

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
23 JUNE 2022
APPENDIX II

Questions from Councillor Begg

1. To the Executive Member for Roads Development and Maintenance
What are the current maintenance arrangements for our cemeteries?

Response from Councillor Greenwell

The maintenance arrangements within our 154 cemeteries take place throughout the year and include planned activities such as grass cutting, weed killing, litter bin and other waste material removal, planned works also include inspections of trees and headstones and other ad hoc property based assessments. We also undertake some seasonal tasks such as pruning of ornamental trees/shrubs and seasonal removal of wreaths around the new year.

We then undertake reactive tasks and these centre around the function of the cemetery so we inter the remains of the deceased and in doing so have to erect soil boxes as part of the process, and deal with surplus materials which is left over. We address issues of sunken lairs as part of the recent burial process having inspections and follow up actions at approximately 12 and 24 weeks post interment to manage the settlement of the lair.

During winter months the service tries to deliver cemetery improvements identified to us through the year through feedback from the community, our staff and members. The largest issue of which is the restoration of historical sunken lairs which creates problems for us when undertaking grass maintenance for example.

The services are delivered directly by our own employees, through the Infrastructure and Environment Department. Some specialist services are provided by third parties for example the tree survey.

Supplementary

Councillor Begg appreciated that Council Workers were doing their best in the face of cuts but asked Councillor Greenwell if he was prepared to meet to discuss cemetery maintenance using West Linton as an example. Councillor Greenwell confirmed he was happy to meet Councillor Begg and to include senior officers in that meeting.

2. To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport
Is the current 2045 carbon net zero target set by Scottish Borders Council an urgent enough response to the climate emergency?

Response from Councillor Linehan

I have a 5 part answer to Councillor Begg's question. However, it is long and complex, reflecting a climate change context which is vast and complex. I will give that full answer to Councillor Begg, but for the purposes of this meeting, I will limit myself to reading out the most immediately relevant parts of the response (parts 4 and 5).

4. SBC's climate goals and the Law. In the report 'Responding to the Climate Emergency' agreed on 25 September 2020, the Council's commitment was framed in terms of '*....a target for achieving a reduction in the Council's carbon emissions, which is at least consistent with the Scottish Government's target of net zero by 2045 and the intermediate targets set out in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets)(Scotland) Act 2019.*'

By virtue of the Climate Change Act Amendment Order 2020, from November 2022, public bodies (including this Council) are also required to:

- a target date for achieving zero direct emissions of greenhouse gases;
- targets for reducing indirect emissions of greenhouse gases;

- evidence for how we will align our spending plans and use of resources to contribute to reducing emissions and delivering its emissions reduction targets; and
- evidence of our progress to achieving our emissions reduction targets

Compliance with the law remains the Council's backstop position. Net Zero is the law. The aforementioned Act sets a legally-binding "net-zero" target of all greenhouse gases by 2045, with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030, 90% by 2040.

However, the Council's emphasis remains on making urgent progress – sooner than 2045 if achievable - and to make that progress both organisationally, and as a region. With this in mind, two critical phases of work are being developed currently. These are:

1. Scoping work with respect to an evidence-based emissions inventory to provide a baseline for Scottish Borders Council estate and services, supported by a clear and accessible carbon measurement and monitoring methodology, to help improve SBC's corporate net zero plan.
2. Scoping of climate and carbon data repository for the South of Scotland (with our partners in SOSE and Dumfries & Galloway Council) that includes science-led and evidence-based data that can inform decision making for both mitigation and adaptation actions on an area-wide basis.

5. Conclusion. By building on existing baselining work, these workstreams will increase our understanding of our emissions reduction pathway and thereby strengthen our ability to plan and deliver actions, potentially enabling Council to accelerate its Net Zero target date.

Supplementary

Councillor Begg asked if Councillor Linehan agreed that having declared a Climate Emergency progress was too slow in comparison with some other Councils. Councillor Linehan acknowledged that constituents were concerned, with the Council committed to listening through the work of the Sustainable Development Committee, and undertook to check what more could be done, including looking at what other Councils were doing.

Questions from Councillor Robson

1. To the Executive Member for Service Delivery and Transformation

What progress has been made on creating a searchable database or file of questions asked at Council meetings?

Response from Councillor Rowley

Officers are currently uploading previous Council Questions and responses to the Members' Enquiries portal which is under development. The search part has still be set up and the whole site tested. It is hoped this will be available to Members after the summer recess.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if it would be available to members of the public. Councillor Rowley agreed to raise this with officers.

2. To the Executive Member for Roads Development and Maintenance

What is the life expectancy of batteries used in electric cars in the Council's fleet, what is the cost of their replacement, and when will that replacement likely occur?

Response from Councillor Greenwell

We currently have 61 electric vehicles on the fleet, of these 14 are three or more years old. The battery warranty on these vehicles is seven years with an expected lifespan of over ten years, we have not needed to change any batteries as yet and generally we do not intend to keep the vehicles beyond the battery warranty period.

New Batteries cost between £4500 and £9000 dependant on size.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked that should the Council decide to keep a vehicle beyond battery life a battery disposal policy would be needed and this should also include disposal by members of the public. Councillor Greenwell undertook to discuss this with officers and issue a briefing note to Members.

Questions from Councillor Steel

1. To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Are you aware of the inadequacy of the X95 bus service to and from Edinburgh from Stow and Heriot in my Ward, as raised with me by Stow and Heriot Community Councils? What representation has the Council made or could the Council make to Border Buses to improve the situation?

Response from Councillor Linehan

Transport Officers at Scottish Borders Council have been in regular discussions with Borders Buses with regards to service levels across the network.

Current service levels are driven by demand and also the availability of drivers.

The X95 continues to be affected by low passenger numbers particularly North of Galashiels and South of Hawick. Borders Buses are keen to reinstate services across the network however due to ongoing issues with driver recruitment, service levels have had to be scaled back in order to reduce the number of cancellations.

Transport officers will continue to engage with Borders Buses and I will raise the points above with the operator at our next meeting.

2. To the Executive Member for Service Delivery and Transformation

How many equal pay claims has the Council received since September 2017 and how many are currently ongoing?

Response from Councillor Rowley

The Council has not received any equal pay claims since September 2017.

Supplementary

Councillor Steel asked if the Council had carried out a co-pay audit and if so when was it reported to Council. Councillor Rowley undertook to check with officers.