

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**  
**28 MARCH 2019**  
**APPENDIX I**

**OPEN QUESTIONS**

**Question from Councillor Paterson**

To Executive Member for Assets and Infrastructure

Could the Executive Member please tell the Council if it is true that that more and more of the recycling material collected from the public is now put into land fill by the Company we use due to the amount of contamination in that recycling. I am informed that this has increased quite drastically from previous years and would like to know how much extra this is now costing Scottish Borders Council? Do you not think that this is a real let down for the vast majority of people in the Scottish Borders who faithfully recycle for every collection if the allegations are accurate that more and more material is being land filled costing the Council tax payer how much extra?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The quantity of contaminated material collected as part of the Council's kerbside recycling service has remained fairly static in recent years **at around 12%**.

In the last 24 months the Council has only once exceeded the target contamination level outlined in its recycling contract. Contamination is an important factor and I can confirm that Officers are currently developing a communication campaign to increase awareness, reduce contamination and increase recycling rates.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the public for their continued support for the Council's waste and recycling services and would ask them to continue to play their part.

**Questions from Councillor Robson**

1. To Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

Can the Executive Member advise whether pigeon droppings can have an adverse impact on human health and in what circumstances that can occur and with regard to the recent fatalities on NHS premises in Glasgow what advice can be offered to householders, such as those at Henderson Court in Kelso, or to people in business premises to help avoid adverse health impacts?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

The droppings from pigeons contain a plethora of pathogens, including Cryptococcus, which was the fungal infection linked to the deaths in Glasgow. Part of the issue with pathogens and droppings is the transmission. Once the droppings are dry, the resultant dust can carry the pathogen into the air and there is a potential for airborne transmission.

From a health perspective if inhaled this doesn't normally affect healthy humans but it can cause disease in **people with compromised immune systems**, such as those with HIV/AIDS, people who have had organ transplants and those who are being treated for cancer. Anyone who may be concerned about their health who has had significant contact with pigeon droppings should of course seek medical advice

Householders should avoid any direct contact with the faeces. The use of simple hygiene precautions especially hand washing after touching potentially contaminated materials and before eating or drinking should reduce the risk of infection.

Removal of any faeces should be carried out by a professional.

### Supplementary

Councillor Robson commented on issues in Kelso and asked if general advice could be publicised on the Council's website. Councillor Aitchison advised that he would see if this was possible and commented that other birds including seagulls also caused problems.

### 2. To the Executive Member for Children & Young People

Can the Executive Member advise how many schools under the authority's control employ single use plastic cutlery in their canteen dining facilities?

### Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

At present all schools within the Council's estate use some form of single use plastic cutlery.

The service will however, be holding a "Disposables Showcase" on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2019 as a precursor to eradicating, wherever possible, single use plastics from the service.

Invitations will be sent to Pupils, Head Teachers, Members and Senior Managers in due course.

### Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if action could be taken to reduce the use of plastic cutlery and Councillor Hamilton advised that there was problem with food to take away but hopefully the event on the 23<sup>rd</sup> would help with this issue.

### Question from Councillor Ramage

To the Executive Member for Adult Social Care (to be answered by Cllr C. Hamilton in his absence)

What funding support does SBC have in place for adults and children experiencing domestic abuse and how sustainable is this funding?

### Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

Scottish Borders Council provides **£179,000** of funding to Domestic Abuse Services locally. This figure does not include interventions that some children and adults experiencing Domestic Abuse may already be accessing, for example they may be engaging with Child Protection or Adult Support and Protection services.

Unfortunately the Big Lottery and Scottish Government funding will come to an end in 2020 and as such Officers are working hard to identify how we 'baseline' the service and integrate it into our delivery of Public Protection Services at a local level.

External funding for Domestic Abuse Services is from a range of providers including Big Lottery, Scottish Government etc. totals **£485,000**.

### Supplementary

Councillor Ramage commented on the increase in numbers since 2010 and asked that funding be provided going forward. Councillor Hamilton confirmed funding would be looked at and that she was due to attend a CEDAR conference in May.

