aid transition to independent living and other accommodation options.

Foster Carers

Foster carers continue to provide care and accommodation to many looked after young people or young people who are in Continuing Care. Currently 48 out of 230 looked after young people are aged over 16 years.

Wheatlands Residential Unit

Our 5 bedded residential unit has had a settled group of young people for some time (in the main 16 to 18 year olds). Recently, as an extension of the residential unit, we have developed a satellite flat, which will allow young people to move on from the unit to a very supported tenancy type placement. The first young person to use the flat will be moving in to the tenancy in April.

Other Developments

Discussion is on-going between SBC and the RSLs on how best to provide appropriate accommodation and support to Care experienced young people. This is managed through both the monthly Housing Options meetings and through direct communication relating to the specific needs of individual young people.

Questions from Councillor Robson

1. To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

In reply to my question to Council on 24 August 2018, Councillor Edgar stated that in undertaking the Council's role in relation to public utilities and the New Roads & Street Works Act, a number of officers are employed to carry out the duties required by the Act, together with other roads functions. However, the Council does employ one dedicated full time Utility Inspector.

Further to this answer, in the light of additional resources for the forthcoming financial year, does the Council intend to employ another Utility Inspector dedicated to checking reinstatement work by public utilities in the Council's road network?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

Council officers continue to be involved in all of the duties required by the Act, together with all other roads functions. Significant work is being undertaken to further improve the inspection regime of the network, and this will assist in the identification and recording of latent defects within the 2 year maintenance period for utility reinstatements. Consideration is also being given to the Council undertaking utility reinstatements. At this time there are no plans to employ another dedicated utility inspector.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson was of the view that an extra officer would pay for itself by ensuring that reinstatements were carried out to the correct standard and asked that the addition of such an officer be kept under review. Councillor Edgar confirmed this would be done.

2. To Executive Member for Children & Young People

When will the Council's updated Autism Strategy be published and what resources are earmarked to assist with its introduction and development?

Reply from Councillor C Hamilton

The Autism Strategy for Scottish Borders Council was launched in 2015. This sits alongside the Scottish Strategy for Autism which was published in 2011.

There is currently a full time Development Officer in post to drive forward this strategy across the Scottish Borders – Anita Hurding. Three engagement events were held across the Borders in September 2017 to find out what parents, careers and professionals across the Borders needed in terms of resources and support.

In addition to this a scoping survey was launched to seek the views of people across Scottish Borders with a diagnosis of autism.

A strategic group currently oversees the direction of the strategy and this is supported by several operational multi agency workstreams.

Questions from Councillor Paterson

1. To Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

Can the Executive Member please let us know what plans the Administration has for toilet provision in the Scottish Borders? Constituents keep asking me when this Administration will be bringing a report to Council.

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

A report is currently being prepared which will set out a number of options for the future provision of toilets in the Scottish Borders recognising that the current Administration has not expressed a view on the current plans for public convenience provision in the Scottish Borders. The report will summarise the position in relation to charging and comfort schemes/partnerships and consideration of any recommendations that are included in the report.

The report currently making its way through the normal consultation processes and Members should expect to be able to consider it in the near future.

2. To the Leader

Will the Council Leader be writing to the Prime Minister asking for clarification on the deal that was recently struck between the UK Government and the European Union with regards to foreign fishing vessels still being allowed to fish in Scottish waters long after we leave the European Union?

Reply from Councillor Haslam

Given the complexity of the negotiations between the UK Government and the European Union all we can really do at this stage is refer to the latest position of the UK Government on this issue. This was given in the statement on the EU-UK Article 50 negotiations made on Monday 19 March 2018 in Brussels David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union the UK Government sets out its position in relation for the next phase of the negotiations, in relation to the EU annual fishing negotiations which includes access to UK sea areas.

'We've also agreed specific safeguards when it comes to annual fishing negotiations. These arrangements will only apply for the negotiations in 2019, since we will still be a Member State for those that take place at the end of this year. Through 2020 we will be negotiating fishing opportunities as an independent coastal state, deciding who can access our waters and on what terms. For the year where it is relevant we have agreed the European Union will have to consult us ahead of the negotiations. And the United Kingdom's share of the total catch cannot be changed, protecting the interests of the United Kingdom fishing community.'

This Council continues to stand strongly behind the fishing communities of East Berwickshire and in my discussions with national politicians I will ensure that the sensitivity of these issues and our commitment to the local fishing industry is fully understood.

