



Community Council of the Royal Burgh of Peebles & District

1.0 Introduction

Scottish Borders Council (SBC) published a Public Document Pack for consideration at their council meeting on 24 April 2025. Section 7 (Pages 3 – 204) details a report for consideration titled “Borders Sporting and Cultural Estate Review”. The report owner is the Director Resilient Communities.

PCC and others received notification of this review on Sunday 20 April, four days before the council meeting, of which one day was a bank holiday. This has not been well received by the community as it is exceptionally short notice and gave little time for analysis, or for the community to brief elected members on our views prior to the debate.

We note that “Local government Investment has reduced by over 20% in real terms” over ten years. We further note page 79 of the consultant’s report which appears the worst indictment of management this writer has ever seen.

We also note that SBC policy in some areas make the use of some venues free of charge. Any consideration of venue income requires this time to be calculated as an added value even if it does not contribute to cash flow. Each venue should have this assessed and added into the equation.

2.0 Executive Summary.

- 2.1 The SBC document is in two parts. Firstly, an overview of purpose and summary with high level recommendations to the effect that the proposal should be adopted by Council. Secondly, a detailed consultants report that drills down into the operations of Live borders, presents evidence and makes recommendations.

In general, this writer understands that SBC has been forced to provide significant unbudgeted additional funding for Live Borders and that this is unsustainable. **However, where was SBC’s oversight of the company that they set up?** SBC needed to adopt this appraisal process and there is no argument about this as it forms a normal



management process that should have been conducted continuously on a rolling basis. The report to Council and the consultants report are commented upon separately.

We do not believe that communities should be punished for management deficiencies that they themselves have no control over. Although documented again later, this extract from the consultants' report appears to be a complete indictment of the past operation of Live Borders and the oversight of it and consequently deserves an additional airing here.

Page 79 – 4.1.4 Leadership, Governance, and Performance Culture

- Notes a lack of strong leadership and governance
- The absence of a senior leadership team
- Unclear strategic direction
- Limited accountability
- Weak oversight of financial and operational performance
- Poor data utilisation
- Lack of performance driven culture
- Inefficient resource allocation
- Suboptimal service planning

We have anecdotal evidence to support this from past employees of live borders.

2.2 It is important, when considering any changes that they do not water down or negate Scottish Government frameworks and strategies such as:

- National Physical Activity for Health Framework
- Sports Scotland's National Strategy for Sport
- Creative Scotland's cultural Strategy
- Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) Strategy
- Museums Galleries Scotland (MGS) Strategy

These all link to SBC's own strategies as listed and described on pages 23 and 24 of the consultants' report.



This writer believes from the evidence presented by the consultants, the evidence that the consultants have missed out, and by personal knowledge and research, that SBC are putting the cart before the horse. Before taking actions that are difficult to reverse and which have the potential to damage communities, Live Borders management should be reviewed for waste, undercharging and inefficiencies and savings/additional income should be quantified. Each venue identified for closure or change should be individually reviewed. Peebles Drill Hall is a clear example of the flaws in the current report. Dilapidations need to be considered and costed going forward. However, efficient management would have had more income to spend and would have identified critical infrastructure work that in some cases would have saved perhaps thousands of pounds, e.g. the Peebles Drill Hall heating system. There appears a provision of service that has never been charged for, this should be reassessed. Where no charge is considered appropriate, a theoretical figure should be calculated so that added value may be demonstrated. **In short, this writer believes that Live Borders should be reset on a proper business footing!**

2.3 Resilience Directors report to council

This writer agrees with the approach taken in the report. However, there are a small number of points that are worth considering.

1. SBC are servants of the community and should be seen to work in partnership with it. Historically the perception, at least amongst many in Peebles has been that this partnership is weak. This writer understands the difficulties facing SBC in this respect and although there have been improvements over the tenure of the present CEO, bombshells like the abolition of area partnerships and this latest initiative are divisive and damage the relationship of SBC with communities. This writer believes that these initiatives have been badly managed.
2. This analysis of the consultants' report gives concern in relation to section 1.3. "This report..... data driven, evidence based, etc... Significant experience over decades has taught this writer to be cautious of such reports, no matter what the supposed expertise is. In general, if an organisation



has employed the correct people, in the correct roles, in the correct numbers, there should be no need for the significant expense of bringing in consultants. Further, they would invariably do a better job most of the time. There are good and less good consultants. The subsequent analysis of this consultants' report demonstrates some very good work. However, this writer is also surprised by some omissions that are considered critical.

