

15th April 2021

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 26th November 2020.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

**3. POLICY LEAD FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MAJOR 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 from December to March 2021.
- 3.2 Financial Services:** Focus in the last quarter has naturally related to revenue and capital budget preparation for 21/22. As normal, the information prepared by officers was extensive and the support from the department to members in relation to queries and questions from across the chambers in the lead-up to the budget was warmly welcomed.

The council agreed the Administration's budget on February 25th with notable highlights being a council tax freeze; resources allocated to 'Staycation' support, roads, footpaths, the wellbeing of young people and welfare rights amongst a package of measures. The department continues

to spend a considerable time on the financial consequences from COVID-19.

- 3.3 Local Tax Collections: Council Tax** collections for 2020/2021 as at 19 March 2021 are 95.65%, down 0.34% on the previous year at this time which represents £185,000 in monetary terms. This reduction in income collected is entirely related to Covid-19 - however the good news is that the current position is a lot better than previously reported.

Non-domestic rates (NDR) collections for 2020/21 at end of February 2021 are actually up 0.53% at 97.73% in comparison to 97.20% in the previous year. This is mainly due to the fact that businesses in the Retail Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) sectors have all benefitted from the 100% Coronavirus RHL relief which has reduced the council net billed sum by circa £11 million during the year. This relief will also be available to businesses in 2021/2022.

- 3.4 Benefits Update: Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF):** The programme funding for 2020/21 is £765,421. As at the end of February 2021, we have spent £577,161 on applications received which is only 82.26% of the profiled amount. There were 40 claims received but not yet processed. We are continuing to support high, medium and low priority cases. However, we do not anticipate spending the full amount of funding available this year. The projected outturn for this fund is around £650,000. Any underspend will be carried forward to 2021/2022.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs): The total funding for DHPs for 2020/2021 is £866,000 including increases in funding related to Covid. We have processed 1,167 applications for DHP and made 927 awards. There were a total of 30 applications outstanding or requiring further information at the end of February 2021.

Benefits processing: Our statistics for processing changes in circumstances now show that we have taken on average 2.48 days, well below our target of 6 days. For new claims processing we took an average of 19.30 days for the year to date to end of February 2021 which is below the target of 21 days.

- 3.5 Helensburgh Waterfront Development:** Heron Bros has continued to make good progress against their contract programme. The work on flood defence walls and placement of rock armour around the site is complete. All the structural steelwork is complete. Casting of the reinforced concrete walls and floor to studio pool, balancing tanks and main pool are nearing full completion. Main and emergency access staircases are installed along with completed installation of steel deck and concrete slab to first floor. Lomond Stone walling facings to the two concrete retaining walls running parallel to

the existing pier are complete and Lomond Stone walling to the southern elevation of the building is ongoing.



Mechanical and electrical installations have commenced to ground floor Changing Village, reception area, plant room etc. External drainage works have commenced along with progressing utilities connections i.e water, BT, electric, gas and sewage. The project has been awarded £100,000 from SportScotland Sports Facility Fund, which will be used to support existing plans including adding a moveable floor to the studio pool. The addition of Changing Places Facility and Pool Pods will also enable more people with disabilities to access swimming as part of a healthy active lifestyle. The project has achieved a rating of excellent in a recent audit conducted by the Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS), a not-for-profit, independent organisation founded to raises standards in the construction industry. Some photographs are included of current work.



- 3.6 Rothesay Pavilion:** Following the demise of the original contractor, specialist surveys of the works completed on site have taken place to enable us to procure a replacement contractor. The final element of this work (the structural concrete surveys), has been completed and the Design Team are now analysing the results to inform their drawings, specifications etc. On the commercial front, the Project Team has engaged with two national construction framework providers to assess their suitability and capability in providing the construction works through to completion. A decision on the procurement route to utilise for the project is expected within the next few weeks. Officers have also been working with our funding partners, and the Rothesay Pavilion Charity (RPC) to assess what this means for the transition to the operational phase for the building, as well the development of the Operational Business Model by the RPC in a post-COVID environment.
- 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:** Since my appointment to this role on 22nd October, 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 as part of the programme of regular sessions put in place for me by the team
- 4.2 Committee Arrangements:** Work is ongoing on the Transition to MS Teams. Currently, all Committee staff, Members' Services staff, key officers and all Elected Members have been upgraded to Office 365 and have the Teams App installed on their devices. Initial familiarisation sessions for Elected Members have been undertaken and have been well received. Further guidance will be developed to apply the features available in Teams to the procedural elements of Committee meetings. There is an update report on the agenda for the April council meeting which provides more information about this extensive project and about proposals for hybrid meetings arrangements.
- 4.3 Elections:** Significant additional work and planning arrangements ongoing in light of Covid risk assessments with regards to the March by-elections and May Parliamentary Elections. This includes establishment and appointment of new Covid Marshall role at polling stations and count venues.

Election training has been completed with our provider Idox through a bespoke training module which has been used for training of Polling Staff at the By-Elections in March and this will be adapted for the Scottish Parliamentary Election in May.

Detailed planning in respect of poll and count arrangements ongoing and in accordance with guidance and direction for the Electoral Management Board and the Electoral Commission to ensure safe conduct of the election process during the Covid context All parts of the process have been subject to risk assessment and there has been liaison and discussion with the EMB and EC on overall arrangements.

