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24<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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**POLICY LEADS REPORT**

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**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 15<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

**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 April to June 2021.
- 3.2 **Financial Services:** The department continues to finalise the draft year end accounts for an extraordinary year. At the time of writing, the council will declare a £188,000 underspend after accounting for earmarking – the earmarking being considerably higher than normal as result of significant COVID monies being carried forward. Clearly this has been a challenging year in financial terms with considerable additional expenditure across a range of areas, combined with a multiplicity of additional funds and revenue that been provided from Government.
- 3.3 **Local Tax Collections: Council Tax** Council Tax collection for 2020/2021 was 96.12%, down 0.28% on the previous year, which is £155,000 in monetary terms. This reduction in income collected is entirely related to

Covid-19. This deficit is not as bad as anticipated and initial indications are that this level of collection will compare favourably to other Scottish local authorities.

Current year Council Tax collection at 31 May 2021 is 20.43% which is up 1.3% on collections at the same time last year, i.e. not long after the first lockdown. Comparing this to the next year back in May 2019 shows that we are 0.04% behind collections in that year. This indicates that the outturn for 2021/2022 collections is looking similar to the level of collections achieved in 2020/2021 at this early stage. Non-domestic rates (NDR) collections for 2020/21 was 97.90% in comparison to 97.08% in the previous year.

**3.4 Benefits Update: Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF):** The programme funding for 2020/21 was £765,421 which included additional Covid-19 related programme funding of £293,000. The council spend at the year end was £641,514, an underspend of £123,907 on the total pot of funding available. This underspend is being carried forward to the 2021/2022 year.

**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.

**Benefits processing:** Internal year end processing statistics are positive with New Claims for Housing Benefit (HB) being processed in 19.2 days on average and changes in circumstances in 2.6 days - both below the target of 21 days and 6 days respectively. The HB caseload has reduced by 8% to 3,600 cases in 2020/2021 as a result of the ongoing natural migration of HB cases to Universal Credit. Council Tax Reduction caseload has also reduced by 1.6% to 7,350 cases in the year; however we are finding that the volume of changes in circumstances for CTR being processed has increased significantly in the last 12 months due to fluctuating Universal Credit entitlements. The last set of statistics published nationally showed the position at the end of quarter 3 in 2020/2021. The council's speed of processing statistics of 16 days for new claims and 5 days for changes were slightly better than the British average of 17 days for new claims and 6 days for changes respectively.

**Flexible Food Fund:** The SWF has been administering claims for a new Flexible Food Fund project launched on 11th January. This scheme is funded by Scottish Government monies for food insecurities. The process supports those households in hardship with a payment towards the monthly cost of food and fuel where they don't have enough money in their bank accounts to support themselves on a month to month basis. As at 31st May 2021 we have issued just over £95,000 in grant payments for food and fuel and supported 323 families in our area.

**Flexible Fund:** The Scottish Government has provided £537,000 of funding for the council, working with the Health and Social Care partnership and the third sector, to deliver projects to support vulnerable people in our communities that were negatively affected by tier 4 lockdown.

- 3.5 Helensburgh Waterfront Development:** The council and Heron Bros recently marked the “Topping Out” milestone, when traditionally the structure and roof are completed. Officers and I were able to visit the site again where I had the pleasure of demonstrating my own DIY skill, or lack of, by drilling that final roof screw.

The progress of structural works is impressive and it is reassuring that this £22million flagship project remains on time and budget. Flood defences walls and rock armour are complete as is the steelwork, concrete walls and floors to the two pools.

Public realm works to the former skate park has also started with the concrete steps nearly done. A new electrical sub-station on the former Mariner’s site has been completed too. Internally, mechanical and electrical works are progressing at a pace. So overall, there is excellent progress to date and we are still on track to complete in July 2022. A visit has been arranged for area committee members to visit the site and see for themselves the progress to date.

- 3.6 Rothesay Pavilion:** Since the last update, the specialist fabric and engineering services survey work stream has been completed. This has been used to inform the specification, drawings and Bill of Quantities, all of which has been finalised, and is ready to enable us to procure a replacement contractor. During this period we have continued to monitor site security, all of the temporary winterisation fabric protection works, including heating installed to protect the council and partners’ investment to date.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic the Scottish Government made additional capital funding available and we have been successful in securing a grant from Historic Environment Scotland (HES).

We are also working to recover costs for defective work from the Administrators and Contract Performance Bond holder.

