

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**  
**31 OCTOBER 2019**  
**APPENDIX I**

**OPEN QUESTIONS**

**Question from Councillor Laing**

To Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Locality Services

Deborah Arnott of Action on Smoking and Health has said that growing up in a smoke free environment is one of the best ways of ensuring that children are not attracted to smoking.

In an effort to de-normalise smoking behaviour, there are a growing number of locations across the country where smokers are being requested not to smoke in the vicinity of children's playparks.

Can the executive member advise if Scottish Borders Council has any plans to adopt this policy and install "No Smoking" signs at our public play areas?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

The Council is piloting the promotion of anti-smoking signage within its new destination play parks, with signs currently asking people to "*Please refrain from smoking within the play area*".

**Questions from Councillor Paterson**

To Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

1. With Scottish Borders Council still being 100% behind the extension of the railway to Carlisle via Newcastleton, do you not think that it's imperative that we have at least one officer of the Council in place to be working with Government Ministers and Officials to reiterate and push the Councils case that the extension of the Borders railway has to take the route from Galashiels or Tweedbank to Hawick and from Hawick to Carlisle via Newcastleton. It is my understanding that at present there is no dedicated officer to deal with this important issue. Will this be rectified as quickly as possible?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

A single dedicated officer would not be an appropriate approach in this instance. A number of senior Council officers are involved in the ongoing discussions around the extension of the Borders Railway from Carlisle to Tweedbank. These officers will continue to promote this major project to both UK Government and Scottish Government.

2. Can the Portfolio Holder please give me feedback from the recycling wagon now doing a trial period in Jedburgh: is it proving to be a success and are the majority of materials dumped in the wagon green waste? I am regularly being asked by my constituents in Newcastleton to ask this question

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The Jedburgh Mobile Recycling Service Pilot commenced on the 8 September and will run until the 22 December 2019. Detailed feedback on the performance of the trial will be provided once the trial has ended.

In the interim, we can confirm that as of the 25 October the Council has received 69 responses to the online consultation and a total of 9.5 tonnes of material have been deposited by residents, the majority of which (i.e. over 90% or 8.7 tonnes) has been garden waste.

Supplementary

Councillor Paterson asked if there were any plans to extend this service to other areas of the Borders. Councillor Edgar advised this would be discussed once the results of the consultation were known.

### 3. To Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

What steps are the Council taking to ensure that businesses in the Borders do not get unduly penalised in the latest round of trade wars with the American Republican Administration imposing tariffs on the export of cashmere and other luxury goods exported from Scotland to America. This action could well have far reaching effects on the Textile industry and other industries like single malt whisky.

#### Reply from Councillor Rowley

The Council shares the concerns being raised about the impact of tariffs on the export of cashmere and other luxury goods manufactured in the Scottish Borders. However, this is clearly a matter for the UK Government to address. This is a 'reserved' matter that the Scottish Government has no control over, and which the Council has no direct influence over either. I believe that the industry has been effective in making its concerns known to the UK Government and understand that the Government is working closely with the US Government, the European Union, and European partners to agree a negotiated settlement.

### 4. To Executive Member for Community Safety

With two police officers from the Scottish Borders being sent to London to help the Met Police deal with the possible problems arising from the protests and possible riots from the Extinction Rebellion in London can I be assured that the 12 extra officers that SBC are paying for will not be sent to any other town or city in the UK and they will continue doing the job that we are paying them to do and that is police the streets of the Scottish Borders?

#### Reply from Councillor Haslam in the absence of Councillor Turnbull

I have been advised that neither of the two officers deployed to London (following a mutual aid request) came from the Council funded Community Action Team.

Both these officers have since returned to their normal policing duties within the Borders.

In the event it became necessary to deploy a funded officer in this way their place would be back filled with another officer in order that (funded) officer numbers are maintained.

### **Question from Councillor S Hamilton**

#### To Executive Member for Planning and Environment

The Executive member for Planning & Environment is no doubt aware of the current level of disruption caused by the large amounts of scaffolding being used to support the dangerous building on the High Street/Exchange Street, Jedburgh. On behalf of residents and businesses who are being affected by this could he please give us an update on the current position and brief outline on the next steps?

#### Reply from Councillor Miers

Officers are continuing to engage with owners to achieve a negotiated purchase of the property. Agreement has been reached with two of the owners, negotiation is still on-going with the other four.

