

28th September 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 29th June 2023. This latest report provides an update on activity during the period to 8th September 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 for August and September 2023
- 3.2 **Financial Services:**
Finance: Officers continue to work on the budget outlook which is formally reported to Policy and Resources Committee. The latest position reported an estimated gap in the mid-range of £7.58m in 2024-25, rising to £25.7m by 2028-29. In order to bridge this gap and balance the budget, officers have already commenced work on the budget approach for 2024-25, working closely with services during this process.
A budget consultation exercise with our communities was also undertaken via a budget simulator to seek their views on the high level

priorities of the citizens of Argyll and Bute. The results from this consultation are currently being collated and will be reported in the first instance to a cross-party budget working group.

In terms of the audit of the 2022-23 financial statements, delays in the recruitment of audit staff by external auditors have resulted in a later-than-normal start to the audit process which, in turn, is likely to affect when the audited financial statements will be available for presentation to Council. Officers are maintaining regular contact with external auditors and are keen to progress the audit as quickly as possible.

Local Tax Collections: The Council Tax collection rate for the current year as at 31st August is 47.67%, this is 3.05% lower than the collection rate for the same period the previous year 2022/23. However, that year's rate was distorted by the Cost of Living Crisis Award which we received from the Scottish Government. Comparing our current year's collections with those of August 2021 gives a better indication of progress and we are 0.07% down on that year so marginally behind where we want it to be for the year.

The Non-domestic rates (NDR) collection rate as at 31st August is 63.76%, up 1.55% for the same period last year. The Council recently received more than £4million in business rates from the Ministry of Defence which has brought the collection rate back into line with a small positive profile.

Empty Property Relief: Details of empty properties across Argyll and Bute were issued to Area Committees with a link to an online consultation. The consultation closed on 31st August and we have only had one response from members. We are currently considering 506 responses we had to a similar consultation with businesses before bringing a report to the Council's Senior Management Team and onwards to Policy and Resources Committee in October 2023. A new policy is due to go to Policy and Resources Committee in December 2023.

Benefits Processing: As at 31st July 2023 processing speeds for Housing Benefit have dropped to an average cumulative processing time of 20.75 days under our target of 21 days. This is good news. Productivity within the team has improved and we have no backlog at present. In-month new claims processing took an average time of 18.5 days for new claims which is very positive. The average time taken to process a change in circumstances is 4.7 days which is still very good and below the target of 6 days. New procedure manuals have been prepared for staff to standardise new and more efficient processes across the service and staff productivity is being reviewed weekly

against the manuals. This ensures staff are operating to a predefined standard which is better for customer service and for benchmarking individual performance.

Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs): Total expenditure in SWF at 31st July 2023 is £196,512. Our programme funding allocation for 2023/24 is £458,284 and we will monitor spend closely in the coming months. As at 31st July 2023 our spent and committed amount on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund is £767,472. Initial DHP Tranche 1 funding allocation for 2023/24 in Argyll and Bute is £869,638. With expected Tranche 2 funding of £192,259 due later in the year, this brings our total DHP allocation to £1,061,897 for the year.

Flexible Food Fund: As at 30th June 23 the project has supported 1,994 households who are suffering from food and fuel insecurities in Argyll and Bute, with a combined client gain of £2,726,000 - an average gain of £1,367 per household. The project has attracted funding of £204,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for each of the next two financial years and we have identified the funds to make up the shortfall to allow the project to continue for at least the next two years. We recently met with officials from Falkirk Council who are considering something similar for their area.

Energy Support: The Council Tax team were 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, however an occasional case continues to come through normally after appeal stage. Monies will be reconciled with the government by 6th October and the scheme will be formally wound up thereafter.

The table below shows the current position with both schemes;

SCHEME	NO. OF APPS	AWARDS		REJECTION S	TO BE PROCESSED
		No.	Value (£)		
EBSS(£400)	221	213	85,200	8	0
EPG(£200)	357	349	69,800	8	0
	578	562	155,000	16	0

3.3 Commercial Services:

Helensburgh Waterfront – Commercial: A report has been prepared for the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee on 12th September to update on the outcome of the public engagement exercise and the assessment of the nine expressions of interest received following the first stage marketing exercise. The proposals were assessed by the Property Development Working Group using a number of key criteria, including:- economic development; planning/transportation considerations; legal/governance/risk; community feedback; and financial outcomes. Following this exercise it was recommended that seven proposals move to stage 2 of the marketing process.

A further report was prepared for the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee on 12th September to advise that installation of the temporary skatepark will be undertaken during Autumn 2023. Officers are also working with Helensburgh Skatepark Group to fulfil their aspirations of constructing a larger, permanent skatepark at an appropriate location. A number of sites are being looked at and officers will be bringing forward an options appraisal report to a future meeting of the Area Committee setting out recommendations for the preferred location.

Rothesay Pavilion: Updates on the project were provided to the Policy and Resources Committee on 10th August and at the latest meeting of the Rothesay Pavilion Lobby Group, which was held on 16th August 2023, including:-

- The Rural Growth Deal Programme Board have agreed to include the completion of Rothesay Pavilion as a priority project as part of the “Tourism – Creating a World Class Visitor Destination” theme, with £9M being allocated to the project. This assists in reducing the funding gap required to proceed with the next two phases of works but significant work is still required to identify sources of additional funding to bridge the remaining gap.
- Robertson Construction Central West (RCCW) commenced work to deliver the Stage 1 interim wind and watertight works on 1st May 2023. Construction is going well and to date it remains on programme and within the approved budget.

In addition, I attended and spoke at a Restoration Reception at the Scottish Parliament on 5th September. In addition to the Leader, local members, and our officers, there were a wide range of guests from the

tourism, culture, creative, heritage and business sectors who were invited to promote the restoration of the Pavilion and to hopefully encourage financial support that will allow us to proceed with construction stages 2 and 3.

Summer Capital Programme Works: Property Services have had one of their busiest and most successful periods, delivering approximately £4M contractor expenditure in ten weeks across 21 schools. A wide range of works have been undertaken to invest in the school estate, from new roofs and solar panels, to gym upgrades and new boilers. Some before and after images are detailed below.

