

MINUTE of Meeting of the EILDON AREA
PARTNERSHIP held remotely by Microsoft
Teams on Thursday, 28 January 2021 at
6.00 pm

Present:- Councillors G. Edgar (Chairman), S. Aitchison, A. Anderson, E. Jardine, and
H. Scott. E. Thornton-Nicol
With 24 representatives of partner organisations, Community Councils, and
members of the public.

Apologies:- Councillor D. Parker

In Attendance:- Service Director Customer & Communities, Communities and Partnerships
Manager, Locality Development Co-ordinator (K. Harrow), Democratic
Services Officer (F. Walling).

1. **WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Eildon Area Partnership held remotely via Microsoft teams, which included elected Members, guests attending within the meeting and those watching via the Live Stream. He outlined how the meeting would be conducted.

2. **FEEDBACK FROM MEETING ON 12 NOVEMBER 2020**

The Minute of the meeting of the Eildon Area Partnership held on 12 November 2020 had been circulated and was noted.

3. **COVID-19 UPDATE**

3.1 Jenni Craig, Service Director Customer & Communities gave a slide presentation to provide an update on the Covid-19 current position. Mrs Craig referred to the current trend which was showing the number of cases accelerating significantly due in part to the circulation of the new, even more transmissible variant of the virus. The continued rate of increase and the impact on health services was deeply worrying. It was essential therefore that everyone followed the current guidance and followed the 'Stay at Home' message. Due to high case numbers in the Hawick area, a Mobile Testing Unit had been deployed in the town. In addition a walk-in testing facility had been opened at the Langlee Complex in Galashiels. The Council was involved in discussions with Scottish Government and other partners about the potential for asymptomatic community testing facilities in the Scottish Borders. Mrs Craig went on to talk about Service implications of the latest lockdown. In general there were no direct impacts on Council services over and above what was already in place during the short Level 4 period which came into effect on Boxing Day. However, the Council needed to ensure that it continue to deliver essential frontline services and to support communities. This would likely result in the need to deploy staff to support certain services, which would result in others having to scale back on their operations. In terms of the Education Service, from 11 January online and remote learning was being provided for all pupils, with in-school arrangements for invited young people and the children of key workers.

3.2 Mrs Craig explained about the Community Assistance Hubs, which remained operational to co-ordinate support within localities. The number of referrals was rising and, due to the continued increase in Covid cases, staff were making more calls to those isolating to

ensure they were aware of the support available. Anyone in need should call 0300 100 1800 to access support. Financial assistance may also be available to those in need. The Council's Financial Inclusion Team was able to help with a wide range of advice and support. This support could also be accessed via 0300 100 1800 and via www.scotborders.gov.uk/coronavirus. Information relating to fuel poverty assistance could be found via www.scotborders.gov.uk/affordablewarmth. Mrs Craig went on to explain that a range of business support was available for firms experiencing difficulty. Information was available online at www.scotborders.gov.uk/covid19business. Businesses were also encouraged to use the national Find Business Support website to check all available funding support, including that being administered by other parties. www.findbusinesssupport.gov.scot The Council continued to work with South of Scotland Enterprise to ensure the most appropriate business support was made available to businesses most in need. In response to a question about funding for businesses, Mrs Craig confirmed that funding for businesses was continuing to flow from Scottish Government and being turned around quickly by the Council. There were ongoing high level discussions about further future funds and where these should be targeted. Once decisions were made it was expected this funding would flow through quickly to the Council and be made available to eligible local businesses.

