

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**  
**29 NOVEMBER 2018**  
**APPENDIX I**

**Question from Councillor Bell**

To Executive Member for Children and Young People

The four Pilots on a new High-School Library organisation were supposed to start at the beginning of this academic year. Against what criteria will these Pilots be judged a success, or otherwise? When will conclusions be reached on these Pilots and decisions taken in respect of the other High School Libraries?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

Although the pilot was due to commence at the start of the academic year in August, procurement issues led to a delay of the self-scanners, electronic tagging of books and security gates. From August to October each library was manned to ensure full access for students. The pilot started on Monday 15 October and will be monitored throughout the session with a formal evaluation in April 2019.

Education officers meet with the headteachers of the pilot schools on a regular basis. Each school has literacy or library ambassadors (senior students) who are consulting with younger students about the facilities and are helping to shape improvements, with the support of the senior leaders in each school. All three schools report good access and no drop in usage this term.

Ultimately the library is to support young people's learning and literacy development. Their feedback will inform the pilot and changes will be made throughout in response to the needs identified. A final evaluation will take place in April 2019 and findings will inform final recommendations about service delivery to meet both the local need and national expectation of a service for 3-18year olds.

Education officers are keen to engage existing librarians in the redesign of a library service for all schools and settings across Scottish Borders that meets the expectation of the national strategy Vibrant Libraries, Thriving Schools (2018-2023).

Supplementary

Councillor Bell asked if Councillor Hamilton accepted that without criteria in advance, any decision would result in cynicism and disrespect for the Council. Councillor Hamilton undertook to obtain further information from officers.

**Questions from Councillor Ramage**

To Executive Member for Children and Young People

1. Can I preface my question by stating my concerns are about librarians and NOT librarian services. I have repeatedly been told about a survey that was completed by pupils in the Scottish Borders which has determined the set-up of a pilot scheme for staff-less libraries. Which schools took part in this survey and how many pupils? Why has it not been made public?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

In March 2018, community engagement workshops were held at Galashiels Academy, Hawick High, Peebles High and Selkirk High schools, as part of the Schools Estate review. The workshops were arranged at each secondary school to allow pupils, staff and community members the opportunity to consider the present and future needs of the building both for learning but also from a community perspective.

**ATTENDANCE**

The events were held as follows:

	Date	Number of Attendees	
		Pupils	Staff/Parents/ Community
<b>Galashiels Academy</b>	13/3/2018	382	82
<b>Hawick High School</b>	20/3/2018	514	69
<b>Peebles High School</b>	21/3/2018	370	234
<b>Selkirk High School</b>	26/3/2018	390	80

## RESPONSE FORMS

An on-line Response Form was created on the Citizen Space platform. The details of website page and links were reported through the press release, social media and Groupcall. Lap tops were available at each engagement event to enable completion of the form and hard copies and details of the link were circulated.

In the period from 18 March to 16 April the Council received in excess of 510 completed forms. These comprised the following:-

	Total On-line Responses
<b>Galashiels Academy</b>	84
<b>Hawick High School</b>	92
<b>Peebles High School</b>	288
<b>Selkirk High School</b>	47

A further 385 forms were received later from pupils at Peebles High School.

The workshops stimulated a high level of engagement and debate. It was a particularly effective method for the pupils to share their views and comments. The consultation covered a wide range of aspects but specific questions about the library were **not** asked. However, during the engagement, libraries featured a lot with students stating that they wanted a change to current provision to include:

- more access to digital (hardware as well as wifi) – they spoke a lot about information retrieval being sourced digitally
- a different approach to study areas – smaller spaces/ different spaces/ range of spaces
- Available access both during the school day and beyond the school day
- Year round access, not just term-time access
- A community library at the school with a wider range of materials and users
- A more relaxed /social environment

Based on this feedback, and the national expectation of *How Good is Our School Library?* it was agreed that the library provision needed to be modernised to become more digitally focused. A pilot in three high schools would help to inform the redesign of the future service delivery model.

A summary report on the Secondary school Review was shared with elected members on 26 April 2018 to this effect.

### Supplementary

Councillor Ramage commented that there was no separate consultation on school libraries and Unison had collected opposing views. Councillor Ramage asked if it was accepted that these were valid views from pupils. Councillor Hamilton confirmed that the children were being listened to, the pilot seemed to be working well and children were still using libraries. There would be a full evaluation at the end of the pilot.

