
SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL PLAN (From April 2023)

Report by Chief Executive

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

23 February 2023

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Council’s approval of the Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2023.**
- 1.2 In February 2022, Council approved the Scottish Borders Council Plan 2022-2023. At the time, it was agreed that the 2022-2023 Plan would serve as template for future years, and that the plan would be reviewed yearly to ensure that it remains responsive to events and provides the basis for the Council’s Performance Management.
- 1.3 The Council Plan from April 2023 continues to build on and develop this approach. It is divided into three main sections. First, a ‘Strategic Context and Vision’ section which, in responding to strategic challenges and opportunities, outlines a long-term vision for the Council. Second, a ‘Scottish Borders-Wide Actions’ section lists key strategic priorities and outcomes for the Council over the next financial year. The final section comprises a ‘Locality Actions’ section featuring key actions and priorities in each of the Borders’ five Area Partnership localities. The present report seeks Council approval of the draft ‘Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2023’, attached in Appendix A

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 I recommend that Council approves the Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2023’ at Appendix A.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scottish Borders Council agreed its present Council Plan in February 2022. This Council Plan sought to build on the existing Corporate Plan 2018-2023 and to update it with the significant strategic developments which had occurred since its publication. These included the COVID-19 pandemic, agreement of the Scottish Borders Climate Change Route Map, and national developments, such as the establishment of a National Care Service. It was intended that the Council Plan 2022-2023 should provide a template for future council plans and agreed that it be reviewed yearly to align with the Council's budget.
- 3.2 The Council Plan 2022-2023 was agreed with the objectives of creating a Plan that:
- a) is short, simple and relatable for the public, but SMART, meaning composed of actions which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.
 - b) sets the strategic framework for the Council and for the Council's Financial Plans.
 - c) operates in sync with the Council's Budget Setting Process.
 - d) is informed by strong engagement with Elected Members.
 - e) is effectively linked with a Performance Management Framework and an embedded culture of continuous improvement.

The Council Plan 2022-2023 was presented and agreed on the basis that it was a 'bridge' from the Council's historic approach to a new and more responsive approach and style of plan.

- 3.3 The new draft Council Plan from April 2023 builds on and augments this approach as explained in paragraph 3.4 below. A number of key developments have occurred since the drafting of last year's plan which have informed the development of this year's iteration. First, in November 2022, Council agreed the 'Administration Policy Plan – 2022-27', outlining the administration's key priorities. Second, as part of the Summer Tour and the Place-Making program, the Council conducted a broad range of community engagements which has allowed for a better understanding of the key concerns and priorities of our residents around which to shape the Plan.
- 3.4 This year's proposed Council Plan also features two significant additions:
- a) A Strategic Context and Vision section, which recognises that the complex challenges and opportunities relating to the Borders require holistic, sustained and co-ordinated action by the Council and its partners, typically over many years. Thus, the aim of this section is twofold. First, it provides the context in which this year's council plan has been drafted as well as the key challenges and opportunities for the region; chief amongst them the climate and nature emergencies,

the cost of living crisis, demographic pressure and challenges around transport and digital connectivity. Second, taking account of these challenges and opportunities, it sets out visions for 2033 for the Council and the region across the plan's six themes. In turn, these visions inform the priorities, outcomes, and actions within the subsequent sections of the Plan. By taking this long-term view, it is intended to provide a framework for operating in an environment which we know is constantly and rapidly changing, and requires us to continuously learn and adapt our approach if we are to be successful in effecting improved outcomes.

- b) In addition to actions and outcomes across the Scottish Borders, this year's Plan includes a section outlining actions and priorities due to be delivered in localities throughout the region, based upon our five area partnerships of Berwickshire, Cheviot, Eildon, Teviot & Liddesdale, and Tweeddale. Our aim is to develop a Plan that 'speaks to our Places' across the Scottish Borders by setting out the priorities for different communities. This will provide a baseline for strengthened engagement and co-production with our communities to support a shared ambition for the region. Again, it is important to emphasise that this is a process, and it will take time to develop an approach that fully and effectively realises community aspirations. However, the development of 'Locality Actions' represents a vitally important step.

