

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

21 MAY 2015

APPENDIX I

Questions from Councillor Mountford

1. To the Executive Member for HR & Corporate Improvement
How much is absenteeism costing Scottish Borders Council each year?

Reply from Councillor Parker in the absence of Councillor Cook

For periods of absence falling between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015 the total cost of Occupational Sick Pay and Statutory Sick pay, where applicable, was £3,747,223. The total paybill in this period was £121,784,516

Work has been ongoing to support managers in effectively managing attendance and the last year's figures are expected to show the Council has achieved the target to reduce sickness absence to 4%.

HR will continue to work closely with managers to improve attendance levels. Over the next 12 months HR staff will work with sections that have higher absence levels to roll out further training and to support managers in managing attendance.

2. To the Executive Member for Education
Can you inform us what cross-Border arrangements are in place for educating children from other local authority areas in Scottish Borders Council schools?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

Currently SBC hold a (reciprocal) arrangement with Northumberland County Council, City of Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway Councils that pupils can make placing requests to Councils outwith their own local catchment area.

Each Council at the moment will accept those placing requests if the child can fit the class organisation of the school of the receiving Council. If it were to result in an extra teacher being required, then the request would be refused. Almost all cases at the moment are accepted.

Currently no Council requests payment from any of the other Councils for educating these children and this is practise across Scotland.

There is a recent development in which Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and Scottish Borders are considering looking at a charging arrangement in relation to Early Years placements, i.e. nursery, when the child has requested a placement outwith their catchment authority.

Questions from Councillor Logan

1. To the Leader
Are there still plans to carry out a review of the Licensing Board?

Reply from Councillor Parker

The Clerk to the Council is currently reviewing the membership of both the Licensing Board and the Civic Government Licensing Committee. Unfortunately, the work on the Review was delayed due to other competing priorities - for example, the governance of Health and Social Care Integration and also the recent Election.

Other local authorities' membership details have now been researched and the Clerk will be contacting members of the Council's Licensing Board and Civic Government Licensing

Committee shortly for their comments on membership. It is intended that a report will be presented to the June Council meeting for consideration.

2. To the Executive Member for Economic Development

Could you advise what economic benefits have been achieved to date as a direct result of the imminent arrival of the Borders Railway?

Reply from Councillor Bell

There are four main sources of economic benefit expected from the Borders Railway –

- 1) Construction benefits (direct benefits) – from sub-contracting, employment and training opportunities created by the £294million investment in new infrastructure.
- 2) Agglomeration benefits – from new business opportunities arising around station hubs.
- 3) Indirect benefits – from the growth of new tourism, business and inward investment opportunities.
- 4) Commuting – created by a two way flow of new labour market opportunities and access to skills, training and learning opportunities.

The Final Business Case for the Borders Railway estimates a net additional economic impact of **£38.7 million** (from passenger and operator benefits, environmental benefits, safety benefits and social inclusion benefits).

The economic benefits of the construction project are currently as follows:

- In the first year of the project, from April 2013 – April 2014, £82m worth of contracts were awarded, of which 21% (£18m) went to companies with a base in Edinburgh, Midlothian and the Scottish Borders.
- 101 Borders Railway sub-contractors have a base in Edinburgh, Midlothian and the Scottish Borders
- 40% of sub-contractors are Scottish companies
- 1,100 employees working on the line at peak construction
- Overall, 148 Scottish companies are involved in the construction of this major infrastructure project.
- On completion of the Railway BAM will provide the final numbers of apprentices, trainees and graduates the project has created.
- As of Nov 2013, ScotRail had recruited 10 trainee drivers from the Scottish Borders.

The Borders Railway Blueprint aims to push up the wider economic benefits of the Borders Railway, ensuring it brings a transformational impact by stimulating the growth of businesses, increasing investment, generating new employment opportunities, and boosting visitor numbers.

The Blueprint aims to increase the number of passengers on the line to 1 million by 2020, up from the original Business Case estimate of 650,000. The Business Case states that approximately for every 250,000 extra annual journeys, there would be a 39% increase from the central forecast of net economic impact, so pushing the net economic impact up to **£53.7 million** (not talking into account wider economic benefits which would also be expected to significantly increase).

