

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL held via Microsoft Teams on 23 September 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:- Councillors D. Parker (Convener), S. Aitchison, A. Anderson, H. Anderson, J. Brown, S. Bell, K. Chapman, G. Edgar, J. A. Fullarton, J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, S. Haslam, E. Jardine, H. Laing, J. Linehan, W. McAteer, D. Moffat, S. Mountford, D. Paterson, C. Ramage, N. Richards, E. Robson, M. Rowley, H. Scott, S. Scott, E. Small, R. Tatler, E. Thornton-Nicol, G. Turnbull, T. Weatherston.

Apologies:- Councillors C. Cochrane, S. Marshall, T. Miers.

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Director Education & Lifelong Learning, Director Finance & Corporate Governance, Director Resilient Communities, Director Social Work & Practice, Director Strategic Commissioning & Partnerships, Chief Legal Officer, Project Manager (S. Renwick), HR Manager (E. Ulrich), Clerk to the Council.

1. CONVENER'S REMARKS

1.1 The Convener congratulated the following on their success in the Paralympics in Tokyo:-

- Sammi Kinghorn – Track success in T53 400m silver and T53 100m bronze athletics
- Libby Clegg - Sprinter, bronze as part of Great Britain's 4x100m universal relay team
- Stephen Clegg - won three swimming medals - S12 100m butterfly silver and bronze in the S12 100m backstroke and S12 100m freestyle.

1.2 The Convener congratulated Stow Primary School which was named Schools Champion at this year's Surfers Against Sewage Plastic Free Awards.

1.3 The Convener welcomed Mr Riddell Graham to the meeting. Mr Graham was retiring from Visit Scotland this month but he had begun his career with Borders Regional Council in 1978 and had led the Scottish Borders Tourist Board until the formation of Visit Scotland. The Convener thanked Mr Graham for his long service to the Borders and for his help personally. The Convener advised that Mr Graham would be presented with a Reiver Statue for his service.

DECISION

AGREED that congratulations be passed to those concerned.

1.4 With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 17 June 2021 regarding the appointment of an independent investigator in connection with the council's handling of school assault allegations, the Chief Executive advised that Andrew Webster QC had hoped to report to the Council in September. However, the investigation was taking longer than expected due to a number of factors and she advised that the report would be brought to Council by November at the latest.

DECISION

NOTED the position.

2. MINUTE

The Minute of the Meeting held on 28 August 2021 was considered.

DECISION

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

3. **COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Minutes of the following Committees had been circulated:-

Jedburgh Common Good Fund	16 August 2021
Executive	17 August 2021
Audit & Scrutiny	19 August 2021
Civic Government Licensing	20 August 2021
Planning & Building Standards	6 September 2021

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes listed above.

4. **EMERGENCY POWERS**

There had been circulated copies of an Emergency Powers report by the Executive Director, Finance and Regulatory, on a proposed major enhancement of the current capacity and resilience of the Wide Area Network (WAN) that carried both internet and corporate connections for 8 of the 9 Borders high schools with a capital cost of £1.7m. The work proposed would align the capacity of the whole network with the technology blueprint already implemented for the Jedburgh Education Campus. The investment proposed would ensure that the network remained fit to meet the increasing network requirements of secondary digital education for all students in the new academic year. The report had already been approved under the Council's Emergency Powers Procedure and had circulated for information.

DECISION

NOTED the report.

5. **SOUTH OF SCOTLAND REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY**

With reference to paragraph 8 of the Minute of 17 June 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Resilient Communities seeking the agreement of Scottish Borders Council for the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report, which had been produced by the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership. The report explained that the Strategy had been produced by the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership (REP). The REP comprised members of Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, and SOSE, together with appointed members from business, communities, social enterprise, third sector, registered social landlords, and representatives from colleges, universities and public bodies. Scottish Borders Council had been involved in every stage of the development of the Strategy. The membership of the REP from the Council comprised Councillors Haslam, Rowley, Mountford and Bell, with Councillor Robson as a substitute. The chair of the REP rotated annually (based on financial years) between Dumfries and Galloway Council (DGC) and Scottish Borders Council (SBC), and Councillor Rowley had chaired the REP in this final crucial phase of the development and agreement of the Strategy. The consultation on the draft Strategy had been completed and efforts to ensure an extensive reach led to the REP hearing from about 350 people including representatives of organisations. This included close to 100 detailed responses offering constructive feedback to help positively refine the Strategy. There was a large degree of support for the Strategy and its themes. However, there were some comments relating to the detail of the Strategy that resulted in amendments that were approved by the REP. The REP agreed the Strategy at its meeting on Thursday 2 September 2021. A Delivery Plan of actions was being developed. Members welcomed the Strategy and looked forward to receiving the Action Plan.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) **the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report; and**

