ITEM 13

Review of Neighbourhood Operations’ Services (the former Environmental Services – Parks and Open Spaces, Street Cleansing, Bereavement Services and Public Conveniences)

Report by Director of Environment & Infrastructure

Scottish Borders Council

30 January 2014

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 This report proposes the approach to be used in progressing with a review of Neighbourhood Operation’s Services.

1.2 The Council’s current revenue financial plan 2013-14 to 2017-18 includes within it a target of £450,000 savings from a “review of Parks and Open Spaces” provision, profiled as £250,000 in 2014-15 and £200,000 in 2015-16.

1.3 From April 2013 Neighbourhood Operations has delivered a “joined up” Neighbourhood Service, encompassing all of the former Environmental Services functions, and their resources, of Parks and Open Spaces, Bereavement Services, Public Conveniences and Street Cleansing. This approach develops the original successful SBLocal approach.

1.4 Having completed an initial review process officers have concluded that in order to achieve the savings contained within the revenue financial plan the review of Neighbourhood Operation Services must include all of the former Environmental Services, as all of the resources are now co-joined and interdependent on each other to ensure delivery of the whole service.

1.5 Neighbourhood Operations also includes roads maintenance and winter maintenance services, however these are not within the scope of this review.

1.6 The services to be reviewed are all universal services that are high profile in individual communities and are greatly valued across the Borders. As such any changes to these services should be managed with great care ensuring that the views of communities are integral to the development of the proposals and the decisions that are made. To that end it is proposed that Neighbourhood Area Managers undertake a three step process with each step involving consultation with local Ward Members.
2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council:-

(a) Agrees to the review of Neighbourhood Operations’ Services, including Parks and Open Spaces provision, Bereavement Services, Public Conveniences and Street Cleansing.

(b) Agrees to the inclusion of maintenance within Burial Grounds as part of the assessment

(c) Agrees to the assessment criteria being used as the basis of the review of grounds maintenance (see Appendix One)

(d) Agrees to the establishment of a community fund which is created to support the growth in volunteer/community involvement/partnership development aimed at delivering the revenue financial plan savings targets

(e) Agrees that the discussion in respect of service reviews should commence with Ward Members and then extend to Community Councils and or other community groups as identified by local members

(f) Agrees that service changes which have an impact on the public will only be implemented following agreement on a locality by locality basis at Area Forums; and

(g) Agrees to authorise the Head of Neighbourhood Services to make service adjustments to services where they have no immediate impact on the public
3. CONSULTATION AND DECISION MAKING

3.1 It is recommended that Neighbourhood Area Managers should commence discussion in respect of service reviews with Ward Members. Draft proposals which set out the way forward will emerge following appropriate discussion and agreement with local Members and should then extend to Community Councils and/or other community groups as identified by local members.

3.2 Thirdly it is suggested that service changes which have an impact on the public are only finally agreed following agreement on a locality by locality basis at Area Forums. It is very likely that these changes may require some funding on a one-off basis and it is suggested that the Director of Environment and Infrastructure establishes a community fund from within available revenue budgets to support the growth in volunteer/community involvement/partnership development aimed at supporting the delivery of the revenue financial plan savings targets.

3.3 The clear intention is to commence the service changes on a consultative and voluntary basis. However, it should be recognised that should the full extent of savings be unable to be realised through this route then an alternative route will need to be agreed. This is likely to require proposals being made to Area Forums, after discussion with Members, but may not include the active participation and/or agreement of community groups in delivering future services. This would inevitably therefore require a net reduction in the service experienced by the wider public in any given community.

3.4 Finally there a set of operational matters than can be revised, for example the emptying of street litter bins and it is recommended that officers are authorised to make adjustments to these services where they have no immediate impact on the public.

4 The Review Process – Parks and Open Spaces

4.1 The approach to the review of Parks and Open Spaces will be integrated and prioritised, allowing decisions to be taken with a clear understanding of the risk and implications that may arise from the decisions.

4.2 The review will segment the service into the following areas:

Maintenance of open spaces

4.3 A baseline review including costs associated with the maintenance of open spaces throughout the region, site by site, resulting in a prioritised assessment, identifying areas for potential reductions/changes to current maintenance standards.

4.4 The review proposes to use an assessment framework (See Appendix One) to facilitate a consistent assessment to the current provision and maintenance standards of open space throughout the Borders.
4.5 The review will highlight to the best available knowledge what land is owned by SBC, what land is the responsibility of SBC through statutory legislation (ie. Burial Grounds) and what land is not owned or the statutory responsibility of SBC.

Sports pitches

4.6 Identification of sports pitches and users, highlighting opportunities to enter into third party agreements with sporting groups which would see the pitch transferred to third parties who would in turn take on pitch maintenance.

