

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
25 AUGUST 2016
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor McAteer

To the Executive Member for Planning & Environment

There is a growing and well organised campaign to create a Borders National Park. The current proposals suggest a boundary closely aligned to the county of Roxburghshire with the notable exclusion of Hawick. Public meetings have been held with a stakeholder event scheduled at Jedburgh Town Hall on 17 November 2016. Given a significant level of public interest can the Executive Member describe the extent of the engagement that has taken place with the organisers and what position this council is proposing to take to support or otherwise development of the National Park?

Reply from Councillor Smith

Officers from the Council's Planning Service have had contact with the original author of the "Unfinished Business" report and the local campaign group over the past 2 years.

A formal meeting with members of the local group, who are promoting the idea of a National Park, was held on 7th March this year. In attendance were officers from Economic Development and Planning, as well as myself and Councillor Bell. The group have since had a further meeting with Dr Chris Bowles (Archaeologist) to talk about heritage assets in the area.

Officers have expressed the view that the proposal for a Cheviot National Park would be unlikely to meet the qualifying criteria set out in the National Parks Act. In addition, they are not convinced that such a designation would actually deliver the benefits the proposers are suggesting. Officers also have concerns about the economic implications of the park, its administration and financial viability. There would also be added legal complications should this be promoted as an extension of the Northumberland National Park.

It is understood that the campaign group are undertaking a feasibility study the results of which could be considered in due course. However as matters stand officers are not convinced that a sound case has been made for a National Park.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer asked if officers' views could be shared and continue to be shared. Councillor Smith advised that the Council had made no public comment on this matter to date and that it was in the hands of the promoters to submit their case to the Council. He further advised that a meeting held with the promoters had not been negative but a number of aspects relating to the proposal needed to be addressed before it could be taken further.

Question from Councillor Marshall

To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

It is over 3 months since the new dog wardens service were deployed to towns in the Borders, Can the Executive Member tell us how many fixed penalty tickets have been issued for dog fouling offences and what percentage remain unpaid?

In addition can he explain the working hours and shift patterns that they are working within our communities?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

The two 3GS Enforcement Officers who work on behalf of Council have to date issued 33 Fixed Penalty notices in the Scottish Borders since starting in May this year, one of which has been in respect of dog fouling.

A robust collection process is in place and approximately 50% of fines are being collected at this time.

The officers are working a very flexible shift pattern incorporating early starts and late finishes depending on the nature of complaints received and the weekly tasking provided by the Safer Communities Team.

They are also working at weekends as well as attending community events to raise the profile of their work.

All towns and most villages are subject to patrols and resources are targeted using the information obtained from the public. Specific areas of concern have started to see a reduction in complaints.

It's important to recognise that the Enforcement Officers are only one aspect of the Council's approach to tackling dog fouling and irresponsible dog ownership. A number of other measures are being taken which include the use of stencils, a new anti-dog fouling campaign and the introduction of the new Green Dog Walkers Scheme.

It is still very early days of this pilot but the officers are being well received by our communities and overall I consider this to be a very positive start.

Supplementary

Councillor Marshall asked if Councillor Paterson was satisfied that just one ticket had been issued. Councillor Paterson replied that it was a work in progress, with wardens deployed at various times of the day. Offenders were very difficult to catch in the act but he also emphasised the importance of dog owner education.

Questions from Councillor Fullarton

To the Executive Member for Social Work

1. Could the Executive Member give us an update on the state of Care Homes in the Scottish Borders? There are concerns about closures of Care Homes elsewhere in the Country due to lack of residents. Could we have an update on the viability of the homes in the Borders? Are self-directed care packages having an impact on care homes in the Borders?

Reply from Councillor Renton

There are 21 care homes for older people within the Council area. One home has closed over the last 18 months for a variety of reasons, but the overall vacancy level for Care Homes is running at 2% across the sector (on July figures). The majority of the homes are running at full capacity.

