



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

**Draft Minutes of the 299<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Community Council  
held on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2022 at 7.00pm at the Burgh Hall Peebles.  
The meeting was recorded for the purposes of Minuting and Reporting**

**Present:** L Turnbull, A Snoddy, F Richardson, P Maudsley, J Crawley, G MacDonald, A Mackenzie, G Ramsay, S Watson, H Young, C Forsyth, J Wilson (observing), Cllr Small, Cllr Pirone, Cllr Douglas, Cllr Thomson

**In attendance:** M Davey of the Peeblesshire News and Keith Langley of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

**Members of the Public:** J Wilson, L Mahon and J Ross

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and started the evening by announcing that there would be no election in November. Sophie Hamilton, Fiona Richardson and Gill MacDonald, previously co-opted members, are all now full members. Peter Maudsley and Chris Forsyth have been re-elected for a further three years. Thanks to Cllrs Begg and Pirone for offering to be returning officers had there needed to be an election. Jacqueline Wilson is a new nominee and is in attendance tonight to observe.

The Chairman asked everyone around the table to introduce themselves which they did.

The meeting was then handed over to Keith Langley of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service who is the Group Commander for the Scottish Borders, part of the East Lothian, Midlothian and Scottish Borders Local Senior Officer Area. The Area Commander is Hilary Sangster. K Langley works with H Sangster to manage the Borders area.

K Langley had been given some questions ahead of his visit to the PCC and was happy to answer those questions and thanked the PCC for the opportunity to come and answer the questions, which were in relation to the fire at Peebles Swimming Pool on 19 June 2022.

K Langley broke his response into four parts: prior to the fire, the actions that evening, the actions after that evening and the role of the on-call fire fighters and staffing in their stations.

The fire was started deliberately, in what they believe was the wheelie bin. This is not first time they've attended a secondary fire in the area that has been started deliberately as there have been other incidents of anti-social behaviour. The watch commander had raised already this with police and the community action team and they had gone into schools to give safety talks and deliver safety messages. CI Fisher of Police Scotland is dealing with that as crimes have been detected.

The fire started in the wheelie waste bin which should not have been against wall and under the eaves. The bin should have been off the building and secured elsewhere. There is no way of knowing if the bin was pushed against the wall or had been stored there. What is known is that Peebles Swimming Pool is audited regularly and has a very good compliance record. A post-fire audit will be done once the cordon is removed.

On the evening of the fire, the control room in Edinburgh was alerted at 0251. The pump from Innerleithen was available at 0252 and it was mobilised to the fire as it was the nearest pump. The first pump was there 0254. The incident commander did an assessment and at 0255 said he had not enough resources to deal with the fire. At 0256 he called on support from the other on call stations. K Langley pointed out that the on-call stations have part-time firefighters with some staff having more experience than others. The nearest officer was mobilised at 0256 and at 0259 the incident commander sent back a message saying the fire had spread to the roof and asked for the police to attend as it was a malicious fire. At 0315 there was a second pump in attendance and at 0330 the third pump was in attendance. The water hydrant on the bridge was required for the large volume of water that was required, and the police assisted securing it. At 0329 they sent another systems message for pump 4 and at 0344 the station commander took charge where he did a further risk assessment for priorities and resources. He employed aggressive firefighting techniques because of the nature of premises. E.g., there was no risk to life in the building and that there were chemicals kept in the building. The fire was not totally under control at 0344 but they were able to use thermal imaging to identify where the fire was inside the building. There was a wind that morning and that was pushing the fire into building. There were officers in the building with breathing apparatus. By 0430 they were able to start cutting away the roof above and below which helped. It was confirmed that there was a small amount of asbestos in the roof but this was low risk. At 0530 the fire was under control and being checked for fire spread. At 0600, the incident was scaled back to two pumps. At 0800 they were sent a stop message and the area was handed over to the responsible person with recommendations.

K Langley confirmed, in his view, that the first attendants' actions were important, and they had done a good job.

