

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber,
Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells,
TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 12th September, 2023
at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors E. Jardine (Chairman), L. Douglas, M. Douglas, J. Greenwell,
C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, J. Linehan, D. Parker, E. Robson, M. Rowley, F.
Sinclair, R. Tatler, E. Thornton-Nicol and T. Weatherston.

Also Present:- Councillors W. McAteer

Apologies:- Councillors C. Cochrane, S. Mountford, and J. Pirone.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Director – Corporate Governance, Director – Education and
Lifelong Learning, Director- Infrastructure and Environment, Director -
Resilient Communities, Director - Finance and Procurement , Clerk to the
Council, Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present: Mr G Clark (Federation of Small Businesses), Mr T Jackson (Chamber of
Commerce)

1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director - Resilient Communities which provided elected members with information on key areas of economic development delivery within the Scottish Borders. The note identified some of the policies and strategies that were driving regional economic development and detailed key pieces of work. The Local Employability Partnership (LEP) was established in September 2021 to help drive the employability agenda and to foster a strong collaborative approach to delivery. One of the key elements of work was the delivery of the No One Left Behind (NOLB) funding programme which had a greater focus on Child Poverty. In the first quarter of 2023/24 a team of 10 key workers had supported 113 clients with a range of barriers to employment. Scottish Borders Council and South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) agreed to form a strategic partnership for delivery of the Business Gateway service in November 2020, with the transfer of services completed in April 2021. The paper briefing note provided an update on delivery and indicated a consistent demand for Business Gateway services, with strong enquiry numbers. All the key agencies in the South of Scotland, including Scottish Borders Council were currently collaborating in terms of the development of a single Responsible Tourism Destination Development Strategy for the South of Scotland. The UCI Cycling World Championships at Glentress were deemed to be a great success and showed the Borders at its best to an estimated television audience of over one billion people. Glentress was the host venue for the cross-country cycling and marathon events and in addition there was a full range of programmes and activities for all visitors and attendees. Following a series of recent meetings and discussions, the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland and The UK Government Department for Transport have confirmed that they are content for the Borders Railway Extension project to move into the first stage of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Business Case process. There was also agreement that Scottish Borders Council could submit a funding request to appoint a Senior Project Manager to help lead the business case process. The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal was signed in March 2021 by the Borderlands Partnership, the UK and Scottish Governments, and the five local authorities within the Borderlands area. An update on the various projects that had The Deal would provide a total funding package of £452m over 10 years for the Borderlands area, with £150m available for the South of Scotland, comprising £65m from the UK Government and £85m from the Scottish Government. The Chief Officer –

Economic Development, Ms Samantha Smith, presented the note and highlighted the various successes over the preceding months. Ms Smith highlighted at the recently held South of Scotland Convention that discussions had taken place regarding short-term lets and the importance of ensuring that applications for licenses were straightforward to complete.

- 1.2 Members welcomed the report and highlighted that the Economic Development team were undertaking a high volume of important work across the region. In response to a question regarding how the number of cases dealt with by Business Gateway compared to its targets, Ms Smith explained that the early numbers were positive and had improved compared to the previous year and the transition year. It was highlighted that the Scottish Borders was well placed to bid to host the proposed regional intelligence centre as part of the regional prosperity framework. Ms Smith explained that the Scottish Borders had some unique opportunities because it was part of two growth deals. Officers would continue to explore future opportunities, and it was hoped that Tweedbank would be well placed to function as a regional intelligence hub for the South of Scotland. The Chairman highlighted that the Scottish Borders had delivered a world class event when it hosted the recent UCI cycling event. It was anticipated that a report on the event would be brought back to Members before the end of the year. The Director – Infrastructure and Environment highlighted that there was an opportunity for the Borders to present to the UCI congress in Bruges in October, with a three-minute presentation to the whole congress and a 15-minute slot for promotional activities.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) **note the information that was provided regarding the current economic development landscape affecting the Scottish Borders; and**
- (b) **note where future delivery updates will be reported back to Executive.**

