

East Berwickshire Christmas Community Update

Cllr James Anderson – December Report

As we come to the end of a challenging year, I want to take a moment to share some positive news and to thank our incredible communities across East Berwickshire.

Wishing everyone a merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

A Major Win for Eyemouth Primary School Parents

This month saw a hugely important outcome for our parents, the formal consultation to move Eyemouth Primary pupils into the High School has been stopped.

This result was not achieved by chance it was achieved by the unwavering commitment, calm professionalism, and collective strength shown by Community Councils, Parent Councils, Community groups, Local residents And the Parents from the wider Eyemouth and Berwickshire community.

Despite the worry, frustration and genuine anxiety this situation caused, the majority of people engaged in the most positive and constructive way possible. That professionalism has been noted across the council.


I cannot express enough how proud I am to represent the people of East Berwickshire. Your determination to stand up for our children while keeping our community united has been inspiring.

Looking Ahead: Working Together for a Better School

Stopping the consultation is only the first step. The next and most important question is:

How do we secure the funding our school truly needs?

I have formally asked in the council chamber the Leader of the Council to look at increasing the budget allocation for Eyemouth Primary School, just as we have done for other areas. I have sat and approved with other elected members millions of pounds to other Schools, to ensure ALL Borders Children have the same opportunities. There is no reason at all for Eyemouth Primary to be short changed and I absolutely agree with parents on that point. We cannot settle for a reduced or compromised budget.

 Our children deserve the best possible start in life, and that begins with the quality, safety and ambition of the building they learn in.

In the new year, I will continue working closely with parents, CCs, SBC officers, Nursery staff and community partners to ensure we move forward together positively, transparently, and with our children's future at the heart of every decision. One major request I have made is for Teachers to be directly involved in the whole process. No more “Teachers cant be involved” , we need Teachers at the heart of the project and who are right now at the coal face of teaching.

To everyone who wrote emails, attended meetings, calmly shared their concerns, or simply supported neighbours during a difficult time, Thank you.

Your voices have been heard, and your community spirit has made a real difference.

Wishing you all a peaceful Christmas and a hopeful, productive New Year.

Here's to continuing our work together in 2026 to give our children and our whole community the future they deserve. 🌲 ✨



Eymouth Harbour Expansion – A Significant Step Forward

This month brought exceptionally positive news for Eymouth, East Berwickshire and the wider Scottish Borders with the announcement that the Eymouth Harbour Trust (EHT) has secured £1.4 million from The Crown Estate's Supply Chain Accelerator. This award represents a major endorsement of the Trust's £250 million plus proposal to create a new deep-water harbour facility, positioning Eymouth as a key hub for the UK's offshore wind and wider marine economy.

I would like to congratulate the entire Harbour Trust team for reaching this milestone. The progress made reflects the depth of expertise within the board, the professionalism of the staff, and the strong, organic working relationship between the Trust, the harbour manager, the harbour master and their dedicated teams. Their collaborative approach continues to demonstrate how effective leadership and local knowledge can deliver transformational opportunities for our community's.

The proposed expansion will bring substantial economic benefits, including hundreds of new jobs, increased long-term investment, and strengthened support for the fishing sector. Importantly, this project builds on a vision first developed by Eymouth's most experienced fishermen many years ago. It is encouraging to see a new generation now carrying that vision forward, utilising the most advanced technology to ensure the harbour's future is robust, sustainable and fit for purpose.

I have long believed that, like many aspects of life, the fishing industry will one day come full circle. Cycles return, and when they do, communities that have preserved their heritage and invested in

their future will be best placed to benefit. Just like Kate Bush it will come round again. I remain confident that Eyemouth will see its fishing sector return stronger than ever one day and that will benefit the Scottish Borders from Eyemouth to Hawick.

Securing this funding is an important step toward making the harbour investment-ready. It reflects the confidence external bodies have in Eyemouth's strategic position and in the Harbour Trust's leadership. I look forward to continuing to support the next phase of work as the full business case, environmental assessments and site investigations progress.

Well done to Euan Scott and his Board for the bravery shown in decision making to ensure this project happens.



Road Safety and Police Activity

I would like to acknowledge the recent work of Police Scotland in our area, where drunk drivers have been identified and removed from our rural roads. It is extremely positive to see proactive policing taking place in our more remote communities, ensuring that dangerous behaviour is addressed quickly and effectively.

