

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held remotely by Microsoft
Teams on Tuesday, 6 October 2020 at 10.00
am

- Present:- Councillors S. Haslam (Chairman), S. Aitchison, G. Edgar, S. Hamilton, E. Jardine, S. Mountford, M. Rowley, G. Turnbull and T. Weatherston
- Apologies:- Councillors C. Hamilton and R. Tatler
- In Attendance:- Executive Director, Corporate Improvement & Economy, Service Director Young People, Engagement & Inclusion, Service Director Assets & Infrastructure, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling)

EDUCATION BUSINESS

- Present:- Mr I. Topping, Mr G Wilkinson, (Parent Representative), Harry Scott (Pupil Representative)
- Apologies:- Mr T. Davidson, Lindsay Craig, Katie Brookes.

CHAIRMAN

In the absence of Councillor Carol Hamilton (Executive Member for Children and Young People) the meeting was chaired by Councillor Haslam.

1. **APPROVAL OF FINAL DRAFT OF PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS FRAMEWORK**
- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director, Young People Engagement & Inclusion seeking approval of the final draft of the Partnership with Parents Framework attached as Appendix 1 to the report. It was proposed that the Partnership with Parents Framework would reflect and align with the national guidance and legislation outlined in Learning Together: national action plan on parental involvement, engagement, family learning and learning at home, to provide a clear strategic direction on collaborative practice with parents for all schools and in Scottish Borders Council. The Partnership with Parents Framework sat within the “Achieving Excellence in Learning play #yourpart”, alongside the Inclusion Strategy and the Inclusion Policy presented to Executive Committee in January 2020. Scottish Borders Council had a clear vision and commitment to raise attainment and achievement for all our children and young people. The full participation of parents in learning and school improvement was an essential element in achieving this. With the aid of a slide presentation, the Quality Improvement Officer, Kevin McCall gave members a summary of the Framework which had been developed based on the information gathered during consultation and on national expectations. The Framework supported the work needing to be undertaken by schools by providing an outline of national policies, research evidence and supportive tools to enable delivery and evaluation of impact. This approach would ensure that all parents living in Scottish Borders could experience a clear and consistent approach to involvement in their school and their child’s learning.
- 1.2 Members welcomed the development of the Framework and in the ensuing discussion received answers to their questions. In terms of the results of the 2019 Parental Involvement and Engagement Census, detailed in tables within the report, Mr McCall confirmed that the level of parental engagement did drop off between Primary and

Secondary and there was also a difference between Primary and Secondary in respect of the gender of parental involvement. This would be one of the focus areas for attention. With regard to the red and amber indicators in the Census relating to Learning at Home and Family Learning, Mr McCall confirmed this was a key area of focus within the Framework. However he stressed that the Census had been carried out in 2019, before roll-out of the Inspire Learning programme and before experience gained during the management of education through the Covid-19 pandemic. Within a national context the Local Authority was now well-placed due to the Inspire Learning regime which provided pupils with their individual iPad to facilitate learning whether at home or in school. Mr McCall explained that most barriers for improvement in terms of parental involvement and engagement were demonstrated to be around practical issues, such as childcare, timing, work commitment etc. He provided an example of how such an issue was approached when, at the request of parents and due to the current requirement to hold meetings remotely, the timing of regular Parent Council Chair Forum meetings had been moved from evening to lunchtime. This had resulted in significantly improved attendance. With regard to the challenges for parents to be able to realistically provide assistance with their children's education in the light of significant changes in basic methods of learning, Mr McCall explained that following a dialogue with parents started over 18 months ago, regarding training needs, a series of outreach training sessions had been delivered and these were now continuing on-line. This was a recognised challenge at school level which needed to happen as part of an evaluation to facilitate a collaborative approach with parents. In this respect and to facilitate an equitable approach, there had been a focus on Community Learning and Development in 18 schools which had been identified as having the greatest level of need and where work was required in terms of relationship building with parents, starting with engagement through the early years teams.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the final draft of the Partnership with Parents Framework, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, and to confirm that this could be circulated to all learning establishments in the Scottish Borders.