Castlehill Primary School – External Works

Before

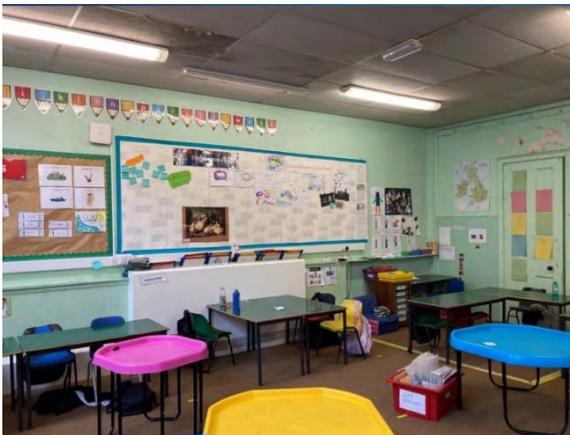


After

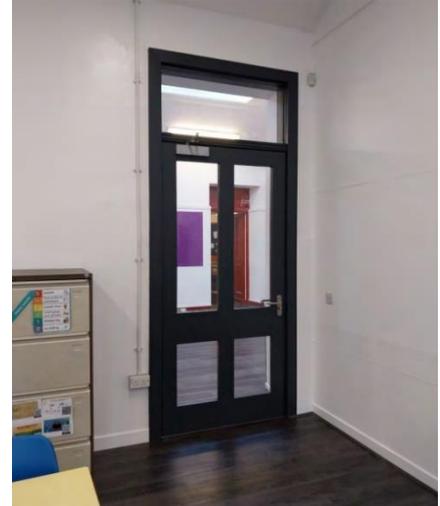


Dalintober Primary – Internal Works

Before



After



Awards Shortlists: I am happy to report that Commercial Service have recently been shortlisted for a further three awards as follows:-

- COSLA Excellence Awards – School Meals by Drones pilot project has been nominated in the ‘Service Innovation and Improvement’ category. The awards ceremony is being held at the Crieff Hydro, Perthshire on 28th September.
- Construction Employers Federation (CEF) Excellence Awards – Helensburgh Waterfront has been nominated in the GB and Republic of Ireland Construction Project of the Year (above £2.5M) category. Winners will be announced at the Gala being held on 5th October 2023.
- Learning Places Awards – Willowview ELC has been shortlisted in the ‘Refurbishment of the Year’ category. Winners will be announced at the Awards Dinner being held in Glasgow on 14th November 2023.

I want to congratulate everyone involved in each of the projects and wish you all the best for the announcements!

- 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.

4. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

4.1 SQA School Examination Results: A report was tabled at the Community Services Committee on 24th August 2023 to update on the initial outcome of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) 2023 examination diet for young people in Argyll and Bute.

Overall, the performance of Argyll and Bute Schools in 2023 is above the current national performance in SQA examinations in two of the four measures (National 4 and Higher) at grades A-C, and above all four measures (National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) at grades A-D.

Table 1 below presents the performance of candidates in Argyll and Bute across all course levels at grades A-C, with table 2 providing the same information for grades A-D.

Table 1– A-C Awards 2019, 2022, 2023 – A&B/National – National 4, National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher

	2018 - 2019	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2022 - 2023			
	A&B Attainment A-C %	A&B Attainment A-C%	A&B Attainment A-C %	National Attainment A-C %	Difference A&B 18/19 - 22/23	Difference A&B 21/22 - 22/23	Difference A&B 22/23 to National A-C
Nat 4	100%	100%	100%	87.80%	0.00%	0.00%	+12.20%
Nat 5	79.43%	78.62%	76.93%	78.80%	-2.50%	-1.69%	-1.87%
Higher	73.19%	79.51%	77.12%	77.10%	+3.93%	-2.38%	+0.02%
Adv H	75.68%	83.72%	79.44%	79.80%	+3.77%	-4.28%	-0.36%

Table 2 – A-D Awards 2019, 2022, 2023 – A&B/National – National 4, National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher

	2018 - 2019	2021 - 2022	2022 - 2023	2022 - 2023			
	A&B Attainment A-D%	A&B Attainment A-D%	A&B Attainment A-D %	National Attainment A-D %	Difference A&B 18/19 - 22/23	Difference A&B 21/22 - 22/23	Difference A&B 22/23 to National A-D
Nat 4	100%	100%	100%	87.80%	0.00%	0.00%	+12.20%
Nat 5	92.00%	91.78%	90.67%	90.50%	-1.33%	-1.11%	+0.17%
Higher	91.38%	92.62%	92.07%	90.50%	+0.70%	-0.55%	+1.57%
Adv H	87.64%	96.51%	93.03%	92.70%	+5.39%	-3.48%	+0.33%

These initial exam results will be updated by the SQA in September to take account of any changes arising from the appeals process, therefore minor changes to the statistical data contained above may

occur. Further reports will be provided to the Community Services Committee to allow consideration of the updated statistical school and national information.

During October and November, analysis of each school's SQA attainment, and associated planning for improvement, will be the focus of Individual Attainment Meetings held with Head Teachers, and the Executive Director / Heads of Service.

- 4.2 MCR Pathways:** Three Secondary Schools in Argyll and Bute are taking part in the award winning MCR Pathways Programme. Over the last few months the Council has successfully appointed an MCR Pathways Co-ordinator in each of Oban High School, Dunoon Grammar School and Hermitage Academy. The co-ordinators have completed their induction training and are now contributing to the work of recruiting mentors from across all walks of life in Argyll and Bute, and will be instrumental in matching mentors to the young people who will benefit from them most.

Pupils in participating schools will have weekly meetings with their mentor, and the relationship which develops between them has been shown repeatedly across the country to develop the young person's confidence, self-belief and resilience. As a result, young people engaging with a mentor have a better understanding of their own potential, attain and achieve more highly, and are more likely to move into positive destinations after leaving school. Mentors also speak of the positive impact of being a mentor on their own lives.

- 4.3 ASN Provision:** A report was submitted to the Community Services Committee on 24th August providing an update on the review of ASN services within Argyll and Bute and set out a number of proposals to address the growing and increasingly complex needs of our children and young people. Recommendations for future improvement to our learning estate includes increased Learning Centre provision (phase 1) and secondary enhanced well-being hubs (phase 2). Having these resources in place could lead to more young people having their needs met in Argyll and Bute, reducing the requirement for external placements.

The Committee approved the recommendations contained within the report, including a recommendation to Council with regard to the capital and revenue funding required to support the implementation of the proposals.

4.4 'SeeMeSeeChange': 'SeeMeSeeChange' professional learning has been provided by the Northern Alliance. The blended model of delivery has brought together colleagues from across nine of our secondary schools, alongside other schools within the regional collaborative group. As a follow up to the training, action plans are currently being developed that will align with the Our Children, Their Nurturing Education (OCTNE) Strategy, which aims to ensure that children and young people have the emotional and psychological support they need. "SeeMeSeeChange is a whole school community approach to tackling the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health.

4.5 A sustainable approach to support language delivery in Primary Schools: Following the success of North Ayrshire Council's languages online team teaching model, language development officers from Argyll and Bute, North Ayrshire and Highland councils have explored this initiative further and the use of technology for live language lessons.

The aim was to motivate pupils and empower teachers to deliver 1+2 languages entitlement by delivering fun, engaging live online language lessons through a unique team-teaching model facilitated by a language expert. During these lessons, teachers learned alongside their pupils in real time and led the learning in their own class. This approach also developed teacher confidence to consolidate the language learning with their pupils during their own class time.