2. How many teachers are absent through stress within the Scottish Borders and how are schools coping with the added pressures that this brings with regards to supply teachers?

### Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

As of 22 November 2018 there are 18 teachers who are recorded as absent with the reason for absence in the category of Anxiety, Stress, Depression and Mental Health Illness. The system does not record whether or not this is personal stress or work-related stress.

The Council recognise the many reasons for stress; bereavement, relationship breakdown, financial concerns as well as work related matters, and the impact this can have on the individual and their family. The Council has effective systems for assisting individuals whether it is personal or professional stress that is leading to absence, and supporting their return to work when appropriate. These include:

- Employee Assistance Programme which provides free advice on a range of matters from financial to moving home.
- Counselling both face to face and telephone
- Mediation
- Personal resilience training
- Mindfulness training
- Drop in health check sessions
- Occupational Health Service

Ensuring continuity of learning for children when a teacher is absent requires careful planning and headteachers are commended for their efforts in reducing impact on learners. The Council has a year long recruitment drive to ensure an adequate bank of supply teachers are available to cover staff absence in our schools.

### Supplementary

Councillor Ramage asked if numbers were monitored over time and if there were variations between schools. Councillor Hamilton advised that officers would be asked to provide a response.

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

#### To Executive Member for Adult Social Care

Scottish Borders Council currently ranks bottom of the league table for awarding Crisis Grants from the Scottish Government funded Welfare Fund, with only 38% of applicants being awarded grants and our average grant of £46 ranking as the lowest average payment of any Scottish Council.

How does the Executive Member explain our poor performance here?

### Reply from Councillor Weatherston

Although our success rates for Crisis Grants are low when compared to other local authorities that does not, on its own, indicate poor performance in this area. Around 12% of applications which are refused are due to there being more appropriate forms of financial assistance, including assistance from DWP. This is an example of where we are using the national guidance to secure overall better outcomes for applicants. As you are aware, staff in this area offer a holistic service and 851 applicants in Q1 received welfare rights or benefit maximisation referrals. Ultimately, it is better to ensure that people get help to access what they are correctly entitled to than to rely on a crisis grant.

97% of those applicants that did have a successful claim were processed by the next working day, which is above the Scottish average, meaning applicants who are successful are able to access funds quickly to mitigate a crisis or disaster.

Whilst the success rate has been relatively low there is no indication of routinely incorrect decision making and the number of successful appeals is extremely low. Notwithstanding this, I'd like to reassure Members that Officers are continually reviewing practices and procedures and are carrying out a range of awareness sessions with key staff in SBC and partner organisations. They are also continuing to carry out benchmarking work with other local authorities. The latest

quarterly figures indicate an increase in success rates since Q1 and these will continue to be monitored.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Anderson was pleased to note the increase and asked that when applications were unsuccessful that we log what happens next so that we don't come bottom of the league.

Councillor Weatherston advised that he had been assured by officers that they were looking at this.

#### **Question from Councillor McAteer**

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

In light of concerns being raised by Borders businesses that application of the current requirement to hold a public entertainment licence is neither fair nor being applied consistently, can the Executive Member for Business & Economic Development explain what action will be taken to address what is reported to be a 'long-standing' policy that may not be fit for purpose. In particular, can the Executive Member provide reassurance that all businesses are being treated fairly and that activities falling within the broad definition of 'entertainment' are being reviewed and updated appropriately.

##### Reply from Councillor Rowley

SBC resolved in April 1996 that a public entertainment licence under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 is required for the following types of premises and events:

*billiard, snooker and pool halls; circuses, concerts and concert halls; dance or mime performances; dance halls and discotheques; exhibitions; fireworks displays; funfairs; gymnasia; health clubs; ice rinks; laser displays; massage parlours; motor vehicle tracks or courses; paint ball games; pop concerts; raves; saunas; ten-pin bowling and indoor bowling centres; variety or musical shows; and video machine arcades.*

Licensing Officers are aware of the concerns raised by one Borders business that the implementation of this policy is unfair. The concern raised is that there is a disparity between the fees charged to Commercial Operators and that charged to Non - Commercial Operators. Commercial operators pay a fee of £185 for a 1 year licence or £550 for a 3 year licence. A fee of £79 is charged for a temporary licence. For non-commercial premises the rates are: £159 for 3 years or £54 for a one year licence. A fee of £39 is charged for a temporary licence. In addition, Commercial funfairs are subject to separate temporary commercial licences fees ranging from £49 for funfairs with 1-5 stalls, £159 for 6-20 stalls and £315 for in excess of 20 stalls.