3. In 2, Recommendations, 2.1(d) this report notes "that until a new Chief Executive Officer and Senior Leadership Team is in place in Live Borders..." everything should continue to progress. In August 2024, PCC had an exchange with Sheila Brodie of Live Borders, the full PCC document is attached as Appendix 1. The relevant section includes – "We note with some concern that Live Borders appears to continue to be without a permanent CEO for the foreseeable future. Without, a permanent CEO going forward it is almost impossible to plan effectively and to have true agreement on policy decisions. Strategic decisions taken before a new CEO is appointed, will very likely make it more difficult to attract a person to the post". This view is still relevant 8 months later.

2.4 Consultants' report

Although this writer considers that the report appears thorough, as a responsible executive, I personally would not have published without the completion of an exercise similar to the one described in this document. Further, for each facility where there is a recommendation for closure or major change, this should have been reviewed internally by officers before publication. The example of the Drill Hall in Peebles is a case in point. A lot of the angst amongst the public could have been avoided. Two other issues stand out. Mostly, the data reviewed and compared only includes an extremely short range between 2019 and 2024, a period during which COVID occurred; and the financial data has not been adjusted for inflation. The implication in the report is that unusual circumstances have led to this crisis. In part this is true. Electricity and Gas prices have increased exponentially. However, additional analysis



demonstrates gaps in information that most would consider of importance. The lack of direction, etc. is also critical.

After, several years on the community council, this writer has learnt to have a significant sympathy with the elected members who are required to make decisions. Most are extremely busy helping their communities and have little time to read sometimes several hundred pages in advance of a council meeting. Most are not experts in any particular field and rely on the reports provided by officers. This is not a criticism, it is the way it has to be. However, when an alternative is put forward or additional information tabled by the community, it should be considered, particularly when the source was a Deputy CEO who once had direct responsibility for £130M at today's rates.

3.0 Consultant Report - Analysis

This analysis is not complete due to time constraints. It considers issues directly related to the Peebles Community Council Area and those holistic issues that bear on the PCC area facilities noted.

General

- a) Inflation – Unless inflation is considered, true comparisons are not possible. This applies to both income and costs.
- b) Income and expenditure figures are only demonstrated for 5 years. Further, COVID was in this mix. Inflation adjusted figures for at least 10 years are required to give a more accurate picture.
- c) Several times statements such as “will ensure that Live Borders can provide improved, modern”, etc are made. There are no estimates given of improvement costs. Difficult to cost yes, but not impossible with caveats.
- d) Several times there are references to dilapidation over time, e.g. page 20 “High number of assets in poor condition”. There are no estimates given of renovation costs. Difficult again yes, but not impossible with caveats.



Executive Summary

- a) Reference “Community Asset Transfers”. - Some are undoubtedly successful and some are disasters. The proposals in this report could create a tidal wave of applications with mixed results over time.
- b) Grant applications could grow markedly as communities are forced to fight for limited resources.
- c) “Strategic pricing”. We note that the costs to the consumer have not reflected inflation over time.
- d) “Commercialisation” – Need to be careful. SBC deliver services to people with a wide range of incomes. Pricing the less well off out of accessing services is not morally acceptable. A significant amount of provision is not charged due to SBC requirements.
- e) “Gift aid” – good idea why wasn’t it introduced before?
- f) “Table on page 16 doesn’t seem to match opportunities.

3.0 Current Estate Overview

Page 32 – Purely on a population basis, Eildon with 30 venues at 31% of the population has a disproportionate number of venues as the remainder with 9, 10 and 11 venues and 15% to 19% of the population respectively. . There may be a good reason for this, but it does stand out. .

Page 33 – This describes the widening operating deficit. Having determined that charges did not keep pace with inflation and that there has been a lack of strategic management. This should have been managed on a rolling basis, year by year. This was a major error.

Page 38 – 3.2.2 Expenditure –

- Sports and leisure activities represent 49% of expenditure but 68% of income. Obviously good
- Culture accounts for 29% of expenditure and is almost at parity.
- Head office at 15% expenditure seems excessive.
- Libraries are a service which isn’t expected to pull in an income and at 7% expenditure isn’t a major cost.



