

29th June 2023

POLICY LEADS REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides members with an update on key areas of activity for each Policy Lead Councillor. This aims to provide updates from all Policy Leads as regularly as possible, so that all members are informed, up-to-date and able to engage with current issues.
- 1.2 The last Policy Leads report was considered by Council at its meeting on 27th April 2023. This latest report provides an update on activity during the period to 15th June 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the report.

**3. POLICY LEAD FOR FINANCE AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES –
Councillor Gary Mulvaney**

- 3.1 **Introduction:** This report provides members with an update on my activities as Depute Leader, Policy Lead for Finance and Commercial Services during the period for April - June 2023
- 3.2 **Financial Services:**
Finance: The Service have been extremely busy working on the annual accounts. Officers are also working with our new external auditors.

In terms of the year end position, at the time of writing, the Council will declare a £3.3m underspend after accounting for earmarking. The main contributing factor to this underspend is the one-off Treasury gain reported during the year of £5.4m combined with a number of other over and underspends to reach the net position. These are

detailed within the revenue budget monitoring pack as reported to council.

The Service have also been busy working with the Communications Team to prepare data and populate the budget simulator to go live on the 19th June.

Local Tax Collections: The Council Tax collection rate for the current year at 31 May is 20.50%, this is 4.57% lower than the collection rate for the same period the previous year 2022/23. That year's rate was distorted, however, by the Cost of Living Crisis Award which we received from the Scottish Government.

Comparing our current year's collections with those of May 2021 gives a better indication of progress and we are 0.07% up on that year which is good news.

The Non-domestic rates (NDR) collection rate is 23.14% - up 6.6% for the same period last year with more paying by direct debit over ten months.

NDR Revaluation and Empty Property Relief (EPR) changes: There have been significant changes in Non-Domestic Rates bills as a result of the Assessor's Revaluation of Rates which is effective from 1st April 2023. This has seen a significant increase in the cost of rates for the Council with our charges of £4.959 million for 2023/2024 representing an increase of £0.644 million from the level of charges in 2022/2023, a 14.9% increase.

In addition the level of NDR charitable relief awarded to Live Argyll in 2022/2023 was £644,191. This is £57,611 above the baseline for the year and the Scottish Government will reduce the Council's NDR funding within the General Revenue Grant as a result.

The gap between the NDR Charitable Relief ALEO baseline and the likely level of relief awarded to Live Argyll in the future is predicted to increase to £161,000 in 2023/2024 and £280,000 in 2024/2025 because of the increase in rateable value of the new Helensburgh Waterfront property.

The Council will be appealing NDR increases on schools and all Live Argyll properties which might reduce these gaps in the future. Proposals must be submitted to the Assessor at the Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute Valuation Joint Board by 31st July.

Benefits Processing: At 31st May 2023 processing speeds for Housing Benefit have dropped to an average cumulative processing time of 21.47 days which is just outside our target of 21 days. The average time taken to process a change in circumstances is 4.64 days which is still very good and below the target of 6 days.

Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs): The Total expenditure in SWF at 31st May 2023 is £79,307. Our programme funding allocation for 2023/24 is £458,284 and we will monitor spend closely over next few months.

At 31st May 2023 our spent and committed amount on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund is £751,302. The Initial DHP Tranche 1 funding allocation for 2023/24 in Argyll and Bute is £869,638. We expect Tranche 2 funding of £192,259 to be due later in the year, bringing our total DHP allocation to £1,061,897 for the year.

Flexible Food Fund: At 31st March 23 the project has supported 1,810 households who are suffering from food and fuel insecurities in Argyll and Bute, with a combined client gain of £2,527,536 which is an average gain of £1,400 per household.

The project has attracted funding of £204,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for each of the next two financial years.

In addition, the project has just won a second national award, The Community Focus Award at the recent ASSIST FM Awards for its work with the Community Food Forum and foodbanks. We are extremely proud of this achievement and of the scheme in general which supports our most vulnerable households.

Energy Support: The Council Tax team are currently processing applications from customers for the Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS) and Alternative Payment Fund (APF) on behalf of the UK Government. These schemes have now closed. They were aimed at people who do not have a direct relationship with an energy supplier and therefore hadn't benefitted from the £400 grant that reduces energy bills or the £200 for those using oil or gas central heating. As volumes of applications had not been as high as expected across the UK and we had experienced the same here in Argyll and Bute, we contacted all care homes in our area to encourage take-up of the scheme. This resulted in 525 applicant awards totalling £145,000. The scheme is now in the process of being wound up.

3.3 **Commercial Services:**

Helensburgh Waterfront – Commercial: The initial stage of the agreed marketing process, which had a closing date of 3rd May, has now been completed. I am happy to report that there is positive interest in the private sector investing in our new Waterfront Development and town centre with nine expressions of interest. There have been a range of expressions of interest including household retail names, a fast food chain, hotel, community proposals and an Electric Vehicle (EV) charging hub.

The next phase of the project will be to undertake the community engagement exercise during June and July. This will be led by a community engagement specialist who will present the themes of proposals received to established community groups via workshops and collate feedback. There will also be a workshop with local schoolchildren. It is anticipated that recommendations on a shortlist of options will be available for Area Committee consideration in August 2023.

Following the practical completion of Helensburgh Waterfront Development, the project had been shortlisted for the national Planning Awards in the category for the Best Use of Arts, Culture or Sport in Placemaking. Unfortunately, we did not win, but it was certainly an achievement to be shortlisted nonetheless.

Rothesay Pavilion: Robertson Construction Central West commenced work on site at the start of May as planned and are progressing well. The stage 1 works will ensure that the main building is wind and watertight and are due to be completed by August 2024.

