

# SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE held in the COUNCIL  
CHAMBER, COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS,  
NEWTOWN ST BOSWELLS on Thursday,  
22nd September, 2016 at 10.00 am

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Present:- Councillors G. Logan (Chairman), W. Archibald, K. Cockburn, I. Gillespie,  
B Herd, W. McAteer and A. J. Nicol.  
Apologies:- Councillors A. Cranston and J. Torrance.  
Also Present:- Councillors S Aitchison, D Paterson.  
In Attendance:- Service Director Children & Young People, Chief Officer Education & Lifelong  
Learning, Service Director Neighbourhood Service, Waste Manager,  
Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (J Turnbull).

## 1. **MINUTE**

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of the Minute of 18 August 2016. With reference to paragraph 3.6 of the Minute of 18 August 2016, it was agreed that the following amendment be added to the Minute.

Paragraph 4.7, line 6 – change “non-competitive action” to “single tender action”.

- 1.2 It was noted, that the amendment had been incorporated in the final version of the Scrutiny Working Group’s report – ‘A Review of the Process in Respect of Decision-Making’.

## **DECISION**

**AGREED the Minute subject to the above amendment.**

## 2. **ASYMMETRIC WEEK**

- 2.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of the Meeting of 18 August, the Chairman welcomed Ms Donna Manson, Service Director Children and Young People; Ms Michelle Strong, Chief Officer Education and Lifelong Learning; Mr Paul Fagan, Depute Headteacher, Peebles High School and Ms Anne Marie Bready, Headteacher, Edenside Primary School, Kelso. The officers were in attendance to give a presentation on the implementation of the Asymmetric Week.
- 2.2 Mr Fagan began the presentation from a secondary school perspective. He explained that previously there had been a 30 period week which had been inherently inefficient because of teachers’ class contract time, resulting in 25 – 45 minutes of teaching time lost each week. The Asymmetric Week had introduced a 33 period week which had enabled efficient timetabling, facilitated the introduction of a greater number of courses for students and increased student support. Mr Fagan referred to Selkirk High School where there had been a reduction in the number of teachers. However, efficiencies in the Asymmetric Week had enabled the school to retain their existing timetable. The 33 period week had also meant that there was less need for supply teachers as there was greater flexibility within schools. More efficient timetabling has also resulted in savings for supply budgets.
- 2.3 Mr Fagan advised that feedback from eight secondary schools had shown an overwhelmingly positive response that the Asymmetric Week had increased breadth and choice for students. Mr Fagan gave an example of Eyemouth High School where, as a result of rurality, certain opportunities had not been taken up. With the introduction of the

Asymmetric Week the school had been able to utilise two additional periods, on a Wednesday afternoon, to enhance the learning experience for students, providing a leadership qualification, whilst protection class time.

- 2.4 Mr Fagan went on to advise that in respect of Peebles High School, all students now had a personal support period, with one learning support teacher assigned to every 15 students. The sessions had proved positive for students. However, the sessions would not have been possible under the 30 period week, when there had been insufficient teacher capacity.
- 2.5 Mr Fagan further advised that feedback received from four secondary schools showed that the Asymmetric Week had also had a positive impact on attainment. Jedburgh High School had used the additional time available to offer six periods of Higher education, previously this had been five. Peebles High School had seen increased attainment in literacy and numeracy; every student now having five periods of mathematics and additional tuition in English. Mr Fagan went on to advise that the Asymmetric Week afforded schools more flexibility and increased options. There was now a greater alignment of timetables with best practice shared between schools. Kelso High School and Jedburgh High School were working together as was Eyemouth High School and Berwickshire High School. Borders College had also aligned their timetable to secondary schools making their courses more viable in terms of increased attendance.
- 2.6 Mr Fagan concluded by stating that the Asymmetric Week had been a resounding success in Peebles High School. Students had an enhanced learning experience with supported learning and greater choice. As a result attainment had increased. Parents had also welcomed the increased choice. Staff morale had also improved, teachers using Friday afternoons for reflection and preparation for the following week.
- 2.7 Discussion followed and Members raised a number of questions. Ms Manson advised that HM Inspectors had not inspected secondary schools since the introduction of the Asymmetric Week. However, Scottish Borders Council (SBC) had carried out an inspection and had evidence to support the positive change the introduction of the Asymmetric Week had achieved for students and teachers. The change to school hours was discussed and Mr Fagan explained that initially there had been concern that a reduction in the lunchbreak from one hour to 50 minutes would affect access to lunchtime sporting activities. To mitigate against this, Peebles High School had improved access to lunch with "grab and go" meals, for students participating in lunchtime activities. There had also been a positive impact in terms of students' behaviour during lunchbreaks. Mr Fagan advised that it was a requirement that students received two periods of physical education each week, a 33 period week had allowed this to be increased to three periods per week. Ms Strong added that in addition, a number of schools now delivered school sports on a Friday afternoon. Mr Fagan acknowledged that the introduction of the Asymmetric Week had been cost neutral. However, now teacher capacity was used more efficiently, therefore providing greater opportunities for students.
- 2.8 Ms Anne Marie Bready, Edenside Primary School, was in attendance to give a primary school's perspective on the Asymmetric Week. She explained that the children's working day had moved to four longer days, Monday to Thursday 9 am to 3.30 pm, with a shorter day on Friday – 9.00 am to 12.50 pm. Edenside Primary School, had one of the larger school rolls with 325 pupils and had introduced staggered lunchbreaks for older and younger children. The schools' focus on the morning was literacy and numeracy. Teachers welcomed the extension in the afternoon, to three teaching blocks, to allow for interdisciplinary learning, art and science. Ms Bready advised that younger children did the bulk of their learning in the morning. The older children, with more learning stamina, continued into the afternoon. The Asymmetric Week enabled teachers to attend cross authority training on Friday afternoons e.g. motivational speaker sessions, GIRFEC and pastoral meetings without disruption to teaching time

