Your Stronger SNP Team Delivering for all of the Scottish Borders

Scottish Borders SNP

2017 Council Election Manifesto
A successful and stable coalition, in which the SNP play a full part, has been running Scottish Borders Council for the last 5 years; despite unprecedented changes to the political landscape in Scotland and the UK. The Scottish Referendum in 2014 brought more power to Holyrood affording the opportunity that policy initiatives will better meet our local needs. There has been a change in UK Government, and the European Referendum of 2016 heralds’ changes to our fortunes forever. With such growing uncertainties now is not the time to change a successful Scottish Borders team.

The financial cuts imposed by the Tory government in Westminster have fed right through to all Scottish local authorities who have to do more with less in order to maintain the quality of public services delivered to meet your needs. Brexit – whatever that comes to mean – will not lessen these financial challenges which will inevitably impact on every household. So a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will focus on delivering:-

- Services that are of the best quality and value for money
- Services that are directed at supporting the most needy, whilst meeting the aspirations of all
- Services that help our citizens, our communities, and our Border economy to prosper
This Administration has grown total expenditure on maintenance and upgrading of our road network from the levels left to us 5 years ago. We will maintain expenditure at a level which improves the position of the Scottish Borders on the national Roads Condition Index to at least the Scottish average for comparable authorities over the period of the next Council. A Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:-

• Build on the successful completion of the new Borders rail line through maximising the opportunities to bring jobs to our area and not just take commuters north.

• Back the campaign for reinstatement of the Borders Railway through Hawick to Carlisle, by supporting practical action.

• Continue to support the reopening of Reston Station and improvements in connectivity via the East Coast Mainline, as this will stimulate economic development within Eyemouth and East Berwickshire.

• Support initiatives for bus interconnectivity within the Borders and encourage optimization of connectivity to new and existing rail services.

• Defend the provision of local public bus services in the Borders.

• Work with neighbouring authorities to promote Gateway Towns and the A68 as a historic cross-border tourist route.

• Investigate the introduction of 20mph residential zones to make our urban and congested rural streets safer.

• Provide sustained long-term investment to build out the network of multi-use paths so we have more walking and cycling routes to work, to school and for recreation.

• Establish a cost effective enforcement solution & deterrent for those towns most blighted by anti-social on-street parking.
This Administration successfully promoted the designation of the Borders Rail corridor as an Assisted Area and campaigned for more locally managed Enterprise support for the South of Scotland. The Scottish Government has responded by supporting the establishment of a dedicated Skills & Enterprise organization for the South. So a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:-

• Work closely with the Scottish Government and our partners in the South of Scotland Alliance to quickly establish and resource the operation of a new Skills & Enterprise Agency for the South. We want this to safeguard existing jobs and attract new jobs and industries to the Borders. We will ensure that regional decisions to improve our economy are made by regional leaders to address regional priorities, involving business people and elected members with clear local responsibility.

• Work to continue the local upward trend in youth employment by encouraging apprentice-ships throughout the local economy - in particular demonstrating best practice in SBC’s own recruitment procedures – and by supporting local initiatives of Developing our Young Workforce.

• Support the effective co-operation of tourist businesses and agencies in schemes (eg Tourism Business Improvement Districts) which will build identifiable marketing brands that will grow the Scottish Borders as a tourist destination.

• Ensure that the new location of the Great Tapestry of Scotland will become both a popular tourist attraction and a regeneration catalyst for Galashiels.

• Seek wherever legally possible to help small local businesses achieve a competitive advantage. For example by promoting the expansion of and uptake of the Small Business Bonus which has reduced or eliminated rates for 6200 Borders businesses; and through supporting other forms of business rates relief – including Community Empowerment schemes where these are appropriate.

• Build on the roll-out of super-fast Broadband which has been supported by £8.4m of Council money. Whilst the target is to give access to 93.8% of properties by 2017 many are being left behind. We will champion rural communities in the South of Scotland as priority targets for the Scottish & UK Governments’ new broadband initiatives.

• Continue initiatives which will sustain shops in our town and village centers and encourage greater take-up of vacant shops and offices within our communities.

• Complete the Conservation Area Regeneration schemes in Selkirk and Jedburgh whilst promoting potential projects in Hawick and other communities.

• Implement with Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise the ambitious Hawick Action Plan to help turn-around the economic fortunes of that community.

• Actively encourage public, private & voluntary sector initiatives to reinvigorate our town centers. This will be supported, as appropriate, by loans & grants.

• Complete the Hawick Flood Protection scheme and maintain the pace of investigation and investment in the protection of other flood-prone communities.
This Administration has exceeded its target of supporting the build of an average of 100 new affordable houses per year (118 achieved). Scottish Borders Council has now targeted and laid out plans to complete 238 new affordable homes per year over the next 5 years. So a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:

• Work closely with the Scottish Government, Housing Associations and local contractors in order to secure funding which will enable SBC to meet its challenging targets for affordable housing in the Borders.

• Work to ensure that the necessary public infrastructure is in place so that new housing developments do not diminish the quality of life for our local communities.

• Work with other agencies (Police Fire & Rescue and Safer Communities Board, Housing Associations and Social Work department) to develop meaningful strategies targeted at reducing anti-social behaviour in our communities.

• Keep up social and enforcement pressure on those few owners who do not clear up after their pets foul our pavements.

• Continue the successful young drivers’ courses so that more 17-25 year-olds improve their skills and become safe drivers.

• Work with Sports Scotland, community partners, and local clubs to keep upgrading sports facilities to attract visitors and improve the health & wellbeing of Borders.