Lobbying and fundraising efforts continue to be taken forward, led by Economic Development and Rothesay Pavilion Charity. The next meeting of the Lobby Group is due to take place on 16th June where an update on the range of lobbying activity that is underway will be provided. A regular progress newsletter will be issued to members and stakeholders regularly (like that done for the Helensburgh waterfront).

- 3.4 **Depute Leader:** I continue to have regular other meetings with the Leader, Policy Leads and the Chief Executive in respect of council business and priorities. In addition, I have deputised for the Leader at COSLA meetings.

4. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

- 4.1 **Argyll and Bute Coronation Flag Competition:** Following my update to the April Council meeting on the flag competition for Primary School pupils across Argyll and Bute, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the four regional winners who were shortlisted from more than 1,100 entries:-



- Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands area winner - Harry MacColl-Smith – P7, Inveraray Primary School
- Helensburgh and Lomond area winner - Leah Rosenburgh – P1, Cardross Primary School
- Oban, Lorn and the Isles area winner - Amelia MacLean – P7, Tobermory Primary School
- Bute and Cowal area winner - Roxana Dulaska – P7, Dunoon Primary School.

Roxana was also selected as the overall winner thanks to her wonderful flag design, which was flown at Argyll and Bute Council Headquarters, Kilmory, on 5th May 2023.

- 4.2 **Dunoon Grammar School Gala Dinner:** Dunoon Grammar hosted a fantastic Gala Dinner on 26th May 2023 to celebrate winning 'The World's Best School Award' for Community Collaboration. The event was arranged by the Junior Advisory Board who did an excellent job! The school catering team provided a delicious three-course dinner to guests, including Dame Emma Thomson and her husband Greg Wise, who delivered after dinner speeches. A raffle and auction were also arranged with lots of prizes on offer.

Building on this success, I am delighted to report that David Mitchell, Head Teacher, was shortlisted for the Head Teacher of the Year Award at this year's Scottish Education Awards, sponsored by Education Scotland.

4.3 Rothesay Joint Campus Early Learning Centre (ELC): Following the closure of a partner provider in Rothesay, and to address the subsequent shortage of childcare and funded ELC places on Bute, the service have agreed to undertake 1140 hours related capital investment at the ELC at Rothesay Joint Campus. This will enable the service to deliver childcare and 1140 funded entitlement on Bute for children aged 0-5, allowing us to better meet our statutory 1140 requirements and to support working parents of non-eligible 0-3-year-olds. The delivery model will allow parents to choose for their child to attend term time (38 weeks per year) or over 46 weeks per year, providing a flexible service to parents, including the option to purchase additional 'wrap-around hours'.

4.4 Headteacher Conference: Head Teachers from across Argyll and Bute gathered in Oban at the end of April to share good practice and collaborate with educational experts from across the country.

Elizabeth Morrison, a Professional Advisor at the Scottish Government, spoke about her vast career in education, focussing on strategic leadership, whilst Joan Mackay from Education Scotland's Curriculum Innovation Team provided head teachers with an insight into evidence-led curriculum design.

Head teachers took part in various workshops throughout the afternoon, which focussed on:

- Leadership of Early Learning
- Leadership of Inclusion
- Shared Leadership Across Settings
- Leading Self-Evaluation for Improvement (delivered by Dave Gregory, Senior Regional Advisor with Education Scotland).

4.5 Developing Young Workforce Conference: Education professionals, agencies and employers met in Dunoon on 19th May for the inaugural Developing Young Workforce Argyll and Bute Conference.

More than 120 delegates gathered in the Queen's Hall to share their thoughts and discuss ideas based around this year's theme:

Guaranteeing opportunities for young people and employers in Argyll and Bute.

A number of young people talked about their experiences of vocational learning and work experience, helping delegates to gain a valuable insight into how schools, employers and communities can work in partnership to provide more prospects for young people.

Delegates also had the opportunity to participate in a range of workshops:-

- Young Person's Guarantee - Scott McKinnon, DYW Regional Lead
- Achievement and the Wider Education landscape - Klaus Mayer, Education Scotland
- How to become an Influencing Employer Partner – Argyll and Bute DYW Co-ordinators
- The Apprenticeship Family - Colin Buchanan, Skills Development Scotland
- Flexible Learning Plans - Simon Easton, Argyll and Bute Education Manager

4.6 Celebrating Success:

Awards for promoting children's rights: Small Isles Primary and Kilcreggan Primary have both been working hard to promote children's rights and their efforts have paid off, with the schools receiving prestigious Silver and Gold Rights Respecting School Awards respectively.

Small Isles have embedded teaching and learning of rights across the whole school community, involving parents, staff and pupils every step of the way to drive forward school improvements through curriculum design and working groups.

Pupils and staff at Kilcreggan have been applauded by accreditors for a number of strengths at the school, including:-

- Children understand how their rights are connected to their lives within school and their local and global community;
- Consistent messaging about rights and respect which underpins every dimension of the school's work;
- A strong ethos of staff valuing and respecting children's views;
- Children have a good understanding of global issues that affect their rights, and are empowered to campaign for the rights of others.

A huge congratulations to both schools, keep up the good work!

Further success for Dunoon Grammar School: Young people and staff at Dunoon Grammar School are celebrating success at a number of prestigious UK Awards. On 14th June 2023, the school lifted the UK Community Award at the Education Business Awards held in London, in recognition of the work undertaken by the school to tackle a lack of opportunities for young people in the area. After evaluating the community's needs and gaps in the workplace, the school facilitated over 50 skill-based courses to empower students to work in professions vital to the local community.

