

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
16 MAY 2019
APPENDIX I

Questions from Councillor Paterson

1. To Executive Members for Roads and Infrastructure

I am having more and more complaints brought to my attention with regards the state of the road from Hawick to Newcastleton. Pot holes are leaving the road in an extremely dangerous condition and some people are saying they will not travel on this road at night. Will the officials please make this road safe as quickly as possible?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison on behalf of Councillor Edgar

The B6399 (& B6357) Hawick to Newcastleton Road is inspected every two months in accordance with the Councils Standards and Guidelines. Any defects noted during these inspections are recorded and instructions are issued to carry out Reactive Maintenance as required within the timescales of the guidelines.

Planned Maintenance on the Councils Adopted Road Network is programmed by the Asset Team. Some significant lengths of the B6357 were improved in the previous financial year and schemes north and south of Newcastleton are under consideration for possible inclusion in future surface treatment programmes in the current financial year.

Unfortunately, the overall condition of our road network means that we are not in a position to treat all identified sections with a permanent form of treatment and must apply a prioritisation process to determine our annual programme which meets available budgets.

To the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

2. Does the Executive Member think that it is deceiving visitors to our town when displaying signs that state that Hawick is the Heritage Capital of Scotland?

Reply from Councillor Rowley

These signs, as there are two of them, have been in place for some time now, and we understand the wording was agreed by the Teviot and Liddesdale Area Committee in conjunction with former Cllr Ron Smith who led the initiative at that time.

The Council is not aware of any concerns about this wording being raised by members of the public or visitors.

3. Will Scottish Borders Council be scrapping the deal regarding Lowood estate that was recently agreed with a company based in the Cayman Islands? I am convinced that the vote, which was extremely close, would have been much different.

Reply from Councillor Rowley

The Council negotiated the acquisition of the Lowood estate with agents representing the Hamilton family. As a public authority SBC was required to provide the information requested by Mr Farquhar. Mr Farquhar and Mr Chisholm have chosen to publicise this information in a way that, in our view, is entirely inappropriate. The Council believes private individuals, in this case, the Hamilton family, should not be subject to this level of scrutiny regarding how they conduct their personal financial and legitimate tax affairs.

The Council remains of the view that the robust business case on which the decision to acquire Lowood for economic development purposes was based still stands. The purchase of the site, which is now in public ownership, will provide good long term value for the taxpayer, creating jobs, new homes and delivering economic benefits. As the transaction is complete, it cannot be reversed.

Supplementary

In response to Councillor Paterson asking if the Chief Executive would instruct an investigation Councillor Rowley advised this was a good Council decision.

Question from Councillor Ramage

To Executive Member for Children and Young People

I have been looking for information on the number of exclusions from schools across the Borders but I can only get a total. Can you give council a breakdown by each school?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

Please note that the following information needs to be taken in context. The figures indicate the number of exclusion incidents which can range from a single day exclusion to a maximum of a 3-day exclusion (with the option to extend with approval from the Chief Officer).

In line with the revised guidance from Scottish Government, Included, Engaged and Involved 2 (A Positive Approach to Preventing and Managing School Exclusions) Head teachers across our schools are seeking to promote a more positive inclusive education for all children and young people. This vision has been developed and shared as part of Scottish Borders Council's Inclusion Strategy 2019 – 2024.

It should be noted that the overall number of exclusions continues reduce which is in line with the strategy, however, when there are specific incidents that dictate that exclusion is the only appropriate action, then this will continue to be used.

The following table indicates the schools where there have been exclusions over the past three full years:

School Name	Number of incidents		
	2016	2017	2018
Ayton Primary School	2	0	0
Berwickshire High School	2	15	54
Broughton Central Primary School	1	0	0
Burnfoot Community School	20	14	3
Clovenfords Primary School	1	0	0
Cockburnspath Primary School	2	0	0
Coldstream Primary School	9	0	0
Denholm Primary School	0	2	0
Duns Primary School	1	0	0
Earlston High School	8	6	4
Eyemouth High School	8	20	4
Galashiels Academy	36	49	20
Gordon Primary School	0	2	0
Hawick High School	93	92	54
Jedburgh Grammar School	10	3	0
Kelso High School	3	7	13
Knowepark Primary School	2	9	10
Langlee Primary School	14	26	12
Melrose Primary School	1	2	0
Newtown Primary School	0	0	1
Peebles High School	32	14	35
Philiphaugh Community School	0	3	2
Reston Primary School	1	0	1

Selkirk High School	36	12	15
St Margaret's RC Primary School (Galashiels)	2	0	0
St Peter's Primary School	1	0	0
Trinity Primary School	8	0	0
TOTALS	293	276	228

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage asked in what way the duration of the exclusion related to the seriousness of the event and what educational provision was there for excluded children. Councillor Hamilton did not have this information and advised she would request officers to respond to Councillor Ramage.

