

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTE of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber,
Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells,
TD6 0SA on Tuesday, 1 September, 2015 at
10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Bell (Chairman – Economic Development Business), C. Bhatia (Chairman – Other Business), S. Aitchison, M. J. Cook, V. Davidson (from para. 4), G. Edgar, J. Mitchell, D. Moffat, D. Paterson, F. Renton, R. Smith.

Also Present:- Councillors G. Garvie, I. Gillespie, G. Logan, A. Nicol, S. Scott, T. Weatherston.

Apologies:- Councillors J. Brown, D. Parker.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (People), Corporate Transformation and Services Director, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Officer Economic Development, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (F. Walling).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present:- Mr G. Henderson
Apologies:- Mr J. Clark

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Bell chaired the meeting for consideration of the Economic Development business. He welcomed Mr Henderson to this section of the Executive meeting and passed on the apologies of Mr Clark.

1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a briefing note providing an update on recent Economic Development. The Chief Officer Economic Development, Bryan McGrath, summarised the paper and highlighted the main points. The update referred to recent activity of the Business Gateway Team, who had worked with 233 businesses and individuals during the period 1 April to 31 July 2015 and assisted 71 business start-ups of which 10 had the potential to be high growth. Mr McGrath advised that, as the Scottish Borders Business Week had proved so popular in 2014, this would be expanded in 2015 to a Business Month which would run from 1 October to 6 November with over 20 events scheduled across the area. The update summarised activities relating to tourism support in the Scottish Borders. The major focus was on preparations for the Borders Railway opening celebrations, which were nearing completion and for the Tour of Britain which would pass through the Scottish Borders on 8/9 September, with the Stage Finish being at Floors Castle, Kelso. Eight tourism Ambassadors had been recruited and would be based at the three railway stations for the first nine weeks of the opening of the Railway. Other proposals relating to the railway included two hop-on hop-off buses which would be available seven days a week for visitors between Galashiels, Abbotsford, Tweedbank, Gattonside, Darnick, Melrose, Dryburgh, St Boswells and Bowden. With regard to progress on European funding the update confirmed Scottish Government approval of the Scottish Borders Local Development Strategy for the delivery of two EU 2014-2020 funding programmes: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development through the Scottish Rural Development Programme; and the European Maritime Fisheries Fund. An indicative allocation of just over £4m had been made to the Scottish Borders LEADER Programme for the period to 2020. A new LEADER Local Action Group, made up of rural partners and stakeholders, had been recruited. This group would be the decision-making

body for LEADER applications, the Programme being open to applicants at the end of this year.

- 1.2 Members discussed the update and received answers to their questions. Mr Henderson referred to the half-day out-reach surgeries held by Business Gateway in Hawick, Kelso, Duns, Eyemouth, Galashiels and Peebles. Although attendance at these events had been limited he believed that these were important and should be continued if possible. His suggestion was welcomed that the Federation of Small Businesses should work in partnership with officers to look at ways to increase attendance and retain this outreach service. Looking at other areas of developing economic activity the issue was raised by Members of exploiting the Scottish Borders as a location for films. This followed interest around recent BBC filming of a series in Peebles. In response Mr McGrath advised that Scottish Borders was a member of the Edinburgh and Lothian film initiative, which attracted a variety of enquiries from TV/ film production units and offered locations in the Scottish Borders. It was agreed that every effort should be made to promote the area and exploit any opportunities that may arise.

DECISION

(a) **NOTED the update.**

(b) **AGREED:-**

- (i) **to work in partnership with representatives from the Federation of Small Businesses to improve attendance and ensure the retention of Business Gateway outreach services; and**
- (ii) **to actively promote the Scottish Borders as a location for TV/film productions.**

MEMBER

Councillor Davidson joined the meeting.

2. STRATEGIC INWARD INVESTMENT APPROACH

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Strategy and Policy providing an update on officers' work to develop a new approach to inward investment, to help support economic growth in the Scottish Borders. The report set out a new approach to attracting inward investment to the area. The report explained that working to attract new inward investment to the Scottish Borders was one of the ways in which the Council and its partners could support economic growth in the area. The opening of the Borders Railway represented a major new opportunity for attracting inward investment, which could be a driver of economic growth by creating jobs and bringing wealth into the economy. It was proposed that the Council take forward a new Inward Investment approach at two levels. The first was to work with Midlothian and City of Edinburgh Councils along the Borders Railway Corridor to promote the opportunities and benefits of the railway. The second was to work at a Borders level to promote opportunities for new investment and development at locations across the whole of the Scottish Borders. There would be close integration between these two strands of work to ensure that the best results were delivered for the Scottish Borders. It was proposed that, in order to provide an effective Inward Investment service at both the Railway Corridor and Scottish Borders levels, the Council should put in place a Rapid Response Team. This team of officers would provide the specialist input to help find the right sites for developers, or support a business to develop a new production space. These existing specialists would include planning officers, roads planners and engineers, building management experts and estates surveyors. The financial contribution of £60,000 to Inward Investment as part of the Railway Blueprint project had previously been approved by Council on 2 April 2015. The service had also identified the need for approximately £160,000 to cover the costs associated with external support and the costs over 2 years of a 1.0 FTE officer. It was

proposed that this funding be drawn from the £500,000 of additional resources identified in the Balance Sheet Review reported to Executive on 24 February 2015. Members welcomed the approach outlined in the report and particularly the establishment of a Rapid Response Team which would have an opportunity to effectively promote to potential investors all areas of the Scottish Borders, alongside the Railway Corridor. It was recognised that, if successful and in terms of a long term strategy, this approach to Inward Investment should be continued beyond the initial two years indicated and that appropriate measures should be taken to support this.

