

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXTERNAL SERVICES/PROVIDERS MONITORING GROUP

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXTERNAL
SERVICES/PROVIDERS MONITORING
GROUP held via Microsoft Teams on
Tuesday, 5 September 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present:- Councillors M. Rowley (Chair), M. Douglas, J. Greenwell, S. Hamilton,
J. Pirone and E. Thornton-Nicol.
Apologies:- Councillors J. Anderson, P. Brown and E. Jardine
In Attendance:- Director Resilient Communities, Chief Officer Audit and Risk, E. Jackson (Live
Borders) and Democratic Services Officer (L. Cuerden).

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 6 June 2023.

DECISION

AGREED the Minute for signature by the Chair.

2. **LIVE BORDERS CONTRACT PERFORMANCE: QUARTER 1 2023/24**

- 2.1 There had been circulated a report by Jenni Craig, Director Resilient Communities, the purpose of which was to provide Members with performance information regarding the Live Borders partnership agreement for Quarter 1 2023/24. The report at Appendix 1 provided Members with performance information on the delivery of the commissioned sport, physical activity and cultural services. Live Borders continued to face challenges including: lower than anticipated participation levels due to the cost of living crisis and a protracted recovery from the pandemic; inflation and energy costs; and continuing changes to the ways in which some services are consumed. Members were reminded of the ongoing review of Live Borders provision agreement due to report in October 2023. Key outputs from the review were to include both a revised SPA and robust, agreed performance management arrangements to enable stakeholders to monitor its delivery.
- 2.2 Ewan Jackson presented the report at Appendix 1. Live Borders continued to operate in a challenging context particularly in the sporting and cultural sectors. Action had been taken to reduce energy consumption but was limited by the age and condition of the estate, the plant and the machinery within the facilities; replacement boilers at the Gytes, Peebles and the air handling unit at Eyemouth pool were planned. In terms of sports facilities, issues with plant and equipment had resulted in Eyemouth and Teviotdale leisure centres and Kelso pool being closed for short periods. Peebles pool had reopened on 7 August. Notwithstanding, approximately 270,000 sporting participations had been recorded in Q1. Membership remained static with new memberships offset by lower than planned retention. The new Live Borders app had been deployed with more than 10,000 downloads initially and a new loyalty card was being trialled. The percentage of bookings made through the app was to be provided at the next meeting. Work was ongoing to establish a new 'Youth Membership' for the 12-17 year old cohort with low monthly fee and unlimited swim and gym use. The 'Get Ready for Summer' initiative generated £2.5k and participation of 170 and two new yoga classes had sold out each week since launch. The Learn2 membership was expected to grow with the reopening of Peebles pool and the increase in the number of suitably qualified instructors. In addition, a programme of planned activities had been developed to generate income. There was increased competition from the 50+ gym/studio providers in the Borders, both local and national

providers. Active Communities had performed strongly over Q1 across all offerings including newer offerings of Netball and Pickleball. Holiday programme participation was in line with its target of approximately 1,000 while other festivals and events attracted almost 4,000. Library membership continued to grow and there were plans to extend opening hours at Galashiels and Hawick libraries. Two new mobile libraries had been ordered and a review of the mobile library routes and stock management/rotation had been undertaken. Borrowbox and Pressreader use continued to grow. Eyemouth RNID and the library service had partnered with the NHS to provide a free drop-in service for hearing checks.

- 2.3 With reference to paragraph 2.5 of the Minute of 6 June 2023, it was confirmed that the swim participation data for 2022/2023 was incorrect whereby both wet and dry activities had been compared against wet only activities for 2019/2020. When compared with wet and dry data for 2019/2020, there had been an overall decrease of 28% participation at all swimming pool sites. With reference to paragraph 3.3, an additional column of 2019/20 wet and dry activities data was to be added to the table. There was a request for opening hours for 2019/20 and 2022/23 to be added to the table also and for this to be continued in subsequent reports. Additionally, there was a request for clarification in future reports on which sites offered both wet and dry activities as opposed to only wet activities.
- 2.4 With reference to paragraph 2.7 of the Minute of 6 June 2023, historical data on the energy consumption per square metre in sporting and cultural venues where possible was provided. The aging plant and machinery had become less energy efficient and resulted in higher kW usage, which along with the cost of energy and poorly insulated buildings had a significant impact on overall costs and on working towards Net Zero targets. Energy surveys were to be undertaken as part of the Joint Review of Services which were to provide comprehensive data across all the Council-owned estate including those facilities managed and operated by Live Borders. Usage data for 2022/23 was to be provided at the next meeting.
- 2.5 With reference to paragraph 2.7 of the Minute of 6 June 2023, the opening hours of Live Borders libraries and SBC Library Contact Centres (LCC) and total operational hours as of August 2023 were provided. It was to be noted that Live Borders was currently planning to extend the opening hours at both Hawick and Galashiels libraries by 4 hours per week. [Tuesday opening to 7pm (+1hr) and Saturday opening 10am-1pm (+3hrs)]. Staff recruitment was underway. In relation to Jedburgh campus, there was to be an extension of opening hours to improve accessibility for the public during school hours with a plan to offer additional services. Public access to Earlston library was to be reviewed with an update provided at the next meeting. In response to a question about parity of provision across the Borders, particularly in relation to Selkirk, it was to be noted that workforce differences across Live Borders libraries and LCC was a factor. Mr Jackson agreed to discuss the matter further with the Head of the Library service.
- 2.6 A summary of the Quarter 1 2023/24 KSI performance was provided. KSI 15, 22 and 23 were coded red and KSI 9 was coded as amber. Staff absence and turnover were low and staff were commended for their resilience during and post-pandemic. It was reported that the cost to attract new members was higher than retention and it was acknowledged that Live Borders had more work to do on retaining memberships and improve efficiency. In response to a question about measures to improve retention, Mr Jackson reported that the Live Borders workforce needed to be commensurate with needs of the members and support them post-induction. The cost of entry was also a factor. Lessons were to be learned from the success of Tri-fitness gym in Galashiels which had been shortlisted for an award. There had been discussion with NHS Borders on the promotion of the 50% off vouchers for gym referrals from GPs and physiotherapists. The KSI performance graphs and tables for Q1 2023/24 were provided for those KSIs that were measured quarterly. There had been a request for visitor figures for museums and cultural offerings to be provided at the next meeting, to which Mr Jackson agreed. There was also a request for

the previous RAG status to be detailed alongside the updated status to better reflect performance trends going forward.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the Live Borders Performance Report; and**
- (b) **NOTED the ongoing joint strategic review; the inclusion of performance information and reporting of a revised Service Provision Agreement within the scope of the review.**

3. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the External Services/Providers Monitoring Group (Live Borders) was scheduled for 5 December 2023 at 2p.m.

The meeting concluded at 3.30 pm