

**SCOTTISH BODERS COUNCIL**

**27 AUGUST 2015**

**APPENDIX I**

**OPEN QUESTIONS**

**Question from Councillor Logan**

**1. To the Executive Member for Social Work**

Do you agree that we have an issue in the Scottish Borders in that we have only one rate of Local Housing Allowance for the whole area? As you may be aware, the rental levels in Tweeddale are generally higher than elsewhere in the Borders and affordable property for people on low income is an issue in that area.

**Reply from Councillor Renton**

Local Housing Allowance rates are set based on Broad Rental Market Areas. There are 18 of these areas across Scotland and are generally defined as being an area within which a resident could reasonably be expected to live which are within reach, by public transport of all the regular facilities and services people generally need. For Tweeddale most of these are accessed within the Scottish Borders.

In answer to Councillor Logan's question, Yes, one rate of Local Housing Allowance for the whole area has been and continues to be an issue in that it could be argued that it potentially disadvantages people reliant upon housing benefit accessing private rented sector homes within their own communities that are in the more affluent parts of Scottish Borders where rents are higher. That is why this administration is developing affordable housing for rent at below Market rent in the Tweeddale area to assist the very people Councillor Logan is rightly concerned about.

Note: The LHA Rate is set are set by the Scottish Government based on market evidence

**2. To the Leader**

Do you agree that there should now be a public consultation on the Great Tapestry of Scotland project given the increasing level of public debate on this controversial issue?

**Reply from Councillor Parker**

The Council has made its decision in respect of the Great Tapestry of Scotland in a careful and very transparent way. Members first considered the matter in May 2014. There followed preparation and discussion, over six months, of the detailed business case and the inclusion of the Tapestry proposals within the Borders Railway Blueprint.

At Council in December 2014 (following a seminar for all Members) Members concluded that the Tapestry project should be supported. I have no doubt at all that every Member has discussed the project with their constituents and been able to represent their views and feelings in the discussions we have had.

Moving forward there is a planning application on which the public can comment and we believe (although it has not been confirmed yet by the petitioners) that a petition will be brought to the Petitions and Deputations Committee on 1 October.

Members will also be interested to know that as part of the opening of the Borders Railway, Scottish Ministers will be promoting the Scottish Borders with the Tapestry as the centre piece, at the Milan Expo. There will also be exhibitions at Waverley Station, Galashiels Transport Interchange, Abbotsford House and the National Mining Museum about the Tapestry. I am sure the Public will continue to be engaged in this Project

**Supplementary**

Councillor Logan referred, with regard to controversial issues, to a consultation on the 3G pitch which was carried out in his Ward and asked why a similar exercise was not carried out within the Leaders Ward on the Tapestry. Councillor Parker replied that people within his Ward had had numerous opportunities to discuss the Tapestry.

### 3. To the Leader

The City of Edinburgh Council procedure for open questions is as follows :- The question is submitted a week in advance, by convention the answer is given in writing at least one and half days before the Council meeting. At the Council meeting the questioner is given the opportunity to ask orally a supplementary question based on the written answer. The Executive member then has the opportunity to answer the supplementary question. The supplementary question and the answer given is minuted. (not necessarily verbatim)

Would you consider introducing this procedure for a trial period of six months in the interests of openness and democracy?

#### Reply from Councillor Parker

No, I do not wish to consider introducing the Edinburgh procedure for questions at Council for a trial period. I believe the current procedure within this Council for Questions to the Leader and Executive Members is already sufficiently open and transparent. The Clerk to the Council will include a summary of any supplementary question and answer within the Minute of the meeting from now on if this helps to aid clarity.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Logan expressed dissatisfaction with the current process and some of the replies he received which Councillor Parker did not accept.

### **Question from Councillor Mountford**

#### 1. To the Depute Leader Finance

Can you please explain why the council's carbon tax liability for 2014/15 has increased by 73% to £315,000? and inform us of what actions are being taken to prevent it rising further?

#### Reply from Councillor Parker on behalf of Councillor Mitchell

The Council's carbon tax liability increased from £182,000 in 2013/14 to £315,000 for two principal reasons.

Firstly our tonnage of CO2 increased due to the inclusion of our street lighting consumption in the calculation of our tax liability for the first time in 2014/15. This was excluded from the calculation of Carbon tax liability before 2014/15 and therefore any street lighting electricity consumption previously did not attribute to our overall carbon tax costs.

