

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
23 NOVEMBER 2023
APPENDIX I

OPEN QUESTIONS

Question from Councillor Robson

To the Executive Member for Developing Our Children and Young People

Could the Executive Member advise what progress is being made in improving Wi-Fi and, or broadband connectivity in primary schools?

Reply from Councillor Carol Hamilton

As part of the delivery of the Inspire Learning Programme, improvements were made across the Primary School estate, where required, Wi-Fi Wireless Access Points were implemented within every P6 and P7 teaching space.

The success of the Inspire Learning Programme in embedding digital at the heart of the learning and teaching across the Scottish Borders increased the demand for fast, capable internet and network connectivity. In addition to the Wi-Fi enhancements within the Primary School estate, as part of the Digital Transformation programme, the Wide Area Network connectivity was increased through 2022 to ensure that each Primary School had fit for purpose internet network provision which will allow for future expansion of Wi-Fi capability if required.

At this time, there are no significant Wi-Fi enhancements planned across the Primary School estate. There is however a process in place which allows schools to fund additional Wi-Fi Wireless Access Points should they have a requirement to do so.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if the Executive member could consider teacher frustration where certain programs were unable to be used to poor internet connection. The Executive Member undertook to do this.

Question from Councillor Robson

To the Executive Member for Roads Development and Maintenance

Could the Executive Member advise whether the Council is represented on any liaison forum with public utilities which deals with their performance levels and standards of service?

Reply from Councillor Greenwell

Yes, there are a number of local, area and national groups set up in this regard and the Council is represented on them.

The Roads Authority and Utility Companies (RAUC) groups meet at local (SBC & East/Mid Lothian), area (South of Scotland) and national levels. The local group typically meets 6 times a year and the other 2 groups 3 times a year. As well as providing a forum for coordinating work programmes they are an opportunity to discuss performance and specific issues.

In addition to this there are local authority only groups (Road Authority Liaison Groups – RALGs) that meet at area and national level to discuss Public Utility company performance and issues.

Supplementary

Councillor Robson asked if it was possible to raise poor performance levels with utility companies. Councillor Greenwell explained that he was in regular dialogue regarding utility companies and would raise the issue of improving performance levels from them.

Question from Councillor Robson

To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Could the Executive Member advise whether consideration can be given to deeming excessive feeding of wild birds as littering?

Reply from Councillor Linehan

The excessive feeding of wild birds would not be deemed as littering in and of itself. With the exception of dog fouling, the definition of litter usually concerns itself with inorganic matter, as outlined by the list provided by Keep Scotland Beautiful which is:

- Dog fouling: including those that have been bagged
- Smoking-related: including cigarette ends, matches, matchboxes, cigarette packaging
- Drinks-related: including cans, bottles, cups, straws and lid
- Confectionery: including sweet wrappers, chewing gum wrappers and crisp packets
- Fast food-related: including fish & chip wrappers, polystyrene cartons, burger wrappers, plastic cutlery
- PPE Masks: Reusable and single use
- PPE Other: including gloves
- Paper material
- Other: any litter not covered by the above, such as newspaper and pieces of plastic

It is assumed by the use of the word excessive, that the question is perhaps concerned with accumulations of unused bird feed, or indeed resulting bird waste. Unsuitable or excessive feeding of birds can contribute to rat or mice problems. Excessive or careless bird feeding can also cause noise and fouling problems for neighbours, particularly where larger birds such as pigeons, crows, magpies or seagulls are attracted. The larger birds will sometimes discourage the smaller birds from feeding. If there are concerns in regard to vermin, these would be dealt with as an environmental health matter.

For guidance and advice on best practice, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is the best source of information, and their website has a dedicated page with advice on responsible bird feeding.

Question from Councillor Mackinnon

To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Could the Executive Member advise what percentage of households in the Scottish Borders have a food waste collection provided and what is the approximate uptake on the existing provision?

