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SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE held in COUNCIL CHAMBER,
COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS, NEWTOWN
ST BOSWELLS on Thursday, 27 October
2016 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors G. Turnbull (Chairman), W. Archibald, K. Cockburn, A. Cranston,
I. Gillespie, B Herd, W. McAteer and A. J. Nicol.
Apologies:- Councillor J. Torrance.
Also Present:- Councillor G. Edgar.
In Attendance:- Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (J Turnbull)

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of 22 September 2016.

DECISION

AGREED the Minute.

2. **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTE**

The Committee requested that Councillor Logan, the former Chairman, be thanked for undertaking the role of Scrutiny Chairman over the past two years.

DECISION

AGREED to thank Councillor Logan for his contribution as the previous Chairman.

3. **SOCIAL WORK DUTY HUB - CUSTOMER SERVICES PROJECT**

3.1 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 22 September 2-016, the Chairman welcomed to the meeting Mr Les Grant, Customer Services Manager; Mr Graeme Dobson, Project Manager; Ms Claire Tracy, Lead Officer Customer Services; and Ms Jane Robertson, Development Manager (Adult Services). The officers were in attendance to give a presentation to Scrutiny Committee on the Social Work Duty Hub, Customer Services Project.

3.2 Mr Grant began the presentation by advising that the Social Work Duty Hub had been in operation since 2006. Since inception, several attempts had been made to measure and quantify the impact of the Hub. Evidence suggested that the Hub had provided a limited positive impact on the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the Social Work Duty Service in the Borders. Mr Grant explained that the overall volume of telephone calls which went un-answered, had regularly been more than 25%, which was unacceptable. Staffing levels also meant that it was often difficult to handle calls out-with normal working hours. In view of the nature of the work, a cautious approach had been taken in terms of applying changes. The decision to evaluate the transfer of the management of Social Work calls and core duty business processes from the Duty Hub to Customer Services was finally taken in late 2012. Various options had been considered, with the preferred model - introduced in June 2014 - providing a centralised Customer Service Unit, offering a single point of contact for all customers. This model enabled Customer Services to provide information, answer questions and signpost services. The model also delivered an interface to the parallel locality duty system for the transfer of customer core information, referral, screening and immediate social work intervention. By changing the model and utilising Customer Services for the day to day management of incoming calls, Social Work could target resources more effectively and efficiently.

- 3.3 Mr Grant further advised that all Social Work calls were transferred to a core group of Customer Services Advisors, trained to effectively manage Social Work enquiries. Evidence from August 2013 to August 2016 showed a clear improvement in response to calls and a reduction in call abandonment rates. When a call was received via 0300 100 1800 it was either resolved at point of contact, referred to Social Work Locality or the caller was signposted to appropriate information or third party services. Mr Grant went on to advise that ongoing work included: reviewing Social Work webpages to ensure information was more customer focused; establishing reporting requirements to provide Social Work with statistics about their service; and, the development of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) scripting. A post implementation plan was also being developed which included: working with Social Work on the Community Led Conversation programme; ongoing involvement in the Framework System Users Groups; Online self-referrals and referrals direct to Border Care and Repair for minor equipment enquiries. Mr Grant concluded the presentation by advising that, going forward, training would be delivered to every Customer Service Advisor, to ensure a greater pool of trained staff was available.
- 3.4 The Chairman thanked officers for the concise and informative presentation. Discussion followed and Members raised a number of questions. Mr Grant explained that Customer Satisfaction Surveys had an extremely low response rate and trying to engage with customers for their views on the service was difficult. However, usage rate for the service was fairly consistent. More calls were now answered on the first point of contact and abandonment rates had reduced. With regard to Customer Services taking on additional services, Mr Grant advised that any additional work streams would have to be resourced and therefore they would need to ensure that staff were fully trained and had the capacity to meet any additional demands. Mr Dobson added that there were discussions ongoing regarding the provision of signposting for Border Care & Repair, key safes, etc. Currently, these enquiries were referred to Social Work. Customer Services Advisors were in the process of being trained to identify such calls and refer enquiries direct to SB Cares. The sharing of the model with other authorities was discussed. Mr Grant advised that they continued to engage with colleagues in other areas to adapt and improve the model, with the support of Social Work. Ms Robertson added that from a Social Work perspective, the model had streamlined and reduced delays for customers and would continue to be developed going forward in terms of integration and partnership. Across the 32 partnerships across Scotland, 50% had chosen a similar model. The other 50% had increased resources within their Social Work departments. With regard to interaction with social media, they could respond to twitter feeds, Facebook enquiries, email enquiries, etc. The website was also being developed to incorporate links to referral websites e.g. Citizens' Advice Bureau.
- 3.5 In answer to a question regarding how calls were supervised when transferred from the initial point of contact, Ms Tracy advised that a new referral and screening form had been developed for Customer Service Advisors. Enhanced training had also been given in adult protection and social care awareness. As Customer Service Advisors developed their knowledge, they would be able to make an initial assessment to either resolve the call at point of contact, or refer the caller to Social Work. Mr Grant added that although Customer Services were dealing with adult services, staff had received training on child protection issues and were aware of the referral process. Regarding monitoring of the service, Ms Tracy advised that an external inspection of adult services was imminent and this would include the quality of customer experience. Call handling rates were also reported to Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Executive Committee as part of performance monitoring and were challenged if required. The Chairman thanked the officers for the information provided and the helpful way in which questions were answered.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation, which would be issued to Members for information.