3. To Executive Member for Children & Young People

Can the Executive Member please tell me why there seems to be a decline in educating our children in Scottish folk/traditional music in our schools?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

There has been no change or reduction to the provision of teaching Scottish/Folk music in our schools. Here are the reasons that this is not the case:

- In all SQA Music exams, from National 1 to Advanced Higher, pupils are required by the course content, to learn about traditional Scottish music. This aspect of the curriculum is assessed within the listening paper. The rationale for this is so that young people learn about their musical heritage and can pass this onto future generations.
- In SQA Music exams, pupils can choose to perform traditional pieces/songs as part of their performance programme. A programme must have contrasting repertoire, thus performing a Scottish piece is a common feature. Music instructors in schools regularly give young people traditional pieces to learn on violin, guitar, flute and brass. Pupils also have the option of performing on penny whistle, clarsach, bagpipes, snare drum and accordion. Schools usually have a number of candidates who choose to perform bagpipes as one or their two instruments of choice.
- School music departments have close links with community pipe bands, folk clubs and fiddle groups.
- In the Broad General Education music curriculum, from Nursery to S3, there is also a strong focus on Scottish Music, either through listening, performing or creating Scottish Music. Music teachers are very clear of the expectation of the delivery of this within the curriculum. Often, the curriculum will have a Scottish unit of work and singing traditional songs features highly. Other staff would be curriculum support teachers, music instructors or Youth Music Instructors or class teachers.

- Some high schools have very successful ceilidh bands which rehearse regularly at lunchtime and who perform at concerts and community events.
- Many of our young people perform in community music groups such as Riddle Fiddles or the Small Hall Band.
- Hawick hosts an annual Burns Competition for all schools for singing and instrumental performing.
- Selkirk High School still has a commitment to using their DSM to employ three traditional music instructors for clarsach and accordion. This school is our traditional music school.
- Young people who get music instruction or play in the regional ensembles often perform Scottish music and our instructors regularly arrange traditional Scottish tunes for their pupils and groups.
- Youth Music instructors regularly teach Scottish content in their projects in primary schools. This includes learning the penny whistle.
- Evidence of all of this work can be seen at school concerts and regional ensemble concerts throughout the year, both in primary and secondary schools.
- Scottish Borders Schools have a strong tradition in performing Scottish music of which they are very proud and this continues to be the case.

The Member is invited to meet the Executive Member to share concerns, as there is no evidence regarding a decline in educating our children in this area.

Questions from Councillor Chapman

1. To Executive Member for Children & Young People

Can the Executive Member for Children and Young People advise what plans this Council has to celebrate Year of Young People, what resources are being allocated to support these plans, and when a public plan will be produced?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

The Council embarked upon a consultation with young people in January and February 2018, as it was felt that the young people should decide how to celebrate the year of the young people. The consultation involved all secondary schools and some primaries. Third sector partners have also consulted with young people. There was an online survey too.

The results of the Consultation will be included in a paper going to the Executive on 1st May. The Children and Young People's Leadership Group is ensuring full partnership support and involvement in events, activities and legacy.

The Secondary School Estate Consultations and Youth Action Hawick have also provided engagement and consultation opportunities.

Key themes have emerged regarding areas for change and improvement. The detail will be in the May Committee paper and further consultation to prioritise a timeline of implementation. However, notably the following suggestions have already been incorporated into delivery plans: social space in schools and community environments (with access to Wi-Fi), Borders wide 'music jam' festival in the early Autumn to promote music and develop music connections, broader learning pathways and a modernised school curriculum, youth learning opportunities and spaces to study at night and further inclusion of the pupil voice in all Council change processes. Another key concept in the feedback is legacy and a commitment to reducing plastic and a campaign on equalities in the Borders. Another key theme emerging is the opportunity for pupil and community debates and this will be developed in parallel to the outcome of meetings with Borders Church representatives who have asked to be included within the YOYP plans, e.g. a debate on faith in the Modern World, a 'question time' panel event on current political issues.

The Portfolio Holder would like to commend the high quality response to the Consultation and note that the full plan will be presented to the May Executive Committee. There will be a Communications Plan embedded with the SBC and Partners YOYP Plan.

Supplementary

Councillor Chapman expressed concern that it was already late March and a number of neighbouring authorities had already published their plans and the CYPP Group had not met for some time and he asked that the Council do everything in its power to promote YOYP for the young people in the Borders. Councillor Hamilton responded that there had been a full consultation with young people with 900 responses, so this was now being taken forward.

2. To the Leader

Can the Leader of the Council advise how she is ensuring that Scottish Borders Council is maximising on Year of Young People throughout 2018 and is at the forefront of all Council meetings, from senior CMT meetings through to Community Council meetings?

