

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL held in Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells on 29 June 2016 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:- Councillors G. Garvie (Convener), S. Aitchison, M. Ballantyne, S. Bell, C. Bhatia, J. Brown, J. Campbell, K. Cockburn, M. Cook, A. Cranston, G. Edgar (from para 20), V. Davidson (from para 6), J. Fullarton, I. Gillespie, J. Greenwell, B. Herd (from paragraph 8), W. McAteer, S. Marshall, D. Moffat, S. Mountford, A. Nicol, D. Parker, D. Paterson, F. Renton, R. Smith, R. Stewart, J. Torrance, G. Turnbull, T. Weatherston, B. White.

Apologies:- Councillors W. Archibald, G. Logan, J. Mitchell, S. Scott.

In Attendance:- Depute Chief Executive (People), Depute Chief Executive (Place), Corporate Transformation and Services Director, Service Director Assets & Infrastructure, Service Director Regulatory Services, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Legal Officer, Chief Officer HR, Chief Roads Officer, Clerk to the Council.

1. **CONVENER'S REMARKS**

The Convener congratulated the Counting Officer and her staff for the successful delivery of the recent EU Referendum.

DECISION NOTED.

2. **ORDER OF BUSINESS**

The Convener varied the order of business as shown on the agenda and the Minute reflects the order in which the items were considered at the meeting.

3. **MINUTE**

The Minute of the Meeting held on 19 May 2016 was considered.

DECISION

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

4. **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the following Committees had been circulated:-

Local Review Body	18 April 2016
Civic Government Licensing	22 April 2016
Scrutiny	28 April 2016
Audit & Risk	9 May 2016
Executive	10 May 2016
Galashiels Common Good Fund	12 May 2016
Eildon Area Forum	12 May 2016
Local Review Body	16 May 2016
LLP Strategic Governance Group	17 May 2016
Hawick Common Good Fund	17 May 2016
Teviot & Liddesdale Area Forum	17 May 2016
Civic Government Licensing	20 May 2016
Executive	24 May 2016
Planning & Building Standards	30 May 2016
Petitions and Deputations	31 May 2016
Duns Common Good Fund	2 June 2016

Berwickshire Area Forum	2 June 2016
Local Review Body	6 June 2016
Executive	7 June 2016
Lauder Common Good Fund	8 June 2016
William Hill Trust	8 June 2016
Selkirk Common Good Fund	8 June 2016

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes listed above subject to paragraph 5 below.

5. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to paragraph 3 of the Minute of the Executive Committee of 24 May 2016, it was recommended that Council agreed that Eccles/Leitholm Primary School be mothballed with immediate effect for a temporary period.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the recommendation that Eccles/Leitholm Primary School be mothballed with immediate effect for a temporary period.

6. OPEN QUESTIONS

The questions submitted by Councillors Marshall, McAteer and Cockburn were answered.

DECISION

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

7. RESPONDING TO THE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT (SCOTLAND) ACT CONSULTATIONS ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION REQUESTS AND ASSET TRANSFER

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive on the proposed responses to the two Scottish Government Consultation Papers on Participation Requests and the Draft Regulations, and Asset Transfer linked to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. At the time the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 was passed it recognised that many parts of the legislation would come into force at different times and that this would involve secondary legislation (orders and regulations) and guidance. A briefing session would be organised for Council members to explain these various aspects of the Act. In March 2016 the previous Scottish Government issued a series of consultation papers on aspects of this secondary legislation and guidance including those on Participation Requests, Draft Regulations and Asset Transfer. The deadline for responses had been extended until the end of June 2016 to enable the Council's response to be submitted. With reference to the consultation response on Draft Regulations for Asset Transfer under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Councillor Davidson proposed that the response to question 5 should include a requirement for groups to evidence support from their local community. With reference to the consultation response on the Draft Participation Request (Procedure)(Scotland) Regulations 2016, Councillor Ballantyne proposed that the response to question 2 be amended to include the need, in the interests of equality, for a paper application to be submitted. These amendments were accepted and the final wording of the response be delegated to the Senior Policy Adviser.