4. REVIEW OF BRIDGES

- 4.1 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 22 September 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director – Assets & Infrastructure providing information to Members on the Council's bridge assets, including a list of all bridges in the Scottish Borders, current processes for inspection and maintenance, planned investment, key issues around bridge condition and plans for improvement. Mr Martin Joyce, Service Director Assets and Infrastructure; Mr David Girdler, Chief Officer Roads; Mr Colin Ovens, Infrastructure Manager; and Mr David Richardson, Asset Manager, were in attendance at the meeting. Scottish Borders Council (SBC), under the requirements of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984, was responsible for maintaining over 1,100 bridges and 155 culverts across the region, many of which were ageing and in need of repair, but were of critical importance to the Scottish Borders, both economically and socially. The current SBC Roads Asset Management Plan (RAMP), approved in 2014, helped the Council deliver the road services and detailed what was required to manage the road network assets, including bridges. However, ensuring that all bridges were inspected regularly to assess condition and then undertaking necessary works was increasingly difficult in the current financial climate. The report presented the current planned investment in bridges and the process around identifying planned maintenance work with future planned actions around performance reporting.
- 4.2 Mr Ovens advised that there was a wide variety of bridge structures, including 562 of masonry arch construction. Responsibility for many of the bridges was shared, for example, 57 of the bridges with Network Rail and several with Northumberland County Council (NCC). He explained that bridges had a limited life and their repair and renewal became necessary due to wear and tear, damage and inclement weather. Additionally, older bridges were not designed to deal with the current volume and weights of traffic which led to more expensive repair requirements.
- 4.3 The RAMP was one of the key strategic plans to be delivered by the Asset and Infrastructure team. As with other services, resource constraints meant that decisions about prioritisation needed to be taken to ensure that public safety was protected and there was appropriate network investment to enhance the Scottish Borders, both socially and economically. The Code of Practice for Management of Highway Structures (CoPMHS) recommended that Councils' adopted the standards contained in the Code. For bridges, this meant that biennially, a visual examination of all parts of the structure should be carried out for all bridges and culverts of 1m diameter and greater. Every six years, a principal inspection – a close examination, using access equipment - should be undertaken on those larger structures identified as requiring a greater level of assessment. Historical inspection information from 2009/2011 was mainly used to make current prioritisation decisions. However, works could be prioritised due to concerns raised about a bridge's condition.
- 4.4 Mr Ovens further advised that the use of data and the RAMP process ensured that SBC met its statutory duty. However, inspections recommended under the CoPMHS had not been undertaken since 2009/11. It was considered that the risks faces by both SBC and road users would be better managed by more regular and planned inspections in line with CoPMHS recommendations. However, it was recognised that additional resources would be required to deliver this enhanced inspection regime. The approximate 'core' annual budget allocation to bridges was £818k. In 2014/15 the Council had invested £1.3 m, which was higher than the annual allocation. This was as a result of replacement of Carlowse Bridge. Again in 2015/16 an investment of £1.9 m was required due to the replacement of Selkirk Footbridge at £700k and bridge repairs linked to the major flood events of January and February 2016. Mr Ovens continued that recent issues had highlighted concerns over the condition of two bridges – Clackmae, on the back road between Earlston and Lauder, and Melrose Bridge (Lowood Bridge) on the link road between Melrose and Galashiels. Clackmae Bridge was in very poor condition; engineers were assessing the extent of repairs required but these might be in the region of £500k. Melrose Bridge repair cost could be circa £800k. These two examples demonstrated that

the annual core budget may be insufficient to perform the required level of inspections and work required, but the Council also had other priorities to consider.

