

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

19 FEBRUARY 2015

APPENDIX I

OPEN QUESTIONS FOR SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL 19 FEBRUARY 2015

Question from Councillor Campbell

To the Executive Member for Education

The Borders is an area rich in Scottish culture and history. The Scottish Studies Working Group recommended Scottish culture should be at the heart of the school curriculum giving our children the same opportunity as those in other countries of studying their national literature, history, art and music etc. Can the Executive Member advise if Scottish Borders are taking forward the recommendations of the EIS and if so, can a report be brought forward on the progress of implementation?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

The Scottish Studies Working Group, (*not EIS*) chaired by Dr Allan, MSP, produced a set of recommendations that Education Scotland have responded to with an action plan. This brings together existing resources, guidance and approaches within Curriculum for Excellence and identifies particular challenges in realising the aspiration that Learning about Scotland should be a 'natural and normal part of the learning experience from early years to senior phase. In Borders this approach has been taken and all schools are expected to build a curriculum giving strong attention to the history and culture of the Scottish Borders. National organisations have embedded this in strategies and this is supported through professional development and, significantly, GTC Scotland have merged this into Teacher standards applicable to every teacher in Borders (and across Scotland).

Questions from Councillor Fullarton

To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

Could the Executive Member confirm that the recent SCOTs figures for the Scottish Borders A, B and C class roads position us in the bottom quartile?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The national road condition indicator generally reflects the level of investment into the Scottish roads network. I can confirm that Scottish Borders Council is in the bottom quartile in terms of the national road condition indicator with 43.5% of its road network in need of substantial repair. This compares with a national average of 37.1% of Scotland's road network in need of substantial repair and an average of 39.7% for rural Scottish authorities. Of the rural authorities Dumfries & Galloway at 49.3% and Argyll & Bute at 57.7% fare worse than Scottish Borders Council and Perth & Kinross at 35.4% and Highland at 35.6% fare better.

In setting its budget, the Council has to strike a balance between investment into the roads network and other critical services it delivers. To significantly improve Scottish Borders Council's road condition indicator would require substantial additional funding, which would mean having to reduce other services.

A table showing the position of each local authority is available on request.

To the Executive Member for Education

Does the recent Government position on preventing any reduction in teacher numbers limit this Council in addressing the issue of under-performing teachers?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

It does not. The primary purpose in undertaking performance management processes is to assist the employee to reach an appropriate level of performance. It is only in the most serious cases

that, after periods of support and monitoring, disciplinary action is taken which may include dismissal.

Even if a teacher were dismissed, that does not in itself mean a drop in teacher numbers, as the post would still be in the establishment and a replacement would be recruited.

Questions from Councillor Logan

To the Leader

1. All Councillor Expenses are published annually. Can you tell us why your expenses are not itemised on the Council website?

Reply from Councillor Parker

I have been advised that it is debateable whether I require to answer this question, as it may not be competent under the Standing Orders. However, in the spirit of openness and transparency I am happy to do so.

Councillors' expenses claim forms are published on the Council website. In fact I make no claims directly so have no expenses claim forms to publish.

As you may have noticed I am visually impaired. Because of my disability particular arrangements require to be made to allow me to undertake my duties. These, of course, constitute reasonable adjustments in terms of the Equality Act.

Therefore staff are made available to drive me to meetings and I use taxis when appropriate. Neither of these require me to submit a claim form.

These costs are properly accounted for and are included in the annual report to Council on Members' expenses.

2. Could you tell us when we can expect to hear the result of the promised review into the Licensing Board and the Civic Government Licensing Committee?

Reply from Councillor Parker

The Clerk to the Council has been researching how other Councils deal with both liquor licensing and other licensing matters. It is anticipated that during March, meetings will be held with the individual members of Scottish Borders Licensing Board and Civic Government Licensing Committee to establish their views, with a report to Council on 2 April 2015.

3. Can you tell us why the grant to the Border Book Festival was not first debated by the Executive or by full Council and what budget provided the funds?

Reply from Councillor Parker

The core funding of £25K for the Borders Book Festival was approved by Council on 6th February 2014. A Business Support Grant of £7k was also allocated and a further one off contribution of £15K was made to fund an additional school programme. These additional awards were made in accordance with the appropriate policies and processes. They were made from the appropriate budgets and authorised by Officers who were responsible for these specific budgets.

While Members set and approve budgets in February; there are many general funding lines and "block" type allocations which Officers are expected to spend as is appropriate.

Budgets are managed by staff at varying levels within the Council and these types of budget decisions are made routinely without any Member involvement as they are deemed to be operational decisions.

Question from Councillor Scott

To Executive Member for Social Work

Can you tell us how many elderly people are unable to return to their homes in the Borders because a care package cannot be put in place because of a lack of staff?

Reply from Councillor Renton

Whilst over the past few months' social work have experienced some delays in providing care packages in some areas I am pleased to advise that currently there is no one awaiting a care package which is preventing a return to their own home.

The establishment of a recent second rapid reaction team to assist with hospital discharges has helped to provide greater capacity to support people home in a timely manner and we also work closely with the third sector to provide short term support when needed.

I am however aware of one person in a very rural setting who has recently moved to the area to live with family who is receiving a partial care package and we are working with providers in the area to provide the full package of care.