- (b) to receive the Strategy's Delivery Plan and a Measurement Framework for the Strategy at a future meeting.**

6. EDINBURGH & SOUTH EAST SCOTLAND CITY REGION DEAL PROSPERITY FRAMEWORK UPDATE

With reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of 17 June 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Resilient Communities seeking ratification of the finalised Regional Prosperity Framework (RPF) for the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region. This followed Council's earlier ratification of a consultative draft Regional Prosperity Framework and associated consultation process at its meeting on 17 June, 2021, and approval of the finalised RPF by City Region partner representatives at the Joint Committee meeting on 3 September 2021. The report explained that the RPF built on City Region ambitions through a holistic economic framework that would provide the basis for economic recovery post-pandemic and future direction for major projects and investment that supported inclusive growth and transition to a net zero economy over the next 20 years. City Region partners initiated a consultation on a draft RPF, which closed on 26 July. Feedback from the consultation was analysed to inform drafting of a final RPF to be presented to the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Joint Committee on 3 September 2021, as contained in Appendix 1 to the report. Scottish Borders Council was represented by the Council Leader on the Joint Committee. Members welcomed the report which set out a vision for the next 20 years.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the overall number and content of responses to the consultation, the major themes which emerged and the broadly positive nature of the majority of responses;**
- (b) ratify the full final version Regional Prosperity Framework (RPF) as contained in Appendix 1 to the report; and**
- (c) note that, following approval of the RPF by the Joint Committee, a number of additional actions would be initiated to support the RPF, namely:**
- (i) formal endorsement of the RPF by the Council's regional partners;**
 - (ii) preparation of an implementation and action plan to support delivery; and**
 - (iii) finalisation of a publication version to include additional graphic content.**

7. SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

7.1 With reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of 25 February 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Community Resilience presenting the finalised Anti-Poverty Strategy for proposed adoption following a 6-month consultation period. The report summarised the consultation process and outcomes, next steps in delivering on the Strategy Action Plan, including the establishment of an Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, and sought adoption of the Strategy. The report explained that following a Motion by Councillor Tatler to Council in September 2020 a Working Group had been set up to develop an approach to public consultation and create a final Strategy and Action Plan for approval. This Working Group had now completed its task and it was proposed that it was replaced by an Anti-Poverty Members Reference Group, the Terms of Reference for which were detailed at Appendix 1 to the report. This Group would monitor the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. The Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy, contained in Appendix 2 to the report set out the steps that Scottish Borders Council and Partners planned to take in tackling poverty in the Scottish Borders in relation to:

- Economic poverty and income
- Fuel poverty

- Housing poverty
- Food poverty
- Impact on family and community health and wellbeing
- Digital poverty

7.2 The Council was continuing to respond to the current Covid-19 pandemic and working with communities through the Community Assistance Hubs. The learning from this work and the lived experience of those in hardship would be taken into account in how the ongoing delivery of the Action Plan, as contained in Appendix 3 to the report, evolved. Members were pleased to support the paper and paid tribute to Councillor Tatler, the Working Group and officers for their efforts in producing this Strategy so quickly. Councillor Tatler, seconded by Councillor Haslam, proposed that the membership of the Members Reference Group should be Councillors Tatler, Greenwell, Linehan, Marshall, Ramage, Robson and Thornton-Nicol and this was unanimously agreed.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the feedback provided from the consultations on the Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan;**
- (b) approve the establishment of an Anti-Poverty Members' Reference Group comprising Councillors Tatler, Greenwell, Linehan, Marshall, Ramage, Robson and Thornton-Nicol and Terms of Reference as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;**
- (c) approve the finalised Strategy and Action Plan, as contained in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively, for adoption; and**
- (d) receive an annual Progress Report of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan.**

