
Report by Director People Performance and Change

Scottish Borders Council

31 March 2022

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes that Scottish Borders Council considers making a tangible gesture that recognises and shows appreciation for the ongoing response and contribution of its employees to the COVID-19 pandemic.**
- 1.2 Options for providing employees with a demonstrable token of recognition are limited by cost and the difficulty in implementing without disruption to the business. As a consequence, it is felt the second option detailed in Section 4 will be perceived as having value to employees, whilst at the same time having a low actual cost and disruption to the business. Any working time lost is likely to be mitigated through increased goodwill, and the feeling of being recognised and valued for the work done. In addition within schools the proposal would involve converting an existing in-service day within each locality.
- 1.3 The granting of an additional day's wellbeing leave is regarded as having a high value to employees, whilst at the same time is relatively low in terms of direct costs. It is also a way of 'giving back' to the family of staff who may also have had to make sacrifices during this time.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council agrees to granting all Council employees a wellbeing day off during 2022 as recognition of their exceptional response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a financial adjustment for staff for whom this is not a practical option.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on Council Services' ability to serve the communities since March 2020. Throughout this difficult period employees have continually been flexible and committed to ensuring essential services continued to be provided.
- 3.2 The issue of additional COVID-19 payments to some staff groups has been both controversial and divisive. The Council has been at pains to emphasise the contributions of all its employees, choosing not to make an artificial distinction between 'frontline' and 'other', and instead choosing a 'One Council' approach. In addition, at a time when services are increasingly under financial pressure, and with very considerable uncertainty about the medium term financial outlook, recognition that has a direct financial cost to the Council, such as a payment or a gift, may be viewed negatively by some, including the public.
- 3.3 The sustained extent of the pandemic has had an impact on the wellbeing and resilience of employees across the Council. In recognition of that, the award of a one off additional day's wellbeing leave would enable individuals to take the day at an appropriate time during 2022 to meet their own personal wellbeing needs without disruption to service provision.

4 Options Considered

- 4.1 A wide range of options were considered and are contained in Appendix 1 of the report. The following two options emerged as the most realistic and having consulted the senior leadership team on these options the award of an additional wellbeing day was considered the most appropriate.

Option 1

- 4.2 The first is to do nothing. This may result in an adverse reaction from employees and Trades Unions, particularly given the significant efforts of Council employees throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Option 2

- 4.3 Grant a one-off additional wellbeing day's leave for staff in 2022.- This would apply to staff who have contracted hours and were employed for a period of three months or more on 31 December 2021.
- 4.4 Legislation ensures that part-time employees are not treated less favourably than their full time colleagues and as such would be entitled to this extra wellbeing leave on a pro-rata basis.

- 4.5 The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning would need to convert an in-service day in each locality to facilitate a wellbeing day for Teachers.
- 4.6 There are some staff groups within schools who work term time and are not part of the in- service day programme. It is proposed managers would have discretion to make a payment in lieu of the wellbeing day if it would not be possible to award it without disruption to the service.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

(a) There are no financial implications to option 1. Financial implications of granting an additional wellbeing leave day to all staff notionally equates to £ 305,269.

(b) The cost is notionally based on lost productivity for all staff on the assumption that they will all be taking a day off where they have been required to work. For some services there will be further additional costs for casual/relief staff who are required to provide cover for the staff member.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

If no action is taken to recognise the sustained effort of employees there is a risk of an adverse reaction from employees and Trades Unions.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

Given the options are either a continuation of the current position or an additional wellbeing day's leave, there are no equality or Fairer Scotland duty implications and an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required. .

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

There is no impact/ difference to any of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

5.5 Climate Change

There are no Climate Change implications to the proposals in this report.

5.6 Rural Proofing

There are no Rural Proofing implications to the proposals in this report.

5.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

5.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

Approved by

Name Clair Hepburn
Title Director People Performance and Change

Signature

Author(s)

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Background Papers: Nil
Previous Minute Reference: N/A

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Contact us at chepburn@scotborders.gov.uk

Appendix 1

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The initial proposals were to explore:

- A day's annual leave
- A bench for each major town
- An event that staff can attend
- A pass for local attractions like Abbotsford, Tapestry etc.
- A donation to Borders in bloom
- Creation of a small garden to celebrate staff contribution
- A thank you card

Whilst working through these proposals, some further suggestions have also been identified:

- Local restaurant voucher
- Employee bonus

2 OPTIONS FOR STAFF RECOGNITION

2.1 The estimated cost of all the options detailed below are available under section 5.1 of this report. The following options have been considered.

