

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
29 AUGUST 2019
APPENDIX I

OPEN QUESTIONS

Questions from Councillor Robson

1. To Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

What are the saving in revenue terms in closing play parks on an averaged per site basis and what is the additional revenue cost per site for the new play parks on an actual or estimated basis?

Answer from Councillor Haslam in the absence of Councillor Aitchison

The Council is investing significant sums in enhancing play facilities in our towns improving the quality of facilities which in many cases provide a very poor play experience. No net saving is planned from the programme which is designed to be revenue neutral. The overall revenue budget for the upkeep of parks across the Borders is contained within the budget for neighbourhood services and no savings are projected from this budget as a result of the play programme.

The removal of old play equipment from play parks, which following appraisal, deemed to be low value facilities, will allow for sufficient resources to be deployed to maintain the new facilities being invested in by the Council through the Outdoor Community Spaces capital project on an ongoing basis.

The new facilities include more pieces of equipment, widening access and providing higher play value than the previous, aged, low-amenity, play equipment. The decommissioning of the older low value facilities will ensure the revenue impact to the Parks and Environment service budget is cost neutral.

I would further confirm that no play park will be decommissioned until such times as the new play park investment in that locality is complete.

Members should also note that no town or village which currently has a play park will be left without one following the upgrade process.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked how we could be confident that the changes would be revenue neutral if the savings associated with the closure of a single playpark could not be quantified. Councillor Haslam advised that from the overall total cost of all play parks it could be confirmed as revenue neutral.

2. To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

How and when is it intended to take forward the conclusions and recommendations of the Parking Issues Working Group?

Answer from Councillor Edgar

Members will recall that at the Executive Committee on 16 April 2019 the recommendations and conclusions of the working group were considered and agreed.

Progress to date has been focussed around the work to review Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) along with some initial re-lining works on a limited basis which is being programmed; in tandem to this, officers are developing a three year programme for implementation of the other recommendations relating to signage, lining and other infrastructure along with the development of a media campaign subject to available resources.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if a progress report could be provided after one year. Councillor Edgar confirmed he would ask officers to provide this.

3. To Executive Member for Children and Young People

How can private sector nursery providers access capital resources made available by the Scottish Government to facilitate the extension of **early learning** and childcare **provision** from 600 to 1140 hours?

Answer from Councillor C. Hamilton

No additional capital funding was received from the Scottish Government in respect of facilitation of the extension to 1140 hours within private and voluntary provider settings. The report to Council in May 2018 quoted that the multi-year capital funding allocation received of £7.7m was against a need of £9.9m in respect of only the refurbishment of 8 Local Authority settings, 2 expansions and 3 new builds.

In respect of later communication, the Council received an allocation of funding for 3 additional graduates to support the expansion in November 2018. This funding allocation was not ring-fenced.

Late in the financial year (mid-March), the Scottish Government intimated that due to a perceived problem nationally, they could advise local authorities that if they had any unspent additional graduate funding, then this could be used to support private and voluntary early learning and childcare organisations. This notification however unfortunately came too late to be actioned as Early Years and Childcare budget had been committed in full for 2018/19.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if we could check what other Councils were doing to see if we could learn from them to help introduce some flexibility for private sector partners. Councillor Hamilton advised that she would discuss this further with Councillor Robson after the meeting.

Questions from Councillor Paterson

To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

1. Will this administration please drop any thoughts of changing the gritting regime now or at any time in the life of this council meaning that pavements in the Borders Region would not be getting gritted before school children set off to school?

Answer from Councillor Edgar

Members will be aware that the Executive has considered a report on a review of the Winter Service. One of the proposals contained in the officer's report was to alter the approach to the treatment of footpaths, and this would have the potential to see a later than current start time for treatments and may see no treatments of footpaths being undertaken at weekends.

The Executive has asked officers to reconsider the recommendation re footpaths and represent a report on this specific aspect prior to arriving at a decision.

In doing so the Executive must consider the requirement to deliver financial efficiencies along with an appropriate risk balanced approach to public safety during normal winter weather conditions.

Supplementary

Councillor Paterson asked what would be done if this resulted in people staying in all weekend because they were too scared to go out. Councillor Edgar advised that the safety of the public was paramount to the Service and the situation would be re-assessed if this occurred.

2. Will this Administration oppose any moves by the UK Government if they try to dispose of any rubbish in a Landfill site or any area in the Scottish Borders Council's area in the event of a no deal Brexit making it uneconomical to export the waste generated by the South of England to the European Union?