OTHER BUSINESS

2. MINUTE

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting held on 15 August 2023.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

3. ANNUAL PROCUREMENT REPORT 2022/23

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director – Finance and Procurement which presented the 2022/2023 Annual Procurement Report (APR) for review, a mandatory report required by the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. The report explained that organisations which were required to prepare a procurement strategy must also publish an annual procurement report. Those documents were part of the reporting landscape for the public sector to support increased transparency and visibility of public expenditure and to embed sustainability into public sector procurement. The purpose of the reporting was to demonstrate to stakeholders that procurement spend was being used to best effect to achieve better public services; social, economic, and environmental outcomes in the area; and compliance with a range of local and national policies. The report included a dedicated section which noted the support and service provided during the period. The Director – Finance and Procurement, Mrs Suzy Douglas, presented the report and responded to Members questions. In response to a question regarding the number of qualifications achieved through training by priority groups being listed as unknown, Mrs Douglas explained that the employability services team would likely have the data and undertook to explore whether the data could be included in future reports. Regarding spending on community meals, Mrs Douglas highlighted that the Council had committed to using meat from local butchers in school meals and stressed that the

Council recognised the wider benefits of using local suppliers of produce to make meals at schools and care homes across the region. The Chief Executive explained that the Council had explored using a local supplier of groceries to produce meals in schools and care homes, however had been unable to find a supplier able provide sufficient volume and guarantee the quality required. Members highlighted that they were more comfortable with local spending on procurement, and that meet-the-buyer events had been well attended. In response to a question regarding whether more businesses could be supported as part of the Scottish Government Supported Business Framework, Mrs Douglas explained that the procurement process had the potential to help with engagement.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Annual Procurement Report 2022/23, as contained as Appendix 1 to the report, for submission to Scottish Government.

4. WINTER SERVICES PLAN FOR YEAR 2023/24

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director – Infrastructure and Environment which provided a review of the performance of Scottish Borders Council's Winter Service during 2022/23 and presented SBC's proposed Winter Service Plan for 2023/24. The Winter Service Plan was contained in Appendix A to the report. SBC provided a winter service on almost 3,000km of roads and 787km of footway across the Scottish Borders. The Winter Service Plan was reviewed annually and presented to Elected Members to outline the steps what aimed to make sure, within available resources, that the road and footway network was safe over the coming year. As part of the Fit for 2024 programme of transformational change, the Council was required to modernise and adapt all of its services to meet present and anticipated future needs in a responsive and agile manner, ensuring that services could continue to be delivered cost effectively and sustainably, while delivering efficiencies and savings where required. The winter of 2022/23 was not significant in terms of snowfall, which was limited to a few occasions. Incidents of ice and prolonged frost were also less than the previous five-year average and on a par with those experienced the previous winter. That led to a reduced need to treat primary and secondary routes as frequently and resulted in lower-than-average salt usage. The Winter Service Plan for 2023/24 was similar to the previous 2022/23 Plan in terms of policy, priorities, routes, call out arrangements and resource planning. Section 5 of the report provided details on a revised salt spread rate regime that was trialled, on approximately half of the primary precautionary salting routes, last year. It was proposed that the trial should be continued in the coming winter. The Infrastructure Manager, Mr Brian Young presented the report and responded to Members questions. Mr Young highlighted that no adverse feedback had been received from the public regarding in the trial. Members welcomed the plan and highlighted that the Council delivered an excellent winter treatment service across the region. In response to a question regarding the 359 tons of salt which had been saved as a result of the trial, Mr Young explained that salt was ordered in advance of the winter to ensure that supplies were available and that the saving represented an on the ground one. Regarding the definition for success for the trial, Mr Young confirmed that the trial aimed to deliver the same high levels of service whilst also making savings. It was highlighted that the colder nights of the year no real savings could be made. In response to a question regarding the future outlook following the trial, Mr Young outlined that the fleet was always being developed, and that it would be difficult to affect large scale changes in a short period of time. Regarding feedback of the trial, Mr Young explained that feedback from the crews undertaking the work of delivering the plan was used to assess how effective salting regimes had been. Mr Young confirmed that the vehicles in the fleet were flexible, and that a snow plough would not be fitted to a vehicle which was carrying out gritting treatment. The Director – Infrastructure and Environment acknowledged the need for the different SBC services to communicate and work more collaboratively with each other to deliver services across the region. In response to a question regarding incidents where access to local and minor roads were being covered by snow ploughed from main roads, Mr Young explained that due to the way snow ploughs operated it was an which was hard

