

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCOTTISH
BORDERS COUNCIL held in Council
Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells on 25
November 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:- Councillors D. Parker (Convener), S. Aitchison, A. Anderson, H. Anderson, J. Brown, S. Bell, K. Chapman, C. Cochrane, G. Edgar, J. A. Fullarton, J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton (from paragraph 4), S. Hamilton, S. Haslam, E. Jardine, H. Laing, J. Linehan, S. Marshall, W. McAteer, T. Miers, 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

In Attendance:- Chief Executive, Director Finance & Corporate Governance, Director Infrastructure & Environment, Director Resilient Communities, Director Social Work & Practice, Director Strategic Commissioning & Partnerships, Chief Officer Health & Social Care Integration, Chief Legal Officer, Clerk to the Council.

1. CONVENER'S REMARKS

1.1 The Convener congratulated the following:-

- (a) Fiona Henderson School of Dance who won 'Dance School of the Year' Award which was a UK wide competition;
- (b) Jim Clark Motorsport Museum was a runner up at the SPACES Awards on 10 November in the Small Project Category;
- (c) Councillor Jardine won the Resilience and Recovery category for his work during the Covid pandemic at the LGIU & CCLA Councillor Awards, Councillor Chapman was highly commended in the New Councillor category for his work with young people. Councillor S. Scott had been nominated for the Lifetime contribution; and
- (d) Scottish Borders Council had won the Client of the Year category at the Learning Places Scotland Awards 2021, having been nominated by BAM, the main contractor for the scheme.

DECISION

AGREED that congratulations be passed to those concerned.

- 1.2 With reference to paragraph 1.4 of the Minute of 23 September 2021, the Chief Executive updated Members on the progress of Andrew Webster QC. It had been hoped that his investigation would have been completed. However, despite having interviewed a number of parents, employees and former employees and received a number of written submissions further work was needed. The Chief Executive read out a letter from Mr Webster explaining his position. The expected completion date was now the end of January 2022 and given the importance of the subject the Chief Executive advised that there would need to be additional special meetings of Council held to deal with the report. In response to a question from Councillor McAteer she confirmed that the terms of reference for Mr Webster remained unchanged.

DECISION

NOTED the position.

2. MINUTE

The Minute of the Meeting held on 28 October 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:-

Local Review Body	13 September 2021
Cheviot Area Partnership	22 September 2021
Tweeddale Area Partnership	27 September 2021
Pension Board	28 September 2021
Hawick Common Good Fund	4 October 2021
Executive	5 October 2021
Audit and Scrutiny	5 October 2021
Chambers Institution Trust	6 October 2021
Pension Fund Committee	20 October 2021
Pension Fund Board	20 October 2021
Audit and Scrutiny	21 October 2021
Tweeddale Area Partnership	2 November 2021

DECISION

APPROVED the Minutes listed above.

4. APPOINTMENT OF LEADER

Following the resignation of Councillor Haslam as Leader of the Council, Councillor Mountford, seconded by Councillor Aitchison, moved that Councillor Rowley be appointed as Leader of the Council and this was unanimously agreed. Councillors Mountford, Aitchison, Bell, Robson, H. Scott and the Convener all thanked Councillor Haslam for her work as Leader and spoke in support of the appointment of Councillor Rowley. Councillor Rowley thanked Council for his appointment as Leader and paid tribute to Councillor Haslam. He advised that any changes to appointments resulting from his appointment would be brought to Council at the meeting on 16 December.

DECISION

AGREED that Councillor Rowley be appointed as Leader of the Council with immediate effect.

5. BRIDGE HOMES LLP ANNUAL ACCOUNTS TO 31 MARCH 2021

With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 28 October 2021, there had been circulated copies of the final accounts in respect of Bridge Homes LLP which had now been signed off by the auditors, KPMG. An unqualified Audit opinion had been received and the Audit and Scrutiny Committee had also reviewed the accounts and had nothing to add.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the audited accounts for the year to 31 March 2021 in respect of Bridge Homes LLP.

6. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN - DEVELOPMENT PLAN SCHEME 2021

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director Infrastructure and Environment providing the annual update of the Development Plan Scheme. The report explained that publishing a Development Plan Scheme annually was a statutory duty and it must include a participation statement setting out how, when and with whom the Council would consult on the various Local Development Plan stages. The proposed Development Plan Scheme 2021, which was contained in Appendix 1 to the report, had been prepared to provide information on the development plan process. It set out the latest position on the Council's development plans. Once approved the Plan would be sent to Scottish Ministers. Members noted the significant number of consultation responses which had been received and the complexity of dealing with these during the pandemic. Councillor Rowley proposed that the

second recommendation be amended to include consultation with the Executive Member and this was unanimously accepted. It was noted that the next report would be brought to Council in February 2022.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) approve the proposed Development Plan Scheme 2021, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report , for publication, deposit and copying to Scottish Ministers, and;**
- (b) authorise the Director Infrastructure and Environment, in consultation with the Executive Member for Enhancing the Built Environment and Natural Heritage, to make any necessary minor editing and design changes to the Development Plan Scheme prior to publication.**

7. TWEEDBANK CARE VILLAGE

- 7.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Chief Officer Health and Social Care Integration presenting the Outline Business Case for change and seeking approval to progress the innovative Care Village development at Tweedbank, Central Borders, as the first Borders Care Village. The report explained that in 2020, Senior Managers and Elected Members visited and assessed new visions for care facilities, including the Hogeweyk development in the Netherlands. The Council then commenced design works for Care Villages in Tweedbank and Hawick and the Revenue and Capital Investment Plan approved in March 2020 included a £22.679m allocation for “new residential care provision” for Tweedbank and Hawick. Consultations and work undertaken by the Council and the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) concluded that a different model of care was required. The concept of the Care Village model supported unique needs, lifestyles and personal preferences for living, care and well-being for people living mainly with severe dementia and frailty. In addition, a model that could also adapt and meet specific local demand for a range of residential care that included: respite, intermediate, nursing and specialist care. The Care Inspectorate strongly encouraged innovation and diversity in future care provision and wished to encourage care providers and commissioners to provide care on a smaller unit scale. Following the lessons learned with regards infrastructure during the Covid 19 Pandemic it was expected that further more stringent demands on the fabric of residential care provision, to meet infection control measures would be expected. The Care Village concept would ensure a building which met the highest standards of infection control in line with new guidance. Additionally there was a pressing need to address and improve the current estate to meet these expected demands. Work had been ongoing to identify suitable sites for the two new Care Villages. A site had recently been agreed within the Hawick area which was the focus of a separate paper and Outline Business Case. A possible site had also been identified and to progress an Outline business case for the inclusion of a Care Village within the Tweedbank site.
- 7.2 This Tweedbank site was central within the Borders and offered the correct range of opportunities, partnerships resources and delivery of outcomes required for such a provision. The Care Village would form part of the overall expansion of Tweedbank in line with the approved Supplementary Planning Guidance including private, social and assisted living housing, neighbourhood centre and business zones. The Care Village itself would complement the wider developments and also contain an element of community based spaces and functions at the centre of the Village to ensure that the ethos of the village being at the heart of thriving residential area was delivered. The key factors included: location, strategic fit with the capital master plan, with very close proximity to the Borders General Hospital, (BGH). This proposal also provided further opportunities to support additional developments with two third sector partners. Aberlour were a well-respected provider for children’s services and wished to expand their input to support vulnerable children through a new centre which could be accommodated within the Tweedbank initiative. Cornerstone had been working for a number of years with the Learning Disability service for adults to find a site for a residential provision for adults with extreme complex needs and again Tweedbank

could provide an excellent location for this resource, this would enable people previously placed outside of the Borders, to return to their home setting. These two developments would enhance the Care Village model.

- 7.3 Mr Myers answered Members' questions and agreed to replace any reference to "elderly" with "older people". With regard to the Hawick development, a full option appraisal would be required covering 4 sites and a report would come to Council in Spring 2022 with the preferred site and business case. Members discussed the proposals in detail and looked forward to receiving the full Business Case. Some concerns were expressed regarding the Care Village becoming an institution and the need for smaller units than were being proposed. Officers assured Members that the aim was to make the development as homely as possible, with the aim always to care for people in their own homes as long as possible until their needs changed to require a different setting. The decommissioning of Waverley Care Home and Garden View was planned to be carried out in tandem with the opening of the care village.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) approve the timeline to proceed with the development of a full business case and design brief of a Care Village at the Tweedbank site, within the central locality of Eildon with a full business case submitted to Council by Summer 2022;**
- (b) approve that both Waverley Care Home (24 beds) and Garden View Intermediate Care Home (25 beds) operated by SBC were decommissioned and closed to secure revenue funding to provide for the Tweedbank Care Village;**
- (c) to note that an outline business case will be brought forward in spring 2022 for a Care Village provision within Hawick.**

