

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
12 NOVEMBER 2015
APPENDIX I

Questions from Councillor McAteer

1. To the Executive Member for Education

In light of the recent school role problems at Hobkirk School, and the subsequent placement requests from parents that may well result in the school being mothballed can the Executive Member for Education advise

- a) What the council strategy and criteria is for designating 'single' teacher schools
- b) How many schools within Scottish Borders Council area are currently single teacher schools or are in danger of meeting the designation criteria during the next year
- c) How many schools have previously been subject to mothballing and have any subsequently re-opened

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

- (a) Every school in Scotland is staffed on an annual basis in line with national legislation on class sizes. In Scottish Borders our teacher:pupil ratio is 13.7, which is below the national average, ie our classes are smaller in the Scottish Borders overall. Our schools are staffed according to class size legislation:
 - Primary 1 = 25 pupils maximum per class
 - Primary 2 & 3 = 30 pupils maximum per class
 - Primary 4 to 7 = 33 pupils maximum per class
 - Composite classes = 25 pupils maximum per class
 - Secondary classes (S1 & S2) = 33 pupils maximum per class
 - Secondary classes (S3 – S6) = 30 pupils maximum per class
 - Secondary practical classes = 20 pupils maximum per classSBC does not designate 'single' teacher school. The roll numbers are received in May each year. Each school is then staffed in line with the class size legislation, eg up to 25 children in a school = 1 class; 25 – 50 children = 2 classes; more than 50 children = 3 classes and so on. The age and stage of the children can have an impact on the number of classes required.
- (b) There are five schools currently single teacher schools. There are nine schools which are currently two class teacher schools. Roll projections indicate that for school session 2016-17 these figures will remain the same in each category.
- (c) Ettrick Primary School was mothballed and has not re-opened. Other schools have closed in the last ten years, but they were not mothballed.

2 To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

On the 7th October 2015 the Executive Member for Environmental Services stated 'I have instructed Officers to develop a new strategic approach to dealing with this issue (dog-fouling) which will come before Council at the earliest opportunity'.

Given 5 weeks has passed since that statement and this now appears to be the 'earliest opportunity' can the Executive Member explain why he has been unable to deliver the new strategy as stated and provide an indication of when we are likely to have it brought before the council?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

I understand the negative impact dog fouling has in our communities and it is something that affects everyone. This Council will tackle it and I recognise it is a key priority for the public. Officers are currently considering feedback from members of the Administration on the proposals and will bring a full report to Council once these have been finalised. This will be at the earliest opportunity, but this issue is so important, that the time must be taken to consider the best ways in which to combat the problem. In the meantime, I will be writing to the Scottish Government requesting an update on their review of the dog fouling legislation and their plans for increasing the fixed penalty amount.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer asked if he could be advised when the earliest opportunity was likely to be and was advised as soon as the best solution could be presented.

Question from Councillor Mountford

To the Leader

Can you confirm that Scottish Borders Council spent £1.5m on external consultants in 2014/15?
On which projects were they employed?

Reply from Councillor Parker

Yes. I am happy to provide a full list of the projects to Councillor Mountford.

I can confirm that the Consultants were employed on the development of a broad range of revenue and capital projects including:-

Flood protection schemes in Galashiels, Selkirk and Jedburgh;

European LUPS schemes;

The design and commissioning of school building projects - including the new Kelso High school, Duns Primary school;

Preparatory work for new 3G pitches in Hawick, Jedburgh, Peebles and Selkirk;

Technical support to upgrade the Council's financial systems:

Child protection:

The review of passenger transport;

The upgrade of Wilton Lodge Park in Hawick as well as the corporate transformation project to review passenger transport.

Consultants were employed to provide a range of professional disciplines including but not restricted to, structural engineering, flood prevention, environmental studies, architecture, IT and transport. Expenditure on Consultancy support varies year on year dependant on the nature and scale of projects being undertaken.

Supplementary

Councillor Mountford asked if he could receive an explanation why the cost had increased by 32% over the previous year and did Councillor Parker consider this was value for money. Councillor Parker confirmed that he did consider that it was value for money. The amount was different every year depending on the nature and scale of projects and whether there was internal expertise available. In 2010/11 the cost had been £1.8m.

Questions from Councillor Cockburn

1. To the Executive Member for Education

At the Scottish Borders Council Meeting of the 27th March 2014 it was agreed that a budget of £140,000 was to be set aside for financial year 2014/15 for grants for voluntary sector organisations developing out of school care provision. Please can I ask how much of the £140,000 was used for grants for this purpose, and if the budget was allocated for grants, how many grants were distributed?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

I can confirm that £122,275 of the budget for voluntary sector school provision was allocated.

This comprised:

£50,000 for Start-up Grants for Out of School Care on Fridays to support the implementation of the Asymmetric Week and an additional 46 separate grants for out of school care provision and to individual groups who met the specified criteria.

Supplementary

Councillor Cockburn asked how it was hoped to help the voluntary sector with out of school care going forward and was advised that applications meeting the criteria needed to be submitted and the level of funding for next year would be looked at as part of the budget process.

2. To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

In April 2014 I asked you if you agreed that our Council should approach Midlothian Council and suggest that our two Councils should join forces and carry out a new review of the signage and the general layout of the junction at Leadburn. You replied that Midlothian Council carried out significant amendments to the junction in April 2012, and were undertaking before and after studies of driver behaviour and accidents at the junction.

Please could you tell me if Midlothian Council have supplied this Council with the results of their before and after studies?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

I am advised that the results of the study have not been supplied to date as the studies are still ongoing. Midlothian Council is however happy to share their findings to date and speeds and accident data are being forwarded to SBC officers. Midlothian Council have also confirmed that they are still actively considering additional measures at the junction.

Supplementary

Councillor Cockburn asked that as Midlothian Council did not seem to be taking the necessary action could Scottish Borders Council not take over this land and carry out the required work. Councillor Edgar advised that the Council already had enough projects needing attention and this junction was the responsibility of Midlothian Council so any pressure to carry out improvements should be put on them.

Question from Councillor Marshall

To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

In light of recent media comments where frustration has been reported at the lack of progress being made by this Council regarding the introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement, can the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure explain why there has been a delay and what steps are being taken to progress this important issue quicker.?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The decision on how to move forward in relation to the control of on-street parking is a critical one with potentially far reaching consequences for this Council.

The application for, and potential introduction of, Decriminalised Parking Enforcement has significant financial implications for the Council at a time when it is facing unprecedented financial pressure. As such it is only right that all aspects are properly evaluated before making a decision that once made will be very difficult to reverse in the future.

The current position is that a report on the matter was recently discussed at Corporate Management Team and is scheduled for further discussion at the Leaders Group. Following that it is anticipated that a further final report and recommendations will come before Members early in the New Year.