Driving under the influence is completely unacceptable at any time of year. Unfortunately, the festive period often brings an increase in people taking risks, and this can lead to avoidable and sometimes devastating accidents. I want to be absolutely clear: please do not take the chance. Even one impaired driver puts lives at risk.

As we move through the Christmas season, I urge everyone to play their part in keeping our roads and residents safe. Plan ahead, make responsible choices, and encourage others to do the same. A moment's recklessness can have lifelong consequences — let's ensure our communities enter the new year safely.



Rural community Cafe's.

I have been around a few of the community Cafe's in our area and its been an absolute treat. Co-path have some wonderful cooks dishing up some fantastic dishes including some great soup and scones. Reston put on a fantastic Christmas lunch with a brilliant raffle. It has given me a great opportunity to meet with our locals and put the world to rights. I will continue to come along to the community Cafe's when I can and thank everyone for their welcome and kindness.



Chainsawing courses complete

A huge thanks to Louise Wall who through the BCC RB Trust funded chainsaw courses for eight places that took place in the Eyemouth community woodland. Thanks also go to Jill from Border Machinery Ring for organising the trainer and to John the trainer who was absolutely fantastic. Because of this funding, We now have seven trained and certified chainsaw operators who can help in the Community Woodland, but it also means there are seven people using chainsaws safely in the area and the certificates can also help some of the trainees in their working life. Louise Wall is a passionate lady devoted to nature and woodland management. An absolute force to be reckoned with and gets things done! Thanks from all the trainees, all at Eyemouth community council and myself for her help and support.

Digital Identification Motion

At a recent meeting of Scottish Borders Council, I brought forward a motion requesting that the Leader of the Council write to the UK Government expressing concern about the proposed introduction of a mandatory digital identification system, and calling for proper and meaningful public consultation.

Unfortunately, the motion did not receive sufficient support in the Council chamber to be carried. An amendment was submitted by Cllr Tatler, supported by Cllr S Hamilton, which proposed instead that the Council seek further information from the UK Government. While understanding the intent behind requesting clarification, the practical effect of this amendment is that it prevents a similar motion to my original from being brought forward for at least six months.

As a result, the opportunity for the Council to formally reflect and communicate the concerns held by many residents of the Scottish Borders has been delayed. In my view, this risks silencing public opinion on an issue that raises legitimate questions around privacy, accessibility and equality .

The administration were backing the amendment to the substantive motion, meaning it fell and a vote would have been pointless. It was notable that Conservative members supported the amended position, effectively aligning with the UK Labour Government's approach on this matter.

I would like to thank the councillors who did support my original motion and took the concerns of residents seriously. While I am disappointed that it did not secure enough backing to pass, I remain committed to raising these issues and ensuring that the voices of people across the Scottish Borders are heard in future debates.

Fundraising

It was a really nice night at the late night shopping in Eyemouth. I helped George Power hon Provost on the Mulled wine stall to raise money for the Christmas lights. We raise over £85 in a couple of hours and it was so popular that we run out of Mulled wine and had to shut up early. Eyemouth community council also Donated £500 to pay for new tree lights in Kirk Square as well as buying the Christmas gifts for residents of Saltgreens care home totalling £300 and Bought the gifts from Santa for the town Christmas party, Seashells nursery and Highway Nursery.

George also proves you are never too old to sit on Santa's lap!



Shop from scheme Eyemouth

Fantastic news on the Shop Front Scheme, George Power and I have the first quotes coming in and over the winter months will be getting everything programmed in for a new brighter high street for summer 2026. It would be great to see more Schemes like this for the smaller Berwickshire villages, If the Community councils are interested in being involved to help local shops please get in touch and we can see what funding is available.

Honouring the fallen

It has been a real privilege to attend both Remembrance Day and VE Day events this year. These occasions give us the chance to pause, reflect, and remember the immense sacrifices made by so many during times of war.

We remember first and foremost those who never came home, men and women who gave their lives in service, leaving behind families, friends and futures that were never realised. Their sacrifice is the foundation of the freedoms we enjoy today, and they must never be forgotten.

We also remember those who did return home. Many carried the effects of war with them for the rest of their lives, yet went on to build families, contribute to their communities and live full, meaningful lives. Their service did not end when the fighting stopped, with their families they rebuilt the country.

