

## **Motion by Councillor Rowley, Executive Member for Economic Regeneration and Finance**

### **Seconded by Councillor Haslam, Leader Scottish Borders Council**

The Covid 19 pandemic has impacted on all areas of Borders life. This is a budget which aims to ensure the Council plays its part in the long road to recovery, and in doing so helps our communities, and people, by protecting our environment, making best of use of new technology and providing the best possible stimulus to our local economy.

This is a budget which addresses many of the challenges we face. It seeks to **Build Back a Better Borders** as we recover from the pandemic, helping our towns, protecting jobs, expanding early years childcare, protecting our most vulnerable people and investing in infrastructure that will enhance our communities, protect our environment and reduce our carbon foot print.

In doing so we aim to work closely with our community planning partners and continue the joint working that has taken place during the last year to improve the well-being and quality of life of all Borderers.

We do this however against a backdrop of continued restrictions in local government finance. COSLA called this year for a fair funding settlement for local government, we did not receive this.

The 2021/22 Local Government Settlement from the Scottish Government offered the Borders little in the way of additional core revenue and capital support at a time when the Council has significant additional Covid costs to manage, alongside falls in income due to the impacts of Covid-19.

Despite this the Conservative and Independent Administration has committed to deploying significant resources to delivering vital major infrastructure in communities across the Borders, including extra care homes for our older people, supporting our social landlords to deliver more warm, sustainable homes in our communities and significant investment in educational and community campuses in Galashiels, Hawick and Tweeddale.

With little flexibility in this year's Local Government Settlement our priority focus is on empowering and investing in our communities across the whole of the Borders.

Building Back a Better Borders will deliver a £500,000 fund to revitalise communities, it will support them in restarting events, assist community groups to recharge activities post-Covid 19, and help our communities to recover and thrive. This is additional to significant other community funding and support for community groups.

We recognise our community groups and volunteer organisations are vitally important to where we live, but are often over-stretched and under-resourced so we are investing in support workers in each locality. They will help groups create

their plans, help secure the best funding sources and effectively deliver their projects.

Towns and villages of all scales are central to Borders life and sustain surrounding rural areas. With a focus initially on smaller, often forgotten settlements, we'll invest in a rolling programme of Place Planning, working with communities and businesses across the Borders to identify what every settlement needs and then working to draw in regeneration funding from a growing array of external sources.

We are ready to draw in £93m of capital investment from the **Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal**, more from the **Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal** and the Borders Railway Blueprint, but we need to do more. This support will help maximise funding coming into the area, reinvigorate communities and regenerate settlements from regeneration funds, with our partners at South of Scotland Enterprise and emerging opportunities including the **UK Government programme of Levelling Up Funds**.

**Support for Food Growing and Cultivating our Communities Growing** will encourage more food growing in communities across the region and work with our community planning partners to involve them too. We hope this will help support the council's developing anti-poverty action plan. They will also support the fantastic work that dozens of community, civic amenity and floral groups do to enhance our towns and villages making them better places to live or visit.

Younger people tell us **sustainability** needs to be at the heart of all we do. Our exceptional natural environment is a defining character of Borders life, one of the great reasons to live or visit here and our rich natural capital resources are likely to be central to future growth and regeneration. Building on the Council's adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and mainstreaming of Sustainable Development we'll invest in a post that delivers those plans. recognising we are in a new era and more sustainable ways of working will need to come initial funding will come from reducing the significant mileage costs associated with travelling to meetings.

We live in a dispersed rural region where road travel is a daily necessity. **Roads** impact on our lives daily and consultation has told us they absolutely must remain a high priority for investment now, and in future years too.

We recognise however that a long hard winter and the inevitable restrictions of Covid-19 over a whole year have impacted on our roads network's condition. We are therefore investing an additional £1,112,000 this year, growing by £510,000 to £1,612,000 in 2022/23. The additional funding will not go into a general pot but into a clear list of priority upgrades across the Borders defined by road condition and local concerns. Residents will see what they get for their extra commitment.

**In total our budget will invest an additional £118.7m in roads bridges and pavements over the course of this plan.**

With such an extensive network of smaller rural roads the budget is never enough, but alongside this significant additional funding sits a commitment to do things better, to trial potential new technologies, and transition to a greater proportion of our road work being a long term improvement not a short-term fix.

Our plant and vehicle fund will see us run ever-fewer dirty diesels through our communities with a **£6,000,000 investment to transition to cleaner, more sustainable e-vehicles** across much of our fleet.

Our communities and places matter whatever their scale or remoteness so whilst Hawick is benefitting from a **huge investment in flood protection** we recognise its smaller neighbour, Newcastleton needs support too. Its residents have endured a series of devastating flooding events, so there is a commitment to fund swift community engagement which will then inform feasibility studies into the best options for flood protection alongside significant flood investments.

**Empowering our people of all ages, regenerating our settlements (of every size) and enabling every one of our communities to recover and thrive is at the heart of our budget. We are investing for the future in the most important places to us; our people, our places and our communities. We have already agreed to freeze the Council tax and I now urge you to support the Administration's Budget proposals for revenue and capital set out in our financial plan for 2021/22.**