2. LEARNING ESTATE STRATEGY - SECONDARY SCHOOLS UPDATE

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Service Director, Young People Engagement & Inclusion and Service Director, Assets & Infrastructure to provide an update on plans for the replacement of the Secondary School Estate and on the planned submission to Scottish Government seeking funding from Phase 2 of the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP). The report outlined the further adjustment that required to be made to the Capital Investment Strategy to progress with the replacement of Galashiels Academy, while accelerating the replacement of Peebles High School following the significant fire in November 2019. The Service Director, Young People Engagement & Inclusion, Lesley Munro, presented the report which advised that the plan for secondary school replacement sat within a wider strategy, which would make recommendations regarding future work-streams and policies that would be required to deliver the overall Learning Estate Strategic Plan. This strategy would be presented to Scottish Borders Council following further engagements at locality level and feedback from Scottish Government, which was expected to be by the end of the year. In February 2020, adjustments to the Capital Investment Strategy were approved by Scottish Borders Council to progress with the replacement of Galashiels Academy, while accelerating the replacement of Peebles High School, maximising the opportunity to enhance facilities there. In response to Scottish Government's request for a status update, it was proposed that Galashiels Academy and Peebles High School were presented as priority projects. The proposals also aligned with the Fit for 2024 programme which looked to extend the use of schools as community assets. The replacement of outdated inefficient secondary schools in Galashiels and Peebles would also make a substantive contribution to the sustainability and energy efficiency of the wider school estate. Mrs Munro outlined the proposals for both schools which were detailed within the report which also set out the delivery programme and estimated budget details for each. The report went on to look at proposals for Hawick High School in the Capital Plan.

2.2 In a discussion of the report Members expressed their enthusiasm and support for the exciting and ambitious programmes at both Galashiels and Peebles. In terms of the proposals in Galashiels for the replacement of the swimming pool and provision of enhanced sports facilities for the town they noted the importance of engagement with sports groups and other stakeholders to ensure there were no missed opportunities in the development project. With regard to timescale for delivery of the programme and whether this could be shortened, the Service Director Assets & Infrastructure, John Curry, emphasised the importance of spending sufficient time in the initial phase of consultation and engagement with the community and stakeholders to ensure that the Council arrived at the best possible brief for this ambitious project. Mr Curry added that the proposals would result in particular solutions which were fit for purpose for each school site. In response to a question from Mr Topping, Mrs Munro confirmed that the Primary School replacement programme would continue and run in parallel with the Secondary School programme. She also responded to a question from pupil representative Harry Scott about the position of Hawick and Selkirk High Schools within the strategy. She explained that some improvement work was being carried out at Selkirk High School, which was fourth in terms of the programme, in particular to create social areas and improved toilet facilities. The delivery of Hawick High School was third in the programme and slightly behind that of Galashiels Academy and Peebles High School. Some refurbishment work had already been carried out at Hawick High School and Mrs Munro said she was happy to consult with a pupil group there about any further particular refurbishment work that may be required in the meantime ahead of the investment in a new build.

DECISION

AGREED:

- (a) to endorse the submission of an update proposal to Scottish Government seeking approval for funding support towards the replacement of Galashiels Academy and the substantive replacement of Peebles High School;**
- (b) to note that the requirement for additional upfront capital funding to replace Galashiels and Peebles Secondary Schools would require to be prioritised within the Capital Investment Programme 2020/21; and**
- (c) that locality engagement would be undertaken on the overall Learning Estate Strategy in preparation for presentation of the full strategy to Scottish Borders Council following cluster engagement and Scottish Government feedback.**

