

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St. Boswells and via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 6th December, 2022 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors E. Jardine (Chairman), L. Douglas, M. Douglas, J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, J. Linehan (from paragraph 2) , S. Mountford, D. Parker, J. Pirone, E. Robson, M. Rowley, F. Sinclair, R. Tatler, E. Thornton-Nicol and T. Weatherston

Also Present:- Councillor W. McAteer

Absent:- Councillor C. Cochrane

In Attendance:- Acting Chief Executive, Director Infrastructure and Environment, Director People, Performance and Change, Director of Resilient Communities, Democratic Services Team Leader, Democratic Services Officer (D. Hall)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS

Apologies: Mr G Clark (Federation of Small Businesses) and Ms S Petrie (Borders Chamber of Commerce)

1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - DEVELOPING THE WORKFORCE

- 1.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Resilient Communities which provided an update on Scottish Borders Council's (SBC) commitment to deliver Employability Support in the Scottish Borders. The report provided a brief breakdown of the diverse employability interventions SBC and the Council's partners were utilising to tackle unemployment in the region and in particular supporting priority groups. It also outlined the coordinating role of the Local Employability Partnership (LEP). The unemployment rate in the Scottish Borders had risen since February 2020 from 1,860 to 2,015 as of August 2022, measured by the Universal Credit claimant count. It was anticipated that Covid-19 had impacted significantly on the number of people seeking employment, as well as claimants moving onto Universal Credit and those affected by the crisis in the Ukraine. This had created a high demand on support services especially for young people and those with additional barriers. The report highlighted the Council's, and its partner's, significant commitment to support those most in need to reach their employment goals. It highlighted the work of SBC's Employment Support Service and other departments and the various projects and interventions funded through external funding from Scottish and UK Government.
- 1.2 The Chief Officer – Economic Development, Ms Samantha Smith presented the report and highlighted that the focus of the LEP had been to simplify the support landscape and deliver employability services which were fit for purpose. The key focuses of the LEP included ensuring that skills support matched demand, that support was available for people of all ages, and that processes were people centred. Members thanked officers for the report and welcomed the work that was ongoing. Ms Smith explained that the job of the LEP was to ensure that support was available for people who wished to get back into work, and that agencies and groups were linked up in an effective way with employers and employees. In response to a question regarding the percentage of working age people that were no longer in work following the Covid pandemic, Ms Smith explained that the number of working age people in work was approximately 75%, and that the LEP was focused on helping people get the right skills, for the right job, and that it was possible to examine on a local level what the labour market needed. Regarding the Key Performance Indicators (KPI), Ms Smith explained that success was defined by

people in paid employment in a permanent job. There were a considerable number of other KPIs, which were on track, and Ms Smith undertook to report back to the Committee at a future meeting. Regarding instances where people transected multiple criteria, Ms Smith explained that regardless of where a person came into contact with the LEP, they would be assessed and directed to the correct support for them. In response to a question regarding support for those with additional needs as they transitioned from children to adult services, Ms Smith explained that the supported employment team had a special focus on those with additional support needs and undertook to provide more detail at a later date. The Director of Resilient Communities advised that a future meeting of the Anti-Poverty Reference Group would have a focus on employability, which would allow the pathways from children to adult services to be discussed in detail. The Chairman explained that the Council viewed issues related to employment as extremely important, and highlighted the appointment of an Employability Champion as a reflection of its commitment.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the Council's ongoing commitment to employability support services in the Scottish Borders;**
- (b) endorse the establishment of the Local Employability Partnership and its objective to align and integrate support; and**
- (c) note the challenges and impact on employability deliver relating to short term in-year funding.**