This was followed by news on 15th June that two Dunoon Grammar teams had won at the Apps for Goods UK Showcase:-

- Swipe n Swap scooped the Future Founders award sponsored by TPX Impact. Designed and coded by Mya McNiven, Tiffany McArthur, Jordan Dgany, Jodie Loy and Olivia Kay this app aims to tackle both the climate and cost of living crises by making it fun and easy to trade pre-loved goods.
- David Wallace, Liam Kennedy and Noah Gallanagh created an app that will educate and 'train' pet owners and lovers to take better care of their pets and the environment – thanks to a talking AI version of their real actual pets. They received the Sustainable Innovators prize, sponsored by the Bank of New York Mellon.

Well done to everyone at Dunoon Grammar School who was involved in contributing to their continued success at a national level. The young people are a true credit to Argyll and Bute.

5. POLICY LEAD FOR ROADS AND TRANSPORT - Councillor Andrew Kain

5.1 Introduction: The nature of the remit I will repeat some detail from previous reports and make no apology for this.

Roads are Council strategic assets used by the vast majority of residents in Argyll and Bute for everyday living and all manners of business; and essential for economic success. While there will always be aspects which should and can be improved, the network in Argyll and Bute has been improving over the last few years. Prudent investment has resulted in a much improved network. There is much more to be done and, with £8,000,000 committed in the budget for this year and next, more will be done.

5.2 Road Improvements: This is an area worth repeating: more than 86% of Argyll and Bute's roads are in a good or fair condition according to the latest survey of the area's network. Despite normal maintenance work in some areas badly affected by the pandemic, more than 50% of

the region's roads network, which covers more than 2,300 kilometres, is within the 'green' or 'good condition' band.

As has been previously mentioned but remains an important factor: while as above the situation is improving it would still take in excess of £100m to get us to 100%. As everyone, will appreciate this will not be possible within ever constrained budgets. So, the service is engaged in looking to do more for less.

The importance of an effective road network is obvious to all. Road networks are a significant economic enabler for all areas. Available and safe roads, both local and trunk routes, are particularly important for the economic prosperity of rural mainland and island communities of Argyll and Bute.

Prudent investment and sensible engineering solutions over previous years have seen our road network improve and continue improving. However, I believe we can, and should, do more through greater cooperation between Members and Officers.

5.3 Greater involvement - Roads Reconstruction: The Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 1st June endorsed proposals for additional member and Area Committee engagement for the development of the annual roads capital programme. This will create better focus on priorities and potentially have a positive impact on time and resources. The intention is to engender a more effective collaboration between members and the service with the objective of enabling us to be focussed on priorities and do more for less and in timely manner. I remind again on the considerable shortfall that does exist across Argyll and Bute to get all roads to A1 condition; and stress this greater engagement must not be seen, or driven, to be an area competition. The final say will always be based on facts such as; safety, economic benefit and in the end engineering/resource realities; and for the benefit of all Argyll and Bute as a whole.

5.4 New vehicles procured from additional funds following Budget meeting: I am pleased to note that a low mileage, ex-demonstrator jetpatcher has been secured and will be delivered in the coming weeks. Additional operator training has been taking place during June to increase the number of users that our operations team will have. I look forward to this additional resource being available. I have seen the jetpatcher in use and this technique helps to provide proportionate repairs not only filling any defects but also sealing hairline cracks and other voids which, if not treated, would lead to further deterioration of our road network.

Our teams are also in the process of procuring a road marking machine. Unfortunately they have not been able to find a suitable vehicle already built so this will take longer for the vehicle to be delivered due to its specialist nature and build time. However, when achieved this vehicle will add value to operations and possibly provided a revenue earner.

5.5 Route Optimisation: As reported to the June Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, the Council now has a supplier in place to provide route optimisation software. Whilst the first project to be rolled out is to be around waste collection, which sits within the portfolio of the Policy Lead for Climate Change and Environment, there will be a number of opportunities which will be explored across the Roads and Transport portfolio where there are many cyclic activities that have the potential to benefit from this type of system.

5.6 Marine Issues:

Oban Municipal Harbour Authority: The Council's plans to establish a Municipal Harbour Authority in Oban are continuing to move forward. The council is already the Harbour Authority for Oban North Pier, and while CMAL/CalMac and Northern Lighthouse all have responsibility for separate areas within the bay, the approaches into and out of the bay are currently unregulated.

The Council and stakeholder communities want to establish a Harbour Authority to enforce positive safety measures and, on 22nd December last year, the Council submitted a draft Harbour Revision Order (HRO) to Transport Scotland. Since then, positive discussions have taken place between the Council and Transport Scotland, and the Scottish Government's legal team will now review the draft HRO. We are now awaiting approval of the draft HRO from the Scottish Government. Once this has been done, the HRO will need to be approved by the Argyll and Bute Harbour Board before we then begin the statutory 42-day public consultation. Oban Bay is very busy with marine traffic, particularly during the summer months, so it is vital that we establish a Municipal Harbour Authority for this area so that people have safe and regulated access within the bay.

While there are differences of opinion as to some of the operational detail there is expressed and, I believe, unanimous support among stakeholder groups for addressing greater safety and future development of Oban Harbour through the establishment of a Municipal Harbour Authority.

Port Marine Safety Code: the Council remains on course to achieve this national good practice standard for its ports and harbours – something that very few others in the UK have secured. The Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC) sets out a national safety standard covering different aspects of running ports and harbours, and represents ‘good practice’ as recognised by a wide range of industry stakeholders.

While the timing of further progress with the HRO is largely out of our hands we continue progressing as much as we can. Another two sessions have been arranged with our designated person, who is an independent professional, to update and inform the Harbour Board and stakeholders on regulation and process.

5.7 Kilcreggan Upgrade: we visited Kilcreggan Community Council in June to brief and engage more fully with residents and local members on the ferry replacement / infrastructure proposal as there had clearly been some confusion as to intentions and indeed the Council’s role.