In Argyll and Bute 28 classes across 22 schools were involved in the pilot, which covered French, Gaelic and Spanish.

The pilot showed a positive impact on pupil confidence, engagement and progress and will be offered to other schools during the course of this session.

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

5.1 Introduction: The nature of the remit I will continue repeating some detail from previous reports and again I 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 investments have resulted in a much improved network. There is

certainly 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:** 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 it is still 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, as a Council, 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:

Refuse Collection Vehicles (RCVs): The Council operates a fleet of RCVs which collect refuse from over 48,000 domestic properties and some 2700 commercial properties across the Council area. In 2016, the Council introduced three-weekly general waste collections and two-weekly recycling collections and the service operated with two spare vehicles which generally provided sufficient resilience to cover for planned inspections, servicing, MOTs, running repairs etc. Over the past few years there have been a number of challenges in the supply chain for spare vehicle parts which has affected many sectors, not just the Council. Often, this has resulted in vehicles being off the road for prolonged periods of time pending delivery of parts. Whilst some spares are stocked by our fleet team it is not practical nor cost effective to hold all parts.

The additional funding has provided four new vehicles with two being used as spares increasing the number of spare RCVs from two to four significantly improving resilience. The other two vehicles purchased are being used to accelerate the replacement programme of the older vehicles. The additional vehicles have assisted in service continuity and have reduced reliance on hired vehicles.

Jetpatcher: The additional funding allocated for the jetpatcher has secured an ex-demonstrator unit which is due to be delivered in September. This additional vehicle in the fleet will help the team to take a more proactive approach to carrying out repairs and contribute towards maintaining the Council's road network in a fit for purpose and proportionate condition.

Road Marking Unit: Securing road-marking contractors can be problematic for many road authorities. The geography of Argyll and Bute compounds this, meaning that delays are often experienced in road markings being completed. All available markets have been checked and unfortunately, there are no completed vehicles available for purchase. The specialist nature of these vehicles and the relatively low numbers means that a specialist build has to be specified and procured. Following market research our teams are in the process of finalising a specification before going to the market for delivery. Due to the limited number of suppliers and specialist nature of the vehicle, we are expecting a lead time of approximately 12 months, although this will be updated once the specification has been concluded and order placed. Once delivered we should be more effective with road marking in Argyll and Bute and there is likely opportunity to rent out the marker (with Argyll and Bute always the priority).

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 advanced to the next stage as the Harbour Board, on 31st August, approved the formal draft Harbour Revision order be sent to Transport Scotland. While 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 submitted a draft Harbour Revision Order (HRO) to Transport Scotland in December and, since then, positive discussions have taken place between the council and Transport Scotland, and the Scottish Government's legal team. The draft agreed during this informal process has been amended by Transport Scotland which is the draft Harbour Revision Order agreed by the Harbour Board on 31st August. This will now set in train a 'formal' 42-day consultation process directed by Transport Scotland, where all stakeholders will be contacted for their views.

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 with safety as the priority providing safe and regulated access within the bay.

I believe there is 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. The Harbour Board also approved the Marine Safety Management Plan to be uplifted to website.

Other marine issues:

Work is progressing on giving piers and harbours in Argyll and Bute a makeover as part of a £9.2 million investment by the Council to support island and rural communities with marine links to the mainland and/or central belt.

The Council has prioritised lifeline ferry services in its Marine Asset Management Plan (AMP), and piers across Argyll and Bute are being upgraded to accommodate Caledonian Maritime Asset Limited's (CMAL) new vessels.

The Council has already carried out shore power upgrades in Fionnphort to ensure the vessels can charge overnight, and work is now underway to do the same on Gigha. Safe boarding for crew and passengers is a priority, and the council will improve access at Fionnphort, Feolin, Dunoon and Kilcreggan as part of the plan. The council will also carry out a review of its own ferry services infrastructure as part of the process.

Iona and Fionnphort: The Council hopes to start work at Iona in spring/summer next year. Alongside this, work is progressing at Fionnphort to ensure sheltered, overnight berthing can take place, safe access for crew and passengers, and provision of charging facilities. The Council is also carrying out a traffic survey at the terminal to improve traffic management.

Craignure: Ground works have started on the new terminal at Craignure.

Port Askaig: The Council has commissioned a study to determine options for the existing marshalling area at Port Askaig following unsuccessful attempts to purchase land for additional space.

Dunoon and Kilcreggan (see later Kilcreggan): CMAL plans to introduce new vessels at Dunoon and Kilcreggan that will see an improvement in the reliability and resilience of the service for commuters and visitors. Ground investigation work is ready to start as soon as Transport Scotland confirms vessel funding.

Feolin: Plans for Feolin include the improved infrastructure required for a new replacement vessel, as well as the installation of a pontoon for use when the passenger-only service is in operation. The Council will

also investigate accommodation and other shoreside facilities at Port Askaig as a priority to support the Jura service.

Gigha: The Council is carrying out a feasibility study to confirm that the new vessel will be able to charge on the island overnight.

Campbeltown and Rothesay: The Council is progressing plans to extend and/or strengthen Campbeltown Pier. It is also exploring options for the Rothesay Harbour Quay stabilisation works following failed tenders for piling and grouting works, and will be carrying out a further tender exercise soon.

Kilcreggan Update: Unfortunately there has been little advance since our visit to Kilcreggan Community Council in June and this will remain the case until Transport Scotland confirm vessels. However, the community has suggested possibilities in line with developing economic benefit which we will pursue.

The Island of Luing: From a very promising meeting in June there has been a bit of a communications blip. However, this is a believe back on track and the community is engaging with the Service in regards to ferry times. While everything possible 'within budgetary constraints' will be done to reach a compromise solution it must be recognised that the 'ideal', in the eyes of some, is likely out of reach.

- 5.7 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 previously commended 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. Unfortunately Councillor Kelly has resigned from the Council – the tenacity he exhibited will have to be maintained by each of us given the importance of this to Argyll and Bute.

- 5.8 Strategic Transport Projects Review (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 Transport Minister, 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.

- 5.9 Flood Prevention:** Having visited Campbeltown earlier this month I was impressed with the progress and the quality of the work. This £15M investment, funded 80% by Scottish Government, as part of the first cycle of the national flood prevention programme will help to significantly build resilience against flooding in Campbeltown. I met with Ward Councillors, Officers and staff from the contractor and consultants and we were given a tour of the works thus far complete.



It was certainly impressive and will, without doubt, benefit Campbeltown and its residents. Although little will be visible on the surface when works are complete there is significant and complex engineering delivered to effectively address flooding and storm waters.

