

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE held via Microsoft Teams on
Tuesday, 20 April 2021 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors S. Haslam (Chair), S. Aitchison, S. Mountford, G. Edgar, C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, E. Jardine, M Rowley, R. Tatler, T. Weatherston.
Also Present: Councillors S. Bell, W. McAteer and Ms S Harkins (South of Scotland Enterprise).
In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Executive Director, Corporate Improvement and Economy, Executive Director, Finance & Regulatory, Service Director - Assets & Infrastructure, Principal Officer, Housing Strategy, Policy & Development, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (J Turnbull.)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Present: Mr G Clark (Federation of Small Businesses) and Ms E McGowan (Scottish Borders Chamber of Trade)

CHAIRMAN

Councillor Rowley chaired the meeting for consideration of Economic Development Business).

1. SCOTTISH BORDERS BUSINESS GATEWAY DELIVERY

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by Executive Director Corporate Improvement and Economy, which set out the actions taken by South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) in preparation for the transfer of the Business Gateway Service from Scottish Borders Council (SBC), detailing the future SOSE Business Gateway delivery model in Scottish Borders and the Performance Management Framework to be utilised in reporting by SOSE to SBC. The Executive Director summarised the report, highlighting SOSE's approach, resource, roles and responsibilities. He explained that the main purpose of the report was for Members to agree the performance management framework and associated indicators which were detailed in paragraph 8 of the report.
- 1.2 Members considered that in terms of the quarterly reporting, the focus should be on outcomes and not outputs. Ms Harkins from SOSE advised that outcome measurements would be included as the contract progressed. In response to a question about assistance for businesses wanting to export, Ms Harkins explained that this was an important outcome for the region and a programme and process would be established around exporting. In response to a further question the Executive Director clarified that the £250k per annum to SOSE for Business Gateway delivery was an indicative figure and once the pay award settlement had been agreed the amount would be confirmed.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED the work undertaken to transfer the Business Gateway Service to SOSE.**
- (b) **AGREED:-**
- (i) **the Performance Management Framework and associated indicators for 2021/22 proposed within the report; and**

- (ii) to receive the necessary performance management information as part of the scheduled Quarterly Performance Management reports Executive already receives.

2. UPDATE ON THE SCOTTISH BORDERS STRATEGIC EVENTS PLAN

- 2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by Executive Director, Corporate Improvement and Economy which provided Members with an update on the Council's Events Strategy and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the events sector. The report outlined the significant impact events had in the region and highlighted some future opportunities. The report recommended that a new Events Strategy should be produced this year and reflect the Event Scotland National Strategy, the VisitScotland National Tourism Strategy and take account of the significant challenges associated with the Covid-19 Pandemic. One of the key events in the forthcoming years was the Enduro World series. This event would be held in the Tweed Valley and an allocation of £10,000 from the Scottish Borders Council Events budget was recommended to support the major event during the current financial year.
- 2.2 Members discussed the report and received answers to their questions from the Director. They recognised the Covid-19 Pandemic had had a catastrophic effect on events and that support going forward was critical. In response to a question from Councillor Tatler, Chair of the Scottish Borders Living Wage Group, the Executive Director gave assurance that where funding pertained specifically to employment, the Council's commitment to the living wage would be clear. It was suggested that events relating to sport be identified in the Strategy as 'sporting events'. Regarding 'event' criteria, the Director clarified that events must demonstrate economic activity not already obtained within the Scottish Borders and would tend to involve overnight stays and a significant number of visitors. Funding for local events was already in place through the Customer and Communities team.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) that a new Scottish Borders Strategic Events Plan 2022 – 32 was presented for approval later this year following discussions with event organisers, Event Scotland and VisitScotland;
- (b) funding of £10,000 for the Enduro World Series during the current financial year; and
- (c) to delegate authority to the Executive Director Corporate Improvement & Economy in consultation with the Executive Member for Economic Regeneration & Finance to provide financial support for Events in 2021 as follows:
 - (i) Up to £2.5k to plan an entirely new event in 2021 or 2022.
 - (ii) Up to £5k in 2021 to prepare to hold an existing event in 2022 where no event was held in 2021.
 - (iii) Up to £10k to hold an existing event in 2021.

OTHER BUSINESS

3. MINUTE

The Minute of the Meeting held on 16 March 2021 had been circulated.

DECISION

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

4. **PROPOSED FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO FUND DEDICATED EMPTY HOMES OFFICER**

- 4.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by Executive Director Corporate Improvement and Economy seeking approval to use £40,000 from the second homes council tax affordable housing investment budget to fund a full time, dedicated Empty Homes Officer for a period of 24 months. The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 placed a statutory requirement on local authorities to develop a Local Housing Strategy, supported by an assessment of housing need and demand. The strategy set out the strategic direction for housing investment and service delivery in the Scottish Borders for 2017-22 and was approved by Scottish Borders Council and submitted to the Scottish Government in September 2017. The LHS identified the need to bring empty properties back in to effective use. Since 2010 the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, funded by the Scottish Government and co-ordinated by Shelter Scotland, had been working with Councils and their partners to develop services aimed at bringing private sector empty homes back into use. One focus of the partnership was to support local authorities to develop empty homes work and ensure dedicated resources to work with owners. The Empty Homes Partnership would fund 50% of the staffing cost for 24 months as kick-starter funding. 22 Local Authorities across Scotland currently employ a dedicated empty homes officer. The Principal Officer presented the report and answered Members questions. With regard to the process for reporting empty homes, the Principal Officer advised that information was available on the Council's website. For homes empty for over two years the Council had introduced a 200% Council Tax surcharge as an incentive for owners to bring properties back into use. However, there had been no significant difference in the number of empty homes as many could be exempt from Council Tax. The Principal Officer explained that an evaluation of the Empty Home Officer post would take place after 12-18 months to determine the impact and whether a permanent post would be advantageous.

DECISION

- (a) **NOTED that a contractual arrangement would be finalised with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership (SEHP) to utilise lock-starter funding to support the recruitment of an Empty Homes Officer.**
- (b) **APPROVED that the additional funding for the post be provided from the Revenues raised from the second homes council tax affordable housing investment budget.**

5. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2021/22 – BLOCK ALLOCATIONS**

There had been circulated copies of a report by Executive Director Finance and Regulatory seeking approval for the proposed individual projects and programmes within the various block allocations in the 2021/22 Capital Financial Plan. Appendices A – R contained proposals for various projects to be allocated resources from the block allocation within the 2021/22 Capital Financial Plan and those budgets approved at the meeting of Scottish Borders Council on 19 March 2021. Not all projects had been fully identified at this point and as and when this information was available this would be brought to the Executive Committee for consideration.

DECISION

APPROVED the block allocation breakdowns contained in Appendices A – R of the report.

6. **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, and 6 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

7. MINUTE

The private section of Minute of meeting held on 16 March 2021 was approved.

The meeting concluded at 11.00.