As has been the case throughout the objective is to improve the reliability and resilience of the ferry service between the village, the wider community and Gourock. This is within the constraints under which we must operate.

After a frank and constructive discussion I believe we have an opportunity to more fully engage with the community now and when confirmation of ferries is achieved. The community have done considerable work in outlining an holistic vision on how to improve the attraction, facilities and economic future of Kilcreggan. Part of this vision is reliable ferry services that will better enable developments in tourism and improved access for locals.

Transport Scotland is (hopefully) close to confirming the designs for new passenger ferries coming into operation on the Gourock, Dunoon and Kilcreggan routes.

I am confident, once it is clear on vessel design that, working with the community the service can deliver a solution that is sympathetic to the community vision with our objectives aligned. A solution that will enable berthing in more difficult conditions provide greater resilience, contribute to economic benefit and enhance local communications.

5.8 Luing school transport: Since before my time as a councillor there have been issues raised by the community on Luing in relation to school transportation. These were raised and led by Councillor Mackenzie along with other ward Councillors. Behind the scenes both

Roads and Education service officers have been working towards addressing community concerns. This was with the backdrop of an already legal and compliant service; and limited resources. It was also a desire to look to a solution that would help address more strategic island and community issues.

On Wednesday 14th June officers and members met with the community on Luing and the basis of what could be an elegant solution for school transport and greater community flexibility was agreed in principle. The community have sent their proposals, as suggested, to the Head of Roads and Transport who will coordinate with Education as to how to achieve delivery. The target is to deliver an agreed solution by 1st August 2023. The discussions also included sustainable economic development and a schools transport solution will add to those foundations and assist in more strategic and sustainable development.

- 5.9 The Rest and Be Thankful:** I am pleased with the announcement from Scottish Government that a final proposal has been confirmed for the permanent works at the Rest and Be Thankful on the A83. It is my understanding that given the majority of the proposals will take place on the existing carriageway, the construction process should be able to commence much sooner than if an alternative route was to be chosen due to a reduction in consents, permission, land acquisitions etc. being required. That said, points of detail will be incredibly important and as a Council I would suggest we need to understand the duration of the physical works, the capacity and speed of the use of the alternative route during the construction phase, the return to service plan should the alternative route not be available, the vision for walkers, cyclists, wheelers and equestrian users and finally, the operating plan particularly around dealing with any collisions or broken down vehicles within the covered section of the route.

We will of course be engaging with the new Transport Minister to ensure she is fully aware of the strategic importance of the Rest to the economy of Argyll and Bute and therefore Scotland; and that the construction phase has the potential to cause considerable further disruption.

I think it is appropriate to commend Councillors Donald Kelly and Douglas Philand on their dedication and persistence over many years (along with others) in lobbying vigorously for a solution to this situation. Without their efforts and that of others this outcome may not have been achieved. However, while I am sure they will continue to ensure that commitments made are brought to fruition I would urge their continued vigilance and support to officers in ensuring the construction

phase is, in and of itself, considered a strategic operation and that disruption is minimised.

- 5.10 Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2)** STPR2 is highly significant for the future of transport investment in Scotland for the next 20 years and the recommendations for our communities are particularly disappointing in light of the initial assurances we were given and how engaged the Council was throughout the entire process.

My view is that some of the outcomes if progressed, as suggested, will have unintended, negative and potentially damaging consequences. We will be seeking further discussions with both Transport Scotland and the new Transport Minister of Scottish Government, as soon as possible, to both express our major concerns about the review and to seek further clarification on issues of a strategic nature impacting Argyll and Bute.

- 5.11 Flood Prevention:** The £15 million Flood Protection Scheme in Campbeltown is continuing to make good progress, with the project on course to be complete by February 2024.

Works in Argyll Street, Castlehill and Ralston Road are now finished, and Burnside Square is due to reopen to pedestrians at the end of June, although some elements may not all be complete by this stage due to the lead in times for some items of additional requested works.

As part of the improvements, the Council is installing outdoor electrical points in the Square as well as arranging portable tie-down anchor points. The Square will remain closed to traffic until later in July. This is to allow the new entrance and exits to be completed and for the appropriate signage to be in place, as well as allowing drainage works on Burnside Street to be completed.

In terms of the surrounding streets, drainage works are required on Witchburn Road and, due to the nature of these works, a road closure is necessary.

The service is working with the contractor to develop these plans, and has requested that works are carried out during the school summer holidays to reduce some disruption. This is likely to be a rolling closure, where sections of the road are closed at a time, rather than a whole stretch.

Work is due to start on 3rd July for around six weeks. Diversion routes will be in place around the Meadows/Smith Drive for cars and along

the Moss Road for HGVs, with specific arrangements in place to maintain local access.

The installation of new drainage under Dalaruan Street is due to begin in the school summer holidays and a public information event will take place prior to works commencing.

Working with contractors, the service is doing everything it can to get the necessary work done quickly, with as little disturbance, as possible. I look forward to a visit in near future to review and discuss with local members.

5.12 Future: While much has been achieved the challenges will remain; resources will become further strained. Within these constraints Officers are looking to effectively 'do more with less'. Technology will not solve every problem; but technology applied with expertise and professionalism will contribute greatly. Greater cooperation across the breadth of Argyll and Bute is essential if we are to do better within resource boundaries and we all have a part to play.

6. POLICY LEAD FOR CARE SERVICES – Councillor Amanda Hampsey

6.1 Health and Community Care: System pressures continue to be monitored nationally with a focus on discharge without delay.

