

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
17 DECEMBER 2015
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor Mountford

To the Executive Member for Education

Please will you provide details of the financial savings and efficiency benefits that have accrued since the introduction of the asymmetric week in Borders schools?

Reply from Councillor Aitchison

The purpose of the creation of the asymmetric week was to enhance learning experiences for our children and young people and create opportunities for efficiencies and savings. In the secondary sector an asymmetric week enabled the implementation of a 33 period week and move away from an inefficient 30 period week, resulting in the alignment of timetables across secondary schools increasing curricular choices in the smaller secondary schools, but also allowing greater subject choice to all our students in the senior phase especially.

In our primary schools it has enhanced the opportunity to develop the four capacities: there is ample time for learning experiences in literacy and numeracy as well as greater opportunity for children to participate in sporting and cultural activities in their communities.

There has been more interaction at Senior level across all our schools and an increase in attainment in all levels of schools in both sectors. It is very difficult to quantify the qualitative benefits of the asymmetric week, but what we can say is that there has been an increase in attainment and our sports participation levels, including volunteering and Duke of Edinburgh participation have all increased and are higher than the national average in each respective performance area.

In terms of financial savings, it was clear that the 33 period had to go ahead to deliver our ambitious secondary school curriculum – this would have created a £500,000 budget cost in transportation in running separate primary and secondary transportation, therefore this additional cost has been negated. There are greater financial savings yet to be fully achieved as the new curriculum beds in and curriculum structures fully evolve and this is included within the current financial plan.

Supplementary

Councillor Mountford asked if Councillor Aitchison was satisfied that the disruption and inconvenience for parents particularly those of primary school children in rural areas was justified. Councillor Aitchison replied that he had expected more comments but had personally received no complaints. He had received positive comments on the benefits for children but was happy to speak to Councillor Mountford regarding any individual cases if there were problems.

Question from Councillor Logan

To the Executive Member for Roads and Infrastructure

The Scottish Information Commissioner recently ruled that the Scottish Borders Council should make a full disclosure in respect of a Freedom of Information request on a decision taken by the Council in March 2012 over a deal with New Earth Solutions (NES) to deliver a waste treatment plant at Easter Langlee. She states

“It is difficult to see how disclosure of this information three years on, could cause substantial prejudice to NES’s legitimate interests. Since March NES have submitted two sets of annual accounts..... which contain information on its “financial health. Given this, I find it difficult to

accept that the withheld information should in any way dissuade future business partners from working with NES.”

Given the decision of the Commissioner do you now agree that the Scottish Borders Council should release an un-redacted copy of the full report presented to the Council on 25 October 2012 (Waste Treatment Project Contract Variation) together with the Risk and Mitigation Register and Minutes?

Reply from Councillor Edgar

Freedom of Information Requests are matters which are wholly delegated to officers. My understanding is that the decision made by the Scottish Information Commissioner did not in fact require full disclosure of that 2012 report. There has been insufficient time since we received your question to properly consider your request in the context of the Decision made by the Information Commissioner, the outstanding two requests being reviewed by the Information Commissioner and the contractual commitments the Council has. I have therefore asked officers to consider your question and will provide you with a written answer.