5.10 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 Introduction: This report reflects the business conducted at the Integration Joint Board and forthcoming business of note for the council, along with any pertinent external Policy Lead business.

6.2 IJB Business: The Integration Joint Board recently presented its draft annual performance report which is subsequently submitted to Scottish Government. The report notes performance and narrative against the year 1 priorities of the Joint Strategic Plan and National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes. It incorporates the financial outlook, risks and planning for the future. This report is shared with partners and at Area Committees for noting.

The Integration Joint Board has also approved a Joint Digital Health and Care Modernisation Strategy which reflects activity for both services and staff infrastructure.

The board received the six-monthly update to the Strategic Workforce plan and progress was noted, accompanied by the Partnership Staff Governance report.

The Alcohol and Drugs Partnership have undertaken a period of development work corresponding with changes in government policy and guidance to refresh their local policy. This was presented to the IJB, noting progress.

The IJB considered the updated Planning with People Guidance ahead of the Engagement Strategy Refresh which will be presented to the IJB for approval in September. The IJB also considered its duty in respect of the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and impacts on planning for the future.

The Child Poverty Action Plan Review was presented for the period 2022-23 including an up-to-date Equality Socio-Economic Impact Assessment.

All reports are available to members and members of the public at [Argyll and Bute Integration Joint Board \(IJB\)](#)

6.3 Operational Updates:

£450,000 Investment in Tiree Community Care Hub: In May 2023 Argyll and Bute Council, on behalf of the HSCP, was successful in applying for £450,000 of funding from the Scottish Government's Islands Programme to assist with the modernisation and reconfiguration of the Council-owned Tigh a Rudha care home on Tiree. This investment will act as a catalyst to better meet the current and anticipated future care needs of both islands and will support Tiree's and Coll's population retention and growth plans. Tigh a Rudha will be transformed into a modern and flexible Community Care Hub which will also provide onsite key worker accommodation, and intermediate, end of life and respite care facilities and GP beds.

Health and Community Care:

Currently a Community Integrated Short Life Working Group is in progress, devolved for the Argyll and Bute Unscheduled Care Group (Right Time, Right Place, Right Care). The purpose of this group is again to standardise best practice across the HSCP for community services. The initial focus has been on updating the Community Standards from 2019. This work will progress to standardising processes including virtual wards and Single Point of Access.

The Care at Home Service is now working with three external partners who now hold sponsorship licenses to employ overseas workers. Within Argyll and Bute we now have overseas workers working in the localities of Helensburgh and Lomond and Oban. Whilst this form of recruitment has shown to be successful in attracting staff into social care, our main challenge is now access to affordable housing. Availability of affordable accommodation has impacted upon the number of staff that can be employed within social care.

As at August 2023 there are 1,067 people in receipt of care at home support. One hundred and thirteen of these people have chosen option 1 Direct Payment where they commission their own care package with funding from the HSCP. This amounts to 1,863 hours per week.

A further 782 people receive 8,052 hours per week from externally commissioned services and 172 people receive 1,953 hours of service from internal care at home services. There are 16 registered providers with 12 providing care at home currently. Due to recruitment issues there is a degree of unmet need – this is regularly monitored and prioritised by the service and wherever possible new service is delivered. It should be noted that there is still throughput in the service with a number of hospital discharges and community referrals receiving service.

System pressures and corresponding business impacts are ongoing and will feed into any winter-themed national planning.

Public Health – Blue-Green Prescribing for Scotland: The HSCP's Public Health Team is participating in an exciting programme in partnership with Scotland's Hydra Nation and Glasgow Caledonian University to investigate how to increase the use of non-pharmaceutical approaches to common mental health conditions. This is in recognition of the environmental impacts of antidepressants and emerging evidence about the efficacy of antidepressant use.

Blue-green prescribing is the prescribing of water-based non-pharmaceutical interventions and eco-informed prescribing of antidepressants to people with common mental health conditions. The research defines blue-green prescribing as:

1. The prescription of blue space activities (e.g. swimming, kayaking, surfing, paddle boarding, canoeing, etc.) to people with common mental health conditions using social prescribing pathways.
2. Green prescribing is the eco-informed prescription of antidepressants to people with common mental health conditions by considering antidepressants with less environmental impacts.

Primary Care – Vaccination Programme: The Spring/Summer COVID-19 vaccination programme across the HSCP was completed on 30th June 2023 and the overall uptake across all cohorts was 72.2% with the care home uptake at 92%.

Flu and coronavirus vaccines are being offered to those eligible between September and December. It's strongly recommended that people get vaccinated if they eligible this winter. Invitations to those who are eligible have been sent out from late August, and the final appointment started being sent from late August and the final appointment was due to arrive during week commencing 18th September. People may receive invitations at a different time than previous years. The postal invites will arrive in white envelopes with

clear NHS Scotland branding while people with a digital preference will receive their vaccine appointment or prompt by text and/or email.

As per previous campaigns the scheduling of vaccine appointments is a mixed model of timed appointments and prompts. Prompts have been sent to all cohorts excluding those aged over 75 years old. Those in the over-75 cohort will begin to receive a letter with a timed appointment week commencing 18th September.

Scheduling of appointments is slightly different in "bundled areas". Bundled areas are locations in Argyll and Bute where vaccination teams will visit only a couple of times during the campaign. In these areas everyone has received a national prompt by letter or text. This advises people to book an appointment via portal or by calling the national helpline. The prompts include portal usernames and dates of any previous vaccinations to enable easier access to the portal.

The appointing method for these areas has been different to others due to the rephrasing ask that came on Friday 1st September. Following the identification of the newly identified COVID-19 variant of interest, BA.2.86, in Scotland, the Scottish Government concluded that as a precautionary measure the safest approach is to bring forward those most vulnerable as soon as possible. This includes care home residents, those aged over 75 and those aged over 12 with weakened immune systems, who were originally being vaccinated from mid-October.

The Argyll and Bute team successfully rephrased the programme and brought forward as many bundled area clinics as possible, some from December to September. In turn this meant a quick turnaround of appointments was required. Following meetings with the national scheduling team, a prompt letter was risk-assessed as the best option to ensure everyone in these areas received an opportunity to book an appointment at a clinic in their location.

The HSCP local teams are working hard to make best use of prescribed national systems within Argyll and Bute's often complex geographical context. The focus remains on delivering a person-centred, local vaccination programme.

There are 25 bookable Argyll and Bute venues on the portal, all with appointments available. People who are booking an appointment online will be shown nearby clinics and should also be able to scroll through a list showing all 25 Argyll and Bute clinics.

If people have questions about the vaccination and appointments programme, there is a dedicated email address available – nhsh.abcovidvaccs@nhs.scot – and a national helpline to call (0800 030 8013). These are the best routes to direct any questions about the programme.