Alongside responsive work we are continuing to develop our Older Adult Strategy which concentrates on Care Homes and Housing, Care at Home, Right Care, Right Time (including Community Hospitals), Dementia and Palliative and End of Life Care.

Care at Home remains a highly pressurised service particularly felt by providers. Smarter Commissioning is the approach to co-ordinate and work proactively together within localities improving relationships and continuing to decrease any delay in service provision.

Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) held a focused session with Health Improvement Scotland on the review of hospital standards for older people with the view to supporting a more consistent approach to care across our community hospitals and sharing good practice.

The Argyll and Bute Collaborative Care Home Group has secured funding for enhanced support for care homes focused equally on human rights and well-being as well as clinical support. Business case planning is in development with Hub North for a longer term

capital plan for care homes on the mainland and Rothesay (hospital and care home). This is the start of a long process of transformation whilst short term the priority is essential repairs and refurbishment.

The acquisition of Kintyre Care Service was completed on 20th March 2023.

The success of the bid for capital on Tiree gives the opportunity to collaboratively redesign the care home Tigh-a-Rhuda to make it fit for the future and better aligned with community expectations and more flexible use.

A short life working group will be established on Mull to review the use of Bowman Court, this will include Mull Community Council representation.

A short life working group for social work adults should conclude over the summer focussing on the standards, practice and priorities and how we grow our own.

6.2 Children, Families and Justice: It remains the case that children's accommodation in care remain stretched with limited availability of residential and foster placements. Support of kinship care remains key to coping with these pressures. Recruitment of staff into children's residential settings is proving particularly challenging.

Implementation of updated Children Protection Guidance and the Scottish Child Interview Model - we are in the early stages of considering the Bairn's Hoose model of support with a particular emphasis on considering how this will work in our remote and island areas.

As reported previously a new model of out-of-hours social work replaced previous arrangements on 3rd April. Early reports on the functioning of this service are positive.

There are no significant updates on Justice Social Work over this reporting period.

6.3 Primary Care: Primary Care are pleased to update that the Spring/Summer Covid Booster campaign is underway with a 57.6% uptake across all eligible cohorts as of 21st May 2023.

All immunisations have now successfully transferred from GP practices to the HSCP for all age groups.

The Community Treatment and Care services continue to develop with 86% of posts now recruited. Premises suitable for clinical work remains a challenge in Argyll and Bute due to an increased demand on space.

The national pressures on dental care continue to impact on Argyll and Bute. The HSCP provides a small public dental service specifically for those who may not be able to access mainstream dentistry.

Many practices report difficulties filling dentist vacancies and dealing with the backlog of care following Covid. Dental Corporate Bodies are currently utilising temporary dental list numbers to hold patient registrations, until new dentists are recruited. This maintains access to emergency care for patients on these lists, but routine dental care is not offered.

While noting the challenges within the provision there is still strength in the areas of dental prevention and in continuing to support the Dental Outreach centre in Campbeltown which is supporting the national effort to train dentists.

All of our GP practices are operating normally and we are working with our four directly managed practices to ensure we can support any required improvement activity and recruitment.

6.4 Strategic Planning, Performance and Technology: After a competitive interview process, Kristin Gillies has been appointed as the Head of Service for Strategy, Planning, Performance and Technology following the retirement of Stephen Whiston. The Annual Performance Report of the Integration Joint Board has now been approved and circulated for note at Area Committee and Community Services Committee.

The HSCP Digital Modernisation Strategy and action plan has now been approved at the Integration Joint Board and included in the HSCP Strategic plan 2022-2025. A key workstream is the implementation of the ECLIPSE system replacing Carefirst for social work, community nursing and community Allied Health Professional (AHP) health services, which is on track for delivery.

7. POLICY LEAD FOR PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES – Councillor Kieron Green

7.1 Introduction: Since April I have continued to chair monthly Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee meetings, the Argyll and Bute Licensing Board, and Local Review Bodies. I also attended COSLA Community Wellbeing Board on 21st April and 9th June, with migration and humanitarian protection, violence against women services and cost of living being included amongst agenda items.

I am aware of the significant pressures currently on employees at all levels within Development Management, Development Policy, Building Standards, and Regulatory Services through combinations of increased demand, shortages of qualified applicants for vacancies and changes to policy. They have my full support and thanks in delivering services and I would ask that members are mindful of this when facing enquiries from constituents.

7.2 Sustainable Design Awards: Submissions for the Argyll and Bute Sustainable Design Awards came in from all corners of the council area. Site visits were inspirational – showing the extent to which architects and clients, have been willing to use innovative techniques, diverse materials, along with healthy ingenuity to deliver ambitious projects. They also showcased the flexibility of the planning team in responding to unique applications, and working with developers to achieve results that enhance our communities. I was delighted to be present as the winners were announced last week and hope that these are inspirational for reflecting heritage and the landscape in future developments. You can see submissions below:



Iona Abbey
Public Vote



**Campbeltown Picture
House**
Members Vote



Lochend
Sustainable Design
Award



Charcoal Huts
Under £100k



The Rockfield Centre
Community Regeneration
Award – Winner



The Burgh Hall
Community Regeneration
Award – Commended



Asknish House
Built Heritage



Iona Village Hall
Aesthetic Design (Large
Scale)
Winner



**Helensburgh Leisure
Centre**
Aesthetic Design (Large
Scale)
Commended



Taigh an Ailtire
Aesthetic Design (Small
Scale)
Winner



Eilean da Mhèinn
Aesthetic Design (Small
Scale)
Commended



St Comghan's Chapel
Aesthetic Design (Small
Scale)
Commended

My particular thanks go to Peter Bain and Kim de Buiteleir who gave their professional input alongside myself and Cllr Amanda Hampsey during the judging process. The extremely high standard of entries made deciding who the winners were extremely difficult and my congratulations go to all who put forward projects for consideration.