4.7 Review of the current charging regime identifying opportunities to ensure appropriate recovery of costs and overheads where appropriate.

Allotments

4.8 Review of charges for Allotments

4.9 Identification of locations where discussions should be taken forward aimed at handing over management and maintenance to an allotment group.

Events use of open spaces and associated Fees and Charges

4.10 Review of current charging regime identifying opportunities to ensure appropriate recovery of costs and overheads where appropriate.

5 The Review Process – Burial Grounds

5.1 The Burial Grounds (Scotland) Act 1855 establishes the Council’s legal responsibility to provide, maintain and administer cemeteries and burial grounds.

5.2 Burial grounds extend to 98 hectares of ground, which is approximately 15% of the total area of land maintained by Neighbourhoods Operations. Burial grounds, due to their nature contain many obstructed grass areas with lots of historic monuments and areas of uneven ground. They require a significant amount of staff resource to maintain them to even a satisfactory standard.

5.3 The review process proposes to segregate burial grounds into three categories: Active, Closed and Churchyards and to identify opportunities therein for:
   A - Reduction in SBC maintenance (whole area and or partial area) and increased maintenance by third parties
   B - Reduction in SBC maintenance (whole area and or partial area)
   C - Cessation of SBC maintenance (whole or partial area)
   D - Promoting increased biodiversity with consequential changes to maintenance regimes

6 The Review Process – Public Conveniences

6.1 SBC provides 43 public conveniences throughout the region, with cleaning operations being delivered through the Neighbourhood Operations service.
6.2 Staffing changes in the last three years have seen the numbers of staff employed directly to undertake cleaning activities fall from 14 FTE in 2010 to just 3 FTE in 2013, with the toilets now being cleaned by neighbourhood operatives as part of their mix of duties in grounds maintenance, street cleansing and burials.

6.3 Future opportunities include the creation and publicity of a regional scheme that promotes public conveniences in third party locations as well as partnerships for certain facilities where other bodies exist to take on the provision of facilities in future; eg St Abbs Harbour Trust

6.4 Since 2011 Neighbourhoods Operations have been monitoring the daily usage of public conveniences, details of which are available. This data will assist in decision making. Usage varies however there appears to be three levels of usage and therefore profile for the existing facilities. This suggests three options relating to future strategy.

6.5 Key Strategic facilities – These facilities have levels of use above 300 visits per week. They are situated at economically active locations and clearly support the performance of the region’s economy in being available for use by visitors and shoppers in the region. They will be actively managed and where possible improved.

6.6 Neighbourhood facilities – These facilities have levels below 300 visits per week, are not being utilised effectively therefore not delivering best value. Discussion should be held with individual Communities to better understand their views and to influence how a better value service can be provided.

6.7 Comfort Scheme – Facilities that are used less than 100 times per week which, should communities decide they could be closed, could be alternatively provided through the creation of a comfort facility, ie. a facility located in a local business or community facility which is advertised as available for public use, for which the organisation/business could receive an annual payment from SBC towards the costs of making the toilets available to public use.

7 The Review Process – Street Cleansing

7.1 The litter bin strategy has been in place since 2008. Following the implementation of Neighbourhood Services it is appropriate to undertake a review and update of the litter bin strategy to reflect changes to working practices and reflect on lessons learned following the implementation in 2008.

7.2 Matters for inclusion in the review include, but are not limited to, changes in new technology in the industry, reviewing the route based emptying of litter bins and reviewing the appropriateness of bin locations.
8 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial

(a) The aim of the review programme is to generate savings of £450,000. £250k in 2014-15 and £200k in 2015-16.

(b) The majority of savings are likely to be generated from changes to grounds maintenance services.

(c) In order to increase community involvement in the various service areas a limited budget, established from available revenue budgets, may be required to initiate and provide support to community groups setting up and taking over maintenance and provision where SBC is withdrawing from service provision and maintenance.

8.2 Risk and Mitigations

(a) Changes to provision and maintenance of services as identified within section 4 to 7 of this report will vary in their impact and significance to the Borders, however all of the changes present a similar risk to the reputation of the Council locally, regionally and nationally. In order to mitigate this risk, sustained and meaningful consultation regarding any proposed changes will be required with the Elected Members as well as the Communities that they represent in the Borders.

(b) Further risk assessments and mitigating strategies will be developed for each aspect of the programme as the various reviews develop.

8.3 Equalities

(a) An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposal detailed in this report relating to grounds maintenance, and it is anticipated that there are some adverse equality implications. It will be appropriate that this is updated to reflect current proposals.

(b) An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on a proposal similar to that detailed at section 6 of this report relating to public conveniences and it is anticipated that there are some adverse equality implications. It will be appropriate that this is updated to reflect current proposals.