3. STANDARDS AND QUALITY REPORT AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

3.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Young People, Engagement & Inclusion providing information on the progress made by the Education Service and schools during 2019-20 and noting the improvement priorities for session 2020-21. Chief Education Officer, Michelle Strong, explained that The Standards & Quality Report, attached as Appendix A to the report, was an evaluation of academic session 2019-20 and drew on a range of data/information to support its conclusion. This report acknowledged the challenges faced by schools as a result of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdown but also highlighted a number of successes and achievements across all sectors. The Improvement Plan, Appendix B to the report, was a statement of our objectives for academic session 2020-21. This was a slimmed down plan which took cognisance of the challenges our teachers, families and young people have faced returning to school buildings. It was also important to note the inclusion of Inspire Learning as a key driver for improvement in schools. Ms Strong drew attention to notable achievements recorded in the Standards and Quality Report 2019/20, including: continuation and return to education of young people at Peebles High School following the devastating fire; the provision of 16 childcare hubs from 23rd March to 10th August for children of key workers and some children identified as vulnerable to support the Covid-19

response; the launch of the Inspire Learning Programme, which allowed all learners in our secondary schools to stay connected with learning throughout the period of lockdown; and the opening of the new community campus in Jedburgh. The report and Appendix A set out attainment levels for Broad General Education which were all on track and SQA data. Due to Covid-19 the data for Broad General Education reflected the position in February 2020 rather than June 2020 so comparisons with previous years could not be made. Also, due to a delay in benchmarking toolkit, the normal SQA data could not be presented. A more detailed report would be brought to a future meeting. In terms of Leavers Destinations, 27% went in to employment, which was the highest percentage over a 5 year trend and is above the national figure. The report went on to list Service priorities for the session 2020/21 Improvement Plan which remained consistent to ensure continuous improvement across all sectors.

- 3.2 Members welcomed the report and received answers to their questions. Ms Strong gave further information about the Quarriers Resilience for Wellbeing Service which had continued to develop and support young people in all secondary schools across the Scottish Borders and had offered over 4 thousand sessions within the 2019/20 period. There was a Quarriers Resilience Practitioner in each of the 9 High Schools. During the lockdown Quarriers were flexible in their approach. Support, which was usually provided face to face, was continued by text, phone and Teams meetings. It transpired that some young people preferred to engage in this way. Ms Strong went on to explain how the Health and Wellbeing intervention model had been rolled out to improve confidence and build resilience. Young people who were receiving the service reported increasing levels of wellbeing. In further discussion Members commented on the clear benefits of the Inspire Learning programme in terms of the development of independent learning in addition to the facilitation of equity of access for every child. Reference was also made to the excellent example demonstrated in a local context by the textile department of Hawick High School which had developed a sector leading curriculum partnership with the Centre of Excellence in Textiles and local textile manufacturers.

**DECISION
NOTED:**

- (a) **the Standards and Quality Report 2019/20 attached as Appendix A to the report; and**
- (b) **the Education Improvement Plan 2020/21 attached as Appendix B to the report.**

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Haslam thanked the additional representatives for their attendance for the Education business of the Executive Committee. As she had to leave the meeting Councillor Mountford took over the chair for the remainder of the business.

OTHER BUSINESS

4. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting of 15 September 2020.

**DECISION
APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.**

5. **WINTER SERVICE PLAN FOR YEAR 2020/21**

- 5.1 With reference to paragraph 2 of the Minute of 20 August 2019, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Assets & Infrastructure providing a brief review of the performance of Scottish Borders Council's Winter Service during 2019/20 and presenting in Appendix A to the report the Council's Winter Service Plan for 2020/21. The