Moving onto staffing, K Langley wanted to talk about what is being done locally and nationally. The on call fire fighters across Scotland work tirelessly to help local communities, balancing work and families commitments too, which means their availability can be dynamic. There is a computer system called Gartan, it is a central system to keep an eye on what's happening and to gauge availability. There are recruitment issues nationwide. There is an on call support watch commander in each area, three in Scottish Borders. There is one in the Peebles area and the station is trying to focus on recruitment and pinch points. All issues are being worked on nationally. A pre-employment form has been introduced. An on call firefighter has to make a huge commitment of a minimum of 80 hours a week on top of a job. There is a 12-week introduction to let them see what's involved, as otherwise what happens is that staff join, then after 12 – 18 months they lose their commitment. They are looking at moving the staff around, as that had not been done before and that is helping relieve some pressure and producing some positive statistics.

They have introduced focussed recruitment. In Peebles it is very difficult to staff the second pump. Daytime cover is important, but communities have changed, as there are people who don't work in Peebles during the day, and it can be difficult to find the cover in the summer because of holidays.

On 19 June there was no one available, this was because of absences. It has been investigated and dealt with internally. Steps have been taken to maximise availability, there is one new firefighter and two are waiting for medicals. This was the first night in 38 weeks that the pump was not available. Normally the level of commitment and availability is fantastic. 94% of the time they have had a response for the on-call pump in Peebles.

The Chairman thanked K Langley for his useful and candid explanation and said that he was reassured to some extent that appliances were there quickly, although was concerned about lack of cover. However, an explanation had been given and noted that steps were being taken to remedy things which was appreciated. Peebles is a vibrant town, with hotels, and he hopes that the fire service can guarantee if the shout comes the fire service can respond appropriately.

S Watson asked if there were plans for a full-time station? K Langley said they were looking at resources, but that they are forecasting the next 10 to 25 years.

The Chairman said it was a good question, as the LDP is being renewed for the next 10 years and it suggested there might be an additional 1700-1800 new houses. Has the fire service factored these in the LDP? K Langley, said yes. In the SBC planning process, this goes through the fire safety team. Overall, domestic estates are low risk because of smoke detecting systems. The Fire Service saves lives. The new builds are high standard and nowadays people are safer in their own homes. The Chairman asked if the extra 1700 houses would have an impact on the Fire Service's ability to respond. K Langley said national fire calls have dropped around 60%, there is one service all over Scotland and that there is good fire cover for Peebles. P Maudsley asked how many shouts are there a week? K Langley said, averagely 3-4 a week. S Watson said if there are more houses, there's more risk. K Langley said, yes, but the Fire Service is to save lives. The Chairman said we all appreciated the retained fire fighters and said if there is anything we can do to help with recruitment let us know.

The Chairman welcomed the two members of the public to the meeting and asked them whether they were here to simply observe or if they wanted to discuss something. They both said they wanted to see what happens and also to talk about antisocial behaviour in Peebles.

**Apologies for absence:** Cllr Tatler, Cllr Begg, Cllr Douglas, G Mackie, M Bruce, J Shearer, J Mitchell, S Hamilton, L Hayworth, S Rae, H Young

**Approval of Minutes:** A Snoddy confirmed that Cllr Douglas did attend the meeting on 8 September via Zoom.

**Approval of the Minutes of 8 September 2022, as amended,** proposed by C Forsyth and seconded by P Maudsley.

**Matters arising from the Minutes:**

**Taxis:** Cllr Douglas was following up about disabled access to taxis and about the standards of cleanliness and had fed the following back via the SBC enforcement officer:

*Re-cleanliness of vehicles. It is a condition of taxi operators to maintain their vehicles in a clean and tidy condition both interior and exterior. We do conduct spot taxi checks and by luck I am in Peebles on Tuesday so will conduct some checks. I will also send out an email to operators reminding them of their duties. If the Community Council have complaints regarding a specific taxi firm please ask them to email me details.*

*In relation to disabled passengers access. We have specific Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) licensed as taxi/private hire vehicles however it is up to the operator if they wish to have one of these vehicles. They obviously cost more to purchase but as an incentive we do not place an age limit (normally 8 years old) on WAVs. There are 5 licensed WAVs in the Tweeddale area.*

Additionally: *In relation to the suggestion Peebles taxis were not up to a cleanliness standard, as well as the reminder email sent to operators yesterday, I visited the rank twice today and each taxi and driver were of an acceptable level, clean and tidy.* The Secretary can produce the full response on request. The Chairman suggested that if anyone was informed that a taxi was not up to standard they should email Mike Wynne at SBC Licensing Standards.