4. UPDATE FROM PARTNERS

4.1 Eildon Community Assistance Hub

In attendance to give a presentation on the Eildon Community Assistance Hub was Oonagh McGarry – Team Leader from the Council's Community Learning & Development Service. Ms McGarry explained that the aim of the Hub was to ensure that individuals had the support they needed during the pandemic. The Hub co-ordinated requests for support, direct from the public and by referral; triaged through Health & Social Care teams to ensure vulnerable individuals were identified and supported; and worked with voluntary groups and public sector services to signpost to or supply services. Amongst 450 enquiries, 226 of which were from people classed as "shielding", the Hub helped to provide food; medicines; help with social isolation; and other information and advice including on financial issues. The Hub worked with 17 Resilient Community volunteer groups and 8 Foodbank/Fareshare outlets. There had been over 200 calls to people who requested community help when shielding and the Hub had contributed to over 1,500 calls to people across the Borders who were self-isolating. There were also follow-up calls to vulnerable people. Ms McGarry went on to highlight what had worked well in the Community Assistance Hubs. She drew particular attention to the volunteer groups which had provided amazing support in local communities; whilst Health & Social Care services continued to provide ongoing support and appreciated closer links with a wide range of community supports. Up to 16 partners and volunteer groups were involved in weekly Hub meetings and this had resulted in a real "can do" collaborative and problem solving approach. The Community Assistance Hubs would continue to operate as long as they were needed and could be contacted on 0300 100 1800

Covid-19community@scotborders.gov.uk. In conclusion, Ms McGarry confirmed that the Council and partners were looking to further develop the locality model of working in the future. In the discussion that followed the presentation, the value of the Community Assistance Hubs was recognised, noting that there was a huge amount of work going on in the background, of which the public were not always aware. In response to a question about the work of the Hub during the current lockdown, compared with the first, Ms McGarry advised that there were the same number of resilience teams involved and the Hub had benefited in the way it operated from the experience gained during the first lockdown.

4.2 Café Recharge

With reference to paragraph 3.2 of the Eildon Area Partnership minute of 12 November 2021, Amy Wight was in attendance to give an update on the Community Interest Company Café Recharge. Ms Wight explained that the café had been due to open again 3 days before the recent lockdown so plans had to be changed once more. The café had

opened for doorstep collections of frozen soups, made from a surplus of food from supermarkets, bread, fruit and vegetables when available and sanitary products. This had been very successful with around 30 portions of soup being collected every day on an anonymous basis with people paying what they wanted. The café also had food bank tokens to give out where appropriate. Ms Wight added that they were hoping to expand what was being offered to include ready meals and free packed lunches for children, to help ease the financial burden for families facing difficulties. The Café was aiming to open fully again in March. Members welcomed the work of Café Recharge and thanked Ms Wight for the update.

4.3 **Changeworks Affordable Warmth and Home Energy Scotland**

Morag Cockburn, from Home Energy Scotland and Kat Custard, advisor with Changeworks, were in attendance to give an overview of support available through Home Energy Scotland and the Warm and Well Borders Project. It was explained that Home Energy Scotland was a free and impartial service funded by the Scottish Government to help people stay warm in their homes for less. Advisors could check eligibility and make referrals to various grants and schemes, including Warmer Homes Scotland, a scheme that helped households keep warm by fitting new energy efficiency improvements like home insulation, central heating, draught-proofing and home renewables systems. The Changeworks Affordable Warmth Services Team had a number of projects designed to support households across the Scottish Borders area, to provide support with: fuel debt support; advocacy work with energy suppliers; expert energy advice; fuel billing support; condensation and damp issues; metering issues and errors; switching support and tariff checking; Warm Home Discount applications; Ombudsman complaint cases; grants for emergency top ups and Covid-19 local fund applications; and food bank applications. Also, in partnership with Citizens Advice Bureaus, Changeworks would work to provide help to identify benefits to which entitled; help to apply for benefits; and support if refused a benefit. When asked if there was a national definition for fuel poverty, Ms Custard explained that this was if household fuel costs were more than 10% of net income, taking into account child care costs and housing. Extreme fuel poverty was recognised if fuel costs were over 20% of net income. It was confirmed that Home Energy Scotland Advisors were all set up working from home and ready to help householders to make the best use of energy and save money on their bills, at a time when many had seen their energy costs rise due to the coronavirus pandemic. People in need of support could be referred via warmth@changeworks.org.uk www.changeworks.org.uk/referral or by calling on Freephone 0800 870 8800

4.4 **Galashiels Foodbank**

John Tucker gave an update on the activities of the Galashiels Foodbank. The foodbank had been very busy, with over 450 approaches for help since mid-March last year. Approximately 80 bags per week were given out of dry and fresh food, each to the value of about £30 and as an example of a typical day Mr Tucker said that on the previous Wednesday food had been given to 60 adults and 40 children. Some were referred from agencies and some were self-referring. Mr Tucker expected that the foodbank, which was run by about 40 volunteers, would become even busier over the coming months. It was currently situated at St Peters church as a temporary measure. Any assistance in finding new premises would be welcome. The Chairman thanked Mr Tucker for his update and for his work at the foodbank.