DECISION AGREED

- (a) the new Inward Investment Approach, working with Midlothian and City of Edinburgh Councils in the Borders Railway Corridor, as well as promoting opportunities across the whole of the Scottish Borders;**
- (b) that a Rapid Response Team be established within the Council to respond to inward investment inquiries and requests as they were fed through; and**
- (c) the proposed budget of £160,000 for the wider Scottish Borders inward investment resources.**

3. DEVELOPING SCOTLAND'S YOUNG WORKFORCE PROGRAMME

- 3.1 There had been circulated copies of a joint report by the Service Director Strategy and Policy and Service Director Children and Young People. The report provided an update on the work of the Council and its partners in introducing a new programme to deliver 'Developing the Young Workforce' Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy. 'Developing the Young Workforce' (DYW) set out the strategy to implement the recommendations of the Wood Commission. The strategy was published by the Scottish Government, in December 2014. Following a major local event, held in February 2015 at Earlston High School, it was agreed that a programme be established to deliver the DYW recommendations in the Scottish Borders. The programme had been set up with 5 key themes. These were: 'Schools and Pathways', led by the Council's Education service; 'Colleges' led by Borders College; Apprenticeships, led by Skills Development Scotland; Employers and Industry, led by the Council's Economic Development service; and Equality, with all partners inputting. The programme aimed to deliver a significant culture change that would see young people being better prepared for work and see businesses more directly engaged in that process. It would aim to deliver a shift in culture towards a 'parity of esteem' for vocational qualifications. The report went on to outline progress being made in delivering the programme, as well as the governance structure that was in place to manage it. The governance structure, summarised in an appendix to the report, clarified that the Borders Learning and Skills Partnership would form the Programme Board to oversee the development and implementation of the programme. Part of the additional resources from Scottish Government to help take forward the programme would be used to fund a programme manager role to support all of the partners in their input.
- 3.2 Members welcomed the report and the development of the programme. In the ensuing discussion some of the challenges in its implementation were referred to. In particular, transport was seen as a key barrier for young people in rural areas. There was also a recognition of the difficulty in engaging small and micro businesses in the apprenticeship scheme. In response to questions on the 'School and Pathways' theme, Members were assured that the redesign referred to of the Senior Phase (S4 – S6) in secondary schools was an evolutionary process. Headteachers were fully involved in the development and changes would be carried out with sensitivity over a six year timescale. With regard to the identification by employers and universities of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) agenda as being increasingly important to meet the needs of business, Members were advised that this would not be at the expense of other subjects and that there would be a balanced approach to the delivery of all subject areas.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED** the new 'Developing the Young Workforce – Scottish Borders' programme that had been set up to deliver Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy's aims across the Scottish Borders.
- (b) **AGREED:-**
- (i) **the proposed allocation of resources to support the Learning and Skills Partnership and the nine Secondary Schools in delivering the aims of the Programme; and**
 - (ii) **to receive regular updates on progress in delivering the programme's objectives, with a particular focus on the Council's responsibilities and actions.**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned for ten minutes.

OTHER PUBLIC BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN

In the absence of Councillor Parker, Councillor Bhatia took the Chair for the remaining business.

4. MINUTE

The Minute of meeting of the Executive Committee of 18 August 2015 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

5. SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT MEMBER'S BILL: PENTLAND HILLS REGIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Service Director Regulatory Services explaining the background and content of a private member Parliamentary Bill on a proposed extension to the Pentlands Regional Park, and seeking agreement on the response to the Bill. The report considered the implications of the Bill in relation to the Scottish Borders and found that there had not been a national or local strategic review, as advocated by Scottish Natural Heritage, on the extension to the Park area. Consequently, there was considerable uncertainty in relation to the future governance and financial arrangements that would be required for the extended Park. The expectation was that there would be no additional Governmental funding and that any resultant costs would be met by the local authorities that made up the expanded Park area. The report considered the potential implications on the Council's current operational arrangements within the proposed area for expansion within the Park. There was concern that it would adversely impact upon the operational capacity of the Council's access team which would, in turn, have implications for the provision of recreational access across the wider council area. The report therefore recommended that a strategic and local review of the potential extension to the Park was undertaken in advance of consideration of its formal designation. This would follow the process advocated by Scottish Natural Heritage policy on Regional Parks. In the interim period, it was proposed that a holding objection be put forward to allow consideration of the council's concerns. Members discussed the report. Particular concern was expressed that there had been no review of current and future needs as required by the Scottish Natural Heritage policy statement on parks and reserves. It was also noted that financial matters in relation to the proposed extension to

the Park had been left entirely to be resolved by the local authorities that made up the Park area.

**DECISION
AGREED**

- (a) to seek a strategic and local review of the potential extension of the Park prior to consideration of its formal designation; and in the interim
- (b) to formally object to the Bill which proposed an extension of the boundary of the Pentlands Regional Park into the Scottish Borders Council area at the present time, the grounds for objection being summarised in the report.

**ITEMS LIKELY TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE
DECISION**

- 6. **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 the Appendix to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

MINUTE

- 7. The Committee approved the private Minute of 18 August 2015.

The meeting concluded at 11.35 am