

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
29 JUNE 2023
APPENDIX I

Question from Councillor Smart

To the Executive Member for Roads Development and Maintenance

As the Kirkpatrick Coast 2 Coast Cycle Route is now in place and being promoted, what plans are in place to upgrade the road surface through the Borders of this route, with a view to ensure cycle safety, paying particular attention to road condition and up to date, clear signage?

Response from Councillor Greenwell

The Kirkpatrick C2C is an action from the South of Scotland Cycling Partnership Strategy – “Launch new South of Scotland Coast to Coast Slow Tourism Touring Route – 2023”

The route uses existing on-road cycle routes and is being promoted as an economic development benefit to experienced, capable, on road, adventure tour cyclists.

There will be a digital map and information launched by South of Scotland Destination Alliance in early July.

There were no specific requirements identified to upgrade the road surface as part of the independent Road Safety Audit undertaken as part of the project.

Consultants Mott MacDonald have prepared a signage strategy for the route, and this has also been run past our in-house road safety team.

Signs are currently being manufactured and will be erected by Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway Council, beginning in July. This work will continue after the digital launch of the Coast to Coast Route in mid July.

The B6399 is inspected on a 2 monthly frequency in line with the Councils Standards on Carriageway/Footway & Footpath Safety Inspections. All safety defects are recorded and instructions issued for their repair.

Notice will be taken of the new cycling designation status of the route and repairs undertaken as appropriate with the budget available and the many competing prioritisations placed on the service.

I can however confirm that there are a number of road surface improvement schemes identified for the B6399 in the 3 year roads capital programme.

Supplementary

Councillor Smart commented on 2 dangerous areas on the road between Newcastleton and Hawick and asked for a copy of the schedule of works. Councillor Greenwell advised that she should have received a copy of the programme of works and if these areas were not included that she should contact Brian Young.

Questions from Councillor Anderson

1. To the Executive Member for Service Delivery and Transformation

Cheques are being discontinued across SBC. However, this seriously limits the needs of residents of care homes and care home staff who rely on cheques on a regular basis. What consultation took place to allow this decision to be made? What plans are in place to negate the negative consequential effects of this decision, and why is it felt wise to move to a digital platform for all finances without adequate consultation with those this decision affects directly?

Response from Councillor Rowley

A report was considered by CMT on 12th January 2022 detailing the cheques issued and received by the Council along with the costs and time consuming work that their process entails. The recommendations in the report agreed that the Council would routinely stop issuing cheques unless there were no other options, to remove reference to cheques in payment terms and to promote payments through digital means. A stage 1 IIA was undertaken to consider any adverse impact arising from the policy change.

Despite a move away from generating cheques from within SBC and actively promoting other payment channels for customers, I can confirm we have not stopped our customers' ability to use cheques for payment.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson commented on issues staff at Saltgreens were having managing cash for residents. Councillor Rowley undertook to raise this. The Chief Executive confirmed that there was a policy in place but the specific situation at Saltgreens would be looked at.

2. To the Executive Member for Estate Management and Planning

Will SBC offer an accessible toilet key to the public in Eyemouth, to be held in an agreed location close to the accessible toilets at to support the large number of tourists visiting the area particularly following the launch of the Coast to Coast cycle route?. This key will also require appropriate signage placed on the toilet door confirming opening hours, conditions for use and location of key for disabled users who do not possess a RADAR key.

In addition, can SBC ensure that all available and operational accessible toilets have appropriate signage in place confirming opening hours and the SBC website updated to highlight all locations in time for the school holidays beginning?

Response from Councillor Mountford

The Council recognise the concerns highlighted by the community over the provision of facilities to support tourists visiting Eyemouth.

Officers have been engaging with concerned businesses and the community to explore options to address these concerns.

Options focus around a community led initiative in Eyemouth. Discussions are ongoing and the Director of Infrastructure & Environment intends to meet representatives of the community in July. Officers are also developing a Comfort Scheme model that we intend to present to Members later this year.

