

## SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

19 MAY 2016

### APPENDIX I

#### **Question from Councillor Logan**

To the Executive Member for Economic Development

When will the report on the structure, membership and the proposed operation of the Great Tapestry of Scotland project be brought to Council for debate?

Reply from Councillor Bell

Officers currently anticipate that a report will be brought to Council in August.

Supplementary

Councillor Logan asked for confirmation of the commitment not to commence construction before the report was considered. Councillor Bell did not recall any such commitment being given but advised that, although the necessary permissions were in place, there were still a number of matters to resolve so he did not anticipate construction commencing before August.

#### **Question from Councillor Mountford**

To the Leader

What progress has been made on developing a fit-for-purpose sound amplification system for the Council Chamber?

Reply by Councillor Cook in the absence of Councillor Parker

The replacement and or refresh of the Council Chamber audio and video equipment is included within the scope of the CGI contract that commences on 1 October 2016. The final detailed specification of the equipment will be agreed with CGI to meet the required outcomes for the Chamber. Work on the Audio equipment in the Chamber is currently scheduled to commence planning in September 2016 and complete delivery by the end of the year.

#### **Question from Councillor Bhatia**

To the Executive Member for Economic Development

What effect would Britain leaving the European Union have the Borders' economy?

Reply by Councillor Bell

The Scottish Borders economy is linked to that of the wider European economy in a number of ways.

1. Borders firms export goods to the EU. Although export figures are not available at local authority level, the latest official figures for Scotland show that the annual value of exports to the EU was £7.1bn in 2014-15 while the value of imports was £5bn, a surplus of £2.1bn.

The UK as a whole has a trade deficit with the EU. To put that in context: Scottish exports to the rest of the world were worth £11.1bn and imports were worth £8.8 bn, a surplus of £2.3bn.

Leaving the EU would potentially affect the ability of exporters to trade with the Single Market and much would depend on the outcome of the UK Government's negotiations with the EU regarding trading arrangements going forward.

2. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a key component of overall investment in the Scottish economy. Of the top 10 nations that were the origin of such projects in Scotland in 2014, 40% were from the US and 19.7% from the EU. Again, there is no equivalent information at local authority level.

If the UK was to leave the EU, there is a significant risk that the level of FDI would fall as businesses became unable to use the UK as a 'launch pad' into the larger EU market. This could have an adverse impact on the ambition for inward investment in the Scottish Borders. There may also be a potential impact on the area if businesses that are currently located in the Borders decide to relocate to an EU country in order to more easily trade with the larger market area.

3 The Scottish Borders has received around £11m in EU funding during the past decade which has been used to help fund infrastructure projects, business development, and regeneration. This figure does not include payments to farmers from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which amount to around €600m across Scotland.

Although it is likely that the UK as a whole would benefit from leaving CAP without the introduction of new government subsidies, the farming sector would not, particularly in less favoured areas such as the Borders. In terms of EU Structural Funds, there is uncertainty as to whether these could be replaced by a new form of regional policy that would support those areas facing the most significant economic challenges.

4. Tourism is a key sector for the Scottish Borders economy. VisitScotland reports that in 2014 overseas visitors to the Borders spent £12m of which £8m was spent by visitors from Germany, France, Netherlands, Poland, Ireland, and Spain. Clearly, the EU provides the largest market of overseas visitors to the area. It is not clear if these numbers would be maintained if we left the EU.

Finally, 5. There is free movement of people across EU member states and this has had an impact on the labour market, with a number of local businesses employing considerable numbers of EU nationals. Of the Scottish Borders population at the time of the 2011 Census, 2.5% were identified as coming from EU nations excluding Ireland; slightly above the figure for Scotland of 2.6%.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Bhatia asked if the Executive Member agreed that it would benefit the Borders to remain in the EU and that Councillors should support this. Councillor Bell advised that the response had been formulated by officers but confirmed that he personally considered that the evidence was clear that the Borders benefited from being in the EU and that all Councillors should make their position on the matter clear.

#### **Question from Councillor Marshall**

##### To the Executive Member for Planning and Environment

I am aware of a number of derelict buildings within the Scottish Borders that have been subject to emergency repairs, some of these on numerous occasions. How much has this cost the Council over the past 12 months?

##### Reply from Councillor Smith

Over the past 12 months the Council has pursued 80 cases involving dangerous buildings. The Council has been required to undertake emergency works in 13 of those cases at a total cost of £6,058. Respective owners have been invoiced for those works. It is anticipated a further 7 of the outstanding cases are likely to require direct action works by the Council. The cost of these works has not yet been quantified.

Councillor Marshall may wish to note that a number of premises in Hawick have required to be re-visited multiple times during this period including:

Former Armstrongs premises – 3 visits  
Former N Peal building – 3 visits  
Former Woodcocks building – 3 visits  
Former Glenmac factory – 2 visits.

Councillor Marshall may also wish to note that the total outstanding costs for works undertaken by the Council for these 4 premises in the past 5 years is £39,338.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Marshall asked what the success rate was in terms of collecting money spent on these properties from the owners. Councillor Smith advised that he could obtain this information and further advised there were three methods of recovery, namely issuing invoices to the owners, placing charging orders on the buildings or using debt recovery. He also advised that the Council had limited powers in terms of which aspects of buildings they could deal with. This mainly covered the external fabric of the building but that no action could be taken in respect of fixtures and fittings.

### **Question from Councillor Greenwell**

To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

Can the Executive Member update us on what progress the roads review is making and when we can expect a report to come to Council?

Reply from Councillor Brown in the absence of Councillor Edgar

In line with the recommendations agreed at the Executive Committee on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016, the business case is currently being prepared and it is anticipated that officers will bring a report to Council on the 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

Supplementary

Councillor Greenwell asked if it was agreed that the current regime of road repairs including potholes was not sustainable and that a more permanent solution was required and this was accepted by Councillor Brown.