

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
20 DECEMBER 2018
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor Bell

To the Executive Member for Transformation and HR

In March 2016 the Council agreed a contract for delivery of ICT services. Associated with that were transformation programme savings dependant on the delivery of a step change in the ICT services; starting in 2016/17.

What were these targeted savings per year through to the present financial year and what is the level of savings actually achieved per year, on a permanent basis, up to the present date?

Reply from Councillor Mountford

Since signing the contract with CGI in March 2016 various briefings and updates have been provided to elected members regarding the progress of the ICT contract and benefits being delivered to the Council through the strategic partnership. These briefings have included updates on target delivery dates for ICT projects and the anticipated savings.

The contract with CGI is designed to place SBC at the forefront of technology in local government in Scotland. The benefits to be delivered go way beyond financial savings.

To date the benefits delivered include:- addressing under capacity and vulnerabilities associated with key person risk within the former in-house ICT staffing structure, removing risk associated with ICT recruitment, providing access to the technical expertise of a major international ICT provider, major investment undertaken to future proof the Council's ICT infrastructure, including:- a new helpdesk, moving file storage and backup facilities to the cloud, increased broadband capacity in our schools, providing greater resilience to ever increasing cyber security threats and a planned full refresh of the Council's curricular and office based desk top estate.

Much work, often not obvious to end users, has been completed to date to address legacy issues with the council's complicated ICT infrastructure and ensure this is fit for purpose both now and in the future.

The contract is also designed to deliver significant financial benefits through the introduction of new systems and ways of working and where delays have been encountered these have been reported to members along with performance monitoring information. Where necessary the associated savings have been re-profiled with alternative temporary measures put in place.

Turning specifically to the issue of savings, the original business case for ICT services approved by Council in March 2016 contained ambitious targets which were dependent upon the delivery of new technology. The savings required in 2016/17 per the business case was £0.747m. The saving required in 2017/18 was £1.393m and in 18/19 was £1.164k, an incremental total over the 3 years of £3.304m.

The savings actually delivered against this original target were zero in 2016/17, £0.572m in 17/18 and £0.942m in 18/19. Savings have increased year on year.

To date recurrent permanent savings of £1.514m have been delivered on an incremental basis. The savings on a cumulative basis are £ 2.086m to date.

Since 2016/17 the Council has delivered 46% of the savings originally envisaged by the Business Case on a permanent basis. The remaining 54% of savings required by the Business Case were delivered on a temporary basis from other budgets.

The Council's budget was balanced overall in 2016, 2017 and 2018 with small underspends delivered in each year.

Issues associated with the delivery of ICT infrastructure has impacted on the Council's transformation programme. Since the contract was signed however close working and ongoing dialogue and negotiation has been undertaken with CGI to ensure best value has been delivered. Where necessary savings have been re-profiled as set out in financial monitoring reports to elected members. CGI has also proactively worked with the Council to provide additional support to the ERP project.

The ERP project Business world is now nearing final completion following a major technical upgrade to "Milestone 7.2" which has been achieved on time and within budget. The technology associated with Business World, including the ability for managers to access detailed financial information from their desk top pc is now being rolled out. Recent feedback from managers is positive demonstrating a step change from the previous position whereby managers relied on finance staff to produce, re-format and interpret data for them.

Extensive project delivery work and process redesign is also ongoing associated with digital customer access and business process re-engineering, with CGI now providing dedicated business change support at no additional cost to the council.

It is anticipated that IT transformation savings required by the budget will be realised in full in the longer term during the course of the strategic partnership with CGI and more savings than originally envisaged may be possible.

Supplementary

Councillor Bell asked if officers could bring a report to Council on performance to show that these savings were on track. Councillor Mountford advised that there was no timetable for this but further briefings would be provided.

Questions from Councillor Ramage

To Executive Member for Children and Young People

1. My initial question was, "Can you inform council how many teachers are absent within the Scottish Borders because of stress and how schools are coping with the situation with regards to supply teachers."

My supplementary question, which has remained unanswered, from the last full council meeting was,

"What support is being offered to these teachers, do you monitor absences over time and is there a large variance in the percentage of absences across our schools" as I have had concerns relayed to me from a concerned parent.

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

As detailed in the previous response, there are a number of supports offered to employees absent from work, including:

- Employee Assistance Programme.
- Counselling both face to face and telephone
- Mediation
- Personal resilience training
- Mindfulness training
- Drop in health check sessions
- Occupational Health Service

Absences are monitored to ensure that support is being provided appropriately and in terms of the Council's Attendance Management policy.

