

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**  
**30 AUGUST 2018**  
**APPENDIX I**

**OPEN QUESTIONS**

**Question from Councillor Paterson**

To the Leader

Will Scottish Borders Council be following the lead of North Lanarkshire Council and be providing free sanitary products for ladies that are unable to pay for them?

Reply from Councillor Haslam

The Council are planning to provide 'all pay cards' to all secondary aged female, transgendered and non-binary pupils, so that they can purchase free sanitary wear in local outlets in a dignified manner. This option will also enable the purchase of sanitary wear all year round and the most personalised, private and dignified solution for pupils.

We are also looking to remit to the CPP the consideration of how free access to sanitary wear for vulnerable adults in the Scottish Borders could be taken forward.

There are no plans, at the moment, for wider distribution of these products.

**Question from Councillor McAteer**

To Executive Member for Children & Young People

In the months prior to this year's school holidays, Hawick High School suffered disruption from a small group of persistent unruly children. Their actions impacted pupils and teachers and resulted in wide-scale public concern. Can the Executive Member assure her colleagues, the parents and most importantly the children who have returned for the new school term that these problems are now resolved and that they will be able to study in a safe, secure and fully staffed learning environment?

Reply from Councillor Haslam

None of us should be under any misapprehension about the nature and intent of this question. It is an unashamed attempt by the Member to stoke fears in the school and community for his own narrow political purposes. That is utterly reprehensible, and it is not a situation that we in this Chamber should countenance again. If the Member is truly concerned for the interests of those he claims to represent, let him approach me with the issues directly, and I and the Service Director will work with him and others to develop a collective approach to issues which arise. If, on the other hand, the Member persists in fear-mongering for petty political gain, then he shames himself and this Chamber, and does gross disservice to the ward he is supposed to represent.

Working with partners, Hawick High School has put in place a range of supports to respond to the needs of a small group of students, as well as implementing an approach to build a positive school ethos for the benefit of all. The school has a range of new staff both teaching and non-teaching, and home economics and fashion & textiles have been reinstated. The school has a vacancy in technical that remains unfilled despite several adverts and one principal teacher post which has had to be re-advertised. The school has a plan with the leadership team to manage this post. This is already known to the Member or would be if he had troubled to pursue this matter in the constructive way normally adopted by Members.

He asks can I assure council colleagues, parents and new children at the school term that the problems are fully resolved? It is important to realise that complex issues of the type which gave rise to the difficulties experienced in Hawick cannot be switched off like a light. However, I am confident that with the arrangements we have put in place and ongoing support that pupils will enjoy the secure and motivational educational environment that we expect.

In responding, I have referred to the efforts of the Council and its partners. Together these organisations have provided leadership. The obligation of leadership does not end with the Chief Executive, Service Director or the Executive Member. All of us in this chamber have a duty to provide leadership, most especially where the circumstances of our communities demand it. Going

forward, I look to the Councillor to provide the reassurance, the support and leadership that his position in Hawick demands.

### Supplementary

Councillor McAteer advised that he had been requested by the community to ask this question and asked if assurances could be given to the people of Hawick that the school was safe and secure for pupils and teachers. Councillor Haslam responded that the school was safe and secure and advised that children were not born bad but needed a support network in place to help them overcome their problems.

### **Questions from Councillor Marshall**

#### 1. To Executive Member for Children & Young People

With the commencement of the new school term - Can the Executive Member confirm that Burnfoot School is fully staffed with fully experienced teachers and can she also indicate the ratio of probationer teachers to experienced staff?

Can she also reassure Members that where probationer teacher training is being undertaken, that such training will be completed during the times available as a result of the Asymmetric week in order to avoid impacting on pupil education time?

Finally can she provide details of how many children from the Burnfoot area who are now attending primary schools in other parts of the town?

#### Reply from Councillor Haslam

The Member actually asks 3 questions. The answer to the Member's first two questions is 'yes' in both instances. Burnfoot PS has one class teacher vacancy and one Principal teacher vacancy. Classes are being covered by experienced supply teachers until these vacancies are filled. Burnfoot PS has one Newly Qualified teacher for session 2018-19. Last year's NQT remains at the school and is an outstanding classroom teacher. New does not mean lesser quality.

SBC operate a robust induction programme for newly qualified teachers which is based on developing practice and strategies to ensure high quality learning every day. The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) stipulates the allocation of time spent teaching and on professional development – SBC adhere to that national agreement.

