

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber,
Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells,
TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 18 June, 2019 at
10.00 am

- Present:- Councillors C. Hamilton (Chairman – Education Business), S. Haslam (Chairman), S. Aitchison, G. Edgar, E. Jardine, T. Miers, S. Mountford, M. Rowley, G. Turnbull (from para 3)
- Apologies:- Councillors R. Tatler, T. Weatherston
Also present:- Councillors H Scott, W. McAteer, S. Marshall, C. Ramage
- In Attendance:- Interim Service Director Children and Young People, Pension and Investments Manager, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (F. Henderson)

EDUCATION BUSINESS

- Present:- Mr G. Jarvie, Mr. I. Topping.
Apologies:- Ms. C. Thorburn, Parent Representative: Ms Alison Ferahi.

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Hamilton chaired the meeting for consideration of the Education business.

1. EARLY LEARNING & CHILDCARE EXPANSION

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Interim Service Director, Children and Young people which proposed that Scottish Borders Council continue to grow and develop their 'Grow Your Own' Scheme to train and recruit individuals into the teaching profession, working in partnership with a number of Universities. Christine Brown, Quality Improvement Officer, explained that Scottish Borders Council was working with two different Universities to develop and deliver training for individuals to become secondary teachers. The report explained that recruitment of teaching staff, in particular for some secondary STEM subjects, had become more difficult nationally, but had been particularly felt in rural authorities. Particular STEM subjects within secondary schools had been a focus for Scottish Government to develop opportunities for Universities to work in partnership with Local Authorities so individuals could become teachers. There were a growing number of programmes available and Scottish Borders Council had been proactive in taking this forward to enable the Authority to 'grow our own' workforce.
- 1.2 It was further explained that there was a demand for alternative routes into teaching for individuals within the Scottish Borders, which enabled people to remain in the Scottish Borders, reducing their financial commitments involved in either living or commuting to a university elsewhere in Scotland. Potential students with child care commitments could be prevented from undertaking study outwith the Borders. Scottish Borders Council's Children & Young People's Department had been working over the past three years to look at alternative ways of training and then recruiting qualified teachers. This had been a risk and an investment, taken by the authorities, which was paying the dividend of providing high quality committed teachers. The report detailed how the Authority had been working with the University of Highlands and Islands since August 2017 offering a distance learning opportunity for Scottish Borders graduates to gain a qualification which

would allow them to enter the teaching profession at secondary level. A partnership agreement has been set up with the University of Highlands and Islands, who offered an initial teacher education programme for graduates who had a degree in either Physics, Business Studies, Mathematics, Home Economics, Technology or English. Applicants required to have National 5 Mathematics (or equivalent i.e. Intermediate 2, Standard Grade 2, O Grade), Higher English, and an appropriate degree.

- 1.3 A further project was launched in 2018 in partnership with Dundee University which offered an 18 month programme with students graduating with a PGDE and having completed their Standard for Full Registration with the GTCS in June 2020. Acceptance onto the course came with a bursary funded by Scottish Government. Students spent 4 days in schools and 1 day distance learning with the University. The first 6 months in one school, then they moved to a second school for a full year. As yet no additional funding had been allocated from Scottish Government for this course to continue past the initial cohort who were going through the programme.
- 1.4 Work continued to look for opportunities to recruit more individuals into the teaching profession in 2019 and Scottish Borders Council were working in partnership with the University of Highlands and Islands to offer 6 PGDE primary teaching places. Recruitment was underway and students would be placed for starting in August 2019. These students would complete their placements within Scottish Borders Council schools and link with the University to follow their academic studies in a distance learning way.
- 1.5 The Committee heard from three current participants about their experience on the programme and they answered Members questions.

DECISION

AGREED that Scottish Borders Council continue to :-

- (a) deliver ‘Grown Your Own’ Programmes for teachers; and**
- (b) develop opportunities for increasing the teaching workforce into the future.**

2. ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY FOR SCHOOLS 2019-2022

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Interim Service Director, Children and Young people which provided Members with information regarding the updated Accessibility Strategy for Schools which was contained in Appendix 1 to the report. Christian Robertson, Quality Improvement Manager, presented the Council’s fifth strategy following the introduction of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils Educational Records) (Scotland) Act 2002 which required all Local Authorities to prepare and implement an accessibility strategy which would improve access to education for pupils with disabilities. The word “access” was used in its widest sense and included the Schools Curriculum, physical access to premise and facilities and communication with pupils with a disability, including taking into account the pupil’s needs and any preferences that they or their parents expressed.
- 2.2 These duties enabled long-term strategic planning to be carried out in relation to school education in the Scottish Borders, to improve access for all pupils with disabilities, as well as promoting a positive attitude towards disability in all schools and communities. The Act applied to both the state and independent sectors throughout Scotland. For the state sector, the responsible body was the Local Education Authority (Scottish Borders Council). The strategy covered all the schools and nursery classes for which it was directly responsible. The strategy does not require covering pre-school education provided by private or voluntary sector providers operating in partnership with the Local Authority. However, in negotiating contracts with these providers, Scottish Borders Council would endeavour to ensure that providers were committed to improving access to pupils with disabilities.

- 2.3 The Committee congratulated the team on the layout of the Strategy and asked questions about the flexibility of the budget, in terms of being able to meet pupils' individual needs. It was explained that the Accessibility Officer worked with families from an early age and was therefore very aware of children coming forward and their needs although there were families moving into the area who needed to be catered for. Resources were a continuing challenge but the aim was to provide the best experience for each child.

DECISION

APPROVED the updated Strategy, attached at Appendix I to this Minute.

3. **URGENT BUSINESS**

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chairman was of the opinion that the item dealt with in the following paragraph should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to keep Members informed.

ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE – LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 3.1 Mr Peter Macklin, Education Attainment Officer was present at the meeting to report on positive destinations for care experienced pupils in more detail and in particular attendance, exclusions and attainment. It was explained that for the period 2016/17, 92.9% of all school leavers were in positive follow up Destinations while only 64% of schools leavers who were looked after for part of the year and 76% of school leavers who were looked after for the full year were in positive follow up destinations. On the 14th to 16th May 2019, Scottish Borders Council in partnership with Developing the Young Workforce Borders held 'Looking at Careers' - an event created to bring together pupils who may have experienced the care system or were dis-engaging from education across the Scottish Borders. The aim was to identify and evidence the skills required in making a positive and sustainable transition into the world of work and further education. Statistics showed young people who had experienced the care system were 30% less likely to reach their full potential. In order to start the process earlier S2/S3 pupils were targeted. The 3 day event held at Springwood Park, Kelso saw over 60 pupils in attendance as well as a range of different businesses. Each delivering a unique workshop personalised with their expertise and knowledge. The sessions were 50 minutes long and as practical as possible. As well as pupils learning new skills throughout the event, on the final day they heard from inspirational speakers. At the end of the 3 day event a keepsake bag with information from exhibitors and a variety of extras was given to each pupil. The event had been well received by those who had taken part.
- 3.2 In response to questions, it was explained that the event would be repeated once confirmation of funding was received from the Scottish Government. Those young people who had attended would be tracked and become Ambassadors. The event would be further developed and it was hoped that Borders College would be involved in the future.

DECISION

NOTED.

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Haslam chaired the meeting for the remainder of the meeting.

4. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting of 4 June 2019.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

5. **CORPORATE DEBTS - WRITE OFFS IN 2018/19**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Financial Officer which detailed the aggregate amounts of debt written off during 2018/19 under delegated authority, as required by the Financial Regulations. The report covered the areas of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, Sundry Debtors, Housing Benefit Overpayments and aged debt from the balance sheet. The total value of write-offs had increased from £0.259m in 2017/18 to £0.702m in 2018/19. There were ongoing risks associated with the management of the Council's debts and these might lead to an increase in the level of debts that would require to be written off as irrecoverable in future years and had been identified in the report. The Council maintained an appropriate bad debt provision to help manage those risks. Members queried why there was a backlog and whether the Council was still recovering a high percentage of its debts, which was previously at 98%. The Pensions and Investments Manager explained that some of the debts were over 5 years old as customers were given every opportunity to pay and this was monitored continually. In response to a question regarding the collection rate for Council Tax the Pensions and Investments Manager advised she would obtain this information and pass it on to Members.

DECISION

NOTED the debtor balances written off during 2018/19 under delegated authority.

6. PRIVATE BUSINESS

AGREED under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in the Appendix to this minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the relevant paragraphs of part 1 of schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

7. MINUTE

The private Minute of 4 June 2019 was approved.

The meeting concluded at 11.00 am