Reply from Councillor Haslam

The Council adopted the approach of consulting the young people and asking them what they wanted out of the Year of Young People. The level of response from the Young People is extensive, honest, enlightening and very inspiring. The Young People have clearly set out an expectation of participation at all levels within the Council. The ideas are absolutely tremendous and insightful: By way of exemplification young people across the Borders have made a call for 'social space outdoors with appropriate street furniture' in all communities i.e. a place for young people to gather. They are planning to lead a 'plastics reduction campaign' in schools and communities and have asked that special recycling 'stations' available internationally are developed in the Borders. They have asked for Community debates on issues such as 'Donald Trump', 'Equalities' and 'challenging perceptions of youth in the Borders'. They have specifically asked that Members, MPs and MSPs attend Question time events in the Borders and that these are streamed on social media – and that the panel face questions on themes set by the young people. They have listed many ideas for events and activities e.g. a cross schools and communities 'great Borders Bake off' and challenged existing practice e.g. they wish 'therapy pets' to be allowed into schools, more carriages on the trains.

This demonstrates the passion and capacity of our young people in taking their place in our communities and in the future of the Borders and builds upon existing excellent practice in youth participation in the Scottish Borders, e.g. Peebles Debating Club recently won the National Donald Dewar Debating Competition. (The Leader took the opportunity to congratulate the team on their success)

The Executive paper in May will set out the YOYP Plan month by month and this will include Members' Briefings re their participation and outline roles and responsibilities across all Council groups and partnership activities. This will be monitored by CMT and the Children & Young People's Partnership Leadership Group.

I would ask that all Members and Council Groups take note of the feedback from the Consultation at the Executive in May, the YOYP Plan and fully respond to the offers of participation both in their locality and in Borders wide activities.

Finally, a policy will be taken to the Executive in the autumn on ensuring pupil and youth participation will build upon the YOYP and ensure that there is legacy in giving our young people their rightful place in our communities and in the future of the Borders.

Supplementary

Councillor Chapman welcomed the Leader's response but asked that all Council departments be involved in YOYP not just Children and Young People. Councillor Haslam advised that there would be regular Member briefings and asked Members to work with their Community Councils to involve young people as membership of Community Councils was open to those 16 years old and above. Everyone was in a position to get involved.

3. To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

Can the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure advise what Scottish Borders Councils understanding of 'fixing our roads' means?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

Scottish Borders Council undertakes cyclical safety inspections of its adopted road and footway network as per the recommendations within The Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance. Any defects identified during safety inspections are then "repaired" to remove the identified defect. There are a number of types of repair undertaken including temporary patching and Jet patching.

The Council also undertake "repairs" to its road or footway network based on condition survey information. These surveys identify sections of the network where damage or deterioration of the asset has occurred. The damage or deterioration may not necessarily be a defect as identified in a safety inspection, however, in undertaking the works, the Council is seeking to improve the condition of the identified section of the network and therefore the network as a whole.

All information is compiled and forms the basis for the Roads Asset Management Plan (RAMP) and this is used to prioritise the actions required on the network. All repairs undertaken on the Council's road and footway network are managed within the allocated Revenue and Capital budgets.

Supplementary

Councillor Chapman asked if a comprehensive report could be provided showing all the ways in which money was spent in repairing our roads. Councillor Edgar confirmed such a report could be prepared and emphasised that road repairs were always carried out to the highest standard.

Question from Councillor Brown

To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

The Council Budget approved on February 2018 contained a cut of £40,000 through a reduction of opening times of the council's Community Recycling Centres. Can the Executive Member give details of the exact changes to the opening times in each centre and provide information about how this change will be notified to the public?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The primary focus of the Community Recycling Centre review has been to explore the potential for changing the sites operating hours to better reflect the needs of residents whilst maximising savings opportunities.

The new operating model has taken account of feedback and findings from:

- Benchmarking
- Stakeholder Engagement; and
- Site traffic data

Potential new arrangements include:

- Eyemouth and Selkirk Community Recycling Centres will be shut two days per week between Monday and Friday and all other sites will close 1 day per week.
- All sites will remain open at weekends.
- All sites will have extended operating hours during the summer periods.
- All sites will see opening hours shifted back so that they are open later in the evening in the summer.

It is not intended to introduce any changes until October 2018. Officers are currently working with the Communications department to develop a detailed communication plan to ensure all members of the public including elected Members, Community Councils and other stakeholders are well aware ahead of the changes.

A members briefing is scheduled to take place on 17 April to provide all members with more detail in relation to the new Community Recycling Centre arrangements.

