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Cllr J. R. Anderson

Scottish Borders Council

Period of Illness and Return to Duties

Over the summer months, I experienced a period of ill health which required me to step back temporarily from a number of public and community duties. During this time, I remained in contact with officers and colleagues where possible to ensure that key local issues continued to move forward.

I am pleased to confirm that I have now returned to full capacity. Since resuming duties, my focus has been on re-establishing active engagement with residents, progressing outstanding local matters, and ensuring that the work paused during my absence is brought swiftly back on track. I would like to extend my gratitude to our community councils, officers, and community members for their patience and support during this period. Especially for the kindness shown and messages received. It is very much appreciated.

I would like to give a huge thanks to the Community Councillors who are standing down in Allanton, Whitsome & Burnmouth. There are a number of fantastic individuals who have put in an immense amount of work over the years who are moving to pastures new.

2. Education and Rural School Engagement

Significant attention has been given to challenges within the Borders education system, particularly around trust, consultation, and the sustainability of rural schools.

Raised formal scrutiny questions to Scottish Borders Council regarding:

The consultation process for cashless systems in schools.

The transition to digital learning via iPads for primary pupils.

Emergency responsiveness and staff safety in schools.

Highlighted the loss of public confidence in SBC's education leadership and its impact on smaller schools and community trust.

Advocated for renewed promotion of rural schools as viable community assets, and for transparent, family-centred consultation in all education decisions.

3. Environmental and Infrastructure Matters

Work has continued across several environmental and infrastructure priorities in East Berwickshire.

Seagull Summit: Represented the region during the Scottish Government's review of urban gull management, advocating for East Berwickshire as a test area for pilot deterrent schemes.

Burnmouth Road Safety: Worked with residents and Scottish Water to resolve a long-standing surface hazard, leading to Scottish Water accepting responsibility and committing to permanent repair.

Parkdean Resort Boundary Issue: Coordinated communication between residents, Parkdean, and SBC officers concerning overgrown trees and hedging behind Barefoots Avenue and along Pocklaw Slap.

Requested a planning investigation into potential breaches of boundary maintenance conditions.

Raised concerns around public safety, insurance liability, and storm-season risks.

Continued engagement with SBC's Greener Gateway and Keep Scotland Beautiful initiatives to enhance the public realm and community environment.

Eyemouth Bantry street lamp condition has been raised and they have been assessed and will be scheduled for replacement in the next financial year.

4. Community Council and Local Engagement

As previous Chair of the Community Council and former Hon. Provost, my work has centered on strengthening communication with CCs, transparency, and collaboration with local residents.

I have Promoted participation in planning consultations and improvement projects to ensure empowered communities. Supported local businesses and voluntary organizations through visibility and advocacy.

Represented Eyemouth in discussions on heritage, tourism, and environmental enhancement, ensuring local priorities are recognized regionally.

Our communities are the heart and soul of daily life and I will continue to push for full community empowerment at every level of governance.

5. ReTweed – Skills, Empowerment & Social Impact

As a trustee of ReTweed with a declared interest at SBC, continued to support the charity's mission to empower women through skills, creativity, and enterprise.

Provided governance and policy insight informed by experience in public service and community resilience.

Supported the development of training and employability programs that deliver measurable social impact.

Helped strengthen partnerships between ReTweed, SBC, and local organizations to ensure continued funding stability and growth. It has not been an easy time recently but we have gotten through a bad time together.

Letter to funders

Dear Funders and Partners...

I am writing to introduce myself as the new Chair of ReTweed. Over the past six months, the organization has experienced a period of significant change. I am aware that some of our funders and sector colleagues may have received communications from our former Chief Officer which were concerning and, at times, unhelpful. In particular, some of those messages portrayed our founder, Hazel Smith, in a way that does not reflect the values or position of ReTweed, or the true Hazel Smith.

In my role as a local Councillor, I became aware of these issues and raised my concerns with OSCR, requesting both an investigation and appropriate intervention. Over several months, we worked carefully to make sense of what was a challenging situation. To ensure stability and accountability, I declared an interest with SBC and subsequently joined the ReTweed board. Following my appointment, the remaining board member chose to step down, leaving me temporarily as the sole trustee after three months of refusing to accept a board in waiting ready to help.

