

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the SCRUTINY & PETITIONS COMMITTEE held via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 8 December 2022 at 10.00 am

Present:- Councillors E. Thornton-Nicol (Chair), N. Richards (Vice-Chair), J. Anderson, P. Brown, J. Cox, M. Douglas, J. PatonDay, E. Robson (from para 2.1), S. Scott and F. Sinclair (from para.1.2).

In Attendance:- Director Resilient Communities, Communities & Partnership Manager, Clerk to the Council, Democratic Services Officer (W. Mohieddeen), and Trainee Democratic Services Officer.

1. MINUTE

- 1.1 Copies of the Minute of Meeting held on 20 October 2022 had been circulated.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute for signature by the Chair.

- 1.2 Copies of the Action Tracker for Scrutiny decisions had been circulated. With reference to item 2 from 9 June 2022, the Clerk to the Council advised that the timeline for the outstanding actions had now been agreed with Directors so this action was now complete. For the following actions, the dates for presentation to Committee were as follows:
1. Item 1, 13 January 2022 – Use of school facilities would be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 20 April 2023.
 2. Item 2, 9 December 2021 – Rural Proofing policy would be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 12 January 2023.
 3. Item 3, 9 December 2021 – Waste & Recycling communications would be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 12 January 2023.
 4. Item 1, 29 June 2021 – Public Transport and Communities would be considered at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 1 June 2023.

DECISION

NOTED the dates where outstanding actions would be considered.

MEMBER

Councillor Sinclair joined the meeting during consideration of the above item.

2. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PUBLIC HALLS

- 2.1 With reference to paragraph 10.3 of the Minute of 14 March 2022, copies of a report by the Director Resilient Communities on the Management and Maintenance of Public Halls had been circulated. The Director explained that when Halls were referenced in the report this was a catch all phrase covering different sizes and types, town halls, community centres, and village halls. The report covered the management and funding of halls across the Borders. Village Halls hosted regular local events and activities, they provided space for local clubs and societies to run activities and play a major role during emergency responses and elections. Village halls were often run by independent voluntary management committees, taking bookings for the halls, ensuring that they were clean and maintained. An umbrella organization called the Scottish Borders Village & Community Halls (SBVCH) brought together 4 Federations of Village Halls in the Borders, with 95 Halls having membership of the Federations. Scottish Borders Council had lease arrangements in place for 45 halls (20 to Live Borders and 25 to local community groups/committees), with the remaining halls owned by their individual communities or held in private trusts. All halls leased from the Council had a

responsibility to run as community enterprises and to fundraise as required. The duration and annual cost of the leases had been developed over a number of years on a case by case basis, which had led to inconsistency. The Council provided c.£50k of funding to the 4 Federations using a formula split between the number of halls within the respective Federation and the rural population for each area (excluding certain towns and villages where halls were now run by Live Borders. The average payment per hall was £526. Further details were given in the report on the management of the halls. As part of the SBC Council Plan 2022-23, under the 'Good Health and Wellbeing' theme, there was an action to review the Cultural Strategy for the Scottish Borders, and it was proposed that this would also explore options to improve consistency in lease, funding and management arrangements for halls.

MEMBER

Councillor Robson joined the meeting during the above presentation.

- 2.2 The Communities & Partnership Manager, Ms Smith, explained that the role of the halls during Covid had been exemplary, but since the Covid restrictions had been relaxed it had been a struggle to get volunteers back. There was an evolving role for halls and it would be useful to review their operation, management and support within communities going forward. Cllr Anderson raised the matter of those community centres leased to Live Borders, whereby management committees were paying an annual contribution equating to 65% of their income from lets to Live Borders, advising that for Eyemouth this was incorrect as they paid a fee which was much greater than 65% of let income. Mrs Craig, Director Resilient Communities, undertook to look into this if Cllr Anderson would send on specific details. Other points raised included the need to be careful so as not to disadvantage some halls by making everything the same; there was a need for capacity building in communities when working with volunteers, especially where there were complex arrangements; the differences between halls' incomes with some achieving more than others; and that any income received should be vested in the halls themselves and not moved elsewhere. Consideration should also be given to the number of halls and whether all were needed or required financial support. Mrs Craig confirmed that, through the Place Making discussions, the number of assets in a community and their use would be verified and then communities asked whether they still wished to retain them all or whether some could amalgamate to get more investment. Discussions on this were only in the very early stages in a few towns at the moment. There were huge variations between areas and the halls themselves, with different funding streams. It was unlikely a consistent model could be brought in across the Borders but hopefully it would be possible to develop a framework in which they all could work.
- 2.3 Ms Smith confirmed that officers had had a look at 2 or 3 halls in private trusts, and these could be quite complex. However, they too could still be a member of a Federation and get additional benefits. Further concern was expressed about the management fee paid by halls, which may still be based on pre-Covid use, and there needed to be a better relationship developed between Live Borders and the voluntary committees running some of the halls. With regard to the promotion of Community Asset Transfers and capacity building to assist communities in making applications, Mrs Craig explained that work was currently underway and a report would be brought to Council on better community engagement and a better way to support communities. It was recognized that the Council website was not structured in the right way to make it easy for communities to get the support they needed, and it was proposed – in the same way as had happened with the cost of living crisis – that information on community support, whether that be asset transfer, how to get more volunteers, financial support, etc., would be brought to the one place. This would also include links to other organisations as it was not just the Council providing support to communities. Ms Clare Malster, the Council's Participation Officer, was available to have a conversation with groups about asset transfers and a video on this had just been added to the Council website. It was a complex process but Ms Malster could help guide people through it, including a "try before you buy" arrangements where the Estates team could arrange a lease of varying lengths to allow communities to check if

they could manage before going ahead. In response to a request for a list of halls, including their ownership and any lease arrangements in each Ward, Mrs Craig advised that this could be provided, although it would not be a complete list, and Members should let officers know of any others which were missing from the list.

DECISION

AGREED to note the findings of the report and that the planned work to review and update the Scottish Borders Cultural Strategy and action plan would include the lease, maintenance, funding and management options for Halls.

URGENT BUSINESS

Under Section 50B(4)(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the Chair was of the opinion that the item dealt with in the following paragraph should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in view of the need to keep Members informed.

3. FUTURE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair advised that an item of business would be placed on the agenda of the next meeting of the Committee to consider potential items for the future Scrutiny Work Programme. Should Members have any items they wished to be included in the programme, they should contact the Clerk to the Council, who would write out to all Members and also Community Councils asking if they had any matters, within the remit of the Council, for a Scrutiny review.

DECISION

NOTED.

The meeting concluded at 10.45 am.