OPEN QUESTIONS

Questions from Councillor Begg

To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

1. We strongly support effective systems that encourage re-use and recycling. This includes support for re-use hubs and doorstep recycling. In this respect:

    (a) What are the financial consequences for the council with the potential loss of aluminium and steel recycling from our doorstep recycling system?
    (b) How much additional benefit do we estimate the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) will make to recycling rates in the Scottish Borders?
    (c) Do we have any impact assessment of the DRS on the producers and retailers affected in the Scottish Borders?
    (d) What plans are there to support re-use systems as an alternative to recycling?

    Response from Councillor Linehan
    (a) In 2019, Zero Waste Scotland undertook a financial assessment of the Deposit Return Scheme, which identified a potential saving to the Council of £244,658.00 per annum against service baseline costs at that time. The majority of this saving came from the additional material removed from the general waste bin, which would have otherwise not been captured.

    However it is important to recognise that these figures will have changed since 2019 as the Council has awarded a new residual waste contract and kerbside recycling contract.

    (b) More recent modelling of the Council's kerbside collection service indicates that the Council's recycling performance will reduce by around 0.1% as a result of the Deposit Return Scheme.

    (c) The Council is not have details regarding the impact on producers and retailers, other than to say that they will have been required to register with the scheme. Circularity Scotland as the Scheme Administrator may have more details in this regard.

    It is worth noting that there is likely to be a financial impact on school catering and this is currently being assessed by officers.

    The Council already supports a number of Re-Use schemes including, Homebasics, Just Cycle, Garden Tools Recycling Project and Hawick Men's Sheds via its Community Recycling Centres and various Service Level Agreements. Re-Use and the circular economy is also outlined in the Council's climate change plan as an area that requires further action/development. In response to that Officers are currently considering what additional support it can provide to an increasing number of organisations that are keen to pursue re-use opportunities. The aim is to be able to provide advice to kick start these operations and get them on to a sustainable footing.

2. The Scottish Borders website details what can and cannot be recycled. It has a 'top tips section' which states that we should 'recycle more effectively by washing, squashing and replacing lids of containers'. At a number of meetings people have been adamant that lids should be put in the Blue bin separately from their containers. Can the Executive member

clarify whether the Scottish Borders recycling team want 'caps on or off' with particular reference to milk cartons?

Response from Councillor Linehan
I can confirm that the Council's website has recently been updated and the advice to wash, squash and replace lids of plastic bottles is accurate and that this applies to milk cartons as well.

Questions from Councillor Robson

1. To the Executive Member for Estate Management and Planning
What steps are being taken to advise businesses of the necessity of obtaining planning permission when altering the structure or appearance of buildings in conservation areas?

Response from Councillor Mountford
You raise a valid point about the need for anyone – and not just businesses – to check whether permission is required for work in Conservation Areas: It is worth noting that not all works will require formal permission. Much of that guidance and advice (as well as the consequences of not having permission) exists on our website but that does, I accept, require someone to search it out.

There is an argument that this is every property owner's responsibility to check before carrying out work without the need for prompting by the Council but we can certainly look again at how we remind people of that responsibility.

As you know, we are currently reviewing our Conservation Area Management Plans which will address the issues to consider before carrying out work, including the need for permission. This review will allow us the opportunity for some additional publicity around work carried out in Conservation Areas more generally, including on where to find advice.

The Council's Development Management Service actively encourages pre-application discussions with our customers on proposed developments prior to the submission of planning and listed building consent applications. That also extends to queries about the need for permission.

Experienced agents acting on behalf of building owners also have a role to play and should be sufficiently familiar with the processes to know when to raise the need for permission as a query.

The Council's Heritage and Design Team provides specialist advice on proposed alterations for all building owners, including businesses within conservation areas to encourage work that preserves or enhances the character of the conservation area.

Having said all of that, it is equally important to say that any work is undertaken at the owner's own risk and may need to be restored in the event that it is considered unacceptable.

We therefore always recommend that guidance or advice is sought before embarking on works or submitting planning or related application.

2. To the Executive Member for Service Delivery and Transformation
What preparations are in hand to facilitate the introduction of voter identification at forthcoming elections in the Borders; what plans are there to inform the public of this new requirement; whether there are costs to the Council in this regard, and if so, what estimate is available as to that additional cost?

Response from Councillor Rowley
The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is responsible for the issue of a Voter Authority Certificate (Voter ID) to electors who make an identity document application in terms of The Voter Identification Regulations 2022. It should be noted that these Regulations only apply to UK Parliamentary Elections.