Together with our Interim Chief Officer, Nichola Purves, and with support from Borders Community Action, we quickly moved to rebuild. Over a two-week period we carried out a robust recruitment process, resulting in the appointment of three new trustees:

James Anderson – Chair

Jane Miller – Secretary (shared role)

Samantha Harcus – Secretary (shared role)

Nicky Francey – Treasurer

As a new board, we have begun the process of reviewing governance, strengthening our financial management, and putting in place the right policies to ensure that the challenges of recent months are not repeated. We have also appointed a staff member dedicated to financial oversight, who is conducting a full review to present to the board. Further board recruitment is planned after our AGM in November.

We are continuing to cooperate fully with OSCR in the investigation I originally requested. This includes reviewing governance practices and updating our policies to ensure full compliance and transparency.

I also want to clarify the position regarding International Tartans. While originally seeded by ReTweed, International Tartans has now become an independent organisation, led by Hazel Smith. We are proud to see it flourishing in its own right, and I wish to emphasise that we have found no evidence of wrongdoing by Hazel Smith. On the contrary, the board fully supports her ongoing endeavours, and the positive contribution International Tartans is making.

Most importantly, I want to reassure you that ReTweed is now under full board control and is being led with care and competence by Nichola Purves, our new Chief Officer, who works closely alongside us. Our projects are progressing well, and our finances are being carefully reviewed and stabilised. We are grateful to our core funders from the Lottery, Robertsons Trust and the Scottish Government for confirming their ongoing support now a new board is in place. The previous Chief Officer reported to several funders that ReTweed was operating at a deficit of over £70,000. This information was false. At the time of that communication, ReTweed in fact held sufficient funds to cover four months of operating costs. With our principal funders now reinstated, the organisation is in a stable financial position and secure for the next two years. Due to unauthorised spending by the previous CO we currently have two months operating costs in the bank and a commitment from our funders going forward. Rebuilding our funds and ensuring better income from trading and rental are a priority going forward.

We recognise that this has been a difficult time for staff, volunteers, and funders, and we sincerely apologise for any concerns caused by the actions of our former Chief Officer. The wellbeing of our volunteers and participants is central to our mission, and I am glad to say that the vibrancy and sense of community that defines ReTweed has returned, our workshop is once again full of women supporting each other, sharing skills, laughter, and friendship.

You are warmly invited to visit ReTweed at any time, meet with Nichola and the board, and see first-hand the positive momentum we are building back. Over the past nine years, ReTweed has made a remarkable impact across the Borders, empowering women and transforming lives. With renewed stability and a strengthened foundation, we are confident about our future.

I would be delighted to catch up with you in person and share more about how we are moving forward together.

With warm regards,
James Anderson
Chairman, Re-Tweed

6. Bus Travel Update Report

Meeting with: Gordon Grant, Scottish Borders Council

Subject: Local Bus Services and Funding

A meeting was held with Gordon Grant (SBC) to discuss ongoing issues and developments relating to local bus services across the region.

Key Points:

Service 253: Operated commercially by Borders Buses. An early morning service is being introduced to support medical appointments and blood tests for residents in the Coldingham, Copath, and Cove areas.

Funding Pressures:

The Network Support Grant from Transport Scotland provides only 14.4p per kilometre, which does not meet the operational costs of rural routes.

Free travel reimbursement rates are insufficient:

Over-16s: 70% of ticket cost reimbursed

Ages 5–15: 47% of ticket cost reimbursed

Combined with rising costs, including National Insurance increases, these shortfalls place significant financial pressure on operators.

Knoll Hospital Bus: Frequency increased to 10 journeys per day after October to improve accessibility for hospital users.

Connectivity: Work continues to improve transport links between Reston, Coldingham, and Eyemouth, supporting access to services and employment.

School Transport: SBC is providing lower-cost buses for school trips, with council-supplied vehicles costing around one-third of private hire rates, delivering notable savings for local schools.

7. Statement on Scottish Government Seagull Summit

The recent discussions held by the Scottish Government on the seagull issue have excluded local voices, with no community representatives invited to take part. This has resulted in a closed-door meeting, dominated by political voices who do not fully understand the challenges faced on the ground or show any care.

Once again, there appears to be a fundamental lack of understanding from the Scottish Government on this matter. By choosing to listen primarily to NatureScot—an organisation that has, in many ways, contributed to the problem, they have overlooked the valuable insight and experience of local residents and communities who live with the issue daily.

The handling of this situation is deeply disappointing and reflects yet another example of a closed-door approach to decision-making by the Scottish Government, rather than one built on open dialogue and genuine community engagement.

8. Statement on Eyemouth Primary School Relocation Plans

Plans recently released to the public for the relocation of Eyemouth Primary School differ from those previously presented to and agreed upon by Elected Members.

