

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 7th March, 2017 at 10.05 am

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

Also Present:- Councillors G. Garvie, I. Gillespie, S. Marshall, W. McAteer.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Place), Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Transformation and Services Director, Service Director Regulatory Services, Service Director Neighbourhood Services, Service Director Assets and Infrastructure, Chief Officer Roads, Chief Officer Economic Development, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (K. Mason).

1. **MINUTE**

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 14 February 2017 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. **PROPOSED AFFORDABLE HOUSING AT FORMER EARLSTON HIGH SCHOOL SITE**

There had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Service Director Regulatory Services and Service Director Assets and Infrastructure seeking approval to dispose of the Council owned allocated Housing Site at the former Earlston High School to Eildon Housing Association in order that it may be re-developed to provide affordable housing. The report also proposed that the Council used available Affordable Housing Investment Budget funding to fund the difference between the market valuation sought by the Council and the affordable housing valuation determined by the District Valuer. The site had been identified as a prioritised affordable housing site in the Council's Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2017-22 which was recently agreed by Council in November 2016 and subsequently submitted to Scottish Government. The Group Manager Housing Strategy and Services advised that in paragraph 4.1 (e) in the report, the figure of £350,000 should read £250,000. Concern was raised in relation to the infrastructure for the development and it was confirmed that development of the Council's site would comply with the Council's Planning Brief which meant that that the new roadway to serve the housing development would also link to a bridging point to enable developer-led construction of a new vehicular and pedestrian bridge over the Turfford Burn at some time in the future, thereby safeguarding future access to the adjoining site. In response to a question raised about Scottish Borders Council building its own houses, the Group Manager Housing Strategy and Services advised that there had been a business case exploring the Council building its own houses but this had not proven cost effective. As the site was an expensive one to develop, this proposal had proven to be the best option. It was noted that the Council would benefit through the payment of Council Tax on the proposed new homes. A request was made for a monitoring report on carbon emissions/tax to be brought to a future meeting and the Chief Financial Officer advised that this would be provided through the regular performance monitoring reports brought to the Executive Committee.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) **delegate authority to the Council's Head of Assets and Infrastructure to dispose of the allocated Housing Site at the former Earlston High School to Eildon Housing Association on the basis of affordable housing valuation of £450,000 for the development of affordable housing; and**
- (b) **delegate authority to the Chief Financial Officer to transfer £250,000 from the Council's Affordable Housing Investment Budget to the Council's Capital budget as a contribution towards meeting the market valuation of the site.**

MEMBER

Councillor Bell joined the meeting during discussion of the following item.

3. CAPITAL PROGRAMME - 2017/18 - BLOCK ALLOCATIONS

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer seeking approval for the proposed individual projects and programmes within the various block allocations in the 2017/18 Capital Financial Plan. Appendices A – X in the report contained proposals for various projects to be allocated resources from the block allocations within the 2017/18 Capital Financial Plan. Not all projects had been fully identified at this point and as and when this information was available this would be brought to the Executive Committee for consideration. Officers were in attendance to answer Members' questions as they considered systematically the 2017/18 Block Allocations detailed in Appendices A – X to the report. In relation to Appendix U – Sports Infrastructure, Officers undertook to provide Members with more detailed information relating to Teviotdale Leisure Centre Redevelopment. In relation to Appendix V – Cultural and Heritage, Officers undertook to provide Members with more detailed information relating to the seating in the Volunteer Hall, Galashiels. Discussions took place relating to the issue of a press release to ensure members of the public were made aware of good news stories detailed in the Capital Programme and it was agreed that Communications would action this using a localities approach.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the block allocation breakdowns contained in Appendices A – X to the report.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Mitchell declared an interest in the following item of business in terms of Section 5 of the Councillors Code of Conduct and left the Chamber during the discussion.

4. COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME - GENERIC BUDGET 2016/17

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Neighbourhood Services recommending an application for funding from the Community Grant Scheme Generic Budget. The purpose of the application from Just Cycle Ltd was to contribute towards the cost of rental of the premises at 5 Tweedbank Craft Centre, Tweedbank. Just Cycle Ltd had been running for just under a year and was successful in securing start-up funding of £9,900 from Awards for All in 2016 to cover running costs to March 2017. The organisation had been successful in generating some income from the sale of refurbished bicycles but was still working towards sustainability and unable to cover all its annual running costs. A grant of £1,000 would assist with rental costs. The Service Director Neighbourhood Services and the Funding Officer explained why the grant was eligible in terms of the scheme for the Generic Budget as it offered a Borders-wide service. A request was made that Just Cycle Ltd be made aware of other similar businesses in the area to ensure that they would not encroach on them.

DECISION

AGREED to grant £1,000 to Just Cycle Ltd, conditional on the organisation revising its fundraising plans to bridge this gap in future years.