The level of these fees is agreed annually by Council. I am not clear on where it is reported the policy is not fit for purpose, as that is a view to date only expressed by one individual business. It is therefore not clear that any action requires to be taken at all.

Officers seek to apply the policy consistently across the Borders area. Licensing Standards Officers have over the past two years been carrying out a number of visits to ensure premises that need a licence do indeed do so. In addition, when applications for occasional licences are received for an event that also requires a public entertainment licence that further licence is sought from the applicant.

#### Supplementary

Councillor McAteer advised that he had been given the impression that the policy needed revision as there was a set fee regardless of the size or complexity of the business. Councillor Rowley advised that he was not ruling out a review if the case was made and there would be a chance to look at this as part of budget through the annual setting of fees and charges.

## **Question from Councillor S. Hamilton**

### To The Leader

Will the Leader write to the Scottish Government in support of the COSLA fair funding campaign, to ensure that this year's local government settlement passes on the full benefit of the increased revenue from the Westminster Government?

### Reply from Councillor Haslam

The short answer to my friend's question is 'absolutely, yes'. Allow me to quote from CoSLA's Fair Funding Campaign:

*"The essential services that Local Government deliver are the foundations on which Scotland is built.*

*These essential services create opportunities for every citizen by strengthening communities and driving forward the economy. Financial threat to Local Government puts local economies and the Scottish economy at risk, but more importantly, puts communities at risk.*

*To build our economy and strengthen our communities we must support the foundations."*

From world class educator to connecting and supporting communities (whether through Community Choices or investment in Superfast Broadband) to driver of local and national economic development, (with £256M spent across Scotland last year and £2.8B in capital investment), councils have a pre-eminent place in delivering individual, family and community wellbeing.

Yet, in the last 5 years, while the Scottish budget has reduced in real terms by 0.4%, Local Government budgets have reduced 10 times that much - by 4%. That is a matter of choice. Just to stand still in 2019/20, councils need £549M. If new policies are not fully funded then these have to be funded by reducing core services. Despite this, already in 2019/20, Scottish Government has committed to funding new policies with a revenue cost of £325m. Again, that is a matter of choice.

Scottish Government has failed to attach any priority local government funding in its Medium Term Financial Strategy. Cold comfort for the individuals, families and communities which depend on us! This too is a matter of choice.

Members, we are long past the moment when Scottish Government should have made the right choice: the choice to protect the 'core' local budgets of councils that deliver essential services. However, the Scottish Government can go some small way to redeeming itself now. It can this year, give councils the resources they desperately need to protect our most vulnerable citizens and to maintain the essential services on which we all depend. It can roll back the burgeoning portfolio of pet projects which compels councils to cut deeper into those services not blessed by ministerial favour. And it can start giving councils multi-year budgets to facilitate long-term financial planning rather than the thin gruel of single year settlements.

This is a direction of travel I am only too happy to encourage and I will on that basis write to Scottish Government to urge its long overdue and desperately needed conversion.

### Supplementary

Councillor Hamilton asked if the response when received could be shared with Members and Councillor Haslam confirmed that would be the case.

## **Question from Councillor A. Anderson**

### To the Executive Member for Transformation & HR

For employees in receipt of Universal Credit, if pay is received earlier than the normal pay date in December, when the information is sent to HMRC and then is relayed to the DWP to decide on the monthly Universal Credit payment, it shows that the person may have been paid twice in the same assessment period. Thus, income from earnings is seen as double the usual amount and they potentially either do not receive any Universal Credit or receive a significantly reduced amount for this assessment period.

What measures have been taken by SBC to inform employees receiving UC of this issue?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston in the absence of Councillor Mountford

Employers are not notified by HMRC if any employees are in receipt of UC. Officers have assessed the potential impact as low. To ensure employees are aware we will be putting information on the staff section on the intranet and Internet.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked if the Council would work with anyone receiving UC to mitigate any issues caused by variable wages. Councillor Weatherston confirmed he would raise this with Councillor Mountford.