4.4 Trading Standards: The priority continues to be the enforcement of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (“The emergency legislation”) and other COVID-19 related work. The team continue to respond to complaints from consumers and enquiries from businesses. This includes the need to respond swiftly and adapt to almost daily changes in legislation and government advice, with up to date detail often required on very complex issues within hours of legislative changes.

4.5 Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management: The Scottish Government provides guidance for recording procurement benefits for use by all local authorities. The procurement benefits for the **year-to-date** in the table below have been recorded in line with the guidance. Savings through Scottish Procurement and Scotland Excel contracts are achieved through buying from national contracts, and reported below as Procurement Benefits. These savings figures are provided to us by the respective awarding body.

Process/Contract Type	*Budget Saving Revenue	Budget Saving Capital	Procurement Benefits Revenue	Procurement Benefits Capital	Total
Open/Restricted Tender	£47,924	£3,390,818	£114,745	£2,190,832	£5,744,319
Quick Quote/Mini-Comp	£25,473	£55,820	£37,908	£90,078	£209,279
Transactional Purchasing Team	£46,166	-	£10,152	-	£56,318
YPO Income	£1,142	-	-	-	£1,142
HSCP	(£10,819)	-	(£7,447)	-	(£18,266)
**Scottish Proc. Contracts	-	-	-	-	-
**Scotland Excel Contracts	-	-	£211,316	-	£211,316
Total	*£120,705	£3,446,638	£374,121	£2,280,910	£6,222,374

Local Spend: Monitoring shows that the current level of spend with local suppliers for the year to date is 35%.

- 4.6 Community Development:** Supporting Communities Fund: The council's Supporting Communities Fund application deadline was 20 March. Over 80 applications were received from organisations. The applications will be checked for eligibility and assessed with recommendations going to the Area Committees for decision in June.

Training for community organisations: The Community Development team ran two training sessions on Participation Requests; 24 and 25 March. Over 20 people attended to hear about how to make a Participation Request to the council. These requests are a statutory part of Community Empowerment Act. The training was well received.

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

- 5.1 IJB:** I would like to take this opportunity to thank Joanna MacDonald for her leadership of the HSCP, steering a course through extremely challenging times with energy, professionalism and openness. She will be missed by all in the Partnership and I wish her well for her next career move to the Office of the Chief Social Work Officer at the Scottish Government.

A number of members of the IJB have also left; Boyd Robertson, Gaenor Roger and Kirsteen Murray and I thank them for their contributions to the board. They have been replaced by Susan Ringwood, Graham Bell and Takki Sulaiman and I look forward to working alongside them in future.

On 31st March I stood down as Chair of the IJB reaching the end of the two year term as set out in the Integration Scheme, with Sarah Compton-Bishop taking over. I will now serve as Vice-Chair and I wish Sarah every success in leading the board as our health and social care services recover from the impacts of COVID.

- 5.2 Local Meetings:** The IJB met on 25th November, 27th January and 31st March. Items brought before the board included updates on progress with culture within the HSCP and NHS Highland, reports on COVID-19 infections and vaccinations, Budget consultations and setting, Carers Strategy Update, Child Poverty Action Plan Review and a Suicide Prevention Strategy.

At Audit and Risk Committee meetings on 11th December and 23rd February updates on Internal Audit, Corporate Governance, Compliance with Integration Scheme and IT Strategy were presented.

Topics discussed by the Clinical and Care Governance Committee on 19th November, 14th January and 18th March were incident exception reports, CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and Winter Planning.

The Finance and Policy Committee on 11th December, 22nd January, 26th February, 19th March gave more detailed scrutiny over budget monitoring and outlooks, and COVID response and financial implications.

Strategic Planning Group (SPG) met on 28th January, 4th March looking at Strategic Commissioning, the Market Facilitation Plan for services in Argyll and Bute, and proposed Older Adult Planning and Engagement Strategic Frameworks.

The Joint Leadership Group between Argyll and Bute Council, NHS Highland and the HSCP met on 17th November and 16th March
On 25th January and 22nd February I attended initial meetings discussing implementing a Recovery Orientated System of Care approach within Cowal to help people with drugs and alcohol addictions.

5.3 National Meetings: As Vice-Chair of the national IJB Chairs and Vice-Chairs I have been part of the Ministerial Recovery Group for Health and Social Care which has met on 20th November, 11th December, 22nd January, 12th February, 5th March, 26th March. There has continued to be a wide ranging membership of stakeholders across Health and Social Care and we have received briefings on progress on COVID-19 infections and vaccinations, and the adaptations being made to services to ensure they can best meet people's needs across Scotland.

The national IJB Chairs and Vice Chairs have also met on 18th November – a network meeting with the Cabinet Secretary, executive meetings on 8th December, 18th January IJB and 8th February. The review of Adult Social Care was discussed extensively, and alongside Peter Murray I met again with Derek Feeley on 21st January to be updated on progress with this review prior to publication.

COSLA Health and Social Care Board met on 11th December, 5th February COSLA and 19th March. The Adult Social Care review, and resulting implications in terms of governance and finance was a major topic in the latter two meetings. As well as this, Self Directed Support, Learning Disability and Autism, the Drug Deaths taskforce, Digital Health and Care and Dementia featured on agendas.

On 20th November, 19th February, 1st April the COSLA Children and Young People discussed Early Learning and Childcare including expansion and deferred entry to schooling, Children's Hearings, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, expansion of Universal Free School Meals, Instrumental Music Tuition.

