

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCOTTISH COUNCIL held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells and Via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 21st February, 2024 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors W. McAteer (Convener), J. Anderson, D. Begg, P. Brown, C. Cochrane, J. Cox, L. Douglas, M. Douglas, J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, E. Jardine, J. Linehan, N. MacKinnon, S. Marshall, D. Moffat, S. Mountford, D. Parker, J. PatonDay, J. Pirone, C. Ramage, N. Richards, E. Robson, M. Rowley, S. Scott, F. Sinclair, A. Smart, H. Steel, R. Tatler, V. Thomson, E. Thornton-Nicol, T. Weatherston

Apologies:- Councillors E. Small, A. Orr.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Director Corporate Governance, Director Finance and Procurement, Director Infrastructure and Environment, Director Education and Lifelong Learning, Director Resilient Communities, Director Strategic Commissioning and Partnerships, Democratic Services Team Leader.

## 1. CONVENER'S REMARKS.

The Convener expressed his condolences to the family and friends of Elizabeth Bell, who had sadly passed away following a tragic road accident near her family home in East Gordon. The Convener provided assurances that Scottish Borders Council would fully support Police Scotland in its investigation and work quickly and tirelessly to address the community concerns.

### DECISION NOTED.

## 2. MINUTE

The Minute of the Meeting held on 25 January 2024 was considered.

### DECISION AGREED that the Minute be approved and signed by the Convener.

## 3. COMMITTEE MINUTES

The Minutes of the following Committees had been circulated:-

(a) Local Review Body	22 January 2024
(b) Jedburgh Common Good	29 January 2024
(c) External Services-Providers Monitoring Group	6 February 2024

### DECISION APPROVED the Minutes listed above.

## 4. REAL ACTION FOR PREVENTION: A VISION OF POPULATION HEALTH IN THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

- 4.1 The Chairman welcomed the Director of Public Health – NHS Borders, Dr Sohail Bhatti, to provide a presentation on the Real Action for Prevention: a vision of population health in the Scottish Borders. Dr Bhatti explained that the concept of prevention was one of the fundamental pillars of Public Health and Government policy and outlined the three types of prevention. Primary prevention was where action was taken to stop a condition, disease or illness ever occurring; secondary was where action was taken to detect the

early signs of a specific disease or issue and intervene before symptoms could develop; and tertiary was where action was taken to reduce the impact of disease that had manifested in an individual. Socio-economic factors had the largest impact upon individuals' health. Health Services had a smaller impact, accounting for a 20% impact. Prevention was seen as a very cost effective way of allowing people to live healthy lives and for every pound spent there would a multiple order of gains made. In the Scottish Borders the NHS and the Council worked together in partnership through the Integrated Joint Board and Dr Bhatti explained that through this partnership the organisations generally worked very well and was adept at resolving problems and responding to crisis, but needed to improve the way in which it prevented crises occurring. Further collaborative work needed to be undertaken to ensure that proactive steps were in place to embed prevention work into the mainstream. Dr Bhatti highlighted that the Scottish Borders had a demographic profile of what Scotland would experience in 2054 and it was imperative that health services were equipped to deal with minor ailments to allow people to live well as they aged well. The importance of putting social prescribing at scale in place was highlighted and it was emphasised that the health service would continue to be under considerable pressure until people were directed away from frontline healthcare. Such social prescribing would involve a considerable range of partners and involvement from communities.

- 4.2 Members thanked Dr Bhatti for his comprehensive report and highlighted that SBC were keen to continue to ensure that through effective partnership working, the clear vision which had been outlined was delivered. In response to a question regarding blood pressure checks at every pharmacy across the Scottish Borders, Dr Bhatti undertook to explore the situation but explained that not every location had an appropriate space for the tests to be undertaken or appropriately trained staff to assess the results, which were imperative to avoid potential misdiagnosis. Dr Bhatti accepted an invitation to attend the Anti-Poverty Reference Group. Regarding waiting lists to register at a dentist, Dr Bhatti explained that work was ongoing through the IJB and the situation was improving, however more work was required. In response to a question regarding a single system to allow all anchor institutions to make referrals for social prescribing, Dr Bhatti explained that a group had been setup to address the issue. The key drivers of a successful social prescribing model would be the citizens of the Scottish Borders, and it was imperative that successful collaboration by organisations continued to empower people. The use of technology and effective algorithms to undertake more tasks within the health service was highlighted as an area that could potentially provide considerable benefits.

## **DECISION NOTED.**

### **5. COUNCIL TAX 2024/25**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Finance and Procurement which sought approval for the freezing of Council Tax at current 2023/24 levels for 2024/25. The report provided background information to the Council Tax as well as confirmation of the charge from April 2024 in all Council Tax bands. Council, in setting the indicative budget for 2024/25 in February 2023, had forecast that Council Tax would rise by 4 per cent from 1 April 2024 providing an additional £2.9m income, net of discounts and exemptions and excluding growth of £0.6m from growth in properties, to fund Council services. In October 2023, the First Minister announced the Scottish Government's intention to deliver a Council Tax freeze across Scotland for 2024/25 in recognition of the impact of the current cost of living crisis on households and there was a commitment for that freeze to be fully funded. As part of the December 2023 Scottish Government budget, funding of £144m was provided which Scottish Government had stated equated to an equivalent 5% increase in Council Tax nationally. The distribution methodology of the £144m was confirmed in January 2024 and Scottish Borders Council would receive an additional £3.2m to support the freeze, that was £0.3m more than the £2.9m approved within the financial plan which supported the current funding gap. The £0.6m assumed for new properties remained in the budget. All council tax values referred

to in the report referred only to the Council Tax element of the charge on households. That excluded charges collected by SBC on behalf of Scottish Water through council tax bills. An increase of 8.8% in domestic water and sewerage charges levied by Scottish Water was due to take place from 1st April 2024. Members thanked the Director Finance and Procurement for the very comprehensive report and highlighted that the decision on freezing Council Tax had been carefully considered by the Cross-Party Budget Working Group.