7.3 Development Management: Through focus on the validation process it has been possible to keep this timescale close to the desired level of five days. However despite the best efforts of officers determination is

now measured at being 25.6 weeks, compared to the target of 12 weeks.

Following this additional continued deterioration in determination timescales, members have already been updated about the production of a Planning Transformation Action Plan. Work continues on this to enable the Council's planners to improve performance in order to meet statutory targets and requirements. Due to the extensive changes required the timescale for change will not be immediate. As such more detailed ongoing reporting to committee will allow members to scrutinise this work as it progresses, and the assurance that the service is committed to meeting the needs of the development community, residents, investors and local businesses.

In the meantime recruitment continues to ensure that all teams are best resourced to handle workload. This is particularly the case for major applications, which are seeing sustained increases due to the number of renewables and energy infrastructure consents being submitted.

- 7.4 Development Policy:** The Scottish Government Reporters have now issued their findings in relation to the Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2). This will enable members to consider the adoption of this over the coming months, allowing policy to be brought up to date with current needs.

Transport Scotland have confirmed that a roundabout is still the preferred design for a junction at Dunbeg, with planning applications for the developments being expected in August.

- 7.5 Building Standards:** Additional properties have been reported as dangerous, with discussions underway with owners following works undertaken to ensure public safety. Action at such properties is resource intensive, with consideration being given as to how to promote responsible property ownership. Continuing commercial activity has contributed to income from Building Warrants being £67k over target for 2022/23.

- 7.6 Regulatory Services:** The Short Term Let team had received 414 applications as of May – of these 28 had been granted, 102 are being consulted on, 88 are awaiting further information, 193 were awaiting allocation to an officer and 3 were invalid or withdrawn.

Further steps for Short Term Lets licensing will be brought to committee in due course, drawing on advice from government and learning from elsewhere in Scotland. Any potential control zone within

Argyll and Bute would be evidence based, utilising data available from issued licenses which will not be complete until after the deadline for operators to apply this autumn.

Suspected Avian Influenza was reported in Argyll and Bute in May. As a result, the response plan involving the animal health team, wider environmental health, roads, contingency planning, mapping and communications teams. As cases tested negative this was subsequently stood down.

A Food Law Enforcement Plan for Argyll and Bute is being developed to identify Council priorities and enable targeted deployment of available resources.

8. POLICY LEAD FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES - Councillor Ross Moreland

8.1 Recycling of batteries: We are reminding residents in Argyll and Bute not to put batteries in to their general waste bins. Batteries pose a significant risk to the environment and can easily catch fire.



You can find your nearest location for recycling batteries on the Zero Waste Scotland website:- [Recycling locator | Zero Waste Scotland](#)

8.2 Waste PPP Update: The Council has in place a 25-year Waste Public Private Partnership (PPP) contract with Renewi which is due to end in September 2026. The waste PPP contract covers Oban and Lorn, Mid Argyll and Kintyre, Bute and Cowal together with the inner islands. The contract provides a disposal solution for general waste through a Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) process, with residual waste being landfilled. The contract also provides a transfer facility and haulage for co-mingled recycling.

The Scottish Government are due to introduce a Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) landfill ban from the end of December 2025. The last nine months of the PPP 25 year contract will not be compliant with the new regulations.

Argyll and Bute Council officers have engaged with Scottish Government officials regarding the request for a nine-month derogation to coincide with the Renewi contract end date of 2nd September 2026, and the Council Leader has been engaging with the relevant Scottish Government Minister to formally discuss the possibility of a time limited derogation.

The purpose of the derogation is to align the introduction of a BMW compliant solution with the natural end of the PPP contract in September 2026, a delay of nine months. Regardless of the derogation request being successful or not, it is intended that the islands and the Helensburgh and Lomond areas, outwith the PPP contract, would become BMW ban compliant from 1st January 2026.

Following the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee held on 1st June 2023, the Leader has followed up with a further communication repeating the request for an early meeting with the Minister and officers will continue to provide updates to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee. The next meeting is scheduled for late August.

Should you wish to read the report from the June Committee, you can access it here:- [WASTE PPP UPDATE.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

8.3 Waste Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs): Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) can be found within items such as sofas, sofa beds, armchairs, kitchen and dining room chairs, and other furniture items found in households as well as some building materials, non-stick cookware and tents.

There are concerns being raised globally at the continuing release of POPs into the environment, and for many years there have been calls for action to reduce and eliminate their production, use and release.

Officers are engaging with the Scottish Environment, Protection Agency (SEPA) and will report to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee later this year.

- 8.4 New Bin Lorries:** Following the budget allocation for new refuse collection vehicles in February this year, I was delighted to see the new bin lorries that arrived at the Lochgilphead depot in May.



- 8.5 Fly tipping:** Officers recently worked collaboratively with Police Scotland in relation to fly tipping in the Kintyre area, following reports of waste not having been disposed of properly. Members of the public can report instances of fly tipping via the Council's website [complete our online form](#) or phone 01546 605514. The timeframe for clearing up waste is five days or one day for hazardous waste and efforts will be made to try to identify the person(s) responsible.
- 8.6 Route Optimisation:** Council officers continue to work with the appointed contractor Webaspx, a leading waste management software solutions company, to build this exciting project. The project will be delivered in phases - the first phase is setting up the Easy Route software, creating the detailed digital model of our road network, domestic bin collection, disposal operation and is being reported as Phase One. Thereafter there will be a second phase to set up and utilise the in-cab or Digital Depot technology and to consider how this integrates with existing customer service systems.