Street lighting is the biggest difference; however a second significant factor was an increase in cost per tonne of carbon (from £12/tonne in 13/14 to £15.90 per tonne in 14/15. This also contributed £15,779 to the increase.

It is worth noting that despite costs increasing, overall, SBC energy consumption actually reduced from 54,534 kilo watt hours in 2013/14 to 53,149kwh in 2014/15 - a reduction of 2.5%. The council continues to invest in a range of actions to reduce our energy consumption including LED street lighting, insulation, boiler upgrades and to explore new initiatives for example solar panels on our building roofs.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Mountford asked that we accelerate energy saving measures such as street light replacements and insulation. Councillor Parker agreed that we should always be looking for ways to reduce our carbon liability but advised that with items such as street lighting the ability of the market to supply our requirements was a problem.

#### 2. To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

What is the total amount of subsidy being paid to bus companies for services in the Cheviot Area and how does that compare with the other SBC localities?

### Reply from Councillor Edgar

The Council spends £1.9 million annually on subsidised local bus services across the Scottish Borders.

It would be almost impossible to break this figure down in to localities as many of our bus routes crossover in to several different administrative areas.

### Supplementary

Councillor Mountford asked if he could be given an assurance that bus subsidies were broadly equal across localities. Councillor Edgar advised that he could not give such an undertaking but confirmed that they were based on areas of most need.

### **Question from Councillor Bell**

#### To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

There is continued demand from the public for steps to be taken to reduce the speed of vehicles in residential areas, (Recent demands for 20 mph zones in Peebles, in Hawick and in Selkirk to name but a few) but I have heard that officers are being advised against introducing advisory 20's Plenty Zones.

An initiative to get a pilot scheme of an enforceable 20 mph limit in the residential areas of Cardrona was rejected by the Environment & Infrastructure Committee. Given the establishment of similar zones in Edinburgh, when will Scottish Borders Council catch up with the emerging practice in establishing 20 mph enforcement zones to make our residential streets safe for children, for pedestrians and for cyclists?

What steps are you prepared to take to support such an initiative?

### Reply from Councillor Edgar

The speed of traffic in residential areas has always been a topic of concern. Any complaints received are investigated and action taken as appropriate in liaison with Police Scotland.

Council policy remains that, by and large, 20 mph limits are restricted to immediately outside schools and on the approaches to schools. The rationale for this is:-

- This is where they can be most effective.
- Previous traffic calming initiatives have been shown to become less effective the wider they have been introduced.
- Outside schools the limits are regularly enforced and Police Scotland have previously indicated they would be unable to offer similar support on a wider basis

In addition there would also be significant financial implications both in terms of initial set up and maintenance costs. It should also be noted that the Council currently struggles to maintain its existing 20 mph electronic sign provision.

Recent Transport Scotland guidance on 20 mph speed limits is indeed that 20 mph limits should no longer be introduced on an advisory basis (i.e. Twenty's Plenty zones). It does however go on to say that Local authorities who have previously introduced advisory limits can still use these; albeit that the 20 mph limit roundels on the carriageway should not be renewed.

### Supplementary

Councillor Bell asked if, given the pressure on Twenty's Plenty zones, if consideration could be given to reviewing the policy on the provision of enforceable 20 mph zones. Councillor Edgar advised that this would require to be carried out in conjunction with Police Scotland but he would raise the matter with officers.

### **Question from Councillor Cockburn**

#### To the Leader

In respect of the tragedy which happened in Glasgow last Christmas, can you please reassure us that all steps and processes are in place, at this Council, to mitigate any health problems or potential health problems of operators of Council vehicles and machinery?

### Reply from Councillor Parker

The Council has longstanding processes and procedures in place to meet its obligations to monitor the health of its fleet drivers. These include:-

- Pre-employment health checks;
- DVLA Statutory 5 year medical assessments beyond the age of 45 for fleet drivers;
- Attendance management policies with follow up actions which provide the opportunity for driver's health issues to be recorded and monitored by management and the Occupational Health provider for SBC.

Also built into this process are a series of checks and balances that enable managers to monitor performance, compliance with legislative obligations and have reassurance that health conditions which are likely to impact upon the employee's ability to drive are regularly assessed by the medical profession via GP's and Occupational Health Service.

All staff members are also made aware of their obligations to keep us informed of any event/issue which may affect their employment. This is not limited to health issues.

However SBC, like any other employer, must rely on staff to act appropriately and we cannot guarantee that this will always happen.

We will continue to monitor the outputs and recommendations from the Fatal Accident Inquiry and, where required, adjust our process and procedures accordingly.