DECISION

AGREED, subject to the amendments detailed above:-

- (a) **the response to Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Participation Requests Consultation on Draft Regulations as set out in Appendix 3 to the report and subject to the above amendment;**
- (b) **the response to the Asset Transfer under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Consultation on Draft Regulations as set out in Appendix 5 to the report and subject to the above amendment; and**

- (c) **to note that a briefing session would be organised for Council members explaining the various aspects of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act.**

8. RESPONSE TO THE FIRE AND RESCUE FRAMEWORK FOR SCOTLAND 2016 CONSULTATION

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive on the proposed response to the Scottish Government's Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016 Consultation. The report explained that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework 2016, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report, which was the subject of this consultation aimed to set out the priorities, objectives and overall performance targets that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) must meet to carry out its functions. Those related to public safety, efficiency and effectiveness of the service. The deadline for responses was the 15 June 2016 but this had been extended to enable the Council's response to be approved and submitted. The proposed response from the Council was set out in Appendix 2 to the report and had been circulated to members of the Scottish Borders Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board for their comments. The main aspect of the draft response was that supporting local accountability and flexibility should be brought out as a strategic priority within the Framework. In addition it was important that the needs of rural regions such as the Scottish Borders were fully taken into account in the assessment of national and local risks and that this was fully recognised in the allocation of operational and specialist resources. Councillor Moffat highlighted the need for local flexibility which would allow the Service to work with Councils to meet local needs. Partnership working by the Service was commended and it was suggested that they should be encouraged to share their expertise in this area with other organisations.

DECISION

AGREED the response to the Scottish Government's Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016 Consultation as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

9. CHANGES TO PROCUREMENT LEGISLATION

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer on the requirements and impact of the new Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and the updated European Union Procurement Directives. A copy of the Sustainable Procurement Strategy was issued at the meeting. The new legislation came into force on 18 April 2016. Some elements of the changes were being phased during 2016. The overall ambition of the changes was to drive further procurement reform by establishing a national legislative framework for sustainable procurement, supporting economic growth by delivering economic, social and environmental benefits, supporting innovation and promoting processes and systems which were transparent, streamlined, standardised, proportionate, fair and business friendly. In a number of these areas, the Council already operated in line with or beyond the practice proposed therefore existing governance achieved some of the requirements contained within the legislation. However, the changes to the regulatory framework were complex and would require a significant amount of work, stakeholder engagement and training throughout 2016 to achieve full compliance by the end of the phased parts by December 2016. This work created a positive opportunity to dovetail with other governance changes required through the development of the new ERP system and, specifically, Internal Audit recommendations relating to Contract Management and associated new Standing Orders for Procurement.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) **note the update on the changes to procurement and the work underway to deliver a compliant service to the organisation;**
- (b) **approve the content of the general policy statements relating to Fair Working Practices and the Provision of Food;**

- (c) **approve the new Sustainable Procurement Charter and agree for it to be published on the Council website and further distributed as appropriate; and**
- (d) **note the development of a Corporate Contract Management approach which, in due course, would form part of new Procurement & Contract Standing Orders.**

10. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer seeking approval for an updated version of the Council's Financial Regulations. The report explained that the Financial Regulations were a key element in the governance arrangements for the Council. They focused primarily on the financial control, management and administration of the Council's financial affairs. The Regulations were last comprehensively reviewed in March 2012 and these updates reflected the corporate restructuring, amendments to the Council's Scheme of Administration, recognition of the Council's subsidiary organisations, reference to the HR People Planning process and the inclusion of an "Employee Responsibilities" section. Generally the Regulations had been brought up to date to reflect changes in management responsibilities and procedures. There were no substantial changes in terms of the principles behind the Regulations or the control arrangements currently in place. Changes to systems, business processes and procedures and ways of working following the implementation of the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system would require a further update of Financial Regulations to ensure these remained fit for purpose in the new operating environment. It was agreed the date on the front cover of the Regulations be amended to read June 2016.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the revised Financial Regulations shown at Appendix 1 to the report for immediate implementation.

11. SESPLAN: RATIFICATION OF PROPOSED STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services seeking ratification of SESplan Proposed Plan and Action Programme and the noting of associated documents. The report explained that the SESplan Proposed Plan provided the strategic long term context for the preparation of Local Development Plans within south east Scotland. It set out a vision and a series of outcomes in relation to the creation of a thriving, successful and sustainable region. It included a number of housing and infrastructure proposals of direct relevance to the Scottish Borders. The SESplan Proposed Plan was accompanied by a suite of associated documents including the Action Programme which set out the proposals for delivery alongside the Plan. Members noted the level of development proposed for the Scottish Borders area. Reference was made to the Planning Review by Scottish Government, which could result in changes to SESplan; cross border implications; and the A7.