Question from Councillor McAteer

To Executive Member for Community Safety

Can the Executive Member for Community Safety confirm when the Sergeant and six Constables forming the new CAT team will be in place? Can he also assure members that if these officers are recruited from staff operating within the existing Borders Local Area command that the vacated positions will be simultaneously back-filled?

Reply from Councillor Turnbull

The Chief Executive has discussed this with both the Assistant Chief Constable Paul Anderson and the new Divisional Commander John McKenzie. They have confirmed that approval has been given by Police Scotland Committee and recruitment is now underway.

In the meantime we will be adding to the resource incrementally and should any of these placements be from existing resources they will back filled as soon as possible.

Question from Councillor Laing

To the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Locality Services

It has been some considerable time since elected members received any information regarding the review into public toilet provision in the Scottish Borders.

Can the Executive Member provide us with an update?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

Officers continue to work with community groups from across the Borders who have expressed an interest in operating these discretionary services directly, for example, in Jedburgh and Stow.

At the same time, officers are continuing to develop the discussions and procurement options internally to then engage with third parties externally, and we expect the outcome of that process will conclude in the latter part of the year. This will allow members to consider what direction they may wish to take over this service in future.

Supplementary

Councillor Laing advised she had received complaints regarding the toilets at Eyemouth and Coldingham and asked what steps could be taken to improve matters before the start of the holiday season. Councillor Aitchison asked for details of the defects so that they could be dealt with, and encouraged anyone to report specific incidents. Cllr Aitchison further advised that the previous Council decision was being implemented.

Question from Councillor S. Scott

To Executive Member for Children and Young People

Can the Executive Member advise:-

- 1) When will the shortlist of possible names for the new Jed Campus be finalised?
- 2) When will the public vote on this short list commence?
- 3) When and in what manner will the result of the public vote to name the new campus be announced?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

The construction of the new campus is progressing well and visitors to the site are consistently remarking on what a wonderful facility it will be for the community of Jedburgh and surrounding areas.

Given that this will be so much more than a school, we are keen to agree a name that encapsulates the opportunity this facility will create for all who access it.

The timescales for this are:

- 1) The shortlist of possible names for the new Jedburgh campus will be announced week beginning 27 May 2019.
- 2) The public vote will be live from week beginning 27 May 2019 until 30 June 2019. Voting will be carried out online using SBC's Citizenspace tool – links will be provided on SBC's social media channels for general public, and link sent directly to schools and community groups to encourage as many people to take part as possible.

The result of the public vote to name the new campus will be announced on Monday 1st July 2019. This will be done via social media and media release.

Questions from Councillor H. Anderson

1. To Executive Member for Planning and Environment

Achieving our Climate change targets -

Given the Scottish Government's new target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045, what steps will be SBC taking to achieve these targets at a local authority level?

Reply from Councillor Miers

Scottish Government has set particularly ambitious targets for climate change. The new target to achieve net-zero emissions by 2045 is welcome—and Scottish Borders Council is committed to playing its part in the wider effort to achieve this goal.

The Council reports annually on its climate change activities under the Public Bodies Duty of the Climate Change Act (Scotland) 2009. The duties require that a public body must, in exercising its functions, act 'in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets, adaptation programmes, and in a way that it considers is most sustainable.' The Scottish Government introduced a new Climate Change Bill to Parliament in May 2018, proposing far more ambitious targets, which have now been superseded by the carbon neutral 2045 ambition.

Currently, key emissions reduction activity includes -

LED Street lighting programme

Home insulation schemes and development of an Affordable Warmth Strategy

Energy Efficiency Programme for Council estate

Business resource efficiency support

Capital projects – e.g. Jedburgh JICC

Fleet management inc. Electric Vehicle adoption

With our built estate we have an ongoing programme of monitoring energy consumption and associated carbon emissions to identify our poorest performing buildings for strategic investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies. This investment is designed to drive down our utility costs and reduce our carbon emissions as far as is technically and financially feasible.

