

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells and via MS Teams on Tuesday, 16 May 2023 at 9.00 am

Present:- Councillors E. Jardine (Chair), M. Douglas, J. Greenwell, C. Hamilton, S. Hamilton, J. Linehan (from para 5), S. Mountford, D. Parker J. Pirone, E. Robson, M. Rowley, F. Sinclair, R. Tatler, E. Thornton-Nicol, and T. Weatherston.

Apologies: Councillors C. Cochrane and L. Douglas.

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

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the meeting held on 18 April 2023.

DECISION

APPROVED for signature by the Chairman.

2. **OFFICE PREMISES**

With reference to paragraph 7 of the Minute of the meeting held on 18 April 2023, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director – Infrastructure and Environment which set out the proposed approach for how Scottish Borders Council intended to utilise its office accommodation, post pandemic, to realise best value and support communities effectively. A programme of work, which had commenced during the pandemic, was in progress and remained to be completed. There were some key areas within Council Headquarters that were the current area of focus which, once completed, would offer flexible solutions to office accommodation and enable improved opportunities for inter-agency and third party collaborative working. Members highlighted that the works to re-imagine how Council HQ was used had the potential to deliver huge benefits for the local community of Newtown St. Boswells, cut costs for Scottish Borders Council with regards to rental paid on behalf third sector agencies, provide the Council with appropriate training suites and a vibrant workplace for Council employees. Councillor Hamilton proposed amended recommendations, which were shared on screen for attendees. Regarding reference in the report to Covid safe capacity of the workspace at Council HQ, the Director – Infrastructure and Environment explained that due to previous legal Covid requirements the office was laid out in specific distanced manner, with adequate space between desks. Capacity of the office could be increased quickly, dependent on the acquisition of computer screens, docking stations and other information technology. Members highlighted that whilst hybrid working, and holding meetings via Microsoft Teams, had allowed Council services to be provided throughout the pandemic, connectivity problems remained a concern. In response to a question regarding the works at Paton Street, Galashiels, the Chief Executive confirmed that the works had been completed and the building was occupied. Regarding the capital receipts received from the sale of property in Hawick, the Chief Executive explained that the receipts related to the sale of flatted accommodation above the contact centre, and that Council policy was not to ring fence receipts received, but to use the funds as part of the overall capital programme. Regarding the building at Tweedbank which was part occupied by CGI and the Inspire Academy, there was approximately 300m² vacant which remained vacant.

The space had been marketed for lease, with three ongoing enquiries. The space needed to be fitted out by whomever became the tenant of the space in the building. Following concerns raised on the necessity of a working group a vote was held. Councillor Thornton-Nicol, seconded by Councillor Sinclair, proposed that the recommendations of the report be approved as they originally were. Councillor Hamilton, seconded by Councillor Mountford moved as an amendment that his recommendations, which had been displayed on screen in the Council Chamber and online, be approved.

VOTE

Councillor Thornton-Nicol, seconded by Councillor Sinclair moved that the recommendations in the report be approved as they had been circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Hamilton, seconded by Councillor Mountford moved as an amendment that his proposed recommendations were approved.

Due to the number of Elected Members present online it was not viable to vote by the normal show of hands and therefore Members gave a verbal response as to how they wished to vote the result of which was as follows:-

Motion – 4 votes

Amendment – 10 votes

The amendment was accordingly carried.

