



*Community Council
of the
Royal Burgh of Peebles & District*

16 April 2025

David Robertson
Chief Executive Officer
Scottish Borders Council
Newtown St Boswells
Melrose, TD6 0SA

By email

cc Tweeddale councillors, Tweeddale area community councils

Dear David

Area Partnerships

At our last community council meeting I was tasked with making a "Participation Request" for inclusion in the group considering the replacement mechanism for the Area Partnerships. I am sure that there must be a formal application process. However, time would appear to be of the essence as a report is apparently due in June and we are now halfway through April. Please therefore accept this letter as our application. Our community council is sceptical of disbandment of the Area Partnerships and most certainly before a suitable alternative mechanism has been put in place. That is not to say that we disagree with the premise that the partnerships were not working well. Clearly there was a need for improvement, and we will be pleased to make a positive contribution to what comes next if allowed to do so.

There is further concern that the decision-making process to date has excluded the communities. At no time were we asked for our opinions and suggestions. Surely, it would have been better to have improved an existing system, than to start all over again. As one of your elected members has apparently said, "to throw the baby out with the bathwater". The document entitled "Area Partnership Review 2024/25", identifies (1.3) a requirement under the 2015 Act, "to take account of the needs and circumstances of people living within the area and to consult". There was no effective consultation. (1.4) notes that work has been going on for 5 years to make changes to Area Partnerships. None of this work took place within the Area Partnerships themselves. (1.5) notes: "However, the fundamental area for discussion is whether there is value in continuing with area partnerships or whether there are more effective ways to



engage our communities in decision making”. Surely, when determining what the communities need, the communities, in this case in the form of the area partnerships, should have been involved with the discussions. That would have taken account of at least a part of the views of the community. According to Peeblesshire News, there is a Councillor, Caroline Cochrane, who is SBC’s executive member for community and partnership development. We had never heard from her, let alone ever had an interface. Not very impressive really!

However, we are where we are and must move forward. I have been involved with area partnerships for more than six years and with SBCCN and I believe that I may have something to offer to the discussion. During those six years, I had some discussions with John Curry, who once agreed that the East Lothian model was worth considering and I tabled two reports on the area partnerships, one on 24 July 2020 and one on 24 May 2022. These are appended for interest. We mostly agree that the SBCCN or similar is of value and similarly we agree that it badly needed improvement. To this end I joined a meeting at SBC HQ on 09 November 2023 to discuss how the SBCCN could be improved. This initiative was never repeated and, apart from a draft minute, there was no further communication relating to it. The time given by the community representatives was in effect wasted. There is a working party on “non-financial support for community councils”. This project was initiated by the council’s executive committee on 14 May last year and was expected to take 6 to 12 months. As area lead, I completed the work I was tasked to do and stood ready to carry this forward. This too appears to be moribund as the last communication to me was 7 weeks ago and the last to the other community councils was January. Is it any wonder that we lose faith!

This is SBC’s last chance to produce something that works. I agree that community councils don’t always help SBC and the lack of support from the communities that we serve isn’t helpful to us. However, this initiative can be made to work if the will is there. In my past commercial life, I would have been told, “just do it”; there were no medals for failure!

Yours Sincerely

Peter Maudsley
Chair