

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
25 NOVEMBER 2021
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor Paterson

To Executive Member for Infrastructure, Travel & Transport

While welcoming all moves encourage car drivers to move away from the use of Fossil Fuel and increasing the use of any fuel that does not in any way harm the environment, can the Executive Member please tell me when this administration are having to make yet more cuts to balance the books why are they still allowing the free use for electrical vehicle charging and what is the total cost to the Council tax payer since this was first introduced and are there any plans to introduce charging for the use of electrical vehicle charging in the Scottish Borders?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

Thank you Cllr Paterson for raising this issue. A condition of earlier Transport Scotland grant funding for EV charge points was that they were free at the point of use to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles. This condition has now been removed and SBC, like other Local Authorities, should consider introducing a charging regime. In 2020 the cost to the Council was £33,296. A report on the issue is currently being prepared and will recommend that the Council should implement a charging regime going forward. It is anticipated that it may be possible to have a proposal before Council as early as the 27 January Council meeting.

Questions from Councillor H. Scott

To Executive Member for Infrastructure, Travel & Transport

1. At some point in the future Scottish Borders Council, as the landlord for Lowood House, will take possession of the property.
 - a) has any assessment been done in relation to repairs and maintenance which may be required, and if not when will such an assessment be made?
 - b) will the outgoing tenant be required to make a contribution to the cost of any repairs to the property required due to deterioration or damage during the period of their tenancy?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

Officers are in regular contact with the current occupiers and have visited Lowood House on several occasions over the past few months. The current occupiers are due to vacate the property next spring and a more substantive visit to Lowood house is being planned for Estates and Property Officers in early December to review the house and assess likely ongoing maintenance.

The current occupiers are responsible for all repairs and maintenance during their occupation and are required to leave the property in the condition it was in when the Council purchased it.

2. Langlee Community Centre House Committee have expressed their concern about the continued use of the Community Centre by the NHS as a Covid19 testing station, thereby denying the use of the large hall and café to the groups who normally use those facilities.

Langlee houses some of the poorest and disadvantaged people in our community. The Community Centre and its facilities, and what they offer in the way of support and companionship, play a vital part in the maintenance of their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Recent correspondence received by me from NHS Scotland shows that the required facilities for a testing station are not overly prescriptive.

Will SBC now look at renewing its effort to finding an alternative site to house the testing station so that the use of the centre is returned to those who need it most?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

The UK Government has asked that the PCR test sites remain operational until end March 2022, the current lease expires in January 2022. The Langlee site is the only PCR site in the Borders, it has high usage which is anticipated to increase over the winter period. It is in a relatively central location within the most populated Borders locality (Eildon: 36,825). In the week 8th-14th Nov 2021, there were 705 PCR tests at Langlee. Five groups were displaced from Langlee because of the use of the upstairs area of the community centre for the PCR centre. All five were offered alternative provision.

SBC are supporting the Department of Health and Social Care (UK Government) in looking into options for alternative provision including:

- Utilisation of empty units in Galashiels town centre
- Use of a mobile testing unit
- Use of portacabin/other temporary structures.
- The use of an alternative Council owned building

Any alternative must meet certain criteria set out by UK Government including:

- minimum size for the testing area (15x10m)
- space for safe queuing
- separate entrances and exits (one-way system)
- testing centre must be kept separate from other building uses
- sufficient toilets must be available (for staff and public)

One option looked at by SBC includes the old school building (Council HQ). The Old School has parking/queuing space available and is in a central-Borders location. However this has been discounted due to space and accessibility

Supplementary

Councillor Scott advised that this facility was essential to the mental and physical wellbeing of the Langlee Community and asked Councillor Edgar to ensure negotiations to find an alternative venue were pursued and that regular updates on progress were provided. Councillor Edgar confirmed officers were actively engaged in finding an alternative venue and he would keep Members updated.

3. To the Executive Member for Wellbeing, Culture & Sport

Since its opening to the public, how many paying customers have visited the Great Tapestry of Scotland building, and how much revenue has been raised from ticket sales to the attraction?

Reply from Councillor Jardine

The Great Tapestry of Scotland is operationally managed by Live Borders. We have sought the information from our partner to respond to this question.

To date there have been 7,705 tickets bought and £69,997 in revenue income. This is in line with the revised Business Case projections from Jura Consulting in February 2021 which included COVID implications on visitor numbers.

4. To the Executive Member for Public Protection

On 17 December 2020 I submitted a question asking on how many occasions in 2020 the Police Community Action Team (CAT) had monitored the 20 mph speed limit outside schools. The answer was that none had taken place.

On how many occasions in 2021 has the CAT monitored speed limits outside schools, and if so, which schools were covered by that monitoring?

Reply from Councillor Turnbull

- No specific police speed limit monitoring activity has taken place outside schools during 2021 that is formally recorded.

- The CAT have recently started working with Junior Road Safety Officers in promoting the 20mph speed limit outside schools across the Borders, starting in Cheviot and Berwickshire. The latest schools, on 18th November 2021, were Eyemouth and Coldingham PS. This involves speed checks and other activities involving the children.
- Any Elected Member can request a specific issue be raised at the monthly CAT Oversight meeting. Attendees are cross party and from throughout the Borders.
- Police activity in relation to speeding enforcement looks at those areas with a history of accidents or other concerns being raised. None of the Borders schools would appear to have such an accident history.
- There is regular communication between the Police and Council around accidents and enforcement activity. Both participate in the Road Safety Working Group.
- The Scottish Government – Scotland’s Road Safety Framework to 2030 will be a key policy driver for enforcement.

Question from Councillor Robson

To Executive Member for Wellbeing, Culture & Sport

Can the Executive Member advise when Kelso Library’s opening hours will be returned to those prior to COVID lockdown and why this is allegedly linked to extending the opening hours of the Council Contact Centre located therein?

Reply from Councillor Jardine

The facility in Kelso is an integrated Library Contact Centre operated by the Council’s Customer Advice and Support Service and opening hours are based on demand, available resources and provision of safe usage for staff and customers.

Despite re-opening Contact Centres and Library Contact Centres customer demand via telephone and email channels remain largely at the same levels indicating a shift in contact preferences by customers.

It is unlikely, due to the changes in demand that sites will simply return to pre-Covid opening hours or times. Adjustments to opening times will reflect demand and the particular needs of those accessing the sites face to face e.g. school age or working customers e.g. via evening and weekend opening hours. This should match accessibility to demand.

The expansion of mobile library services, click and collect and the provision of digital reading devices, all of which remain available, will have contributed to the reduced demand at physical sites.

Opening hours at all sites will be increased gradually over the next two months, however, this must be done in a manner to ensure customer and staff safety as well as meeting the emerging customer demand for face to face based services.

Officers are not aware of any significant level of requests for additional opening hours or complaints about inaccessibility. Any information on any specific issues or difficulties being encountered would be welcomed so appropriate action and assistance can be taken/provided.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson advised that he had received representations regarding opening hours which he would pass to officers. He did not feel demand could be properly assessed if the library was not open and he knew groups who wished to use the meeting space. Councillor Jardine agreed communication could be improved around opening hours and agreed to take the matter forward working with local Members.