

**SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL**  
**25 JANUARY 2024**  
**APPENDIX I**

**OPEN QUESTIONS**

**Question from Councillor Thomson**

To the Executive Member for Roads Development and Maintenance

Will the Council consider moving from the provision of cut Christmas trees to the provision of a living tree to those communities currently in receipt of a cut Christmas tree? Whilst it is recognised that there would be a cost implication for provision and planting of a living tree, these could be mitigated by the reduction of delivery journeys from plantation to site, annual cost of tree (potential replacement thereof as happened this year), all giving a significant benefit to the environment, as well as Council finances.

Reply from Councillor Greenwell

I would like to first of all acknowledge the challenges faced in the provision of Christmas trees last month. As outlined previously, the contractor experienced some significant supply issues which, in trying to mitigate the impact of, caused further problems in the discrepancy of provision across communities. I would like to again assure members that the specification and standard of trees ordered was the same as in previous years. We have received an apology from the contractor for the issues that we experienced this year.

Living Christmas trees are something that Officers have been exploring as a sustainable alternative to annual tree provision in communities. As the question states, the costs of one-off provision of a Living tree to communities could offer a more financially and environmentally sustainable means of Christmas tree provision. The trees could be planted at an agreed site in those communities that can accommodate a living Christmas tree. Where relevant, the one off investment could ensure communities have a recurring, consistent standard of Christmas Tree for a number of years. We have had some approaches from communities noting interest in this approach – it is acknowledged that not all locations currently used would necessarily be appropriate, and this would require further consideration with communities.

It is proposed to review the wider issue of Christmas tree provision by Scottish Borders Council to communities across the region – the current budget consultation includes a question around Christmas tree provision so we await the outcomes of this consultation process.

**Question from Councillor Begg**

To the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

Are there any plans to share transport resources with partner agencies?

In particular has SBC explored the possibility of sharing NHS Borders patient transport / delivery services with SBC bus / transport services?

Reply from Councillor Linehan

SBC are regularly engaging with partner agencies to see how we can work more effectively to achieve common goals and avoid duplication of effort and resource. Such initiatives depend on resource and capacity which can often impede progress.

However, our Passenger Transport team re-engaged with NHS Borders on the 11 January to arrange a meeting to explore the potential of sharing vehicles and resources. The

objective being to support the delivery of services and addressing the pressures are currently facing whilst also maximising use of vehicles we have available.

Officers have provided dates for meetings and will get together with colleagues at NHS Borders to look at options.

We will update members in due course of the outcomes of discussions.

#### Supplementary

Councillor Begg asked if Councillor Linehan would be prepared to report back in 6 months on how progress was being made on partnership working, particularly given ongoing budget pressures and the need to maintain services. Councillor Linehan agreed to provide comments after 6 months.

#### **Question from Councillor Anderson**

##### To the Executive Member for Community Engagement

Under the Single Outcome Agreement and the SBC strategy, SBC measure the median wage against other regions of Scotland. What progress is being made to meeting the target?

##### Reply from Councillor Cochrane

The purpose of the Single Outcome Agreement was to specify the improvement priorities that had been identified for the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership and which focused the partnership on delivering better outcomes for the people of the Scottish Borders and Scotland.

In the 2013 Single Outcome Agreement the Partnership agreed performance measures with targets set at intervals over a 10 -year period. At that time the following measures were recorded:

- the gross weekly earnings (residence based) as 90% of the Scottish average. The target was to increase this to 95% by 2023. In 2023 the median gross weekly earnings (residence based) were recorded as 96% of the Scottish average.
- the gross weekly earnings (workplace based) as 81% of the Scottish average. The target was to increase this to 85% by 2023. In 2023 the median gross weekly earnings (workplace based) were recorded as 93% of the Scottish average.

Both of the targets identified for 2023, in the Single Outcome Agreement, were exceeded.

During the period covered by the Single Outcome Agreement the National Living Wage was introduced. This has been adopted by a number of organisations, with 55 registered as living wage employers in the Borders, including:

- Scottish Borders Council
- South of Scotland Enterprise
- Borders College
- NHS Borders, and
- The four main Registered Social landlords in the Borders

Scottish Borders Council adopted the Living Wage for Modern Apprentices in April 2023, before many other local authorities in Scotland.

The multi-agency Scottish Borders Living Wage Group works to address the rise of in-work poverty and rebuild prosperity within local communities.

It should be noted that the Single Outcome Agreement was superseded by the Community Plan following the enactment of the Community Empowerment Scotland (Scotland) Act in 2015. The Community Planning Partnership is working to address wider factors contributing to poverty and the following improvement outcomes have been identified:

- Help mitigate against the financial challenges of day to day living for those who are most affected; and
- Children and young people from low-income households are supported to develop life skills to help them succeed in life.

I also have some supplementary information on the actions that other partners have taken during that time which I will share with you.