

26th November 2020

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 update was provided to the council at its meeting on 22nd October 2020. At the same meeting, the council agreed a number of changes to Policy Lead roles and remits. The relatively short period since then, particularly for those members whose remits have changed significantly or for new Policy Lead councillors, means that some updates in this report are shorter than usual. All have put in place arrangements with their service for the months ahead and will provide the usual level of update at future meetings.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** Members are asked to consider the report.

3. POLICY LEAD FOR STRATEGIC FINANCE AND CAPITAL REGENERATION PROJECTS – Councillor Gary Mulvaney

- 3.1 Introduction:** This report provides members with an update on my activities as Depute Leader, Policy Lead for Financial Services and Major Projects during the months of October and November.
- 3.2 Financial Services:** The department continues to monitor current year expenditure and how Covid-19 has impacted on our finances, both in the short term and longer term. Updated projections have been provided to the Policy and Resources Committee. Officers continue to explore what fiscal flexibilities may be open to the council and recommendations will be brought back for members' determination.

In terms of the 21/22 budget, it looks likely that the timetable will be as tight as we saw in the current year, with no formal budget announcement from the Scottish Government until late January or the start of February 2021. That announcement quantifies the local government block allocation and ultimately what the actual settlement (and conditions) we and other council's will receive. In the interim, our budget models are reliant on various assumptions and estimates.

The cross party Budget Working Group has met virtually on two occasions so far and have offered constructive feedback to officers on the themes and ideas suggested. This group is, of course, not a decision making body, but does offer members and officers to work cohesively to consider the longer term challenges facing the council. It is envisaged at the conclusion of its work, that the group may be able to offer recommendations for wider member consideration. With the SG settlement announcement delayed, it does offer the group to further consider their work and additional meetings have been scheduled.

- 3.3 Local Tax Collections:** Collection of Council Tax for the current year at the end of October is 65.52% which is down 1.29%. This represents a reduction in income for the year of £720,000. A national benchmarking exercise was undertaken with 24 Scottish Local Authorities comparing the position at the end of September. This showed that Council Tax collections are down across the country ranging from 0.67% to 2.70% with the average across the range being 1.31%.

Collections of Non-Domestic Rates is 82.2% which is 7.18% higher than the same time last year. The reason for the increase is that most businesses are benefitting from 100% rates relief in relation to the Coronavirus regulations.

- 3.4 Benefits Update:** Processing times for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims is very good. New claims are being processed in 19.40 days on average, well below the target in the service plan. There has been a significant increase in claimants claiming Universal Credit in Argyll and Bute from 1,500 before the pandemic to 3,220 at the end of August 2020. This represents a 180% increase across the period.

Spend on the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) is £314k at the end of October against an annual budget of £765k. Therefore we have spent 70% of the profiled budget for the year to date. The number of applications being made per month peaked in April/May 2020 but is on the rise again. Spend will increase month to month going forward.

Finally, spend and commitments against the Discretionary Housing Payment budget is £805,000 for 2020/2021 against an expected liability of

£865,128. This fund will be stretched this year due to the increasing number of new Universal Credit claimants.

3.5 Helensburgh Waterfront Development: Heron Bros has made good progress against their contract construction programme, with the result that construction is slightly ahead of programme. They have achieved significant progress on the improved flood defences around the site, which is a welcome position given the recent bad weather, and the piling works are all but complete. The structural steelwork for the new leisure centre will begin arriving on site through November/December, and the glulam beams, which will support the pool hall roof are programmed to arrive early in January. The Contractor, Argyll and Bute Council, and our partners in HIE and Scottish Enterprise are progressing plans for a major 'Meet the Buyer' Event, most likely in the form of a webinar, which will be focussed on companies in Argyll and Bute, showcasing the contract opportunities which are still on offer, and which we will be encouraging them to bid for.

3.6 Rothesay Pavilion: As was reported in the All Members Briefing issued last month, following the demise of the main contractor, the focus of the Project Team's efforts has been concentrated on dealing with the commercial issues arising from the contractors insolvency; ensuring that the works already undertaken are properly protected from the elements; and developing the specifications and scope of requirements to enable us to appoint a replacement contractor.

