

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCRUTINY &  
PETITIONS COMMITTEE held via Microsoft  
Teams on Thursday, 12 January 2023 at  
10.00 am

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Present:- Councillors E. Thornton-Nicol (Chair), N. Richards (Vice-Chair), J. Anderson, J. Cox, M. Douglas, E. Robson, S. Scott and F. Sinclair

Apologies:- Councillors P. Brown and J. PatonDay

In Attendance:- Waste Manager, Senior Communications & Marketing Officer (A. Drummond), Clerk to the Council, and Trainee Democratic Services Officer.

## 1. **MINUTE - 8 DECEMBER 2022**

1.1 Copies of the Minute of Meeting held on 8 December 2022 had been circulated.

### **DECISION**

**APPROVED the Minute for signature by the Chair.**

## 2. **SCRUTINY ACTION SHEET**

Copies of the Action Tracker for Scrutiny decisions had been circulated. With reference to item 2 from 9 December 2021, regarding the Rural Proofing Policy, the date for presentation to Committee had now been changed to 20 April 2023, to allow work to tie in with other reviews underway e.g. Integrated Impact Assessment.

### **DECISION**

**NOTED the dates where outstanding actions would be considered.**

## 3. **WASTE AND RECYCLING COMMUNICATIONS**

2.1 With reference to Paragraph 1.2 of the Minute of 8 December 2022, Adam Drummond, Senior Communications and Marketing Officer, presented an update on the Council's Climate Change Communications. In working towards the Net Zero target, it had been challenging to develop and sustain the level of communications required due to multiple competing priorities and staff vacancies. The recent recruitment of a Climate Change Officer was to result in more effective communications with internal and external audiences henceforth. A brief overview of the plan was presented to Members which would provide an easily accessible, web based source of information and plans on the action of Scottish Borders Council towards its Net Zero Commitments; to raise awareness, signpost to resources, highlight best practice and support behavior and cultural change internally and externally related to the climate emergency, and to work with national and local partners. The initial web content was in its final stages and was to be published shortly. Climate emergency training had been rolled out internally and 1800 staff had completed the e-learning module on Climate Change. This was to be an area of focus in the coming months.

2.2 Ross Sharp-Dent, Waste Manager, then presented an update on the Waste and Recycling Campaign. This initiative, as part of the Climate Change communications Plan, aimed to encourage positive behavior change, to increase recycling performance and to reduce the amount of recyclable waste going into general waste bins (currently at 76%).

The previously delayed campaign had launched in December 2022 to coincide with the festive collection communications and was disseminated via social media platforms, Councillor and Community Council briefings, posters and a press release. A staff video had also been produced. The Council web page had been updated with a new 'missed bin' service whereby the public were apprised of missed collections reported by the waste crews and subsequent remedial action to be taken. The results of an information gathering survey conducted in January 2022 had now been published. The survey had highlighted public confusion as to the type of refuse permitted in the different bins. It was confirmed that excess recyclate could be put out alongside the blue bin for collection, although that needed to be in a clear or white bag tied at the top. No black bags could be used for recyclate, as there was an assumption that this could contain ordinary waste so would be contaminated and the sorting machine did not recognise black bags so these would be rejected. Large cardboard boxes could be flattened and also left out for collection.

2.3 A summary of planned initiatives was provided: the Primary Schools Waste and Recycling Resource was to be launched in conjunction with Levensat (General Waste Contractor) in March 2023 and contained online lesson plans, activities and games; a Community Engagement Review to maximise community involvement; and 'Recollect' - a one year trial of a web app to be rolled out in March/April 2023. The interface allowed the public to type in an item and be directed to the correct means of disposal. Training was to be provided to CAS staff to enable them to use the app and provide answers at the first point of contact. The app also provided reminders to put out domestic bins. Comprehensive data gathered from the trial was to be used to address public knowledge gaps and improve behaviours.

2.4 The shortage of HGV drivers was discussed. All posts for HGV drivers were filled apart from one. There were also loaders who were trained as HGV drivers but the number of those in the workforce had shrunk from 20 down to 2 or 3 in recent years. Currently, any gaps in drivers were being filled by foremen and supervisors. A recent recruitment exercise for six HGV drivers received no applicants. Scottish Borders Council was committed to training new drivers and had undertaken to put applicants through their DVLA car licence training first if they did not have a pre-1997 licence, with a view to starting HGV training one year later, although there was a backlog of testing. In response to a question about the reporting of full bottle banks, it was confirmed that this was not currently possible via the website but this was something which would be considered. Where it was known in advance e.g. festive period, summer festivals, etc. then additional bottle banks were brought in and also bins were emptied more frequently. The advent of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for plastic bottles and cans would likely result in a reduction in the amount of recyclate to be collected by Waste Management. While the Council was still obliged by legislation to collect plastic at kerb sides and bottle banks, it was acknowledged that the position, timing and routes of collections would be reviewed at the appropriate time. The issue in the Borders was distance and not volume so it may mean vehicles would pick up less waste as the assumption was less would be going into general waste bins. The frequency of collections may reduce. There was an acknowledgement that while emails had been sent out to all Community Councils on the waste campaign over the festive period, communications with Community Councils required greater focus to ensure that information was being disseminated to their local community. It was suggested that future waste management email communications to Community Councils should also be sent to Elected Members to allow them to check on receipt and that the information was being disseminated out to communities.

## **DECISION**

**NOTED the updates and AGREED that waste management emails to Community Councils also be sent to Elected Members to allow them to check that the information had been received and was being disseminated out to communities.**

#### 4. **FUTURE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

There had been circulated copies of a briefing note by the Clerk to the Council, the purpose of which was to provide Members with details of the proposed process for future Scrutiny reviews. The Clerk to the Council gave an explanation of the work of the Scrutiny and Petitions Committee: to monitor the Authority's performance in achieving policy objectives and priorities; to review the Council's effectiveness against agreed standards, targets and budgets; and to act as a focus for value for money and service quality exercises. Subjects for review were to be brought to the Clerk by members of the Committee and other Elected Members; this was to be submitted via email with no need for a rationale to be completed at this stage and reviews could be focussed and specific. Further explanation was provided as to how proposals for review were to be initially assessed for inclusion in a Programme of Work. With a focus on their strategic role, Members had the authority to objectively scrutinise the delivery of a project against a plan, or a benefit realisation against a target, according to set criteria. The review would proceed in one of three ways initially: an Information Hearing whereby officers or representatives made a presentation; a more focussed Hearing where questions would be submitted in advance and supplemented by further queries to delve deeper, with a Working Group convened to probe further still; or a Working Group would be convened immediately to take matters forward. Oversight of a Working Group was to be ensured through the approval of their remit by the Scrutiny & Petitions Committee. Due attention was to be given to the scale and number of reviews at any given time to ensure reviews were adequately resourced and proportionate across the service. The Clerk to the Council had received one subject for review to date. It was suggested that one Working Group at a time was convened; this could be either for a short term of a few months or longer up to a year. There was general agreement that each Committee member proposed one subject for review before the next meeting on 20 April 2023. The Clerk to the Council would also write out to all Members and Community Councils asking for any subjects for review.

#### **DECISION**

**NOTED the briefing and AGREED to each Committee member submitting one subject for review before the next meeting.**

*The meeting concluded at 11.10 am*