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## SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL PLAN (From April 2024)

Report by Chief Executive

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### SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

29 February 2024

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#### 1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 **This report seeks Council's approval of the Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2024.**
- 1.2 The Council Plan articulates the Council's strategic ambitions for the year ahead, as well as a long-term vision for the Council. In February 2023, Council approved the 'Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2023'. For financial year April 2024 to March 2025, a new iteration of the Council Plan has been prepared updating actions to take account of the changing strategic and operational landscape, previous performance and evolving priorities. Performance against the Council Plan is reported to the Executive Committee on a Quarterly basis.
- 1.3 The 'Council Plan from April 2024' builds on and develops a format first used in 2022. It is divided into three main sections: first, an introductory section comprising the Leader's Foreword and an Introduction from the Chief Executive which, together, set out how the Council Plan is constructed, the Council's long-term vision for where it wants the Scottish Borders to be by 2033, together with the Council's values and its priorities; second, a 'Scottish Borders-Wide Actions' section affirms and details the key strategic priorities and outcomes for the Council over the next financial year. The final section comprises a 'Locality Actions' section featuring key actions and priorities in each of the Borders' five Area Partnership localities.
- 1.4 The present report seeks Council approval of the draft 'Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2024', attached in Appendix A.

#### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that Council approves the Scottish Borders Council Plan from April 2023' at Appendix A.**

### 3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Scottish Borders Council agreed its present Council Plan in February 2023. The Plan followed a style and format first adopted in 2022, intended to provide the Council with an annually refreshed Plan that:
- a) is short, simple and relatable for the public, but SMART, meaning composed of actions which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound;
  - b) sets the strategic framework for the Council and for the Council's Financial Plans and operates in sync with the Council's Budget Setting Process;
  - c) is informed by strong engagement with Elected Members, while being responsive to and reflective of the aspirations of the Scottish Borders' communities; and
  - d) is effectively linked with a Performance Management Framework and an embedded culture of continuous improvement.
- 3.2 The new draft Council Plan from April 2024 builds on and augments this approach as explained below.
- 3.3 In developing the Council Plan, the Council seeks to take both a long-term and a short-term perspective. Complex interconnected issues typically take sustained action over many years, not just by the Council, but by national governments, partners, businesses, and communities. Page 5 of the Council Plan sets out the Council's vision for the long-term. The Council has an indispensable role in shaping the future, and, crucially, the Council Plan is about articulating what that Council contribution will be. The annual 'Scottish Borders-wide' and 'Localities' Actions represent 'steps on the road' – the short-term – which the Council must deliver if long-term ambitions are to be realised.
- 3.4 The development of the Council plan is influenced by a broad range of factors.
- Foundational to effective decision-making is relevant and good quality evidence. The Council's aim is for the plan to be rooted in the available data and evidence, highlighting the challenges and opportunities which the Scottish Borders currently faces and plotting an ambitious path to a positive future.
  - The plan must also reflect the strategic priorities of Elected Members, set within the local and national policy context.
  - The Council's determination to ensure the Plan is influenced by public and community aspirations and concerns is manifested in the Community Conversations which took place during the late summer and autumn 2023, and in the Council's commitment to Place-making.
  - Strategic investment decisions and decisions on funding priorities whether through the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy, Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal, City Region Deal and Regional Prosperity Fund, Shared Prosperity Funding, or other vehicles feature strongly in the projects which animate much of the Council Plan.
  - The foregoing factors all influence the Council's service planning process, establishing priorities and projects, while providing evidence

and feedback on service delivery and setting the context for service planning and activity.

3.5 Figure 1 (below) illustrates these relationships. Metaphorically, the Council Plan is a river, fed by a series of a tributaries which charge and shape the course of the river culminating at the river mouth, which, simply, is the finalised Council Plan annually presented to Council on Budget Day in conjunction with the Council's Financial Plans.