In terms of appointing a new contractor to complete the project we have been working with two national construction frameworks and assessing the suitability and capability of the respective procurement routes to providing the construction works through to completion, and are currently reviewing

the outputs from the adjudication process with our funding partners. Based on this work we currently estimate the programme duration to be between 40 - 46 weeks and, have also been working with the Rothesay Pavilion Charity to better understand what this means for the transition to the operational phase for the building 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 taking up the role of Support Services Policy Lead, I continue to have regular meetings with the managers, Heads of Service, and Executive Directors within my remit. These meetings are undertaken in partnership with the Depute Policy Lead and Shadow spokesperson.

- 4.2 Committee Arrangements:** The council has agreed to record committee meetings for the website and has been implemented for the recent Policy and Resources Committee on 13th May and PPSL on 19th May. Easy guide developed to support process. A report has been prepared for the June meeting of the council on progress with transition to Teams and hybrid meetings with further review in September - intention is to pilot Teams at June Area Committee.

Transition to new Mod.Gov application on iPads – development sessions have been arranged for Legal and Regulatory Services officers, and an option of two sessions for Members to choose from on how the new application works. Member Services are liaising with Heads of Service/Directors and Chief Executive's Offices to identify other officers who would benefit from a run through of the new application.

- 4.3 Elections:** Successful implementation of arrangements for the poll and count in respect of 6th May Scottish Parliamentary Election. Running an election in the current circumstances made it even more challenging than usual but the professionalism and hard work of all involved made the process run smoothly.

Isle of Bute BID – timetable in place starting with report and Business Plan being issued with the council Agenda for 24th June. Publication of the Notice of Ballot on 29th July and ballot day is scheduled for Thursday 9th September.

Boundary Commission Review – it is the Commission’s intention to have completed their review of electoral arrangements in respect of the six Council areas with inhabited islands, including Argyll and Bute, by end June 2021. The proposals arising from these reviews will be considered by the Scottish Parliament later in 2021 and any changes approved will be implemented prior to the Local Government Elections in May 2022.

Potential Community Council by-elections have been identified for Colonsay and Avich and Kilchrenan – these are currently under consideration in consultation with the Returning Officer.

Cruach Mhor Windfarm – The Trustees have been collating information to help build a register of electors for election of a Community Representative to serve a four-year term on the Windfarm Trust. This will see postal ballots being issued to those on the register on 3rd June with the return date (date of the election) being 24th June. Counting of votes will take place on Monday 28th June.

Legal services have administered the taxi fund – We have paid a grant of £1,500 to 225 drivers. Taxi inspections have now recommenced and all taxi drivers have been informed.

New Complaint Handling Process (CHP) implemented from 1st April 2021 successfully. Training sessions held with key groups of staff, LEON module for all staff live, system changes completed. Full procedure and additional guidance documents available on the Hub and NHS intranet for HSCP staff.

**4.4 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	£47,970	£3,390,818	£156,274	£2,012,745	£5,607,807
Quick Quote/Mini-Comp	£62,150	£55,820	£134,841	£137,298	£390,110
Transactional Purchasing Team	£55,445	-	£14,251	-	£69,696

YPO Income	£1,142	-	-	-	£1,142
HSCP	(£11,318)	-	(£7,447)	-	(£18,765)
Scottish Proc. Contracts	-	-	-	-	-
Scotland Excel Contracts	-	-	£211,316	-	£211,316
<b>Total</b>	<b>£166,707</b>	<b>£3,446,638</b>	<b>£516,682</b>	<b>£2,150,043</b>	<b>£6,280,070</b>

**New Community Benefit Initiative:** A review of the way in which community groups can receive a benefit achieved through the Council's procurement process and the related contracts has been undertaken. As a result a new Community Benefits Initiative was launched in September 2020 and, to date, there has been 31 requests made through the new online application process from Community Groups, 3 of which have been taken up and promised by suppliers.

**4.5 Community Development:** As at May 2021 the following applications have been made:

Oban, Lorn and the Isles	30
Helensburgh and Lomond	18
Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands	21
Bute and Cowal	20

Award recommendation reports have been prepared and will be discussed at Area Committees throughout June 2021.

The council made a decision at their meeting held on 26th November 2020 to agree a time extension until March 2022 for the groups who received the council's Supporting Communities Fund in 2020. A further report is tabled at today's meeting recommending that this is extended further to December 2022. Four groups have contacted the council's Community Planning and Development Service to request a further extension, due to the Covid 19 regulations restricting planned face to face activity and alternative methods being looked at and where there are no alternative methods, time given for the event to take place at its scheduled time in the calendar year.