8. SOCIAL WORK NON RESIDENTIAL CHARGING POLICY

- 8.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Social Work and Practice detailing the public feedback from the recent consultation and proposed changes to the Charging Policy for Non-Residential and Residential Care Services. The report explained that each year, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) produced guidance on the principles that underpinned local authority charging policies. The COSLA Guidance was subject to revision annually or as policy developed. As a result, Scottish Borders Council reviewed its non-residential care charging policy every year. Income generated by contributions people made through the charging policy enabled the council to continue providing a service to people who had an assessed need and ensured the development and delivery of high quality services. There was a range of changes consulted on and a complete rewrite of the actual policy was proposed to ensure the policy was more accessible and easy to read. A public consultation, which concluded on the 17 October 2021, explored how people viewed proposed changes. These changes intended to improve equity in respect of Financial Assessments, Extra Care Housing Charges and Sheltered Housing Charges. The consultation also sought views on the council's proposal to increase the level of payment people received for Direct Payment and Short Breaks Rates and addressed the linking of the cost of Meals at Home (Frozen Meals) charges to the national excel contract. The consultation covered the agreement reached by council last year, to apply an annual 5% increase to the taper rate. The proposal for financial year 2022/23 was to move from 70% to 75%. The consultation had been advertised across multiple channels and media, as outlined in appendix 1 to the report, and ran from 17/09/2021 to 17/10/2021. Postal returns were accepted until 20/10/21. There was a comprehensive range of activity resulting in 80 individuals engaging in the consultation process and 3 organisational responses.
- 8.2 Councillor Thornton-Nicol, seconded by Councillor H. Anderson, proposed as an amendment that recommendation (g) be reworded to read "a 5% increase in the taper rate for 2022/23

and a 5% annual increase until the taper rate reaches 90%". Councillor Thornton-Nicol spoke in support of her proposal.

- 8.3 Councillor Robson, seconded by Councillor Chapman, proposed a further amendment to reword recommendation (g) to read "a 5% increase in the taper rate for 2022/23" which would leave the taper rate at 75%. Councillor Robson spoke in support of his amendment.
- 8.4 In light of this second amendment, Councillor Bell requested an adjournment to allow his group to consider their position. The Convener agreed to this and adjourned the meeting for 15 minutes. When the meeting recommenced Councillor Thornton-Nicol withdrew her amendment advising that the decision should be left until the next Council term. Following that withdrawal Councillor Tatler, seconded by Councillor Haslam, moved that the 90% amendment be reinstated and recommendation (g) duly amended.

VOTE

A vote was then taken on the Motion by Councillor Tatler and the amendment by Councillor Robson as follows:-

<i>Motion</i>	-	18 votes
<i>Amendment</i>	-	15 votes

The Motion was accordingly carried.

DECISION

DECIDED to approve:-

- (a) the continuation of a co-production approach to the development of the new Charging policy to be used from the 1st April 2022;**
- (b) an evaluation of impact on the introduction of a single financial assessment process in specific chargeable matters e.g. Housing Support;**
- (c) an evaluation of options for introducing an equal charge, with appropriate individual Financial Assessment, across current and future Extra Care Housing developments;**
- (d) the introduction of equal charging, with appropriate Individual Financial Impact assessment, across all current and future Sheltered Housing (housing support) developments;**
- (e) the linking of the Direct Payment rate to the Scottish Living Wage;**
- (f) the linking of the Short Breaks Rate paid to unpaid carers to the Residential costs set by the Scottish Government;**
- (g) a 5% increase in the taper rate for 2022/23 and a 5% annual increase until the taper rate reached 90%; and**
- (h) the linking of meals at home charges to the national Excel contract.**

MEMBER

Councillor Linehan did not re-join the meeting after the adjournment

9. **CHAMBERS INSTITUTION TRUST MEMBERSHIP**

With reference to paragraph 9 of the Minute of 27 May 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Finance and Corporate Governance which had been brought in response to the motion agreed at Council on 27 May 2021 which called upon Officers to bring a report to Council regarding the Membership of the Chambers Institution Trust (CIT). That motion stated:-

“Scottish Borders Council requests that the Chief Executive brings a report to Council setting out the options and implications of including additional external members in the Chambers Institution Trust to supplement the existing governance arrangements.”