**Victorian building at PHS:** Email from Cllr Begg to say no buildings at Peebles High School are listed.

**Fence at Priorsford Nursery:** Cllr Pirone confirmed that fence will be replaced by a higher one in the next couple of months.

**Speeding at South Parks:** Cllr Pirone spoke to P Gilhooley and they have looked at the data. There is not much more that can be done for now. They may look at employing Community Speedwatch UK for Tweeddale.

**Repairs to Pirate Ship in Kingsmeadows playground:** Cllr Pirone confirmed this has been done.

**Parents issues sub group:** H Young is absent but sent email to say that there is nothing to update. The works on the Glasgow Road are ongoing and she has followed up with Cllrs Tatler and Pirone.

**Police Report:** M Bruce has circulated his report. The Chairman said that M Bruce is establishing a good relationship with the local officer. Looking at the multi ward report there are a lot of incidents of ASB in it but there is not much more we can do until M Bruce and the group start to work. It can be seen from report that there are a number of dedicated teams working with young people and M Bruce's working group will develop facilities for young people in Peebles. The CC recognise that most of the young people are good people but there is a small minority are causing problems, but they are problems. The CC has also made progress with the street pastor scheme. Things are happening, being driven by the CC. P Maudsley said he was concerned about the number of assaults in the report. The Chairman agreed. M Bruce has been speaking to Community Sergeant who said Police Scotland are setting up hubs for members of the public to speak to officers about their concerns. There needs to be an improvement, but we will stick with it and let M Bruce and his group do their work with SBC, the police and youth services. P Maudsley said he had been speaking to parents with concerns, and The Chairman noted that the Head Teacher at PHS is supportive and understanding.

J Ross said she had not been in Peebles long, around 2 years. She came to live here to be near grandchildren. She said that Peebles is a lovely town with many appealing things. However, since she has moved to Peebles she has called 999 eleven times and has had to call 101 more than 30 times. She claimed that ASB is not a small problem here, it is a big problem. She claims there are gangs and they are growing. Police Scotland advised her to get Ring doorbell, which she did, but that attracted more people to her door. It recorded several incidents. The video was given to police. The police said they did not recognise the persons on the video, even though they had also been provided with names. J Ross said this is not good enough.

L Mahon said she has lived in Peebles for a number of years and has been going through a similar number of incidents including being threatened in her own home. She said it's been going on for years and she considered the Police response to be that she should just live with it.

The Chairman said what he heard from them both was not new. The CC has been desperate to get a proper police response.

L Mahon said the ASB has involved lots of broken windows. The gangs are growing and there are weapons.

The Chairman said the steering group knows about the gangs, being driven by a core of individuals and something needs to be done to divert the hangers-on from core group. If we can do that, we might make an impression. We need to find alternatives for the young people to hang out, other than, e.g. Tweed Green.

L Mahon said this feels never ending and there are adults involved as well in the ASB. Cllr Pirone asked about the adults and L Mahon confirmed the adults involved come from the pubs. The Chairman confirmed we have asked the police for robust policing. L Mahon said that the police simply give them the equivalent of a "slap on the wrist". Cllr Pirone said unfortunately, that's the legislation. L Mahon said they run off if they know the police are coming so when the police arrive there's nobody to be seen.

C Forsyth said that he had had the same hassle. His door had been kicked, he'd phoned police and had no response but kept phoning. Eventually he did speak to the police, but they effectively shrugged it off.

L Mahon said we need to get the police back in Peebles.

The Chairman reassured L Mahon that the CC was behind her and would support her, however the CC is made up of volunteers and have no resources whatsoever. The CC role is to tell the police and SBC about the problems we're experiencing. They've been doing that for 3-4 years, and little seems to be happening.

J Ross said there was CCTV installed at the top of School Brae after a number of incidents which made a difference. This is no longer being monitored, or has been switched off. The Chairman confirmed that SBC are not renewing the CCTV.

L Mahon said when the police are visible in town, there are fewer issues. She said the police she has spoken to are amazing.

J Ross pointed out that all these new homes in the LDP are going to need to be supported by police and fire service.