- 5.4 Staffing and Recruitment:** Recruitment is ongoing for a number of senior posts in the HSCP – Chief Officer, Chief Financial Officer and Head of Children and Families, with George Morrison stepping up as Acting Chief Officer on an interim basis. The recent Chief Officer recruitment process did not result in an appointment and arrangements are currently being considered for a fresh recruitment process.

Work on improving culture continues, with an ongoing dual focus both locally in Argyll and Bute by the Culture Group and at NHS Highland Board level, where structural and policy improvements are progressing. Courageous conversations training continues to be delivered and is still the cornerstone of building a strong, open and resilient culture across the HSCP. Managers are also taking part in online training on the new, national NHS Once for Scotland HR policies, which will improve confidence levels for managers discharging their roles in the workplace. Our management induction programme got off to a very positive start, with sessions on Finance and on HROD having been very well received. The April session will cover organisational and staff governance. The IJB received an update on initial feedback from this programme at their development session on 31st March.

The partnership model for working with Trade Unions and Staff Side in Argyll and Bute was commended by the NESH Organisational Change Oversight Group at its meeting earlier this month. The process for managing change and the impact on employees is now well established and progressing efficiently through change proposals, ensuring that employee representatives are involved at the appropriate stages in the process. NHS Highland are looking to use our model to inform their new model of staff engagement and oversight.

The Council HR Team are currently working to make the £500 payment from Scottish Government to social care staff after receiving the detailed guidance on eligibility in mid-March. NHS employees in the HSCP received this in their February pay.

- 5.5 Children and Young People's Service Plan (CYPSP):** The Children and Young People's Services Plan (CYPSP) 2020 – 23 is the core plan for the multi-agency delivery of children's services in Argyll and Bute. It is one of the key strategic plans developed and implemented on behalf of NHS

Highland, Argyll and Bute Council and the Community Planning Partnership.

The Integration Joint Board and Council approved the Plan in the autumn of 2020 prior to it being submitted to the Scottish Government.

Coming towards the end of Year 1 of the Plan we can report that various pieces of performance and improvement work have been undertaken to progress the Plan.

There are four strategic priorities within the CYPSP

1. By ensuring strong, respectful collaborative leadership and communication through the GIRFEC approach we are getting it right for our Children and Young People CYPSP.
2. Our children and young people have access to early help and support CYPSP.
3. We will improve the mental health and well-being of our children and young people.
4. We will ensure our children and young people's voices are heard.

The Plan has a key focus on delivering improved outcomes using the Quality Improvement methodology, this work has progressed by establishing a multi-agency Argyll and Bute Quality Improvement Faculty who work to ensure we are developing change ideas that will ultimately improve outcomes for Children and Young People.

This is a ground breaking approach to delivering outcomes through service planning and is informing practice in other areas of the country. The rigor involved will allow more robust reporting and provide confidence we can evidence improvements.

- 5.6 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS):** NHS Highland are currently being provided with enhanced support from Scottish Government for CAMHS and Argyll and Bute have a series of enhanced support meetings to ensure the right support is in place to make progress.

An NHS Highland CAMHS programme board has been established, the remit of the board is to try to address key issues and improve ways of working in line with the NHS Scotland National CAMHS Specification

The Scottish Government have announced an additional £120 Million for CAMHS and Psychological services across Scotland and NHSH are working jointly to ensure a robust business case is in place to secure additional funding, in line with the NHS Highland remobilisation plan.

Due to a national increase in referrals to CAMHS since a return to school in August last year, and the higher level of concern about the emotional wellbeing of young people during the pandemic, more referrals have, and are being received.

The HSCP have also approved additional CAMHS resource to augment the team, this has been welcomed and new posts will be advertised very soon to progress this.

The Counselling in Schools team have taken up post under the management of the Child Health Manager for Schools. The team comprises of a team leader, 7.5WTE counsellors, admin support and a research assistant. The service commenced on the February 8th 2021.

- 5.7 Child Protection:** Performance Indicators across all stages of Child Protection intervention from initial referral through Initial Referral Discussions (IRDs) on to Case Conferences and decisions on Registration continue to show trends lower than levels recorded prior to the COVID pandemic. While return to schools after the October break in 2020 may have influenced an increase in figures through to the end of December numbers reverted to being lower than early 2020 for the first quarter of 2021. Partners have continued to meet on a fortnightly basis to consider trends and anticipate any significant issues that the developing picture of COVID may cause, and the Child Protection Committee and its sub-groups have continued to work on service priorities informed by the data described.

Argyll and Bute Child Protection Committee has volunteered along with six other Local Authority Committees to participate in a “deep dive” analysis of performance data throughout the pandemic being completed by Social Work Scotland (SWS) in association with Strathclyde University. The initial meeting with SWS will be held on 25th March.

- 5.8 Secure Accommodation:** The Children and Young People’s Commissioner in Scotland has used powers available to initiate an investigation into the use of the Secure Authorisations undertaken by Chief Social Work Officers across Scotland. This investigation undertaken within a context of the requirement for public bodies to produce three-yearly Children’s Rights Plans and the very recent approval by the Scottish Parliament of the incorporation of UNCRC into Scots Law, looks at the rights of young people who are admitted to secure provision to legal representation, consultation with decision makers and written evidence of decision making by Chief Social Work Officers.