The safeguarding works are well progressed and we shall shortly be installing enhanced temporary heating and ventilation within the building to protect the internal finishes over the winter months. Determining the most efficient and effective route to the appointment of a replacement contractor is proving to be extremely complex and challenging. This is because not only does it require the co-ordination, programming and management of remediation works which will need to be carried out under existing warranties/guarantees, and which have a number of technical and physical interdependencies, but also the subsequent delivery of the remaining works, whilst protecting those works previously completed (and their warranties/guarantees). Members will be kept updated on the procurement process.

3.7 Depute Leader Update: I continue to meet regularly with the Leader, the Chief Executive and other officers in terms of this role, covering a wide range of subjects.

4. POLICY LEAD FOR SUPPORT SERVICES – Councillor Mary Jean Devon

4.1 Introduction: This is my first Policy Lead report since being appointed to the role of Policy Lead for Support Services at the Council meeting on 22nd October. In the short interim period I have had meetings with both Executive Directors, the Head of Customer Support Services, the Head of Legal and Regulatory Services, Community Planning Manager and the Customer Engagement and Transformation Manager. These initial meetings have been very useful in providing a detailed overview of my wide ranging portfolio.

Moving forward, a programme of regular meetings have been put in place with the Executive Directors and the relevant Heads of Service to ensure that I am appraised of ongoing developments across my remit. This will enable me to provide a fuller update for colleagues at the next council meeting. This new role presents an exciting challenge for me and I look forward to working closely with the Depute and Shadow Policy Lead for Support Service.

5. POLICY LEAD FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE – Councillor Kieron Green

5.1 Local Meetings: I have been at meetings of the IJB on September 16th, HSCP Clinical and Care Governance Committee on September 21st, Finance and Policy Committee on September 25th and October 30th, Joint Leadership Group on September 30th, Strategic Planning Group on October 14th, and Audit and Risk on October 20th. Priorities at these have been the continued operation of Health and Social Care Services during the pandemic, remobilisation and recovery where suspension had been necessary, progress with addressing issues relating to culture, and the financial position of the HSCP.

On October 13th I met with Pam Dudek, the newly appointed Chief Executive of NHS Highland, who was visiting services across Argyll and Bute to introduce and acquaint herself with staff and the facilities here. I discussed the importance of the partnership with the wider NHS Highland area in supporting the safe delivery of a full range of health services locally.

Recognising that Culture is not only an issue for staff, but also the IJB in its governing capacity on October 28th we held a development session focused on relationship within the board. Especially at this time, when it is challenging to meet face to face I found it valuable to have the opportunity to listen to the different perspectives of board members on our roles and how we work together. This session also gave a chance for the IJB to be introduced to the Culture Group and how it is contributing to the HSCP.

5.2 National Meetings: The COSLA Children and Young People Board took place on October 2nd with the Health and Social Care Board on October 16th. Agenda items for the Children and Young People Board included The Promise to the care-experienced community, Children's Hearings, and Mental Health. At the Health and Social Care Board Fair Work in Social Care, considering Carers as part of EQIAs, and the Independent Review of Adult Social Care were new topics discussed.

I substituted for Cllr Currie on October 26th when the COVID-19 framework was being discussed at COSLA Leaders with the Depute First Minister present. At this I made the case that as rates within Argyll and Bute vary significantly, that the future possibility of more localised measures appropriate to the situation in different parts of our area should be open to being considered.

On November 5th I was present at a joint COSLA-Community Justice Scotland event. This looked at the impact the COVID-19 was having on all parts of the justice system, including prisons and work in the community. As well as direct consequences from restrictions on capacity of services due to the virus, there was also mention of issues around delays following from this and how this has been affecting individuals within the system.

The national IJB Chairs and Vice-Chairs Executive met on October 9th and November 11th, with discussion around how better working with the Scottish Ambulance Service can be achieved, and a move for IJBs and Health and Social Care Partnerships to take a more active role within the Community Planning Process – something which we are already achieving here in Argyll and Bute with HSCP officers leading in a number of areas.