The HSCP is also currently running pneumococcal and shingles vaccination clinics and staff have been lettering and texting those individuals who meet the eligibility criteria to invite them in for a vaccination.

The HSCP is also currently working with the Scottish Government on the national RESPECT campaign which is about promoting considerate and respectful engagement when engaging with health and social care staff.

- 6.4 Dentistry Services:** As noted previously, members are alert to changes indicated by independent dental practitioners in Argyll and Bute. There are 14 dental practices within Argyll and Bute (who have varied commitments to NHS Dental Services) and none of these are currently accepting new NHS adult patients. Many practices have reported difficulties filling dentist vacancies and dealing with the backlog of care following COVID-19.

John Lyon, Clinical Director of Dental Services for NHS Highland, attended the Integration Joint Board to support understanding of the current situation and locally the Head of Primary Care is involved in national planning groups.

In addition to independent dental practices there is also the Public Dental Service (PDS) which is a service run by local NHS Boards, with dentists working for the PDS salaried and employed by the relevant Board. These are separate to independent practices and have a responsibility to provide emergency treatment (but not routine care) to unregistered patients. They also provide dental care to those people registered with the PDS who have additional support needs.

The NHS Highland Dental Helpline (0845 833 2310) can offer advice to the public on which practices are currently offering NHS registration for patients and it will also provide advice and appointments for unregistered dental patients with a dental emergency. For dental emergencies out of hours always dial 111.

6.5 Children, Families and Justice: The new birthing pool at Victoria Hospital on Bute was officially opened in June by Isla Barton, Director of Midwifery for NHS Highland. I'm delighted that expectant parents on Bute can now access this facility.

In relation to the National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum seeking children, there have been a number of rulings in respect of children being housed in hotel accommodation. This has resulted in more children being dispersed across Scotland.

The Chief Social Work Officer has been attending national meetings regarding the Bairns Hoose model for supporting children within the Child Protection system. Standards have been published and will be considered by multi-agency partners for opportunities and challenges.

6.6 Acute and Complex Care: A Programme Development Manager has been successfully recruited to scope and develop a neurodevelopmental service model and approach.

6.7 Strategy, Planning and Performance: The Eclipse Project is a replacement of CareFirst as a platform for the Single Social Care and NHS Community IT System. The wider strategic deliverables are: single system- health and social care; one stop shop for service users (not being asked the same questions over and over); cloud based, mobile working; cost savings - staff time, less time in office; supporting development of Electronic Patient Record; improve functionality for users and improved data.

At this stage we are still embedding Eclipse (three months post go-live) and the Eclipse Support Team remain central for supporting this process including robust support for staff snagging, change control and scoping for Phase 2 to support implementation to our four community health teams; Mental Health, Community Nursing, Allied Health Professionals and Child Health.

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

7.1 Introduction: The Public Local Enquiry Section for a Section 37 Application by SSEN Transmission took place in Dalraddy in June and I was present on 19th and 20th to give evidence regarding the Council's objection to this.

I chaired Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee meetings on 21st June and 23rd August, and the Argyll and Bute Licensing Board on 27th June and 7th September.

The COSLA Community Wellbeing Board met on 1st September where Housing in Scotland, Afghan Resettlement and Relocation Schemes and Domestic Homicide Review were some of the agenda items discussed.

The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership held a workshop on 6th September to review the constitution in light of ongoing discussions around membership and structure.

- 7.2 Development Management:** There is now a full time administration officer available for assisting in planning application communications including with applicants and agents. The aim is to improve customer experience and reduce the need for planning officers to be involved with this aspect. By enabling a greater focus on processing applications this should in turn contribute to reducing the backlog of applications currently in the system.

Monitoring of performance within the service is being achieved through reporting to PPSL and the Policy Leads/Executive Leadership Team Group. The latest report [DM Performance Update FQ1 23-24 Appendix 1.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#), shows that there has been a reduction in the backlog by 33 applications, which can be attributed to a more stable staffing situation following recruitment and increasing familiarity with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The raw figures for average time taken to process applications remains high however. At present applications are having to be assessed against NPF4 and both the existing Local Development Plan (LDP) as well as LDP2, and it is anticipated that processing should be quickened further should the council choose to adopt LDP2.

Recruitment does however remain an ongoing priority, due to staff turnover and to ensure that capacity exists for major applications. Income from Planning Applications remains above target although this is dependent on the number of major applications received.

- 7.3 Building Standards:** Officers are continuing to work with property owners to secure futures for dangerous buildings. Wider options for disused and neglected buildings are being explored, including the risk appetite for greater council interventions, given the costs and resources that would be required.

The service is on target for budget with commercial work being conducted as resources allow.

7.4 Regulatory Services: The Environmental Health Service has, like other Scottish councils and due to a national shortage of professionally qualified officers, a number of vacancies, with work being prioritised to ensure public safety. Targeting recruitment to individuals with a military background is being piloted, and a pathway for school leavers to gain qualifications whilst working for the council is being developed. Export businesses are continuing to make use of commercial hubs which is still affecting budgets, although also reducing workload. Applications for short-term lets licenses are being submitted at an increasing rate prior to the deadline of 1st October which has been set by the Scottish Government. The situation is under review and should additional resource be necessary then temporary staff may be recruited to support the team. Further changes to policy may be considered in light of experience from processing applications and hearings.

Monitoring for Avian Flu continues, and although there has been no outbreak reported in Argyll and Bute a positive case was identified in a wild bird carcass. A wider assessment for animal health and welfare was carried out in June which will be incorporated into a Scottish Government report on disease preparedness.

Council officers supported the local community in giving assistance to visitors when the Tiree Music Festival was cancelled due to weather conditions when festivalgoers had already arrived on the island.

7.5 Biodiversity: Development of a Rural Delivery Plan for Scottish Government policies has been initiated. Of particular relevance to biodiversity in Argyll and Bute are nature restoration, climate mitigation and adaptive efforts on farms, creating new crofting opportunities, increasing sustainability through remote monitoring of the fishing fleet and improving regulation around aquaculture, and restoring Atlantic rainforests and peatlands.

The setting up of nature networks across Scotland, including Argyll and Bute, is a requirement of National Planning Framework 4 and is being supported by £5m of capital funding. This is being supplied by the Scottish Government to support their commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

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

- 8.1 Cleaner and Greener Fleet:** Argyll and Bute Council has been successful in securing almost £100,000 of funding for electric vehicle chargers at council offices, depots and schools.

Transport Scotland invites local authorities to bid for funding through its competitive Switched on Fleets initiative. The fund is designed to enable the transition of older petrol and diesel vehicles to cleaner, greener electric options.

Over the past few years, the council has changed over 70 vehicles to electric or plug-in hybrid, with plans in place to bring even more into the 500 vehicle fleet in the future. Having the infrastructure in place to allow these new vehicles to charge is vital to supporting the council's commitment to becoming a net zero carbon emissions organisation by 2045.