As a tourism destination, there may be visitors who are unfamiliar to the area. With this in mind, the Council are willing to make a RADAR key available for disabled visitors, held at a location agreed with officers and the local community.

Since the Public Toilets report was presented to Council in March 2023, an officer working group has been established to progress the agreed actions. Members will recall that the report formalised the arrangement that had been in place since August 2021. Several omissions have however subsequently been highlighted from the list of toilets that remain open. To clarify, the disabled toilets at:

- Harbour Road Toilets in Eyemouth;
- Shedden Park in Kelso;
- High Street in Galashiels;
- Volunteer Park in Hawick; and
- Howegate Toilets in Hawick

Remain open for disabled users and are being serviced daily by the Council.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson asked for a timeline for putting the keys in place and Councillor Mountford undertook to provide this information.

Question From Councillor Sinclair

To the Executive Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

What support will Scottish Borders Council offer to childminders, including those who are not partner providers for 1140hrs ELC, now that the decision has been taken to remove funding for a dedicated childminding development officer after more than 20 years?

Response from Councillor L. Douglas

The annual contract between Scottish Borders Council and the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) has been in place for over 20 years and during that time has always been reviewed and considered on an annual basis. At the time of the start of the Contract, there were about 4 times as many Registered childminders in the Borders as there are now, (currently in the region of 80, 9 of whom are on the Council's Framework of funded providers of Early Learning and Childcare (ELC)).

The growth of nursery provision and increase in funded hours are being cited as two of the main reasons for there being such a significant reduction in the number of Registered childminders across Scotland. The Council's focus remains on targeting support where it is most needed and is of most benefit supporting the delivery of statutory provision.

Whilst Scottish Borders Council has valued the work of the SCMA Development Officer over the years, like many other Local Authorities who no longer Contract with SCMA, SBC needs to ensure that it is responding to the changing landscape of ELC and making best use of limited resources. The SCMA were given 3 months' notice that the Contract was not being renewed for this core part of the service. However, the Council is very pleased that SCMA have agreed to continue to co-ordinate the Council's Supported Childminding Scheme as a stand-alone Contract, as now happens in a number of other Local Authority areas.

The Council will continue to support childminders through its' central Early Years Team and the 9 childminders who are on the Council's Framework of funded providers will continue to receive the additional support through the Early Years Teacher Team. In addition to this, the Council will encourage all childminders to be members of the SCMA so that they can access the support and membership benefits it offers.

Question from Councillor Robson

To the Executive Member for Education and Lifelong Learning

Can the Executive Member advise whether issues specific to the Borders arose during the Council's participation in the pilots that preceded the national roll-out from August 2023, of the additional year of early learning and childcare to eligible children who defer entry to Primary 1? In particular are there problems of resources or capacity or difficulties for private provider colleagues? Is the Council able to gather data about household and child characteristics better to inform the development of provision?

Response from Councillor L. Douglas

We were very pleased to be selected to pilot the "Give them Time" Pilot. Scottish Government Funding was provided to support this extension to the offer already in place whereby children born in January or February could automatically defer starting school until the August following their 5th Birthday, to include all those born in August to December as well.

Procedures were already in place to administer the scheme and no issues were encountered in provision of resource.

Data will be used to inform the national evaluation of the pilot and the report will be publically available.

Data shows that the number of parents requesting to defer their child's entry to P1 has increased from 70 parents in session 2016/2017, to 169 for session 2022/2023 with the actual number of children who have taken up the deferral remaining between 14% and 16% of the total P1 intake for the last 4 years.

This is because we also had an increase in the number of parents who, having applied for a deferred entry place, decided in the end to send their child to P1. In session 2022/23 of the 169 applications initially received 27 parents subsequently changed their mind and sent their child to P1.

There have been a few instances where both school and private and voluntary settings reported they were full, due to increased numbers of parents applying for a deferred entry place. However, on these occasions, almost all children were able to get a place with their second choice ELC provider.

Scottish Borders Council have always supported parents of children who have not had their 5th birthday before the first day of term in August by approving 100% of the eligible applications since session 2017/18.

