

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
26 SEPTEMBER 2019
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor Marshall

To the Executive Member for Children & Young People

Given the recent announcement by the Scottish Government that Scottish Borders Council are not to be included on the list to receive funding from an additional £1 billion to support the Schools Estate within our region.

- (a) Can the Portfolio Holder update us as to what level of discussions are now taking place regarding this latest funding blow?
- (b) Can the Portfolio Holder also confirm that Hawick is still very much on track to receive a new School by 2024?
- (c) Can she also update members on where her department is in terms of securing a site for this new school?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

Officers have requested feedback from both Scottish Government and SFT with regard to the allocation of the Phase 1 Pilot funding associated with the Government's new Learning Estate Strategy. Although 11 Councils received support across a range of projects, this first phase was always intended to be relatively small scale in order to pilot the revised funding model and implementation of the new Learning Estate Strategy (which has replaced the former "Schools for the Future" programme). The initial funding commitment is in the range of £220-275m from the £1bn to be provided by the Government in future years.

Officers are continuing to progress the design development of new schemes in Eyemouth, Earlston, Galashiels and Hawick using currently allocated resources and it is anticipated that public consultation event will take place across these towns in due course with member briefings in advance. No decision has been taken as yet with regard to any preferred site in Hawick.

As the capital programme in 2019/20 assumed that the previous funding model would continue, the implications of the new strategy are currently being assessed by the Capital, Education and Finance teams and will be brought to Council as part a Learning Estate update and the budget process for 2020/21

Question from Councillor McAteer

To the Executive Member for Community Safety

With the recently reported April to June 2019 Scottish Borders crime statistics revealing an overall increase of 12%, and with acquisitive crime and thefts by housebreaking contributing with over 30% increases over the same period, can the Executive Member provide any reassurance to the Borders Public concerning the safety and security of their property. Additionally, with a reported 17% solvency rate for theft by housebreaking, can he explain what action he has taken on our behalf to ensure that adequate policing resources are addressing a startling 12% drop in performance.

Reply from Councillor Turnbull

The question raised relates to the Police Scotland Q1 Scrutiny Report held on 30th August 2019. As you rightly point out reports of this type of crime during Q1 have increased while detections have fallen. In that report the police allude to a group of organised criminals

whom they are tackling with other neighbouring divisions. It can be the case that the detection of one of these types of crime can lead to multiple detections.

As you will be aware the police have operational independence and Q1 is not a particularly good indication of performance overall. Some of these investigations take time to conclude and the results not reflected in the figures for a period of time. Disruption, detection and prevention activity are all essential parts which I am confident the police are working hard to achieve.

The police reported solvency from Q1 to week 20 for crimes of dishonesty increasing from 34.1% to 40.1%.

I am further advised that the detection rate for housebreaking has risen from 17.7% in quarter 1 to 33.6%, a rise of 15.9% so far in Quarter 2. This is a 10.7% increase when compared to the same period last year.

Looking at previous years reported crime and detections move within each quarter. At this stage in the reporting year I would expect to see an improving trend going into the remaining 3 quarters.

The police cannot do this alone, they need the public to support the police in reporting any suspicious activity either through 101 the non-emergency number or 999 in an emergency.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer asked, given that these statistics were a measure of Police performance, what steps Councillor Turnbull would be taking to publicising these improving figures to the public. Councillor Turnbull advised that it was not his place to become involved in police operational matters but the Police, Fire & Rescue and Community Safety Board would continue to put pressure on the police to increase solvency rates.

Questions from Councillor Ramage

To the Executive Member for Children & Young People

1. Are all classroom staff being given an iPad?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

All class teachers will be issued an I-pad as per the publicised plan and previous briefings to elected members.

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage advised that she had been approached by a classroom assistant who had not received an iPad. Councillor Hamilton advised that the pupil they were supporting would have one.

2. What are the monetary savings made from removing librarians from Galashiels, Peebles and Kelso High Schools? What is the cost of buying and fitting the self-service equipment for the staff-less libraries?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

As reported in June, the saving from the three schools is £78,203

Although the capital spend on library equipment and software in 2018/19 was £42,843, this is a one-off cost and allows the learning resource spaces in all three schools to be open and accessible for extended hours beyond the school day.

It is also noteworthy that the pre-installed Live Borders library app is on the I-pad's, allows young people to request materials from public libraries 24 hours per day.

Supplementary

Councillor Ramage considered that the saving was small compared to the important role of librarians in schools and commented on the Scottish Government funding being used to support library projects in other areas. She asked when a full report would be provided on this matter. Councillor Hamilton advised that the libraries were not staff-less. There was currently work ongoing with Live Borders and the Chief Officer had recently met with library support staff.

Question from Councillor Robson

To the Executive Member for Children & Young People

Further to the announcement by the Scottish Government on 6th September whether the Council's share of the £15 million investment in "frontline staff" for additional support for learning has as yet been identified, if so what that amount is and whether it is recurring, and, what plans there are to deploy these additional resources if and when they become available?

Reply from Councillor C. Hamilton

The Council is yet to receive clarification from Scottish Government regarding the additional investment announced for "frontline staff" for additional support for learning provision.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked when this money was received that it be focused on early intervention work. Councillor Hamilton advised that she would ensure officers kept her informed of progress.