- 4.5 Presently, the list of planned works within the Infrastructure Team was primarily compiled from 2009/11 condition information and records of previous load carrying assessments to determine which bridges were safe to carry heavy loads. The SBC Roads Review currently underway included work to address the gaps around the robustness of performance information on inspections undertaken and condition of bridges. Mr Ovens concluded his report by advising that officers hoped to complete, on an annual basis, the performance reporting table as promoted by the Society of Chief Officers on Transport in Scotland (SCOTS) and look to integrate this measure into the existing performance reporting to the Executive Committee. Principal inspections would populate the major investment plan for the bridge assets. However, distribution of funds would continue to be targeted towards those bridges which the Infrastructure Team considered to be in need or urgent repair. Until such time as officers had a fully developed inventory of asset conditions, this would continue to be determined using existing condition data, adhoc inspections, engineering knowledge and experience.
- 4.6 Following discussion, a number of questions were raised and answered by officers. In terms of repair materials, Mr Richardson confirmed that if possible, this was carried out on a like for like basis. In respect of the Tweed Bridge, Mr Ovens advised that the repair works were being funded by Transport Scotland and the pedestrian bridge would transfer into the ownership of the Council once the works were completed. The cost of bringing all bridges up to an optimum standard was discussed. Mr Ovens advised that until they had carried out the inspection process it was difficult to quantify a cost. Officers advised that where possible, external funding or partner working was considered for every bridge repair. For example, the Union Chain Bridge repairs were being funded by Heritage Lottery Funding, and the Historic bodies in both Scotland and England, as part of a joint project with Northumberland County Council. Mr Joyce added that in each instance potential funding streams were investigated to minimise the impact on the Council's budget. Regarding windfarm developers contributing to the cost of repairs of bridges, the officers gave an example of the strengthening work to Martin's Bridge, which had been funded by a windfarm developer. Officers confirmed that no inspections were carried out on private bridges, only those on the public list. In terms of the Council's position compared to other authorities, some were ahead of the Council and others in the same position. In terms of prioritisation of repairs to bridges, this was assessed regularly using the results of inspections, the potential use of weight restriction, impact on communities, cost, ability to phase work, etc. Members also considered the potential costs of repairs and how this had to fit in with other competing Council priorities e.g. care for elderly, new schools, etc. Following further discussion it was unanimously agreed that the need to carry out inspections on the bridges asset was paramount in order to prioritise repairs using the CoPMHS recommendations. Once the inspection of bridges had been carried out, the results could then be incorporated into the regular performance monitoring reports to Executive Committee. The Committee also asked that officers continued to assess, on a case by case basis, any opportunities for funding to assist with future repairs to bridges.

DECISION

(a) AGREED to NOTE:

- (i) The size of the bridges asset and the challenges this presented;**
- (ii) The current process for carrying out inspections, for assessing the current condition of the bridges asset and the process used in identifying planned maintenance works; and**
- (iii) The improvements being considered to improve data on the overall condition of the bridges asset and subsequent prioritization.**

- # (b) **AGREED to RECOMMEND to the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE that:**
- (i) **the current Roads Review should take account of the need to inspect bridges within the Code of Practice for Management of Highway Structures recommendations and that, if possible, some additional resources be identified to allow this work to be carried out in line with the priorities within the Roads Asset Management Plan;**
 - (ii) **once the inspection of bridges has been carried out, that the condition of all bridges be categorised and incorporated into the regular performance monitoring reports to the Executive Committee; and**
 - (iii) **when considering future repairs to historic and iconic Borders bridges, officers continue to assess on a case by case basis any opportunities for external funding.**

MEMBER

Councillor McAteer left the meeting following consideration of the above report.