- The report goes on to say that sport and leisure is a major cost driver but doesn't highlight that it is the major income driver as well.
- There is no year-on-year comparison

Page 39 – "Total expenditure increased significantly over the period 2019/20 to 2023/24" when it was £12.57M. Bank of England inflation calculator would have given £13.24M. **Therefore, the report as written looks bad. However, the true picture is different.**

Page 40 – When inflation is considered, staff costs were also lower than if they had mirrored inflation. Utility costs of course went sky high as noted.

- Under repairs and maintenance, it notes plumbing and heating costs have increased markedly but doesn't say how much was down to the one item at Teviotdale. Any well-run organisation will have a sinking fund for emergencies.

Page 41 – Marketing expenditure was down by circa £100K when B of E inflation is considered. Presumably this does affect sales.

Page 69 – 3.4 Pricing

- We know that prices did not keep pace with inflation and were static for some years (see appendix 2).
- Membership costs quoted in the report as being "significantly below industry benchmarks". 3.4.9, page 72 "This analysis highlights the critical need for Live Borders to adapt its pricing strategy".

Page 79 – 4.1.4 Leadership, Governance, and Performance Culture

- 4.1.4 notes a lack of strong leadership and governance
- The absence of a senior leadership team
- Unclear strategic direction
- Limited accountability
- Weak oversight of financial and operational performance
- Poor data utilisation
- Lack of performance driven culture
- Inefficient resource allocation
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Peebles Specific Items

Gytes Leisure Centre – The table on page 44 shows a major increase in usage of circa 30% in 5 years.

- Report identifies the strong demand for fitness related activities
- Report identifies the Gytes as a success story
- Report says some activities can go to the Drill Hall – According to this report the Drill Hall should be closed?
- Repurposing not costed
- Financial impact assessed as +£300K. This is very doubtful. It would have to include people moving away from venues like the Hydro, where there is a superb swimming pool and other excellent facilities adjacent to the fitness suite.
- No allowance for lost income during suggested changes

Peebles High School - The table on page 44 shows a major increase in usage of circa 50% in 5 years.

- No explanation of why the increase. Is it the all-weather pitch?

Peebles Swimming Pool – There is a marked fall in attendance at the pool from a high of circa 89,000 to 57,844.

- Does not identify the time out due to the extensive fire. June 2022 to August 2023
- Report identifies the importance of the swimming pool.
- Report says Learn to swim take up is 88.79%. PCC information says there is a waiting list. This does not equate.

Peebles Library / Museum / Gallery – Report notes that Peebles remains a heavily used library.

- Report notes the COVID affect
- However, does not identify that the lift was out of action in the 2023/2024 period for two months restricting access for children and the infirm. March to May 2024
- Page 51 provides data but does not split it and confuses with figures provided on page 49.
- Obviously not properly discussed with Chambers Institution trustees and takes no account of the trust or the current £4M+ project of refurbishment.



Peebles Burgh Hall – Listed as a moderate use venue.

- Figures do not consider the 3 months out of action due to the removal of the suspended ceiling. Or the reduction in use due to the subsequent poor acoustics.
- The report does not seem to understand the unique nature of the Chambers Institution and therefore the consultants cannot have interviewed trustees
- Unsurprisingly this report takes no account of the past history of missed opportunities, lack of strategic direction and waste such as the mismanaged upgrade of the Burgh Hall kitchen.
- Anyway, a new direction is being progressed by the trustees.

Eastgate Theatre – Not mentioned anywhere in the report even though Live Borders was an important source of funding.

Peebles Drill Hall – The proposal to close the Drill Hall or to pursue a Community Asset Transfer is seriously flawed.

- Page 123 states that the hall has no strategic value to Live Borders. This is not relevant. All that is relevant is the cost benefit (to the community and SBC strategy). The potential savings as noted at £35,076 per annum are small.
- Page 124 in describing suggested change to the Gytes suggest moving some activities to the Drill Hall. Surely this is an error.
- Does this suggestion consider historical losses due to poor pricing? See appendix 2.
- The report states that “No usage data available”. Firstly, the Drill Hall committee provide this information to Live Borders and secondly no one approached the Drill Hall committee for information.
- Football was severely reduced from November 2021 until February 2022 due to SBC use of the halls for students after the High School Fire. The income was therefore reduced.
- There was also the COVID affects to consider
- Report does not appear to mention the £14,000 contribution made to Live borders by the Drill Hall management committee.
- The report says that the Drill Hall is well used and implies that alternative facilities may be difficult to find.
- Vital activities in the hall



