

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of MEETING of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber,
Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells
on 9 December 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:- Councillors D. Parker (Chairman), S. Aitchison, S. Bell, C. Bhatia, J. Brown, M. Cook, V. Davidson (from para.3), G. Edgar, J. Greenwell, J. Mitchell, D. Moffat (from para.3), S. Mountford, D. Paterson, F. Renton (from para.3), R. Smith, T. Weatherston.

Also present:- Councillor G. Logan.

In Attendance:- Depute Chief Executive – Place, Chief Financial Officer, Service Director Strategy and Policy, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

MINUTE

1. The Minute of the Meeting of 11 November 2014 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED and signed by the Chairman.

FUNDING FOR THE SWAN PROJECT

2. With reference to paragraph 6 of the Minute of 11 November 2014, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note by the Chief Financial Officer. This provided further information in support of a recommendation, in the Revenue Monitoring Report, to use surplus welfare reform funding, funded from revenue support grant carried forward from 2013/14, to support the one-off costs of implementing the Scottish Wide Area Network (SWAN) project in the current financial year. The project would replace out-dated technology and assist with the delivery of wider welfare reform objectives through the provision of fast on-line access in a wider number of Council public buildings for people who otherwise would have difficulty accessing these services. The briefing note gave the background of the funding of Discretionary Housing payments (DHP) which were introduced in July 2001 and replaced the Exceptional Hardship and Exceptional Circumstances payments. DHP payments were mainly funded from a budget provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This budget was also topped up by funding totaling £58,000 per annum using resources the Council's own base budget. The Council received £457,000 from DWP in 2013/14 to fund DHPs and had spent this allocation in full. In addition, the Scottish Government had also made funding available to rural local authorities to assist them with the impact of welfare reform in December 2013. This funding was received as part of the Council's general revenue support grant and not as a specific ring-fenced grant. Scottish Borders Council received £669,000 late in 2013/14, the majority of which remained unspent at the end of the year and was carried forward for use in 2014/15 for a variety of welfare related projects and support. The Council had received a further £426,000 from Scottish Government for 2014/15.
3. Two tables within the briefing note showed analysis of resources received to fund Welfare Reform in 2013/14 and 2014/15. These showed an uncommitted balance of £849,000 at December 2014, having met all known commitments. It was anticipated that a further £86,000 would be spent on new DHP claims between December and 31 March 2014. A further table in the briefing note set out the proposed use of the uncommitted balance in 2014/15 which included £400,000 on the SWAN project. Following the spending proposals

there remained an uncommitted balance of £126,000. Through meeting one-off phasing and installation costs incurred the SWAN project would increase on-line access for the public, with free Wi-Fi being available in all Council public buildings including area offices and Libraries. This access would further support Welfare Reform projects such as Looking Local and support welfare benefit claimants' transition to Universal Credit as it was rolled out from spring next year. Members discussed the report and the view was expressed that a decision should not be made on the recommendation before further detailed information had been received from Social Work about possible alternative uses for the surplus funding bearing in mind current pressures. Members requested a briefing on progress with the SWAN project.

VOTE

Councillor Cook, seconded by Councillor Mountford, moved that approval be given for the use of £400k surplus welfare reform funding to support the implementation of the SWAN project and that a briefing on the SWAN project be provided for Members.

Councillor Bhatia, seconded by Councillor Smith, moved as an amendment that the decision to use surplus welfare reform funding to support the one-off costs of implementing the SWAN project be deferred until questions about possible alternative uses for the surplus had been answered.

On a show of hands Members voted as follows:-

*Motion - 10 votes
Amendment - 2 votes*

The motion was accordingly carried.

DECISION

DECIDED to approve the use of £400k surplus welfare reform funding to support the implementation of the SWAN project and that a briefing on the SWAN project be provided for Members.

MEMBERS

Councillors Davidson, Moffat and Renton arrived during consideration of the above item.