Cllr Pirone wanted to make it clear that all these issues have not fallen on deaf ears. SBC is listening and it is in hand. She can assure everyone that something is being done. The police were merged into one force and since then they have had recruitment issues resulting in less police on the street. She has offered to write to the Scottish Government on behalf of the police, but they want to recruit first. SBC is not in charge of the police, but they can work with them. They pay CAT to carry out that task. She cannot force the police to be in Peebles 24 hours a day. There are continuing issues with resourcing and neither the SBC nor the CC can do anything to resolve that. However we need to solve the ongoing problems. Ringleaders have been dealt with. Adults is a different thing, and the

Police can arrest them. SBC is looking at mobile CCTV and if they can they will bring that to Peebles. There are Police hubs coming to Peebles during 19-21 October and Cllr Pirone will send the visitors that information when she has it. Cllr Pirone hopes things will calm down but encouraged everyone to keep phoning the police.

Cllr Thomson said the police have made a commitment to try to be more visible in the town but if they get called off then they need to move on. L Mahon said that's why the need to re-open the police station. Cllr Pirone: SBC and CC cannot solve that. She suggested that they could write to their MSP. L Mahon confirmed she has spoken to MSP over the years. P Maudsley: at the moment we have M Bruce fronting some initiatives that offer promise and the SBC initiatives are also welcome. P Maudsley said he was told that at the weekends there are only 10 or 12 officers in the Scottish Borders at night. If they arrest someone, two of those officers have to attend Hawick Dalkeith or Edinburgh to book it in. There is a major problem with resource.

G MacDonald would like to know more about the hubs. Cllr Pirone explained they would be held in October 9am to 4pm in Peebles and that she hopes to know this week exactly where. She also acknowledged that some of the public won't feel comfortable speaking to them.

The Chairman asked that we move on because of time. Everyone has got the message that there is an ongoing policing problem and he said to the visitors to continue to write to their MP and MSP.

#### **Chairman's report.**

PHS had held a Freshers Fair and he thanked A Snoddy, M Bruce, S Hamilton, J Mitchell and F Richardson for attending. There was lots of interest at the stall.

The Chambers Institution Beneficiaries Group had met, and there had not been a lot of progress. A Snoddy and P Maudsley attended. They have no Chairperson yet.

ASB: There had been letters sent between the SBC councillors and the Chairman. The SBC letter was published on social media before the Chairman had had a chance to read it and discuss it with his colleagues, which was unfortunate. There had also been a letter from Mr Wilson from PHS which had been published. The Chairman had nothing more to add.

The Tweeddale West councillors have said they would like to introduce a rota system for attendance at the meetings. The Chairman asked if those not in attendance can submit a report/update, by email, for that month. Cllr Thomson said that the Cllrs meet regularly to discuss what goes on at each of the community councils and to make sure all actions are ticked off. The person coming will be able to update the CC with everyone's updates. The Chairman said the feedback was needed.

#### **Cllr reports:**

Cllr Small: the High School work is starting this week, trees have been cut down. There's not been much on the planning side of things happening. He and Cllr Thomson had attended one of the day centres in Peebles, Dovecot Day Centre. They'd been invited to see their activities and to ask residents for their views on what's happening in the town. There had been concerns about the potholes. The councillors had come away with a list of things that the residents had given them to consider. Cllr Small said that he and Cllr Tatler had talked about a meeting regarding the car park charges, in November. S Watson said there was a meeting about the car parking back in March and that a consultation should have gone out. It was meant to go out in June and then August and nothing had happened. P Maudsley confirmed this and had consulted about the questionnaire that

was to go out. Cllr Tatler is aware the questionnaire should have gone out and didn't and has therefore missed the busy summer period. Cllr Tatler suggested it could go out in two tranches. There are a number of things to be discussed.

Cllr Thomson: She attended the Peebles Citizens Advice Bureau AGM and she is also the link for the SBC voluntary sector. It was a good meeting with good ideas which she will take back to SBC. She'd been contacted by parents having difficulty accessing services at school so she is working with Peebles' families around that. There had been Customers Engagement Sessions in August and had been asked about the outcome of that. She has been told that it is on the Chief Executive's desk so something should come out soon. She hopes this will be a localised response. Things continue to be busy. She has not got date for new planning guidelines.