4.5 **SBHA**

Debby Gillett, from SBHA, gave an update of arrangements during the current Covid-19 restrictions. She explained that, although all SBHA offices remained closed, contact could still be made during normal office hours. The team was also calling tenants to check if all was well. In line with Government guidelines only emergency repairs were being carried out. If visits were required for essential work, a full range of PPE and hygiene measures would be used. New build and external work programmes continued but were subject to change and the grounds maintenance service was operating as normal but in accordance with Covid-19 guidance. If any tenants were experiencing a drop in income and needed

help with accessing benefits or rent or budgeting advice, the Financial Inclusion Team was available to help. SBHA would continue to advertise and allocate homes as long as restrictions allowed. Ms Gillett provided the following contact information for support and enquiries: 01750 724444 enquiries@sbha.org.uk www.sbha.org.uk

4.6 The Bridge

The Chairman referred those present to the update from the Bridge which was included with the agenda papers.

5. FIT FOR 2024: REVIEW OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS & COMMUNITY FUND :

With reference to paragraph 5 of the Eildon Area Partnership meeting of 12 November 2020, discussion continued on the Review of Area Partnerships & Community Fund. Locality Development Co-ordinator, Kenny Harrow, explained that the Eildon Area Partnership now needed to build on the findings of the SCDC report that was circulated at the last meeting and consider how it could strengthen community engagement and participation going forward. He gave a reminder that Area Partnerships and communities could make recommendations to the Council by the end of January 2021 about how they would like their Area Partnership and Community Fund to operate in the future. The summary of comments received so far, for Eildon, was included from page 23 of the Agenda pack. These comments had been compiled from those submitted by email since the last Eildon Area Partnership meeting and those put forward at the Chairman's consultation meetings held in December, to which all Community Councils and contact organisations were invited. The Chairman referred to the original list of questions which had been raised to prompt responses and comments and asked for further views. In terms of whether the Area Partnership should continue as a Council Committee in the future or be a community meeting there was a feeling that this should have the concept of a community meeting but would need administrative support, at least in the short term. The idea of a rotating chair received support. It was also suggested that the Community Council network should be involved although it was appreciated that the Network currently covered the whole Scottish Borders Area. With regard to the remit and purpose of future Eildon Area Partnership meetings there was support for the idea of themed meetings. Mr Steve Oliver, Station Commander, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, was happy to attend meetings to provide updates or alternate this with Police or other services. With regard to the future of the Community Fund, there was strong support for the formation of a funding panel to assess applications, although under current legislation the decision making would remain with elected Members. It was felt that the way applications for funding were currently presented at meetings did not facilitate proper consideration and an informed decision. Any community participation in the process appeared to be tokenistic. In terms of the funding allocation to Community Councils, Village Halls and local Festivals the view was that this should not be changed. The Chairman thanked those present for their additional contributions. Mr Harrow advised he would re-circulate the questions to Eildon Area Partnership contacts and include examples of how the other localities were looking at this. This would provide a final opportunity to feed in views before the end of January.

6. EILDON COMMUNITY FUND 2020/21

Assessments of two applications to the Eildon Community Fund had been circulated, plus a summary of grant funding within Eildon in 2020/21 and the source of that funding. The summary showed grant applications awarded, those under assessment and those to be considered by the Area Partnership. There had been one Fast Track application which had been approved, from Oxton & Channellkirk Community Council for £1,200 to pay for a Noticeboard. Also included were regular funding commitments to Community Councils, Village Halls and Local Festivals. Before consideration of the two following applications, Mr Kenny Harrow gave a summary of each and confirmed that each met the Community Fund criteria.