QUARTERLY CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT AND PRESENTATION

4. With reference to paragraph 6 of the Minute of 30 September 2014, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive presenting a quarterly performance update for Members. The Quarterly Public Performance Report, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, provided a high level summary of performance information for each of the Council's eight priorities, identified in the Corporate Plan approved in April 2013, and a more detailed presentation and explanation of each Performance Indicator (PI). The report explained that in accordance with statutory duty all the performance information presented was also made available on the Council's website. In response to Members' comments when the performance report was last considered by the Executive Committee, the language used around performance indicators had been simplified and the information provided on Resilient Communities adjusted to present a more accurate and detailed situation of what was happening on the ground. The report detailed the actions being taken to improve performance in respect of the two PIs that had not met the target set.
5. The Service Director Strategy and Policy guided Members through the Quarterly Report and highlighted the key areas, giving further information and answering questions where required. In particular there was discussion around Corporate Priorities 2 'improve attainment and achievement levels for all our children and young people' and 5 'maintain and improve our high quality environment'. Under Corporate Priority 3 'provide high quality support, care and protection' and in particular the information on the value of cash seizures, it was proposed that a direct approach be made to Scottish Government to request that the scope

be widened for the use of Proceeds of Crime money, to enable funding of local sports projects, not just rugby and football. In response to points raised about the difficulty for migrant communities in accessing information and services from the Council, the Service Director confirmed that work was ongoing to ensure that all the resident population of the Borders had access to the information provided.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the performance presented within the Quarterly Performance Report, as appended to the report, and the action that was being taken within services to improve or maintain performance.**
- (b) **AGREED that the Leader write to the Scottish Government requesting the scope be widened for the use of Proceeds of Crime money, to enable funding of local sports, not just rugby and football.**

MONITORING OF THE CAPITAL FINANCIAL PLAN 2014/15

- 6. There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer providing an update on the progress of the 2014/15 Capital Financial Plan. The Chief Financial Officer advised that this was an additional report on capital outwith the normal quarterly reporting cycle to bring forward a number of budget adjustments. The monitoring tables in Appendix 1 to the report detailed actual expenditure to 31 October 2014. Specific issues identified in these tables were summarised within the main report and identified a net timing movement of £5.842 million. At this point in the year an unallocated budget of £0.028 million remained in the Emergency/Unplanned schemes. The report explained that the timing movement was due to the re-profiling of the following projects which would have the effect of reducing budgets in the current year with a corresponding increase in 2015/16: - Galashiels Transport Interchange; Waste Collection Lorries purchases; Duns Primary School; Complex Needs– Central Education Base; Strategic Business Land; Demolition and Site Preparation; and Wilton Lodge Park. This was offset in part by the forward timing movement of budget for Play Facilities, Contaminated Land, Eyemouth Seafood Technology Park and Demolition and Site Preparation. A table within the main report provided an update on the project position of the Emergency and Unplanned Schemes. Appendix 2 to the report contained proposals for various projects and programmes to be allocated from the block allocations within the 2014/15 Capital Plan. Members looked systematically through the appendices and received answers to their questions where further information was required.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) **the projected out-turns in Appendix I to the report as the revised budget for 2014/15;**
- (b) **the budget adjustments on the following projects from 2014/15 to 2015/16:-**

	Current Approved Budget £000's	Timing Movement £000's
Transport Interchange	4,493	(400)
Play Facilities	90	4
Waste Collection Lorries	750	(750)
Contaminated Land	52	6
Duns Primary School & Locality Support Centre	3,802	(3,029)

School Kitchen Improvement Programme	98	55
Early Learning and Childcare	719	(439)
Residential Care Home Upgrades	67	(22)
Complex Needs – Central Education Base	368	(280)
SEBN Facilities	150	(98)
Sports Trust – Plant & Services	361	(168)
Jim Clark Motor Museum Relocation	95	(80)
Jedburgh 3G Pitch	0	13
LUPS Strategic Business Land	563	(99)
Demolition & Site Preparation	519	(170)
Wilton Lodge Park	1,202	(150)
Eyemouth Seafood Technology Park	458	15
Borders Railway Stations	250	(250)

- (c) the budget virement of £0.007m from Haylodge Park and £0.005m from Additional Drainage in Parks and Open Spaces to Drainage in Parks and Open Spaces;
- (d) the budget adjustment in 2014/15 in relation to Plant & Vehicle Replacement of £1.916m;
- (e) the budget virement of £0.009m from School Refurbishment & Capacity Projects to School Health & Safety Projects;
- (f) the budget adjustment in 2014/15 in relation to Hawick 500 year Commemorative Statue of £0.034m;
- (g) the allocation from the Emergency & Unplanned Schemes budget in relation to the following project in 2014/15:

	£ '000s
Tower Mill Air Conditioning Equipment	13

- (h) the block allocations contained in Appendices 2A – M; and
- (i) to instruct project managers and budget holders to ensure that robust arrangements were in place to achieve the projected out-turns.