Reply from Councillor Linehan

Food waste collections are provided in 6 towns across the Scottish Borders in line with the Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012. This includes:

- Hawick
- Galashiels
- Tweedbank
- Selkirk
- Peebles; and
- Jedburgh

Around 24,500 receive a food waste collection service, which works out at 41.5% coverage.

Householder participation in the food waste collection service varies considerably across the Scottish Borders. In 2022 we undertook an exercise to determine participation in all the Council's kerbside collection services. This indicated 73% of household's presented their food waste bin at least once over a 6-week period. To put this into context participation in the general waste service was 96% and 93% in the recycling service.

This demonstrates that participation in the food waste service is considerably lower than the other kerbside services. This is not unusual and is a challenge faced by many local authorities.

It is important to note that food wastes make up the largest single waste type within the average general waste bin at just under a third (32.25%). In fact, household food waste alone accounts for 2,240,000 tonnes CO2 equivalent, this represents 2.9% of Scotland carbon footprint.

We would like to thank residents that already take advantage of the food waste collection service and would encourage those that don't to give it a go. Further information on the food waste service is available on the Council's website.

Supplementary

Councillor Mackinnon asked if there were plans to expand the collection to more areas, and whether the promotional messages to encourage participation could be communicated to the public. Councillor Linehan explained that there was considerable activity ongoing in the sector and highlighted that a mobile phone app was being prepared which would show how, where and what type of recycling was possible. Whilst it was hoped that food collection could be rolled out to more areas, it was not planned in the immediate future.

Question from Councillor Begg

To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

I receive regular complaints about uncollected waste on scheduled waste collection days in Tweeddale West. The repeated reason given on the Council's website is that a refuse collection vehicle has broken down.

In regard to the Council's fleet of refuse collection vehicles could the Executive Member advise: -

What are the servicing arrangements?

What is the age of the Council's fleet?

What is the Council's scheduled replacement programme and is the projected budget for the financial year 24/25 sufficient given significant inflationary pressures?

What guarantees can be given to ensure that my constituents can receive a reliable service in the future?

Reply from Councillor Linehan

Refuse Collection Vehicles are returned to fleet services for inspection and maintenance on a 6-weekly cycle in addition to their annual MOT. Any faults or breakdowns that occur in between regular inspections are reported to fleet services for repair. Fleet services hold stock of wear items to minimise down time. However worldwide supply chain issues since the COVID pandemic have impacted delivery timelines for vehicles and vehicle parts.

The Council has recently taken delivery of 6 new Refuse Collection Vehicles and 4 food waste vehicles at a cost of over £1.4 million. This has enabled us to replace 10 of our older less reliable vehicles some of which were 10 years old.

As a result of this investment the current age of the refuse collection fleet is between 2 months and 7 years, which means all vehicles are now within the agreed 7-year lifespan.

A further 6 refuse collection vehicles are scheduled to be replaced next year (2024/25) and there are sufficient funds within the Council plant and vehicle fund to cover the costs.

As you have alluded to vehicle costs are increasing, and this will be even more prominent as we shift towards alternative fuel vehicles which can be up to 4 times as much. To put this into context a standard Refuse Collection Vehicle is around £190k, an electric is £600k and a hydrogen fuel cell vehicle is £800-900k. A wider review of the Council's Plant & Vehicle Fund is currently ongoing with the aim of ensuring it is fit for purpose.

We understand the importance of providing a reliable refuse collection service and apologise to residents for the inconvenience and frustration of the recent missed collections. The Council is

working hard to ensure its refuse collection fleet is fit for purpose as is demonstrated by the recent and future planned investment.

It is important to note that we have also experienced HGV driver shortages and this has also impacted service delivery across the Borders. We have recently increased the number of HGV driver posts, which we have filled following a successful recruitment drive and the outlook is far more positive.

Supplementary

Councillor Begg asked whether the Executive Member shared his concerns regarding a potential budget gap. Councillor Linehan shared those concerns and explained that whilst she would like to see more being done, the Council had to balance its priorities when considering its asset allocation.