Preparation

ERO staff have received training in respect of the processing of Voter Authority Certificate applications through the ERO Portal which has been designed and developed by UK Government at no cost to the ERO. The ERO Portal went live on 16 January 2023.

Senior ERO staff have attended various seminars/briefings held by UK Government, Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission.

Awareness
The Electoral Commission commenced an awareness campaign in January which was aimed for the upcoming elections in England.

The ERO's Engagement Officer will work with SBC Communications and various stakeholders to raise awareness locally.

Costs
Funding has been provided to the ERO from UK Government with the option of submitting a Justification Led Bid if additional costs are borne. The funding is based on projected demand and time taken to process an application. The impact on the ERO will not be known until the next UK election.

Supplementary
Councillor Robson asked if the ERO could provide Members withsimple text on the subject that they could use to get the message out. Councillor Rowley advised he would be happy to do that.

3. To the Executive Member for Communities and Equalities
What proposals are there regarding the future use, change of use, or decommissioning of the housing in Maxmill Park, Kelso?

Response from Councillor Tatler
The council are currently actively looking to identify alternative accommodation options to allow us to discontinue the use of Maxmill Park as temporary homeless accommodation. Due to significant demand for the provision of statutory temporary accommodation to homeless households and the corresponding lack of alternative options across the social housing landscape at present, this is proving challenging. The current use of the provision in Maxmill Park is minimal, however we recognise that the homeless service may be required to utilise these properties again should demand for this accommodation increase.

At present there has been no decision on the future use of the site and how this is utilised or disposed of by the council. Further investigations are expected to identify alternative uses, or a means to dispose of this site from council ownership once we have alternative options for meeting our statutory duty under homeless legislation.

Supplementary
Councillor Robson asked if local Ward Members could be kept updated and Councillor Tatler confirmed he was sure this could be done.

Questions from Councillor Ramage

To the Executive Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

1. I was contacted, by a parent, about her concern over inappropriate content that pupils were able to access while using their iPads. I understand that filtering is constantly updated by CGI and the National Cyber Security Centre, but I only realised recently that Apple Classroom, an app which allows teachers in the classroom to see what apps/ website pupils are using in class, was not working for a number of months.

    • Why was Apple Classroom not performing as expected and for how long?

- There are many parents across our area who need reassurance that all problems have been addressed and assurances that these problems do not happen again. Do you not agree?

- It has also been highlighted, by teachers that the use of iPads has doubled their workload as separate work has to be produced for pupils who are absent. Many teachers are in fact missing lunch and eating it in the car at the end of the day because of the heavier workload that technology has brought about. Surely this needs to be addressed?

Lastly it has been brought to my attention that pupils are expected to write on their iPads (a basic life skill that should be taught in schools) with their finger. Writing with a stylus or Apple Pencil, (costing £80) is not a natural way to learn to write as you have to constantly lift your hand plus only benefits those that can afford to buy a stylus. How will the Education Department address this?

Response from Councillor L. Douglas
The Council is confident that it has appropriate web filtering protection in place in all our schools and we are not aware of any incidences where pupils have been able to access content that is not appropriate to the age and stage of the pupil over the SBC IT network monitored by CGI. This network is subject to the strongest filtering controls. If Councillor Ramage can, however, provide specific examples where she believes our firewalls and content filtering has been bypassed and inappropriate content viewed in schools or on our devices, by pupils, then we will be happy to fully investigate the matter with CGI as a matter of the utmost concern.

- **Why was Apple Classroom not performing as expected and for how long?**

  Apple Classroom is performing as expected in our schools. There was, however, a period of around 18 months when this was not the case for the following reasons

  - An update to the Apple Classroom app resulted in a change to the way staff joined the app meaning caching servers in the schools needed technical work to be undertaken
  - Unfortunately we were not aware of this update in advance of it happening
  - All Inspire users had to change the domain name for their Apple ID as there was a clash with the corporate Apple domain. This was a large piece of work to plan a move for
  - This was an issue which was not unique to Scottish Borders, for example Glasgow and Edinburgh City Councils had the same problems.
  - Following the technical work, unfortunately the app was still not working as expected and the Inspire Team spent a significant length of time testing out scenarios and feeding this back to CGI to ensure that the platform was robust and appropriate support was in place before asking staff to use it again
  - Apple Classroom has however been working effectively for a number of months now, for the avoidance of doubt Apple Classroom is not the mechanism by which web filtering is undertaken and IT security contained.

- **There are many parents across our area who need reassurance that all problems have been addressed and assurances that these problems do not happen again. Do you not agree?**

  Yes. From time to time problems may be encountered with the complex deployment and operation of IT. Parents should always contact their school in the first instance if they have a concern or need reassurance.