8. TWEEDBANK DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

With reference to paragraph 9 of the Minute of 17 June 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by Director Environment and Infrastructure providing an update on the delivery approach to realise the overall ambition to expand Tweedbank in accordance with current plans and policies. The report provided a detailed update on the Council owned sites and progress with the Supplementary Planning Guidance and Design Guide. With regard to the former Lowood Estate, the Council was close to being able to secure occupation of the house and an option appraisal process would be undertaken on a range of future uses in the short, medium and long term. It was proposed that the option appraisal would take 3 months to complete and a report on this would be brought back to Members in early 2022. The report also explained that further enabling works in the form of an access road and services would be developed in 2021/22 that would lead from the extended Tweedside Park towards the north into the former Lowood Estate. The funding for this access road was allowed for within the City Region Deal programme. The City Region Deal also provided for a range of new office and manufacturing space spread over 3 phases. However, officers were currently obtaining independent Commercial and Residential advice to appreciate trends because of the Covid-9 pandemic. This advice would be reported back to Council to ensure that full control of the type and timing of future development within phases 2 and 3 of the Central Borders Innovation Park took place. Officers were also working on plans for the Residential Care Village, supported living and affordable housing developments. Members discussed the detail of the report and noted that officers were working on an updated financial model.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the progress with the projects on Council owned sites; and**

- (b) approve the construction of the road and service infrastructure providing access to Business Zone 1 and 2.**

9. HAWICK HIGH SCHOOL PROJECT UPDATE

With reference to paragraph 15 of the Minute of 29 November 2018, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Environment and Infrastructure providing an update on the delivery of a new school in Hawick. The report detailed the background to identifying a site and explained that it had been determined that the site of the existing school was the best option. With regard to flood risk, a feasibility study had been carried out and this noted that the existing school had large elements sitting at ground level which displaced large volumes of flood water placing a risk to neighbouring buildings. The proposed new building, positioned with a reduced footprint on a plinth set at a level consistent with SEPA requirements, would sit out-with the flood risk level and would not increase the flood risk to adjacent properties in the same way. Both aspects were a fundamental requirement of a planning application within a flood risk area. Locating the new building on the existing site would ensure that the school remained at the heart of the community, continuing well over 100 years of education provision at this important town centre location. It would ensure continued access to the adjacent synthetic 3G and 2G sports pitches at the Volunteer Park and the wider Wilton Lodge Park. It would also continue to benefit from the established access arrangements at the Common Haugh for bus travel to and from the school. There was also significant investment with the Hawick Flood Protection Scheme in terms of the Active Travel Network and the existing school site connected well with this initiative. Having established that the existing site appeared to be feasible, a concept design for the new building had been identified. With some adjustments to the existing operational school, it was possible to construct a 4 storey new build in the area of ground between the adjacent cricket club and the older school buildings. Displacement of the existing social area and music buildings would be required. The next step for the project was to engage in consultation with the Community and a blended approach would be taken. Members welcomed the report, supported the proposed site and looked forward to having a new school in 2027.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to note the contents of the report;**
 - (b) that there appeared to be a technically acceptable option to locate the replacement of Hawick High School within the existing school site; and**
 - (c) that a community consultation exercise be undertaken to present the preferred option.**
- 10. CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM STRUCTURE REVIEW – CHANGES TO SCHEME OF DELEGATION, SCHEME OF ADMINISTRATION AND STANDING ORDERS**
- There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Executive requesting approval for changes to the Scheme of Delegation to reflect the new job titles and changes to line management with the recent restructure of the Council's Corporate Management Team, as well as some subsequent minor changes to the Scheme of Administration and Standing Orders. The report explained that over the last few months it has been necessary to review the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT), to ensure the Council had a flexible and dynamic approach that allowed it to better reflect priorities, and to ensure that there was the right capacity, experience, and skills in the right place. As well as responding to the departure of one member of CMT staff, the changes to CMT would assist in defining the commissioning arrangements around social work and social care, including the relationship and processes between the Council, the IJB and the Health & Social Care Partnership. With the pandemic and speed of digital change, it also meant that reflection was needed on what required to be delivered in the Transformation programme now, versus previous thinking pre-