However, it is noted that there have been some issues raised that are being addressed around more specialised aspects of Care Home provision particularly nursing care, due primarily to the difficulty in recruiting trained nurses. This has led to two homes moving from nursing to a residential based service.

The other area for development is the need for more specialised dementia care resource(s) so as to minimise hospital admissions.

To date there is little evidence to suggest that self-directed care packages are having any impact within the care home sector.

Supplementary

Councillor Fullarton commented on the pressure on care homes and the recent closure of several homes by Four Seasons and asked if underfunding of social care was an issue. Councillor Renton assured him that officers had noted his concerns and would be keeping the situation under review.

2. Could the Executive Member please provide an update on self-directed support in the Borders and how it is working?

Reply from Councillor Renton

There are now approximately 800 people using Self-Directed Support, an increase of over 100% in the last year. The majority of people are choosing to use the social work managed option i.e where their Care Manager arranges their support directly.

However, there are also over 200 people purchasing their own support through a direct payment, and a number of people are using a mix of options. There is a slow uptake of the Individual Service Fund, which is the new option where people use an existing provider but arrange the timings of their support directly with them, thereby offering a greater degree of flexibility. This is partly due to the lack of capacity in the provider market to offer the flexibility people want. However following the recent successful care at home tender a number of providers have indicated that they are keen to explore this option further.

The recent appointment to a one year Local Area Coordinator post in Teviot for older people and adults with a physical disability, funded through the Scottish Government SDS budget is a response to the SDS survey last year. People responded that they wanted more information about, and connection to, their community. This post will offer support to reduce isolation and prevent people having to seek traditional social work services and already has proved very helpful for a number of families.

Supplementary

Councillor Fullarton commented on the slow uptake and asked for assurances that there was ample funding available from the Council. Councillor Renton believed there was sufficient funding but would confirm this with officers.

3. To the Executive Member for Roads & Infrastructure

Could the Executive Member please inform us when the bus service between Chirnside and Eyemouth, previously provided by Waites, will be reintroduced?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The number 37 bus service between Chirnside and Eyemouth will continue to be operated by Travelsure. This company has run this service off-peak since the contract with Wait's finished in 2013. The school journeys on this service were withdrawn in 2013 due to very low passenger numbers which was affecting its financial sustainability. The only regular passengers at that time were out of catchment school children attending Eyemouth High School. There is no plan to re-introduce these journeys at present.

No school transport is provided between these two points as Chirnside is in the Berwickshire High School catchment area and there is no statutory requirement on the Council to do so. However over the past three years it has been possible with agreement from Wait's for privilege lifts to be awarded on their Y04 contract to Eyemouth High School as the number of entitled pupils have fallen. Wait's have had their Operator's Licence revoked by the Traffic Commissioner from 31st August. Emergency contracts to replace those run by Wait's are currently out to tender. At this time the unfortunate position is that it is not known who the new operator will be, where they will operate from or if spare capacity will be available.

Supplementary

Councillor Fullarton asked for assurances that privilege lifts for pupils attending Eyemouth High School would be included as part of the tender. Councillor Edgar advised that while every effort would be made to accommodate privilege lifts no guarantees could be given until the new provider was known and he reiterated that the Council was not obliged to provide such lifts.

Question from Councillor Scott

To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

Since Jedburgh is the only major settlement without a recycling centre could the portfolio holder update us on how he is going to rectify this? The Scottish Government is going to spend £100m on Infrastructure Projects – would the Executive Member consider applying for this money for this project?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

The Council has invested in excess of £2 million over the last two years upgrading its Community Recycling Centres and developing a new facility at Kelso.

The development of a similar facility in Jedburgh would require further significant capital investment (around £600,000) and ongoing revenue support (around £150,000) at a time when there is significant pressure on the Council's budget.

Whilst I accept that Jedburgh is now the largest town without its own facility it is important to consider this request in relation to the existing service provision provided across the Borders as a whole.