A meeting has been scheduled for October 20th to address these concerns and to seek clarification on the discrepancies between the approved proposals and the publicly released plans.

No further comment will be made until after the meeting on October 20th.

9. Community Council Nominations Open

The Community Councils of Whitsome & Allanton and Burnmouth are currently seeking nominations for new members.

This is an excellent opportunity to join a group of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers who work hard to represent and improve their communities. Serving on a Community Council offers a meaningful way to contribute to local decision-making, share ideas, and help shape the future of your area.

10. Huge Congratulations to Coldingham Community Council!

A massive well done to Coldingham Community Council (Jack and Robbie) for their outstanding efforts in raising funds for the new Coldingham Play Park! An incredible amount of work has gone into this project, and thanks to their dedication and community support, they've now raised almost the full amount needed.

A fantastic achievement for the community, well done to everyone involved! 🎉 Keep going, the finish line is in sight!

11. Motion to Scottish Borders Council for October 2025, raising the concerns of constituents.

Council Notes:

That the UK Government has indicated its intention to introduce new digital identification measures which could, in time, become a requirement for citizens to access public services or carry out routine activities.

Council Believes:

- The ongoing “digital revolution” is moving too far, too fast, without sufficient public debate or democratic consent.
- Every citizen Subject: Opposition to the Introduction of a Mandatory Digital ID System has a fundamental right to freedom and autonomy in their daily life. The ability to travel, work, and access essential services should never be conditional on a government-issued digital credential.
- UK citizens already possess multiple legitimate forms of identification—including passports, driving licenses, and National Insurance numbers, which are accepted across public and private sectors. A new digital ID system is therefore unnecessary and risks duplicating existing systems at public expense.
- Many residents across the Scottish Borders, particularly older people, rural communities, and those without reliable internet access, could be unfairly disadvantaged or excluded by a compulsory digital ID system.
- Citizens have a right to privacy, security, and control over their own personal information, and should not be compelled to share or store data through a centralized digital platform they did not vote for or consent to.
- Digital inclusion should be about choice, not coercion.

Council Therefore Resolves To:

Request that the Leader of Scottish Borders Council write to the UK Government expressing this Council's opposition to any move toward mandatory digital identification.

Ask that the letter urge the Government to rethink and consult widely on the potential impacts of digital ID systems, particularly on rural, elderly, and low-income communities.

Affirm that the Council supports the use of technology where it empowers residents and improves access to services, but opposes any digital policy that erodes individual rights, privacy, or freedom of choice.

12. Berwickshire projects receive funding through Coastal Communities Fund

Following a call for projects issued by Scottish Borders Council (SBC) in July, seven projects across Berwickshire have been awarded funding through the Coastal Communities Fund for 2025–26.

The Fund, distributed from Crown Estate revenues to coastal local authorities, aims to ensure that communities along the region's coast benefit directly from the income generated by Scottish Crown Estate marine asset.

Details of projects and funding received are:

- The Upgrade of Sandy Playpark (Bantry) and wider area, led by Eyemouth Development Trust, has been awarded £15,000. (this is for a feasibility study not equipment)
- The Marine Skills Training Centre Feasibility Study, delivered by Eyemouth Marine Ltd, has secured £5,000 from the Fund, with an additional £1,500 in match funding, bringing the total project cost to £6,500.
- The Coldingham Playpark Redevelopment Project, led by Coldingham Community Council, has been provided £25,000 towards equipment and installation costs based on an approved contractor quote.
- The Sea Our Underwater World: Public Aquarium project, managed by St Abbs Marine Station, has been awarded £35,225 from the Fund, alongside £51,400 in match funding, for a total project cost of £86,625.
- Coastal Access and Sustainable Active Travel project, led by Sea the Change, has been allocated £27,000 from the Fund, with £16,000 in match funding, bringing the total cost to £43,000.
- The Fruitful Futures project, delivered by Abundant Borders, has received £8,070, fully funded by the Coastal Communities Fund.
- Marine Education Centre, managed by Berwickshire Marine Reserve, has been awarded £17,500 from the Fund, with £3,800 in match funding, giving a total cost of £21,300.

13. Looking Ahead

Priorities for the remainder of 2025 include:

Continued oversight of education reform, consultation, and rural school viability.

Progress on planning compliance and boundary maintenance at key local sites.

Strengthening community resilience and emergency preparedness.

Maintaining an open, transparent, and accessible presence across SBC and community channels