### Questions from Councillor Bell

#### 1. To Executive Member for Finance

I applaud the Council's process for reviewing eligibility for Council Tax discount for single occupancy. But some of my constituents have received the request for confirmation on 16<sup>th</sup> March which says, and I quote "For your entitlement to **continue** you must complete an online review form. You **must** respond before 31 March 2019." Do you think that is adequate notification?

### Reply from Councillor Tatler

To ensure best use of resources, we used the annual Council Tax bills as an opportunity to issue an insert asking people to renew their entitlement to Single Occupancy Discount online. To ensure

a significant response and to minimise the cost of issuing further reminders, customers were asked to confirm their status within a two-week period. Given the process is very straightforward and support is available from Customer Advice & Support staff, we consider it is a reasonable timeframe. However, I wish to assure you that reminders will be issued to those who have not responded, before any discount is removed.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Bell asked that a more tempered statement be issued to the public in future. Councillor Tatler advised he had met with the Service Director to discuss and these points had already been taken on board, adding that a good response of over 70% had so far been achieved.

#### 2. To Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

It is possible that the Planning Bill currently going through the Scottish Parliament will be amended to require Councils to make a more detailed analysis of Housing Demand by category of need. Could this Council make a start by using our Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) process to quantify the affordable housing need per significant community as this could then feed some more detailed quantification of affordable housing demand into the Local Development Plan?

#### Reply from Councillor Rowley

It remains unclear what new, amended or additional requirements will emerge from the Planning Bill that is currently progressing through parliament and specifically whether this will require a more detailed analysis of housing demand to be carried out. However, irrespective of the outcome of the current parliamentary process, there is considerable merit in using information from the Local Housing Strategy and Strategic Housing Investment Plan to inform the forthcoming Local Development Plan. Members will be aware that the Strategic Housing and Planning Services have recently been brought together under the management of the Chief Planning and Housing Officer and this will assist in this process.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Bell suggested that a Members briefing from RSLs would have assisted the consideration of recent planning applications if actual need had been specified and that needed to be focussed through the SHIP. Councillor Rowley acknowledged that this was reasonable and that there would also be input from SOSEA.

#### **Questions from Councillor Drum**

##### To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

1. How does SBC plan to ensure it meets the Scottish Governments targets for recycling for 2020 with 60% of household waste recycled/composted or prepared for re-use?

#### Reply from Councillor Edgar

The Scottish Governments recycling targets are aspirational and targeted at Scotland as a whole, and therefore the Council currently has no statutory obligation to meet these targets. At present, SBC is achieving a recycling rate of 39.9% and performing extremely well compared to its rural family group, which achieved an average recycling rate of 30.5% over the same period.

Over the last 4 years the Council has taken a number of steps towards improving recycling performance including the introduction of a food waste collection service, upgrades to community recycling centres as well as introducing re-use schemes at a number of facilities working with local community groups and the third sector.

Going forward, the Council is in the process of developing a new waste transfer station, which will enable the Council close its landfill site and divert waste for treatment while also capturing potentially recyclable waste placed in the residual waste bin. In addition, the Council is also looking an education and awareness communications campaign which will ask residents to play their part in improving recycling rates and reducing landfill costs.

Achieving the Scottish Government's aspirational recycling rate of 60% is likely to be extremely challenging, requiring significant change and investment nationally, such as the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme.

2. It has been stated in the press that all the Borders' roads are inspected and reported on every two months. Can the Executive Member confirm that this is the case and can these inspection reports be made available for general scrutiny?

#### Reply from Councillor Edgar

The Code of Practice for Highway Maintenance (CoPHMM) 2011 provides recommendations on the approach to be taken in determining frequencies for safety inspection of carriageways and footways.

The inspection regime for SBC roads was last approved in January 2015 and allows for:

Strategic Routes - inspected monthly  
Main Distributor Routes – inspected every second month  
Secondary Distributor Routes – inspected every third month  
All other routes are inspected annually

At the present time, the information is logged and stored in a written format and while it can be viewed, it essentially comprises several forms with added written notes for each and every road and footway inspection. As such, it is not in a format that makes it ideally presentable for general scrutiny but they can be made available as required.

