

Scottish Borders Council Operating Model

Report by Chief Executive

Scottish Borders Council

31 August 2023

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks approval for the strategic principles which will inform the development of the Council's Operating Model over the next 5 years.**
- 1.2 This report aims to define the overarching aims of a revised operating model for Scottish Borders Council and establish the strategic principles that should guide its implementation. An operating model provides a structured framework to enable the efficient and effective delivery of public services, ensuring alignment with organisational objectives, stakeholder needs, and statutory requirements. It encompasses the organisational structure, governance mechanisms, processes, and capabilities. The objective of the operating model is to ensure the Council remains able to fulfil its responsibilities and deliver the highest possible quality services to all communities.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 I recommend that Council approve the strategic principles and aims for developing a revised operating model for Scottish Borders Council as set out in section 4 of this report and agree to receive further reports as detailed proposals are developed.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scottish Borders Council along with most other local authorities faces unprecedented challenges over the coming years in terms of demand for services, fiscal pressures, demographic changes and the impact of global climate change. The Council has a long track record of responding to such challenges through our transformation activity. The pressures facing the council are however growing and they require a well-planned, proportionate response. This will require the Council to position its future service delivery model in such a way as to take advantage of opportunities to maximise the benefits for communities and ensure the sustainability of the organisation
- 3.2 The recent '[Local Government in Scotland – Overview 2023](#)' document, published by the Accounts Commission, states that 'Radical change is needed across Scotland's councils' and that 'Councils have never faced such a challenging situation'. The operating environment within which SBC delivers services has changed dramatically in recent years, not least due to COVID-19, and pressures are continuing to deepen. SBC's operating model needs to evolve in future, building on the strong foundations laid down by Fit for 2024 to allow it to continue to deliver vital services. Further drivers for change are:
- Cost of living crisis
 - Service Demands
 - Workload, capacity and skills
 - Lack of Prioritisation
 - Member/ Community dissatisfaction with Services and poor public image
 - Financial resource Constraint
 - Community Expectation
 - Recruitment, Staff Retention and career progression.
 - Climate crisis
- 3.3 An effective operating model for Scottish Borders Council should embrace the principles of citizen-centricity, collaborative governance, transparency, accountability, agility, effective leadership, efficient resource allocation, sustainable development, and staff engagement. By adhering to these principles, the Council can establish a strong foundation for delivering high quality public services, meeting community needs, and promoting the well-being of its residents.
- 3.4 Implementing this operating model requires a comprehensive review of existing practices, stakeholder consultation, and the development of robust governance structures and processes. It is a continuous journey that necessitates ongoing evaluation, adaptation, and improvement to address emerging challenges and ensure the long-term success of the Council.
- 3.5 This report serves as a starting point for further discussions and exploration of the specific requirements and context of the Council, providing a roadmap for designing a future operating model that aligns with the unique needs and aspirations of the Scottish Borders.
- 3.6 The development of the Council's operating model will evolve, identifying the successful things to do more of, what we should possibly do less of, and

also establishing key areas for improvement in line with the needs and priorities of residents and communities.

4 PRINCIPLES OF THE OPERATING MODEL & NEXT STEPS

The following principles serve as the proposed foundation for the future operating model for Scottish Borders Council. They will build upon existing plans, particularly the Council Plan, and will seek to establish consistency and clarity across all Council services over processes, structures, quality and expectations.

Citizen-Centric Approach

4.1 A citizen-centric approach is essential, placing the needs, aspirations, and well-being of the community at the forefront of decision-making and service delivery. SBC's operating model should ensure ongoing active engagement with citizens, incorporating their input in policy-making, service design, and evaluation processes.

Collaborative Governance

4.2 Collaborative governance encourages partnerships and collaboration between the Council, other public sector partners, third sector organisations, and community stakeholders. It fosters inclusive decision-making processes and shared accountability, allowing for collective problem-solving and the pooling of resources to achieve common goals.

Transparent and Accountable Practices

4.3 Transparency and accountability are vital to promote public trust and confidence in the Council. The operating model should include mechanisms for open access to information, clear decision-making processes, and robust systems for monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, it should encourage the responsible use of resources and adherence to ethical standards.

Agile and Responsive Operations

4.4 The operating model should support a more agile and responsive approach in our neighbourhoods to meet evolving societal, economic, and environmental challenges. This entails flexibility in resource allocation at a local level, streamlined efficient processes, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances swiftly. It should foster innovation, experimentation, and continuous improvement in service delivery.

