

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 21 March, 2017 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Aitchison (Chairman – Education Business), S. Bell, C. Bhatia, J. Brown (from para 2.2), M. Cook, V. Davidson (from para 1.2), G. Edgar, J. G. Mitchell, D. Moffat, D. Parker (Chairman), D. Paterson, F. Renton, R. Smith.

Also present:- Councillor I Gillespie

Apologies:- Mrs J. Aitchison

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Service Director Children and Young People, Service Director Neighbourhood Services, Democratic Services Team Leader, Financial Services Manager, Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

EDUCATION BUSINESS

Present:- Ms A. Ferahi, Mr G. Donald, Mr D. Moore, Miss E. Page.

CHAIRMAN.

Councillor Aitchison chaired the meeting for consideration of the education business. Before the first item on the agenda Councillor Aitchison gave presentations to the pupil representatives who had contributed to the Education-themed Executive Committee and said a little about their future plans for further education. On behalf of the Executive Committee, he referred to the value of hearing the student voice at meetings and thanked them for their valuable contribution, adding that they were a credit to their schools. The pupil representatives who received presentations at the meeting were Lauren Cardwell, Rory Hamilton, Izzie MacLean, Duncan Moore, Eilidh Page and Isabella Timmins. Lucy Anderson had been unable to attend and would receive her presentation in school.

MEMBER

Councillor Davidson joined the meeting during discussion of the presentation below.

1. **ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE & EQUITY - CLOSING THE ATTAINMENT GAP - PUPIL EQUITY FUNDING**
- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Children and Young People outlining the drive to raise attainment for all Borders children and to close the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged. A presentation to accompany the report was given by the Service Director, Donna Manson, with further information provided by Senior Lead Officer, Liz Wharton. Setting out the national context it was explained that the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework (NIF) published in January 2016 and 'Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education', published in June 2016, placed a duty on all schools from August 2016 to have a strategy for closing the attainment gap. Nationally, £120 million had been provided by Scottish Government to help schools raise attainment with a focus on supporting those children and young people who faced barriers to their learning due to the impact of poverty. This was referred to as Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Borders schools would receive a total of £1.8 million PEF for 2017/18. The sum that each school would receive varied considerably from £1,200 to £130,000. A breakdown of the allocation to schools was provided as an appendix to the report. Although there was a sharp focus on the poverty-related attainment gap Mrs Manson explained that Scottish Borders Council would take a sensitive and inclusive approach. The directorate had established a strategic group, comprising volunteer Headteachers, two senior officers and an attainment advisor from Education Scotland. The work of the strategic group would have two main dimensions:

universal approaches for raising attainment for all; and targeted interventions to achieve equity for learners and close any attainment gap. Head teachers were accountable for the use of PEF within their schools and reporting processes to parents were to be incorporated into plans. To ensure the greatest impact from PEF, two people would be seconded to work with schools on planning, monitoring, measuring and evaluating the specific strategies to ensure improved outcomes. These posts would be funded through school carry-forwards.

- 1.2 Members discussed the report and received answers to their questions. With regard to parental involvement Mrs Manson referred to the positive engagement of parent councils and a noticeable change of attitude to a more inclusive approach. Home School Link workers would be involved to assist individual families where appropriate. She advised that a new Quality Indicator, relating to Family Engagement, had been introduced in respect of schools' performance monitoring. It was recognised that there was a challenge around engaging with all parents. Ms Ferari believed that there was a willingness from parents to be involved and suggested that there may be advantages for parent councils to engage through cluster groups. In response to a further question, Mrs Manson confirmed that there was alignment between the Scottish Government framework and the aspirations of Scottish Borders Council with regard to quality improvement. There had been a shift in the approach within Curriculum for Excellence towards nurture with the key being to make a difference to children's lives. There was further discussion about how to evaluate the impact and improvement attributable to PEF over and above existing working practices. It was noted that a report on progress would be brought back to the Executive after a period of 12 months

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the strong focus on raising attainment for all and reducing the attainment gap, particularly for those children and young people who faced barriers to their learning due to the impact of poverty.**
- (b) **AGREED that a report on progress be brought back to the Executive Committee in March 2018.**

MEMBERS

Councillor Brown joined the meeting before the presentation below and Councillor Edgar left the meeting during discussion of the presentation.

2. EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE - EXPANSION TO 1140 HOURS

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Children and Young People to update the Committee and seek approval for the proposed strategic approach to the delivery of 1140 hours funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds in communities across the Scottish Borders by 2020. The report also shared information on the trial of extended flexible ELC currently underway at Philiphaugh Community School Nursery, funded by the Scottish Government. A presentation to accompany the report was given by senior lead officer, Grace Frew. The report explained that nationally by 2020 all three and four years, and around 27% of two year olds, would be entitled to 1140 hours of free Early Learning and Childcare provision – almost double current levels of entitlement. The current entitlement of 600 hours ELC was provided by Scottish Borders Council with varying levels of flexibility by 46 school nurseries, commissioning arrangements with 28 partner providers and 2 childminders (who were part of a pilot project until June 2017) for three and four year olds. Two year old provision was delivered through 7 school nurseries, 13 partner providers and 5 childminders. The focus over the forthcoming financial years would be the strategic development of school nursery provision encompassing both capital and revenue investment. This would include property, the workforce, demographics and the needs of our most vulnerable families. The proposal was to develop a cluster approach to provision, within each High School cluster, having an Early Learning and Childcare Hub which would

offer full day care, 50 weeks per year. This would be developed by a five year phased approach. The report gave details of Phase 1 - a trial of ELC which started on 9 January 2017 at Philiphaugh Community School Nursery – and of Phase 2 with 7 schools offering extended hours from August 2017. This phased approach would utilise learning and data to inform planning for future phases of the Service Delivery Plan. The report proposed re-allocation of capital spend for 2017-18 to provide a new ELC provision in St Boswells Primary School, the largest Primary currently without ELC and no sustainable ELC partner provider.

- 2.2 Members welcomed the proposals outlined. In response to questions Mrs Manson confirmed that, within Phase 3, criteria for the location of extended ELC provision would include the capacity for generating employment and that development of the project would be in collaboration with the private sector. Also in Phase 3 the rural schools who did not currently have provision would be submitting plans. In further discussion Members questioned the capital and revenue implications of the extended hours. It was agreed that an additional element be added to the report's recommendations to request that a report on the financial implications be brought to the Executive Committee in June 2017.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) **the proposed strategic approach to the delivery of extended ELC;**
- (b) **the continuation of the trial;**
- (c) **the allocation of the Early Years capital budget 2017/18 to the build of a new ELC provision in St Boswells Primary School;**
- (d) **to proceed with a full options appraisal regarding the identification of priorities for early learning and childcare building investment and to bring recommendations to a future meeting; and**
- (e) **that a report on revenue and capital implications of the phasing of these steps be brought to the Executive Committee in June 2017.**

CHAIRMAN

This being the last meeting of the Education – themed Executive Committee before the Local Government Election, Councillor Aitchison thanked staff, Members and representatives for their work and contribution over the past five years. On behalf of the Committee, Councillor Bhatia thanked Councillor Aitchison for the energy and commitment he had brought to the Borders in his role as Executive Member for Education.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11.35 am and reconvened at 11.45 am

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

When the meeting reconvened, Councillor Parker took the Chair for the remaining business.

3. **MINUTE**

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 7 March 2017 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

4. FINAL REVENUE VIREMENTS AND EARMARKED BALANCES 2016/17

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer seeking approval for the final 2016/17 budget virements and approval to carry forward identified earmarked budgets to 2017/18. The monitoring of the General Fund Revenue Budget at the end of January had identified the final virements and earmarked balances for 2016/17. These included routine virements, as shown in Appendix 1 to the report and earmarked balances, shown in Appendix 2, where it had been identified that budget was required to be carried forward to support expenditure in 2017/18.

DECISION

APPROVED:-

(a) the virements in Appendix 1 to the report; and

(b) the earmarked balances in Appendix 2 to the report.