pandemic. These changes to CMT required amendments to be made to the Council's Code of Governance documents. The Scheme of Delegation, appended to the report, contained the changes stemming from the amendments to Directors' job titles and subsequent changes in responsibilities. No new delegated powers had been added to the Scheme. As a consequence of the changes to Directors' job titles and responsibilities, a number of minor changes were also required to the Scheme of Administration and to Standing Orders and these were detailed in the report. The report also contained an update on the future working of committees, including the technology to be used, the livestreaming and recording of Council committee meetings with a further report brought to Council on this in due course. The Chief Executive advised that there would likely be further changes to CMT in future as it evolved to ensure it was fit for purpose.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the changes to job titles and responsibilities of the Corporate Management Team;**
- (b) approve the changes to the job titles and responsibilities of the Corporate Management Team in the Scheme of Delegation, as detailed in the Appendix to the report;**
- (c) approve changes to the Scheme of Administration, deleting all references to the 'Service Director – Young People, Inclusion and Engagement', and replacing that title with 'Director – Education & Lifelong Learning'; and for Appointment Committees, to delete the word 'Service' so the functions referred are "The recruitment of staff to posts at Director and above."; and**
- (d) approve a change to Standing Order No. 49(c), deleting the reference to the 'Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory)' and replacing that title with 'Director – Finance & Corporate Governance'**

11. CHIEF SOCIAL WORKER ANNUAL REPORT

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Social Work and Practice in his role as the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO) providing his annual report on the work undertaken on behalf of the Council by the CSWO in this statutory role for 2020/21. The annual report contained in Appendix A to the report, provided an account of the decisions taken by the CSWO in the statutory areas of:

- Fostering and Adoption,
- Child Protection,
- Secure Orders,
- Adult Protection,
- Adults with Incapacity,
- Mental Health,
- Justice.

The report also gave an overview of regulation and inspection, workforce issues and social policy themes over the year April 2020 to March 2021, and highlighted some of the key challenges for that year. As was the case in last year's annual report, given the workload implications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, Scottish Government recommended the continued use of a condensed reporting template to enable CSWOs to present shortened reports for local governance structures. This recommended template had been used. Members paid tribute to the work of staff over this difficult period and noted the continuing issues with recruitment and the actions being taken to try and improve this. The Director answered Members' questions and agreed to provide further information regarding local traineeships for Social Workers and the complaints process.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the report of the Chief Social Work Officer as contained in Appendix A to the report.

MEMBER

Councillor Edgar left the meeting during consideration of the above item.

12. QUEENS PLATINUM JUBILEE HOLIDAY 2022

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director People, Performance and Change asking the Council to consider the best approach to allow employees to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022. The report explained that the UK Government had announced that there would be a 4 day weekend from Thursday 2 June to Sunday 5 June 2022 to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. They intended to move a late May bank holiday to Thursday 2 June and give an additional one off holiday on Friday 3 June. Following the UK Government announcement the Scottish Government had confirmed the same arrangement for Scotland. CoSLA had not issued specific guidance to Local Authorities, leaving the decision at the discretion of each Council. The report set out 3 options for consideration and recommended option 2 which was to grant a one-off additional day's leave on Friday 3rd June. This was the option being used by the majority of Councils who had plans for the Jubilee and mirrored the steps taken by the Council in 2011 to celebrate the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Miss Kate Middleton. Members agreed to support this proposal.

DECISION

AGREED to grant the holiday as an additional one off annual leave day on Friday 3 June 2022, as outlined in option 2 within the report. If staff were required to work on this holiday no enhancements to pay would be given and only time in lieu would be granted.

13. OPEN QUESTIONS

The questions submitted by Councillors Robson, Bell, H. Scott and H. Anderson were answered.

DECISION

NOTED the replies as detailed in Appendix I to this Minute.

14. 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 II to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 6, 8 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

15. Committee Minutes

The private sections of the Committee Minutes as detailed in paragraph 3 of this Minute were approved.

