

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the AUDIT AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held via Microsoft
Teams on Thursday, 9 December 2021 at
10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman), H. Anderson, J. Greenwell, N. Richards, E. Robson, H. Scott, S. Scott, and E. Thornton-Nicol
Apologies: Councillor J. A. Fullarton
In Attendance:- Director Resilient Communities, Director Infrastructure & Environment, Director Strategic Commissioning & Change, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall).

SCRUTINY BUSINESS

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

1. MINUTE.

There had been circulated copies of the Minutes of 22 November 2021 and 30 November 2021.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. SCRUTINY ACTION TRACKER

There had been circulated copies of the Scrutiny Action tracker. The Clerk to the Council advised that the updated tracker reflected the latest situation and that discussions with various Directors were ongoing, with further updates on the Income Management Policy expected soon.

DECISION

NOTED the Scrutiny Action Tracker.

3. COMMUNITY FUNDING - EVALUATION PROCESS

3.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director, Resilient Communities providing an overview and summary of the evaluation process of the Community Fund from April 2021 to the present date. On March 2021 Council agreed that from April 2021 the current evaluation scheme for applications would be extended to anybody/organisation which received a grant award from a part of the Community Fund. It was also recognised that the need for uniform scrutiny and evaluations across all Area Partnerships was important and support would be offered where required. Members commented on the operation of the Fund in their areas and the need to involve groups in this process in addition to Community Councils. The Community Fund budget for 2021/22 was £470,718 and was allocated to each Area Partnership based on population estimates. The report also contained details of a number of ring-fenced grants totalling £194,593 made to Community Councils, Village Halls and Festivals.

3.2 Ms Shona Smith, Communities & Partnerships Manager, presented the report and answered Members' questions. In response to a question regarding the process when groups had failed to return completed evaluation forms, Ms Smith explained that a traffic light system was in use whereby a gentle reminder was sent out, followed by further

communications and requests, and finally a notification was sent out that explained that future applications for funding from the group would not be considered until the evaluation form had been completed. Ms Smith further advised that the majority of groups were made up of volunteers, and that communications focused on helping groups complete the evaluation form. Regarding the higher Village Hall administration fee rate paid by the Federation of Village Halls in Berwickshire, Ms Smith advised that the Federation had agreed to that fee and that the figures had been published publicly. In response to a question, Ms Smith advised that discussions were ongoing to understand why different areas held differing levels of financial reserves. In response to a question on a lack of triennial reviews of Local Festivals funding, the Clerk to the Council undertook to investigate with the various Directors involved and report back to the Committee.

DECISION

(a) NOTED the evaluation process including the evaluation form, and progress to date

(b) AGREED to add the review of Festival Funding to the Action Tracker.

4. RURAL PROOFING POLICY

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director, Resilient Communities providing information on the existing Rural Proofing policy and the effectiveness of the policy in helping to ensure that rural issues were properly considered in Council Policy making. The Policy was developed and approved by the Executive Committee in November 2007 and was reviewed over the first few years of implementation. The most recent report was taken to the Executive Committee in 2011. The key aims of the policy were to help ensure that the needs of people living and working in the rural areas were fully taken into account in the development of all new Council policies and strategies. SBC had embraced and incorporated the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Integrated Impact Assessment into the Council reporting structure, which raised the question regarding the validity of the Rural Proofing policy and whether the Council still required this particular aspect within the Committee Report Template. Members had an extensive discussion on the relevance of the rural proofing policy in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, acknowledged the desire to reduce the levels of paper work required to be carried out by Council Officers, and highlighted the need to ensure that rural issues were fully considered when Officers were preparing reports and recommendations. Councillor Anderson proposed an extra recommendation which was unanimously agreed.

DECISION

AGREED:-

(a) to note that the members of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee had discussed the relevance of the rural proofing policy in light of the inclusion of UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Integrated Impact Assessment checklists within the Council Committee reporting template and decided that they wish to take any further action; and

(b) that the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Integrated Impact Assessment Goals checklists would be strengthened to ensure that elements of rurality were fully incorporated, and that the draft checklists be considered by the Committee prior to submission to Council.