Men like Abraham Johnston, pictured below, who served his country by sailing in the Russian convoys and later returned home to live a good and valued life. Although he is no longer with us, his service, character and contribution will always be remembered by those who knew him and by the wider community.

Remembrance is not only about history it is about respect, gratitude and ensuring that future generations understand the true cost of conflict. We owe it to those who served, those who were lost, and those who came home, to remember them with dignity and sincerity.



Eyemouth Town Team – Next Steps

Following the completion of the Eyemouth Place Plan, Scottish Borders Council has now agreed with the Eyemouth Town Team to take forward three priority projects for further development and potential investment.

<https://gofibre.co.uk/gofurther-fund/>

1. Town Park and Community Space

Plans are being developed to enhance the Town Park into a high-quality community space. Alongside the proposed destination play park and pump track, there is an ambition to include a café, kitchen facilities, public toilets, improved walking paths, better sports pitches and courts, and flexible space for community events. This work links closely with current proposals relating to Eyemouth Primary School. This is part of the place plan and although will not happen immediately it will be part of the ongoing work supported by community groups.

2. Beachfront and Bantry Improvements

This project focuses on improving the beachfront and Bantry area, including better access, general upgrades and improved park facilities. Feasibility funding is being sought through the Coastal Communities Fund in 2025/26 to help develop these proposals further.

3. Built Heritage Network

This project aims to bring new life to Eyemouth's historic buildings by supporting restoration, reuse and the development of a connected museum and heritage network, helping to celebrate and protect the town's rich history.

To move these projects forward, smaller working groups will be set up to develop detailed project plans. These will help identify which projects are best placed to progress to the next stage of investment.

Borderlands Place Programme

The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal is a partnership aimed at tackling long-standing economic and social challenges across the Borderlands region, including the Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Cumbria and Northumberland.

As part of this deal, the Borderlands Place Programme has set aside £7.2 million to support regeneration in four priority towns in the Scottish Borders: Eyemouth, Galashiels, Hawick and Jedburgh. This means £1.8 million is allocated to each town.

Funding for Place Programme projects is expected to be available from April 2027, although projects that are well developed may be able to access funding earlier, depending on readiness.

Berwickshire Community Council Forum Update

1. Overview

Over the past few weeks, Berwickshire has made real progress in improving how Community Councils (CCs), local residents and Scottish Borders Council (SBC) work together.

Key issues this period have included: Eyemouth Primary School consultation, Community facilities and assets (community centres ect), Transport and connectivity, Support for coastal and rural resilience.


2. New Community Council Training Programme

A new training programme is being delivered through the Berwickshire Community Council Forum, led by Cllr James Anderson and supported by SBC community officers.

The programme is designed to: Build CC confidence and practical skills, Help SBC Community Engagement Officers understand what CCs need, Improve communication between CCs and the Council, Provide consistent advice and guidance across all Berwickshire CCs, First Training Session

Eyemouth CC Training

 5th February

 6.30pm

3. Area Structure & Local Priorities for 2026

To make training and support more relevant, Berwickshire has been grouped into three areas. Each has its own issues and priorities.

Area 1: East Coast & Coastal Communities

Eyemouth • Burnmouth • St Abbs • Coldingham • Ayton • Cockburnspath & Cove • Reston & Auchencrow

Main Priorities: Coastal resilience and flood protection, Support for tourism and visitor facilities, Transport links: A1, bus services, and Reston station, Protecting community facilities and public toilets, Helping communities lead on their own local plans

Training Venue: Eyemouth Community centre

Area 2: Central Berwickshire (The Merse)

Duns • Greenlaw & Hume • Gavinton, Fogo & Polwarth • Swinton & Ladykirk • Allanton, Whitsome & Edrom • Leitholm, Eccles & Birgham • Grantshouse

Main Priorities: Support for agriculture and rural businesses, Housing needs and planning boundaries, Better digital and road connectivity (A6105 / A697), Support for volunteer-run facilities, Improving local transport options

Training Venue: (TBC) Coldstream Community Centre, 6.30pm

Area 3: Western & Lammermuir Hills

Abbey St Bathans, Bonkyl & Preston • Lammermuir • Gordon & Westruther • Hutton & Paxton • Coldstream & District

Main Priorities: Tackling rural isolation and improving transport, Understanding and managing energy developments, Broadband and digital inclusion, Community-led emergency and resilience planning.