Effective Leadership and Governance

4.5 Strong leadership and effective governance structures are crucial for successful Council operations. The operating model should define clear roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities at all levels, while enabling effective decision-making, risk management, and performance oversight. It should encourage a culture of professionalism, integrity, and collaboration among staff and elected representatives and devolve operational decision making to front line staff wherever possible.

Efficient Resource Allocation

4.6 Efficient resource allocation is necessary to optimise service delivery and achieve desired outcomes within budgetary constraints. The operating model should prioritise evidence-based decision-making, resource efficiency, and performance measurement. It should promote collaboration

between departments, effective project management, and the adoption of digital technologies to streamline operations.

Sustainable Development and Environmental Responsibility

4.7 The operating model should reflect a commitment to sustainable development and environmental responsibility. It should encourage practices that minimise SBC's environmental footprint, promote climate resilience, and support the transition to a low-carbon economy. Integration of sustainable development goals into policies, service provision, and infrastructure planning should be a key consideration, with the aim of SBC achieving its Net Zero obligations and acting as an exemplar for communities.

Staff Engagement and Development

4.8 Staff engagement and development are critical for building a motivated and skilled workforce within the SBC. The operating model should prioritise the recruitment, training, professional development and retention of employees. It should promote diversity, equality, and inclusion, while fostering a supportive work culture that recognises and rewards excellence. The recruitment and retention of talented individuals is vital to the delivery of high quality services; as is the involvement of staff in designing and developing Council services and business solutions.

What specific things will the developing Operating Model impact?

4.9 The development of the Council's operating model will reshape the Transformation Programmes for SBC, and look at the key overarching component parts that affect the overall effectiveness, relevance and financial sustainability of all Council services. It will align with the 6 key themes of the Council Plan (Clean Green Future; Empowered Vibrant Communities; Fulfilling our Potential; Good Health and Wellbeing; Strong Inclusive Economy and Infrastructure and Working Together Effectively) and will pose key questions in the design of the future Council, including:

- Customer & Communities – Have we engaged meaningfully and are our services designed and co-produced?
- Staff – Are we fully enabling, equipping & empowering staff to allow SBC to excel?
- Digital Technology, Systems and IT – Are we using the full potential of digital solutions to maximise the benefits for customer experience, community wellbeing, staff enablement, financial sustainability and service quality?
- Property – Does the current and planned SBC estate optimise its value and effective use, whilst minimising its footprint and costs?

Next Steps

4.10 Scottish Borders Council has an excellent track record of delivering change and balancing its budget over many years. The COVID-19 response provides recent evidence of how quickly the Council was able to adapt its entire operating model in response to rapidly changing requirements, always with customer and community needs at the centre of all activity. The key lessons from this are that a clarity of purpose can unify efforts towards remarkable success – a success valued by communities and a source of pride for all parties across SBC. This will be a key goal of the Operating Model.

4.11 There will be communications developed for all key stakeholders around the ideas shared within this report. This will seek to explain the “what and why” of SBC’s developing operating model, whilst also seeking to encourage involvement in developing the ideas. Progress will be reported to Elected Members as the ideas set out in this report are developed.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

There are no costs attached to any of the recommendations contained in this report however the financial sustainability of all Council services is dependent on the evolution of the Council’s operating model.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

The risks for Scottish Borders Council of not evolving the operating model are significant. In an increasingly fast-changing operating context, there is a need to proactively adapt all facets of the Council’s operating model in order to meet growing demands, increasing financial pressures and a range both known and unknown challenges that will need to be met.

5.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

A full IIA will be undertaken as part of evolving the operating model. Indeed, the implications of any changes to the operating model will need to fully explore all potential impacts on a range of different groups.

5.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The developing operating model will be designed to facilitate the fulfilment of all SBC’s sustainability goals.

5.5 Climate Change

The development of the operating model will require SBC to carefully consider all positive steps that can be taken by SBC in contributing to action around climate change.

5.6 Rural Proofing

The operating model should explore decentralised models of service delivery and co-produced local solutions, which will ensure that all rural issues are fully considered.

5.7 Data Protection Impact Statement

It is anticipated that the proposals in this report will seek to enhance SBC’s data protection arrangements, by ensuring that data maturity and effective use of information are increasingly at the heart of improvement activity.

5.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

It is not anticipated that there will be any changes to the Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation as a direct result of evolving the Operating Model. However, any specific changes that may be required at a future date will be fully discussed in accordance with established protocols.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Director of Corporate Governance, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications will be consulted and any comments received will be reported verbally to the Council meeting.

Approved by

David Robertson

Chief Executive

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Clair Hepburn	Director – People, Performance & Change
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Background Papers: [insert list of background papers used in compiling report]

Previous Minute Reference: [insert last Minute reference (if any)]

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