Cllr Pirone has been looking at the bus route 62. The public is returning back to commuting and there have been a few complaints, e.g. the buses have been too busy to get on. The bus should return to its 30-minute service by the end of the year and there will be new buses too. They've had ongoing issues with recruitment and sickness. They have introduced some new routes and new double-deckers will help. In planning she has been working with DDL care in Cavalry Park as they have put in a change of use for their building. It is an office but they want to put a care hub in underneath. The support offered from the CC is appreciated. Cllr Pirone has seen P Maudsley's letter and is hoping for holistic approach. In her role as chair of CAT she has concerns that issues discussed are not public facing, so starting from this week they will be issuing a statement to say exactly what is being dealt with. She has been working on the 20 mph consultation and speaking to police, unless there is a lot of accident data, they won't enforce. She does not agree with this and is looking to establish the Tweeddale area as a Speedwatch area. Cllr Pirone will need community involvement to include training the public to use the handheld speed guns. Letters from the police, visits and charges may come of this. The Chairman said he is not sure any enforcement action will come of it but can see the benefits. Cllr Pirone said that it is working successfully in Fife and people are being charged as a result. G MacDonald said that the over 16s at the High School may want to be involved. P Maudsley again said caution should be implemented where different communities work in an area that is not local to them for personal safety reasons. The Chairman confirmed that the CC is supportive of the initiative in principle. Cllr Thomson said there is a will in other areas to have the 20 mph introduced.

Cllr Small confirmed that the footpath to Eddleston should be completed by mid-November.

**Treasurer's Report:** G Mackie's report had been circulated.

**Planning Report, Scottish Borders Community Council Network, Peebles Common Good:** P Maudsley said the planning report had been circulated. Ballantyne Place – For information – Glenrath Farms have applied for a multioccupancy license for a property in Ballantyne Place, presumably to lodge farm workers in. The application has been withdrawn. Milne and Pickles in the Northgate have applied for a liquor licence, and did anyone have any objections? No. Nothing much to note in the new planning applications. There will be a presentation from Leithenwater Wind Energy Project in December. The latest development would sit up above Peebles/Glentress with 13 turbines with a blade tip height of 660 feet.

There is a meeting of the SBCC on 20 October and P Maudsley will attend.

The parking working group had already been discussed earlier in the meeting.

Chambers Institution Trust. P Maudsley disagrees with the Chairman that not much is happening. Cllr Tatler's view is that actions were agreed, taken to trustees and the trustees agreed with Cllr Tatler. This may allow us to go forward. The next meeting is on 18 October and we will see what happens. There is no chairman elected from beneficiaries but not from want of trying. Cllr Tatler asked for volunteers, meanwhile he's doing a fine job. There will be one or more inspections of the institution to give the beneficiaries group a good overview that will link it in future proposals.

P Maudsley had a meeting with Crick Carleton on the Peebles Action Plan, now the placemaking plan for the future. C Carleton will lead the initiative for a couple of years. He is also facilitator for Tweeddale Area Partnership. They have agreed to involve as many people as possible from Peebles by going to numerous groups. The U3A will give a presentation, the callants, etc. to try and get a buy in. There have been more than 1000 comments in from public regarding the concerns about Peebles regarding facilities and amenities, traffic and parking and a sense of control.

There are invitations for comments regarding proposals for making part of the Scottish Borders a National Park. Do we want to be part of it? Do we support this? The present plans do not include Peebles and Tweeddale. P Maudsley does support it personally but is aware others do not. The Chairman put it out to the councillors for their viewpoints: S Watson would like to part of the National Park, but asked if we were would new housing be curbed? Planning said we need another bridge, but we still see housing going up. South Parks was supposed to be 50 and became 71. P Maudsley said it's a complex area of planning. There will be no major development on the southside till there is a new bridge and there is no money for a new bridge. The Chairman said it might curb excessive housebuilding. A Mackenzie: Not only might it be good to curb new developments but it would be good for tourism. G MacDonald: feels tourists come to Peebles and Tweeddale already; what difference does the status give us? She would need to know more about it. P Maudsley said that controlling new developments would be good but thinks that it would advertise our position more, otherwise all the paperwork would not include Peebles. Cllr Pirone confirmed that it is the Scottish Government that sets it up, e.g the Cairngorms National Park. P Maudsley: Better to have more tourists than not enough. The Chairman asked if it would affect planning decisions and the marketing? Do we think that Peebles and the wider area would benefit? A Snoddy: Ex-Cllr Stuart Bell warned us against joining a National Park status. J Wilson asked what is the rationale for making it a national park? Why Scottish Borders but exclude Tweeddale/Peebles?. To make an informed decision we need to understand the bigger picture. Cllr Pirone agrees with S Bell in that we ought to be careful. It may mean we are not able to do certain things such getting investments. As things stand she would vote against it as she would worry without the investment side, jobs don't come, that it would be tourism and nothing else. The Chairman thanked her and said her view was useful. G Macdonald suggested we could ask Stuart Bell for his input? The Chairman's early feeling is that we should support it, but takes Cllr Pirone's and J Wilson's point about finding out more. P Maudsley will investigate and update us all.