Answer from Councillor Edgar

Following the closure of Easter Langlee landfill site on 1 August 2019 the Scottish Borders became a landfill free zone.

It is not proposed to reopen the site. However, it would be within the powers of Scottish Government to permit the site to be reopened in the event that no alternative arrangements for waste disposal were available.

Supplementary

Councillor Paterson asked for his question to be answered and Councillor Edgar confirmed that the Borders was a landfill free zone so could not receive waste.

3. To the Executive Member for Finance

At what level are Council officials allowed to use Council credit cards and are family members allowed to buy things like iTunes using these Council Credit Cards? Are family members allowed to use these Council Credit Cards?

Answer from Councillor Tatler

The use of credit cards is standard business practice in many organisations. They offer a quick, reliable, cost effective, means of paying for goods and services, and provide access to necessary business purchases that can only be made through the internet for example renewals to online computer software licences.

The Council currently accesses a credit card payment facility with the Bank of Scotland. In total this facility is set at a maximum of £35,000. Purchases undertaken using council cards cannot exceed this sum in any month. The balance is cleared in full each month and **no** interest charges are incurred ensuring best value.

6 members of the Council Management Team are currently issued with corporate credit cards. They are the Chief Executive, both Executive Directors, the Service Director Human Resources, the Service Director Assets and Infrastructure and the Chief Financial Officer.

The limits on the cards are as follows

Chief Executive £5,000

Executive Directors £5,000 (x2)

Service Director HR £3,000

Service Director Assets and infrastructure £13,000 (used for DVLA licencing of the vehicle fleet)

Chief Financial Officer £4,000

Officers in council departments may use these cards for online purchases with the approval of the card holder. All use must be in line with the council's approved policies. No use without card holder authorisation is permitted. All transactions are scrutinised, and signed for retrospectively each month by Service Directors.

The use of these cards is restricted only to legitimate Council Business, personal transactions are not permitted. Staff family members are not permitted to use the cards for any purpose.

Questions from Councillor H. Anderson

1. To the Executive Member for Children and Young People

Given the vital importance of viable nursery provision for the future of rural schools, can you clarify what steps are being taken to protect rural nursery provision in Tweeddale West?

Answer from Councillor C. Hamilton

Provision of Early Learning and Childcare is one of many options which are explored as a support to sustaining rural schools.

In Tweeddale West there are specific examples of provision being protected in Broughton and Newlands.

The playgroup provider in Broughton has notified SBC that they intended to close, and in response we have worked with the Care Inspectorate to register an early level class – a model which has worked successfully in other settings where very small numbers of nursery children learn alongside a small primary one two class.

In Newlands, the provider has been supported financially for over 7 years to enable them to meet their rental obligations and through recent meetings, officers have offered guidance around more sustainable staffing and operational models.

Unfortunately, in some areas there are not sufficient children to run a viable provision, given the environment and staffing requirements and not all primary schools in the Borders have an Early Learning and Childcare provision. Another option in a rural area is for Childminders to come onto the Council's framework of ELC provision and the Council continues to facilitate and support this.

Offering all 3 and 4 years olds as well as eligible 2 years olds 1140 hours of quality early learning and childcare is a key priority, and where it is not feasible to retain a provision due to very low numbers, this entitlement will be offered as close by as possible or through other providers such as childminders.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked if it would be possible to receive a report on which Primary Schools lacked nursery provision, the number of private providers at risk and the steps which the Council could take to assist. Councillor Hamilton advised that she would discuss with officers.

2. To Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

Following the community consultation, can we be updated on the review of closure plans for 11 play parks in Tweeddale?

Answer from Councillor Haslam in the absence of Councillor Aitchison

The Council requested feedback to the programme for decommissioning of play parks with an end date of 18th August. Officers will now undertake a review of the feedback and where appropriate respond prior to implementing the Council decision.

In announcing a significant investment in outdoor community facilities the Council recognised the need to address the historic over provision of low value playparks, indeed the Council is in amongst the largest providers of play parks per 1000 head of population when compared to similar authorities, however when it comes to quality it is amongst the lowest in play value terms.

The Council decision to invest in destination playparks and decommission those play parks which are obsolete does not remove the spaces from fulfilling an important community need in terms of access to open spaces. These spaces can be used for informal play and have the potential to help the Council address other issues such as its obligation to identify places for community food growing.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked where the final report would be presented and if Members would have the opportunity for input. Councillor Haslam advised that any report would be submitted to the Area Partnerships.