The delivery of the Blueprint Action Plan is a two year programme which started in early 2015, with a long term vision to transform the economy of the Scottish Borders and Midlothian and the wider city-region. Infrastructure drives investment, and creates the opportunity for business growth, higher value jobs and better connected communities.

This is the information that we have on the economic benefits achieved to date. I would finish by saying that there is a bit of a problem getting Borders specific information because the construction project is not yet completed but we will get more information on impacts when Network Rail hands over the completed project in June.

Question from Councillor Ballantyne

To the Executive Member for HR & Corporate Improvement

With reference to Councillor Gillespie's question at the last Council meeting, regarding employment tribunals, can you please advise how many, if any, cases have been settled in the employee's favour prior to a tribunal hearing becoming necessary?

Reply from Councillor Parker in the absence of Councillor Cook

Within the timeframe the Council has settled 8 claims prior to the hearings taking place at Employment Tribunal. These claims all relate to equal pay. The equal pay claims arose out of historic differences between rates of pay between men and women often on account of the types of work undertaken; particularly those traditionally undertaken by men such a roads manual worker paid a bonus which gave rise to the inequity. A number of ET/EAT judgements dating back to 2004-2005 highlighted the issue and all Councils were affected to a greater or lesser degree, this led to a high number of equal pay claims from 2006 onwards being lodged against all Councils. The pay/ grading systems for all Councils had to be redesigned to address this issue and single status was designed to eradicate this inbuilt historic inequality.

The 8 pay claims relate to this equality issue and do not relate to management action's following disciplinary action, the Council has not settled any unfair dismissal claims. There are no outstanding unfair dismissal claim's, the one outstanding case listed in Cllr Gillespie's question was an unfair dismissal/disability discrimination and we have now been notified ET has now dismissed that claim against the Council.

Questions from Councillor Cockburn

1. To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

The Central Borders is shortly to be serviced by a modern rail service. Do you agree that greater attention must now also be paid to the level of funding, and the potential for better connectivity, of the much needed bus services which are a vital lifeline to some of our more rural areas, which have no other passenger transport systems?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The introduction of the Borders Railway will provide a new link between the central Borders and Edinburgh that will be used by Borderers and visitors alike. It is important that transport connections are maintained and, if possible, improved where funding allows.

The Council has no plans to reduce the frequency of its current subsidised bus network particularly for those communities who reside outwith the central Borders. However, Elected Members must remember that the Borders also has a well established commercial bus network over which the Council has little or no influence. Every effort is being made to engage with the commercial operators to ensure that the current level of service is maintained.

A paper will be presented to Councillors in the near future which sets out connectivity with the Railway for different modes of transport.

2. To the Executive Member for Planning & Environment

Did the changes made to the Development Contribution Policy in March 2014, at the Planning & Building Standards Committee make a significant difference to development in the Borders and to development contributions to this Council?

Reply from Councillor Smith

The Development contributions Policy amendments introduced in March 2014 focused on two issues a) the efficiency of the process and b) a move to enable more affordable housing contributions through the payment of commuted sums rather than on-site provision.

- (a) In terms of the first issue, performance figures for 2014/15 show a marked improvement in the average time taken to determine applications subject to legal agreements.
- (b) In terms of developer contributions, a total of £1,349,379 developer contributions were received in the financial year 2014/15. This compared with a figure of £822, 298 for the year 2013/14. Legal Agreements to the value of £1,406,868 were also concluded in 2014/15 compared with a figure of £1,316, 652 in 2013/14.

Whilst these increases are welcome, care must be taken in attributing these to the change in the Developer Contributions policy alone as the level of development activity will be influenced by a range of macro and local economic factors. These figures also include payments from consents granted prior to the change in policy.

The annual report on developer contributions which will be submitted to Executive later in the year will provide more detail and analysis on developer contributions.

Question from Councillor Aitchison

To the Executive Member for Community Safety

Was SBC consulted on the proposed closure of the St Abbs lifeboat station?

If so, what was the response and if not, what is the council proposing to do about this decision?

Reply from Councillor Moffat

As far as we can ascertain the Council has not been consulted on the proposed closure and it is our understanding that the RNLI will have taken this operational decision after a review of their resources.

Officers will contact the RNLI to better understand the reasons for the proposed closure and the resultant impact on the community and the wider public.