An early draft of a section of the investigation report has been commented on by Argyll and Bute Chief Social Work Officer and returned to the Commissioner’s Office. The report is scheduled to be published late

summer 2021. Learning from the investigation initiation and now the draft section of the report is being acted upon with a new provision within Argyll and Bute Council for a Secure Panel to review applications for secure authorisations, and planned development sessions with Area Team Social Workers to better understand the responsibilities of the Chief Social Worker in making a Secure Authorisation decision.

5.9 Finance: The forecast outturn position for 2020-21 is a forecast underspend of £2.016m. This consists of an underspend of £295k within Social Work delivered services and an underspend of £1.721m within Health. The forecast outturn for social work takes into account the planned early repayment of £1m to the Council which will reduce the amount due to be paid back next financial year. Whilst this has been enabled thanks to the funding of undelivered savings amounting to £2.228m, this is coming from additional vacancy savings above the budgeted level. Overall we are forecasting to deliver £7.662m out the £10.386m savings target (74%). Of this £5.731 is delivered on a recurring basis, and £1.931m delivered non-recurringly. This means that £4.655m has to be carried forward into the next financial year.

The funding from the Council has now been approved. There is a 0.39% increase for 2020/21 along with a total of £1.398m new funding including above inflation uprating for free personal and nursing care of £253k; Scottish Living Wage uplift of £616k; Carers Act funding of £516k and £13k for Criminal justice. There are a number of consequential impacts for expenditure.

Funding from NHS Highland includes a 1.5% increase (the national uplift) plus an NRAC uplift of £2.9m. This is 50% of our share of the total NRAC uplift of £16.4m. The full amount of £5.75m is promised for the following year. In addition they have agreed not to seek repayment of the £1.280m brokerage provided last year.

The IJB approved a balanced budget for 2021-22 with:

- management/operational savings amounting to £3.646m in 2021-22 and £2.676m in 2022-23.
- policy savings amounting to £561k in 2021-22 and £782k in 2022-23.
- the removal of £85k previously agreed savings relating to the management restructure now completed
- an investment in financial sustainability totalling £505k in 2021/22

The Transformation Board which had paused in February 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic has been restarted and 5 areas of focus have been agreed for next year. These have been approved by the Strategic Planning Group and are as follows:

- Primary Care Improvement Plan
- Children's Services – shift from out of area residential placements to more fostering and early preventive support
- Care Homes and Housing – with replacement strategy for local authority care homes which are no longer fit for purpose, with improved range of models of care, including nursing care provision in West
- Community Hospitals – ensuring cohesive strategy linking tightly to primary care, reviewing the model
- Learning Disability – expansion of core & cluster models to reduce out of area placements; and review of day services

In addition transformation work will continue in these areas:

- Increased support for Carers, fulfilling aspirations of the Carers Act
- Community assets approach – ensuring a focus on early intervention and prevention
- Digital services including medical records and appointment booking

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

6.1 Introduction: I was 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 Directors, together with the relevant Heads of Service, to discuss the key service areas included within my remit and to gain a fuller understanding of the current priorities and challenges.

6.2 Business Support: Business Gateway and Economic Growth officers continue to administer various national funding streams to provide support to the businesses impacted by the pandemic. This is a fast paced and often rapidly changing situation and the team are dealing with very extensive numbers of enquiries as well as assessing and processing applications against national criteria.

Digital Boost Programme: Businesses in Argyll and Bute have benefited from digital skills training and one-to-one expert help thanks to DigitalBoost funding from the Scottish Government of circa **£114k** since 2019/20.

DigitalBoost provides local workshops, support from a digital expert, online tutorials, and practical guides on topics including social media, cyber resilience, data analytics, digital marketing strategy and e-commerce. Another key component of the DigitalBoost service is a five-minute online health check businesses can take to assess their digital strengths and weaknesses.

For this year, 2020-21 to date, the following interventions under DigitalBoost have been achieved:

- 21 businesses supported through 2 days of advice;
- 38 businesses supported through 1 hour surgeries;

39 businesses supported through Argyll and Bute Digital Boost Programme webinars, plus 11 scheduled to year-end.

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: Despite Covid 19 and the associated restrictions and challenges the council continues to take forward a significant number of area regeneration schemes, many of which are being delivered in close partnership with our community organisations. Included within these is the current public realm project at Colchester Square Lochgilphead which is nearing completion and the recently completed car parking works at Tarbert Harbour undertaken by the Harbour Association and funded through the Councils Tarbert Lochgilphead Regeneration Fund.

Works are progressing well as part of the Dunoon CARS and Rothesay CARS/TH projects with a number of priority projects having completed on site and others starting on site.

The council was delighted to hear earlier this year that following their application to the 2020 SURF Awards Campbeltown had won Scotland's most improved place. The regeneration of Campbeltown has been delivered through two consecutive CARS investment projects as well as CHORD investment and has been the result of almost 15 years of work. This has only been possible through strong partnerships with the community, businesses, external funders and the private sector which has been fundamental to the success of the project.

Work continues to progress on our Shop Local initiative funded through the Scotland Towns Partnership which has delivered bespoke shop local promotional material for each of our towns to support in the recovery process. Further support to our town centre businesses is being delivered through the small scale shop front improvement grant scheme, funded through town centre funding from SG. There has been a high take up by businesses of the grant scheme across a number of our towns and the resulting physical works will help to deliver more attractive and vibrant town centres.