As Vice Chair of the executive I met with Derek Feeley who is leading a review into Adult Social Care for the Scottish Government. This has a remit to look into future ownership, governance, and operation of what has been described as a national care service. A key theme is the desire for greater consistency of outcomes across Scotland, whilst having flexibility around the delivery of services to meet local needs.

Also in this capacity I attended the Scottish Government Mobilisation Recovery Group on September 18th, October 9th, and October 30th. These have included reports on the situation regarding COVID-19 across Scotland, the Strategic Framework around this, and planning for the delivery of services through the winter period. This included the redesign of urgent care – building on experiences earlier in the year to directing people accessing urgent care to do so in the first instance through telephone triage, or GP and Pharmacy Services rather than through Accident and Emergency.

Efforts to achieve greater use of digital services within Health and Social Care were highlighted at an event on September 23rd. Whilst there is greater uptake now of NHS Near Me, and expansion of this within social care is being pursued, there is recognition of the difficulties of accessing these with limited internet speeds in rural areas.

- 5.3 COVID-19:** With local cases of remaining at relatively low levels, the HSCP is concentrating on delivering as many services as possible within the current guidelines. Preparation to cope with potential increases remains relevant with plans being updated as appropriate, and these can be activated again at short notice should this be necessary.

The importance of visits to care homes is being recognised, however there continue to be challenges around implementing the enhanced guidance in relation to that particularly around internal visits.

- 5.4 Human Resources (HR):** The Argyll and Bute Culture Group is now active and is now part of the process to identify and implement actions relating to culture. Improvements including weekly communications from the Chief Officer and around culture and wellbeing are established, with the Chief Officer and Senior Leadership virtual check in sessions continuing.

Monitoring of progress with culture will be important in giving assurance that the changes that have taken place are reflected in staff experiences and this is planned to be carried out in due course.

Arrangements are being made to extend availability of the Guardian 'Speak Up' Service to cover council employees of the HSCP. This will give all HSCP staff an additional channel to raise issues in confidence and be listened to.

The management restructures within Adult Services and Children and Families which had been delayed as a result of COVID-19 have now been implemented, although some final appointments remain to be made to Area Manager positions. This provides a Professional Lead for Social Work to complement the existing leads within health.

- 5.5 Finance:** The Scottish Government has in principle offered to cover all COVID-19 related costs, however there remain uncertainties around the amount of funding being offered to cover undelivered savings. Consequently as of 30th September there is forecast to be a £2.561m overspend consisting of £2.060m in Social Work and £0.501m in Health.

As required under the Integration Scheme a £2.988m Financial Recovery Plan was agreed by the IJB in September, including delivering £1m of

existing savings, £0.650m of additional non-reoccurring savings and being able to claim for £1.338m of COVID-19 related loss of income and undelivered savings. As of 30th September, £952k of this plan had been delivered, with £2.0m remaining outstanding.

Agreement was reached with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde over the disputed value of the Service Level Agreement for previous years. This will however continue to be a significant portion of HSCP expenditure for future years, and will require ongoing negotiations to reflect changes in the delivery of services.

6. POLICY LEAD FOR BUSINESS, REGENERATION AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT – Councillor Alastair Redman

6.1 Introduction: This is my initial Policy Lead report since being appointed to the revised role of Policy Lead for Business, Regeneration and Commercial Development at the Council meeting on 22nd October. Since taking on this new portfolio I have met with the Executive Director, together with the Head of Service for Commercial Services, to discuss the key service areas included within my remit and to gain a fuller understanding of the current priorities and challenges.

A programme of six-weekly meetings have been scheduled with the Executive Director and Head of Service to provide regular updates on all service matters and I look forward to working with them closely over the coming months.

6.2 Business Gateway: Business Gateway and Economic Growth officers are administering the Scottish Government Business Hardship Fund, which was formally launched on 20th October. Members should note that the implementation of the scheme is highly dependent on guidance from the Scottish Government. This guidance is subject to frequent changes as the Government considers what businesses are eligible for support in each tier of Covid-19 measures. There has been significant interest in this scheme and staff are processing applications as quickly as possible to ensure businesses get the necessary support.

