

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 10 May, 2016 at 10.00 am

- Present:- Councillors S Bell (Chairman – Economic Development Business), C Bhatia (Chairman Other Business), S Aitchison, J Brown, M J Cook, V Davidson (from para 4), G Edgar, D Moffat, D Paterson, R Smith.
Councillors D. Parker, J. G. Mitchell and F. Renton
- Also present:- Councillors J. Fullarton, I Gillespie.
- Apologies:- Councillor J. Mitchell, D. Parker, F Renton.
- In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Corporate Transformation and Services Director, Chief Officer Economic Development, Service Director Regulatory Services, Group Manager Housing Strategy & Services, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (F. Henderson).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present: Mr J Clark, Mr G Henderson

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Bell chaired the meeting for consideration of the Economic Development business.

1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

- 1.1 With reference to paragraph 4 of the Minute of 2 February 2106, there had been circulated copies of a briefing note providing an update on recent Economic Development activities. The Chief Officer Economic Development, Mr Bryan McGrath, referred to the paper and highlighted the main points. Under the Business section of the update it was reported that for the 3 month period 1 January 2016 to 31 March 2016 the Business gateway team assisted 77 business start-ups, of which 9 had the potential to be high growth. The advisers had delivered 23 start-up workshops and 26 Growth workshops with 273 attendees. During the same period four start-up workshops were held in Peebles, Hawick and Kelso with a total of 80 attendees. In 2015-2016, the Scottish Borders Business Fund received 43 applications and approved 37 grants valued at £107,960.65 supporting projects with a value of £243,947.02. These projects were forecast to create 43 jobs and safeguard 57.5 jobs with a forecast economic impact of £953,745 GVA. The Scottish Borders Business Loan Fund offered loans of between £1,000 and £20,000 over terms of up to three years. In 2015-16, the Loan Fund received 11 applications and approved 7 loans valued at £129,504. These loans were forecast to create 12.5 jobs and safeguard 29 jobs with a forecast economic impact of £393,420 GVA. Scotland's Employer Recruitment Incentive - SERI Scheme – The Scottish Government had confirmed funding for the SERI Scheme in 2016/17. The Scheme was re-launched on 1 April and was targeted at those furthest from the workplace. Eight additional places were available for the Scottish Borders and Barnardo's Works had been contracted to deliver this support.

In terms of Regeneration it was reported that the Scottish Borders Railway Ambassadors Pilot had been extended into the 2016 season. A weekend service would be provided in April, Fridays would be added for May and June, whilst Thursday would also be covered

in July and August. The service would then taper off into the autumn and finish at the end of October. Support had been given to the National Archaeology conference in Galashiels on 28 May and the forthcoming visit of the Flying Scotsman. Selkirk Business Improvement – Steering Group had appointed a new Project Manager, who was progressing the business plan development and consultation processes. A revised timescale for the BIDS ballot process had been identified, the ballots now scheduled for November 2016.

- 1.3 In terms of Tourism and Events, it was reported that the new walking site www.walkscottishborders.com was now live. This was the sister site to www.cyclesscottishborders.com which had been running since 2012. Both sites were now 'mobile friendly' and were available for use by businesses wishing to link to the cycle and walk network or by visitors requiring access to route information and visitor information on tablets and mobile phones. In relation to Funding, The Leader Programme was open, with application deadlines set for 31 May and 31 August 2016. The programme Coordinator and Facilitator were continuing to work with a range of potential applicants. The new Forth Fisheries Local Action Group, covering the Scottish Borders, East Lothian and Fife, had received a funding allocation of just over £1m for the period 2014-2020. The new Action Group would make recommendations on European Maritime Fisheries Fund(EMFF) local development applications. Scottish Borders Council was the lead partner for the three areas and had employed EMFF Programme Co-ordinator, based in Eyemouth, to support the development of projects, and applications to the fund, from groups and businesses across the whole FLAG area. In response to a question from Elected Members in relation to Fishing, Shooting and Equestrian events, the Chief Officer Economic Development agreed to bring a more detailed report to the next meeting. The Committee welcomed the draft Cycling Strategy and a consultation event was suggested and expressed disappointment at the level of applications for the RSA Funding and noted that work would be undertaken to raise awareness of opportunities for local businesses.

DECISION

NOTED the update.

2. BUSINESS GATEWAY ANNUAL REPORT AND BUSINESS PLAN 2016 -17

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director which summarised the Business Gateway Service's performance in 2015/16 and sought approval of the Business Plan for the delivery of Business Gateway Services in the Scottish Borders to 31 March 2017. The report explained that 2015/16 saw the majority of national targets being achieved by the Business Gateway team with a particularly good performance with business starts. Over 1500 business people attended Business Gateway events, an increase of 150% on the figure for 2014/15. In addition, Business Gateway advisers were heavily involved in other local actions, most notably the launch of the Borders Railway and the recent flood events. The Business Plan for 2016/17 fully uses the new European Regional Development Fund confirmed on 31 March 2016. The plan showed a boost to the start-up team as well as a new geographical focus for the Growth Advisers, using the Council's 'Localities' Map. There would be an increase in the number of events delivered across the whole area. Emphasis would be applied in the areas of Exporting and Innovation for local businesses. In the next 12 months Business Gateway would continue to deliver against the National Service Specification and would aim to achieve the outcomes set out in the new ERDF operation plan. Using EU Funds, the Business Plan would enhance service delivery at the local level by aligning to the priorities in the Local Outcome Improvement Plans (LOIP) and the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023. Mr McCreadie, Principal Officer – Business (Acting) answered Members questions and the Chairman thanked Business Gateway for the help following the recent flooding.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to acknowledge the strong performance and positive impact of the service in 2015-2016;
- (b) to approve the 2016-2017 Business Plan for Business Gateway in line with the national service specification, including the proposed reporting indicators in Table 2 of the report; and
- (c) that an annual review meeting be organised in November 2016 with a range of Business Gateway customers to allow elected members to directly receive feedback on service delivery and areas for further improvement.