REVIEW OF WINTER SERVICE PLAN FOR YEAR 2014/15

7. With reference to paragraph 11 of the Executive Minute of 22 October 2013, there had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Service Director Commercial Services and Service Director Neighbourhood Services to review the performance of the Winter Service during 2013/14, and to inform Members of changes and developments to some elements of the Winter Service 2014/15. A table within the report illustrated the planned actions and salt usage that had occurred during the winter of 2013/14. The winter had not been particularly bad in terms of extreme winter weather although it was the wettest winter in Scotland since 1910. An average total salt usage of 23k tonnes, compared with 43k tonnes the previous winter, indicated that the winter weather did not extend past the normal below freezing night

temperatures and there was little record of secondary treatment or dealing with snow conditions.

8. The Infrastructure Manager, Colin Ovens, updated the Committee on changes proposed to be introduced during the winter of 2014/15. The Winter Service Plan was subject to annual review and officers had taken the opportunity to re-write the Plan to produce a more 'dynamic and interactive' version, produced as an 'easy-to-read' guide of the Council's winter service. The Plan was attached as Appendix A to the report. The Plan would be supported by Neighbourhood Services – Winter Service Operational Plan and supporting information on the Council's website. A further change to the 2014/15 Winter Service Plan, and in accordance with instruction from the Executive Committee, was the establishment of a definitive secondary route network for treatment with salt. The establishment of a definitive secondary route network would ensure that the Council could provide, through its communications, more detailed, specific, and consistent information to the public on the next level of treatment that was being provided after primary salting. This exercise defined the sections of rural road network which would be covered under secondary treatment and these were detailed in a list and a map accompanying the report. A further action was for officers to prepare draft secondary routes in towns where currently a primary route took place and to meet with Ward Members and Community Council representatives to finalise the actual routes to be adopted. At the start of Winter 2014/15 there were 975 salt bins distributed across the Scottish Borders. With respect to meeting requests for salt bins, a summary of the full salt bin evaluation process and the current salt bin protocol were shown in appendices to the report. During the winter of 2013/14, 18 Community Councils with a Community Resilience Plan took up the offer of an annual supply of one tonne of salt for community use.
9. Members discussed the Winter Service Plan and in particular the defined secondary salting route network for rural roads and the proposal for defined secondary salting routes for towns where designated primary salt routes existed. In response to a point raised by a local Member officers agreed to include Duns and Eyemouth in the list of towns for which defined secondary salting routes would be prepared. Officers emphasised that it was important for Members to feed in local information with regard to particular roads and pavements to enable treatment priorities to be established within the resources available. It was agreed that this be discussed further at the meeting of the Administration Policy Working Group in January 2015.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED:-**
 - (i) **the process undertaken by the Department to manage the road network during snow and ice conditions; and**
 - (ii) **the number of approved and current Community Resilience Plans in operation and the number of communities taking up the offered supply of salt, suitable container and salt spreading equipment.**
- (b) **AGREED to instruct the Service Director Commercial Services to:-**
 - (i) **prepare draft Secondary Salting Routes in towns where there was currently a designated Primary Route , and meet with Ward Members and Community Council Representatives to finalise the route to be adopted; and**
 - (ii) **assess requests for additional salt bins and prioritise the purchase of any bins that were approved from future Capital Programmes in time for the following winter.**
- (c) **AGREED to approve the amendment of the Winter Service Plan 2014/15:-**

- (i) to an easy-to-read format, as Appendix A to the report, which clearly set out the Council's policies, priorities and resource parameters; and
 - (ii) to define a secondary salting route network in rural areas to be introduced during the winter of 2014/15 and as listed in Appendix C to the report.
- (d) **AGREED** that all Members identify any issues in their own Wards to officers prior to further discussions about local priorities at the Administration's Policy Working Group meeting in January 2015.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 a.m.