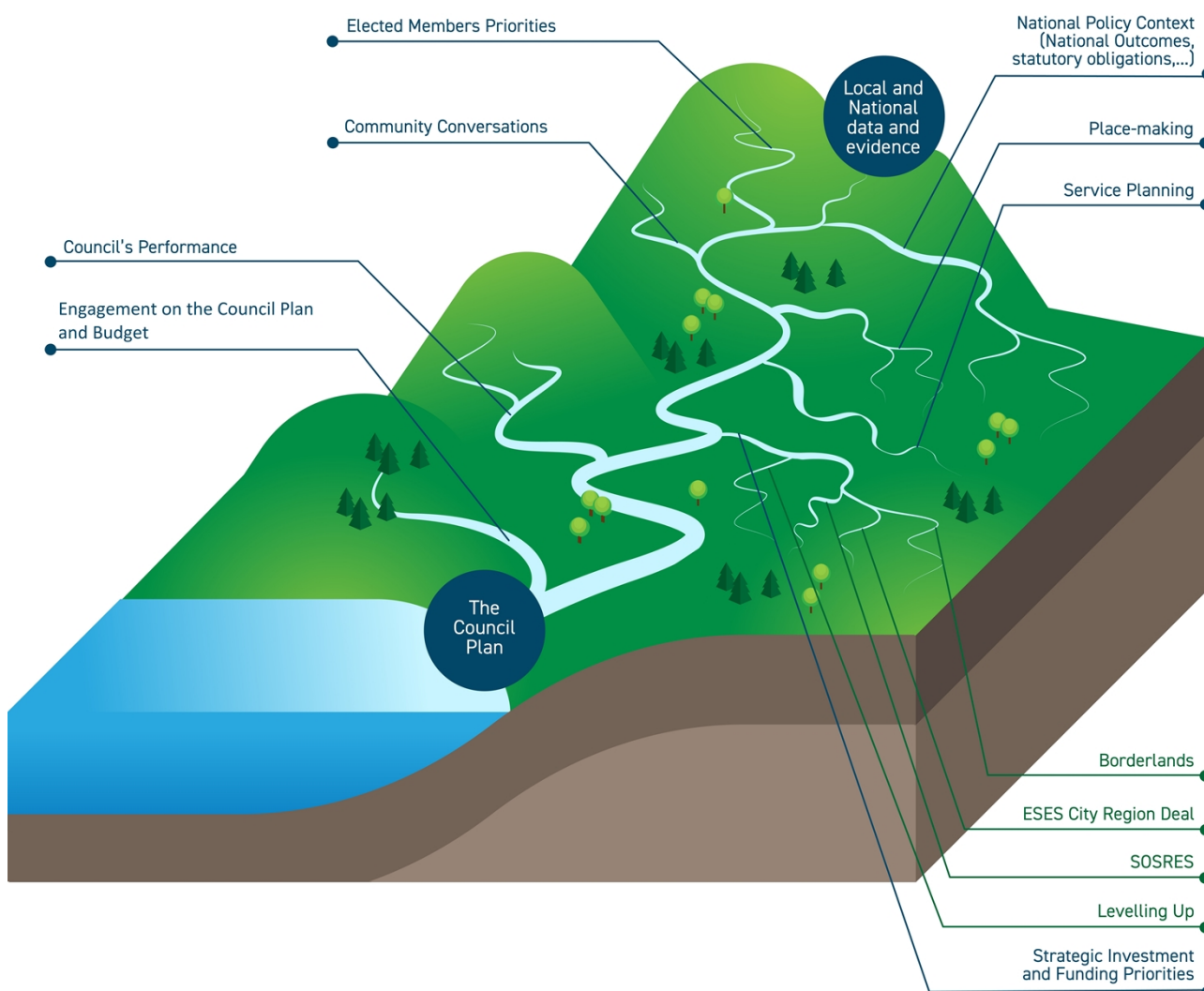


Figure 1 – What shapes our Plan

3.6 Drawing all of the above together is the Council's performance management process. Regular monitoring of delivery against the Council Plan verifies whether the Council is succeeding in doing what it said it was going to do in the Council Plan. Where it is not, it must change what it is doing. This influences delivery against the Council Plan across the course of the year and has a critical bearing on shaping the next iteration of the Council Plan when it is refreshed annually.

3.7 Consistent with the aims for the Council Plan described in para 3.1, the Council Plan from April 2024 maintains the same priority themes:

- Clean Green Future

- Fulfilling Our Potential
- Strong Inclusive Economy, Transport, and Infrastructure
- Empowered Vibrant Communities
- Good Health and Wellbeing
- Working Together, Improving Lives

...while also seeking to strengthen:

- The relationship to the Council's Financial Planning process, reflecting that a key function of the Council's Financial Planning process is resourcing the delivery of the Council Plan;
- Community influence within the Plan through the Community Conversations, recognising that understanding public and community needs is essential to the development of effective plans and solutions; and
- Delivery of the Council Plan by continuing to develop consistent and effective service planning, ensuring that service plans describe how each of the Council's directorates will help deliver the Council Plan.