• Work with Forest Enterprise Scotland & Developing Mountain Biking Scotland to improve the mountain bike offering in the wider Tweed Valley for the benefit of Borders residents, sporting enthusiasts and visitors.
 Schools and Learning

Education is the largest area of local authority spending and responsibility. Closing the attainment gap is a clear Scottish Government priority. Whilst we want to achieve this it will not be at the expense of overall attainment. So a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:-

- Ensure adequate support is in place for individual Head-teachers as they directly administer the over £1.8m pupil equity funding which is allocated to individual Borders schools.
- Ensure support for all our education staff as they take up responsibility for embedding the new Curriculum for Excellence in our learning communities.
- Maintain the pace of the school building programme which is rectifying years of underinvestment in the physical infrastructure of our schools.
- Work on a presumption of keeping rural schools open as these are at the heart of many small communities.
- Ensure that the resource priority is front line teaching and specialized support as opposed to education administration.
- Encourage the provision of language teaching in Scottish Border schools at as early an age as practical.
- Ensure early-stage detection of learning difficulties and social difficulties of some school pupils so that support can be effectively directed.
- Support the expansion of early learning & child care from 600 to 1140 hours per year.

 Social Work in the Community

A significant recent transformation has been the integration of Health & Social Care, pooling relevant resources and capability under one Board to provide better, joined-up, health & social care services. The Council has also established SBCares as a Limited Liability Partnership wholly owned by SBC and working in partnership with them to provide adult social care services on their behalf. Recognising that Scottish Border Council’s role is now more in policy definition & scrutiny rather than the direct delivery of social care services; a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:-

- Support realisation of the benefits of an effective partnership which oversees the integration of services between SBC and NHS Borders. Including more easily accessible high quality services; timely services and effective use of resources.
- Continue the targeting of financial resources at support services which enable older and more frail people to stay in their own homes wherever possible.
- Seek to ensure that growth in the provision of extra care housing matches the growth in demand from our aging population
- Work with other agencies to ensure the security and well-being of young people who act as carers within our communities.
- Ensure that the highest standards of quality are maintained in the provision of home care.
Farming & fishing sectors are a vital component of our local economy, providing both food security and the achievement of climate change targets. Recognising that if we leave Europe there will be massive changes to both sectors, a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:

- Lobby Scottish and UK Governments for appropriate replacements for current European farm and environmental support programmes which recognise the importance environmental & economic importance of agriculture and forestry on marginal land.

- Use its Business Gateway function to encourage and support co-operative investments by farmers and fishing interests to ensure as much economic value from the Scottish Borders renowned primary produce is processed by local manufacturing and marketing capacity, with the aim of supporting local employment.

- Bring maximum benefits to the Borders economy while we can from EU environmental and rural diversification programmes such as LEADER.

- Continue agreed support for Eyemouth Harbour Trust and encourage diversification of the use of Eyemouth harbour; making use of European Fisheries Fund and Coastal Communities funding.

- Work with fishermen and onshore processors to stabilize and secure capacity and to provide a sustainable future for the sector along the Berwickshire Coast; including taking advantage of new developments in Scotland’s relationship with Europe.

- Support the Scottish Borders Food & Drink Network to improve the ability to meet local demand for local procurement.
Council Organisation and Resources

The efficient and effective operation of Scottish Borders Council within a fully democratic framework will be the best basis for maintaining the quality of Council services whilst meeting public expectations. Therefore we welcome the prospect of more community and empowerment initiatives from the Scottish Government. Across Scotland local government is striving to meet the public’s expectations at the community level. So a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will:-

• Increase the role and resources of Area Forums so that within a framework of locality plans they take a growing responsibility for the definition of priorities for local services.

• Pilot participative budgeting initiatives as a new Area Forum responsibility. Build on this experience to grow community choices budgeting towards 1% of SBC’s budget, including innovative funding schemes.

• Reposition Community Planning. This currently fosters co-ordination across public bodies only at a regional level – we will seek to give it a place in each locality/Area.

• Improve public engagement by bringing some council committees and meetings closer to communities throughout the Scottish Borders.

• Ensure that every pound spent by SBC maximizes benefit to Borderers through, inter-alia, pursuing strategies of continuous improvement.

• Continue balanced investment in maintenance of Council properties.

• Support appropriate Scottish Government initiatives which are brought forward to enhance the role and responsibilities of Community Councils. Legislation is needed to make any substantial changes, and training & support will be needed to make changes effective.

Local Powers in Local Communities

Where citizens become involved in their local communities a feeling of ‘belonging’ is fostered, this builds confidence in people and communities. There have been significant legislative changes in this field (eg Community Empowerment) in the last 5 years. Scottish Borders Council has rolled out a successful resilience scheme and piloted a localities programme in the Cheviot area. Community involvement in any locality varies over time and a Scottish National Party led administration on Scottish Borders Council will support the virtuous circle of involvement by:-

• Helping those communities who feel able to look after their own amenity areas by investigating innovative means to facilitate this.

• Helping Community Councils and Community Development Trusts to develop their own empowerment and resilience initiatives as a means of supporting regeneration of local communities.

• Seeking out examples of best practice in local empowerment across Scotland and the UK and investigate their applicability in our rural environment. Including community led urban & rural land use initiatives.

• Encouraging the dissemination of best practice between Community Councils and between Community Development Trusts

• Encouraging the development of community-run social enterprises – in particular by seeking to make such initiatives a priority for the new Southern Skills & Enterprise organization.