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## AMENDED COUNCIL POLICY DOCUMENTS IN RELATION TO COMMUNITY COUNCILS

I refer to the 12 significant documents circulated to Community Council for comment. I have circulated these documents to our members and my response takes cognizance of their remarks. The first comment I would make is that there is an urgent need for the Council (and perhaps the Scottish Government) to consider what it actually expects from a Community Council made up of volunteers. It appears that year on year there are more and more roles for community councils with extensive documents to consider and respond to.

A role description which provides a realistic outline of the duties of a Community Councillor and anticipated time commitment expected would be a good start.

I fully understand the need for policy documents to provide a working framework for Community Councils and a point of reference when required.

As a Community Council we understand that we have several significant roles:

1. Consulting with our and informing our communities in relation to their needs and aspirations and feeding them to the relevant public body in an effort to inform our needs for public service. These consultations are formalized in our Plan for Place.
2. Responding on behalf of our communities in relation to SBC consultations and consultations from other public bodies.
3. Considering planning applications for any buildings/developments in our area – consulting with local communities and responding.

From our experience these are roles which require a significant commitment of time by our community councillors. With the advent of battery energy storage system development in our area this time commitment has been greatly increased.

Number of Community Councillors:

At this time our Community Council has an allocation of 10 members: 4 – Leitholm, 2 – Eccles and 4 Birgham. We believe that the geographic area covered by a community council should be taken into account in addition to population of the area when deciding community council numbers. A community council with responsibility for a town serves one community, while a rural community council can serve several distinct communities. This is the case with our own community council where each of our villages has a distinct character and needs. We seek permission to extend our community council numbers by 2 members with these members being recruited from anywhere in our area as opposed to specific village. This would provide flexibility to have some of our number with specific tasks within our organization.



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We note the extensive process for election of members in your paperwork. We are not sure how this works in other Community Council areas, however, historically we have never had a surplus of applicants despite vacancies being advertised in our communities.. Our current community councillors were elected either at our AGM where they attended and showed interest in our work, or alternatively, have been actively recruited from our communities to fill mid term vacancies with their membership confirmed at meetings.

#### Finance:

At this time we operate a bank account paying bills by cheque and in line with our guidelines. We believe that there is now a need for our Treasurer to have access to internet banking and would ask for guidance as to how this can work. From my previous charity work, our treasurer did have access to internet banking. Prior to any payment being made she required email permission from a second signatory prior to making a payment.

#### Planning:

I note that it is now proposed that the onus will be on our Community Council to check council planning lists to see whether we would wish to comment. I would make the following points:

1. My understanding of the planning process is that the Community Council is a statutory consultee in planning matters and as such the council should continue to make any applications for our area known to us.
2. As volunteers, already committing many hours to deliver a service to our community and to the Scottish Borders Council, it is unfair to place this additional burden on us.
3. Such is the complexity and amount of paperwork involved in many of the current planning applications there is a need for Community Councils to be supported through the process.

#### Equalities Document:

Bullet point 2 says that CCs should seek to improve the diversity of its members. We would suggest that this should be 'in line with local demographics'.

Bullet point 4 refers to 'staff' – should be individuals/people?

#### Resource Implications:

Through any review at this time there needs to be a keen focus on making best use of our human resources – both in relation to our staff team at SBC and our volunteers in community councils. Wherever possible processes need to be simplified and streamlined.

Had I been presented with a handbook containing these 12 documents at my time of considering joining our community council, I would have been liable to walk away.