5. HOUSING BENEFIT OVERPAYMENT AND DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Neighbourhood Services, seeking approval of the Housing Benefit Overpayment and Debt Recovery Policy. The report explained that in administering Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Council had a responsibility to recover any Housing Benefit which had been overpaid. It was essential for the Council to demonstrate that it carried out administration and recovery of Housing Benefit efficiently, effectively and fairly and followed the guidance issued by the DWP. The policy, attached as an appendix to the report, had been based on the DWPs recommended model and replaced the policy which was agreed by Committee in June 2000. It provided clarity on how the Council would interact with claimants and their agents in the administration of Housing Benefit overpayments and set out a clear debt recovery strategy. In answer to questions, the Service Director explained that there was a distinct two-stage process before a decision to recover overpayment would be made. A claimant could ask for a reconsideration or appeal against a decision. She advised that historically the number of fraudulent claims was low but could provide the exact numbers if required.

DECISION

APPROVED the Housing Benefit Overpayment and Debt Recovery Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, to take effect from 1 April 2017.

6. ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM SUSTRANS

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services providing details on additional funding from Sustainable Transport Charity, Sustrans, for cycling and walking related projects in the Scottish Borders. Sustrans was very supportive of the work the Council was undertaking and had made a significant contribution to a number of projects throughout the Scottish Borders over a number of years. Graeme Johnstone, Lead Officer for Access and Transport, explained that Sustrans had allocated £140k in additional spend for cycling and walking related projects for the Scottish Borders area which would be allocated into the current financial year and the 2017/18 financial year. Detailed in a table within the report were the seven projects that would benefit from this funding and indication of the proposed spending allocation. Path construction at Duns High School and feasibility work in connection with the Hawick Flood Defence Scheme would be match funded. Fully funded would be detailed design work for routes from Kelso to Sprouston, Kelso to Roxburgh, Earlston to Leaderfoot, Peebles to Eddleston and path construction at Lauder. Members welcomed this report and the Chairman asked for thanks to Mr Johnstone to be recorded for identifying funding to bring many schemes to fruition.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the additional funding of £140k allocated to Scottish Borders Council from Sustrans for cycling and walking related projects.**
- (b) AGREED:-**
 - (i) the spending allocations as detailed in table 4.1 of the report; and**
 - (ii) to approve the virements in 2016/17 and 2017/18 as detailed in Table 4.1 of the report.**

7. ANNUAL REPORT ON THE SOCIAL WORK STATUTORY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES FROM 1 JANUARY 2016 TO 31 DECEMBER 2016 AND NEW SOCIAL WORK COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

There had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Chief Social Work Officer and Service Director Neighbourhood Services, providing information on the number and types of complaints received by Social Work from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016, summarising the changes arising from 113 complaints and improvement actions. The report was presented by the Service Director, Jenni Craig, who summarised the main points and answered questions. During 2016 there had been 113 complaints received which was an increase of 22.82% from the previous year. Of those received 36% were not upheld. The report detailed the nature of the complaints and improvements identified for 2017 arising from complaints-based intelligence. The report also outlined the new statutory social work complaints provisions introduced by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsmen (SPSO) and sought approval of the revised Social Work complaints handling procedure (SW CHP). Following a period of consultation the SPSO had published 'The Social Work Model Complaints Handling Procedure' together with associated guidance for implementation. This would provide a standard approach to handling customer complaints about Social Work services across Scotland. Adoption and implementation of the standardised SW Model CHP was required from 1 April 2017 and would coincide with the implementation of a new National Health Service Model CHP bringing both social work and National Health Service (NHS) services into line with the existing local authority standard CHP. A new SBC SW Model CHP was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. It followed in its entirety the SPSO SW Model CHP. The new CHP moved from a 3 or 4 stage process to a 2 stage process and removed the stage in the current complaints procedure for consideration by a Complaint Review Committee. In considering the report's recommendations Ms Craig asked that recommendation (c) be removed.

DECISION

- (a) NOTED the annual report information on Social Work Statutory Complaints procedures from 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2016.**
- (b) AGREED:-**
 - (i) to approve the Social Work Model Complaint Handling Procedure (SW CHP), as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, for all complaints relating to Social Work services whether they were delivered through Scottish Borders Council, ALEOs or the Health and Social Care Partnership, from 1 April 2017; and**
 - * (ii) to recommend that Council disband the Social Work Complaint Review Committee once the process for all social work care complaints raised before 1 April 2017 had been completed.**

8. **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 the Appendix to this minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of part 1 of schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

9. **HOUSING BENEFIT AND COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION VERIFICATION POLICY**

The Committee approved a report by the Service Director Neighbourhood Services.

The meeting concluded at 12.15 pm