Training Venue: To be confirmed with CCs

4. Community Assets & Facilities

Several communities continue to raise concerns about local facilities:

Public Toilets: Especially contracted facilities like the Cedar Café toilets, where a legal clarification from SBC is still awaited.

Community Centres: Eyemouth Community Centre and Duns Southfield continue to play major roles in local service delivery. Work is ongoing to protect Citizens Advice services and secure future investment.

Funding Opportunities: CCs across Berwickshire are being supported to access available grants to strengthen local resilience, improve facilities and support local priorities.

BHA issues have been raised regularly over the last few weeks, I have been talking with Evie Copeland from BHA and ensuring Tenants have the service they require and deserve.

5. Next Steps (Dec–Feb)

Finalise dates and venues for area-based CC training programmes

Establish the Eyemouth Schools Working Group

Begin the 12-week engagement process for the future of Eyemouth Primary

Continue helping CCs access funding and partnership opportunities

6. Conclusion

Berwickshire communities have shown remarkable strength, professionalism and resilience. The progress made in November/December shows what can happen when residents, CCs and SBC work together constructively.

The training programme launching in February will help create a more confident, informed and united network of Community Councils, better equipped to represent their communities and influence local decisions. We have many new faces within the community councils for our area which is fantastic to see!

REVIEW OF NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY COUNCILS WORKING GROUP

NOTE of Meeting of the REVIEW OF NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO COMMUNITY COUNCILS WORKING GROUP held via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 16 December 2025 at 6.00 p.m.

Present:- Councillors C. Cochrane (Chair), J. Anderson, J. Paton Day, T. Weatherston, Community Councillors Mr. A Baillie, Mr B. Hope Mr M. Ladds, Mr K Marsh, and Mr P. Maudsley.

Apologies:- Councillor M. Douglas, A. Smart and T. Weatherston.

In Attendance:- Participation Officer (E. Coltman), Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Team Leader (D. Hall).

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked colleagues for attending the meeting of the Working Group.

2. MINUTE

There had been circulated copies of the Note of the meeting held on 4 November 2025. It was noted that Cllr Anderson had some minor amendments to the Note.

DECISION

APPROVED the Minute.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE

There had been circulated copies of a terms of reference with the agenda.

DECISION

AGREED to approve the Terms of Reference.

4. FACE TO FACE MEETINGS – AGENDA ITEMS

4.1 The Chair invited the Participation Officer, Mr Erin Coltman to lead the discussion in respect of the upcoming January face-to-face session. That session was intended to cover an extended range of business matters and provide an opportunity for networking among members. Attendees were asked to inform the Chair of any topics they wished to be included at the start of January, though it was noted that to date, no such suggestions had been received. The Chair referenced the previously circulated report detailing potential agenda topics and expressed a desire for the working group to help shape the meeting's agenda. All members were encouraged to provide input and communicate any further suggestions for discussion.

4.2 Potential topics for the January session were presented to attendees, with specific reference to the planning process and other items highlighted within the report approved at the meeting on 23 September 2025. Attendees discussed prioritisation, suggesting that that planning, grant funding, communications and websites, and the role of community councils were the most popular areas for focus. The merits of each topic were considered, particularly noting that the planning process could either be relatively straightforward or frustrating. Grant funding for projects frequently presented challenges dependent on the size and composition of different community councils. It was acknowledged that communications had been discussed previously and that whilst the role of community councils was well supported by existing documentation, including guidance on constitutional matters, data protection, community empowerment legislation, and community planning its importance meant that it should be considered as a topic.

4.3 Given recent developments in respect of Live Borders in the region, asset transfer was highlighted as a matter of relevance, alongside the importance of resilience and emergency planning. Youth participation was also identified as an area requiring greater emphasis, with several members expressing concern about ongoing difficulties in increasing youth involvement within their respective community councils.

4.4 The discussion moved towards the practicalities of training delivery. Attendees expressed interest in a training programme encompassing the planning process, with the suggestion that short videos be produced to provide guidance on key procedures and roles. It was agreed that such resources would be beneficial for both new and existing members, particularly given the complexities associated with planning applications and the technical requirements now expected of community council members. The production of training videos was seen as a useful means of supporting knowledge transfer and onboarding, and an action was taken to explore this further. Further debate highlighted ongoing frustrations with the planning system, especially around the recognition and utilisation of place plans. Attendees voiced concerns that significant effort invested in developing place plans was not being reflected in local authority responses to planning applications, and that there appeared to be a lack of meaningful engagement between the council and community councils.