5. SCRUTINY REVIEWS

- 5.1 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 22 September there had been circulated copies of the updated list of subjects which Scrutiny Committee had been asked to review and which included the source of the request, the stage the process had reached and the date, if identified, of the Scrutiny meeting at which the information would be presented. In addition, Members were also asked to consider further subjects for inclusion on this list for presentation at future meetings of the Committee. When deciding whether subjects would be reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee, Members required a clear indication from the initiator of the request as to which aspects of the subject they wished to be reviewed. This would enable the Committee to determine whether the subject was appropriate for consideration. The Clerk to the Council advised that she would pursue with the Service Director Children and Young People, the provision of an update on home schooling to be brought to either the November or January meetings. In February 2017, there would be a report listing all the recommendations made by Scrutiny Committee and the impact of the decisions made.
- 5.2 The Chairman, Councillor Turnbull, asked if the work of integrated Boards such as the Health and Social Care Integrated Board and the Police, Fire & Rescue, and Safer Communities Board could be included on the Review list. The Clerk to the Council suggested that two separate reports may be appropriate, one concentrating on the Health and Social Care Integrated Joint Board, the other on the Police, Fire & Rescue and Safer Communities Board. The reports could also incorporate information on how these areas were covered in other local authority areas and bring in information from other organisations such as Cosla and Audit Scotland.

DECISION

AGREED the list of subject for review by Scrutiny Committee as amended and appended to this Minute at Appendix 1.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on Thursday, 24 November 2016.

**DECISION
NOTED.**

The meeting concluded at 11.30 am

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Scrutiny Committee – Review Subjects 2016/17

Timetabled for Scrutiny Meetings

Source	Issue/Description	Stage	Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date
Councillor Nicol	Review of Bridges Assets. The review should include the condition of bridges on the register and the processes for inspection and maintenance.	Presentation by Martin Joyce, Service Director Assets and Infrastructure.	27 October 2016
Councillor Torrance	Social Work Duty Hub.	Graeme Dobson, Project Manager, Les Grant, Customer Services Manager.	27 October 2016.
Scrutiny Committee	Drugs and Alcohol Strategy.	Elaine Torrance, Chief Social Work Officer; Tim Patterson, Joint Director of Public Health, Fiona Doig.	24 November 2016
Scrutiny Committee	Policies and Procedures for Protective Marking of Documents and Management of Information.	Information Governance Board to make presentation.	24 November 2016
Lib Dem Group	Implications of the Community Empowerment Act on the Council – <i>“there may be multiple implications of the Community Empowerment Act e.g. disposal of assets either SBC or Common Good, the transfer of local services to community groups who wish to take them on, future provision of allotments etc.”</i>	Presentation from Shona Smith, Communities & Partnership Manager and Douglas Scott, Senior Policy Advisor on Communities and Partnership.	26 January 2017.
Scrutiny	The impact of third party use on the Local Authority’s road network, e.g. timber transportation and wind turbine transportation.		26 January 2017

Review Subjects to be considered/awaiting further information

Source	Issue/Description	Stage	Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date
Councillor Gillespie	Home Schooling. To consider the requirement for a change in the law to ensure health assessments for home schooled children are carried out. Also to investigate parents undertaking an examination to ensure that they were adequate educators for primary secondary school education.	Donna Manson, Service Director Children & Young People will provide private updated.	Private Briefing for Members in September/October 2016. Cllr Gillespie to discuss with Ms Manson and advise at next meeting.
Councillor Archibald	Artificial sports pitches. Briefing paper to be brought forward on existing artificial pitches in the Scottish Borders, to include information on the use costs, benefits and issues of these facilities.	Presentation from Rob Dickson, Corporate Transformation and Services Director.	Deferred until report considered by Executive Committee.
Royal Burgh of Peebles & District Community Council	This issue relates to how (and under what circumstances) community consultation is designed, planned and managed and how the processes by which Council canvasses the views of local communities can be facilitated and improved upon. In particular, use the example of the process that led to the decision by the Council's Executive Committee to agree that Victoria Park, Peebles is the preferred location for a 3G pitch.	Presentation from Rob Dickson, Corporate Transformation and Services Director.	Removed. (Paragraph 2.2 of the minute of 18 August 2016 refers).