5. WASTE & RECYCLING COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

5.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of 3 June 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by Director, Infrastructure & Environment that provided a progress update on communications with the public to encourage the reduction in contamination of waste and recycling. A number of key activities had been undertaken since the Scrutiny update in June, including the promotion of "Recycling Week" and the digital "Recycling

Sorter tool”; Schools resources packs had been introduced at 8 primary schools as part of a pilot project; Kerbside Recycling contract awarded, including a requirement for the supplier to provide support with public engagement and education; compositional analysis of kerbside recycling and general waste bins; and the development of the stakeholder engagement questionnaire.

- 5.2 Mr Ross Sharp-Dent joined the meeting to present the report and answered Members’ questions. Regarding waste contamination, Mr Sharp-Dent undertook to send out the breakdown of the analysis, and suggested that the highest levels of contamination would likely be seen in general waste that had gone to community recycling. In response to a question on the disposal of potentially harmful chemicals such as pesticides, Mr Sharp-Dent explained that change was now beginning to happen within the industry to amend the relevant policies and guidelines, and that whilst the Council currently had sole responsibility to manage such waste, he hoped that a shift in responsibility for managing potentially dangerous waste would occur. Regarding the expansion of food waste collection across the Borders, Mr Sharp-Dent advised that the food waste recycling scheme had only covered 6 towns due to the level of funding that was available, and was in line with the statutory requirements to provide the service. He went on to add that the Scottish Government’s position on food waste suggested that funding applications to widen food waste management programmes would likely be considered favourably, but that any funding provided would be limited to capital costs only. The Chairman suggested that one of the main factors negatively affecting waste management in the region was a lack of regular and clear communication and education measures to ensure that the public were certain about how different categories of waste needed to be treated and disposed of in the correct bin. Councillor Anderson proposed an additional recommendation which was unanimously agreed.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to support the delivery of a stakeholder engagement questionnaire to help inform future communication and education programmes; and**
- (b) to ask Communication Officers to attend the March meeting of the Committee to allow Members to have a discussion about a programme of communication in regard to climate change, including waste and recycling.**

6. PETITION

- 6.1 The Chairman advised those in attendance that the Principal Petitioner, Mrs Marion Henthorn, had chosen not to speak in support of the petition and was not in attendance at the meeting. This was permitted within the procedure. The Chairman read out the statement included with the petition and then read out a letter from the Chairman of the Food Foundation that explained that the issues outlined in the petition had been resolved. Officers were invited to explain their response to the petition.
- 6.2 **Flowerpot Café, Victoria Park**
There had been circulated copies of report by the Director, Infrastructure & Environment that summarised the content and context of a petition received by the Committee. The petition, titled “Flowerpot Café, Victoria Park”, received in the region of 30 signatures. The petition requested that the Flowerpot Café, run by the Food Foundation, operated in the community garden at the Victoria Park Day Centre was reopened. The Director summarised the report and the response from the Council. Members agreed that no further action was required.
- 6.3 In response to a question from the Chairman on the anticipated long term use of the building by SBCares, the Director Infrastructure & Environment explained that whilst opportunities were currently limited due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the expectation was that the building would continue to be utilised in the short to medium

term. There were continued issues with the pandemic and the vulnerability of users so the building could not be used for more activities at the moment as the safety and wellbeing of clients was paramount. The Director Strategic Commissioning & Change, added that a long-term review of LD Day services was ongoing, with a consultation due to conclude in October 2022. Following the conclusion of the consultation more clarity would be provided. The Chairman asked that one of the Estates team contact the Chairman of the Food Foundation to explain what had been discussed at the meeting and that the relocation of the café would require planning permission which the Food Foundation would need to submit to the Council.

DECISION

AGREED that the issue raised did not require further action as to all intents and purposes it had been resolved.

The meeting concluded at 12.00 pm