8.4 Acting Sustainably

The implementation of changes as detailed at sections 4 to 7 of this report will deliver substantial reductions in terms of Council resources being deployed throughout the region. This will reduce the use of resources and contribute positively to the Councils requirements to ensure that its services are delivered within a sustainable organisational framework.
8.5 **Carbon Management**

The implementation of changes as detailed at sections 4 to 7 of this report will deliver substantial reductions in terms of Council resources being deployed throughout the region. This will reduce the use of resources and contribute positively to the Councils requirements to reduce its carbon footprint and ensure that its services are delivered within a sustainable organisational framework.

8.6 **Rural Proofing**

There is no rural proofing implication within this report.

8.7 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes required to the Councils Scheme of Administration required as a result of the proposals being outlined in this report.

9 **CONSULTATION**

9.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Head of Corporate Governance, the Head of Strategic Policy, the Head of Audit and Risk, the HR Manager and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the report.

Approved by

**Director of Environment & Infrastructure** Signature …………………………………....

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenny Hastings</td>
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**Background Papers:** None

**Previous Minute Reference:** None

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Jacqueline Whitelaw can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Jacqueline Whitelaw, Environment and Infrastructure, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA, Tel 01835 825413, Fax 01835 825071, email e&itranslationrequest@scotborders.gov.uk.
## Appendix One – Open Space Assessment Framework

### PARKS REVIEW – Interpretive Table REVISED DRAFT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Maintenance Cost</th>
<th>Carbon Input</th>
<th>Economic Output</th>
<th>Landscape Value</th>
<th>Cultural Value</th>
<th>Equalities</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
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<td>Income</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Fair/Equal</td>
<td>Very Easily Accessible</td>
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</table>

### Notes

**Ownership** – Does SBC own the area being maintained, or have a statutory obligation to maintain the area? If yes, the area will score four (4), if no, the area will score zero (0).

**Maintenance cost** – What are the costs associated with the provision and maintenance of the area?
An area will score one (1) if the costs are very high to provide/maintain and will score four (4) where the costs are low to provide/maintain. Examples of areas which score one (1) include floral displays/hanging baskets and play areas. Areas that score two (2) include High Amenity grass areas and rose beds. Those that score three (3) include Amenity grass, shrub beds and hedges. Those that score four (4) include rough grass and woodland areas.

**Carbon input** – What are the inputs associated with the provision and maintenance of the area?
An area will score one (1) if the carbon inputs are very high to provide/maintain and will score four (4) where the carbon inputs are low to provide/maintain. Examples of areas which score one (1) include floral displays/hanging baskets. Areas that score two (2) include high amenity grass areas and play areas. Those that score three (3) include amenity grass, shrub beds and hedges. Those that score four (4) include rough grass and woodland areas.
**Economic output** – Does the area generate any income to SBC as a result the provision and maintenance of the area?
Areas which generate any income at all will score four (4), examples of which include cemeteries, sports pitches, allotments, woodlands and more formal parks and recreation grounds. Those that do not generate any income will score zero (0), these areas would include amenity green space.

**Landscape value** – Does the area contribute to the landscape value/visual appeal of an area as a result of its provision and maintenance and, if so, to what significance/impact?
Examples of areas that will score four (4) include formally laid out gardens (e.g. Henderson Park, Coldstream/Bank Street, Galashiels/Old Gala House, Galashiels/the Walled Garden, Hawick), woodlands, village greens set in central locations within settlements and war memorials. Areas scoring three (3) include shrub beds and hedges, wildflower areas situated in high profile settings, adjacent to busy arterial routes and at prominent buildings/settings. Areas scoring two (2) include amenity grass areas, sports pitches, play areas, areas situated in less prominent transport locations perhaps within or adjacent to housing developments. Areas scoring one (1) include less formal grass/scrub land situated away from main arterial routes not visible to visitors and passers-by.

**Cultural value** – Does the area support or contribute to cultural values through its use or maintenance?
Locally important scores zero (0), the area is not generally utilised for activities beyond that of the immediate area in which it is located. Neighbourhood important sites score one (1) where the area is used and has an importance that serves the neighbourhood extending beyond the immediate vicinity, it may be used for events such as school sports days, one-off local events, etc. Regionally important sites score two (2), examples may include sports pitches used for events, or camping areas, etc. Areas which score three (3) would have national importance and these would include war memorials, areas used for civic festivals, such as the Common Ridings, and include sites such as the Tweed Green, Coldstream and the Raid Stane site, Galashiels. Those areas which are of international importance would score four (4), they would include archaeologically sensitive sites which contribute to the Borders region and make it renowned internationally, Examples may include Coldingham Priory.