The meeting concluded at 12.10 p.m.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
23 SEPTEMBER 2021
APPENDIX I

To Executive Member for Adult Wellbeing

1. Can the Executive Member advise how many occupational therapists employed by Scottish Borders Council were in post in the Borders as at 31st March 2020, as at 31st March 2021 and are currently in post now?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston
Based on information provided by HR –

31/03/20 – 13 Occupational Therapists

31/03/21 – 16 Occupational Therapists (13 WTE)

Current Vacancies – 2 x F/T

2. Can the Executive Member advise how many grant applications for aids and adaptations to private dwellings were received in the last two financial years and have been in this financial year, what percentage of the applications were granted aided or are presently outstanding, what percentage of the applications required or will require an assessment on site and how many of those assessments have been carried out?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston
Private sector grants for major adaptation:

As per best practice and reflected within Scottish Borders Council's Scheme of Assistance all requests for assistance are subject to assessment. Assessment identifies people's needs and the ability of their house to meet that need. That foundation then allows for a considered recommendation to be made. Consequently, 100% of applications received for a private sector housing grant have had a needs' assessment carried out prior to submission.

Grant Applications	
2019/20	87
2020/21	29
2021/22	16

We operate a collaborative approach in regard to delivery of major adaptations – pre application discussions are routinely held to ensure submission of valid applications and efficiency of service. Consequently 100% of applications received have been approved

Question from Councillor Bell

To Executive Member for Adult Wellbeing

I have become concerned about our Social Work Department's capacity to resource Care at Home provision. On how many occasions in total over all of the past 3 months have SBC been unable to resource 'packages' of Care at Home, either through our own staff or using contracted staff?

To understand this in context what - if any – were the equivalent figures for the same 3 months in 2019, and 2017; assuming that these numbers can be identified?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston
Social Work maintain a waiting list at all times by locality over the previous 3 years over July, August and September. A summary of the waiting list over a month is shown below in Table 1

	2019	2020	2021
Month	Total	Total	Total
July	50	43	44
August	53	46	49
September	62	47	71

What this highlights is over the last 3 years July and August have remained at stable waiting lists averages however we are seeing a significant spike in September 2021 against normal waiting lists. The detail of this has seen a significant spike in the central area which is predominantly down to a significant number of vacancies in Care at Home across all providers in the Central area.

Members should note that clients awaiting packages of care are receiving care in the main whether formal or informal and Social Work are providing Support and guidance.

Care at Home capacity has come under increasing pressure over last couple of months, not only across Scottish Borders but also nationally as reported. This is due to two drivers:

- Demand - Increase in complexity of care
- Supply - Increasing vacancies across the sector

We are seeing an increase in the complexity of need and demand for services in Care at Home long with a significant pressure in employment with Health and Social Care (H&SC). Pressures in staffing have increased as a result of COVID as people left the sector due to pressure coupled with an inability to attract staff into the sector and significant competition in other employment markets and other similar paid roles.

As a critical issue across H&SC in Borders we are working collaboratively both with health colleagues and through the Recovery Board internally looking at options to increase capacity within the Homecare area through use of different mechanisms to provide non registered care, to quickly progress recruitment and training and to actively attract people to the care sector.

Supplementary

Councillor Bell advised that he remained concerned and asked if Members could be made more aware of the pressures on care staff. Councillor Weatherston undertook to discuss this with officers.

Questions from Councillor H. Scott

1. To Executive Member for Transformation & Service Improvement

In terms of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, 2005, what are the current estimates, both in officer time, and monetary value, of completing Scottish Borders Council's Gaelic Language Plan to fully comply with the provisions of the Act?

Reply from Councillor S. Hamilton

An estimate of officer time incurred in developing the Gaelic Language Plan amounts to £6296. The officer time is fully funded within the approved Council budget.

This is made up of 4 different officers carrying out various tasks ranging from initial research, producing the Plan, preparation of the statutory consultation and writing the covering committee report, as well as meetings with the Gaelic Board. The estimate also includes time to conduct a staff survey which is still to be carried out.

2. To Executive Member for Infrastructure, Travel And Transport

Note: Councillor Edgar had left the meeting by this point and the Convener advised that the answer to the question would be passed on to Councillor Scott. That answer is replicated below.