DECISION

DECIDED to:-

- (a) establish a dedicated Member/Officer working group to oversee and drive the implementation of the HQ re-provisioning project, ensuring effective co-ordination and accountability;**
- (b) give initial endorsement to the Proposal and Vision for the new HQ as outlined in Section 4 of the report while empowering the Member/Officer working group to finalise the project scope, considering stakeholder feedback and expert input;**
- (c) approve the planned works for Council HQ, as detailed in Section 7 of the report, with a budget allocation of £480k from the Asset Rationalisation & Demolition Capital Block. This would enable the necessary improvements to be carried out promptly;**
- (d) encourage the exploration of additional development opportunities for the remaining areas of the HQ campus, maximising its potential to meet future demands, enhance operational efficiency, and accommodate other public services seeking collaborative space. An update on this to come to the Executive Committee by September 2023;**
- (e) request a comprehensive assessment of the flexible working policy's effectiveness, implications for the Council, and its impact on Service Delivery. This report should be presented to the Executive Committee by September 2023, allowing for timely evaluation and potential adjustments; and**
- (f) actively promote and support an authentic hybrid working approach, encouraging staff members to work remotely and in the office whenever feasible. This flexible arrangement could foster a productive and adaptable workforce while maintaining the benefits of face-to-face collaboration.**

3. **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE FUND**

With reference to paragraph 8 of the Minute of the Meeting held on 16 November 2021, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Director- Resilient Communities which provided evaluation and outcomes of the awards made in relation to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Fund, which was open from 5 January 2022 to 30 April 2022. The report explained that the Committee had agreed on 16 November 2021 to allocate £70k to create a Queen's Platinum Jubilee Fund. The purpose of that Fund was to enable non-profit making community/voluntary groups, schools and churches within the Borders to apply for grant funding to take part in celebratory events/community and legacy projects to mark the late Queen's platinum Jubilee Weekend 2-5 June 2022. Approval for decision making for the fund was agreed at Officer level, with final approval and sign off by the Director – Resilient Communities. The Committee had asked that a report providing evaluation and outcomes of the awards made in relation to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Fund be brought back at a later date. The Director – Resilient Communities presented the report and responded to Members questions. Regarding the number of organisations which had been unsuccessful in their application for funding, 18 groups had either withdrawn or been refused. In response to a question regarding the amount of funds which groups had applied for, discussions had been held with all of the applicants to determine what level of funding they needed to secure in order to ensure that their project or event was successful prior to awards being made. The Director confirmed that the overspend by the Council on the Fund had stemmed from high demand, combined with some applications taking longer than others to be submitted. That had resulted in concerns that some communities would feel aggrieved that they had not been able to access the Fund. The decision had been made through delegated powers by the Director of Resilient Communities and the Chief Financial Officer to increase the budget for the Fund based on the levels of demand which had been seen. The Director confirmed that the decision had been made at an officer level based on those delegated powers. The Chief Executive outlined the timing of the Fund, confirming that the celebrations had taken place in early June 2022, and that the application process had closed on 30 April 2022. Reporting of the expenditure was made retrospectively on 14 June 2022 and 22 August 2022 following the celebrations. The reporting of the expenditure, which had been a relatively small amount in the context of the budgets involved, had been made via the established virements process. Members highlighted that the level of community interest in the Fund had been extremely high, and that for reasons of fairness it would have been difficult to exclude some communities from accessing funding due to their lack of capacity to apply early in the application window. It was explained that due to the pre-election period of the local government elections held in May 2022, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to make a decision on all of the applications at an Elected Member level. Members congratulated the officers involved for their work. In response to a question regarding the rate of return of evaluations, which was 85.7%, the Director confirmed that engagement with groups who had not returned evaluation forms was ongoing, and invited Members to help encourage their communities to engage with the Communities and Partnership team who could assist with the completion and return of the forms.

DECISION

AGREED to note the number, evaluation and outcomes of the awards made from the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Fund.

4. **PRIVATE BUSINESS**

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 Paragraphs 1 and 6 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

SUMMARY OF PRIVATE BUSINESS

5. **PRIVATE MINUTE**

The Private Section of the Minute of the meeting held on 18 April 2023 was noted for signature by the Chairman.

6. **SECOND HOMES COUNCIL TAX AFFORDABLE HOUSING INVESTMENT BUDGET PROPOSALS**

A report by the Director – Infrastructure and Environment was considered and the recommendations approved.

The meeting concluded at 10.10 am