- **It has also been highlighted, by teachers that the use of iPads has doubled their workload as separate work has to be produced for pupils who are absent. Many teachers are in fact missing lunch and eating it in the car at the end of the day because of the heavier workload that technology has brought about. Surely this needs to be addressed?**

  The premise of this question needs to be verified.

Technology is a strong enabler to workload reduction and in particular for tudents who are absent, because they can still access their learning online at home through Glow or Showbie on their ipad, the need for staff to provide different learning or provide catch up materials following a pupil absence should be reduced.

The Inspire Team are available to support staff to ensure most effective use of technology to reduce workload. There is an extensive programme of professional learning available and the team are happy to be contacted to support individual or whole school bespoke packages where this is requested.

The intention behind the deployment of ipads is to enhance the education experience and to reduce teachers workload.

Lastly it has been brought to my attention that pupils are expected to write on their iPads (a basic life skill that should be taught in schools) with their finger. Writing with a stylus or Apple Pencil, (costing £80) is not a natural way to learn to write as you have to constantly lift your hand plus only benefits those that can afford to buy a stylus. How will the Education Department address this?

There is no expectation that pupils have to supply their own stylus. Schools have bought a variety of stylus' for use in class.

Handwriting is still taught as a skill at the appropriate stages in primary school using traditional tools and with the opportunity to practise on the ipad as a complimentary option.

We have been trialling a new handwriting app which will be rolled out. Use of this app has demonstrated an improvement in writing skills which are easily transferred from the ipad onto paper and could be a core tool in supporting closing the poverty related attainment gap. We are happy to share the pilot impact report.

As a result of this app being added, we are looking to support schools in purchasing a class set or more of high quality stylus that is good value for money and is very close to replicating the feel of a normal pencil

Supplementary
Councillor Ramage had been advised that teachers could not download the upgrade and asked that this be checked. Councillor Douglas advised this could be done and asked Councillor Ramage to provide her with details of the actual instances where this had happened.

2.   What percentage of school staff have been absent in 2022 because of work related stress? How many AM3 forms have been completed in the last year? (Absent management forms)

Response from Councillor L. Douglas
Percentage absence for teachers with Anxiety, Stress, Depression & Mental Health Illness absence for 2021 (01/04/2021 – 31/03/22) = 0.78%
Percentage absence for teachers with Anxiety, Stress, Depression & Mental Health Illness absence for 2022 (01/04/2022 – 20/03/23) = 0.82%

The AM3 (Stress Management Report Form) is in place to enable employees to confidentially report work related and non work related incidents.

14 teachers have submitted AM3 forms in 2021
13 teachers have submitted forms in 2022

Question from Councillor Anderson

To Executive Member for Education and Lifelong Learning
What is being done to promote positive behaviour in all our schools and if pupil behaviour towards our staff and other pupils is considered to be unacceptable, what actions are available to the Head Teacher and pastoral staff to deal with such issues?

<u>Response from Councillor L. Douglas</u>
The Inclusion Framework details the actions required to ensure the ongoing development of inclusive practices in all Learning Establishments within Scottish Borders Council. This framework reflects national policy and legislation and sets expectations relating to:

- The promotion of positive relationships and behaviour.
- Ensuring schools deliver inclusive practice through effective learning and teaching and maintain positive learning environments for all children and young people.
- Providing targeted support within local communities to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children, young people and families.
- Ensuring that exclusion is only ever used as a last resort and provide guidance to schools to ensure appropriate support is in place for the child or young person so that they are able to re-engage in education.

The Inclusion and Wellbeing Service provide advice, support and training as well as direct interventions in circumstances where pupil behaviours are cause for concern and all headteachers have access to this resource. Ensuring positive behaviour requires effective partnership working with parents and other agencies to meet the wider needs of our young people. This may include provision for meeting mental health needs or provision of suitable environments to allow a reset of behaviours. A specific example of this would be where a young person may be "hosted" in an alternative school for a period of time supported by a youth worker.

Exclusion is a last resort which can be effectively implemented in order to provide a short period of time for planning additional provision or support for a young person to return to school.

Following a Collaborative Improvement Exercise earlier this session, an action plan was created to ensure that all possible measures to support school in ensuring positive behaviour are implemented, as part of which, and following reviews of our policies on Respectful Relationships and Responsible Use of Mobile Technology are being presented to the next meeting of The Education Sub Committee.

<u>Supplementary</u>
Councillor Anderson asked for reassurance that small schools were not asked to deal with serious issues where they did not have the space. Councillor Douglas advised that Headteachers should contact officers and asked if he could provide her with specific details.