Questions from Councillor Turnbull

To Executive Member for Education

1. Do you anticipate any rural primary school closures under the new Education Strategic Plan?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

There are no such specific proposals to close rural primary schools. The School Estate Strategy will create a vision for developing schools that are suitable to meet modern education demands. Decisions arising from this strategy will be based on educational benefits for pupils. This long term approach will ensure all key school estate recommendations are comprehensive and holistic.

2. Can Council be advised of the level of School vandalism and what costs have accrued and what actions are in place to reduce the expenditure?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

The Council does not keep specific records on the level of vandalism in schools.

However, anecdotally, whilst vandalism is recognised as a problem it is not considered to be a major issue. The level of vandalism in schools across the Borders seems relatively low compared to other local authority areas, particularly in large urban areas.

CCTV has been in place for some years to cover some of the more vulnerable school premises and has been successful in both catching out and deterring vandals.

We also work closely with our Locality Integration Officers who prioritise attendance and high visibility in particular schools when required which is effective.

Pupils are continually supported in becoming responsible citizens and within this schools use every opportunity to reinforce pupils understanding of their role and responsibility within their community.

3. Can Council be advised of about the level of incidents involving weapons within our schools and what policies are in place?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

Overall we do not have high numbers of incidents involving weapons in our school. Within our reporting framework we have had one incident in Secondary School (since December 2013) and six incidents in Primary School (since December 2013).

We do not have policies in place specifically to address weapons but within the curriculum pupil safety is of high importance and we also offer opportunities for pupils to participate in events where safety is the central focus e.g. Safe T in the Park.

To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

How much compensation has this Council paid out to motorists due to vehicle damage caused by the state of the roads within Scottish Borders?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The compensation figures paid out are as follows:-

2007/08	£2,700.02
2008/09	£3,606.92
2009/10	£11,637.55
2010/11	£11,065.47
2011/12	£4,055.13
2012/13	£12,514.30
2013/14	£2,354.22
2014/17 Feb 2015	£835.27

The higher figures for 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 reflect damage caused to road surfaces because of harder winters.

Question from Councillor Weatherston

To the Depute Leader Finance

At the Eildon Area Forum held in Stow last year you advised that this Council was considering the provision of free railway passes for the elderly and disabled – can you please update us?

Reply from Councillor Mitchell

Officers undertook to report back to Councillors on the potential for a Council concessionary fare scheme.

Councillors will be aware that First Group cease to hold the ScotRail passenger franchise on March 31st 2015. Although ScotRail currently operates concessionary schemes with some Scottish councils, they have indicated that they cannot enter discussions about potential future schemes effective after their current franchise. This position will change once Abellio have taken over the ScotRail franchise on April 1st 2015. In the meantime, officers have had an initial discussion with Abellio's mobilisation team for the ScotRail franchise and gathered information about other council schemes.

Officers will discuss with ScotRail the options for a scheme after Abellio have taken over the franchise in April 2015 and report to Councillors on the potential costs and benefits.

Questions from Councillor Mountford

To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

Given the assurances that were made when Community Wardens were withdrawn, can you tell the Council what action is proposed to alleviate the epidemic of dog fouling that is blighting the Borders?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

The Council agreed that the warden service would cease as of the 31st March 2014 as it is a non-statutory service.

It is the responsibility of the dog owner to clean up after their dog.

If fouling exists within a public space it is the Councils responsibility to clean this up. This will be done as part of our ongoing cleansing regime.

We will work very closely with the local community police officers who have a key role in addressing antisocial behaviour related matters, including littering, fly-tipping, and have the same powers as local authority wardens to combat dog fouling.

Staff within Neighbourhood Operations are committed to working with local communities to educate dog owners regarding their responsibilities. Trained staff can target problem areas for dog fouling, including the issuing of fixed penalties, as part of a range of highly visible front line services for the public across the whole of the Borders.

To the Leader

In view of your statement last year that Scottish Borders Council would get free IT advice from Gartner as a result of your visit to the IT Conference in Barcelona in October 13, can you please give an update on the outcomes from this relationship?

Reply from Councillor Parker

Officers have been working with Partners, including Gartner, on a range of projects including the development of a new ICT Strategy. Officers plan to bring a proposal regarding this to Council on 2nd April.

Question from Councillor Cockburn

To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

Why did your Department not assess the needs of local businesses and the use of CRCs for trade waste as part of the original Integrated Waste Strategy and offer a service that was fit for purpose?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The aim of the Integrated Waste Management Strategy is to deliver a waste service in the future that is 'fit for purpose' and financially sustainable in the long term. This is to be delivered through the implementation of the actions outlined within the Strategy, which includes the development of a trade waste access policy at our Community Recycling Centres.

At the time of developing the Strategy a number of key priorities had been identified including the review of the garden waste collection service and the introduction of food waste collections

The development and approval of a Community Recycling Centre trade waste access policy in addition to these key priorities would have significantly delayed the development and approval of the Strategy.

Officers met with 24 Councillors recently as part of the consultation process and valued the feedback received. Work on a number of actions that came out of these meetings is currently being progressed, including a detailed consultation exercise with local businesses.

Further updates will be provided to members over the coming months.