5. SBC COMMUNITY GRANT SCHEME - YEAR END POSITION 2016/17

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Neighbourhood Services presenting information of the estimated year end balances in the Community Grant Scheme (CGS) for 2016/17 and recommending a carry forward into 2017/18, in line with the agreed CGS process. The current budget position of the CGS 2016/17 and estimated year end balances were as follows:-

Budget Heading	Total Budget 2016/17	Expenditure to Date	Applications Pending	Estimated year end balance as at end Jan 2017
Berwickshire	£22,236	£22,076	£0	£160
Cheviot	£20,984	£20,894	£0	£90
Eildon	£40,867	£35,081	£0	£4,536
Teviot & Liddesdale	£22,271	£20,572	£0	£1,699
Tweeddale	£37,368	£33,056	£4,312	£0
Generic	£12,696	£10,770	£1,000	£926
Totals	£156,422	£142,449	£5,312	£7,411

The CGS had awarded grants totalling £142,449 to end of January 2017. If the recommendations of the report were approved, the estimated year-end balance of £7,411 would be detailed as a virement request for ear-marking in the Financial Services report to Executive Committee in March 2017. It was noted that year end balances were estimated as at end January 2017 and final carry forwards as at end March 2017 were expected to be lower. There was currently one application undergoing assessment at present which, if approved, would use up the existing budget in Eildon area. It was confirmed that any funds carried forward would do so within their localities.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) **note the estimated year end balances for 2016/17; and**
- (b) **approve the carry forward of any year-end balance into 2017/18.**

6. UNION CHAIN BRIDGE - UPDATE

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Depute Chief Executive – Place providing an update on the progress of the project prior to the submission of the Stage 1 application to Heritage Lottery Fund in April 2017. Union Chain Bridge had substantial historical significance because it was the longest suspension bridge in the world when opened in 1820 and was currently the oldest operational suspension bridge in the world to have been designed to carry wheeled vehicles. It was a Grade 1 structure in England and a Category A listed building in Scotland the highest designations. Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council were working in partnership to pursue Heritage Lottery Funding for a restoration project to repair and continue the usable lifespan of the bridge. Additional work had been undertaken in advance of the Stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund application, but it had not altered the programme aspiration of completing the works for the 200th anniversary in 2020. Members welcomed the report and hoped that the new Members appointed after the Local Government Election in May 2017 would continue to support the project.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to note the progress of the project to date; and
- (b) that a report be presented to Council prior to the submission of the Stage 2 Heritage Lottery Fund in May 2018, to approve final budgets (capital and revenue) and the delivery programme.

7. **SCOTTISH BORDERS WALKING FESTIVAL 2018 TO 2020**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services seeking to agree the locations of the Scottish Borders Walking Festival in 2018, 2019 and 2020. The Scottish Borders Walking Festival (SBWF) was held during the first week of September and moved around the Border towns on an annual basis. The Department's Countryside Access Team was tasked with ensuring that the event took place each year and had been held in the Scottish Borders since 1995. The Walking Festival was due to take place in Peebles in September 2017. All Community Councils had been invited to tender an interest in hosting the event in 2018, 2019 and 2020 and expressions of interest were received from six communities. Following an assessment, it was proposed that the communities of Hawick, Ettrick and Yarrow (along with Selkirk) and Jedburgh (along with Ancrum) should host the event between 2018 and 2020. Councillor Davidson expressed disappointment that the report advised that accommodation provision was poor in the valleys of Ettrick and Yarrow, submitting that the accommodation provided was of the highest quality.

DECISION

AGREED that the Scottish Borders Walking Festival should be hosted by Hawick in 2018, Ettrick and Yarrow and Selkirk 2019 and Jedburgh and Ancrum in 2020.

MEMBER

Councillor Edgar left the meeting during discussion of the following item.

8. **TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION ACTION PLAN**

With reference to paragraph 3 of the Minute of the Executive Committee of 4 October 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director seeking to agree a rolling three year action plan focusing on priority towns, as part of the Council's new approach to town centre regeneration. Town centres were recognised for the important role they played in the local economy in the Scottish Borders Economic Strategy 2023. Action to support our town centres was identified as a priority in the Council Administration's Manifesto, Ambitious for the Borders. In response to the challenges that some of our towns faced, specific action plans had been developed including, most recently, the Hawick Action Plan. Town centres were also likely to be an important issue for the proposed new South of Scotland Enterprise and Skills vehicle to address. In October 2016, a report was presented to the Council's Executive Committee on a new approach to Town Centre Regeneration. Recognising the importance of town centres, there was agreement that a targeted use of resources would be more effective, particularly for those town centres which had significant challenges. The Council agreed to establish a rolling three-year Town Centre Regeneration Action Plan with a focus on priority towns. The new approach to Town Centre Regeneration included a priority approach utilising a 'Town Centre Index'. The Index was based on a range of statistics to better understand the situation in each town and to provide an objective basis for prioritising public sector interventions and investment in town centres. For the Town Centre Regeneration Action Plan, the Council agreed to focus on the least resilient towns, which were currently: 1= Hawick; 1= Jedburgh; 3 Eyemouth; 4 Galashiels; and 5 Selkirk. The Town Centre Regeneration Action Plan was set out in Annex 1 to the report. The Action Plan focused on projects and activities which aimed to have a significant economic impact and benefit within the respective town centres. Members discussed the issues relating to various town centres including the impact of supermarkets and the internet on shopping habits and footfall, vacancy levels, housing in town centres, and tourism.

