

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 2023
APPENDIX I

Questions from Councillor Anderson (Asked by Councillor Tatler in the absence of Councillor Anderson)

1. To the Executive Member for Estate Management and Planning

The toilets at Eyemouth's old High School Hall have been closed for two years. With the Annual pantomime taking place, once again no toilets exist for the 100s of guests attending the pantomime. The portaloos previously provided do not provide adequate facilities for elderly and disabled people. When will the toilets in Eyemouth's Old High School Hall be fixed and will it be in time for this year's pantomime as promised last year?

Reply from Councillor Mountford

The Council needs to be reducing its property footprint to ensure this can be sustained moving forward. There are consequently no plans to renovate and reopen the former Eyemouth High School hall toilets. These are closed and in a dilapidated condition that would require a significant capital investment to bring to a standard suitable for use. If the pantomime organising committee would like to obtain prices from local firms for portaloos hire, the Council will see what we can do to assist with these costs.

Supplementary

Councillor Tatler asked if a discount for use of the hall had been offered. Councillor Mountford was not aware but would check with officers.

2. To the Executive Member for Roads Development and Maintenance

What is being done to ensure staff digging graves use crawler boards to reduce damage to the grass in our cemeteries, by Heavy tracked vehicles.

Why have the crawler boards for the tracked vehicles not been used as appropriate, and does SBC recognise the trauma caused to my constituents by heavy tracked vehicles defacing the graves of their loved ones? Will a formal apology be given to those families who have repeatedly suffered this upset?

Reply from Councillor Greenwell

Every endeavour is made to try and minimise ground damage when carrying out excavations and backfilling of graves, particularly on ground that is already wet and saturated, including the use of ground protection boards. This is an active cemetery site, and as with any excavation works, there are always risks of ground disturbance. In Eyemouth Cemetery, additional mitigating measures were undertaken for recent internments in this location such as removing sections of fence to enable direct access, with the aim of minimising ground disturbance across the site. However it would appear on this occasion to not have been entirely successful and officers will investigate further. Officers are happy to speak with and apologise to any families affected for any distress caused.

Supplementary

Councillor Tatler advised this was not the first occasion this had happened and asked for assurances that the graves would not be desecrated for a fourth time. Councillor Greenwell did take this on board but urged Councillor Anderson to get in touch with Carol Cooke, Parks & Environment Manager, who was doing a lot of work engaging with communities and perhaps a site visit could be arranged.

Question from Councillor Thomson

To the Leader

Can you please advise what the purpose and intent of the Community Conversation sessions are. Also, could you provide an estimated cost for these sessions.

Reply from Councillor Jardine

Thank you for your question. At the start of the current administration I set out our intention to try to engage more effectively with local communities over their priorities and concerns. Last year we ran a series of engagement sessions in 11 communities and gathered feedback from local people on issues that are important to them and their views on the performance of the Council. This was reported to members, in full, in December 2022 following analysis of the feedback. This feedback was used to inform decisions around the Council's budget. The exercise was broadly welcomed by communities and subsequently has been repeated this year with meetings taking place in a further 9 communities. Once again the feedback will be collated at the conclusion of the sessions and be submitted to Council. Any issues identified by communities with resource implications can be considered as part of the budget process. As members will be aware, Officers of the Council operate in a flexible way, as such there have been no costs associated with Officer time in attending these meetings, Council venues have been used and any costs will have been limited to travel, catering and advertising materials. These costs are not known at this juncture but are likely to be minimal and in any event are estimated to be no more than £2000. Any costs will be met by the communications and marketing budget in the Council.

Supplementary

Councillor Thomson would like to understand how this related to a recent response from the Chief Executive to West Linton Community Council that consultation on the sale of the public toilets would not be meaningful as the decision had already been taken. Therefore, why are we spending money holding engagement events with communities while not giving communities the opportunity to engage. Councillor Jardine advised there was an opportunity for representatives from West Linton to attend the recent community conversation engagement session in Peebles and there had been active engagement with the community on these toilets. He urged people from West Linton to get in touch with himself, the Portfolio holder or the Chief Executive to try to move things along. However, we are looking at different ways of engaging, such as the Community Conversations, but we are not changing our direction in any way and remain open to engagement.