Questions from Councillor McAteer

1. To the Executive Member for Adult Social Care

I like many Members present today, represent a specific group of mainly elderly vulnerable people who are alarmed, worried and anxious at the prospect of Council run day care services being withdrawn to be replaced by Local Area Co-ordination (LACS). While there is evidence that some service users do benefit from using self-directed support there is equally a large number, including family carers, who depend on regularly attending our day care centres. Threatened closure of the Katherine Elliot Day Care Centre in Hawick has been met with disbelief and abhorrence. We have

been told that this Centre will continue to remain open if new care plans do not meet individual needs. Can the Executive Member give an assurance to those service users in Hawick, and their dedicated carers, that the Katherine Elliot Day Care Centre will remain open in such circumstances?

Answer from Councillor Weatherston

The day service transformation is predicated on the fact that no substantial changes will happen until we are confident that users and their carers assessed needs can be met through alternatives.

We are currently engaged with users and their carers to discuss what alternative arrangements will look like for each individual. The implementation plan allows additional development time in Teviot.

In addition to this phase the executive report also described individual arrangements that may be required for people with more complex needs or those who may have dementia. In that respect officers continue to work in partnership with health and third sector colleagues to develop stronger community based models of care that will meet peoples assessed needs.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer asked if the position of the Katherine Elliot Day Centre could be reconsidered. Councillor Weatherston advised that the Council would work with individual clients and their relatives to get the best outcome for them; and asked that people did not become fixated with particular buildings. Councillor Weatherston appreciated that there was a higher number of clients in Hawick but it was about providing the best service for these clients. He was happy to work with officers and the Hawick Members on this matter.

2. To the Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

The highly contentious purchase of the Lowood Estate has placed additional financial pressures on a hard pressed Council that is continually forced to cut services. However, development of the Lowood Estate and the associated infrastructure costs are according to some sources likely to be substantially greater than the purchase price. Can the Executive Member reassure the Members that no substantial additional costs will fall to this Council and can he explain how the future development and infrastructure costs will be funded?

Answer from Councillor Rowley

The purchase of Lowood estate and the development of land already in Council ownership at Tweedbank have been subject to detailed Council reports and the figures included in these reports have not changed from those previously outlined. The reports detailed how these developments would be funded as far as these were known at this point, the funding arrangements include a series of partnership arrangements with Scottish Government, local RSLs and the private sector. I can assure the Elected Member that the costs set out in the detailed reports to Council have not changed, should there be any material change this will be reported to Elected Members at the appropriate time.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer advised he just wanted reassurance that the Council would not be left with the full costs. Councillor Rowley advised that discussion were ongoing with a whole range of partners and the Members Oversight Group was also in place. A Members briefing would be organised soon.

Questions from Councillor H. Scott

To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

1. The signage at, and the design of, the junction at Ladhope Vale and Bridge Place, Galashiels, has been the subject of much controversy for some time. Whilst the roadside signage has been improved, the white roundel marking and arrows in the centre of the junction are almost invisible and in serious need of restoration. These white roadway markings are a major factor in road safety by informing drivers that they are about to

negotiate a mini-roundabout. When will these markings be restored to a state where they fully perform the purpose for which they are intended?

Answer from Councillor Edgar

The condition of lining within the towns is assessed annually by Council Officers within Assets & Infrastructure.

The white roundel marking and arrows on the roundabout at the Ladhope Vale and Bridge Place junction have been added to the list of town lining for Galashiels and issued for programming. We do not have an exact date for the lining at the junction to be carried out, however we anticipate that it will be completed this calendar year.

2. White lines on sections of the A7 road between Galashiels and Fala Hill are in a serious state of disrepair, and in some places non-existent. In many places the growth of roadside foliage has reduced or obscured views, and lane and hazard line markings are no longer appropriate, requiring to be replaced by continuous white lines which prohibit overtaking. White lines on each side of the carriageway are also extremely important in providing guidance to drivers on corners and steering them away from soft verges. Whilst no correlation can be drawn linking recent serious accidents on this stretch of road to the poor state of white lines, when will action be taken to improve the state of white lines so that they may contribute to making this particular section of the A7 as safe as possible?

Answer from Councillor Edgar

The retroreflectivity of the centre lines on the A and B Class road network is surveyed every 2 years, with the most recent survey of the A Class having been carried out in 2019.