- Walking football
- Netball
- Hockey
- Badminton
- Table tennis
- RVS day Centre used every morning for catering for elderly and isolated persons
- Art Group
- Friday pensioners lunches
- Some SBC meetings
- “Schools out” which involves a breakfast club, after school club and holiday club. Makes no contribution to income as per SBC guidance.
- Polish School who meet every Saturday morning and provide lessons, history and culture for many local Polish children.
- Two youth bands who have created a bands rehearsal space.
- NHS Blood donors
- Lloyd’s Banking Group for a community bank space. Vital as other banks in Peebles close.
- Peebles high School – Enhanced Learning Support.
- Spanish Lessons
- Guide dog training
- Moorfoot runners
- Peebles Brownies
- U3A Art group
- Carmen’s exercise classes
- Camera Club
- Borderlands tabletop gamers
- Taekwon-do
- Pickleball
- Bridge club



Appendix 1 – 2024 communication from PCC to Live Borders

Dear Sheila

We thank you for your response to our Secretary's email and we note with some concern that Live Borders appears to continue to be without a permanent CEO for the foreseeable future. Without, a permanent CEO going forward it is almost impossible to plan effectively and to have true agreement on policy decisions. Strategic decisions taken before a new CEO is appointed, will very likely make it more difficult to attract a person to the post. Relating to this, please could you explain what is meant by a "single membership trust"

In relation to the central issue that is concerning some people in Peebles, the opening hours of the Library and Swimming Pool, it may be helpful to refer you to an extract from last month's Chairman's report which is appended to this email. Factually, our facilities opening hours do not appear to be as user friendly as those used in the comparisons. In fact, reviewing additional facilities such as Dunbar and Peterhead, these also have more user-friendly hours.

Most local authorities provide mobile library services, and we do not disagree that these are a most welcome resource for those communities served. However, we don't understand where the 160 hours in your response comes from as the library in the Chambers Institution is open for less than 40 hours per week.

Live Borders

Recent concern was expressed regarding the opening times of the library and of the Peebles swimming pool. The swimming pool times, and some comparisons are below. Everywhere reviewed has a better timetable. It is also understood that some facilities at the pool are broken and not thought to be scheduled for repair. Live Borders are in danger of creating a self-fulfilling prophesy. They reduce the quality and make it more difficult to access at times suitable to the public and the public stop going. Finally, someone says there is no demand, and it is not



commercially viable. This must not be allowed to happen, and a review is needed.

Sunday	Closes 12:30
Monday	Closes 21:00
Tuesday	Closes 20:30
Wednesday	Closes 18:30
Thursday	Closes 17:30
Friday	Closes 19:00
Saturday	Closes 12:30

Berwick upon Tweed	Closes 22:00
Wooler	Closes 22:00
Inverurie	Mon to Thurs 06:15 to 21:30, Fri to 20:30, Sun 09:00 to 15:00, Sat 09:00 to 15:00
Fort William	Closes 21:00, Friday 20:30, Sat/Sun 15:00
Lanark	Closes 21:30, Friday 20:00, Sat/sun 16:00

It is a similar picture with Peebles library. However, in this case the trustees of the Chambers Institution Trust, i.e. the elected councillors have a strong responsibility for ensuring that William Chambers' legacy is protected.

Opening times in Peebles are mostly 10:00 to 15:00 except Thursday until 17:00 and closed Sunday. Closing at 15:00 precludes visits from primary school children after school. Literacy is linked to reading and the other libraries reviewed make access easier.

Fort William	Berwick Upon Tweed	Inverurie
Monday 10:00 to 20:00	09:00 to 17:00 (5 days)	Closed
Tuesday 10:00 to 17:30		09:00 to
Wednesday 10:00 to 17:30		09:00 to



Thursday	10:00 to 20:00		10:00 to
19:00			
Friday	10:00 to 18:00		Closed
Saturday	10:00 to 13:00	10:00 to 17:00	10:00 to
14:00			



Appendix 2 – Expanded detail on the Drill Hall

Schools Out

The Drill Hall provides a Professionally registered and regulated childcare service providing vital childcare 50 weeks per year for local working families as a not-for-profit organisation, providing a quality service at a rate 30% lower than the alternative private costs of childcare in the area.