Supplementary

Councillor Brown asked if the Executive Member could confirm that now that the review had been completed and money removed from the budget that it was highly unlikely that a recycling centre would be provided in Jedburgh. Councillor Edgar agreed that it was highly unlikely.

Question from Councillor Drum

To Executive Member for Transformation and HR

During the recent winter weather when we had both amber and a red warnings in place for parts of our region and both Scottish Borders Council and Police Scotland were advising that only 'essential' travel should be undertaken, some staff did not attend their place of work. Do we have figures for the number of staff who had to use annual leave or TOIL for the days they did not come into work?

Reply from Councillor Mountford

Council staff made an exceptional effort to ensure frontline services continued to run through the period of adverse weather.

Managers and staff were prepared for the disruption and the vast majority of staff who were not deployed to front line services were able to work from home or other local bases.

Annual leave and Toil are recorded locally and are not currently held centrally on Business World although this will be part of the system in the future.

Supplementary

Councillor Drum asked how many staff were disadvantaged because they were in posts that could not work from home or did not have IT equipment. Councillor Mountford undertook to try to obtain this information if possible.

Question from Councillor Ramage

To Executive Member for Children & Young People

The recently approved Conservative led administration voted to make a cut of £80,000 to school crossing patrols and janitorial services. Can you clarify which crossing patrols are to be targeted for these cuts and exactly how many schools will lose their crossing patrol? How many staff will risk losing their posts and how the "consultation process" will be undertaken?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

The review will look at the service as a whole rather than targeting any individual site. A key element of the service review, which is in its infancy and information gathering stage, will be to identify and implement efficiencies without necessarily incurring any job losses.

The consultation will include a number of factors such as Crossing times, Crossing numbers and crossing locations. The process will consult with a broad range of stakeholders including, Parent / Community Groups, Senior Management, HR, Head Teachers staff and pupils

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage noted that there had been no mention of a review in the budget papers and that she had passed schools on her way to the meeting where crossing points were unmanned. She asked if removing crossing patrols did not compromise the plan to keep children safe as they walked to school. Councillor Hamilton undertook to look into the matter further and get back to her.

Question from Councillor H. Anderson

1. To the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

The Council budget approved on 20 February 2018 contained a 5% reduction in funding (amounting to £11,000) to CAB services across the authority. Can the Executive Member detail how and when this reduction will be implemented, bearing in mind that the existing contract has several months to run and a new contract of service has yet to be negotiated.

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

In setting its budget the Council agreed to savings of £161k in 2018/19 and a further £11k in 2019/20 to be achieved from a reduction in costs as a result of the integration of Customer Services, Welfare Benefits and Housing staff. It was also agreed that a review be undertaken of the welfare and debt advice provided by the Borders Citizens Advice Consortium.

An initial meeting took place on 20 February 2018 to discuss the format for this review and further meetings are being set up with the relevant stakeholders to progress this.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson advised that CAB were concerned that the £11k cut would be made mid-year which would result in the loss of 24 hours of advice provision per week. She asked if the cut would be made in 6 months time and asked that consideration be given to not making this cut. Councillor Aitchison undertook to take the information provided by Councillor Anderson away and come back to her with a response but he did emphasise that this was a review.

2. To Executive Member for Community Safety

On 20 February the Council approved a budget containing a commitment to spend £282,000 to deploy a new community policing team comprising a Sergeant and six officers to target anti-social behaviour and prevent low level crime, such as parking. Can the Executive Member give details of how this new team is to be recruited, when it will be operational, who these officers will be operationally accountable within SBC and how this new team's work will be directed and targeted?

Reply from Councillor McAteer

The new Community Action Team has been established by Police Scotland and the Sergeant and six police constables are now in place. The team will be fully operational from 1 April 2018. The team will remain operationally accountable to Police Scotland's Area Commander but their work will be co-ordinated through Graham Jones, the Councils Safer Communities Manager.

A prioritised work plan will be developed for the Team which will be determined by local intelligence and the proposal is to set up a new Member/Officer group which will meet on a regular basis in order to consider tasking and shaping the plan. There will be further discussions with Members on this shortly.

The first meeting will be arranged as soon as possible but for the first few weeks the Team will focus on parking and anti-social behaviour.

The relationship between the Council and Police Scotland in respect of this new service is underpinned by a service level agreement.

Regular performance reports will be presented to the Police, Fire & Rescue & Safer Communities Board and the Executive Committee on the effectiveness of the new service.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked if consideration could be given to setting up a process to log how the officers spent their time to ensure that the Council was receiving the service for which it was paying. Councillor McAteer confirmed that this would need to be done and indeed it was crucial as we had to ensure that our communities were safer as a result of employing these officers.