In the future, with the adoption of new systems such as 'Confirm OnDemand', it is intended to move to a more automated and digital processes in terms of inspection reporting.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Drum asked if this data could be shared with communities. Councillor Edgar confirmed that officers were happy to act on information from any group.

### **Questions from Councillor Thornton-Nicol**

#### To the Executive Member for Finance

1. Can I ask what the total annual cost is to SBC to provide the hot drinks machines across the estate including rental, purchase, maintenance costs, staff costs for filling and cleaning, consumables, staff costs for monitoring the token provision, the actual money collected from the machines, the number of machines in use and the number of drinks provided on an annual basis?

#### Reply from Councillor Tatler

The Council currently operates a total of 19 coffee vending machines across its education and office accommodation estate.

As an average, the total number of drinks dispensed from all vending machines equalled 92,000 per annum with total income generated of approximately £81,000. Total annual operating costs are in the region of £37,000 per annum.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Thornton-Nicol asked if the use of unbranded cups could be used and Councillor Tatler agreed this could be considered.

2. How much does it cost for the newspapers delivered every year across the estate and where are they used for, and do we retain them for any time and to what purpose?

#### Reply from Councillor Tatler

A review of the Council's approach to newspapers has taken place recently. The cost of this in 2017/18, the last full year for which data is available, was £1,911.38. From 1 April 2019 - the number of sets of newspapers delivered to SBC will be reduced.

The Council receives newspapers for various reasons. One area, for example, is the Communications team who review all coverage weekly to put in place plans to effectively manage the reputation of the Council. This ongoing monitoring allows them to review their performance in promoting important information to the public, as well as ensuring any inaccurate or misleading information is addressed if and when required. Other teams who receive newspapers have a statutory duty to place public notices in line with legal timescales as well as making newspapers available for other departments, elected members and visitors.

The Council retains one set of local newspapers for one year. Going forward, we will continue to review this process to ensure it is as streamlined, and cost-effective as possible.

#### 3. To Executive Member for Adult Social Care (To be answered by Cllr Haslam in his absence)

Taking into account the poor press interpretation of the Reimagining Day Services that were announced a few weeks ago and the furore it has caused and is still causing, do we have a revised comms strategy for all future announcements?

#### Reply from Councillor Haslam

The number of people attending the existing Day Centre provision has fallen significantly over recent years. The Council had agreed to review the provision of Day Care Services within the 17/18 budget, and as a result the Council is now supporting the introduction of more Local Area Co-ordination which enables people to have more choice and control over the activities and opportunities on offer. This approach is based on working with individuals to identify their needs and support them to access more local activities and opportunities.

Any changes to existing services will only be undertaken once the existing service users needs have been addressed. If successful this approach may, as has been the case in Berwickshire, lead to the local Day Centre no longer being required.

We have been consistent in this message for the last 2 or 3 years, but unfortunately this has been recently misinterpreted as a closure plan, which is not the case.

We have reviewed our planning and communications and will be taking a report to the Executive on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April. Following this there will be a comprehensive message made available for members and the public.

#### **Question from Councillor Laing**

##### To Executive Member for Assets and Infrastructure

Can the Executive Member tell me if there is any arrangement in place by which the council co-operates and communicates with utility companies to co-ordinate work which requires the digging up of roads and pavements?

##### Reply from Councillor Edgar

I can confirm that Council officers have a schedule of regular meetings with utility companies to discuss and coordinate upcoming works.

There is also legislation (New Roads and Street Works Act 1991) that requires utility companies to register their planned works in advance and this also allows a level of co-ordination by the Council. The notable exception to this can be emergency works, such as a gas leak, where consultation and advance notice is not required.

The overall aim is to balance the statutory rights of road works authorities and undertakers to carry out necessary works, with the expectation of road users that disruption from works shall be kept to a minimum.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Laing advised there were several bad examples in her ward and asked if this could be eliminated. Councillor Edgar advised that they could not prevent the work but did make sure that proper remedial action was taken up to the required standard.

