

## **COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS 2023**

**Report by Director - Resilient Communities**

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### **SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**

**25 January 2024**

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#### **1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on the feedback gathered from the nine separate Community Conversations which took place during September 2023 with Elected Members, Senior Officers and members of the Public and to seek approval on the next steps.**
- 1.2 The feedback from the Community Conversations is attached as an Appendix to this paper (Appendix 1). The main issues arising from the feedback have been captured along with the proposed service response.
- 1.3 The Conversations allowed the community members to share their thoughts about what really matters to them and their community and they form a key part of how the Council engages with communities and develops its plans.
- 1.4 A Community Engagement Strategy is being developed and will come to Council in due course for approval. In the meantime, planning is now underway for the Community Conversation programme for this year and it is proposed that this is developed with the input from Elected Members, Area Partnerships and other key stakeholders.

#### **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **I recommend that Council:-**
  - a) notes the feedback received from the Community Conversations at Appendix 1 which will be considered in the development of the 2024/25 Council Plan which the Council will consider alongside its budget;**
  - b) agrees that the feedback is shared with each Area Partnerships Community Councils and with Schools;**

- c) agrees that different options should be considered to develop the programme for 2024 along with input from Elected Members and Area Partnerships; and**
- d) agrees to build upon the successful youth engagement and look to tie in with existing youth forums to continue conversations with young people.**

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council is committed to better understanding, and working with, communities and is currently developing a Community Engagement Strategy to ensure that the Councils priorities and plans are reflective of communities. The Community Conversations are just one part of a wide network where regular engagement activity takes place across the organisation and the strategy will be considered by Council at a later meeting.
- 3.2 Nine separate Community Conversations took place over the summer of 2023 with Elected Members and Senior Officers to discuss the priorities and concerns of communities with members of the public and High School pupils. In a change to the Community Conversations that took place in 2022, each Conversation was based in a High School which afforded the opportunity for a separate session with pupils.
- 3.3 The feedback from the Community Conversations is attached as an appendix to this report. The main issues arising from the feedback have also been included along with the proposed service response.
- 3.4 Not every issue has been addressed for various reasons; several are personal to individuals, not something that the Council can resolve, or are general comments. The Appendix adopts a "you said/ our response" approach. Some responses are still being gathered and will be added to the report when available.
- 3.5 Over the nine venues between 15 and 30 young people from across S1 to S6 engaged in each conversation. A similar number attended the open public sessions.
- 3.6 While the attendance of Senior Management staff varied across the nine sessions, the makeup consisted of; The Leader of the Council, Elected Members in each Ward area, up to 3 Directors/Chief Executive and Officers from SBC Communications as well as the Communities and Partnership team. Live Borders, the Councils strategic partner for Culture and Sport also attended each public session.

### **4 FEEDBACK**

- 4.1 The feedback presents a huge range of issues important to local people, of which some are easier to address than others.

The main themes of comments were:

- Concerns around public transport
- Lack of local facilities
- Capital projects – including new school builds
- Public Toilets

- 4.2 Place was identified as being important to those that attended the conversations and there is scope to feed these views into the current Place Making plans via the Town Teams.

4.3 The sessions demonstrated that youth voice was important and the sessions with High School pupils were engaging and informative. There is enthusiasm from all to continue these conversations with young people in our communities.

## **5 PROPOSED NEXT STEPS**

5.1 The issues raised within the Community Conversations will be noted and, where appropriate, actioned by the relevant services.

5.2 As an initial stage the feedback should be shared with Area Partnerships and Community Councils as well as being available in an easy read format on the SBC website.

5.3 The information gathered will help to form the priorities for the 2024/25 Council Plan and budget, as well as information gathered via the place-making process, the budget consultation and via our continuous engagement with the community.

5.4 For 2024 it is proposed that Officers look at options to maximise effective conversations with our communities. A lot of effort and resource went in to support the conversations in 2023 and although there were valuable conversations, especially with the school pupils, the public attendance at each was not as high as we would have liked. Potential options to consider for 2024 are detailed below and the proposal is for Officers to work with Elected Members, Area Partnerships and other key Stakeholders to plan the engagement programme for 2024.

5.5 Options that could be considered for this year, either on their own or in combination include:

- a) Continuing the 2023 format and having sessions across 9 school clusters.
- b) Using the 2022 format that visited each Ward allowing for 11 conversations.
- c) Community Conversations are scheduled over the course of the year, allowing for more space between each conversation.
- d) Combine Community Conversations with an Area Partnership meeting, utilising existing dates in the diary to have an open session to support a community conversation within each of the five localities.
- e) Utilise digital technology and develop an online conversation for the five localities.
- f) Build upon Live Borders attendance at the conversations and involve key partners in this process. Involving key partners in co-ordinated Community Conversations will help to reduce the number of times the public are being engaged with, potentially reducing costs and clearly demonstrating partnership working across organisations.

- 5.6 Notwithstanding the options detailed above it is critically important to continue to develop conversations with young people in our communities. It is therefore also proposed that we look to build upon existing partnerships that are being led by young people within our localities.

## **6 IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Financial**

There is likely to be some financial costs involved in establishing better links with existing Youth Networks. This may involve room rental, if SBC buildings are unavailable, travel costs and refreshments. Associated costs will be explored if proposal is agreed and will be met from existing budgets.

### **6.2 Risk and Mitigations**

There are clearly very high expectations of the Council within our local communities that, given the finite resources available, will require careful management, prioritisation and engagement to deliver. There is a reputational risk if local issues cannot be resolved. The way in which this is communicated and shared is therefore important.

### **6.3 Integrated Impact Assessment**

An integrated impact assessment (IIA) will be undertaken if next steps are agreed and plans are developed.

### **6.4 Sustainable Development Goals**

There are no direct economic, social or environmental issues with this report but the Sustainable Development Goals will be considered in any plans that are agreed as a result of the feedback

### **6.5 Climate Change**

There are no direct carbon emissions impacts as a result of this report.

### **6.6 Rural Proofing**

This report does not relate to a new or amended policy or strategy and as a result rural proofing is not an applicable consideration.

### **6.7 Data Protection Impact Statement**

There are no personal data implications arising from the proposals contained in this report.

### **6.8 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes required to the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation.

## 7 CONSULTATION

7.1 The Director (Finance & Corporate Governance), the Director (Corporate Governance), the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change) and Corporate Communications have all been consulted and comments included in this report.

### Approved by

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Jenni Craig

**Title**

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**Author(s)**

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**Background Papers:** Nil

**Previous Minute Reference:**

**Note** – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Kenny Harrow can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Communities and Partnership Team, Scottish Borders Council, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose, TD6 0SA.