2. PLACE BASED INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

2.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director of Resilient Communities which provided an update on the delivery of the Scottish Government Place Based Investment Programme which had allocated £33m of capital funding to Scottish Local Authorities, payable in the financial year 2022/23 to support town centre regeneration projects and community wealth building. Scottish Government and Council Leaders had agreed that Local Authorities would receive a share of funding to help support place based investment over a five year period. The current financial year was the second year of the programme. The Scottish Borders had been allocated £791k based on a combination of total population and existing deprivation levels. The allocation needed to be financially committed by the end of the current financial year. Council officers had identified a number of potential projects throughout the Scottish Borders that funding could be allocated to within the current financial year. Details of the proposals were provided in the report. The Director of Resilient Communities explained that the funding proposed in the report aimed to accelerate community led regeneration and advance community wealth building. The importance of projects being delivered within the financial year was highlighted, and the Director explained that any part of the allocation which had not been used by the end of the year would be returned to the Scottish Government. The Director provided some additional details of the proposed projects. The £370k which had been allocated to the sports changing facilitates and social hub in Chirnside was part of a total project cost in the region of £630k. The £25k which had been allocated to assist the purchase of a sports pitch in Gordon was part of an overall £50k project cost. The Stow Community Trust, which was developing a pump track had been allocated £60k, with significant levels of match funding in place. Greenlaw Bowling Club had been allocated £80k to help expand and modernise their club pavilion, with additional funding provided by the club, to help deliver the overall project at a cost of approximately £140k. The Lead Officer – Economic Development, Mr Graeme Johnstone, had worked with all of the proposed projects, and the aim had been to provide a reasonable mix of projects across the region.

- 2.2 Members thanked officers for their excellent work, welcomed the report, and highlighted that all of the projects would deliver real positives for local people and the wider region. In response to a question regarding whether a contingency project was in place should one of the list be unable to proceed, the Director explained that due to the timeframes involved it was unlikely that a back-up project would be completed in time. Ms Smith stressed that capital projects were being closely monitored due to inflationary pressures, and that if a project was to be unable to proceed then it was an option to provide additional support to another ongoing project from the list. In response to a question regarding how projects were selected for funding support, the Director explained that the current list of projects for approval had come to the Council's attention via partnership working, and undertook to promote funding opportunities on a wider, more effective basis to communities. The Acting Chief Executive explained that the funding landscape was cluttered, and acknowledged that communities should have access to a clearer picture of what was available. Work to improve the Council website to more effectively direct and signpost groups to funding opportunities would be undertaken. The Director encouraged any community or Elected Member to engage with the Community Engagement Officers in their respective localities who would be able to help communities with potential project funding. The Chairman highlighted that communities and volunteers were delivering projects which would improve where they lived.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

(a) **note the progress made to deliver the Scottish Government's Place Based Investment Programme which was intended to provide funding for Scottish Local Authorities over the next three years; and**

(b) **to commit £791k from the current financial year allocation to ten projects throughout the Scottish Borders as detailed in the report.**

3. SCOTLAND'S TOWNS PARTNERSHIP - SCOTLAND LOVES LOCAL GIFT CARD

- 3.1 The Chairman welcomed Ms Nicola Hutchinson of Scotland's Towns Partnership to provide a presentation on the Scotland Loves Local (SLL) Gift Card scheme. Ms Hutchinson explained that the Scotland Loves Local Gift Card scheme was supported and spearheaded by the Scottish Government. The scheme aimed to promote local spending, boost local businesses, and make communities stronger. Each of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland had a programme. The card covered all sectors, excluding gambling, and was free to access for every business, with almost 4,700 merchants signed up. The card was sold online at www.scotlandgiftslocal.com. Two-thirds of Local Authorities were actively promoting the SLL programme, and there had been 6,002 business registrations. Approximately 3,500 unique merchants had been registered, with £580,843 spent to date. That figure did not include disbursement programmes. Ms Hutchinson highlighted that on average recipients of cards spent 65% more than the value of the gift when they used their gift card. The SLL card could be used to disburse funds to low income households; as corporate rewards; to drive consumer spend; and also to provide sector specific support.

- 3.2 Ms Hutchinson highlighted an example of Disbursement carried out by Glasgow City Council, who had used their Local Authority Covid Economic Recovery funding to provide £105 to 83,000 Glasgow residents. The cards had been provided to people who were in receipt of council tax reductions. The programme had been a success, with £7.7m spent in Glasgow businesses between the end of August and November, 85% of which was spent in food stores. Other Local Authorities in Scotland had subsequently approached Scotland's Towns Partnership with a view to providing support to low income families in a similar way. The card could also be used as an employee reward in place of other non-cash rewards, which would help support local businesses. The effect of maximising footfall and spend was also highlighted, and local business partnerships could also reward consumers with other incentives, such as buy one get one free and discounted SLL gift

cards. The SLL gift card could also be used to drive spend in specific sectors such as tourism and hospitality by making the cards available to those sectors at a discounted rate.