The bid focussed on key areas where there are gaps in the existing network and will see chargers being installed at sites on Bute, Islay and Tiree, as well in Campbeltown and Oban.

In previous years, funding has been secured from this initiative to install chargers in Helensburgh and on Mull, as well as other sites in Rothesay and Oban.

- 8.2 Hermitage Park's Green Flag:** Hermitage Park is a fantastic green space for visitors and residents, and is a testament of the ongoing commitment to become net zero by 2045.

Hermitage Park in Helensburgh has again been recognised as one of the best parks and greenspaces in Scotland.

Keep Scotland Beautiful has awarded the Park Green Flag status, for the fourth consecutive year.

The Green Flag Award is the benchmark for excellence in green spaces and recognises the hard work of managers, staff and volunteers who help ensure that outdoor areas provide the public with a safe, clean and inspiring local environment.

The award follows a £3.7 million heritage-led regeneration of the park including a new pavilion, restored War Memorial Garden, a demonstration garden and upgraded children's play park. Funding included £2.33 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and

generous support from a range of additional funders. The regeneration was managed by Argyll and Bute Council with ongoing support from the Friends of Hermitage Park, who were instrumental in identifying the need to improve the park for the community – well done to everyone involved.

8.3 Waste Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs): We are all sure to have POPs in our households – POPs are generally found in items such as sofas and mattresses.

Historically POPs have been disposed of in landfill. It is anticipated that, in line with recent changes in England, landfilling of POPs will be banned in Scotland and that the material will need to be disposed of via Energy from Waste (EfW). POPs are generally found in items such as sofas and mattresses. Disposal of POPs via EfW will introduce cost pressures to the Council associated with the processing of these materials, i.e. transportation, shredding and the processing of the shredded material through EfW.

The Stockholm Convention developed initiatives to address concerns of POPs and to protect human health and the environment. The convention is noted within The Persistent Organic Pollutants Regulation 2007.

The regulation places strict controls over the management of the POPs products and determines how they should be destroyed. POPs are contained within fire retardant foam materials included in many soft furnishings made prior to 2019. POPs are also contained within some other products e.g. some building materials, non-stick cookware, tents etc.

There is the possibility in future that more items will be identified by the regulator to be treated in a similar manner to soft furnishings with POPs. Typical items containing POPs which have been historically disposed of in landfill and are likely to have to be transitioned to EfW include but are not limited to:

- Sofas
- Sofa beds
- Armchairs
- Kitchen and dining room chairs
- Stools and foot stools
- Home office chairs
- Futons, bean bags, floor and sofa cushions
- Leather, synthetic leather, other fabric and foam.

Non-upholstered items, such as wooden chairs without a cushion or textile back, seat, or arms are not likely to contain POPs. Waste from manufacturing new domestic seating that the manufacturer can demonstrate does not contain POPs are not covered by SEPA's draft guidance.

There will be an additional financial demand to the Council which relates to POPs. This financial demand affects the whole of Argyll and Bute and the Waste PPP contract due to the additional cost of transporting materials, separately shredding items and then processing through EfW. Officers will continue to monitor updates from SEPA and reporting findings to Committee – further information can be found in a recent report presented to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in August [POPs REPORT](#)

[SEPA'S DRAFT GUIDANCE](#)

- 8.4 Play Park Funding:** In August 2022, the Scottish Government confirmed a full five-year funding package to all Scottish Local Authorities from 2020/21 through to 2025/26. Argyll and Bute Council will receive a total of £938k for Play Park funding. All Scottish Councils have received funding through the Capital Allocation for Renewal of Play Parks Fund for investment in play park equipment.

In March 2023 the Council gave consideration to a report outlining a suggested process and timelines for proposing further engagement with other groups, including Youth Forums and relevant Community Councils in relation to the Play Park Funding Award of £938k which had been awarded by the Scottish Government for the 28 play parks being renewed in Argyll and Bute in a programme running until 2025/26.

Officers provided an update to Members of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in August. It is good to see the high number of respondents to the consultation, both adults and young people.

Area Committees were presented with an update report on play parks at their respective meetings in September, and officers will be arranging a business day with each Area Committee to agree how funding will be spent in each area, with a view to reporting this to the December Area Committees for formal approval.

8.5 Route Optimisation: I attended a session on 3rd August with officers and the system supplier to see how the system will work, and the benefits it will bring. This is a really interesting system and I am looking forward to its implementation.

8.6 Climate Change: An update on works undertaken on Climate Change following various reports from officers to the Policy and Resources Committee in May 2023:-

- Annual carbon footprint assessment under production for submission in November 2023.
- Officers are engaging for a consultant to work with the Local Authority to assist with the next Plan for Net Zero Route Map – the consultants will work with all services who have climate change activity, on future challenges, funding opportunities and legislative changes.
- Work is in hand for Elected Members who have not yet undertaken their Carbon Literacy Training, to do so.
- Officers have now been presented with the Bronze Carbon Literate Organisation Award – again, a massive congratulations to all staff involved in this award.



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

9.1 **New Funding Support and Advice for Local Businesses:** Everyone is fully aware of the many challenges our communities and business sectors are currently facing. Local businesses are a hugely important lifeline for our communities, not just for the services and products they deliver but for the vital jobs they create and for the wider contribution they make to the health of Argyll and Bute's economy.

Whether you're a new business just starting out or if you are already established, the range of grants and free specialist support offers the opportunity, to further develop your company.

Argyll and Bute Council has unveiled a package of new funding measures and specialist help to support local businesses. A combination of business grants and free expert advice will deliver vital support for local businesses across Argyll and Bute. The programme is funded by the UK Government under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Coordinated by the council's Business Gateway Team, grants and specialist help includes:

- **Small Business Development Grant** of up to £5,000
- **Business Start-up Grant** of up to £500
- **Trade Fair, Training or Accreditation Grant** of up to £1,000
- **Fully funded expert help** half a day to two days of support from a subject specialist
- **Intensive Support Programme** focused on exploiting business opportunities and building resilience

Further information on the full range of support available to Argyll and Bute's business sector is available on the council website <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/business-support/financial-support-and-grants-businesses>

The £450,000 programme of support, running over two years, builds on the success of previous council programmes that have helped deliver growth to hundreds of local businesses.

9.2 **Emergency Funding for Island Communities:** The current cost of living crisis has created very challenging circumstances for many people across our communities. This is particularly true for the region's islands with estimates showing that, due to a number of factors, those in island communities are facing, in some cases, around 20% to 60% higher costs of living than the UK average.

Following on from the previous allocation, this latest Islands Cost Crisis Emergency funding will again go to support projects and initiatives which will help hard-pressed families and individuals in our remote communities. Funding for initiatives to help Argyll and Bute's island communities navigate the current cost of living crisis has been approved by councillors. Argyll and Bute Council will direct £141,000 from the Scottish Government's Island Cost of Crisis Emergency Fund to a range of measures, supporting island communities.