Question from Councillor M. Douglas

To the Executive Member for Estate Management and Planning

Following a recent meeting of the Licensing Board held in the Council Chamber, I have been approached by a member of the public concerned at the lack of facilities provided to the deaf and hard of hearing.

Can the Executive member please confirm whether a hearing loop system is installed in the Council Chamber, and whether it is operational or not. If one is installed but not operational, are there plans to repair or replace it? Alternatively, if a loop system is not installed, are there plans to install one?

Response from Councillor Mountford

Yes, there is a hearing loop installed in the Council Chamber however it is currently not working. A specialist contractor attended the site on 26 June to measure and obtain the specification for specialist items which will be ordered and fitted by 7 July, subject to parts availability and access to the Chamber to undertake the works. The reason for the system not working is that the current microphones in the room aren't connected to the existing induction loop, nor are there any specific induction loop microphones in the Chamber.

The work required is the installation of ceiling microphones (lowered by wire similar to the existing Teams speakers) which will be linked back to a new induction loop amplifier in the AV Rack, which will also be linked to the Teams system, in turn allowing Teams calls, and for anyone speaking in the room to be heard by anyone with a hearing aid.

Question from Councillor Ramage

To the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing

Has any consideration been given to the suggestion six month ago by Elected members that LAC be given a secure mobile device managed by CGI?

Carers get £120 per year toward phone costs. However, this puts the security concerns on to our carers. CGI could very easily supply a secure device that can be set to stop young people downloading Snap chat and other potentially dangerous apps.

Response from Councillor Parker

This has been considered by Officers but is not a recommended course of action.

The phone allowance is in place to ensure that all care experienced children have the same access to a private device of their choice as other children living in Scottish Borders to ensure the approach does not inadvertently discriminate against care experienced children.

Carers are provided with advice and guidance as to 'Safe Guarding Children online'.

Question from Councillor Begg

To the Executive Member for Estate Management and Planning

How many EV Charging points are now operational here at SBC HQ? Of those, how many are available to visiting members of the public and how many are available to Councillors?

Response from Councillor Mountford

The recently completed Smart Grid project has delivered dual EV chargers providing 64 charging points for electric vehicles at SBC HQ.

28 charging points were installed adjacent to the visitor's car park on the site of the former canteen. They have had a tariff applied to make them available for Public/Councillor use. The remainder were installed in the Bowden Road Depot for use by Council Fleet vehicles.

In addition, there is also 1 charging point located at the Old School Building and 2 charging points at Waverly Place Car Park, Newtown that are available for both members of the Public and Elected Members to use should they wish.

Question from Councillor PatonDay

To the Executive Member for Service Delivery and Transformation

How many young people are at this time receiving work experience, training or apprenticeships within the Council or its Contractors?

Response from Councillor Rowley

The Council currently employs 35 Modern Apprentices employed across a variety of services.

The Council also has extensive arrangements in place to deliver community benefits through a range of contracts with our suppliers. The procurement report which is submitted annually to the Scottish Government highlights these opportunities. The information reported to Council previously and published for 2021/22 highlights:

- 35 new employment opportunities were created
- 6 people were engaged as apprentices
- 11 young people were involved in work experience placements and employability programmes
- over 1600 young people were engaged in community benefit related support activities with our suppliers

The Employability Service currently have 1 placement in SBC which is being delivered through No one Left Behind funding at an early years centre. The placements are identified and set up using a person centred approach as we try and match the skills and needs of the young person to the right type of placement. Many placements are catered for through external companies and organisations in the area where they reside or on an accessible travel route.

The service is also currently delivering 2 pre-employment training courses one in Eyemouth and one in Galashiels for 16 individuals. These courses last 10 weeks for a minimum of 2 days per week through a blended learning approach of face to face sessions and virtual training. Individuals have the opportunity to obtain accredited qualifications in employability, personal development, core skills and customer care. A short work taster placement may also be offered during the training with follow on 1-1 support.