Option 1 – Take no further action

2.2 The first option is to do nothing further than the standard "thank you" messages that have been regularly sent to colleagues. This may result in an adverse reaction from employees, particularly given the significant efforts of Council employees throughout the Covid 19 pandemic.

Option 2 – Additional day's annual leave

2.3 Grant a one-off additional day's leave. This option would be in addition to the recently approved additional day for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June 2022.

2.4 As this would be an additional annual leave day and not a fixed or public holiday, there would be no enhancements payable for working on that day.

2.5 Legislation ensures that part-time employees are not treated less favourably than their full time colleagues and as such would be entitled to this extra leave on a pro-rata basis.

- 2.6 Those employees on maternity leave would be entitled to accrue this day if other employees not on maternity leave were granted it.
- 2.7 The Director of Education & Lifelong Learning would need to apply to Scottish Government seeking permission to reduce the number of school days from 189 days to 188 days if a decision to grant the day's additional leave is taken.

Option 3 - An event that staff can attend

- 2.8 A social gathering may be considered as a potential option, and for the purpose of this report, details and approximate costs are based on holding events at Springwood Park in Kelso, however other venues may be available.
- 2.9 Springwood can accommodate approx. 500 guests in one sitting, depending on the type of function required. This is one of the larger venues within the Scottish Borders.
- 2.10 Scottish Borders Council employ just under 5000 staff so numerous events may be required to accommodate all employees, however this option may not appeal to everyone.
- 4.11 Organisation of these events would require planning and time from SBC officers. Consideration may need to be given to employees who live outwith the Scottish Borders.
- 2.12 Various options in terms of catering and entertainment are available and detailed in section 5.1 of this report.
- 2.13 Adverse publicity may also be a factor in determining if this is a viable option.

Option 4 – Bench in Major towns

- 2.14 Purchasing and installing benches with an engraved plaque across locations within the Scottish Borders may be an attractive proposal as a public acknowledgement of the work of SBC employees. This would also be a benefit to the community.
- 2.15 The amount of benches installed could be increased or reduced to fit in with budget constraints.
- 2.16 Locations would need to be considered as to where the benches are located however, an option could be to hold a vote to determine this.
- 2.17 Consideration should be given to the upkeep and durability of the benches.
- 2.18 Organisation of these benches would require planning and time from SBC officers.

Option 5 – Local Attraction Pass

- 2.19 This option could allow staff to choose from a list of local attractions to attend, thus giving staff a reward of their choice whilst giving money back to the local community.
- 2.20 There are numerous local attractions within the Scottish Borders and determining a condensed list may be challenging and cause unrest with local businesses that are not included. Providing staff with an opportunity to choose a local attraction would appeal and feel rewarding. There are no general passes available.
- 2.21 Prices for local attractions vary depending on numerous factors such as the type of pass required and the time of attendance.
- 2.22 Organisation of this would require planning and time from SBC officers. Consideration may need to be given to employees who live outwith the Scottish Borders.

Option 6 – Donation to Borders in Bloom

- 2.23 Borders in Bloom are a volunteer group who work to keep towns clean, green and floral for those who live and work within the Scottish Borders.
- 2.24 Providing a donation to this organisation may not feel like a reward for all employees, however it would enhance the environment for local communities.
- 2.25 Budget for this would be open for discussion.

Option 7 – Creation of Garden to celebrate staff contribution

- 2.26 The creation of a garden to celebrate staff contribution could be a lasting legacy. Creation of a green space would be environmentally friendly and allow staff and members of the public to visit throughout the year.
- 2.27 Employees could be involved in the design of the garden if this was a viable option.
- 2.28 Consideration must be given to various factors such as where the garden would be located, and what would be included within the garden. The general upkeep would also be a factor.
- 2.29 Costs vary depending on the size and materials used, however SBC Contracts could carry out this work. Further consideration must be given to any planning permissions that may be required.

Option 8 – Thank you card

- 2.30 A thank you card is another option for consideration. This would be a relatively low cost option with a further opportunity to issue this electronically.