- 2.9 Discussion followed and Members raised a number of questions. Ms Breadie advised that provision of additional childcare had not been viable with only three parents stating they would utilise the service. Parents planned ahead and family members assisted or they had a parents' rota for childcare. There had not been a huge demand for After School Friday Clubs; families choosing to make their own arrangements for childcare or choosing to maximise this time with their children. Ms Breadie acknowledged the public perception that teachers had more time off, explaining that teachers had a huge commitment to learning. Teachers used Friday afternoons to collaborate with other teachers and to discuss the needs of vulnerable children.
- 2.10 Councillor Aitchison, Executive Member for Education, was in attendance and thanked officers for their interesting presentation which highlighted that small changes could make a significant difference. Children were spending less time in school but results had improved. Friday afternoons were now spent with parents and grandparents which was positive for families and children. The Asymmetric Week had been a success; children and staff were more focused and motivated with increased opportunities for children.
- 2.11 The chairman thanked Councillor Aitchison and officers for their very informative and interesting presentation.

## **DECISION**

**NOTED the presentation.**

## **3. MEMBER**

Cllr McAteer left the meeting following consideration of the above item.

## **4. COMMUNITY RECYCLING CENTRES - UPDATE ON RE-USE/REMARKETING OF GOODS**

- 4.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of the Meeting of 18 August 2016, there had been circulated a report by Service Director Neighbourhood Services providing an update on the re-use/remarketing of goods received at Community Recycling Centres. Ms Jenni Craig, Service Director Neighbourhood Service and Mr Ross Sharp-Dent, Waste Manager were in attendance. Mr Sharp-Dent advised that over the last 10 years the Council had made significant changes to the way it managed waste with a focus on improving recycling performance and reducing waste going to landfill. As people moved towards a more circular economy, where they kept products and materials in use for as long as possible, this focus was likely to shift to waste prevention and re-use. Progress had been made by the Council in relation to re-use in the following areas:

- Supporting local re-use organisation
- Bulky Waste
- Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE)
- Selkirk Re-Use Pilot
- Just Cycle – Bicycle re-use
- Wood and Furniture re-use
- Textiles.

- 4.2 The Waste Resource Action Programme (WRAP) had undertaken re-use case studies and developed a best practice guide for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's). This confirmed that there were further opportunities to improve re-use at the Council's Community Recycling Centres. Mr Sharp-Dent highlighted that it was important to recognise that the Council faced a number of key challenges in improving re-use at Community Recycling Centres including : A lack of space for providing re-use facilities; a disconnect between the number of customers who wished to deposit items for re-use versus those that wanted to purchase re-used items; impending financial and legislative drivers which required a continued focus on recycling and diversion from landfill, at least in the short to medium term. It was clear that re-use was going to play an ever important

role as we moved towards a circular economy and this required the Council to continue to make progress and explore opportunities in this area.