The Fund aims to support urgent action to help island residents facing financial challenges. In the first year of funding, the council channelled £197,000 into initiatives including the Love Local Gift Card and topping up existing free school meal support. Councillors have given the go-ahead for 2023/24's funding allocation to support similar initiatives.

9.3 Funding for Helensburgh Businesses: Historic Environment Scotland and Argyll and Bute Council jointly fund the Helensburgh Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). The programme focusses on the regeneration of historical buildings as well as traditional skills training and community engagement.

The Shopfront Improvement Scheme is part of the Helensburgh Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) and is available to businesses within the designated CARS area in Helensburgh town centre. Previous shopfront improvement grants have resulted in an increase in customers and more people shopping local.

Many of our communities are benefitting from the Shopfront Improvement Scheme across Argyll and Bute, to help transform their shopfronts and increase footfall as a direct result. We have seen fantastic success stories of vacant shops reopening, exiting businesses getting a new lease of life and more people shopping local. We hope to see the same results and would encourage business owners to get in touch and apply for the grant to help cover repair costs. You can check if your business is eligible for the grant on the [Helensburgh CARS boundary map](#).

If you are eligible, you can apply for grants for up to 80% towards the total costs of improvements, subject to conditions. More details including how to apply are available on the council website <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/planning-and-building/growth-and-development/helensburgh-cars-grants-how-it-works>.

9.4 Covid Business Support: LACER funding is now complete. Just under £135k was paid out in LACER Business Start-Up grants and almost £186k in Small Business Development grants. Just over £34k was de-committed due to ineligible spend/clients not claiming all of their sum approved.

9.5 National Islands Plan Review: Scotland's first ever National Islands Plan was published in 2019. It is now being reviewed as required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, which may lead to the publication of a new National Islands Plan. The Act requires a review of the Plan within five years of initial publication. This review provides an opportunity to reflect on changes in circumstance for island communities since 2019. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 requires that a consultation must take place as part of this review. This will provide the Scottish Government with information on what may need to be revised before any new Plan is laid before parliament.

The aim of this review is to provide a detailed overview of the impact of the current National Islands Plan since its publication and it will inform a new National Islands Plan.

A report was considered at the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in August, where it was agreed that formal response to the consultation would be shared with Members of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board for their views and input to the final response from the Council.

[The National Plan for Scotland's Islands](#)

Snapshot of works:

- Argyll and Bute UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan: The Fund has launched and a total of 17 projects came forward. The total grant requested meant the fund was oversubscribed. 13 projects were successful with a total of £486,771 being awarded. The additional funding came from a small additional capital award from the Scottish Government.
- Islands Programme (IP) 2023/24: The Council submitted two applications to the IP 2023/24 and successfully secured funding for both projects. £700,00 awarded to Tobermory Worker Accommodation project, as part of the Rural Growth Deal, and £450,000 awarded to the HSCP for the Tiree Community Care Hub project – I am looking forward to seeing these projects progress.
- Shared Rural Network (SRN) and Scottish 4G Infill (S4GI) Programmes: A further to S4GI sites have now been activated on Jura one at Craighouse and the other at Ardlussa. These sites were extremely challenging due to the remote nature and the distance over

fibre that required significant input from our Roads department due to the fragile nature of the current infrastructure, EE are the anchor tenants on each of the masts. There is one final S4GI site to be commissioned which is at Crinan the anchor tenant on this site is Three which they are using as an SRN site.

- RCGF Round 11 – 2024/25
 - Kilmartin Museum Redevelopment – the RCGF funded element of the project has been completed and works are ongoing in relation to fitting out the refurbished museum. The Museum has now re-opened and is looking fantastic – I wish the Museum every success.
 - Obair Ùr Thirodh Tìree Community Business Hub – a contractor was appointed for the project in March 2023 and works are commencing. It is expected that they will be ongoing until February 2024.
 - Kerrera Old School - Community Hub Final Phase – Works commenced early in 2023 and are expected to complete in September 2023.
 - Ulva Ferry Shore Facilities Building - Doras Caolas Ulbha – A contract was awarded early in 2023 and construction works are now progressing, works are expected to complete in July 2024.
 - Aros Waterfront Development, Mull – outdoor activity hub – procurement work has commenced and it is expected that a contract will be awarded Autumn 2023.

9.6 New 4G mast boost for Islay: I was delighted to visit Islay on 10th August to meet with Jenni Minto MSP and representatives from Virgin Media following the delivery and installation of the company's first new 4G mast on the island.

They are building more than 60 sites in Argyll and Bute as part of the Shared Rural Network Programme. Upgrade works will tackle not-spots and areas of patchy signal, improving mobile connectivity in remote and rural areas.

When all Shared Rural Network upgrades have been delivered, 4G coverage is expected to increase from 60% across Argyll and Bute to around 85%.

I was very happy to hear about the investments in improving rural mobile connectivity that Virgin is making through the programme and look forward to other locations also benefiting from improvement as operators work on boosting coverage.

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

10.1 Economic Growth and Communities:

Argyll and Bute Loves Local: Local businesses across Argyll and Bute are the backbone of communities, providing independent services and supporting local employment.

The first ever Scotland Loves Local Week was run from 28th August to 4th September with communities encouraged to support local businesses by shopping local.

By loving local, we are choosing to back businesses and build stronger communities. Here in Argyll and Bute, we have fantastic independent shops and businesses who really are in the heart of the community.



From jewellery makers to artisan bakers, the finest seafood in the world to cheese makers, we are lucky to have great producers and entrepreneurs on our doorstep. Shopping local not only benefits businesses, you are helping to keep people in jobs. Please show your support and get behind the Scotland Loves Local campaign.

To help promote town centre recovery by encouraging more people to shop local, the council launched the Argyll and Bute Gift Card in 2021.

The scheme now has over 300 businesses across Argyll and Bute including restaurants, independent shops, experiences and visitor attractions signing up to support the initiative.

The card works the same as a gift voucher and is available to buy online from <https://scotlandgiftslocal.com/product/argyll-bute-gift-card/> Businesses can sign up to the scheme by registering at <https://lovelocal.scot/register-your-business/> Scotland Loves Local Week is organised by [Scotland's Towns Partnership](#) (STP) – the organisation behind the Love Local campaign

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. The Museum officially opened on 3rd September and the event was very well attended – I look forward to all that the museum will bring to our area.

Investment in Argyll and Bute: Ambitious plans for further town centre investment across Argyll and Bute continue to help enhance the area into a great place to work, live and visit. At a meeting of the Policy and Resources committee, councillors approved proposals to support a range of projects with funding from the Scottish Government's Place Based Investment (PBI) Programme.