In tandem with this negotiation officers are progressing a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO), should this prove necessary. The necessary papers were submitted to Scottish Government on 13<sup>th</sup> September and are currently undergoing technical assessment.

Officers have also been securing the necessary statutory approvals for the demolition of the existing building and preparing the tender documentation. This will enable demolition work to start as soon as ownership is secured. A listed building consent application and a staged building warrant are currently being processed by the Council for the demolition.

Architects have been appointed to develop a design for the replacement building taking account of the approved design brief and the requirements of the potential end user of the building.

In the meantime officers will continue to monitor the building to ensure public safety is maintained and provide members and the local community with periodic updates on progress of the project.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Hamilton advised that there appeared to be a lack of information at Community Council meetings and asked that the report frequency be increased. Councillor Miers agreed that this could be done.

### **Questions from Councillor H Anderson**

#### 1. To Executive Member for Business and Economic Development

In October 2018 Scottish Borders Council agreed a motion which called on the council to convene an early meeting with key stakeholders in farming and rural civic society to explore both the important contribution they can make towards improving local prosperity and to identify the potential barriers they were facing. It was also hoped that this meeting would strengthen the council's understanding of the key contribution these farmers and rural leaders could make towards the work of the South of Scotland Enterprise and the potential Borderlands Initiative.

How has this commitment been progressed?

#### Reply from Councillor Rowley

The commitment has been progressed. However, progress has been challenging given the uncertainties around Brexit and the consequent challenge in identifying the most appropriate focus for discussions

I understand you agreed to the work being managed jointly through SoSEP and the Council which is both helpful and appropriate. To date discussions have taken place with the Deputy First Minister at his meeting with the South of Scotland Alliance and with The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Agriculture through the South of Scotland Economic Partnership. I also understand you have corresponded with the Cabinet Secretary on the matter and that he indicated his support for this initiative.

At a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary attended by the Partnership, and the Leaders of Scottish Borders Council and Dumfries and Galloway Council there was agreement that sectoral meetings were to be arranged to facilitate the type of discussion your Motion intended. These discussions are important for the reasons your question highlights and in shaping the focus and activity of the new Enterprise Agency.

The Partnership commissioned work directly with the agriculture sector to augment the work completed with other businesses. That work will be completed next month and will form the basis for a sectoral discussion.

In parallel the strategic land use pilots continue and they will also provide valuable learning and input to the forthcoming discussions.

The likely timescale for a further sectoral meetings including Agriculture is between now and the end of January.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Anderson commented on the lack of a formal structure for updating those who had submitted motions. Councillor Rowley undertook to discuss this with officers.

#### 2. To Executive Member for Adult Social Care

In November 2018 Cllr Weatherston in his capacity as the portfolio holder for Adult Social Care was asked for an explanation of the fact that Scottish Borders Council had the second lowest rate of spend through the Welfare Fund and also had the highest rate of applicant refusals. Can we now be updated on whether there has been any change in the performance of the Fund over the last 12 months?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

Figures published by the Scottish Government in July 2019 detailing Scottish Welfare Fund activity across Scotland, for the year ended March 2019 show changes in the performance of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

The figures show that our overall Scottish Welfare Fund expenditure increased by 34% from 2017/18 to 2018/19 this is for both Community Care Grants and Crisis Grants.

Crisis Grant award rates increased over the year with an acceptance rate of 54% in Quarter 4 compared to 38% in Quarter 1 when you last asked me about this. This is in the context of an 8% increase in the number of applications for Crisis Grants within the Scottish Borders over the year, achieved in part from greater awareness of the fund.

Only 8 Local Authorities including Scottish Borders increased their award rates within this period, the others reported no change or a decline.

During Quarter 4 96% of those applicants that did have a successful claim were processed by the next working day, which is directly in line with the Scottish average, meaning applicants who are successful are able to access funds quickly to mitigate a crisis or disaster.

Officers are continually reviewing practices and procedures and will continue to carry out awareness sessions with key staff within the Council and partner organisations.

One area of success to note is the improvement of links between Scottish Welfare Fund and Homeless Services. This has resulted in positive outcomes which include reducing the time applicants spend in temporary accommodation once they have signed for their tenancy assisting their resettlement into the community after living an unsettled way of life.