- 4.3 Mr Sharp-Dent further advised that a number of re-use organisations, most of which had charitable status, operated across the Scottish Borders e.g. Homebasics, Berwickshire Furniture (BFR) and Just Cycle. The Council provided financial support as part of Service Level Agreements currently with Homebasics, Scrap Store and Book Donors. In return those organisations provided information on re-use, which supported the Council's recycling performance figures.
- 4.4 The Council also accepted Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) at Community Recycling Centres. This equipment was uplifted free of charge under contract by a Producer Compliance Scheme (PCS). However, recent changes to WEEE's Code of Practice could mean that providers might be less inclined to support this concept going forward. Mr Sharp-Dent went on to discuss the Selkirk Re-Use Pilot whereby the Council provided a shipping container and a Service Level Agreement with Homebasics to provide them with large domestic appliances. This pilot had been successful. Unfortunately, not all recycling centres had the capacity to implement this scheme due to lack of space.
- 4.5 Mr Sharp-Dent referred to Galashiels Men's Shed where the Council provided bicycles for repair and re-use. The project had now developed into Just Cycle, a locally registered charity based at Tweedbank. Just Cycle recycled unwanted bicycles and made them available at an affordable price. The Waste Services section was working with Just Cycle to expand the number of bike donations at its waste facilities across the Borders. Selkirk Community Recycling Centre would be the next facility to accept bike donations.
- 4.6 Mr Sharp-Dent continued that the Waste Service section was exploring other re-use opportunities such as wood re-use. The Council had identified space at Galashiels Community Recycling Centre for storage of wood and it was hoped to commence this operation shortly. If this project was successful it would be extended to other sites. Mr Sharp-Dent went on to advise that 78% (119 tonnes) of textiles went for re-use. As part of the arrangement with Nathan Wastesavers, SBC received an income which supported wider waste services. SBC would continue to work with the third sector to identify and develop partnership working.
- 4.7 Councillor Nicol had circulated information regarding Oskars, a recycling facility in Paisley, and asked if SBC could introduce a similar scheme. Mr Sharp-Dent advised that Oskars provided a similar facility to Homebasics and BFR. He emphasised it was important that the Council continued to work in tandem with these organisations and utilise their expertise to ascertain which waste streams they were able to recycle.
- 4.8 Following discussion, a number of questions were raised. In terms of staff training, Mr Sharp-Dent advised that staff had a good knowledge of what was reusable. However, the material needed to be placed in separate, clean containers and not all sites had this storage capacity. The lack of space was a real challenge and would require investment. Ms Craig added that in terms of making a success of re-use and remarketing of goods, SBC needed to look at where investment was required and work with charitable organisations to draw down funding. Strengthening partnership working was a way to progress. With regard to the re-use of light bulbs from PPI schools in primary schools, Ms Craig would discuss with the Service Director Asset and Infrastructure and advise Members outwith the meeting. There was a discussion on the temporary closure of sites, without notice, when goods for recycling were being uplifted. Mr Sharp-Dent advised that a split level site enabled the site to remain open e.g. Hawick, Kelso and Selkirk sites. However, in Galashiels the site had to be closed for public safety. It was also not feasible to advise in advance when the site would be closed as the operator travelled to many sites and was unable to specify an exact time for collection. However, site managers did try to minimise disruption. Hopefully, in the future, sites would be improved to allow operators to access the site without requiring closure to the public. Mr Sharp-Dent

concluded by advising that organisations such as Homebasics provided significant benefits in terms of recycling and re-use of goods. However, these organisations were voluntary. Most of their funding came from Zero Waste Scotland and was limited. Recycling and re-use was the right way to progress but this was not a statutory requirement. However, SBC would continue to facilitate recycling and re-use by working closely with organisations, to continue to develop and progress the service across the Borders.

- 4.9 Councillor Paterson, Executive Member for Environmental Services, was in attendance and stated that community recycling centres did a fantastic job. Feedback from the public was extremely positive. He referred to Hawick Men's Shed Organisation who were repairing and recycling old furniture. He emphasised the importance of recycling and re-use continuing, supported by SBC.
- 4.10 The Chairman thanked officers for the interesting presentation. After further discussion it was agreed that SBC's Waste Management Member Officer Working Group be asked to consider ways in which Council could facilitate and encourage arm's length organisations to continue and expand this valuable upcycling/recycling facility.

#### **DECISION**

**(a) NOTED:-**

- (i) The progress made in providing re-use facilities at Community Recycling Centres;**
- (ii) The challenges in providing re-use facilities at the Council's Community Recycling Centres; and**
- (iii) Supports the continued development of re-use facilities at Community Recycling Centres, where affordable and practicable.**

**# AGREED to RECOMMEND that the Waste Management Member Officer Working Group be asked to investigate initiatives to facilitate Arm's Length Organisations continuing and expanding the valuable re-use and remarketing facility at the Council's Community Recycling Centres, as part of their consideration of the new Waste Management Plan.**

#### **5. SCRUTINY REVIEWS**

- 5.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of 18 August 2016, there had been circulated copies of the updated list of subjects which Scrutiny Committee had been asked to review and which included the source of the request, the stage the process had reached and the date, if identified, of the Scrutiny meeting at which the information would be presented. In addition, Members were also asked to consider further subjects for inclusion on this list for presentation at future meetings of the Committee. When deciding whether subjects would be reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee, Members required a clear indication from the initiator of the request as to which aspects of the subject they wished to be reviewed. This would enable the Committee to determine whether the subject was appropriate for consideration.
- 5.2 The Democratic Services Team Leader explained the current status of the reviews listed and Members discussed a number of the items on the timetable. It was agreed to progress the review of the Community Empowerment Act on 26 January 2016, together with the review on Timber Transportation. Councillor Gillespie advised that he would liaise with the Service Director Children and Young People regarding a suitable date for the review on Home Schooling. Councillor McAteer had requested the review on Policies and Procedures for Competitive Marketing and Management of Information be presented this year, and this was agreed. Members were keen that all reviews were timetabled before the end of their current term of office.

**DECISION**

**AGREED** the list of subject for review by Scrutiny Committee as amended and appended to this Minute at Appendix 1.

6. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would take place on Thursday, 27 October 2016.

**DECISION**

**NOTED.**

*The meeting concluded at 11.45 am*