The need for improved recruitment of community councillors, especially those with relevant technical skills, was emphasised, as was the desire for more transparent and accountable planning procedures.

4.5 Examples were shared illustrating the challenges faced by community councils in negotiating matters such as wind farm developments and other major projects, where the complexity of the process and the perceived lack of influence over outcomes was apparent. Attendees also expressed concern that place plans risk becoming obsolete if not actively referred to in both routine and major planning decisions and called for the local authority to recognise the value of community expertise and input.

4.6 It was agreed that future training should address the role of community councils, the responsibilities of office bearers, and youth participation. The planning process was temporarily set aside for the January meeting but was identified as a key issue for subsequent sessions. Attendees were invited to consider the proposed topics further and to circulate any additional suggestions prior to the next meeting. Agreement was reached to focus initially on the role of community councils, office bearers, and youth participation, with further discussion on planning to be scheduled for future meetings.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) that the topics for discussion at the January meeting would be the Role of Community Councils, Officer Bearers, and Youth Participation; and
- (b) that training in respect of the planning process be considered at a future meeting.

5. USE OF GENERIC EMAIL ADDRESSES

5.1 With reference to paragraph four of the Note of the meeting held on 4 November 2025, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Community Co-ordinator that outlined the responses from community councils about the use of readily available generic email accounts, and the risks of users, external to SBC, having access to scotborders.gov.uk email accounts. The report explained that a check of community council email addresses held by SBC indicated that, at the start of November, 47 community councils had generic email addresses e.g. communitycouncil@gmail.com while 19 community councils did not. In order to understand why some community councils chose to use a generic address while others did not two brief surveys were circulated (one for those with generic email addresses and one for those without). One CC who responded to the survey had a generic email address for correspondence with the public but use personal email accounts for correspondence between each other and organisations such as SBC. A total of 27 community councils submitted a response to a survey the results of which indicate that community councils are comfortable using generic accounts such as communitycouncil@gmail.com and secretary@hotmail.com. However, it was recognised that some community councils may benefit from support from setting up and managing such accounts.

5.2 The group discussed the widespread use of generic email addresses among community councils (CCs), with those not currently using them expressing interest in receiving support to set up such addresses. The Participation Officer advised that specialist IT officers had outlined the risks and costs associated with adopting official domains, recommending the development of guidance and

support for CCs to manage generic email accounts. Several attendees shared experiences with different providers, noting challenges with Gmail's system and ongoing costs, while Outlook was highlighted as a more compatible and user-friendly option. The need for practical training, particularly regarding account handover and two-factor authentication, was identified, with Councillor Anderson volunteering to produce instructional materials to support the rollout and ongoing management of generic email addresses.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) that guidance on the use of generic email addresses be developed for Community Councils; and
- (b) that Councillor Anderson work with the Community Engagement Officer to prepare a training on how to effectively set-up and handover generic email addresses to other Community Councillors, particularly using the outlook platform.

6. COMMUNITY COUNCIL NETWORKS

6.1 With reference to paragraph six of the Note of the meeting held on 4 November 2025, there had been circulated copies of a report by the Community Co-ordinator that presented three options for community council networks, including a population breakdown, for discussion. Options for a community council network to replace Scottish Borders Communities Councils' Network discussed previously were Borders wide, Locality, High School Cluster, and Population. The Working Group agreed to consider locality and high school cluster options alongside networks based on the former District Council areas, with all options to include a population breakdown. There was no correlation between the number of community councils and associated population in the options contained in the report.

6.2 Locality forums already existed in Berwickshire and Teviot & Liddesdale. However, the focus for Teviot & Liddesdale was rural issues and the network did not include Hawick or Burnfoot community council.

Locality	No of possible CCs	Population
Berwickshire	21	22,301
Cheviot	13	19,201
Eildon	12	36,423
Teviot & Liddesdale	8	17,706
Tweeddale	12	21,466

6.3 The difference in population between the locality with the largest population (Eildon) and the one with the smallest (Teviot & Liddesdale) was 18,717. The locality with the largest number of community councils was Berwickshire (21) and the smallest was Teviot & Liddesdale (8). There was no correlation between the number of community councils and the population in a locality area.