- 3.3 The Scottish Borders gift card had been launched on 9 November 2022, with 91 merchants registered to accept the gift card across the Scottish Borders Council area. The majority of merchants were retail based, which was in line with expectations and consumer perception. It was hoped that the number of registered businesses would continue to increase, and work would continue with key stakeholders to promote the programme's benefits. Ms Hutchinson expressed her hope that Members would continue to promote the scheme and encouraged attendees to spread the word. Members thanked Ms Hutchinson for her presentation and expressed their hopes that the scheme would be a success. In response to a question regarding the ability to put additional money onto cards, Ms Hutchinson explained that it was not currently possible to top the cards up, but that a digital version of the card was being worked on. Regarding the potential development of a points based rewards programme for retailers, Ms Hutchinson explained that she was not aware of any other Local Authorities adopting such a scheme. Each Local Authority could develop their own plans, and the Scottish Borders could potentially create a rewards scheme. It was confirmed that window stickers for signed up merchants were available and had been sent to Scottish Borders Council. Ms Hutchinson undertook to share her presentation.

DECISION

NOTED the presentation.

OTHER BUSINESS

4. MINUTE

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting held on 15 November 2022.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

5. SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL'S QUARTER 2 2022/23 PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

There had been circulated copies of a report by the Director People, Performance and Change which presented a summary of Scottish Borders Council's Quarter 2 2022/23 performance information. The information contained within the report would also be made available on the SBC website at www.scotborders.gov.uk/performance. The Director, People, Performance and Change, explained that the appendices to the report showed the performance the Council against the Council Plan themes. In response to feedback the report would be altered for the next Quarter to combine Council Plan milestones and benchmarking into a single appendix. Appendix 1 to the report showed performance compared to milestones. Work on the Rural Exchange Network of 4G had not progressed, and had now been tied to the Borderlands Digital Programme. Participation in Get into Summer 2022 programme had been strong, with 902 children taking part, supported by 425 parents. A 250 mile coast to coast cycle route had received the approval and had moved to the delivery stage. Adult Support & Protection had been inspected in August and September, with a positive outcome published by the Care Inspectorate on 18 October 2022. The Community Action Team had carried out 68 static road checks, 13 person drug searches, and 13 premises drug searches. 77% of the drug searches had been positive. The overall recycling rate was very positive, with 55.78% of household waste recycled. Less than 1% of household waste in the region was sent to landfill. Attendance at primary and secondary schools had improved. There had been one asset transfer received in the Quarter. The 80% target of looked after children of all ages in family based placements had not been achieved. In response to a question regarding the drop in the number of foot patrols carried out by the CAT, Councillor Pirone explained that

members of the CAT had been engaged in work related to the search for a missing person. In instances where the CAT was unable to carry out the appropriate amount of work then a refund to SBC of the money paid to support the work of the team was made. Regarding energy consumption classified as green, the Director undertook to provide more explanatory comments. Members highlighted that more work needed to be done to ensure that colour schemes did not lead to confusion. The Acting Chief Executive explained that with regard to the working age population claimant rate, the 18-24 claimant rate had been static, whilst the overall 16-64 rate had reduced. The Director explained that the number of high risk domestic abuse cases discussed at Multi Risk Assessment Conference was higher than previous years had been marked as green because that increase represented an improvement in the number of cases which were reported to authorities and were being addressed.

DECISION

AGREED to:-

- (a) note the Quarter 2 2022/23 Council Plan Performance Report in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (b) note the Quarter 2 2022/23 Community Action Team Performance Report in Appendix 2 to the report; and
- (c) note the Quarter 2 2022/23 Performance Indicators Report in Appendix 3 to the report.

6. 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 1 to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 9 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

7. SALE OF FORMER BURGH YARD, GALASHIELS

Members approved a report by the Director of Infrastructure and Environment on the sale of the former burgh yard, Galashiels.

The meeting concluded at 11.45 am