Digital Boost Programme: A Digital Development grant fund was launched nationally, using some of the £1.5m additional monies allocated by the Scottish Government. 16 recipients of Digital Boost 121 support in Argyll completed an Expression of Interest in the grant and have now been sent an application form.

Local Growth Accelerator Programme: COVID-19 has had an impact on the demand for growth support, with some SMEs seeking to scale back or delay their approved growth plans and others in the pipeline choosing not

to submit an application to the programme yet. COVID hasn't stopped growth altogether – as well as some registered SMEs progressing their growth plans, a number of new clients have been engaged.

Recognising that many SMEs have shifted from a growth agenda to a survival agenda, we secured approval from the Scottish Government to flex our LGAP support to allow the programme to also help businesses build their resilience to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and changing economic climate. Recovery support set to launch in November. The intention is to add COVID Recovery support to the existing Growth support and to maintain the Phase Two overall target spend for LGAP.

6.3 Projects and Regeneration - Strategic Events and Festivals: The council is taking forward a significant number of area regeneration schemes and consulting with community groups on possible schemes such as Ardrishaig public realm works. Works are progressing well as part of the Dunoon CARS and updates to the Google Street View images and 360 degree internal tours of the shopfronts that have already been completed. Google Street View images allows businesses to showcase their premises on a digital platform which is increasingly important for businesses in these challenging times.

Work continues to progress our Shop Local initiative funded through the Scotland Towns Partnership. The Council also approved in October a range of town centre capital projects to support recovery in this financial year. Many of these projects build on the investments already completed or underway through previous town centre funding.

The Rothesay THI project is currently in year 4 of 5 and substantial progress has been made to date. Work is underway to develop repair proposals for a further two tenements and a shopfront. Community engagement activity is currently being undertaken to develop murals for the town.

CHARTS: Officers worked with CHARTS on resubmission of the Creative Scotland bid which was unfortunately unsuccessful. There is no deadline for this and the aim is to submit during week beginning 9th November. CHARTS have re-programmed their delivery in order to continue to operate until March 2021. Operation past this date is dependent on a successful bid to Creative Scotland.

A series of support sessions led by Glasgow School of Art Innovation School are running on line and there will be funding available for a few organisations to deliver the plans which have developed as part of this project.

6.4 Economic and Social Recovery: The council is continuing to look to economic and social recovery with the Argyll Economic Resilience Forum continuing to meet every second week. Items of discussion include business support and grant aid, implementing Scottish Government job support programmes and the Rest and Be Thankful need for a permanent solution. The Officer Advisory Group, which has been established to support the Forum, now meets on a regular basis looking to take forward key actions. The key focus has been on the discussions around the Economic and Social Recovery Plan. However, it is recognised that businesses and communities are still in the response stage as the second wave of the pandemic hits, with ever tightening restrictions, including the Scottish Government's five-level COVID-19 response system/approach which came into force on Monday 2nd November 2020.

6.5 Digital: The council is continuing to coordinate investment in our digital infrastructure that is being delivered by the private sector, HIE and the Government. The latest figure for broadband is 93.3% of Argyll and Bute premises are now connected to the fibre network.

With regards to R100 no contract has been signed yet but the Scottish Government are confident that this will happen before the end of the year. It is hoped that following the agreement of the contract greater clarity will be provided on where Government investment will be targeted delivered by BT across Argyll and Bute.

With regards to the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, these vouchers can be pooled with other eligible premises with a possible £1500 through the DCMS RGC vouchers.

7. POLICY LEAD FOR ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES – Councillor Rory Colville

7.1 Introduction: I am really pleased to take on the Policy Lead role for Roads and Infrastructure Services. This is a service which delivers vital services for the council – cleaning the streets, emptying bins, managing landfill, operating ferries, running port and harbours, managing and maintaining the road network, transporting children between home and school, supporting public transport and keeping public open spaces safe and attractive. The services is also at the forefront in caring for the environment with initiatives such as LED lighting, hybrid and electric vehicles, electric vehicle charging ports and recycling.