**Peebles Community Trust:** M Bruce had circulated his report. The AGM scheduled for next month has pushed back to February 2023 as there are data protection issues to sort.

## **AOB**

The Chairman had circulated Jeremy Cunningham's Report which discusses school transport. It is a good report. Should SBC be ferrying the students from their pickups right to the school door? There are increasing issues with traffic on the bridge, Springhill Road, etc. Could it be that other drop off and pick up points could be set up in town and they could walk to and from the school? We need to



debate this and ask how people feel about it. Cllr Pirone said she had not seen the report. A Mackenzie said that a member of the public had brought to his attention that buses are almost mounting the pavements making the pedestrians feel unsafe. Would it be possible to put bollards around the pavements, like the ones in Northgate? It's probably not the right width. It was a good report. The Chairman is going to start the conversation with SBC. The report talks about SBC traffic officers resisting the suggestions to walk from the High Street. Cllr Pirone asked if this has been shared with the head teacher, or the Parents' Council? That should be where the conversation should start. The secretary will check with Jeremy Cunningham to see if he has been in contact with Mr Wilson.

The Witches Memorial unveiling will be at 11am on 22 October on Tweed Green. F Richardson and G Mackie will attend for the CC and M Bruce will be representing another group. Anyone can attend.

The Great Borders River Clean. If anyone wants to get involved, the Secretary has details.

The recent Tweedlove Festival was very busy. There was lots of wild camping at The Sware, causing problems in woods which were used as toilets. Kingsmeadows car park was taken over by professional teams and there were campervans at Haylodge Park and East Station car park too. Cllr Pirone spoke to the licensing officers as they need licences to run these events. She asked the police to raise some of the points. This is common good land. There are a few things needed to be done to make it better. J Ross commented that it was run well with security during night. She had applied for a permit to park but it was a waste of time as there was nowhere to park. No designated area. Cllr Pirone will look into the issues from the wild camping.

### **A Statement by the Chairman and Vice Chairman**

It is with considerable regret that I have decided step down as Chairman and member of this community council as of the 10th November which is the date of our next AGM.

I feel that I need to explain why. Quite simply I have been 'scunnered' by the the antics of Scottish Borders Council including some of its officers and councillors. I have no desire to denigrate the whole of SBC, many of whom do a great job. This is not a decision made in haste but one I have been pondering for many weeks. I have served on this community council for over six years and as your chairman for the last three and half. I have enjoyed my time on the CC and the support that I have received from you members but events over the past two years or so in particular have made me realise that SBC is not interested in what people have to say or the PCC on their behalf. Whilst councillors and SBC in general talk of community empowerment and engagement and working with the community, they are only interested in this if it agrees with their own narrow view and they seek views of the community, it seems, only, to tick boxes.

You will all remember that I was pilloried by councillors over the data breach debacle; indeed bullied by them even though I had offered an apology. This I believe was an attempt to shut me, and by extension you, the community council, down.

Then we have had the ongoing debacle over the puffin crossing which was forced through in spite a large body of objection in the town. It is worth recalling, that this CC never ever asked for there to be no crossing, only that there should be a holistic review of all traffic issues in the town to determine the best solution. Every one of our councillors chose to ignore the points made by this community council. From my own experience I know that this junction is now less safe than it was; others have

told me the same thing. Time will tell, I only hope that there are no serious accidents. Social media reports indicate that this junction is now more dangerous for all users, but what do we know?

Within the last few weeks I wrote to the Tweeddale group of councillors asking questions on behalf of the CC and the public regarding the ongoing ASB issues. To then publish the response, addressed to me as Chairman of the PCC, on social media before I had had a chance to read it and discuss with colleagues and to then present the letter as a response to our petition was disingenuous, discourteous and unprofessional. Well over 400 people have signed the petition showing their support for our stance.