3.8 Reinforcing the reciprocal relationship between the Council Plan and the Council's Financial Plans, this year public feedback on priorities within the Council Plan was sought by placing questions around Council Plan priorities within the Council's established 'Budget Engagement' conducted on Citizen Space. As highlighted in the Report on the 'Council Plan and Budget Engagement and Consultation Update', respondents focused on the importance of the public transport network, on a lack of local facilities and on the Council's internal processes and organisation. As noted in the same report, the current iteration of the Council Plan seeks to address those concerns.

3.9 Finally, building on existing dialogue with partners across the region, a draft of the Council Plan was issued to Community Planning Partners for comments. Partners were supportive of the objectives pursued in the draft Plan while underlining the need for greater partnership working amongst Community Planning Partners to address the region's challenges.

## **4 IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Financial**

The Council Plan should be understood as an articulation of strategic intent by the Council. Where that intent gives rise to financial implications not already expressly budgeted for, those financial implications will necessarily need to be reported to Council/the appropriate committee.

## 4.2 Risk and Mitigations

- a) As highlighted in the Leader’s Foreword to the Council Plan, ‘the past three years have been a turbulent time for the Scottish Borders, our communities and Council. From the COVID pandemic to Storm Arwen, to the cost-of-living crisis, every family, every household has felt the effects of the economic, health, environmental and social challenges we have all had to face.’ At any time let alone in such a context, having clear priorities and a robust plan which sets out what the Council wants to achieve and how it intends to do so is essential, not only for the Council, but for Scottish Borders residents too. This is the fundamental purpose of the Council Plan: to provide a clear strategic framework for the Council’s priorities, ambitions and actions, together with the values which inform them.
- b) Furthermore, reviewing the Council Plan annually, and developing it into an ongoing process built upon engagement with communities allows us to create a Plan which provides not only a clear strategic framework but also agility and responsiveness in a rapidly changing context.

## 4.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

An integrated Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is published contemporaneously with this report.

## 4.4 Sustainable Development Goals

The draft Council Plan complements the Embedding Sustainable Development Report of 29 August 2019. The draft Plan is explicitly part of a journey aimed at embedding a culture in the Council which supports delivery of the UN SDGs ‘as they relate to local government’, in the context of the Council’s remit and responsibilities. The goal is to embed values in the Council’s decision-making, policy development and delivery which are complementary to the UN SDGs. It informs the ‘values’ of the Council Plan, and ‘Our Priorities’ are strongly correlated with the UN SDGs as noted below:

<b>Our Priorities</b>	<b>UN SDGs</b>
Clean Green Future – Accelerate action to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change and extreme weather.	13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Fulfilling Our Potential - Empower schools and their communities to deliver a high-quality education focused on excellence, equity, wellbeing and improved outcomes for children, young people, and families.	4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all potential
Strong inclusive economy, transport and infrastructure – Deliver the key economic development programmes for our region, making our economy stronger, greener and more sustainable.	1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation

	and foster innovation
Empowered, vibrant communities – Support communities and empower people to achieve strong, active, resilient and sustainable communities and realise opportunities for improving people’s lives.	11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable
Good health and wellbeing – Ensure the people of the Scottish Borders have the opportunities and are supported to take control of their health and wellbeing, enjoying a high quality of life.	3 Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages
Working together improving lives – Ensure that Scottish Borders Council is effective, sustainable, responsive, and aligned to the needs and priorities of our communities.	16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

#### 4.5 **Climate Change**

A just transition to net zero is at the heart of the draft Council Plan, most directly in relation to the Clean Green Future Outcome, but it is also invested strongly in other outcomes, such as in the Strong Economy Outcome ambition for an economy that is ‘stronger, greener and more sustainable’, or in Localities Actions which ‘support community-led initiatives that contribute to tackling climate change and nature loss.’

#### 4.6 **Rural Proofing**

The draft Council Plan has been developed with a strong focus on place, recognising the particular geography and demography of the Scottish Borders. It is a specific objective of the Plan to develop ‘community-led place plans across rural communities and towns.’ At the same time, the commitment to ‘enhanced participation and engagement’ will have a strongly positive effect in promoting inclusivity and thereby facilitating the participation of those people, businesses and stakeholders based in rural locations.

#### 4.7 **Data Protection Impact Statement**

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

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

There are no changes to the Scheme of Administration arising from this report.

### 5 **CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The Director (Finance & Procurement), the Director (Corporate Governance), the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Director (People Performance & Change), the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and their comments received incorporated into this report.

**Approved by**

**David Robertson**

**Chief Executive**

**Author(s)**

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**Background Papers:** Scottish Borders Council Plan (from April 2023)

**Previous Minute Reference:** Scottish Borders Council 23 February 2023

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

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