#### **Questions from Councillor H. Anderson**

##### To the Leader

1. When will the full site inspection of the High Schools be completed in order to confirm the installation costs for WIFI access in our 9 High Schools and what is the budget estimate for this work?
2. How much for the budget for the roll out of iPads from April onwards has been set aside to
  - (a) cover the costs of training teachers to use the new technology,
  - (b) cover the costs of teacher cover and
  - (c) ensure sufficient teacher cover and paid time to enable all teachers to transfer their teaching materials onto the new format?
3. What targets have been set for topic specific use of the new digital technology in our high schools and what provision has been made to ensure that subject teachers can collaborate to develop subject specific materials consistently across the authority?
4. What steps have been taken to ensure sufficient charging facilities for these machines will be available in schools and how are the additional costs of charging the iPads on a daily basis to be met?

##### Reply from Councillor Haslam

1. Wi-Fi is already available in all SBC schools. The survey work is being contracted via CGI who have appointed a contractor. The Council's agreement with CGI is that the initial Wi-Fi surveys will be completed by the end of April 2019. This survey work is being undertaken by a local business who have prior knowledge of the Scottish Borders School Estate. The costs are commercially confidential. I can confirm however that the cost for this work is within the budget approved by Council on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019.
2.
  - (a) Two full time Apple Distinguished Educators are being supplied by CGI as dedicated resource to the project. Costs are borne by CGI within the budget agreed by Council and the detail of the costs of these educators is not disclosed to the Council.
  - (b) Time has been set aside in the Work Time Agreement for the first year of deployment of 5 hours dedicated training per teacher. More time will be set aside for training each year. These sessions are to be scheduled in non-contact time and no additional cover requirement, or costs is expected.
  - (c) Using ipads is seen as a way of enhancing the process of teaching and learning - it is not envisaged that there will be a requirement for teachers to transfer existing materials in bulk. ipads can be used to access existing online educational content within Glow and they can be used for sharing feedback on pupil's work without the development of new materials.
3. The ipads are designed to enhance the delivery of the whole curriculum and best practise will be developed to ensure subject teachers can collaborate effectively. A major benefit of the ipads is that teachers can easily share best practice online accessing a wide range of educational materials and do not having to develop subject specific resources by themselves. There will be opportunities

in the future for subject staff to collaborate between establishments and to share good practice on cross schools days and network meetings days.

4. As part of the rollout of ipads the review of schools will also assess the adequacy of charging facilities. Students will be expected to bring their ipad to school charged each day. It is estimated that on average education usage, each iPad costs less than £1 per year to charge. Any additional charging on an exceptions basis required in schools will be met by existing energy budgets.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked supplementary questions and received answers as follows:--

(a) Would there be a need to pay teachers for the time spent loading work onto the iPads – No they would come pre-loaded and not all subject matter would be taught that way.

(b) Teachers would need time to adapt to this way of teaching so was there a goal to have a certain percentage of subjects using iPads by a specified date – the pace of progress would be driven by the children

(c) Were we considering the installation of charging points – we need to give children the necessary tools to succeed.

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

##### To Executive Member for Assets and Infrastructure

I remain unconvinced after speaking to officers that the relocation of the bin lorries from Duns will be a success and would ask the Executive Member if this could be evaluated after 6 months and the results reported back to Members.

##### Reply from Councillor Edgar

The changes to the kerbside collection service were approved by Council as part of the budget setting process for 2019/20. This decision was taken following a comprehensive review of the service, which considered 17 different options, the majority of which would have involved significant changes to the services received by households, the frequency of collection and the way in which waste is presented at kerbside.

The new approach involves rationalising the delivery of the service from 4 depots to 2 depots plus a route review to improve productivity. The benefit of this approach is that it enables the Council to continue to provide the same service to residents at the same collection frequency whilst delivering significant savings.

As with any service change of this nature Officers will work with frontline staff, HR, Trade Unions and finance team to monitor the implementation of the service changes.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Moffat asked if an evaluation be undertaken after a suitable period of operation to ensure that the expected difference was being achieved. Councillor Edgar advised that this would be done.