The Stirling Street / Park Street / Stirling Place junction in Galashiels is one of the busiest in the town, carrying not only motor cars, but 'buses travelling to and from the Transport Interchange. Northbound traffic in Stirling Street must give way to traffic travelling from Stirling Place to Park Street, but at the moment is governed only by a single pole mounted 'give way' sign. The give way road markings at the junction are almost invisible. The absence of clear road markings at this very busy junction is causing confusion, and some danger, not only to drivers who may miss the sign, but to pedestrians crossing the road at that junction.

On 15 March 2021, I was told that the give way markings would be renewed at some point. Can I ask that some urgency is given to the repair of the give way markings on the road surface to mitigate against, as far as possible, vehicular accidents occurring there, and when are these repairs likely to be carried out?

Councillor Edgar had left the meeting but the following response was provided to Councillor Scott following the meeting:-

The Council is responsible for a significant road network, which is in excess of 3000km, and whilst every effort is taken to deliver our planned improvement programme efficiently and to the benefit of the communities we serve, there are significant challenges balancing the demands placed across such a large network with the resources we have.

However notwithstanding all of this the intention to undertake road relining works at Stirling Street/Park Street/Stirling Place as soon as practicably possible and this will be as part of a larger programme in the wider Galashiels area with this likely to be delivered during October 2021. Clearly complications can happen where weather and other priority initiatives emerge and this will be kept under review

Question from Councillor H. Anderson

To the Executive Member for Community Development & Localities

I am pleased to hear that the Scottish Government are providing additional funding for play parks. I understand that the Scottish Borders will receive an initial allocation of an additional £113,000 to support play park provision across the Borders.

Given that this additional funding was not factored into our budget deliberations in February, can you advise of the democratic process to be used by this council in order to ensure a fair and equitable allocation of these funds across the whole council area?

Reply from Councillor Tatler

Scottish Government have announced a £5million programme of investment nationally into Play parks. SBC has initially been offered an allocation which totals £113k towards its play park estate. The offer is conditional on the investment having been delivered by the end of March 2022, and key to the principles Scottish Government wish to see observed in the process of determining where the money is spent is that children and young people are involved in the prioritisation process.

Whilst this grant is hugely welcomed the challenges it presents to the council and also to the play park manufacturing industry are significant.

The funding criteria does not therefore lend itself to seeing investment delivered across 11 wards in this financial year. That said, we are led to believe that this is only the first tranche of a potentially larger amount signalled to be invested in play parks by Scottish Government. If we did receive further funding then we can expect to deliver benefits and improvements across the remaining play park estate in the Scottish Borders.

Importantly, this Council has an ambitious play park investment programme in place already and we intend to use both our investment plans aligned with the investment by Scottish Government to

speed up the delivery programme, subject to the conditions placed on us by the Scottish Government for any future funding.

As to how we will assess and determine priorities with our communities.

Officers will shortly be contacting members asking them to confirm their ward level priorities for investment. Once understood, members can expect to be advised of the outcome of that process and next steps towards delivery including what level of engagement and involvement is achievable given the tight timeframes for delivery.

However, the expectation for engagement to form part of the process carries with it risks in terms of delivery and its only correct to outline those risks at this stage.:-

- It is understood that suppliers are advising a minimum of 20 week lead in time from placing orders to having equipment produced and ready for installation;
- Typically an installation of circa £113k could expect to take 4 weeks;
- Suppliers have in-house design capacity which is used to aid the visualisation and eventual procurement decision, this capacity is restricted due to the impacts of Covid;
- Suppliers are faced with meeting the demands across Scotland as well as their normal business;
- Installation companies in Scotland are also impacted on the scale of the investment nationally, given their limited capacity also.

There only remains 26.5 weeks until the end of March 2022, so this is an extremely tight timeline and will require some flexibility from stakeholders including members, suppliers and potentially Scottish Government if this valuable opportunity is not to be lost.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson sought assurance that communities would be involved in how this extra money was spent. Councillor Tatler advised that consideration would need to be given to how this was done. Councillor Parker highlighted that the funding was quite small in play park terms and that it would be difficult to spend the money by the end of March 2022 given the current shortage of play equipment.