Network & Infrastructure Manager, Brian Young, explained that the winter of 2019/20 was not particularly significant, continuing a pattern towards slightly warmer and wetter winters. Snowfall was limited to a few occasions while salt usage and the number of precautionary treatments undertaken was very much along average lines. The Winter Service Plan for 2020/21 was similar to the previous 2019/20 Plan in terms of policy, priorities, routes, call out arrangements and resource planning. It further set out the potential impacts of Covid19 and associated contingency planning. Mr Young went on to outline some amendments to the Winter Service Plan for 2020/21. Following the recent change of Trunk Road operating contractor, the Council had been notified that they would not be called upon to provide support in delivering a winter service on the Trunk Road network. At the Executive meeting of August 2019 Members had agreed to several amendments to the Winter Service Plan. However they had requested further information in relation to the arrangements for primary footpaths. A total of 174 km had been identified as the primary footway network that received winter treatment, as included in Appendix B to the report. The footway network was treated currently on a reactive/post treatment basis as conditions, prevailing temperatures and resources dictated. Unlike the roads network, there was no pre-treatment applied to any of the footway network. The arrangements for 2020/21 did not alter this policy but there would be a change in timing in that reactive treatment would be carried out on weekdays only, other than in extreme severe and prolonged circumstances. In terms of contingency planning relating to Covid-19, the potential for staff to be affected and the impact on delivering the service was recognised. A Resilience Plan to incorporate contractors within the Council's resources to enable service continuity was almost in place, with staff and Unions being engaged in discussions around how this may work for this winter. With reference to the financial implications set out in the report, Mr Young drew attention to the target to deliver savings of £150k in 2020/21 from changes to winter operations.

- 5.2 In answers to Members' questions about the Winter Service Plan 2020/21, Mr Young referred to the pressure to achieve savings and explained that by carrying out treatment of footways on weekdays only this avoided stand-up of workforce over the weekend which had often been proved to be unnecessary. In a discussion about particular issues relating to Covid-19 and pressure points within Town Centres in terms of pedestrians and treatment of footways in bad weather, it was noted that the Council was responsible for facilitating the safe passage of pedestrians in town centres but that shop owners would be responsible for safety implications brought about by queuing or gathering outside their premises. Mr Curry advised that the Council should have a pragmatic approach towards this issue and there would be engagement with local communities and businesses.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the performance of the SBC Winter Service during 2019/20; and**
- (b) endorse the Winter Service Plan for 2020/21.**

6. UPDATE ON THE SCOTTISH BORDERS EVENTS PLAN

- 6.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director, Corporate Improvement and Economy providing an update on the Council's events strategy and recommending a review of the proposed strategy due to the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the events sector, along with the reconfiguring of grant support for the events that the Council had previously supported. The Executive Director advised that there were two elements to the report. He firstly referred to the Strategic Events Plan for 2020- 2030 which had been developed by officers following discussions with key stakeholders. The subsequent changed landscape due to the Covid-19 pandemic, had resulted in almost every event in the Scottish Borders being cancelled or at least severely curtailed during the course of 2020. Furthermore the ongoing nature of the pandemic and its implications for many events had far reaching consequences for the sector. It was clear this had been one of the sectors hardest hit. It was therefore recommended that Council

Officers reviewed the current Strategic Events Plan, had further discussions and engagement with event organisers and sought to produce a fully re-drafted strategy taking into account the impact of recent months along with the potential restrictions initiated by Covid-19.

- 6.2 One of the key events supported by Scottish Borders Council was the Borders Book Festival. Following discussions with the Book Festival organisers, it was clear that they had been very successful in minimising the financial impact of cancelling this year's event and had now been able to develop and provide a virtual offering to customers, which would be beneficial to the festival in the longer term, allowing the organisers to help grow the product. The organisers had incurred significant costs associated with converting this year's event to be on-line. Costs had included the development of podcasts, virtual interviews with a wide selection of authors and the marketing and promotion of the festival. These had in effect been start-up costs for a new Book Festival. It was therefore recommended that Scottish Borders Council supported the festival during the current financial year with a grant of £20,000. This proposed financial allocation was in line with previous grants provided to the event organisers. In a discussion of the report Members expressed sympathy with event organisers and the situation the sector was in. In relation to the Borders Book Festival they praised the initiative shown in the provision of a virtual offering and commented on the quality of the programme offered. The Executive Director confirmed that the grant would be from the Economic Development budget and that it met the required terms.

**DECISION
AGREED:-**

- (a) that the proposed Events Strategy be fully re-drafted following the severe impact inflicted on the events sector by the Covid-19 pandemic;**
- (b) that officers continued to engage with and assess the most appropriate support for event organisers during the current pandemic; and**
- (c) funding of £20,000 for the Borders Book Festival.**

The meeting concluded at 11.50 am