MEMBER

Councillor Anderson declared an interest in the following application, in terms of Section 5 of the Councillors Code of Conduct and did not take part in the consideration.

6.1 Stow Community Development

The application from Stow Community Trust was for a sum of £11,000 to help fund a Community Development Worker for a 12 month period. The creation of the post would facilitate engagement with residents of Stow and Fountainhall to support their involvement in the creation of a Community Action Plan. The Community Action Plan would describe what the community wanted to achieve, what activities were required and what resources were needed. The post holder would support, write and begin to implement delivery of the Action Plan in collaboration with community members. It was also hoped that during the 12 month period the post holder would be able to make a start on some key priorities and 'quick wins' within the plan. The request for £11,000 was unanimously approved.

6.2 Lauderdale Cycling Club

The application from Lauderdale Cycling Club was for a sum of £2,636.02 for a storage shed, limbo pole, pop-up shelter, fence posts and bike maintenance coaching for its club Community and High School Cycling Development project. This aimed to progress the club's Development Plan of enabling more people, including children and families, to enjoy cycling in the local area and to keep the club's equipment together in one place. The club was also looking for funding to increase the number of members who had their Level 1 & Level 2 coaching qualifications across Mountain Bike Leader, Rider Leader and general coaching. Before consideration of this application it was noted that there was a typing error in respect of the Annual Accounts Balance shown in the published application – this should have read £3,114.86. There was unanimous support for the application and the request for £2,636.02 was approved.

7. CURRENT CONSULTATIONS

The Chairman referred to the consultations, as listed on the agenda, which were included on the Council's website and for which responses were requested.

8. OTHER INFORMATION AND NEWS FOR NOTING:

A list of information and links was included on the agenda. Mr Harrow emphasised in particular that there was still money available in the Eildon Community Fund and that applications should be submitted by mid February in order to be included for consideration at the next Eildon Area Partnership meeting. Also included in the list of information were links to Covid-19 support sites.

9. DATE OF NEXT EILDON AREA PARTNERSHIP - 25 MARCH 2021

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 25 March 2021. Suggestions for agenda items could be sent to the Locality Development Co-ordinator at kenny.harrow@scotborders.gov.uk by 11 March 2021

10. ANY OTHER FORMAL BUSINESS

No items were raised.

11. OPEN FORUM

11.1 Heriot Community Council representative, Mr John Williams, wished to raise three matters as follows:

X95 bus – with reference to the discussion at the last Area Partnership meeting, about the significant reduction in this service, there had been some progress in taking this forward with bus service operators and politicians, following a combined effort with Stow & Fountainhall Community Council and support from elected Members. Contact with other communities in Midlothian such as Newtongrange, Gorebridge and Eskbank and also Pathhead, had revealed a groundswell of opinion and concern about the need to sustain a regular bus service into Edinburgh on the A7 and A68.

Winter maintenance for Heriot underpass – this was a longstanding issue previously raised with the Council by way of a petition. Mr Williams explained that when this was constructed as part of the Borders Railway works there was no appetite for anyone to look after its maintenance, it not having been finished to Transport Scotland standards and the Council consequently not prepared to take responsibility for maintenance. It had been suggested winter maintenance be provided by a resilience group which was impractical. When there was heavy snow, 10 days ago, it was practically unusable and was eventually partially cleared by the Council. There had been some recent progress with the Council's senior management but Mr Williams asked for help to persuade the Council to provide maintenance for the underpass on a proper basis. Councillor Aitchison expressed his sympathy with the position Heriot found itself in. He stressed that the disruption caused by the underpass was entirely due to the construction of a railway which had not been of any benefit to the village.

Section 36 Windfarm applications (large schemes with applications direct to Scottish Government) – Mr Williams drew attention to 3 of these schemes which were at an early stage of application in this area, with turbines of heights of 180m and above. There were concerns about the difficulty in ensuring communities were properly informed as only online consultations were permitted at the present time.

- 11.2 Steve Oliver introduced himself as the new Station Commander for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service at Galashiels. He could be contacted by email at steve.oliver2@firescotland.gov.uk

CHAIRMAN

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.55 pm