

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held via Microsoft Teams on
Tuesday, 1 December, 2020 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Haslam, S. Aitchison, S. Mountford, G. Edgar, C. Hamilton, E. Jardine, M Rowley, G. Turnbull, R. Tatler, T. Weatherston.

In Attendance:- Executive Director, Corporate Improvement and Economy, Executive Director, Finance & Regulatory, Service Director - Assets & Infrastructure, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (F. Henderson.

1. **MINUTE**

The Minute of the Meeting held on 17 November 2020 had been circulated.

DECISION

AGREED that the Minute be approved and signed by the Chairman.

2. **CORPORATE DEBT – WRITE OFFS IN 2020/21 MID YEAR UPDATE**

With reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of 15 September 2020, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director, Finance & Regulatory which detailed the aggregate amounts of debt written off in the first 6 months of 2020/21 under delegated authority. The report covered the areas of Council Tax, Non-Domestic Rates, and Sundry Debtors, Housing benefit Overpayment and Aged debt from the balance sheet. The total value of write off between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 was £371.1k. The Executive Director referred Members to the table within the report which showed the amounts written off by category and a comparison with previous years. The highest value of write-offs continued to be within the category where the liable party had become insolvent. This was in part a reflection of the economic situation. It was explained that as much of the resource dealing with these had been highly involved in Business Grants and other Covid-19 related work which remained ongoing, there would not be an expectation that the write off levels would exceed those reached in 2019/20. An annual budget provision for sundry bad debts of £125k and £635k for Council Tax was maintained, which was regularly reviewed and if necessary would be revised in future. It was expected that the level of debts written off in 2020/21 would be lower than 2019/20 due to continued heightened risk factors, particularly Covid 19. Performance in this area continued to be closely monitored and management action, including the approved policy on debt recovery and supporting procedures, were in place to minimise risk. In response to a question on the high level of Housing benefits overpayments write-offs, Mr Robertson confirmed that he would clarify the situation.

DECISION

AGREED to note the debtor balances written off under delegated authority for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020.

3. **EYEMOUTH HARBOUR OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE PROJECT- UPDATE ON THE PROPOSED DIVE SHORE ACCESS ROAD FOR RECREATIONAL DIVERS**

- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Executive Director, Corporate Improvement and Economy and Service Director, Assets & Infrastructure which provided elected members with an update on the Eyemouth Operations and Maintenance Project Neart na Gaoithe offshore windfarm and specifically on the funding and construction of the proposed dive shore access road for recreational divers, which was a key condition of the recently approved planning application. The report explained that earlier in the year

planning permission had been granted to Eyemouth Harbour Trust for a new Operations & Maintenance (O&M) base at Eyemouth Harbour to support the Neart an Gaoithe Offshore Wind Farm. The O&M base would house office, warehousing and staff welfare facilities for the servicing of the wind farm and had potential to provide the town with significant economic benefits, including direct and indirect employment opportunities and allowed for the diversification of the existing harbour operations. The key planning condition was the requirement that vehicular access be maintained to nearby popular diving sites at Greenends Gully and Nestends Gully during the construction and operational phases of the O&M base development. Following discussions between Eyemouth Harbour Trust and Scottish Borders Council, it was agreed that a re-routing of the access road which was also known as the Dive Shore Road would be required to satisfy planning conditions outlined in the initial application. It was also agreed that Scottish Borders Council would design and help fund the new access road to help ensure the work related to the O&M base could be initiated. The proposed new section of Dive Road would provide vehicular access to the popular dive sites and would be approximately 60 metres in length, with its width varying between 5.5m and 3.25m. The new road had been designed to facilitate access for emergency vehicles should they be required and it was proposed that this new section of road would be constructed by the Council's in-house construction team, SBC Contracts.

- 3.2 The cost of the new section of road had been estimated to be in the region of £145k, part funding of £20k was being provided by Eyemouth Harbour Trust. A contribution of £125k was required from the revenue roads budget to allow for the works at the Dive Shore Access Road to proceed. The sum of £125k would be allocated from the Emergency & Unplanned Schemes fund to the Roads Block within capital to allow eligible capital works to take place which were being re-allocated from the revenue budget to allow the scheme to be funded. Members welcomed this development.

DECISION

AGREED

- (a) that the Dive Shore Access Road be constructed by SB Contracts as part of the Eyemouth Operations and Maintenance Contract;**
- (b) to Approve funding of £125k from the revenue roads budget to allow works at the Dive Shore Access Road to proceed**
- (c) that the £125k to be allocated from the Capital Emergency and Unplanned Schemes fund to the Roads Block within 2020/21 to fund eligible capital works which are being re-allocated from the revenue budget to accommodate the project.**

4.0 **ANNUAL PROCUREMENT REPORT**

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Executive Director, Finance & Regulatory which presented to Members the Annual Procurement Report (APR) 2019/20, a mandatory report required by the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. The report explained that Organisations that required to prepare a procurement strategy must also publish an annual procurement report and these documents were now part of the reporting landscape for the public sector to support increased transparency and visibility of public expenditure and to embed sustainability into public sector procurement. The key ambition of the procurement strategy was to support the local market and the economy. During 2019/20, and through delivering on the strategic objectives, the value of local spend with third parties operating in the geographical boundaries of the Scottish Borders had increased from £75.9m to £77.1m (44.3% of the total Council expenditure). Following approval, the report had to be submitted to the Scottish Government and, as a minimum, published on the internet. Delivering sustainable procurement with social and economic impact was an area of key importance and the Procurement team, working in partnership with the Supplier Development Programme (SDP), had recently been announced as the winner of the Best Procurement Delivery category in the Government Opportunities (GO) Excellence in Public Procurement Awards Scotland 2020. The project

behind this achievement supported local micro, small and medium sized repair and maintenance businesses to access procurement opportunities, with the judges noting the project as a great example of community wealth building across the Borders. A further key ambition of the procurement strategy was support the supply chains cash flow by ensuring the efficient and effective payment of invoices. The average indicator for the year 2019/20 was a strong 90%, and despite the challenges 2020 had brought, the performance continued to improve with a current average (as at Sept 2020) of 96%. During Living Wage week in November 2019, it was confirmed the Council had been successful in receiving Living Wage accreditation. This accreditation recognised the Council's commitment to paying all directly employed and regular third part contracted staff the real Living Wage. As a result, monitoring payment of the real Living Wage was an integral part of the procurement and contract management activities. Members congratulated the Procurement Team on their success, welcomed the progress made and found the case studies and graphics easy to read and enhanced the report. Members requested that comparisons with other Local Authorities be included in the report for future years.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the submission of the Annual Procurement Report 2018/19, as contained in the appendix to the report to the Scottish Government and its publication on the Council's website.

5. PRIVATE BUSINESS

DECISION

AGREED under Section 50A (4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the business detailed in Appendix 4 to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 6, 8 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

13. MINUTE

The private section of Minute of meeting held on 17 November 2020 was approved.

The meeting concluded at 10:50am