The council has also been successful in securing funding from Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) 2021/22 which will help deliver three key initiatives:

- A new Port Ellen Community hub on Islay (£746,223)
- Scalasaig housing and business units on Colonsay (£335,000)
- Kilmory Business Park in Lochgilphead (£650,000)

Argyll and Bute Council has worked with South Islay Development (SID) and Colonsay Community Development Company (CCDC) on plans for each of the community projects and applied for funding on their behalf.

The council will re-develop land in Kilmory, Lochgilphead, unlocking 5.9hectares to build a new business hub. The investment includes business premises and storage options for up to ten new and expanding small and medium sized enterprises. The project aims to create up to 30 jobs in the local community, including for school leavers.

Helensburgh CARS – The council has been successful in securing funding from HES for the Helensburgh CARS. The latest round of CARS funding will build on the investment that has already been made in the town to help attract people and business to the area.

- 6.4 Commercial Services:** A £650k government grant via the Regional Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) has been awarded to develop a new business and industry development at Kilmory Park, Lochgilphead. This will leverage in other funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), the council and the private sector to deliver the new business park on ground that is part owned by the council. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been submitted to the private sector partner to agree and take the project forward in 2021. The business park is aimed at allowing local firms to expand and attract inward investment and create jobs.

The service is also scoping out a shared catering and cleaning service with West Dunbartonshire Council. Officers are looking at around 15 areas where efficiencies or improvements could be made through joined-up ways

of working. Results from this exercise will be known in April and if implemented would be first shared service in Scotland for this sector.

Several commercial leases and sales have been agreed, creating income for council that can be reinvested into services. This has included the lease of a public toilet at Pulpit Hill, Oban to an operator who will continue to offer public toilet service but remainder will be used as 'pod style' tourist accommodation.

We have been working with Ministry of Defence in Helensburgh to develop options to meet their demand for both office and residential accommodation in the area.

Two proposals have been received from private sector companies to develop land at Oban Airport.

Internal upgrade works have been completed at Carradale and Inveraray Primary Schools.

The team are working on specific business cases and programme of works to deliver over £1.1m worth of climate change works to our existing buildings. This will include energy renewable projects for solar panels and Air Source heating which will reduce costs over a ten-year period and reduce carbon emissions.

The service have been working successfully in partnership with Education to support an increased number of our children back into face to face learning in our schools by providing catering and cleaning that meets current requirements.

6.5 Digital: 93.5% of Argyll and Bute are connected to the fibre network, realistically 84.5% are able to receive Superfast Broadband with speeds greater than 30Mbps. Currently 1.8% of premises have access to a Full Fibre Connection. This will increase as we enter the R100 build phase as the contract with BT was signed in December 2020.

The Scottish Government have given early sight of 45,000 premises for the North Lot which will be part of the build and are eligible for an Interim Voucher of £400 as connections will be made after 2021 although there is not yet an associated date, more will follow over the coming months when the full intervention area will be released. As part of this contract Argyll and Bute are to get 3 subsea cables to Iona, Colonsay and Lismore with surveys being undertaken this summer 2021.

The Scottish 4G Infill (S4GI) mast at Glenbarr went live in December 2020. This has increased 4G coverage in the area with modelled coverage maps indicating that coverage ranges from Rhunahaorine in the North to Kilkenzie in the South. This coverage is from EE who provide the Emergency Service Network (ESN), it is hoped that over the coming months the other 3 operators Vodafone, O2 and Three will install their equipment as part of the new Shared Rural Network (SRN). Planning approval has been given to a further 4 S4GI masts Southend, Mull and 2 on Jura.

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

7.1 Introduction: Since taking up the Policy lead for Roads and Infrastructure I have been busy getting to grips with the detail of the service. Whilst I was very familiar with many parts of the service it has been a real eye opener for me to see the volume and type of work covered by the service. From collecting the bins, disposing of waste and recycling materials, public conveniences, fixing the roads and bridges etc, dealing with flooding, coastal protection, electric vehicle chargers, ferries, ports and harbours, public transport, home to school transport, co-ordinating utilities such as gas and electric works in the public road, dealing with dozens of temporary traffic orders to facilitate works and events to name but a few.

I have also been attending liaison meetings with colleagues from Transport Scotland, BEAR and the police as well as participating in the Northern Roads Collaborative.

The following will give colleagues across the chamber a flavour of some of the activity underway:

7.2 Roads Capital Reconstruction Programme: This year's £10M Roads Capital Reconstruction Programme has been finalised and issued to all Members. The programme includes over 140 individual schemes across the four administrative areas which will see improvements to roads across the area. The works are being delivered through the services Mixed Economy Model with a significant amount of work being delivered by our internal teams supported by SMEs and national contractors. This provides some flexibility and enables the service to be able to respond to increases to budgets such as this year's bumper £10M programme.

I'm keen for officers to hold a Members Development day later this year detailing how schemes are prioritised, the types of repair solutions available and how these are delivered. I'd like to follow this up with a round or area specific workshops in the autumn to discuss future programmes.

7.3 Northern Roads Collaboration: Along with Cllr Good I have attended two meetings of this group which consists of seven councils. The group, supported by Heads of Service, are working on numerous collaborative opportunities and projects. Two areas which I've got a particular interest in are:

- Fifth Core Cables – I raised this at the last meeting and it has been agreed by the Collaborative to refer this matter to SCOTS with a view to getting an improved response from electricity companies when underground cables require work to keep the street lighting on. As members we regularly receive several complaints about dark lamps which are often due to cable faults out with our direct control.
- Argyll and Bute will lead on a pilot utilising high resolution video survey footage which will help to refine the asset management process. This process is being carried out as a collaborative piece of work with the NRC and may also be helpful in taking forward an initiative to bid for funding to strengthen roads which are subject to HGV traffic from the spirits industry.