3. **SOUTH OF SCOTLAND COMPETITIVENESS STRATEGY 2016 - 2023**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director which sought approval for the new South of Scotland Competitiveness Strategy 2016-2023 and its associated Action Plan. The report explained that the South of Scotland Alliance agreed to develop a new South of Scotland Competitiveness Strategy for the period 2016 to 2023. Work on the new Strategy had enabled the Alliance to analyse the up-to-date economic data for the region, reflect on the lessons learned from the successes and shortcomings of the last 10 years and consult with the partners and stakeholders on whom the successful delivery of any new Strategy would partly depend. It was highlighted that despite the notable successes of the South of Scotland Alliance and other partner agencies, the regional economy had continued to struggle in recent years. Growth had not kept pace with the rest of the country and GVA per head actually fell between 2007 and 2013, from 72% of the national average in 2007 to only 70% in 2013. Average weekly wages had also slipped over the same period, from 89% of the national average to 87% - in monetary terms, a gap of more than £65 per worker, per week. The finalised Strategy and its Action Plan were agreed by the Alliance on 15 April 2016 and the documents were set out in Appendix 1 and 2 of the report. Approval for the documents was now being sought from Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway Councils. In response to questions the Chief Executive confirmed that while the Chief Financial officer was leading on the City Deal project he was kept apprised of the work of the South of Scotland Alliance. The Chief Officer Economic Development advised that the Action Plan recognised the importance of good broadband and a report on future broadband proposals would be presented to a future meeting.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) approve the new South of Scotland Competitiveness Strategy 2016 -2023 and its associated Action Plan as set out in Appendix 1 and 2 to the report; and
- (b) request that the South of Scotland Alliance regularly monitors progress on delivery of the actions set out in the Action Plan.

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

In the absence of Councillor Parker, Councillor Bhatia chaired the meeting.

4. **MINUTE**

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 19 April 2016 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

5. **STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN PROGRESS FOR 2015-2016**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services to advise Members of the affordable housing completions, and progress made in the delivery of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) projects for the period 2015-2016. The Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) was the sole document for targeting affordable housing investment in Scottish Borders. Annual updates had previously been submitted to the Scottish Government in November of each year with the current SHIP 2015-2020 being submitted in October 2014 when it changed to bi-annual submissions. This report advised Members that for the financial period 2015-2016, 220 new affordable houses were delivered. This meant that over the 4 year period 2012-2016, a total of 467 new affordable homes have been delivered, which averaged at 116 units per annum exceeding the Council's target of 100 new affordable homes per annum. The report further detailed the Strategic Housing Investment Plan Progress update and financial implications. Members welcomed the report and noted that a press release would be issued. The Group Manager Housing Strategy and Services and the Housing Strategy Manager answered Members questions.

DECISION

AGREED to endorse the progress made in the delivery of affordable housing projects in 2015-2016 as set out in the Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2015-2020

6. LOCAL ACCESS AND TRANSPORT STRATEGY - CONSULTATION RESPONSES

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services to advise members on the results of a recent consultation exercise that would help provide advice on the development of a Local Access and Transport Strategy for the Scottish Borders. The report explained that the development of a Local Access and Transport Strategy (LATS) was a key document for the Scottish Borders, providing a focus for transport issues throughout the Local Authority area and beyond, whilst detailing key projects and longer term aspirations. A Main Issues Report (MIR) provided the basis for consultation with stakeholders and the general public and asked a number of specific questions that would help mould the Officers' overall approach to the main strategy document. A twelve week consultation period for the LATS concluded on 23 October 2015, with 31 responses received from statutory consultees, community councils and the general public. A list of the people and organisations that responded had been provided in Appendix A to the report. The Chairman expressed concern about the poor response to the consultation and in particular that there had been no comments received on a proposed new bridge for Peebles. In terms of de-criminalised parking it was noted that a report would be brought to Council in June. It was highlighted that integrated ticketing was an issue across Scotland and progress was slow as there were so many different operators. Members expressed particular concern regarding damage to roads caused by forestry traffic and the need for a more radical approach and make direct representation to the Scottish Government for more funding. The Service Director Regulatory Services advised that an Action Plan would be developed to accompany the Strategy

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the lack of responses from the recent consultation exercise undertaken as part of the development of the Local Access and Transport Strategy for the Scottish Borders.**
- (b) AGREED:-**
 - (i) that an action plan would be developed to accompany the Strategy; and**

(ii) that an options report on the issues caused by timber transport be brought to a future meeting and that the Timber Transport Officer be invited to attend.

(c) NOTED that a report on de-criminalised parking would be presented to the Council meeting in June 2016.

7. **PRIVATE BUSINESS**

DECISION

AGREED under section 50a(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in the appendix to this minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 9 of part 1 of schedule 7A to the Act.

8. **MINUTE**

The Committee approved the Private Minute of 19 April 2016.

The meeting concluded at 12.00 pm