The Drill Hall offers free sessions every week for local vulnerable children who are referred by schools and social services ensuring children from deprived homes are provided with a safe, nurturing, warm space to play with friends, experience new opportunities, complete homework and be provided with food and nourishment. This is even more important during the school holidays when school lunches are not available.

The Drill Hall first opened 10yrs ago with Schools Out catering for an average of 12 children attending after school. This has risen to an average of 30 children per day attending from 7am for breakfast and until 6pm after school and from 8-6pm during school holidays. The Drill Hall is not replaceable due to the stringent regulatory requirements from the Care inspectorate and the lack of useable space within local primary schools. there is no alternative. If the Drill hall were to close this service provision would probably cease with the loss of circa 8 paid staff positions. Further, this provision has provided 12 successful childcare apprenticeships in partnership with Borders College as offered over the years to PHS school leavers. When this service moved to the hall in 2015 it fell under the SBC SLA that provides regulated early years and childcare providers **free lets** of all council buildings. This policy is still in place. When Live Borders took over management it was asked several times over several years what the let costs would be in order to budget for that cost. It wasn't until Summer 2023 that an email was received advising that it was up to the Drill Hall management committee to decide. The committee met and concluded that they would honour the SBC SLA due to the vital contribution School's Out made to the day to day running of the hall (provide free Wi-Fi to all users, administration support,



cleaning) and to the families and children it served. Schools Out also provide the use of their minibus for a suggested donation to many local groups. Peebles Rugby, Peebles football club, Kingsland Primary, Polish school, Peeblesshire Youth Trust are all regular users and have claimed that without the minibus they would struggle to afford the transport costs to get to games and experiences further afield.

Analysis of Drill Hall Charges

Live Borders did not manage the charges for the use of the Drill Hall in any meaningful sense. There were suggested charges which were then left to the Drill Hall Committee to implement. This policy took no cognisance of the needs of Live Borders finances as a public service. The hire charges, at least from 2019 to 2024, were not subject to a sensible review due to inflation, see table below.

	2019		2024		2024 Adjust ed for inflation	
Space	Non-Affiliated	Affiliated	Non-Affiliated	Affiliated	Non-Affiliated	Affiliated
Main Hall	£23 per hour	£16	£25	£17	£28.50	£20
Room 1	£10	£8	£11	£9	£12.50	£10
Lounge	£10	£8	£11	£9	£12.50	£10
PC suite	£10	£8			£12.50	£10
Room 3	£8	£6	£9	£7	£10	£7.50
Junior Groups						
Main Hall	£13 per hour	£10	£14	£11	£16	£12.50
Room 1	£6	£4	£7	£5	£7.5	£5
Lounge	£6	£4	£7	£5	£7.5	£5
PC suite	£6	£4	£7	£5	£7.5	£5
Commercial Hire						
Whole Centre	£ 240 per day	£140	£280		£300	
Main Hall	£30 ph Day			£40 per hour	£37	
Main Hall	£40 ph Evening				£50	
Rooms				£30 per hour		



The Drill Hall management committee historically met with a representative from Live borders every three months. However, this was never the same person twice. These meetings stopped. The Live Borders 'pricing policy' was received at the end of 2023 and the committee considered that to raise the fees payable in line with inflation during a time of cost-of-living crisis would be unfair and possibly result in the closure of long-standing groups. At no point were financial pressures raised by Live Borders. Hence the lower than inflation rises in October 24.

There are numerous examples of waste or inefficiency, which have been reported to Live Borders by the Drill Hall Committee without always generating any action by them.

- First aid kits in non-usable state
- Cleaning chemicals delivered monthly despite not being used by cleaners. Mostly out of date and skipped at cost of £275.
- £855 for Hall equipment. Not known what this was for
- £1109 for office equipment. Not known what this was for
- For over three years the committee have reported the waste of money burned by the current heating system. No radiator valves work so that they are on full, 24 hours per day, 7 days a week from October to May. A timer on the boiler along with a thermostat has been requested without any result.

NOTE: If this is repeated across the entire range of facilities, then the waste may be astronomical. Before any decisions are made, this needs to be assessed.

Report completed by

Peter Maudsley
Chair