

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

29 JUNE 2016

## APPENDIX I

### OPEN QUESTIONS

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

To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

There have been recent concerns regarding the lack of effective maintenance of cemeteries across the Borders specifically relating to headstones that have been laid flat on safety grounds and grassed areas that are badly overgrown.

Can the Executive member for Environmental Services explain why regular maintenance and grass cutting is apparently not taking place to an acceptable standard?

Can he confirm if there has been a reduction in staff or indeed a reduction in hours committed to this specific role in order for his department to carry out this important and emotive council service?

#### **Reply from Councillor Paterson**

An effective maintenance schedule remains in place for the Councils maintenance activities in all of its 154 cemeteries and churchyards. This is demonstrated through the hard work and commitment of the staff employed to undertake this maintenance

The Council has a duty to maintain cemeteries and included in this duty is to keep them safe. Headstones, particularly those of a certain age, can become unstable and in thankfully very rare instances have been the cause of death or serious injury to the public, as was the case in the tragic circumstances in Glasgow on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

The Council has a five year rolling programme for inspection and repair. Where repair isn't possible the Council opts to lay headstones down, therefore removing the threat posed by the unstable structure. Opportunities to re-erect headstones are taken wherever possible and is supported by the efforts to work in partnership across the Scottish Borders with the Unpaid Work team, who deliver part of this important work in cemeteries.

Neighbourhood Operations delivers work across the environmental service area including Grounds Maintenance, Street Cleansing, Public Conveniences, Bereavement Services and Roads maintenance including winter maintenance. Whilst there have been changes in the staff numbers across the whole of neighbourhood operations since 2011, there has been no decrease in the staff deployed in the role of cemetery maintenance.

Periodically issues around grass cutting do emerge. Grass cutting is a very seasonal activity, and is influenced by many factors including the weather, other priorities clashing with grass cutting such as providing support to Civic Events including Common Ridings and planting seasonal plants which at this time of year takes place in late May or early June. This can result in grass growth appearing long at some locations and with a little patience and through the efforts of the staff employed we very quickly are able to return to business as normal during these times.

Staff in our Neighbourhood operations Service are responsible to provide grass cutting services within our cemeteries and churchyards. Councillors or members of the public/interest groups who wish to compliment/comment or complain should contact one of five area teams, located in each of the Councils administrative regions. They will work to look into the issue and respond or undertake work within their remit as soon as possible.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Marshall read out a complaint from a constituent regarding Wiltonhill Cemetery and overgrown grass around graves, asking for reassurance that this neglect would not continue.

Councillor Paterson advised that he had visited both cemeteries in Hawick and had not witnessed any problems. However, he asked that any future complaints be directed to himself or relevant staff for investigation.

### **Question from Councillor McAteer**

#### To the Executive Member for Economic Development

The Galashiels town centre co-ordinator was announced on 16 December 2014 and has been in post for 18 months. His role was to work closely with the council's economic development team and in partnership make a real difference to Galashiels Town centre. We were advised that this pilot scheme 'will also help determine the potential for the council to develop similar roles in other towns in the Scottish Borders'. When are we likely to see the result of this pilot project and can Future Hawick and those other Border town in need of similar co-ordination support see that happen anytime soon?

#### Reply from Councillor Bell

A review of the Galashiels Town Centre Coordinator role is planned to be undertaken during the summer, with the results being reported to Executive Committee at its Economic Development themed meeting on 4 October 2016. As with other pilot projects, it was always intended that it would be reviewed towards the end of its delivery period. The review will consider opportunities, costs and risks as well as potential future actions.

#### Supplementary

Councillor McAteer sought assurances that the Council would find ways to help other communities after this lengthy pilot. Councillor Bell advised that in addition to Town Centre Co-ordinators there were other models and commented on the upcoming BIDS ballot to be held in Selkirk. Town Centre Co-ordinators cost between £80k to £100k each so funds would need to be identified from other services if these posts were to be rolled out elsewhere. He emphasised the need for local businesses to get involved for such posts to succeed and be sustainable, confirming that all aspects of the pilot would be fully evaluated.

### **Question from Councillor Cockburn**

#### To the Depute Leader (Finance)

Please can you tell us the amount of revenue raised in the last year when letting out the Galashiels Transport Interchange conference facilities for non SBC events?

#### Reply fro Councillor Parker in the absence of Councillor Mitchell

In 2015/16 income from private use of conference facilities was £2,150.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Cockburn asked if similar facilities were being adversely affected. Councillor Parker advised that this issue had never been raised with him.