**Equalities** – Through the provision and maintenance of the area, does it contribute to the equality obligations placed on Scottish Borders Council?
Areas will score four (4) where contribute positively to SBC’s obligations through their provision and maintenance examples include children’s play areas and sports grounds. Areas that do not contribute positively towards SBC’s obligations through their provision and maintenance will score zero (0) examples include amenity green spaces.

**Accessibility** – As a result of its provision and maintenance, does the area deliver benefits in terms of accessibility to the region?
Areas which are inaccessible and or do not support access will score zero (0) examples include steep embankment areas, floral areas, shrub beds and hedges. Areas that are accessible and support access will score two (2) examples include road side verges and amenity green spaces within settlements. Areas that greatly contribute to the access of the area and/or support the issue of access through their provision and maintenance will score four (4) examples include footpaths and link routes in and around settlements.
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### Notes

**Ownership** – Does SBC own the area being maintained, or have a statutory obligation to maintain the area?

**SCORE:**
- 0 - No
- 4 - Yes

**Maintenance cost** – What are the costs associated with the provision and maintenance of the area?

**SCORE:**
- 1 - **Very High** to provide/maintain: e.g. floral displays/hanging baskets and play areas.
- 2 - **High**: high amenity grass areas and rose beds.
- 3 - **Medium**: amenity grass, shrub beds and hedges.
- 4 - **Low** to provide/maintain: e.g. rough grass and woodland areas.
Carbon input – What are the inputs associated with the provision and maintenance of the area?

**SCORE:**

1. **Carbon inputs Very High** to provide/maintain: e.g. *floral displays/hanging baskets.*
2. **High**: *High amenity grass areas and play areas.*
3. **Medium**: e.g. *amenity grass, shrub bed, hedges.*
4. **Low** to provide/maintain: e.g. *rough grass and woodland areas.*

Economic output – Does the area generate any income to SBC as a result of the provision and maintenance of the area?

**SCORE:**

0. **No income** (does not generate any income: e.g. *amenity green space.*)
4. **Income** (generates any income at all: e.g. *cemeteries, sports pitches, allotments, woodlands and more formal parks and recreation grounds.*).

Landscape value – Does the area contribute to the landscape value/visual appeal of an area as a result of its provision and maintenance and, if so, to what significance/impact?

**SCORE:**

1. **Low**: e.g. *less formal grass/scrubland situated away from main arterial routes not visible to visitors and passers-by.*
2. **Medium**: e.g. *amenity grass areas, sports pitches, play areas, areas situated in less prominent transport locations perhaps within or adjacent to housing developments.*
3. **High**: e.g. *shrub beds and hedges, wildflower areas situated in high profile settings, adjacent to busy arterial routes and at prominent buildings/settings.*
4. **Very High**: e.g. *formally laid out gardens (Henderson Park, Coldstream; Bank Street, Galashiels; Old Gala House, Galashiels; the Walled Garden, Hawick), woodlands, village greens set in central locations within settlements and war memorials.*

Cultural value – Does the area support, or contribute to, cultural value through its use or maintenance?

**SCORE:**

0. **Very Low**: locally important, e.g. *the area is not generally utilised for activities beyond that of the immediate area in which it is located.*
1. **Low**: of neighbourhood importance, where the area is used and has an importance that serves the neighbourhood extending beyond the immediate vicinity, e.g. *used for events such as school sports days, one-off local events, etc.*
2. **Medium**: Regionally important, e.g. may include *sports pitches used for events, or camping areas, etc.*
3. **High**: Nationally important, e.g. *war memorials, areas used for civic festivals, such as the Common Ridings, and include sites such as the Tweed Green, Coldstream and the Raid Stane site, Galashiels.*
4. **Very High**: International importance, e.g. *archaeologically sensitive sites which contribute to the Borders region and make it renowned internationally, examples may include Coldingham Priory.*
Equalities impact – Through its provision and maintenance does the area meet the needs of the community it serves, in terms of the function and type of open space it provides?

**SCORE:**

0 - **Minimal**: Serves minimal need/purpose to the community e.g. roadside verges that are not required for access/community safety.

2 - **Moderate**: Moderately meets the needs of the community it serves.

4 - **Significant**: Significantly meets the needs of the community it serves e.g. leisure, recreation, quality of life, community safety, worship.

Accessibility – As a result of its provision and maintenance, does the area deliver benefits in terms of accessibility to the region.

**SCORE:**

0 - **Inaccessible**: Inaccessible and/or does not support access, e.g. steep embankment areas, floral areas, shrub beds and hedges.

2 - **Accessible**: Accessible to public and/or supports access, e.g. roadside verges and amenity green spaces within settlements.

4 - **Very accessible**: Greatly contributes to the access of the area and/or supports the issue of access through its provision and maintenance, e.g. footpaths and link routes in and around settlements.