**4.6 Customer Support Services:**

**Communications:** The Communications Team have been working closely with colleagues to shape and promote messaging around staycations in Argyll and Bute this summer. This has centred on the campaign that the team developed titled - 'Have a Great Time, Be a Great Visitor'. It uses the now well-recognised #abplace2b logo and hashtag.

The campaign is giving practical information and tips to visitors and a paid-for social media advertising campaign, throughout June and July focuses on encouraging people to plan ahead to have a great time here and be a great visitor. The campaign will direct people to the abplace2b website. The team will use analysis of the impact of this campaign to focus any additional promotion on the most effective of those channels.

The team are using #abplace2b Instagram account to support local businesses by looking for appropriate photos from them to share. People follow our account for scenery/wildlife/lifestyle photos which we accompany with messaging about the area being a great place to live and work. This provides the businesses with access to a wider audience with information about their services and products.

It continues to be a busy time for the team from a Covid perspective, as public health information continues to demand a high level of communications involvement.

**Registration:** The Customer Service Team have been busy with an increase in weddings, now that the restrictions are being lifted. Many people love to come to Argyll and Bute to be married, particularly for outdoor weddings – our beaches are very popular! Many people had delayed or postponed their wedding ceremony during Covid and are now catching up. This is a busy, but very rewarding time for our registrars.

**Digital/online:** Our website continues to be very well used, with an overall satisfaction rate of 87% and as a result of our increased use of automated payments, auto-directed calls and web or voice payments, we continue to see 'channel shift' to automated and self-service customer transactions instead of face to face or telephone. This is better for the customer, as it means 24/7 access to services and that our Customer Service Agents deal with the more complex calls. We have also been awarded our highest rating yet for website accessibility from Silktide – a score of 98/100 which puts us 13th in all UK council rankings.

**HR and Organisational Development:** The HROD Team have been busy on a number of fronts. We have successfully completed a review of the LGE pay and grading system and, in line with the national COSLA agreement with Trades Unions, have consolidated the Living Wage by the 1st April deadline. The associated changes to the Conditions of Service, approved by council last June, will be implemented from 1st July. The team have also ensured that all eligible staff in the HSCP received their £500 bonus payment and two additional pay runs were added – one on 29th April and the final one on 27th May, which met the Scottish Government's target date for delivery.

The team are taking a leading role on the people elements of the Our Modern Workplace project, having just completed the third employee survey on home working. It was important to ask employees what their experiences of home working are a year on from Lockdown. Over 70% have told us that they wish to continue working from home in the future, at least some of the time. We have heard from employees that home working improves work life balance, reduces time on commuting and for some people, aids their concentration. Many would like to spend some time in the workplace, but enjoy flexibility.

We recognise that this is not the case for all employees, and those who do not have the appropriate space or environment for home working are a priority for working from an office. The next steps will be to work on updating our supporting HR policies, whilst supporting the project manager to engage with teams on a location by location basis, to reach the optimum configuration of office space for the future.

**ICT:** The ICT team continue to work on a wide range of applications and improvements. We are working to increase the bandwidth available to improve overall ICT performance, MS365 implementation is continuing, gradually looking to activate all the different functions that are available. A high profile issue has been cyber security, with a number of public sector bodies having been targeted with Ransomware. This has been elevated to a red risk in our operational risk register. 94% of all cyber-attacks come in through email and over 90% of them are due to human error, including setting a weak password. So the message is – never open an attachment in an email you think may be suspicious, make your passwords impenetrable and if in doubt, call the ICT team.

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

**5.1: HSCP Leadership:** Fiona Davies, who has previously worked within NHS Highland has been appointed as Interim Chief Officer for the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). It is expected that she will be in post for around a year from May 2021 until permanent arrangements can be made to fill this post. I thank George Morrison for again stepping in to provide continuity during the transition between Joanna MacDonald's departure and Fiona's arrival, and would like to formally welcome Fiona to Argyll and Bute HSCP.

**5.2 Local Activities:** The HSCP Audit and Risk Committee met on 20<sup>th</sup> April, with reports on Internal Audit, Charging for Non-Residential Care Services and Risk Management Strategy.

The HSCP Finance and Policy Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> April and 21<sup>st</sup> May discussed progress with Service Transformations, COVID-19 costs, Financial Risks, updates on Children and Families and Older Adult and Community Hospital Savings, including the Jura Respite Flat. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June the HSCP Strategic Planning Group considered updates on the Joint Strategic Plan, Strategic Commissioning Strategy, Engagement Framework and re-establishing Locality Planning Groups following the pandemic.