DECISION

- (a) **AGREED to ratify the SESplan Proposed Plan and Proposed Action Programme as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 of the report.**
- (b) **NOTED:-**
 - (i) **the following associated documents: Housing Background Paper (Appendix 4); SDP2 Transport Appraisal (Appendix 5); Updated Environmental Report and Habitats Regulation Appraisal (Appendix 6); Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment (Appendix 7), and;**
- (a) **the publication proposals as set out in paragraphs 3.20-3.22 of the report.**

12. HAWICK ACTION PLAN

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director which provided a first opportunity for Council to discuss the Initial Hawick Action Plan, published in March 2016, and agree the priority actions that should be taken forward in

the first instance. Since the announcement of the closure of Hawick Knitwear at the start of the year and the subsequent Business Breakfast workshops led by the then Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, Mr Fergus Ewing MSP, an Initial Hawick Action Plan had been prepared. This was based on the issues and opportunities for growing the economy highlighted at the workshop held in February 2016. The Action Plan was structured around three key themes which came through strongly at the Business Breakfast. The first theme focused on making Hawick a 'Great Place for Working and Investing'. The second theme focused on making Hawick a 'Great Place for Living and Learning' and the third strategic theme focused on making Hawick a 'Great Destination to Visit', aiming to make Hawick a great place to visit and stay. The work was being led by a partnership of Scottish Borders Council, Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland. However, it was also imperative that local businesses and other local organisations in Hawick became actively involved in taking forward actions and activity to support the development of the town and its economy. The ongoing challenges facing Hawick were highlighted by the recent announcement by Peter Scott Knitwear that it was considering the closure of its manufacturing operation in Hawick, with the potential loss of a further 50 jobs. There was a risk that a self-fulfilling negativity was becoming entrenched in the community. It was essential at this time that all those with an interest in the future of Hawick work together to build a more positive image and culture of self-belief for the town and this needed to be a feature of the Action Plan. It was noted that a scheme for rates relief was also being investigated but it needed to be able to demonstrate economic benefit. Members welcomed the report and again highlighted the need for everyone to work together in a positive way, with local Members providing a cohesive leadership for the town.

DECISION

(a) NOTED the Initial Hawick Action Plan 2016 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

(b) AGREED:-

- (i) that the Council should support further work with businesses in Hawick over the Summer 2016 period; and**
- (ii) to ask the Corporate Transformation and Services Director to present an update report to the Committee in Autumn 2016 setting out progress, clear priorities and actions for the Council, and the anticipated resource requirements, including how they may be funded.**

13. HOUSEHOLD WASTE CHARTER

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Neighbourhood Services proposing that Scottish Borders Council sign-up to the voluntary Household Waste Charter and associated Code of Practice. The report explained that in 2014 the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed to convene a Zero Waste Task Force to identify recommendations for the transformation of the management of public sector waste into an effective feedstock for the circular economy. A key recommendation from the Taskforce was that Local Authorities should be empowered and enabled to move towards more consistent recycling collection systems whilst allowing Councils to design services in accordance with local needs and issues. This approach had now been articulated into the Household Recycling Charter and associated Code of Practice, which had been scrutinised and approved by COSLA Leaders. The 'Charter' was entirely voluntary and it was at the discretion of each individual Local Authority whether to sign-up or not. A review of the Code of Practice indicated that the majority of Scottish Borders Council's current kerbside collection services were not compliant with the requirements of the Code. The most significant changes that would need to be made if Scottish Borders Council was to deliver a Code of Practice compliant service were:

- Cease providing a comingled collection of Paper, Card, Cans and Plastics (i.e. blue lidded bin) and replace it with two containers. One for Paper and Card and another for Metals and Plastics.
- Either increase the number of bottle banks or provide a kerbside glass collection service.

- Consider reducing the volume of non-recyclable waste (i.e. general waste – Grey Bin) collections.

In a joint letter, Councillor Stephen Hagan - COSLA Spokesperson for Development, Economy and Sustainability - and Richard Lochhead - Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food and Environment - had asked that Councils sign up to the Charter. Formally signing up to the 'Charter' did not commit Local Authorities to designing and implementing services that would result in higher costs than currently budgeted for. The implication of this was that if achieving Charter compliance was affordable (either with or without funding) and efficient this would require the Council to deliver the service changes. Where there was a funding shortfall, compared to existing budgets, an application would be made to the Scottish Government for financial support. If the application was rejected, no service changes would be required or enforced. This matter had been considered by the Waste Management Plan Member Officer Reference Group and they supported the recommendation to sign up to the Charter. It was noted that the Charter did not mention residual waste reduction. The challenges for a rural authority were also highlighted and it was unlikely that the same service could be provided across the Scottish Borders as this was impractical.