## **DECISION**

### **AGREED to:-**

- (a) **accept the additional funding of £3.22m through the 2024/25 Local Government Finance Settlement to freeze Council Tax at 2023/24 levels; and**
- (b) **approve the Council Taxes to be paid in financial year 2024/25, from 1st April 2024 in respect of all chargeable dwellings in the Scottish Borders as set out in the table below, with a Band D equivalent of £1,356.11.**

### **Scottish Borders Council Tax applicable Charges from 1 April 2024:**

<b>Council Tax Band</b>	<b>Applicable Annual Charge Per property £</b>
<b>A</b>	904.07
<b>B</b>	1,054.75
<b>C</b>	1,205.43
<b>D</b>	1,356.11
<b>E</b>	1,781.78
<b>F</b>	2,203.68
<b>G</b>	2,655.72
<b>H</b>	3,322.47

## **DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Councillor Rowley declared an interest in the following item of business in terms of Section 5 of the Councillors Code of Conduct given his employment with SOSE and left the Chamber during the discussion.

### **6. SOUTH OF SCOTLAND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STRATEGY**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Resilient Communities which presented a final working draft of the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy. The first Regional Economic Strategy Delivery Plan included a commitment to “Develop a South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Destination and Marketing Strategy” under the theme of Cultural and Creative Excellence, Action 4 (C). All five of the key agencies in the South of Scotland, including Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, South of Scotland Enterprise, South of Scotland Destination Alliance, and VisitScotland had been collaborating to support the development of a single Responsible Tourism Destination Development Strategy for the South of Scotland. The report reflected the high level of ambition in the South of Scotland to grow the tourism sector, attract more visitors and increase market value. The Chief Officer – Economic Development, Ms Samantha Smith, presented the report and highlighted that the strategy had involved considerable consultation with local businesses and stakeholders across the region. Elected Members congratulated Ms Smith on the work involved and highlighted that the South of Scotland had been included in the Lonely Planet list of Best in Travel destinations for 2023.

**DECISION  
AGREED to:-**

- (a) endorse the South of Scotland Responsible Tourism Strategy; and**
- (b) recognise the potential of the South of Scotland to contribute to the successful delivery of the National Tourism Strategy “Scotland Outlook 2030” and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.**

**MEMBER**

Councillor Rowley re-joined the meeting.

**7. LIVE BORDERS - PLANNED TEMPORARY CLOSURES OF FACILITIES**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Infrastructure and Environment which provided an update on the temporary closures which were required to some of the Live Borders operated sporting facilities to ensure necessary electrical inspections/works were undertaken and proposed that, given buildings were closed, further survey and scoping work was undertaken, subject to available resources. A joint programme of actions was approved by Council at its meeting of 23 November 2023, including undertaking condition surveys of SBC buildings managed by Live Borders. Electrical compliance-related works were planned by Live Borders in a number of buildings which would require their temporary closure for short durations. Works to upgrade the heating system at Eyemouth Leisure Centre was ongoing and the facility remained closed. It was proposed that those temporary closures were utilised to allow some further scoping works to be undertaken, which was the same principle adopted following the Peebles Swimming Pool fire whereby additional fabric improvement works were delivered at the same time. The Director Resilient Communities, Mrs Jenni Craig, presented the report and responded to questions. In response to a question regarding a lack of communication regarding the potential closure of the Teviotdale Leisure Centre, Mrs Craig acknowledged local frustrations regarding the closure and confirmed that Scottish Borders Council and LiveBorders were working to gain a full understanding of the condition of all of the buildings within the estate in order to ensure that they were sustainable in the long-term. The Chief Executive provided assurance that when officers became aware of unforeseen, or extended closures, local Ward Members would be advised of the circumstances as a matter of priority. The proactive approach to undertaking works was lauded as a positive step to ensuring that future closures for works could be managed in a more efficient manner. In response to a question regarding whether alternative facilities were being offered for use by groups, Mrs Craig confirmed that LiveBorders had offered the use of alternative locations and undertook to investigate the full extent of such offerings. Regarding the timeframe for the condition survey, the Chief Officer – Estates, Mr Ray Cherry, explained that the programme had been started and was being undertaken in-house to allow the results to be compared to the ongoing survey of SBC’s estate. Due to the size of the estate, it was expected to take some considerable time. Mrs Craig explained that LiveBorders were planning to produce a monthly newsletter for Elected Members in order to effectively share key information.

**DECISION  
AGREED:-**

- (a) the proposal, subject to available resources, to take the opportunity of temporary closures to carry out condition surveys and a scope exercise which would identify further works requeued to the Eyemouth and Hawick facilities from simple interventions to full decarbonisation; and**
- (b) to delegate authority to the Chief Executives of both organisations, in consultation with the elected members of the SBC/LiveBorders Executive Board, to extend those closures, if required, to facilitate additional works, subject to available funding.**

8. **OPEN QUESTIONS**

The questions submitted by Councillors Sinclair and Thornton-Nicol were answered.

**DECISION**

**NOTED** the replies as detailed in Appendix I to this Minute.

9. **PRIVATE BUSINESS**

**DECISION**

**AGREED** under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in Appendix II to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 6 and 8 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

**SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS**

10. **MINUTE**

The private section of the Council Minute of 25 January 2024 was approved.

11. **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The private sections of the Meeting of the External Services-Providers Monitoring Group held on 6 February 2024 was approved.

***The meeting concluded at 12.05 p.m.***