As I take on this role for the service, winter is upon us and I am pleased to see a winter fleet ready to respond to the adversities winter can bring. I am also pleased that new gully cleaners are on order, this being an initiative of the Administration at the last budget setting.



In the future I will report in more detail in terms of the services and have already embarked on the first of a programme of meetings with officers.

8. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

- 8.1 Kilmory Outdoor Nursery:** Work has been carried out for the Kilmory Outdoor Nursery, which is within the Walled Garden, to ensure that the site can start operating as an outdoor nursery, and which will increase space and choice in Mid Argyll for ELC and 1140 hours. The site will be handed over to MAKI Pups in November and I wish them all the very best in their new environment.
- 8.2 Preparation for National 5 Qualifications session 2020/21:** Plans for ensuring quality moderation with schools working in their existing trios and agreeing a number of pieces to be moderated are underway following expected National Advice. Secondary Schools will also have the opportunity to link with appropriate schools in the Northern Alliance and receive support from Peter Havilland, Attainment Advisor, and Education Scotland.
- 8.3 Out of School Care Group Grants:** Grant funding from the Education Service has been made available to all out of school care groups operating across Argyll and Bute to support their increased running costs due to COVID. This will ensure continuity of care is available to parents during holidays and after school in these challenging times.

- 8.4 Online Learning:** Following the success of online learning during lockdown, Lucy Blake, Joint Head Teacher for Achahoish and Clachan Primary Schools, has decided to build on this success and is delivering online learning. Children from both schools join the same class online and this has proved to be very successful, showing how digital learning can link rural schools effectively.
- 8.5 Silver Rights Respecting School Award:** Kilcreggan Primary School achieved their Silver Rights Respecting School Award and as a result Fran Bretman, Head Teacher has been invited to join the panel for an online European Conference to discuss the award and its impact with other Educationalists.
- 8.6 What Scotland Learned:** Gayle Gorman, HMI Chief Inspector of Education, is publishing a document on ‘What Scotland Learned’ during lockdown and dealing with the pandemic. This will illustrate successes, achievements and challenges. Interviews will be carried out with academics and educational leaders. Education Scotland have expressed their wish to interview Peter Bain, Executive Head Teacher of Oban and Tiree High Schools and Tiree Primary School, to seek views from an Argyll and Bute perspective, and whose contribution will inform this piece of work. Four key questions form the basis for the interview that centre on learning and teaching, challenges/silver linings and leadership in dealing with the pandemic.
- 8.7 Investors in Young People:** Hermitage Academy has received glowing feedback from Investors in Young People (IYYP), 18 months after becoming the first school in Scotland to gain the national accreditation. In a follow-up report from IYYP, the school is referred to as “an ambassador for its young employees”, and is praised for its commitment to attracting, recruiting, developing and retaining young staff, students, and probationary teachers.

When Hermitage Academy received IYYP accreditation in February 2019 it was the first school in Scotland to do so. Eighteen months later and Hermitage is still the only school in the country to have this prestigious accolade to its name. This in itself is a remarkable feat, but to then receive such a fabulous follow-up report is just amazing. Hermitage is recognised as an employer of choice and the IYYP acknowledges the large number of practices that the school has put into place that result in positive outcomes for its young people. It’s clear that Hermitage is leading the way when it comes to providing opportunities for young people, particularly those in its workforce, and I look forward to seeing what they achieve next. I have a strong feeling that they might be going for gold next. Watch this space!

8.8 Gold Award by Woodland Trust: Ulva Primary School on the Isle of Mull has been awarded a gold award by the Woodland Trust for taking an active role in green activities on the island. The Trust's "Green Tree Schools" initiative offers schools the opportunity to bring the great outdoors, wildlife and green issues into the classroom.