Reviews Completed 2015/16

Source	Issue/Description	Stage	Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date
Councillor Nicol	Recycling Centres. Update on remarketing of goods for recycling at Community Recycling Centres, including how other authorities approached this.	Presentation by Jenni Craig, Service Director Neighbourhood Services and Ross Sharp-Dent, Waste Manager.	22 September 2016. Completed.
Councillor Cockburn	Asymmetric Week	Presentation by Donna Manson, Service Director Children & Young People, Ms M Strong, Chief Officer Education & Lifelong Learning; Mr P Fagan & Ms A M Bready, Headteachers.	22 September 2016. Completed.
Ettrick and Yarrow Community Council	Great Tapestry of Scotland Working Group – Report	Report by Scrutiny Committee Working Group, presented by Councillor Mountford	18 August 2016. Completed.
Greenlaw and Hume Community Council	To consider outsourcing success stories from this Council and elsewhere in Scotland in particular where the service has been outsourced to a third sector organisation	Presentation by Kathryn Dickson, Procurement & Payment Services Manager.	18 August 2016. Completed.
Councillor Torrance	School Transport and Escorts	Presentation by Dona Manson, Service Director Children and Young People.	28 April 2016 Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Following the review on road repairs maintenance, presented to the January meeting of Scrutiny Committee. There was a further report to the March meeting on the implications on the capital and revenue budgets of the trunk status of the A72 and A7. Scrutiny Committee requested a further report identifying the revenue and capital costs of works to individual roads in the roads infrastructure.	Report from Asset Manager.	28 April 2016. Completed.

Source	Issue/Description	Stage	Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date.
Councillor Logan	Support for Highly Able Learners in Schools	Presentation by Donna Manson, Service Director Children & Young People.	28 April 2016. Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Financing arrangements for the Transport Interchange in Galashiels – to include subsidy arrangements and departure charges.	None	24 March 2016. Completed.
Councillor Archibald	Equalities Legislation. Consideration on the Council's up to date grant application form and information on how legislation is applied to local festivals, in particular where the Council awards grants.	None.	24 March 2016. Completed.
Councillor Bhatia	Protection of Private Water Supplies – “in relation to Planning e.g. when a planning application is granted which requires an additional private supply or taking water from an existing private supply, how do existing householders ensure that their supply is protected? This may be purely a civil matter or the Council may have a role. This is further exacerbated with large forestry/windfarm applications.”	Recommendation to be considered by Executive Committee on 22 March 2016.	18 February 2016. Completed.
Ettrick and Yarrow Community Council. Allocation of budgets for rural maintenance and repairs.	To review extent to which the SBC budget for road repairs and maintenance is sufficient to meet need and the not unreasonable expectation that roads will be maintained in a safe condition. Within this context, to particularly examine how the allocation of budget for rural roads is arrived and whether more should be allocated.	Recommendation considered by Executive Committee on 8 March 2016 – accepted.	28 January 2016. Completed.
Graeme Donald	Religious Observance } Policy } These were } presented together at	None – briefing session	29 October 2015. Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Faith Schools } the same meeting.	None – briefing session.	29 October 2015. Completed.
Councillor Turnbull	Fees for taxi licensing – the amount paid to outside bodies in administering taxi licensing and how the fees for a licence in the Borders compare with those of neighbouring authorities.	Information emailed to Cllr Turnbull from Licensing Team Leader on 5/10/15. Cllr Turnbull does to wish to pursue further.	14 October 2015. Completed.

Source	Issue/Description	Stage	Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date.
Scrutiny Committee	Attainment levels in Schools in Deprived Areas.	None – briefing session.	24 September 2015. Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Mainstream Schools and Children with Complex Additional Support Needs	None – briefing session.	24 September 2015. Completed.

Reviews Completed 2014/15

Source	Issue/Description	Stage	Scrutiny Committee Meeting Date
Scrutiny Committee	Funding available to Community Councils	Presentation from Clare Malster, Strategic Community Engagement Officer	11 June 2015. Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Presentations on Planning Enforcement and Building Inspection Regime.	Presentation from Alan Gueldner, Lead Enforcement and Mr James Whiteford, Lead Building Standards Surveyor.	11 June 2015. Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Procurement Control of contractors policy/repairs & maintenance framework agreement procurement project.	Presentation by Kathryn Dickson, Procurement and Payment Services Manager, Graham Cresswell, Health & Safety Manager; Ray Cherry, Senior Architect; Stuart Mawson, Property Manager.	28 May 2015. Completed.
Scrutiny Committee	Use of Small Schemes and Quality of Life Funding by Area Fora.	Report by Jenni Craig, Service Director Neighbourhood Services.	26 March 2015. Completed.