

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
7 OCTOBER 2015
APPENDIX I

OPEN QUESTIONS

Questions from Councillor McAteer

To Executive Member for Environmental Services

1. Following recent public comments, where the Executive Member for Environmental Services stated that Scottish Borders Council will not pursue those that do not pay dog fines, can we receive an assurance that this is not the policy of this Council, and can we have an explanation of circumstances when it might be justified or appropriate to take this course of action?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

I can confirm it is the Council's policy to pursue the recovery of fixed penalty notices served for dog-fouling. There are circumstances in which this will not be appropriate such as where a household is assessed as vulnerable, there are concerns over the ability to pay and where it is not economically viable to carry out further recovery and enforcement activity.

This Council recognises the distress, inconvenience and risks to health that dog fouling causes in our communities. That is why I have instructed Officers to develop a new strategic approach to dealing with this issue which will come before Council at the earliest opportunity.

2. In light of a recent announcement that Fife Local Authority plan to introduce monthly street waste collection, can the Executive Member for Environmental Services provide reassurance that this diminution of a valuable service will not be similarly introduced to Scottish Borders Council during the life of this Council?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

On the 25th June Council unanimously approved its approach to the development of a new Waste Management Plan, which will include a full review of the delivery options for its kerbside collections.

A Member-Officer Reference Group has been established with member representation from all parties which will be fully engaged in the development of this new Plan.

Until such time the review is complete it is not possible to confirm what the kerbside collection services will look like in the future. However at the current time the Council has no plans to implement 4 weekly collections of residual waste.

It is worth highlighting that Fife is currently only introducing 4 weekly collections to 2,000 households. This forms part of a 9 month trial which aims to collect data to inform future kerbside collection service delivery models.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer asked for confirmation that a 4 weekly collection could not be ruled out. Councillor Paterson advised that nothing was being ruled out at present but reaffirmed that there were no plans at this time to implement 4 weekly bin collections.

To the Executive Member for Community Safety

3. In view of Police Scotland's recent decision to cease to provide Ward related crime and incident statistics, can the Executive Member for Community Safety explain how Scottish Borders Council will now be able to provide the transparency and reassurance Ward

constituents seek, specifically given the continued challenge to the effectiveness of Police Scotland in relation to Community Policing?

Reply from Councillor Moffat

The Scottish Borders Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board has the responsibility for scrutinising the performance of policing in the Scottish Borders based on crime and incident statistics. The Council receives the detailed minutes of these meetings. The Police Scotland Scottish Borders Local Policing Plan 2014 -17 sets the objectives and priorities for local policing in the Scottish Borders and the Plan was approved by the Council at its meeting on the 27th March 2014. To supplement this Plan, Police Scotland earlier this year has renewed individual Multi Ward Police plans which cover the whole of the Scottish Borders. These were developed on the basis of consultation and engagement with local communities. These local plans identified priorities for each ward and the Police are focusing on responding to these priorities and reporting progress to Area Committees. Some statistics can be provided such as if there has been a reduction or increases in relevant demand for police in a given area but only where this demand is directly associated to the Multi-Member Ward plan priority. These are used to demonstrate if the work being conducted by officers is having a positive impact in reducing the occurrences of the identified priority.

Supplementary

Councillor McAteer asked Councillor Moffat to agree that more detailed and inclusive figures on crime, including solvency rates, were needed so that people could understand what was happening in their areas. Councillor Moffat stated that Police Scotland provided the opportunity for anyone to look-up information regarding their area. It was not broken down by town at present but this would hopefully be available within the next few months.

Questions from Councillor Logan

To Executive Member for Education

1. If the maximum number of N5 examinations a student can sit is restricted to six, do you agree that some of pupils in the Scottish Borders are at a disadvantage compared to students elsewhere in Scotland when trying to gain places on the best University courses?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

I disagree with the assumption that Scottish Borders young people are disadvantaged by the number of National qualifications they are presented for within Scottish Borders Schools.

The implementation of Curriculum for Excellence has resulted in a change to qualifications; replacing Standard grades with National qualifications. Despite the changes to qualifications, entry level to university remains the same. Students require good quality grades at Higher level for all degree courses. For a limited number of courses students may be required to gain Advanced Highers in specific subjects, as well as Highers.