From a domestic sector perspective, we are delivering the Government's Energy Efficient Scotland Route-map at a local level via Home Energy Efficiency Programmes (HEEPS): Area Based Schemes (ABS) projects and the eventual development of a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES). In working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are ensuring strong alignment with Government aspirations on climate change.

The Council is developing future carbon reduction ambitions through a Borderlands Energy Masterplan, and is likely to propose adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as advised by the Scottish Government.

It is recognised in the UK and Scottish Governments' declarations of a 'Climate Emergency' that, far more must be done. This means further strategic direction from Scottish Government, the provision of resources to really prioritise carbon reduction, and, importantly, a proper correlation between high level target setting and practical action at national, regional and local level.

To take one example: transport – transport cannot be viewed simply from the standpoint of cities, but must include proper consideration of how you secure effective low carbon modes of transport within rural areas like the Borders and between such areas and other parts of Scotland, the UK and beyond.

This Council is ambitious that future generations who live in the Scottish Borders can look back on a place and communities that have played our part and more than our part in responding to a challenge which threatens every human and every creature in every environment across our planet.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked if the report on Council policy could be updated for the next Council meeting. Councillor Miers advised that this was updated annually and he would ascertain the timescale for the next update.

2. To Executive Member for Adult Social Care

Assessing the impact of rurality on the roll out of Universal Credit

In November 2018 the Council supported my motion which asked Council staff to work proactively with the DWP to assess and address the impact of rurality on the ability of people to both successfully claim Universal Credit and then comply with the strict criteria to continue to receive Universal Credit. Given the increasing number of claimants and the fact that nearly 6 months have now lapsed since this was agreed, when might we receive the report?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

The motion called on the Council to continue to proactively work with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to assess and address the impact of rurality on the ability of people to both successfully claim Universal Credit and then comply with the strict criteria to continue to receive UC.

I can confirm that we are doing so, and an operational group continues to work collectively on actions to mitigate any negative impact including:

- Developing a Universal Credit context information report, which maps out Job Centre locations, urban-rural classification and broadband accessibility by postcode area.
- All local Registered Social Landlords are now on the DWP landlord portal allowing online rent verifications to be completed for their tenants.
- Job Centres continue to offer UC applicants combined appointments with their work coaches to verify ID and complete claims/work commitment requirements.
- The Council also continues to offer travel costs assistance via the Scottish Welfare fund where claimants are unable to fund their own travel to a job- centre location for their first appointment.

From April, DWP are funding Citizens Advice Scotland to provide a 'Universal Support: Help to Claim' service via local Citizens Advice Bureaux. At this stage, it is not yet clear how Help to Claim will impact on delivery of local services. It is expected that this picture will become clearer over the forthcoming months and, if appropriate a report will be brought to Council.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson advised that she had asked for this report over 6 months ago and proposed that the Council needed to broadcast the good work being done which was accepted by Councillor Weatherston.

Question from Councillor H. Scott

To the Executive Member for Neighbourhood and Locality Services

The 2019/2020 Community Fund: Interim Guidance Notes (v1) states that grant funding given to groups who undertake projects for the benefit of their communities cannot be used for the payment of "wages, salaries, or fees of sessional workers", and yet it would appear that grant money paid to organisers of events, as defined by the Scottish Borders Council Events Plan 2014-2020, can be.

This seriously disadvantages community groups who wish to undertake projects for the improvement or wellbeing of their communities, but which do not have the capacity to undertake these projects without paid assistance from outside their group.

Will:-

- (a) This restriction be removed so that groups applying for community grant funding are placed on a level playing field with organisers who wish to fund events?
- (b) If the restriction is not to be removed why?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

The funding available for community events does have different criteria to those events which are defined by the Scottish Borders Council Events Plan 2014-20. The Council funds these latter events, which can include payment of wages, salaries or fees, because of the significant economic impact they have for the borders as a whole.

On an interim basis, Members agreed that the grants available from the new Community Fund would be based on the current criteria used for the Community Grant Scheme which has been in place since 2005. A restriction of that scheme is that grants cannot pay for wages, salaries, and fees of workers or sessional workers.

We will ensure this is included within the scope of the consultation on the future governance arrangements for Area Partnerships, which includes the allocation and disbursement of the Community Fund. Members will receive a report on this in June.

Supplementary

Councillor Scott advised he was disappointed by the answer and asked how community groups could undertake tasks when they needed external help. Councillor Aitchison suggested that the funding had been agreed by Council in March and this could be raised as part of the consultation.