DECISION

AGREED that:-

- (a) Zero Waste Scotland continue to provide support to complete the options appraisal/transition plan;**
- (b) following completion of the options appraisal and stakeholder engagement a report would be presented at a future Council meeting for consideration prior to implementation; and**
- (c) Scottish Borders Council reserved the right to opt out of the Charter if it was not considered to be in the best interests of the Council.**

14. ON-STREET PARKING AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Officer Roads on the progress and findings of the Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) Working Group and to seek permission to undertake further work and analysis prior to a final decision being made in relation to the control of on-street parking. The report explained that following the withdrawal of the traffic warden service there had been a reduced monitoring and enforcement service of waiting and loading restrictions within the area's towns and villages. This in turn had led to concerns of reduced compliance and poorer traffic management as well as increased public dis-satisfaction and complaint. An officer/member Working Group was set up to look into the issue and explore the options available to the Council in relation to the future control of on-street parking. The Working Group had concluded its work and made recommendations on what it considered the preferred way forward for the Council. The report noted that much of the information on illegal parking was to a large extent anecdotal. In order to undertake a proper analysis of the scale of the problems a specialised company would be required to undertake full day surveys and analysis in a number of key towns. Indicative costs of £17,700 had been obtained for undertaking 0800 -1800 surveys and providing detailed analysis in a number of key town centres. It was proposed that the single day parking surveys were undertaken in the towns listed in the report and a further report brought back to Council prior to deciding upon whether to proceed with the feasibility study outlined. Members supported the survey proposal and Councillor Parker moved approval of an amended recommendation (d) to include the towns of Eyemouth, Jedburgh, Innerleithen, Lauder and Selkirk at an increased cost of £32,500. Councillor Bhatia also requested that West Linton be included. Members supported these additions and commented on the issues in particular towns. While many of the complaints about parking came from businesses, few were received from the public so any changes would need to be subject to full consultation. Councillor Cockburn, seconded by Councillor Moffat, moved in terms of Standing Order 36 "That the question be now put". On a show of hands Members voted as follows:-

For - 22 votes
Against - 6 votes

The debate was therefore closed.

DECISION

(a) NOTED:-

- (i) the updated position in regard to on-street parking control and in particular the findings and recommendations of the Member/Officer Working Group;**
- (ii) the concerns raised under financial risks in terms of affordability; and**
- (iii) the alternative of using the powers provided within the Police and Fire (Reform) Act 2012 to inform the Local Policing Plan as a mechanism for greater control of on-street parking enforcement in the future.**

(b) AGREED:-

- (i) to the funding of parking studies in the following key town centres; Duns, Eyemouth, Galashiels, Hawick, Jedburgh, Kelso, Innerleithen, Lauder, Melrose, Peebles, Selkirk and West Linton at an indicative cost of £32,500 to be funded from within the existing Place budget;**
- (ii) that following the analysis of the parking studies a further report on the findings would be presented to the Council in September 2016; and**
- (iii) that should the Council decide to support DPE then a full public consultation be undertaken and that proposed details on this be presented to the Council in September 2016.**

15. BELLWIN CLAIM 2015/16 – UPDATE

With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of the Executive Committee of 19 April 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer providing an update regarding the claims for financial assistance being progressed in response to the major flooding events caused by major storms Desmond, Frank and other flooding events during the 2015/16 financial year. The report outlined the progress on revenue works being undertaken under the Government funded "Bellwin Scheme". It also outlined how the claim was progressing towards completion and indicated the expected size of the unaudited claim at £3.5m. The report also provided detail of an application to secure further capital funding of £0.925m for flood damage under a separate government backed compensation scheme being operated through the Society of Chief Officers of Transportation in Scotland (SCOTS) for flood affected Councils.

DECISION

NOTED the:-

- (a) extent and costs of works undertaken to date and those remaining to be completed in response to major flooding events experienced over the winter 2015/16;**
- (b) proposed timing of the Interim and Final Audited claims in respect of Bellwin;**
- (c) progress made to date on remedial works under the Bellwin Scheme and works remaining to be completed; and**

- (d) **further funding compensation application that was being progressed through SCOTS for capital flooding repair works that were not eligible for Bellwin funding.**

16. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION – PROPOSALS

With reference to paragraph 11 of the Minute of 25 February 2016, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive on the final report and recommendations being made by the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland to Scottish Ministers for the number of Councillors and the Electoral Ward Boundaries for the Scottish Borders Council area. Despite the submissions made by the Council the Commission had recommended that, from May 2017, Scottish Borders Council should comprise 32 Councillors in 10 Wards, comprising 2 Wards each returning 4 Members, and 8 Wards each returning 3 Members. Members expressed their disappointment with the recommendations and particular concern regarding the proposals for the Hawick and Jedburgh Wards. Councillor Cook, seconded by Councillor Brown, moved:-