7.4 Winter Maintenance: Weather conditions were poor around the turn of the year with staff managing pre-treatments as well as call outs to replenish grit where we can. We are well above our normal grit allocation due to officers having to send the gritters out over a prolonged period of freezing conditions. We expect substantial increase in budget spend which will take us well over the allocated winter maintenance budget.

7.5 Traffic Regulation Orders: The A814 TTRO has been progressed following the request from the MoD. It is understood that the military police together with Police Scotland had a strong presence on site and took responsible for the management of the TTRO together with any local arrangements necessary whilst a significant vessel was visiting Glenmallan.

Area Committees are due to receive update reports in June relating to TROs in their areas. This is a follow up to the TRO report to ED&I in December.

7.6 Street Lighting: There has been a focus to reduce the backlog of lighting outages which has resulted in a reduction in service enquiries regarding street lighting issues and staff are working to reduce the backlog of faults. The service is in the process of recruiting to a vacant electrician post.

7.7 Integrated Transport Team: The integrated transport team have been incredibly busy working with education colleagues to roll out the return of school transport. This has included a new suite of risk assessments and procedures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

7.8 EV Charging: Works continue in relation to EV charging infrastructure at our depots and offices throughout Argyll and the islands. Officers are working on a draft EV Charging Strategy which is likely to be presented to the June EDI Committee. Over the last 12 months the service has added over 50 hybrid vehicles to the fleet.

7.9 Marine Asset Management Plan: There is a busy programme of works underway to improve and maintain our marine assets. These works include:

Craignure OBCs – A detailed consultation has been carried out at Craignure . The consultation provides information on both the ‘Interim Options’ Outline Business Case (OBC) and ‘Long Term Options’ OBC. Liaison with local groups continues to take place both in terms of interim and long term options. Further co-working with the community in respect of the streetscape and aesthetics is underway and a detailed report will be considered by the Harbour Board in due course regarding future options.

Craignure Link-span – Work on the link-span was successfully completed on Sunday 7th March. This involved a new housing and pin being fabricated off site, the old being cut out and the new installed. This meant that the linkspan was out of use for vehicles and the ferry could only provide a passenger service whilst these works were delivered.

Iona / Fionnphort – Environmental Impact Assessments will be produced for both Iona and Fionnphort. In addition, photo montages will be produced to allow the public to better understand visual impacts of the completed structures. Further consultation with the public will take place. Programme implications are being considered, but it’s likely that construction cannot now commence until circa spring 2022.

Rothesay – Tender for piling/grouting works have been returned and tender assessments are underway.

Rothesay pontoons – Work has now started on the new pontoons at Rothesay. The contract was awarded to TMS Maritime Ltd. – marine contractors. Value of the contract is circa £553K. Completion is planned for April 2021.

Port Askaig – Road resurfacing. Plans are in place to resurface the marshalling area and main access road during April this year. This will lead to some disruption with ferry sailings adjusted to suit. Officers are liaising with Calmac and a joint press release (ABC and Calmac) will be issued to advise the public of impending works.

7.10 Port Marine Safety Code: I am pleased to report that through the Northern Roads Collaboration we have in place a joint procurement for the Designated Person with Angus Council.

The Designated Person's report has now been received with actions being actioned. A letter to MCA will be issued shortly stating that the Council is working towards compliance.

7.11 Public Conveniences: Following the budget meeting on 25th February, additional funding is now in place to allow all public conveniences to be reopened on 1st April to pre-Covid timetables with enhanced cleaning schedules in place. At the time members receive this report all PC should be open to pre Covid schedules.

8. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

8.1 Education during the Pandemic: Throughout the pandemic Education have had six recovery work stream groups supporting the service and schools to ensure we responded effectively and efficiently to the frequently changing picture for schools. These workstreams are:

- Wellbeing of children, young people and staff
- Remote Learning and Teaching
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Continuity Planning
- Early Learning and Child Care Expansion
- 1140 hours

As a result of the collaborative work of these groups, head teachers and staff in the central team, our schools made a safe and successful return to face-to-face learning in August 2020.

Updated Scottish Government Guidance in December saw a full return to remote learning and our schools and nurseries then offered Hubs for keyworker/vulnerable children in their own schools whilst delivering effective learning remotely.

In February Early Years and P1-3 children returned to school followed by P4-7 and senior phase pupils requiring to undertake practical activities for alternative qualifications. This was followed by some time in school for all S1-3 pupils and after Spring Break it is anticipated that all of our learners will be back in schools for face to face learning.

The Education Digital Learning Team has throughout offered high quality training in online learning platforms that have supported our staff to deliver

good quality learning remotely. Schools also made use of the National Online Learning offering through E-Sgoil.

As a service our use of technology to deliver learning has been transformational and we will continue to use much of what we have learned to provide increased opportunities for all of our learners in a post COVID world.

Throughout the pandemic education representatives have met weekly with colleagues in Public Health, these meetings have been constructive in supporting schools with mitigation measures against COVID.

More regular meetings with the teacher trade unions throughout the year have also ensured high levels of consultation leading to effective support for our staff delivering learning in school and at home.