Projects given the green light include:-

- Dunoon Burgh Hall Trust - Phase 2 to enhance the outdoor area and build on phase 1 investment £74,500

- Dunoon CARS/LACER approach - flexible fund to support businesses with improvements to shopfronts/buildings £49,500
- Helensburgh CARS – Shopfront Improvement Scheme £44,000
- Helensburgh Skate park – the council is working with the Helensburgh Skate Park Group to consider options for a permanent site £80,000
- Tobermory Worker Accommodation - match funding for recently successful Islands Programme award 23/24 £50,000
- Bid4Oban - Shopfront scheme and Oban signage – adds to previous investment and support work of Bid and local businesses £60,000
- Lochgilphead CARS - Shopfront improvement scheme and tenement property maintenance programme - £100,000
- Steel Beam Project/LACER Shopfront improvements in Campbeltown £38,000

Lochgilphead Front Green Award: Congratulations to everyone involved with the Front Green transformation. Working with the community, we wanted to deliver a large community space that offered recreation opportunities and capacity to hold events.

I'm sure everyone agrees that it is a fantastic asset for the town and continues to attract residents and visitors to the area. Investing in the town has created a real buzz that has opened up future opportunities to help support the local economy.

The Lochgilphead Front Green transformation project has received a gold award at the Scottish Design Awards in the public realm and landscaping category. Argyll and Bute Council invested £1.5 million to deliver a long-held community aspiration of creating a new public square to host events along with recreation facilities for residents and visitors. The project led by design consultants Erz resulted in transforming the area to include a new play park, additional seating areas with walking and cycling facilities. Historically prone to flooding, the Front Green was raised with new drainage and landscaping to help ease the flow of water.

The Scottish Design Award is the second award for the Front Green after previously winning the Streets and Spaces category at the Scotland Loves Local Awards. Open to all architects, engineers, graphic, interior and digital designers the Scottish Design Awards celebrate class-leading work, best practice, sustainability and innovation in all its forms.

For more information on the Scottish Design Awards, visit <https://www.scottishdesignawards.com/2023/public-realm-landscaping/lochgilphead-front-green/>

Funding partners for the project include; The Scottish Government's Town Centre Fund, Argyll and Bute Council's Tarbert and Lochgilphead Regeneration Fund, The Scottish Government's Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes (CWSR), Lochgilphead Phoenix Project and the Co-operative Local Community Fund.

Development in Tarbert: Argyll and Bute Council approved a development plan that paves the way to a dedicated Heritage Regeneration Scheme for Tarbert. The scheme will see historic buildings restored, traditional skills training and potential housing opportunities explored.

The council secured funding from Historic Environment Scotland's Heritage and Place Programme (HPP) and National Lottery Grants for Heritage to develop the Regeneration Scheme for Tarbert and submit a delivery phase application for a five-year scheme.

The council has secured £40,000 from HPP and £40,000 from the National Lottery. Councillors today confirmed £60,000 of match funding from the council through Crown Estates funding.

We're excited to hear more about how Tarbert will benefit from a dedicated Regeneration Scheme. By endorsing the match funding of an additional £60,000, we can now develop detailed plans of how to deliver regeneration over a five-year period.

We have seen first-hand how other areas across Argyll and Bute have benefitted from similar regeneration schemes. By investing in the key projects, properties take on new leases of life providing business and accommodation opportunities that prompt further investment to the local economy. I look forward to plans progressing.

The HPP is the new name for Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS). Over twelve years, the council has successfully secured eight rounds of CARS funding, totalling £23 million of investment to six key town centres.

The next steps include recruiting a Project Officer to help identify priorities for Tarbert. This will include engaging with the community and forming a partnership group to help shape key actions including priority building surveys, an energy efficiency pilot and a skills audit to help identify community training opportunities.

10.2 Customer and Support Services:

Customer Engagement Team: A snapshot of some of the work undertaken by the Customer Engagement Team and ICT:-

- The upgrade and redesign of the corporate website is complete and the new site went live in mid-June. The web team will now be working with services to ensure content is up to date and to train content authors on new accessibility standards. Encouragingly the score on the national Silktide index of accessibility rose to 96% in July from 89% in June – well done to everyone involved.
- We are now in peak season for weddings and partnerships, but these are down on 2022 as that year saw a post pandemic surge in ceremonies – as at August, there were 552 marriages registered compared to 613 last year and our registrars have performed 280 of those ceremonies. You can follow the Council's Registrars on Facebook and Instagram **#abregistrars #abplace2wed**

Communications: The Council's social media continues to grow across all channels using a range of topics, as at August:-

- Reach in last quarter = 1,548,000+
- Love Local gift card posts in June/July, reach = 16,300+
- Follower numbers: Facebook = 12,516 Twitter = 18,057
- Instagram = 8,250; LinkedIn = 4,247
- Driving visits to the council website – 30,300+ clicks from our social media posts
- 700+ enquiries from media, the public and employees
- Weekly news roundup maintaining a high click rate for 'more information' – 25%+

Remember when you are posting your scenic pictures of our lovely area on social media, to use our hashtag **#abplace2b**





10.3 Corporate Services:

By-election – Ward 1 South Kintyre: Following the recent resignation of Councillor Donald Kelly from Ward 1 – South Kintyre, the service are in the process of putting in place arrangements for a by-election to be held. An election timetable is being developed, with a notice of election likely to be issued on 19th September at time of writing. It is anticipated that Polling Day will take place on Thursday 2nd November 2023 with an electronic count being undertaken that evening.

Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places 2023-25: As required by the Representation of the People Act 1983 and by Section 17 of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, Argyll and Bute Council requires to undertake a compulsory review, by 31st January 2025, of polling districts and polling places within the UK Parliamentary Constituency for the purposes of UK Parliamentary, Scottish Parliamentary and Local Government elections.

The aim of the review is:-

- Seek comments on the present division of polling districts, and the suitability of the buildings and rooms presently used on election days for polling purposes.
- Ensure that all electors in the county have reasonable facilities for voting (as far as practicable in the circumstances).
- Ensure that (in as far as is reasonable and practicable), the polling places used are accessible to all electors, including those who are less able or have particular needs.

The Council welcomes relevant comments from residents of Argyll and Bute, and any individuals or bodies who have a particular expertise in relation to the use of premises or facilities for those who have different forms of ability or disability. This is now your opportunity to comment of your polling facilities and to suggest alternatives if you are unhappy

with your current facilities. Political parties, existing elected representatives and other interested parties are also invited to contribute.

The review will run from Monday 2nd October 2023 and all representations must be submitted by 30th October 2023 by post to the Election Office, Customer Services, Kilmory Headquarters, Lochgilphead PA31 8RT or by e-mail to elections@argyll-bute.gov.uk

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 – 8th September 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