It must be recognised that placing requests come from all districts and the reasons for them vary considerably. The school roll for Burnfoot Primary is 315. 22 placing requests from Burnfoot were received for schools elsewhere and 3 requests were received for pupils to join the school. This is not a spike in the number of placing requests for schools outwith Burnfoot, but is consistent with a pattern of placing requests in Hawick over the longer-term.

Finally, let me reinforce the point already made in answer to Councillor McAteer. It is time that Councillors McAteer and Marshall resisted the temptation to stoke the fears of those they are supposed to serve in some perverse popularity contest.

#### 2. To The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

Can the Executive Member provide me with an update and a timescale as to where his department is when dealing with the many uncut bankings that we have within my Ward and indeed throughout Hawick?

Will he also reassure me that these untidy and out of control areas will be cut this grass cutting season?

Can the Executive Member also provide me with a timescale as to when all elected members are likely to receive information identifying areas of their communities that are being set aside for "Biodiversity reasons"?

#### Reply from Councillor Aitchison

As Members will be aware the issue of working on steep embankments delivering grass maintenance operations has been reviewed in light of our approach to health and safety within neighbourhood services. The outcome of which has meant that alternative methods of maintenance need to be undertaken to maintain those embankments.

The vast majority of these sites either have already received maintenance, or are scheduled for maintenance, albeit at a reduced level due to the different approach to cutting.

Some sites however remain uncut and plans remain to be developed for their maintenance, which may include no grass cutting being undertaken at some locations.

Where sites remain uncut, they may be considered for changes to their management into the longer term.

Members will also be aware of the duty to promote and enhance the biodiversity of the Borders, and I encourage Members to come forward with their suggestions of areas where they believe that less intensive and changed management regimes can be supported into the longer term within their wards. There is no timescale associated with this duty it is something we are required to consider at all times.

Your local neighbourhood managers would be the initial point of contact on this matter.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Marshall asked if the Executive Member would acknowledge that once beautiful areas had been spoiled and that until this was resolved the public would keep raising the issue.

Councillor Aitchison advised that he had been to visit Hawick and that communities would be consulted to develop a policy within budget and health and safety constraints which would be acceptable to all.

#### **Question from Councillor S. Scott**

##### To the Executive Member for Planning & Environment

Would the Executive Member please remind me how long the scaffolding has been in place on the building in Jedburgh Square on the corner of the High Street and Exchange Street? More importantly could he give an indication when it will be removed?

#### Reply from Councillor Miers

The original Scaffolding crash deck was erected in June 2015 to protect the public from falling debris. The scaffolding crash deck was subsequently extended in to an access scaffolding, and crash deck, to allow for a more detailed assessment to be undertaken, and facilitate the removal of the corner chimney in December 2017. The scaffolding was strengthened in early 2018 to allow the proposed tie straps to be installed. Due to the further movement of the building on the South Elevation the structural scaffolding was strengthened and works to this was completed in early August 2018.

The Council are in the process of reviewing the options for this building and the scaffolding will require to be retained to ensure public safety until the building is made safe.

It's not yet possible to confirm how long the scaffolding will require to remain in place.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Scott asked if this building could be included in a priority list and Councillor Miers agreed that the problem did need to be resolved in a safe manner.

#### **Question from Councillor Ramage**

##### To Executive Member for Children & Young People

I understand that Scottish Borders are not shutting any school libraries but moving to a “library without staff” and that the pupil voice will be at the heart of this scheme. Why then am I getting complaints from pupils about this proposal? They feel that the bullying they are subjected to in other areas within the school will now carry over into what they feel is currently a safe learning environment – the library. Pupils left, unsupervised with expensive equipment, is a recipe for disaster. How do you propose to mitigate these potential problems?

#### Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

As has been mentioned before, this is a pilot project in three High School libraries, Kelso, Peebles and Galashiels. Six High Schools will remain as they are.

We have not said that the pilot libraries will run without staff; we are modernising provision and trying out a range of developments, e.g. a self-serve model for borrowing/returning books, as well as a range of staff being in the library to extend opening times. I am surprised you are receiving complaints from pupils as we have not reduced any staff time yet. The Council will be engaging regularly with pupils throughout the pilot period to ascertain their views before any conclusions are drawn. The modernisation will be responsive and dynamic to pupil feedback.