To achieve this award, pupils planted new trees on the Isle of Ulva; created artwork using natural materials; visited local woods; and completed woodland workshops with Countryside Ranger Jan Dunlop. The children also increased recycling; created tree champions to be a voice for woods and trees; and held an assembly based on the uplifting story of The Man Who Planted Trees, whilst also discussing climate change and the importance of trees to everyone. Pupils also explored the traditions of tree dressing around the world and held their own tree dressing ceremony, decorating one of the trees in the school grounds with Christmas wishes for the future and homemade fat balls for the birds. It is great to see that even during these difficult times, our young people remain resilient and are gearing up with their Christmas spirit, well done to everyone involved.

8.9 Children's Rights: I was pleased to be asked to speak by video to our young people on their rights. The Scottish Government has asked for all Local Authorities to produce a report on how they are taking forward the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Education Service have created a website for our children and young people to find out more about what Argyll and Bute has been doing to support children's rights. We have amazing schools in Argyll and Bute, with fantastic staff, but the most important part of schools and the thing that makes our schools wonderful is our children and young people. The UNCRC says that children and young people should have every chance to be safe, healthy and have their views heard and in Argyll and Bute our schools work really hard to protect and promote these rights. We have 33 schools that are signed up to UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools programme. This means that the whole school community learns about what Children's Rights are and how to support these.

9. POLICY LEAD FOR PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES – Councillor David Kinniburgh

9.1 Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2): My previous report advised that due to Covid-19 measures it was anticipated the Development Plan Scheme (DPS) which is the timetable for preparing the replacement LDP2 would require to be updated, as such a report updating the DPS was presented to and approved by the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing (PPSL) Committee in September for submission to Scottish Ministers

showing an anticipated slippage of adoption of LDP2 by 5 months to spring 2022.

It should be noted that until LDP2 is adopted the statutory status of the current Local Development Plan remains as well as the associated Supplementary Guidance.

Details of the proposed LDP2 and the updated DPS can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/ldp2>

9.2 Planning Applications: Although the submission of planning applications had been expected to tail off during lockdown the submission rate of applications has constantly remained higher than anticipated since 23rd March. The latest figures available show that 1,096 formal applications have been received between 23rd March 2020 and 5th November 2020. This represents 86.1% of the volume received in the same period in 2019 when 1,273 applications were received – this shows an increase by volume since my last report of 5.6% when the figure was 81%.

9.3 Planning Fee Income: Although the number of applications received is encouraging, given the current circumstances we find ourselves in planning fee income remains a concern and projections show that there is likely to be a significant shortfall in planning fee income for 2020/21.

Two main factors for this are that the additional fee income that was expected from amended fee regulations which were due to be implemented in June 2020 by the Scottish Government were paused due to the pandemic and are now unlikely to be introduced before the Scottish Parliamentary elections in May 2021 and only one 'major' planning application has been received in the year to date compared to five in the same period last year which has had a significant impact on fee income.

9.4 Consultation Updates: In my last report I advised of a number of consultations that have been paused due to the current Covid-19 restrictions that are in place. This remains the case for the Conservation Area Appraisal consultations for Helensburgh Town Centre and Tarbert Conservation Area. However, as the consultation relating to the Argyll and Bute Windows Technical Working Note will be conducted on-line, preparation is underway to re-commence this consultation for a six-week period sometime during November and it is hoped that the feedback to the consultation will be reported to the PPSL Committee in February or March 2021.

9.5 Pre-Determination Planning Hearing arrangements: Since my last report the arrangements for conducting virtual Pre-Determination Hearings has been agreed with three hearings due to take place before the end of

this year. As stated previously local participation is a priority in conducting hearings and so far tests carried out by officers using Skype with up to 80 participants, some using the Council network and some using VPN, have proved successful with no major issues identified. This, together with a new procedure in place for conducting hearings virtually it should allow all participants to be heard in an open, fair and impartial way.

- 9.6 Regulatory Services:** Covid-19 enforcement work remains the main priority within Regulatory Services at the moment and resources are being diverted into this type of work to deal with the significant workload that is being placed upon the service at this time.

With the introduction of the new tier system enforcement strategies have been reviewed and there has been an enhanced focus on specific work in relation to the new measures.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1** 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 – 12th November 2020

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