3.5 Two further points highlighted in the introduction to the draft Council Plan should be emphasised:

- a) The Council will need to change to address the challenges of the future and to grasp opportunities. This means a Council which is digitally and technologically enabled to deliver services and meet needs in coming decades, and which is focused on tackling inequalities, while striving to meet the needs of all Scottish Borders citizens. To achieve the best possible outcomes, the Council will need to work in partnership with others. Above all, the Council must mobilise businesses, organisations and citizens across the board, unlocking the energy, expertise and commitment which resides in our communities. As the Council Leader notes in his foreword, this is a 'shared endeavour' underpinned by partnership and co-production.
- b) Extending the notion of 'shared endeavour', the Plan (at page 8) summarises the part that the Council is committed to delivering and how citizens can help by 'playing their part' (#yourpart). We all have a part to play but the bottom line is that 'we're in it together'.

3.6 A key aim of the Council Plan is ensuring that the Council's priorities and actions respond to the aspirations and expectations of our citizens. To this end, development of the draft Council Plan was supported by engagement with our communities during 2022, including the Summer Tour undertaken by the Council Leader and supported by senior officers, and the Place-making Workshops scheduled across the region. Additionally, to assess whether residents were content with our understanding of the region's needs, a public consultation was undertaken on Citizen Space for two weeks, starting Monday 16 January 2023.

- 3.7 Forty-two (42) responses to the consultation were received from all 5 'area partnership' areas within the Borders. The primary conclusion to be drawn from this low number of responses is that we are likely to need to extend the length of the consultation and to amplify the communications around it, if we are to improve feedback and secure a greater number of responses. As is acknowledged in the draft Council Plan and in this report, we are still developing our processes around the Plan, and an improved 'post-drafting' consultation process is something we will aim to strengthen in relation to the next iteration of the Plan.
- 3.8 Insofar as trends can be detected among the low number of responses, they indicate that respondents found the draft Council Plan clear and understandable, and that a majority of respondents agree with the visions outlined by the Council. A small number of respondents took the opportunity presented by the consultation to express dissatisfaction with the Council's delivery in general. When it comes to the priorities expressed in the plan, only three broad issues each gathered more than 5 responses:
- a) Actions within the plan need to be more specific and SMARTer. As already noted, our Council Plan process is evolving. It is expected that it will take a number of iterations of the Council Plan to achieve the degree of 'SMARTness' that the Council is aiming for. It should also be noted that the actions mentioned within the plan represent expressions of more complex actions which reside within business and delivery plans across the Council, and are intended to showcase the Council's priorities over the next financial year. By their nature and so as not overwhelm the Council Plan, priorities and actions in the draft Plan are expressed at a high level, and in language which is intended to be relatable to any reader of the document. Getting the balance right between simplicity of expression and actions which are 'SMART' is a challenge but one that officers will continue to address in future Plans.
 - b) An aspiration to see improved connectivity across the Scottish Borders, with an emphasis on buses. This is addressed in the vision slide for 'a Strong Inclusive Economy' (page 11 of the draft Plan), and a review of the bus network is planned over next year as indicated at page 18, which will put in place the building blocks to help address this challenge.
 - c) A desire to see the Council promote the 'Green Agenda', whether by insulating homes, promoting public transport, or supporting local businesses to become 'green' (accepting that SOSE is the lead agency in relation to business support). This broad aspiration is picked up as part of the plan, chiefly under the 'Clean Green Future' theme. However, it should be recognised that aligning the Council's delivery with our net-zero objectives remains a work in progress, with future council plans needing to further strengthen our delivery on this front.
- 3.9 Finally, building on existing dialogue with partners across the region, a draft of the Council Plan was also issued to Community Planning Partners for comments. Specific responses were received from SOSE and Borders College. These were supportive of the objectives pursued in the draft Plan but underlined a need for greater partnership working amongst Community

Planning Partners particularly when it comes to the region's transport provision.