S1 to S4 will have library provision in their timetable with a class teacher. S5/6 students may use the library during study periods and will be trusted to use the space. However, it will be monitored by senior pupils who have volunteered on a rota basis. We have confidence in our senior pupils to provide leadership, just as they lead and mentor in other aspects of school life.

All books will be tagged and security gates fitted to mitigate theft or loss.

We do not anticipate bullying as the new Quarriers ‘resilience practitioners’, who support pupils with emotional resilience matters, will be in the library space at peak times.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Ramage commented on the costs of a similar scheme in Edinburgh and that the loss of librarians was short sighted. She asked what the timescale for the pilot was. Councillor Hamilton advised that the librarian in Hawick was looking forward to the library refurbishment and she would get back to Councillor Ramage with details of the timescale.

#### **Question from Councillor H. Anderson**

##### To The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

In July this year I wrote to our Chief Executive asking if cemeteries could be re-designated as High Amenity sites and thereby benefit from a more frequent grass cutting regime without having to overturn a budget decision. I had hoped this would give the council the opportunity to respond appropriately to the distress caused to individuals and family members who were deeply offended by the lack of maintenance in cemeteries across the Borders. I was advised by the Chief Executive that this would not be possible as this would require additional manpower resources.

Can I ask Cllr Aitchison if he agrees with me that cemeteries are no less important than football pitches and agrees that they should be re-designated as High Amenity sites in time for next year’s maintenance programme?

#### Reply from Councillor Aitchison

In managing our budget situation this administration agreed to changes to grass maintenance, which included cemeteries, further savings measures also encompassed floral displays, access maintenance budgets, reviewing our arrangements to the management of third party land and efficiencies from our schools budget derived from changes to grass maintenance.

This administration has and continues to listen to feedback from communities around these service changes, and indeed has already positively responded by finding budget to retain floral displays for a further year, allowing more time for community discussions around the changes.

The importance of our 154 cemeteries and burials grounds to the community is well established, officers understand that an acceptable level of service is provided in cemeteries given our financial constraints as a Council.

We are happy to discuss future service arrangements with our communities and would encourage communities to continue to engage with Council officers who will offer advice and guidance around helping communities to achieve their aspirations.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked if this could be reinstated in the next budget round. Councillor Aitchison advised that he expected the budget discussions to be difficult and challenging and needed input and co-operation from communities. All areas would be discussed but he could not predict the outcome at this time.

#### **Question from Councillor Bell**

##### To Executive Member for Children & Young People

I remain concerned about the future of Peebles High School. You undertook in answer to a question at the last Council meeting to communicate to local Members the dates and times of the further consultation "at the beginning of the new term." Pupils went back to school last Tuesday, when will we know the dates & times of the consultation events?

##### Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

The Director has followed up the previous consultation with the Parent Council Chair and before we can set dates with Members a conversation must take place with the whole Parent Council and the Primary Parent Council Chairs from the Cluster Primary Schools as to how the consultation should best proceed to be more inclusive.

The matter will be discussed at Parent Councils next week – the first opportunity since the start of term. A meeting will then be held with the Primary Chairs the following week. Members will then be updated the week beginning 17<sup>th</sup> September as to the plan of consultation suggested by the parents.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Bell asked if, in light of this timescale, the October deadline could be reconsidered and Councillor Hamilton advised she would go back to officers regarding timing.

#### **Question from Councillor Moffat**

##### To the Executive Member for Business & Economic Development

In December 2017 I asked how are the Duns and Coldstream Business Parks were being marketed, as there was a public perception that nothing was happening on either site. I was advised that 1 site in Coldstream was under offer and 3 sites in Duns were at the planning stage but since then there has been no signs of progress. Could Executive Member please give me an update on the current position?

##### Reply from Councillor Rowley

One plot at Coldstream is now going through the legal process of a sale, with the offer to the purchaser's solicitors issued at the start of August 2018. Two further interests have been expressed in the site since the last update in December 2017; one coming forward after seeing the on-site signage, the other having seen the information on the Council website.

At Duns one further interest has come forward since December 2017. There are now only 2 businesses at the planning stage, as previous enquirers have either changed their plans or decided that the capital investment required is too great.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Moffat asked if the local communities could be made aware of progress. Councillor Rowley advised that this was outwith the control of the Council and that private discussions with businesses could not be shared.