6.4 High School Cluster Breaking down by HS Cluster would see some community councils grouped with others out with their locality and natural alignment, e.g. Southdean is in Teviot & Liddesdale locality but part of Jed Grammar Campus Cluster. The number of community councils in each area isn't reflective of the population, for example 11 community councils fall into the catchment areas for both Peebles and Berwickshire High Schools but the population falling into the Peebles HS catchment area was significantly larger than the population in the Berwickshire HS catchment area.

Cluster	No of possible CCs	Population
Peebles HS	11	20,248
Gala Academy	5	18,608
Hawick HS	6	17,125
Earlston HS	9	14,244
Berwickshire HS	11	12,958
Kelso HS	7	10,810
Eyemouth HS	9	8,242
Selkirk HS	3	7,836
Jedburgh Grammar Campus, 8		7,025

6.5 The population difference between the high school cluster with the largest population (Peebles High School) and the smallest (Jedburgh Grammar Campus) was 13,223. The cluster areas with the largest number of communities are Peebles and Berwickshire (11) and the smallest is Selkirk (3). There is no correlation between the number of community councils and the population within a cluster area.

6.6 The Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 restructured local government counties and burghs to form regional, district and island councils 7 between 1975-1996. Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 created the unitary authorities that were in place today. While it had not been possible to get a definitive list of settlements in each area the information below was believed to be correct. The locality areas within Scottish Borders Council reflected the former District Councils with two main differences, community councils in the former Ettrick & Lauderdale and Tweeddale District Council areas mostly reflected today's Eildon and Tweeddale locality areas. That was except for Clovenfords which was moved from the former to the latter following the local government boundary changes that came into effect in May 2017, i.e. it would have been in Ettrick & Lauderdale District Council area but was now in the Eildon locality. Roxburgh District Council included the community councils that today form Cheviot & Teviot & Liddesdale localities. Community councils that were part of Berwickshire District Council are the same as those in today's Berwickshire locality.

District Council	No of possible CCs	Population
Berwickshire	21	22,301

Ettrick & Lauderdale	14	37,641
Roxburgh	22	36,907
Tweeddale	11	20,248

6.7 The population difference between the former district council area with the largest population (Ettrick & Lauderdale) and the smallest (Tweeddale) was 17,393. Tweeddale district council area had the smallest number of community councils and the smallest population but there was no correlation between the number of community councils and the population within the other three former district council areas. Prior to 1975 the burgh of Lauder was within the county of Berwick.

6.8 The Participation Officer presented the report and explained that the Working Group was being asked to consider which of the options outlined should be included as part of the wider consultation with community councils. The Working Group reviewed recent considerations regarding the organisation of Community Council networks, with particular attention given to the appetite for smaller, more locally focused clusters. Several options were presented for discussion, categorised by population size, locality, high school catchment areas, and former district council boundaries. It was noted that information had been compiled from available reliable sources, with the support of digital tools, and that those options may not be entirely comprehensive. The intention was to consult widely on these models as part of the ongoing review, thereby informing subsequent recommendations to the Executive Committee.

6.9 The Group discussed the relative merits of each approach, observing that high school catchment areas appeared to address several community needs and offer a practical structure for centralised representation. Consideration was also given to the distinct requirements of areas influenced by specific factors such as windfarms and coastal funds, emphasising the need for flexibility and local relevance in any adopted model. The importance of clustering Community Councils with similar profiles, particularly those in rural settings, was highlighted as a means to strengthen collective advocacy and improve integration. It was agreed to defer any final decision pending further consultation and analysis, with the matter to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) that consideration of this topic be continued; and
- (b) Information regarding “Area Structure and Local Priorities for 2026” from Cllr Anderson to be circulated to working group members.

7 COMMUNITY COUNCIL GOOD PRACTICE – SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT/IMPROVEMENT SERVICE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE

7.1 There had been circulated copies of a report by the Community Co-ordinator that considered examples of good practice across Scotland. However, given the range of work that community councils undertook it had proven difficult to identify specific examples. It was also acknowledged that good practice could be subjective. There were likely to be examples of good practice in the Scottish Borders which were not acknowledged locally. Similarly, there may be as work elsewhere in

the country that those involved believed to be good practice, but others did not believe it to be so. In such circumstances good practice in one area could be business as usual elsewhere.