to avoid. Mr Young confirmed that work was ongoing to ensure that more data could be provided in map form to show where roads had been treated.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) note the performance of the Scottish Borders Council Winter Service during 2022/23**
- (b) endorse the Winer Service Plan for 2023/24; and**
- (c) to note the continuation of a trial in relation to the salting spread rates applied on 50% of the primary precautionary salting routes.**

5. SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S QUARTER 1 2023/24 PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director – People, Performance and Change which presented a summary of Scottish Borders Council's Quarter 1 2023/24 performance information. The information contained within this report would be made available on the SBC website: www.scotborders.gov.uk/performance. The Director – People, Performance and Change, Mrs Clair Hepburn, presented the report and highlighted that of the 21 milestones reported in the quarter, 11 were showing positive progress. 5 milestones would be completed in future quarters and 5 had been partly completed. Of the 99 performance indicators presented, 66 were in a good position and 17 were highlighted as areas of focus for improvement. There was a delay in receiving information for 8 of them. 6 were provided for information only and 2 had not been reported in the quarter. Mrs Hepburn highlighted that the Community Action Team was back up to full strength from 1st June, and that the upturn in statistics reflected that. Members welcomed the report, and that the information would be published online for the public to examine. In response to a question regarding the collation of information on Facebook engagements, Mrs Hepburn confirmed that Communications had access to technology to undertake analysis. Members highlighted that the occupancy rate of industrial and commercial units had been stable, and that the working age population ages 16-64 employment rate had increased to its highest figure in 4 years. The figure of 79.4% was higher than the rate in Scotland, 74.4%, and Great Britain, 75.6%. Regarding Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, the Chief Executive explained that the Council Management Team received regular updates on the type of FOI's received across the Council. A considerable volume of requests were regularly received from journalists, the Scottish Government, Public Bodies and the wider public. The legislation had placed a significant logistical burden on all public sector entities, and the Council undertook to comply with the legislation to the best of its ability. The Council was committed to proactively publishing information where it was able to do so, however some information could not be published for a variety of reasons. In response to a question regarding people volunteering with the Council, Mrs Hepburn explained that there was a range of different ways that people volunteered, and that there was no specific post for a member of staff to have oversight of volunteers. A large proportion of volunteers came from third sector organisations, and they were often involved in care home initiatives or similar programmes. Mrs Hepburn acknowledged the disappointment expressed regarding the low levels of parking tickets issued and highlighted that following the CAT returning to full staffing levels further capacity was present to undertake enforcement.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the Quarter 1 2023/2 Council Plan Key Milestones and Performance Indictors Report contained in Appendix 1 to the report; and**

- (b) note the Quarter 1 2023/24 Community Action Team Performance Report contained in Appendix 2 to the report.

6. **PRIVATE BUSINESS**

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 1 to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

7. **MINUTE**

The Private Section of the Minute of the meeting held on 15 August 2023 was approved.

8. **HAWICK SITE PURCHASE**

A report by the Director – Infrastructure and Environment was considered, and its recommendations approved.

9. **URGENT BUSINESS**

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chair was of the opinion that the item dealt with in the following paragraph should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to keep Members informed.

10. **EASTGATE THEATRE**

Members received a verbal update regarding the Board of the Eastgate Theatre, Peebles.

The meeting concluded at 11.55 am