Since that time an analysis of the options for adding lay trustees to the current Membership of the Trust had been undertaken. The history of the Trust had been considered as has the range of Counsel's Opinions which had been obtained by the Council over a number of years. Another Opinion of Senior Counsel was obtained to seek further clarity on certain issues. That Opinion was appended to the report. It was noted that those Counsel's Opinions all agreed that lay individuals could not be Property Owning Trustees. By necessity this would mean that appointing such lay trustees would add an additional layer to the current make-up of the Trust and would therefore add a level of complication. Further an examination of the possible role for such Lay Trustees identified that there was little decision making in which they could appropriately engage given they would be neither vested in the property, nor vested in the statutory authority to act as library or museum authority. It was therefore proposed that the Council leave the position as it was and did not appoint lay Trustees to the CIT. It also recommended that a public engagement opportunity should be considered. Councillor Bell and Councillor Tatler as joint Chairmen of the Trust indicated their support for the recommendation to leave the membership of the Trust unchanged.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) leave the membership of the Trustees to the Chambers Institution Trust unchanged and not to appoint lay trustees; and**
- (b) Invite the Chambers Institution Trustees to consider how best to engage with stakeholders in Peeblesshire about the Chambers Institution.**

MEMBER

Councillor Linehan re-joined the meeting during consideration of the above item.

10. **SOUTH OF SCOTLAND ECONOMIC STRATEGY DELIVERY PLAN**

With reference to paragraph 5 of the Minute of 23 September 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Resilient Communities seeking the endorsement of the Delivery Plan 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 Partnership comprised members of Scottish Borders Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, and South of Scotland Enterprise, together with members from business, communities, social enterprise, third sector, registered social landlords, young people and representatives from colleges, universities and public bodies. The Chair of the Partnership rotated annually (based on financial years) between Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council. The current Chair of the Partnership was Councillor Rowley. Scottish Borders Council had been involved in every stage of the development of the Strategy and the Delivery Plan. The Delivery Plan was agreed by the Partnership at its meeting on 5 November 2021. The production of the Delivery Plan had involved a great deal of discussion and consultation with local, regional and national partners. It was a three year 'rolling' Plan with short, medium and long term actions that the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership would review annually. The actions in the Plan were aligned with the vision and priorities within the Strategy. They were grouped according to the main themes in the Strategy and there were some cross cutting actions. The main

organisations were identified for taking forward each action. There was a section in the Plan about the Measurement Framework. The Partnership had decided to take its time in developing this Framework to ensure that relevant outcome indicators were produced that could relate to the Strategy's priorities. Members welcomed the delivery plan.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) endorse the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy Delivery Plan as contained in Appendix 1 to the report: and**
- (b) receive progress reports about the implementation of the Strategy and Delivery Plan, including the Measurement Framework.**

11. MOTION BY COUNCILLOR HASLAM

- 11.1 Councillor Haslam, seconded by Councillor H. Scott, moved approval of the Motion as detailed on the agenda in the following terms:-

"That this Council recognises the 16 days of action to support women and girls who are victims of violence. 3 in 5 women in Scotland have suffered sexual harassment or assault in the past, with over two thirds saying that they don't feel safe walking at night. As a Council we stand with these women and girls and call for more support, recognition and funding from all Governments to prevent this violence, and support women who have been victims of violence. We recognise the work of Borders Rape Crisis Centre, and their new project launching this week, Sunrise - a support service for women 18+ who have experienced sexual violence at any point in their lives in the Scottish Borders. We must do more, we can do more."

Councillors Haslam and Scott spoke in support of the Motion.

- 11.2 Councillor H. Anderson proposed that the final sentence be amended to read "This Council must do more, this Council can do more." She spoke in support of her amendment which was accepted by Councillor Haslam. The Motion as amended was unanimously accepted.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Motion above as amended.

12. MOTION BY COUNCILLOR H. SCOTT

Councillor H. Scott, seconded by Councillor Cochrane, moved approval of the Motion as detailed on the agenda in the following terms:-

"That this Council consults with secondary pupils and staff in the Scottish Borders, on proposals to install gender neutral toilets in the new Galashiels Community Campus, and Peebles High School, the aim to learn and implement lessons for the improvement of those arrangements from those schools and campuses where they are currently in use."

Councillors Scott and Cochrane spoke in support of the Motion which was unanimously accepted.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Motion as detailed above.

12. OPEN QUESTIONS

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

DECISION

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

13. **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

14. **Minute**

The private section of the Council Minute of 28 October 2021 was approved.

15. **Committee Minutes**

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

The meeting concluded at 12.50 p.m.

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.