8.2 Engaging with Young People to Deliver Services: During the planning period for the initial return to face-to-face learning in August 2020, pupils across Argyll and Bute participated in a survey to share their views on returning to school. Schools used the themes identified from the survey to best support pupils back into school after lockdown. Ongoing developments to engage young people in service design are being taken forward with the Children and Young People's Service Plan. Young people are authentically involved in the co-design of the next plan through the Youth Advisory Panel. The panel are currently involved in leading on developing engagement and participation processes for children and young people for the 2023-26 plan.

8.3 Alternative Certification Model: As a result of the impact of Coronavirus and school closures Scottish Qualifications Authority have implemented a new Alternative Certification Model for 2020-21.

The alternative certification model has been created in partnership with SQA and the National Qualifications 2021 Group in order to deliver results for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. This group includes representatives from across the education system including the National Parent Forum of Scotland and the Scottish Youth Parliament. Central Team members have been working with our Head Teachers and SQA coordinators across our schools to ensure we have robust quality assurance systems in place. Our schools have been sharing progress of each young person's attainment throughout the academic year.

This year our teachers will use the assessments learners have completed as evidence to decide what results should be. This is referred to as using demonstrated attainment. No inferred attainment can be used for Provisional Awards.

- 8.4 Supported Study:** Over the Spring break staff across our ten secondary schools will be delivering over 1,160 hours of in- school and virtual supported study for senior phase pupils to access in support of their SQA qualifications.
- 8.5 1140 hours:** All Local Authority and Partner nurseries and childminders delivering ELC have continued to offer 1140hrs attendance patterns. They have maintained contact with children and families throughout the periods of closure and are now working with the Early Years Team, colleagues in schools and parents to ensure effective transitions are planned for our youngest learners.
- 8.6 Trauma informed workforce:** For some children, young people, parents / carers and staff, the circumstances of the pandemic have been experienced as traumatic. For some this will compound other adverse childhood experiences. Over 90% of school leaders, teachers and support assistants across Argyll and Bute have completed e-learning modules at a Trauma-Informed or Trauma-Skilled level. Facilitated training for Named Persons and Lead Professionals continues to be rolled out to ensure this learning translates to Trauma-Informed Practice in our schools. Dyadic Developmental Practice (DDP) training is being undertaken by CAMHS, Educational Psychology and our Family Placement team to ensure a workforce that is skilled and confident in supporting families where relationships are under significant pressure.
- 8.7 Counselling in Schools:** School Counsellors are now in place across Argyll and Bute primary and secondary schools, taking referrals from staff and from young people themselves. Strong links are being developed between the Team Leader, allocated Counsellor(s) and the schools in each cluster. Robust evaluation has been built in from the outset by the Education Psychology Service and research assistant to capture referral trends, duration of engagement and outcomes for children and young people. There is a strong emphasis on equity of provision across mainland and island schools, with the improved use of digital technology enhancing the delivery of services.
- 8.8 Vulnerable groups:** It is acknowledged that prior to the pandemic some groups of children and young people were more vulnerable than others, and it is anticipated that the impact of recent months will have compounded this vulnerability.

There has been enhanced engagement with the Lead for LGBTQ+ young people across Education and Social Work to ensure key staff are aware of the issues that may be experienced by young people identifying as LGBTQ+. This is enabling them to respond more effectively to identified needs of children and young people.

Led by the dedicated Principal Teacher for Care Experienced Children and Young People, the team of Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Liaison Officers who were appointed during the COVID-19 Lockdown in Spring 2020 continue to provide invaluable support to some of our Care Experienced children and their families. They are working closely within the restrictions of COVID. The work of the HWB Liaison Officers continues to have a significant impact on children and their families.

HWB Liaison Officers offer individual trauma-informed support for children through a referral system via the Named Person. This is needs based but is offered from a menu of:

- Brainstem calming activities
- Mentoring
- Focussed one to one relationship building
- Support in the home to access online learning where pupils cannot attend school (COVID related or otherwise)
- Support for parents and carers who may require it (online, telephone or face to face)

As of January 2021, there are 18 children P1 to aged 18 who are being or have been supported, along with their associated families and 10 associated schools.

8.9 Outdoor Learning Support: Since Monday 15th March we have engaged the services of three of our valued local Outdoor Education Centres to provide support to our secondary schools for young people getting back to school. These sessions have been very positively received and we are delighted to now be rolling this out across the Authority so that all schools have some engagement with our outdoor learning providers from Monday the 19th of April up until the 25th of June. It is anticipated that each school will receive between two and four days support from the Centres which will be planned collaboratively. This work will be funded from our COVID recovery budget.

8.10 Gaelic Medium Education (GME) Strategic Planning in Schools: The revision of School Improvement Planning (SIP) in Argyll and Bute has resulted in Gaelic educational planning now being an integral part of the standard School Improvement Plan documentation for schools. Planning priorities in GME are now cross-referenced with the local authority Gaelic Language Plan, as well as with the frameworks which apply to all school improvement planning – *Our Children Their Future, How Good is Our School 4* and the Scottish Government's *National Improvement Framework*.

This coherent and integrated approach to strategic planning in GME has been recognised by *Bord na Gaidhlig (BnG)* as sector-leading practice.

8.11 Gaelic Home Learning During School Closure: To supplement the home learning provided by teachers in schools during closure, Talking and listening sessions have been delivered on Google Meet since January 2021 by the Gaelic Language Co-ordinator at Furan in Oban. Feedback from children and parents has been positive and uptake among primary GME pupils. Sessions are open to all schools providing Gaelic Medium Education.