I had hoped that after the May elections we could have reset the relationship between this CC and SBC; it was not to be. Councillors and Officers do not like to be challenged; this is a necessary function of CC operating in a democracy and especially when we see errors being made. I have seen little or no evidence that councillors are prepared to challenge officers on behalf of this community. I think that councillors and SBC in general do not view the role of CC as important and considered a nuisance by asking difficult questions, but that is what we are here for. I have tried to represent your views and those of our community, incidentally, members of the community have commended me for that, unfortunately it has made little difference. It is now time for me to allow someone else to try. I wish them luck. Finally I do need to let councillors know that many of our residents are disillusioned with SBC and things need to change; many of our residents feel Peebles and Tweeddale is out on a limb and not getting its fair share of resources and attention.

**The Chairman then read out a statement from the Vice Chairman, Scott Rae:**

With regret, I have decided not to stand as a Community Councillor at the end of my current term, which I understand ends at the end of the next Community Council meeting on Thursday 13 October, which I will unfortunately be unable to attend. So in effect, I'm resigning with immediate effect. I've truly enjoyed my time with the Community Council, and value the relationships I've built as part of it, however I question the value that I can add when I don't feel like we're being listened to.

We're a totally voluntary body – we receive no pay, no funding (beyond a yearly administrative grant), no training and no material support from the council – we do what we can with the skills and resources we have available to us, and do our best to represent the views of the local community to the council (and other bodies) and try to hold them to account on local issues, on behalf of the local community. However, particularly over the last year, it has become clear that we - the lowest level of local democracy and the one closest to, most representative of and most available to the people of Peebles - have little support from our local Council or its elected representatives and are often simply ignored and occasionally belittled when we raise concerns on major issues for the town. This is disrespectful to both the Community Council / Community Councillors and the people who share their concerns with us. I accept that the relationship between the Community Council and the SBC Councillors has been poor at times. I'm not saying we hold no responsibility for how this relationship has progressed – it is a 2 way street - however it's largely due to our frustration at the lack of response, communication, real consultation, consistency and respect of our views and those of the community.

There are a number of specific examples that have led me to stand down, and I'll provide detail around these separately. However to summarise, they relate to the response to the recent vandalism and threats / intimidation / violence, the handling of the pedestrian crossing in the

Eastgate, the management of community assets via Common Good and opaque committees, and the lack of support for Community Councils when dealing with complex issues such as complaints.

The common themes however are those I've mentioned, as well as what appears to be denial that there is an issue and that people are concerned, lack of communication around issues, lack of real, meaningful, open and transparent consultation with the community, a lack of long term or holistic thinking, and a lack of support or willingness to represent views that appear to go against council thinking. Most seriously though, the lack of material or legal support for us as Community Councillors in dealing with issues, but particularly the event of, or responding to complaints being made against us is unacceptable. We try to do the best we can with the resources and skills we live in an increasingly complex world, but being a transparent public body open ourselves up to criticism or complaint without the legal or material support other public bodies may have – which isn't acceptable and needs to be resolved.

Many of these are legacy issues, and there was (and perhaps still might be) a hope that, based on their comments during their election, our new Councillors would approach these issues in a different, more inclusive, constructive and consultative way, but with a couple of notable exceptions, I'm not seeing real evidence of this yet. Maybe my words might help prompt change.

I'd like to wish everyone well and good luck for the future.

Thanks

Scott Rae

The Chairman said he is happy to remain in the chair until 10 November with the support of the committee members.

The Chairman said he was surprised to receive S Rae's resignation and confirmed that they'd arrived at their decisions independently.

### **Round the Table**

S Watson: Saddened by the Chairman's statement and agrees with what he says. There's been no support from SBC, it's been terrible, they do not listen, the consultations are just words nothing else.

G Ramsay said he is also sad to hear the statement.

A Mackenzie said he has been on the CC for more than 16 years and that L Turnbull is undoubtedly the best Chairman during his time. He is sad to see him go.

G MacDonald said she was shocked and saddened. She has heard many things across her careers and believes that L Turnbull has chaired everything professionally. She wished him luck saying he had big shoes to fill.

E Small: nothing to add, but sorry L Turnbull is leaving.

**The meeting finished at 2105hrs, and the next meeting will be the AGM on Thursday 10 November at 7pm.**