**DECISION
AGREED:-**

- (a) to approve the Town Centre Regeneration Action Plan 2017/2018 and the key actions identified, as set out in Annex 1 to the report;**
- (b) to note the actions that were already resourced and those for which resources were still to be identified; and**
- (c) that the Action Plan would be monitored by the Economic Development Executive on a regular basis and presented for approval on an annual basis, no later than 31 March each year.**

9. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE AND SKILLS REVIEW - PHASE 2 PROGRAMME

With reference to paragraph 14 of the Minute of Scottish Borders Council of 22 December 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director on the progress of Phase 2 of the Scottish Government's Enterprise and Skills Review. The report outlined officer current views on the proposed South of Scotland Enterprise and Skills Vehicle. The report sought Member agreement for this position, and its further development, to ensure that the Council was able to formally respond to the Phase 2 Review. Scottish Government confirmed that a Phase 2 report would be progressed to develop detail on the establishment of a new Enterprise and Skills Vehicle for the South of Scotland and had encouraged Councils, and relevant agencies and stakeholders, to engage in this process. Scottish Government had asked the Council (and other stakeholders) to consider a response to four key issues related to the proposed new 'Vehicle'. These were: Geographic boundary; Role and remit; Governance framework; and Resources. The geographic area for the new 'Vehicle' should be the administrative boundary of Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. The role and remit of South of Scotland Enterprise and Skills Vehicle needed to recognise the scale of the challenges facing the area. The 'Vehicle' needed to be able to increase the economic capacity of the region and to tackle its structural economic weaknesses in an inclusive and sustainable way. Officers believed that the fundamental imperative for the remit of the new 'Vehicle' would be to have a Relentless Emphasis on Geography and Place. This recognised that inclusive economic growth could only be generated within the towns and rural communities of the South of Scotland through a new approach. The opportunity to establish a specific South of Scotland Enterprise and Skills Vehicle was a once in a generation opportunity to improve the level of investment in economic growth, enterprise, skills and innovation. Building on the Scottish Government's position in the Phase 1 Report, the governance framework to be put in place to underpin the new 'Vehicle' should demonstrate clear accountability at local and national level. It also must facilitate the step change required for the new 'Vehicle' to be established on a bespoke basis that met the ambitions of the South of Scotland stakeholders. The currently preferred governance framework was also described in the report. It was recognised that the ambition to transform the economy of the South of Scotland would not be achieved without a significant uplift in resources and investment. South of Scotland met on Friday 3 March 2017. They considered in detail the Enterprise and Skill review, the work undertaken by officers to date, the outcome of the stakeholder meeting on 17 February 2017 and the proposed way forward following a wide ranging discussion they fully endorsed the proposed way forward. Councillor Bell proposed to add an additional recommendation as (e) in the following terms "notwithstanding recommendations (c) and (d) emphasise that this Council would be ambitious and flexible in all its discussions and would seek to achieve the maximum potential of the new South of Scotland Vehicle". Recommendations (e) and (f) would be renumbered (f) and (g) respectively. Councillor Bell's additional recommendation was unanimously accepted.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to note the progress made in developing Phase 2 of the Scottish Government Enterprise and Skills Reviews;**
- (b) to note that South of Scotland Alliance considered the content of the report at its meeting on 3 March 2017 and fully endorsed the progress and way forward;**
- (c) the Council's position as set out in the report, which had been developed in collaboration with Dumfries & Galloway Council;**
- (d) to submit the Council's position to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Works as a working proposal from the Council;**
- (e) notwithstanding (c) and (d) above, to emphasise that this Council would be ambitious and flexible in all its discussions and would seek to achieve the maximum potential of the new South of Scotland Vehicle;**
- (f) to note that the Chief Executive would continue to engage with the Scottish Government and stakeholders in order to develop a detailed proposal for a South of Scotland Enterprise and Skills Vehicle in line with recommendation (c); and**
- (g) to receive a future report as proposals developed further.**

The meeting concluded at 12 noon.