4 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 As with last year's iteration, this year's draft Council Plan should be understood as a step towards a Plan which is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound), works in sync with our budget process, and is informed by communities across the Borders.
- 4.2 In order to reach this goal, the Council Plan is intended to evolve over the years. In particular, it is intended to bring forward the drafting of the 2024-2025 version of the plan to earlier in the calendar for 2023 to support further engagement with communities and to strengthen the resulting Council Plan and alignment with the Council's Financial Plans.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

The Council Plan should be understood as an articulation of strategic intent by the Council. Where that intent gives rise to financial implications not already expressly budgeted for, those financial implications will necessarily need to be reported to Council/the appropriate committee.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The strategic landscape has dramatically changed since the previous refresh of the Council Plan. In particular, historically high levels of inflation have triggered a cost of living crisis and put further pressure on the Council's budget. This comes in addition to pre-existing challenges within the Borders and the UK as a whole, notably the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lack of growth and the imperative of addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. Reviewing the Council Plan annually, and developing it into an ongoing process built upon engagement with communities allows us to create a Plan which provides a clear strategic framework but also agility and responsiveness in a rapidly changing context. This is described in the first chapter of the draft Plan which outlines our strategic context as well as the challenges and opportunities arising from it. These challenges and opportunities give rise to the visions which, in turn, inform and guide the outcomes, actions and priorities which are listed in the subsequent sections of the Plan.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken. The findings indicate that, whilst the Council Plan is relevant to both the Equality and Fairer Scotland Duty, there is no need for a full assessment to be undertaken. This is because the impact of the Plan is indirect rather than direct. It will impact and influence the Council's decision-making, policy approach and delivery more widely, but by setting the terms in which that decision-making, policy approach and delivery takes place. The specific

plans and policies described in or which flow from the Council Plan will require IIAs.

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The draft Council Plan complements the Embedding Sustainable Development Report of 29 August 2019. The draft Plan is explicitly part of a journey aimed at embedding a culture in the Council which supports delivery of the UN SDGs 'as they relate to local government', in the context of the Council's remit and responsibilities. The goal is to embed values in the Council's decision-making, policy development and delivery which are complementary to the UN SDGs. It informs the 'values' of the Council Plan, and 'Our Priorities' are strongly correlated with the UN SDGs as noted below:

Our Priorities	UN SDGs
Clean Green Future – Accelerate action to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change and extreme weather.	13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Fulfilling Our Potential - Empower schools and their communities to deliver a high quality education focused on excellence, equity, wellbeing and improved outcomes for children, young people, and families.	4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all potential
Strong inclusive economy, transport and infrastructure – Deliver the key economic development programmes for our region, making our economy stronger, greener and more sustainable.	1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation
Empowered, vibrant communities – Support communities and empower people to achieve strong, active, resilient and sustainable communities and realise opportunities for improving people's lives.	11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable

Good health and wellbeing – Ensure the people of the Scottish Borders have the opportunities and are supported to take control of their health and wellbeing, enjoying a high quality of life.	3 Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages
Working together improving lives – Ensure that Scottish Borders Council is effective, sustainable, responsive, and aligned to the needs and priorities of our communities.	16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

5.5 Climate Change

A just transition to net zero is at the heart of the draft Council Plan, most directly in relation to the Clean Green Future Outcome, but it is also invested strongly in other outcomes, such as in the ambition for resilient and sustainable communities in the Empowered Vibrant Communities Outcome, or the Strong Economy Outcome ambition to '*Seize the economic opportunities of a just transition to net zero.*'

5.6 Rural Proofing

The draft Council Plan has been developed with a strong focus on place, recognising the particular geography and demography of the Scottish Borders. It is a specific objective of the Plan to develop 'community-led place plans across rural communities and towns.' At the same time, the commitment to 'enhanced participation and engagement' will have a strongly positive effect in promoting inclusivity and thereby facilitating the participation of those people, businesses and stakeholders based in rural locations.

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 the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have all been consulted and comments included in this Report.

Approved by

**David Robertson
Chief Executive**

Signature

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Background Papers: Scottish Borders Council Plan 2022-2023

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council 22 February 2022

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Alexandre Belle/Michael Cook can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

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