

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL EXTERNAL SERVICES/PROVIDERS MONITORING GROUP

MINUTES of Meeting of the EXTERNAL
SERVICES/PROVIDERS MONITORING
GROUP held via Microsoft Teams on
Tuesday, 6 June 2023 at 2.00 pm

Present:- Councillors M. Rowley (Chair), M. Douglas, J. Greenwell, S. Hamilton, and E. Thornton-Nicol

Apologies:- Councillors P. Brown, E. Jardine and J. Pirone

In Attendance:- Director Resilient Communities, Chief Officer Audit and Risk, Chief Officer Roads, Portfolio Manager (J. Lamb), E. Jackson (Live Borders) and Democratic Services Officer (L. Cuerden).

1. **MINUTE**

There had been circulated copies of the Minute of the Meeting held on 7 March 2023.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Minute for signature by the Chair.

2. **PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2022/23 - LIVE BORDERS**

2.1 There had been circulated a report by Jenni Craig, Director Resilient Communities. This report presented key information in regard to the Live Borders contract for the financial year 2022/23 and performance information on the delivery of commissioned sport, physical activity and cultural services. The report covered the first full year of operations since the lifting of all pandemic restrictions. The performance information was set in a context of significant challenges which included lower than anticipated participation levels due to the cost of living crisis and a protracted post-Covid recovery, rises in energy costs and changes to the way in which some services were being accessed. A joint strategic review was underway with the aim of strengthening and improving partnership and service delivery arrangements and ensuring long term stability of services delivered by Live Borders on behalf of SBC. External consultants had been engaged to support the review and an Elected Members and Trustees Steering Group and a Council Officers' Working Group had been formed.

2.2 Ewan Jackson, Chief Executive Live Borders presented the 2022/23 Performance Report in Appendix 1. The performance summary detailed a number of service highlights. Learn 2 membership (swimming tuition) grew steadily through the year but was 20% below target at 2009, with the prolonged closure of Peebles pool and the challenge of recruiting enough swim instructors as factors. External cost factors had also impacted Teviotdale Leisure Centre and Galashiels pool and significant capital investment was required in the aged facilities. Active Schools continued to show strong performance with good engagement across clusters in extracurricular delivery and Sports Development participation rates were back above pre-pandemic levels. The Library service was recovering well with steady increases in physical visitor numbers while those using digital resources had increased significantly. Museum visits were strong and the use of the Halls estate had been positive. A Fundraising Officer had been appointed to secure external funding opportunities. Challenges remained in improving the Net Promoter Score and retention of staff. A summary of 27 key initiatives to be taken forward in 2023/24 as part of the core business or as individual projects was provided, of which four had been

completed. Appendix 1a detailed the KSIs used to monitor the Service Agreement and included the full year 2022/23 performance against target, RAG status and narrative. Appendix 1b provided case studies from quarter four 2022/23. Appendix 1c mapped the Key Initiatives under Live Borders six strategic goals.

- 2.3 With reference to paragraph 8.7 of the Minute of 7 March 2023, there had been provided detail of operational performance across cultural locations. The full year cultural participation numbers were 38% higher than target, driven by strong performance across several museums. Arts-led live performances saw high participation numbers and was to be further developed during 2023/24. Film attendances were disappointing due to the lack of blockbuster titles released, however live events at Tower Mill performed well. The Great Tapestry of Scotland (GTOS) had in May 2023 retained its 5 star status for a further two years and achieved the 'Taste Our Best' accreditation for Scottish catering. Channel 5 had also filmed for two days as part of Susan Calman's 'Great Days Out' programme. Work has continued to promote GTOS to the travel trade and consumer market. Income based on admission, retail sales and café from January – March 2023 was 12% higher than the same period in 2022. GTOS had hosted 15+ external visitor groups through March and April with a further 32 booked for May.
- 2.4 With reference to paragraph 8.7 of the Minute of 7 March 2023, there had been provided detail of the operational performance and a comparison of visitor numbers pre and post pandemic across libraries. While visitor numbers across libraries were down from 247,163 in 2019/20 to 210,338 in 2022/23, the number of Borrowbox users had doubled to 838 by March 2023 with a 32% increase in audio and a 19% increase in e-books issued on the previous year and web/virtual visits having more than doubled to 114,613. Visits to Library Contact Centres were down from 62,759 in 2019/20 to 23,811 in 2022/23. As part of the strategic review, a survey was to be undertaken to seek the public's view on library opening hours.
- 2.5 With reference to paragraph 8.5 of the Minute of 7 March 2023, there had been provided detail of the operational performance across swimming pools. Visits recorded in 2022/23 had increased to 399,778 from 338,343 in 2019/20. The closure of Peebles pool since June 2022 had a significant impact on participation levels in Tweeddale. An expansion of opening hours was dependant on staff recruitment and availability of qualified swim instructors.
- 2.6 Outreach work continued to engage communities: Bookbug sessions in libraries; Jim Clark Motor Museum promotion at local agricultural/vintage car/national motor shows; artefact loan box service to schools; and GTOS Junior Tour Guides recruited from local primary schools.
- 2.7 There followed a brief discussion matters arising from the report. External customer excellence training had been offered and taken up by 78% of the workforce and a second round of training was to be arranged. Concern was expressed at the limited opening hours of many libraries across the Scottish Borders and the impact on accessibility. Financial and staffing pressures were highlighted and the issue was to form part of the review of the service agreement currently underway. In terms of KSI 21a - energy consumption per square metre, Mr Jackson undertook to provide this data on sporting venues and cultural venues where possible at the next meeting. In terms of volunteer numbers, the Active Schools and Sports Development programmes provided opportunities pupils and parents/carers to participate and support in the coaching or administration of clubs. There was an intention to promote opportunities in the cultural and library sectors going forward. It was agreed that Live Borders could do more to recognise the work of volunteers and this was to be taken forward. On the matter of KSI 6 - health referrals, it was confirmed that collaboration with the NHS and the Integration Joint Board was ongoing to build the social prescribing infrastructure required. The 'Healthier, Happier, Stronger' programme had been made available to users for social prescription via funds from Scottish Borders Council. With regards to reduced opening

hours and low footfall at Earlston High School library and contact centre, it was reported that recent consultation had highlighted that users were more likely to travel to Melrose to access library services. Jedburgh High School SBC contact centre staff had received training while library visitor numbers there had increased. The staffing model had been under review and a move to increased opening hours during evenings was imminent. Concern was expressed at the lack of Saturday opening hours at both Galashiels and Hawick libraries. Mr Jackson agreed to append the opening hours of libraries to the report brought to the next meeting.

DECISION

NOTED:

(a) the Live Borders Contract Performance Report and the ongoing joint strategic review; and

(b) the ongoing joint strategic review and the inclusion of performance information and reporting of a revised Service Provision Agreement within the scope of the review.

3. FUTURE MEETING DATE

The next meeting of the External Services/Providers Monitoring Group (Live Borders) was scheduled for 5 September 2023 at 2p.m.

4. ITEMS LIKELY TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE

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 the Appendix to this Minute on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 8 of Part I of Schedule 7A to the Act.

5. MINUTE

Members considered the Private Section of the Minute of the Meeting held on 7 March 2023.

DECISION

AGREED the minute.

The meeting concluded at 2.55 pm