7.2 The Participation Officer presented the report and explained that the Working Group had requested information regarding good practice elsewhere in the country. Officers had struggled with the request due to its subjective nature. A comparison of national good practice guidance and SBC's CC training handbook had been included within the report. Mr Coltman highlighted that what SBC refer to as 'training' replicated what was nationally referred to as 'good practice'. The Working Group had also asked what the Scottish Government expected of community councils. National support was provided by the Improvement Service. Their email responses had not provided a full response, with a meeting planned for early 2026. Attendees highlighted that whilst guidance was sought and delivered in detail; concern was raised that the length exceeded expectations given the voluntary nature of positions on community councils.

7.3 Concerns were expressed regarding insurance protection for community councillors as part of their roles. Councillor Anderson explained that all community councils were insured by Scottish Borders Council through the appropriate liability cover. Additional extras specific to the functions that individual community councils carried out would need to be acquired where appropriate. The Democratic Services Team Leader and Community Councillor Baillie advised that specific information on insurance was contained in the Community Council Training Handbook and at page 118 of the agenda pack.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) to note the content of the report and the associated guidance;
- (b) that the content be revisited at a future meeting once feedback was received by the Improvement Service; and
- (c) That the Participation Officer provide Community Councillor Hope with contact details in respect of the Council's insurance provider.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 The following discussion took place under any other business. In response to a request from the Chair, it was agreed that the agenda and minutes for the meetings be made publicly available. The Democratic Services Team Leader also undertook to provide a summary to all community councils to ensure that they were kept informed of the ongoing work.

8.2 Community Councillor Hope explained that a 'convention of our Community Councils' event was to be held on Saturday, 17 January from 2pm to 4pm at Jedburgh Town Hall. The event would be focused on considering the impact of renewable energy developments in the region. All community councillors and Elected Members were welcome to attend.

8.3 There followed a discussion regarding the current challenges faced by local community councils. It was noted that several CCs are struggling to maintain active membership and engagement, with particular concern about the lack of new volunteers and the increasing

responsibilities being placed on existing members. The importance of raising public awareness about the vital role of CCs was emphasised, as recent efforts to encourage participation have not yielded significant results. There was concern that without intervention, many CCs may cease to exist within the next decade. It was acknowledged that the difficulties faced by CCs were widespread, with issues such as limited community involvement in local activities, including events like Christmas lights, being a common challenge. Some positive initiatives were highlighted, such as involving young people through junior elections and outreach at local markets, but these remain exceptions rather than the rule. The relationship between CCs, elected members, and council officers was discussed. It was recognised that councillors often faced challenges in engaging effectively with officers, who possessed specialist expertise across numerous disciplines. That could create barriers to effective communication and collaboration. Concerns were raised about the lack of a clear strategy to strengthen the partnership between the local authority and CCs, and the need for such a strategy was identified as a priority. Further discussion addressed the need for improved induction processes for new CC members, including better access to contacts within the council and clearer guidance on reporting community issues. The value of sharing best practice among CCs and facilitating communication between them was also noted, particularly in the context of collaborative projects. Finally, the low attendance at recent milestone events for CCs was cited as an indication of wider disengagement, reinforcing the need for renewed efforts to support and promote local democracy. Suggestions included creating a plan to identify community priorities and developing a management strategy to address them.

DECISION

AGREED:-

- (a) that the Agenda and Minutes of the Working Group be made publicly available;
- (b) that the Democratic Services Team Leader produce a summary of the ongoing work and that summary be circulated to all community councillors;
- (c) that the Working Group consider a Community Council Strategy that focuses on the survival of CCs in the future. The strategy would focus on the relationship between SBC and CCs, as well as a strong induction for new members, including an SBC directory;
- (d) that Community Councillor Hope would share the details of the 'Convention of our Community Councils' event to be held on Saturday, 17 January from 2pm to 4pm at Jedburgh Town Hall with all attendees via the Participation Officer; and
- (e) that an agenda item be included on the January agenda so that the working group can discuss and prioritise what is important to community councillors. The agenda item should be allocated 30 minutes, and a flip chart should be made available.

The meeting concluded at 7.30 p.m.