All sections of centre line that were highlighted as part of the aforementioned survey were assessed, and given an order of priority based on the overall condition of the lines, the hierarchy of the route, accident information, the extent of deficient lining at individual sites and available budget.

Sections of the A7 have been prioritised for relining this financial year and we are currently obtaining prices for these works to be carried out.

Scottish Borders Council has nearly 3000 kilometres of adopted road to maintain across its area. Due to resources, programming and financial constraints, we are unable to complete all sections of lining from the list of priorities each year. Furthermore, the available budget only allows the remarking of centre lines to be considered. Whilst the benefit of edge lines is recognised on certain classifications of road, the Road Asset Management Policy emphasises the requirement to commit the majority of the available budget to essential road maintenance operations, with these works taking the form of resurfacing, surface dressing and patching

The necessary standard of visibility is governed by the speed of vehicles on the road; surveys carried out in the summer and winter months may produce differing visibility as a result of foliage growth and this should be taken into account when the markings are designed. The most recent surveys of the line types on sections of the A7 in 2017 resulted in minor amendments.

Supplementary

Councillor Scott asked if the white lining schedule could be shared with Members. Councillor Edgar advised he would check with officers but advised that the timing of the work could be subject to change due to weather conditions and the availability of budget.

3. To the Executive Member for Transformation and HR

During the recent upgrade of IT equipment why was it necessary to issue a laptop computer and an iPad to elected members, and what was the total cost of the exercise?

Answer from Councillor Mountford

Elected members were issued with a laptop and an iPad during the recent upgrade to replace equipment that had previously been issued.

The laptops replaced for members contained new software capable of running office 365 and Windows 10. The previous version of the software installed on old laptops, windows 7, will no longer be supported by Microsoft after January 2020. This means the equipment used by elected members would no longer be PSN compliant and could be not be connected to the council network.

IPad were upgraded to provide larger screens more compatible with viewing the large and often complex documents supporting council reports.

Members can if they wish decide to operate with only one device as long as this enables them to fully undertake their council duties. Any devices surplus to requirements can be returned and will be recycled to staff. The total cost of this exercise was £44,535.00. The move from paper to IPad has saved £17k per annum in direct paper, printing and postage costs.

Supplementary

Councillor Scott asked why two pieces of equipment were required. Councillor Mountford advised that they had different functionality but if he only wanted one he could hand the other back.

4. To the Executive Member for Children and Young People

The all-volunteer House Committee of Langlee Community Centre raises money which is used to fund worthy causes in their community as well as maintain certain furnishings and fittings in the Centre. They must also pay a fee to Live Borders, circa £9,000 per annum, towards heating, lighting, and caretaker services. The Community Learning Development Service (CLD), an operational arm of Scottish Borders Council enjoys free lets at the Centre, assessed at in excess of £3,000 per annum, this cost falling upon the House Committee. In future will CLD be provided with funding so the cost of these free lets no longer falls on the hard working volunteer House Committee of the Langlee Community Centre, which will allow it to channel that money to the many worthy causes it supports?

Answer from Councillor C. Hamilton

The Langlee Community Centre historically sat within SBC's Community Learning and Development service. During this period the delivery of adult and family learning to vulnerable families in Langlee was a core SBC function and free at the point of delivery. When Community Centres moved to the LIVE Borders Trust it was with the understanding that the CLD services would not be charged for the use of the buildings.

The CLD service deliver adult Literacy and Numeracy classes and family learning opportunities to some of the most vulnerable individuals in the community. If the CLD service had to try and find this budget for pay for Lets and it was replicated across the region in all Community Centres that we deliver these services from the total cost would be circa £16,000.00 per annum.

Within the context of current savings targets the CLD service does not have these funds within its budget. If we have to begin paying for Lets we would have to seek alternative spaces within the SBC estate to deliver from that incurred no charge. This would most likely be schools; which presents us with two main challenges:

1. Many of the vulnerable learners that we work with find schools a very challenging environment, mainly due to personal history and experiences. Community Centres are viewed as very safe spaces for these learners
2. Some of our newer schools have community spaces within and this could be a an option purely in terms of available space but there are also schools that have little space available for community based delivery.

Supplementary

Councillor Scott expressed the view that as this was an operational arm of the Council it should be paying its way and asked if the money saved from the second CAT Team could not be used to fund this. Councillor Hamilton advised she would discuss with officers.