Officers reported to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee on 1st June on how this will be delivered – you can read the report here: [ROUTE OPTIMISATION UPDATE.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

8.7 Council Play Parks: In August 2022, the Scottish Government confirmed a five-year Renewal of Play Parks funding package for all Scottish Local Authorities through to 2025/26.

Argyll and Bute Council has received a total of £938,000. This is to cover 28 play parks.

To decide how best to use the funding, it is important that we to hear from the people who know and use the play parks and a consultation has been issued asking the public and users to tell the Council what matters to them in their local play park.

A link to the consultation on the Council's website can be found here: [Play park funding \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/play-park-funding) and runs until 14th July 2023.

8.8 Seawilding: In 2022, Seawilding won the Coast and Waters category at the RSPB Nature of Scotland Awards. I was honoured to be invited to visit their facility and I was joined by Councillor Martin as Shadow Policy Lead to see first-hand the fantastic work they are doing.



Seawilding, based at Loch Craignish, Argyll, is the UK's first community-led native oyster and seagrass restoration project. Their aim is to restore lost biodiversity, sequester carbon, and to create green jobs. They are pioneering low-cost, best-practice marine habitat restoration methodologies and empowering other coastal communities to do the same.



You can keep up to date with the work Seawilding do, by reading their newsletters on their website:-

[Seawilding | Native Oyster and Seagrass Restoration, Scotland, United Kingdom](#)

9. POLICY LEAD FOR ISLANDS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT- Councillor Liz McCabe

- 9.1 Community Funding:** The Argyll and the Islands Community Led Local Development Fund (CLLD), funded by the Scottish Government, was opened for applications and closed on 23rd June. The Argyll and the Islands Local Action Group will distribute the fund, supported by Argyll and Bute Council.

Projects need to demonstrate that any activity will advance inclusion, equality and diversity and support one of more of the main fund priorities. They include: helping families and services through the cost of living crisis; eradicating child poverty; transforming the economy to deliver net zero; and creating sustainable public services

Organisation who can apply are Constituted Community Groups, third sector organisations and Public Sector Organisations.

Officers will review the applications received and I look forward to hearing how applications received are progressed.

- 9.2 Tarbert Heritage Regeneration Scheme:** I was delighted to hear that the council successfully secured funding for the Development Phase of the Tarbert Heritage Regeneration Scheme £40,000 secured from

Historic Environment Scotland's Heritage and Place Programme and £40,000 from National Lottery Heritage Fund, with the Council contributing £60,000 in match funding from the Crown Estates allocation.

The Development Phase is required to help inform priorities of the scheme, then a further funding bid will be submitted to deliver the key actions over a 5-year period.

- 9.3 Events and Festivals:** The events and festivals sector contributes significantly to our local economy and communities' quality of life across Argyll and Bute, and is a key part of the economic recovery plan for the area, however like other key sectors it has faced significant challenges in the past three years as a consequence of Covid and the pandemic, skill shortages and the cost of living crisis. The Council's annual Strategic Events and Festivals (SEF) funding plays a key role in the recovery of the sector with strong links to the hospitality and tourism industries.

SEF Round 5.2 opened on 10th March 2023 and closed on 17th April 2023. A total of 16 applications were received, and officers reported to the Council's Policy and Resources Committee in May on the outcome of these applications – you can read more about this here: [Committee Report Front Sheet and Template \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

- 9.4 Island Digital Hubs:** As previously reported, our bid to the Islands Infrastructure fund was successful and the Council was awarded £100k to provide bespoke IT equipment and create Digital Hubs at Community Halls on the Islands of Islay, Iona, Tiree and Coll. I was delighted to be informed that the equipment has now been installed in the Community Hall on Iona, and handed over to the community.



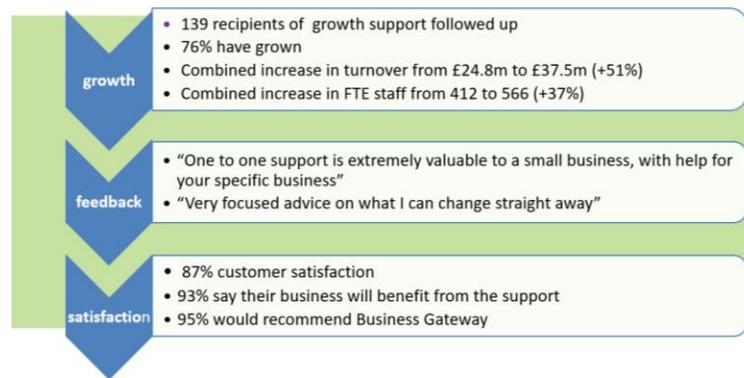
Officers have install dates in mid-June for Coll and Tiree, subject to logistical arrangements being concluded.

- 9.5 Business Growth:** At my most recent Policy Lead meeting with officers, both Councillor Hardie and myself were provided with a presentation on business growth, and how business growth impacts communities and how the Council supports businesses as well as the support provided by Business Gateway.

To give an overview of the work and results from the team in 2022/23:-

- 425 enquiries received locally from Argyll and Bute businesses
- 645 meetings with a business adviser
- 277 existing businesses supported 1 to 1
- 118 new start-up businesses supported

IMPACT



To raise awareness of the support which is on offer and how to access this, officers will be arranging to raise further awareness of what is available to businesses.

10. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, COMMUNITIES AND CORPORATE SERVICES - Councillor Alastair Redman

10.1 Economic Growth and Communities:

Employability: Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team offers a range of services and support to help people back into work and access skills and training. Over the last year, 172 people started to receive support through a number of different initiatives.

They include Fair Start Scotland; Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF); Parental Transition Fund; Young Person's Guarantee -

Employer Recruitment and Training Incentives; and No One Left Behind – Employer Recruitment and Training Incentives.