“That Scottish Borders Council agrees that representation be made to the Minister for Parliamentary Business on the following basis:-

- (a) This Council reaffirms its view that any link between councillor numbers and deprivation must be evidenced;*
- (b) The Boundary Commission's inflexibility on the number of voters in wards was causing division between established communities;*
- (c) The Council reaffirms its previous representations to the Local Government Minister on this issue in April 2014, May 2015 and February 2016; and*
- (d) That no change should be made to councillor numbers in the Borders or nationally until a clear, comprehensive and evidence-based review had been conducted.”*

This was unanimously supported.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Motion as detailed above.

17. EARLY RETIREMENT/VOLUNTARY SEVERANCE

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive seeking approval for 7 members of staff who had requested early retirement and voluntary severance. If all 7 applications were approved, a total one-off cost of £161,812 would be incurred. In total, £254,478 of direct recurring employee cost savings would be delivered each year. The average payback period for all staff was 0.64 years.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the 7 current proposed applications as detailed in the report with the associated costs being met from the voluntary severance/early retirement budget for 2016/17 of £161,812.

18. URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Convener 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 make an early decision.

19. URGENT EUROPEAN MOTION

Councillor Parker, seconded by Councillor Bhatia proposed the following Motion:-

“Scottish Borders Council notes the outcome of the European Referendum, including the clear majority for Remain in the Scottish Borders and in Scotland.

Council welcomes the contribution that EU citizens make to our region and celebrates the cultural, economic and social ties that bind us.

Council recognises the efforts being made by the Scottish Government on a cross party basis to pursue discussions about protecting Scotland's place in the EU with the U.K. Government, other devolved administrations, EU institutions and member states.

Council is concerned about the outcome of the Referendum and its potential impact on the Border's economy. The Council urges the UK government to do all it can to protect Borders and UK businesses, and the UK's future role in Europe.

Council calls upon the UK Government to demonstrate, in due course, significant public support for the final arrangements it comes to with the European Union."

Councillor Parker spoke in support of his motion and accepted an addition by Councillor Aitchison that the words "before any final decision to leave was taken" to the end of the final paragraph. Councillor Ballantyne, while accepting the spirit of the Motion, requested that the following amendments were made:-

That in the third paragraph the words "the EU" be replaced with "Europe", that in the fourth paragraph the words "is concerned" be replaced with "recognises the concern" and that the final paragraph be removed.

Councillor Turnbull seconded these amendments. Councillor Parker was not prepared to accept these amendments so a vote by show of hands was taken.

Vote

Motion - 21 votes

Amendment - 7 votes

The Motion was accordingly carried.

DECISION

DECIDED to approve the following Motion:-

"Scottish Borders Council notes the outcome of the European Referendum, including the clear majority for Remain in the Scottish Borders and in Scotland.

Council welcomes the contribution that EU citizens make to our region and celebrates the cultural, economic and social ties that bind us.

Council recognises the efforts being made by the Scottish Government on a cross party basis to pursue discussions about protecting Scotland's place in the EU with the U.K. Government, other devolved administrations, EU institutions and member states.

Council is concerned about the outcome of the Referendum and its potential impact on the Border's economy. The Council urges the UK government to do all it can to protect Borders and UK businesses, and the UK's future role in Europe.

Council calls upon the UK Government to demonstrate, in due course, significant public support for the final arrangements it comes to with the European Union before any final decision to leave was taken."

MEMBER

Councillor Stewart left the meeting.

20. **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 1, 6, 8 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

21. **Convener**
The Convener commented on a recent press article.
22. **Minute**
The private section of the Council Minute of 19 May 2016 was approved.
23. **Committee Minutes**
The private sections of the Committee Minutes as detailed in paragraph 5 of this Minute were approved.
24. **Great Tapestry of Scotland Update**
Members noted a report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director providing an update on the Borders Railway Blueprint Project to establish a permanent home for the Great Tapestry of Scotland.
25. **Tweedbank Future Development Opportunities**
Members noted and approved a joint report by the Corporate Transformation and Services Director, the Service Director Regulatory Services and the Service Director Assets and Infrastructure providing an update on future development opportunities for Tweedbank.
26. **City Region Deal**
Members noted and approved a report by the Chief Financial Officer providing an update regarding the development of a City Region Deal.

The meeting concluded at 2.05 p.m.

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 26th 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 from 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.