Competitive courses require top Higher grades achieved in one sitting, as well as extras such as relevant work experience and/or wider achievement. Some competitive courses, such as medicine or dentistry, require five Highers at A grade as well as a strong performance in an additional Cognitive ability test.

Scottish Borders approach to National 5 is consistent with the rest of Scotland, although a few schools do offer up to eight presentations.

Scottish Borders approach to N5 examinations provides students with a strong foundation to prepare for Higher and Advanced Higher Exams which are more relevant and necessary for entry to university.

Supplementary

In response to a question from Councillor Logan on the availability of courses, Councillor Aitchison highlighted the problem of becoming obsessed by numbers of subjects studied and the need not to put excessive pressure on students when school was about much more than academic achievement. He also commented on the sharing of subject provision for the smaller high schools and advised that this was a work in progress. However, he highlighted that Scottish Borders Council was currently 4th in terms of Scottish Local Authorities in providing positive destinations for school leavers.

To the Leader

2. With reference to the proposed new building at Tweedbank to house the Great Tapestry of Scotland, can you inform us of the additional cost that will occur to meet all of the conditions imposed by the Chief Planning Officer particularly in phase 2?

Reply from Councillor Parker

The Tapestry project will not incur additional costs as a consequence of the conditions imposed by the Chief Planning Officer. The reference to Phase 2 relates to the wider Business Park Project and the costs to be incurred are already built into the anticipated project costs for that separate project.

3. Given the public concern highlighted in letters, reports in the local press and verbally by our constituents, do you agree that the 25 October 2012 report to Council, entitled "Waste Treatment Project Contract Variation", contains nothing that could possibly be construed as commercially confidential or sensitive and should now be released to the public?

Reply from Councillor Parker

No, I do not agree. The contents of that report are covered by a confidentiality agreement by which we are bound.

Supplementary

Councillor Logan stated that in his opinion there was nothing confidential in the report and that he was happy to submit himself to the Court of Public Opinion and if he had made a mistake he was willing to apologise and asked Councillor Parker if he was prepared to do the same. Councillor Parker reiterated that the report was covered by a confidentiality agreement.

4. To the Executive Member for Social Work

In light of the success of the pilot scheme introduced last year by Perth and Kinross Council in conjunction with the Perth and Kinross Credit Union will you reconsider the decision not to promote Capital Credit Union's prepaid debit card in the Borders? This card, entitled credEcard, has a myriad of benefits apart from assisting with budgets particularly for those people who do not have access to bank accounts.

Reply from Councillor Renton

As reported previously at Council we have actively promoted the use of credit unions in the Scottish Borders and the partnership between Capital Credit Union and the Council was indeed a good example of our commitment to supporting disadvantaged families in the Scottish Borders.

We have in the past hosted awareness raising days, supporting Credit Union road shows and more recently Capital Credit has been promoting its services here at HQ.

The Council is always willing to support the work of ethical credit lenders to assist those people who do not have access to bank accounts but whilst we may support initiatives that help people to manage their finances in a sustainable way we cannot actively 'promote' any single organisation, bearing in mind there will be other products out there.

Capital Credit Union has attended the Council's Strategic Partnership Against Poverty where these matters are discussed and we would welcome a discussion with them on how best they can be supported with this or any other initiative.

Supplementary

Councillor Logan asked why if another Council was doing this why this Council would not. Councillor Renton undertook to provide additional information outwith the meeting.

Question from Councillor Brown

To the Depute Leader (Health Services)

Will the integration of Health and Social Care in the Borders be able to address the on-going issue of Hawick Community Hospital refusing to admit patients who reside out-with Hawick, which is contrary to the assurances given to the people of Jedburgh when the Cottage Hospital closed? Is this not a breach of equality and choice within the Health and Social Care Services?

Reply from Councillor Bhatia

'The Health and Social Care Partnership', in the context of the Integrated care Fund Plan, is reviewing the primary and community services in central Borders including access for patients to local services.

When the community hospital in Jedburgh was closed there was an agreement that patients could access community hospital and enhanced community health services locally. The GPs who provide medical cover in Hawick Community Hospital decided 18 months ago not to accept patients outside the area. It is recognized that this is of concern to the community and to the local members and this will be taken into account when looking at future services.