The team also advises employers on funding opportunities that can help recruit staff using incentive schemes. During 2022/23, 61 employers accessed funding to help 71 people start work. A further 27 people started unsubsidised employment and the remainder continue to receive pre-employment support and training opportunities.

Our Employability Team has a lot of experience and are here to help people back into work in a variety of ways. We understand it can be hard to know where to start and there may be barriers that may stop you from working.

The team has a range of support designed to help you into employment or training. This includes offering ongoing support when you find a job to make sure everything is going well.

I would encourage anyone who is currently unemployed to get in touch with the team who can provide any support your need.

You can contact the Employability Team to register your interest or find out more by calling 01586 555990 or email employability@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Conservation Works in Lochgilphead: Work has begun on a £334,000 project to preserve the heritage of another historic building in Lochgilphead, at 3-17 Colchester Square, which is the second major project to benefit from funding from the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) and the funding package also includes a Private Sector Housing Grant (PSHG).

The aim of the programme is to safeguard Lochgilphead's built heritage by supporting property owners to return their buildings and shopfronts to a good state of repair and boost the town centre's visual and visitor appeal.

We are committed to regenerating our town centres and to preserving the area's natural built heritage. Once complete, these works at Colchester Square will not only give a welcome boost to the area in terms of visual appeal; they will help to conserve another, important historic building in the area for decades to come.

Throughout the six-year CARS project, students from UHI Argyll and Lochgilphead High School will benefit from the delivery of traditional and construction skills training. This is a really important part of the

overall scheme, and will hopefully encourage our young people to consider a career in construction. The CARS programme is jointly funded by Argyll and Bute Council and Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and focuses on the regeneration of historic buildings as well as promotion of traditional skills training and community engagement.

Progress is also moving forward with the remaining two priority buildings at 2-4 and 6-10 Argyll Street, Lochgilphead, and the project team is continuing to support the private owners of these buildings to plan for full communal repair projects starting in spring 2024.

Regeneration Scheme for Tarbert: We welcome the additional funding to start the first phase of a dedicated regeneration scheme for Tarbert. After securing funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund (£40,000) and Historic Environment Scotland (£40,000), the council is also providing match funding of £60,000 for the initial development phase.

The first phase is required to help inform priorities for the Tarbert Heritage Regeneration Scheme. The council will then seek a further funding bid to deliver key actions over the next five years.

We are excited to work with the community to develop the first phase of the Tarbert Regeneration Scheme. The funding from HLF and HES is a welcome boost that will allow us to work with partners to raise awareness of Tarbert's rich heritage and culture.

Regeneration and ongoing investment is critical for Argyll and Bute's long-term economic success. That includes attracting the right skills and people to the area and creating employment and housing opportunities for our communities. We can't wait to get started and deliver real benefits for Tarbert.

Kilmartin Museum: Kilmartin Museum is an incredibly important project and is anticipated to be an economic driver for Mid Argyll and the wider area in attracting visitors from all over the world and it offers archaeology and landscape interpretation, investigations, heritage and cultural activity.



I was delighted to be invited to a tour of the facilities in May along with the Executive Director and Head of Development and Economic Growth, and members of the Museum.

10.2 Customer and Support Services:

Council's New Website: The upgrade and redesign of the corporate website is nearing completion with final user testing involving nearly 400 citizens. I am excited to see the new website once it goes live in June.

Customer Service Centre: In addition to core customer service and registration activities the team processed 124 Under 22 Travel Card applications, 78 Blue Badge Applications and 57 telecare quality review calls in February. The Scotland Loves Local Cards initiative also resulted in additional workloads due to an issue with activation dates, which ends on 19th May.

The customer satisfaction report for the Registration Service covering FQ3/4 had 123 respondents providing 681 scored responses and these gave a 100% satisfaction rating.

There were also many positive and complimentary comments. These included just one of many examples of our Registrars going above and beyond when the Oban Registrar officiated at a wedding on board the Colonsay ferry in April.

10.3 Corporate Services:

Second Review of Scottish Parliament Constituency Boundaries:

Boundaries Scotland (BS) is consulting on proposals for changes to the 70 mainland constituencies for the Scottish Parliament. The three island constituencies of Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles are excluded from the exercise. There will be a separate consultation on regions in 2024.

The proposed changes would see the Argyll and Bute constituency boundary extended to include council Ward 9 - Lomond North. The one month statutory consultation was due to close on 17th June. The Council provided a draft response by that date with a formal response following consideration of a report to the June meeting of the Council.

Boundaries Scotland will consider all responses to the consultation during the summer and thereafter hold any local inquiries that are required. It is anticipated that a report will be prepared for Scottish Ministers by 1st May 2025 and, if subsequently approved by the Scottish Parliament, the new boundaries would come into effect at the next Scottish Parliament election in May 2026.

Procurement and Contract Management – Community Benefits: The Council is committed to maximising Community Benefits arising from procurement activities and to delivering wider benefits for its communities when purchasing goods, services and supplies for Argyll and Bute. The team have been working closely with suppliers to deliver additional social, economic and environmental value to the area. A wide range of Community Benefits have been achieved from October 2022 to 31st March 2023, ranging from the employment of young people by local contractors to the introduction of the warm box initiative by Carr Gomm. Details of all the completed benefits and the community wish list can be viewed on the Council website [here](#).

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1** This report provides members with an update on each of the Policy Lead portfolios. Policy Lead Councillors will be happy to discuss any particular issues with colleagues as required.

Argyll and Bute Council – Policy Lead Councillors Report – 15th June 2023

For further information please contact Aileen McNicol, Leadership Support and Member Services Manager, telephone 01546 604014 or email aileen.mcnicol@argyll-bute.gov.uk