Council's across the UK are in the process of reducing the costs associated with their waste services and in many cases this has included reducing the number of Community Recycling Centres and/or reducing their hours of operation.

A Waste Management Plan is being developed which will include a review of Community Recycling Centres. The focus will be on optimising the current service provision whilst delivering efficiency savings.

The availability of capital funds from the Scottish Government may help reduce pressure on the Council's already stretched capital budget. However, even if the capital funding was available for this type of development it would not resolve the ongoing year on year running costs of such a facility which is critical for any business case.

Given the current financial situation it is hard to see a business case for the development of a new facility at Jedburgh in the foreseeable future.

Supplementary

Councillor Scott asked if there was funding of £20k for a feasibility study. Councillor Paterson advised that this was not the case. Additional funds had been spent at Kelso and at other sites.

Question from Councillor Turnbull

To the Executive Member for Community Safety

What resilience do you think Police Scotland has in the Scottish Borders now, compared to the resilience experienced on 31 March 2013?

Reply from Councillor Nicol in the absence of Councillor Moffat

This question about resilience should be directed at Police Scotland and as a Board member there is an opportunity for you to raise this with the Divisional Commander Chief Superintendent Ivor Marshall at the next meeting of the Council's Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Scrutiny Board on Friday 16th September 2016.

According to the Police Performance reports submitted to the Scottish Borders Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board crime detection rates have been above the Scottish average in the Scottish Borders since 2013. For the year ending the 31st March 2016 the crime detection rate stood at 55.7% as reported at the June 2016 meeting of the Board. This represented a 4.6 percentage point increase in crime detection rate compared to the previous year 2014/15.

Also a high proportion of the public as evidenced in the Scottish Borders Household Surveys have consistently indicated that they feel safe in the home at night and walking alone at night.

The inception of Police Scotland has enabled additional specialist resources to be provided to the Scottish Borders and there has also been the opportunity to utilise a much wider pool of resources in the case an emergency situation or major event.

Supplementary

Councillor Turnbull confirmed he would raise the matter at the next meeting but asked if Councillor Nicol was satisfied that Police Scotland were meeting the needs of the Borders. Councillor Nicol advised that this should be put to the police and suggested the Board Members might wish to discuss possible questions before the next meeting.

Questions from Councillor Ballantyne

1. To the Executive Member for Economic Development

Following their appointment by Council on 29 May 2014, how many times did the Tapestry Project Short Life Member Working Group (Cllrs Parker, Archibald and Davidson) meet and what items did they discuss?

Reply from Councillor Bell

The short life working group with the indicated membership was set up to oversee completion of the business case. That work was concluded in December 2014 when the business case was presented at a Member Seminar prior to consideration and acceptance by Council at its meeting on 18 December 2014. I understand that the group met once and considered the draft material prior to its consideration by Members at the seminar.

2. To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

Audit Scotland's Report on The Condition and Costs of Maintaining Scotland's Roads identifies Scottish Borders as delivering the largest deterioration (9%) in local road conditions in Scotland. What does the Executive Member attribute this to?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

It is a Council decision to allocate and balance appropriate levels of funding to the often competing demands being placed upon it, and this includes the funding allocation for the General Roads and Bridges Capital Block. In the context of ever diminishing and finite financial resources, the deteriorating condition of Scottish Borders Council's adopted road network can partially be attributed to the current planned surface treatment works programme not being able to arrest the overall decline in road condition which is further exacerbated by inclement weather, the expansive rural nature of the network and usage of the roads network by vehicles serving the agricultural, forestry and windfarm industries.

The Roads Review also currently being undertaken within the Place Department will seek to deliver improved efficiencies in relation to planned, reactive and cyclical works affecting the roads network ensuring that a better return on investment is achieved and the maximum benefits derived from the investment being made.

Supplementary

Councillor Ballantyne asked if Councillor Edgar could confirm that Members were adequately informed and had decided to allow this deterioration to happen. Councillor Edgar agreed there were competing priorities for funds and looked forward to receiving Member support when the budget was approved in February.