The current absences due to stress are within 15 different schools and there is no pattern or variance that is causing concern.

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage asked if staff were fully aware of the help available and Councillor Hamilton confirmed they were but agreed to speak to Councillor Ramage privately about any specific cases.

2. This question remained unanswered from the last full council meeting:

“Against what criteria will these [staff-less school library] Pilots be judged a success – or otherwise?”

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

The purpose of the Library Pilot is to seek new and innovative ways of delivering this service to children and young people locally, in line with the new national guidance. As members will be aware, this pilot was instigated following young people identifying a wish for more digital access to library resources and more student space for study.

With regard to the evaluation of the pilots in Peebles, Gala and Kelso High schools, the key element in the evaluation of these pilots will be the experiences of children and young people who are using the library services. A real strength in this is that each of the schools mentioned, have pursued slightly different models of delivery, thus giving us a good basis to compare and contrast their respective experiences. It is likely that we will develop a questionnaire that will be issued to students in these schools so we can compare and contrast their experiences.

We would also be looking to seek the views of school staff who have experienced the pilots, in order to ensure that we factor in the views of this group into the evaluation.

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage asked that pupils be asked as part of the assessment of the pilot what skills they had learned. Councillor Hamilton advised that a questionnaire would be issued to all users.

Questions from Councillor Robson

1. To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

How many injury accidents there have been in the last five years involving Council vehicles when operating during the collection of refuse or recycling from domestic premises?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

Officers from Waste, Fleet and Health & Safety have reviewed their records. These indicate that there has been only 1 injury accident which has occurred in the last five years involving a Council vehicle when operating during the collection of refuse or recycling.

This injury was incurred by a member of staff and happened in March 2015.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked that nothing was done to put this record at risk and Councillor Edgar agreed with this.

2. To the Executive Member for Children and Young People

Why is tendering for school transport for children with special needs on an annual basis?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

SAN Transport contracts are not all arranged on an annual basis with some contracts remaining in place for a number of years. However, in the case of those SAN contracts which are renewed annually, this is usually done in order that contracts can be amended for changes in the child's educational, behavioural or emotional requirements and is related to their individual development as they progress through the education system.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked that the children's interests especially where a child had problems with change should always be a paramount consideration. Councillor Hamilton agreed that this should always be the case.

Question from Councillor Aitchison (asked by Councillor Haslam in his absence)

To The Executive Member for Finance

Does the Executive Member for Finance agree with me that, despite UK Government settlement to Scottish Government increasing year on year, the annual decreases in Scottish Government support for Local Government cumulatively, are now threatening delivery of core services. This affects every resident of Scottish Borders and the "cuts", which is what they are, are the true reason for the annual reduction in services in our towns and communities, and the Borders public should be aware of where the blame lies.

Reply from Councillor Tatler

Yes, according to figures published recently by COSLA in their paper "Fair funding for Council Services" the Scottish budget reduced by 0.4% in the five years to 2018/19 whereas reductions to local government over the same period totalled 4%, 10 times the overall cut to the Scottish Governments budget.

In 2019/20 Scottish Borders Council will see a further reduction in cash terms of 2.3% in its grant from Scottish Government. This equates to £4.6m in cash terms.

When you factor in the effects of inflation of 3.3% based on published RPI figures to November 2018 the cut is 5.6% in real terms.

Over the last 6 years 2013/14 – 2018/19 the council has had to make £60m of savings to meet pressures and offset reductions in government grant. More reductions will be required in future to balance the books.

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APPENDIX II
BUSINESS CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE**

15. **MINUTE**

The private section of the Council Minute of 29 November 2018 was considered.

DECISION

AGREED that the Minute be approved and signed by the Convener.

16. **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The private sections of the Minutes referred to in paragraph 3 of this Minute had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes.

17. **SCOTTISH WATER TANK AT SOUTH COMMON FARM, SELKIRK**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Assets and Infrastructure seeking approval of the sale of 4.63 acres of land to Scottish Water on the terms detailed in the report at a sale price of £65,000. A copy of the Extract from the Minute of the Selkirk Common Good Fund Sub-Committee held on 12 December 2018 recommending approval of the sale was circulated at the meeting.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the recommendation of the Selkirk Common Good Fund Sub-Committee to sell 4.63 acres of land to Scottish Water on the terms detailed in the report at a sale price of £65,000.