The Chief Officer will be happy to meet with local members to discuss the issues.

Supplementary

Councillor Brown asked that if the ward boundaries were changed as proposed would the GPs in Hawick then refuse to treat people from Denholm and the surrounding Area. Councillor Bhatia acknowledged that there was a problem with GP contracts and this was being looked at by the Scottish Government.

Questions from Councillor Fullarton

1. To the Executive Member for Environmental Services

The Council's recycling rates have fallen from 46% to 38% - what will this cost the Council in landfill tax each year if it continues at this rate?

Reply from Councillor Paterson

In 2014 the Council sent over 30,000 tonnes of household waste to landfill. As a result the Council spent approximately £2.5 million on landfill tax. In August, the Council agreed to close its landfill site at Easter Langlee allowing waste to be diverted and therefore minimising the costs associated with landfill tax. It will also assist the Council in working towards European and national recycling and landfill targets.

It is important to outline that a number of positive steps have already been taken since 2014, to increase the household recycling rate including various Community Recycling Centre upgrades, with improvement works beginning at Hawick CRC this autumn. In addition, a new community recycling centre was opened in Kelso this year, while 2015 has also seen a new statutory food waste collection service introduced in 6 communities.

Supplementary

Councillor Fullarton asked if the offer by Zero Waste Scotland to review the withdrawal of the green waste collection was now seen as an opportunity lost. Councillor Paterson advised that it had been made clear to the Council at the time of the withdrawal of the green waste service that recycling rates would fall.

2. To the Executive Member for Education

We are aware of current shortfalls in teacher recruitment in Maths and Sciences. Can the Executive Member give us an update on the outcomes of the Teacher Recruitment Open Day held at the McDonald Cardrona Hotel?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

Over 300 teachers attended the "Cardrona Recruitment" day from across the Scottish Borders, Scotland and the rest of the UK.

All subject vacancies across the secondary sector were advertised prior to the 'Cardrona day' and candidates were interviewed for all vacant positions. All vacancies in the secondary sector were filled as a result of this process prior to the summer holidays, including all science and mathematics posts.

Since the recruitment day there have been 4 additional Maths vacancies across the secondary sector and these positions are currently advertised nationally. We expect to be able to recruit to these vacancies in the very near future.

The event at Cardrona was extremely positive, not only did it allow us to attract many high calibre candidates across the range of secondary school subjects but it also provided us with an opportunity to promote the good work taking place in our schools right across the Scottish Borders.

Supplementary

Councillor Fullarton asked what steps would be taken to fill the current vacancies given the current problems in these subjects. Councillor Aitchison confirmed that given the success in filling previous vacancies he was confident that these posts would be filled.

3. To the Executive Member for Community Safety

As the Chairman of the Police, Fire & Rescue, and Safer Communities Board, the Executive Member must know that the likelihood of 30% of current police officers retiring in the next 3 years is a cause for concern. Does the Executive Member know if this percentage is reflected in the number of police based in the Borders and will he raise this with the Scottish Police Authority Board?

Reply from Councillor Moffat

I understand the staff survey was carried out by an independent body. Every officer and member of support staff from Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland was invited to participate, and 11796 responded (50.4%). There is response rate by region, and East has 29.5% of the response (3476 people). 71% of respondents were police officers. There were no specific statistics for the Scottish Borders. The response rate is really positive and gives us a foundation for improvement and future engagement. 33% of all respondents did indicate an intention to leave, however 49% of those 9181 respondents said it was changes to the pension that made them consider leaving. There are a lot of positives in the survey - 73% of respondents felt their team worked well together, 83% felt they were treated with respect by colleagues. On 3 September 2015, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice asked the Chair of the Scottish Police Authority to undertake an immediate review of governance in policing and asked that the review report be provided in six months. I believe that this national review by the Scottish Police Authority will lead to the greater accountability of Police Scotland at national level and stronger links between the national and local scrutiny of policing in the Scottish Borders, through the Scottish Borders Police, Fire and Rescue and Safer Communities Board which I chair.

Supplementary

Councillor Fullarton asked if Councillor Moffat considered that the justice reforms in Scotland were not working given that 30% of officers wanted to leave. Councillor Moffat advised that it was the pension issue which was the main problem. He also commented on plans to improve the scrutiny of the Police at a local level.