- 2.31 This option would require some organisation and potential costs would be incurred with postage.
- 2.32 As part of the staff recognition scheme, employees who are nominated currently receive a congratulations e-card. This option may therefore be seen as similar to our existing staff recognition scheme.
- 2.33 Print Services can produce these cards in-house if required.

Option 9 – Employee Bonus

- 2.34 A one-off cash bonus is an option but this would have tax implications. Staff within SB Cares and Teachers involved in the SQA process have received cash payments from Scottish Government.
- 2.35 Budget for this would be open for discussion.
- 2.36 Consideration would be required if payment for part-time staff should be pro-rata.

Option 10 – Local Restaurant Voucher

- 2.37 This option could allow staff to choose from a list of local restaurants to attend, thus giving staff a reward of their choice whilst giving money back to the local community.
- 2.38 There are numerous restaurants within the Scottish Borders and determining a condensed list may be challenging and cause unrest with local businesses that are not included. Providing staff with an opportunity to choose a local restaurant may appeal and feel rewarding. There would be tax implications for a monetary voucher.
- 2.39 The voucher value would need to be considered, and budget for this would be open for discussion.
- 2.40 Staff could choose to pool their vouchers and enjoy a visit as a team or use for themselves with family and friends

Option 1 – Take no further action

- 3.1 No cost involved

Option 2 – Additional day's annual leave

- 3.2 Financial implications of granting an additional annual leave day to all staff equates to £ 644,695.
- 3.3 The cost is based on lost productivity for all staff on the assumption that they will all be taking the day off. For some services there will be further additional costs for casual/relief staff who are required to provide cover for the staff member who is taking the day later.

3.4 Consideration must also be given to the pending pay award.

Option 3 - An event that staff can attend

- 3.5 Springwood venue hire costs £3,500 per event.
Entertainment per event would cost approximately £500.
Catering for an event may cost around £25 per person.
- 3.6 One event to cater for 500 people may cost approximately £16,500.
- 3.7 With approximately 500 staff, there may need to be multiple events:
- 3.8 5 events would therefore cost £82,500 (cater for 2500 people)
10 events would cost £165,000 (cater for 5000 people)
- 3.9 It may be possible to negotiate discounts for multiple bookings.
- 3.10 There would be additional costs for SBC officers' time

Option 4 – Bench in Major towns

- 3.11 One bench to be manufactured in-house would cost approximately £1000. This includes engraving and installation costs. There are other lower cost options from suppliers that range from £600 upwards.
- 3.12 There would be additional costs for SBC officers' time to organise.

Option 5 – Local Attraction Pass

3.13 A range of options have been considered and costs are as follows:

Floors Castle	£20.00
Abbotsford House	£12.00
Kelso Races	£25.00
The Tapestry	£10.50
Border Abbeys	£3.00
Cinema Pass	£12.00
Go Ape - Glentress	£34.00
Jackson's Farm	£13.00
Rib Boat Trips - Eyemouth	£25.00
Alpacas - Beirhope/Bedrule	£45.00
Golfing	£20.00
Tempest Brewery	£15.00
Borders Distillery	£15.00

3.14 This list is not exhaustive and can be amended to suit.

Option 6 – Donation to Borders in Bloom

3.15 Costs involved in this option would be open for discussion.

Option 7 – Creation of Garden to celebrate staff contribution

3.16 Costs for this option vary depending on size, location and materials required.

3.17 Parks & Environment planting costs £22 per hour
SBC Contracts cost £23 per hour
A local Landscaper would cost approx. £200 per day

Option 8 – Thank you card

The in house cost to produce 100 cards (A4 folded to A5) with coloured print would be £1035.

3.18 Based on approx. 5000 staff, this would be a total cost of £51,750 to produce.

3.19 Postal costs would be an additional £4,350 first class or £3,250 second class.

3.20 Option to send an electronic thank you card would have no cost involved.

Option 9 – Employee Bonus

3.21 Costs involved in this option would be open for discussion.

3.22 As an example, a £50 one-off bonus payment to all employees would cost approx. £250,000. This assumes no reduction for part-time employees. If a pro-rata basis was utilised, there would be a decrease in this cost.

Option 10 – Local Restaurant Voucher

3.23 Costs involved in this option would be open for discussion.

3.24 As an example, a £50 restaurant voucher to all employees would cost approx. £250,000. This assumes no reduction for part-time employees. If a pro-rata basis was utilised, there would be a decrease in this cost.