It has been a challenging year in education but our staff in schools have risen to the challenge and provided great support and continuity of learning for our children and young people and their commitment and dedication should be recognised.

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

9.1 Planning Applications: As I have previously reported the submission rate of planning applications has remained higher than anticipated since the UK first went into lockdown on the 23rd March 2020. During the period 23rd March 2020 to 10th February 2021 the number of formal submissions that had been received was 1783 which represented 93.3% of the volume received in the same period for 2019/20 when 1912 applications were received. Applications have been steadily increasing month by month and these latest figures represent an increase in volume since my last report of 7.2% when the figure sat at 86.1%.

9.2 Planning Fee Income: Although the number of planning applications received is encouraging they relate to smaller household applications and fewer 'major' applications than the previous financial year and this together with the fact that additional fee income expected from amended fee regulations from June 2020 was not implemented by the Scottish Government. This has resulted in planning fee income to the end of February being under recovered by £420k with approx. £120k of the shortfall being attributable to the amended fee regulations not progressed by the Scottish Government.

On a positive note officers have had a number of pre-application discussions in respect of major developments and are monitoring these to identify which schemes are likely to progress to application submission.

9.3 Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2): Work is continuing in line with the Development Plan Scheme and officers are presently preparing Schedule 4's for consideration by Full Council in June.

- 9.4 Consultation Update:** A consultation relating to the Argyll and Bute Windows Technical Working Note has been conducted on-line since my last report and the feedback from the consultation will be reported to a future meeting of the PPSL Committee.
- 9.5 Pre-Determination Planning Hearings:** In my last report I advised that arrangements for conducting virtual Pre-Determination Planning Hearings had been agreed and since then the Planning, Protective Services & Licensing (PPSL) Committee have conducted 4 Pre-Determination Hearings using Skype, obviously this was a new way of conducting hearings for everyone and I would like to record my thanks to all who took part in the hearings and to the officers who were involved in the arrangements for the procedure which allowed all the participants to be heard in an open, fair and impartial way.
- 9.6 PPSL Training:** Since the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 resulted in the necessity to hold PPSL Committee meetings virtually the normal monthly training sessions before each PPSL Committee meeting have not taken place however in view of the fact that virtual meetings will be the norm for the foreseeable future a programme of monthly training sessions was agreed by the PPSL Committee at their meeting on 17th March 2021, the training programme is due to recommence on 21st April with - Covid-19 and changes to Development Management practices - being the subject which will be covered and as always the sessions are open to all elected members.
- 9.7 Building Standards:** Over the last year Building Standards have been providing a service using digital technology, which they have named Remote Verification Inspections (RVI's), on some types of work. RVI's have proved a useful tool for them during the coronavirus restrictions and have enabled them to view relevant parts of projects using live video calls to their client's mobiles or tablets, although RVI's are not the solution for all inspections and physical on-site inspections will still be required where appropriate the service looks forward to the continuing use of RVI's in the future.
- 9.8 Building Standards Income:** The Covid-19 pandemic has had an effect on fee income for Building Standards and the commercial work that the service has been carrying out for other Local Authorities in recent years has reduced dramatically this has resulted in a shortfall of anticipated fee income in the region of 15% to the end of February.
- 9.9 Customer Service Excellence Award:** Building Standards were the first service in Argyll and Bute Council to achieve Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation in November 2013 and they have been successful in retaining the award following each annual audit since then. The latest audit,

which was delayed from November last year due to Covid-19, was completed remotely on the 9th March this year and resulted in the service once again retaining their CSE status increasing their number of compliance pluses in the 57 areas assessed from 18 in the previous assessment to 20. In March 2020 the service had undergone a management restructure and the assessor concluded that there had been no impact on the CSE award with this restructure and that some improvements had been made, he also concluded that the service had used technology well with the introduction of new working methods, including Remote Verification Inspections, to ensure that processes continued seamlessly for customers using their services during the Covid-19 pandemic. Congratulations to all involved in retaining this award.

9.10 Retirement: The management restructure which took place last year saw Alex Linden taking up the position of Principal Team Leader for the Building Standards Service. Alex, who has been a very experienced and valuable member of the Building Standards team for a number of years is due to retire in June and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alex for all the work he has carried out on behalf of the council over the years and also for the excellent position he leaves the service in and I am sure you will join me in wishing him all the very best for his retirement.

9.11 Regulatory Services: Covid-19 work remains the main priority within Regulatory Services at the moment and Environmental Health officers are preparing for the increased work load associated with the easing of lockdown. To date in relation to Covid-19 there have been 3325 assessments of businesses carried out and 1330 complaints or enquiries have been investigated about or from individual premises. The 4 E's strategy; Engage, Educate, Encourage and Enforcement adopted by the service has worked well with only 4 prohibition notices being served. The work carried out by this service although vital in the protection of public health goes largely unnoticed and our thanks goes to all those involved in carrying out this vital work.

9.12 Short Term Let Accommodation: In February the Scottish Government withdrew the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term accommodation) Order 2021 which targeted the licensing of short-term let accommodation including Airbnb, holiday accommodation and other similar premises which are not regulated.

Following the Parliamentary elections in May the order may be re-laid and the matter will be progressed appropriately by officers at that time as required.

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 – 1st April 2021

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