Agenda items for HSCP Clinical and Care Governance on 10<sup>th</sup> June included CAMHS, Review of Dementia Service Risks, and Infection Control.

I was delighted to attend the formal opening of the Robert Black Memorial Helipad in Campbeltown on 12<sup>th</sup> June. The construction of this facility, led by the community and with the support of local groups will greatly ease and speed the transfer of patients to and from the hospital. It has been named after a local paramedic and supporter of the project who tragically died last year from COVID-19.

### **5.3 National Meetings**

On 14<sup>th</sup> May I attended COSLA Health and Social Care Board, where the agenda included Mental Health Standards for Secondary Care, Future Suicide Prevention Strategy and the Review of Adult Social Care.

On 21<sup>st</sup> May at COSLA Children and Young People Board discussions covered Guidance around the Age of Criminal Responsibility, Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Health, Personal and Social Education Review and the Positive Contribution of Physical Activity and Sport.

As part of the national IJB chairs and vice chairs network and executive, I attended the Scottish Government Mobilisation Recovery Group on 16<sup>th</sup> April, Executive on 20<sup>th</sup> April, Remote and Rural group on 4<sup>th</sup> May, quarterly update with Scottish Government on 5<sup>th</sup> May, a network event on Population Health on 17<sup>th</sup> May, a Conversation with Simon Duffy on 28<sup>th</sup> May and a meeting with COSLA on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. A significant majority of these occasions were focused on the Review of Adult Social Care, and potential impacts on governance and delivery of services locally across Scotland.

### **5.4 Staffing and Recruitment:** The HSCP has successfully recruited to the three Head of Service posts for Finance and Transformation, Children, Families and Justice, and Primary Care. These were all external

appointments and the new members of the team will join in August, September and October respectively.

Officers have worked closely with colleagues in UNISON and Unite the Union to find a resolution to the issue of Social Work Emergency Service. A position has been agreed and the unions will be balloting their members with a recommendation to accept the offer. The Chief Social Work Officer is leading a project to identify and implement a long term, more sustainable approach to this service, working with colleagues nationally and in the Islands councils.

The £500 bonus for health and social care staff across Scotland in recognition of work during the pandemic has now been paid to all relevant employees from the council.

Culture and wellbeing projects, including wellness events and Time to Listen spaces are continuing to be progressed by officers. HSCP staff have been encouraged to complete a Listening and Learning survey, which will gather information about their workplace experience. This survey, from 7<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> June includes four questions from the Argyll and Bute Engagement Exercise 2020, giving the opportunity to note changes in employee experiences since then.

**5.5 Older Adults and Community Services:** Following publication of the Feeley Independent Review of Adult Social Care the identification of potential changes to existing processes and provision has begun. Further progress will be dependent on the legislation brought forward by the new Scottish Government.

A new Carers Lead is in post and consultation is underway on short breaks. This will link with respite requirements and help inform the redesign of day services.

Measures to ensure that safe and meaningful contact for care home residents is in place in line with the Scottish Government “Open with Care” guidance.

In order to improve accessibility and links to other services options are being developed and funding to be requested for moving GP provision in Dunoon onto the Cowal Community Hospital site.

A draft improvement plan for the Mid Argyll, Kintyre, Islay and Jura internal Care at Home services has been developed to ensure these continue to meet expected standards and legislative requirements.

Notification has been received that a Joint Inspection of Adult Support and Protection services in Argyll and Bute will commence 2<sup>nd</sup> August, across social work, health, and the police. This will include:

- A staff survey relevant to those employed by these organisations and providers
- Reviewing the position statement and supporting documentation
- Reading of records of a sample of adults at risk of harm – both individuals not requiring any further intervention beyond initial referral, and those who have been subject of procedures
- The engagement of front line and senior managers in focus groups, to discuss the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on practice

**5.6 Children and Young People:** The Year 1 review of the Children and Young People's Services Plan (CYPSP) 2020-23 has been considered by Community Services Committee and the IJB. Included were updates on short-term 2020/21 progress, information on quality improvement projects and developments, and plans for coming year.

As part of the Recovery and Renewal Fund for Mental Health, one off funding has been allocated by the Scottish Government in order to improve CAMHS following COVID-19. Locally this will support reducing waiting times for those on CAMHS and psychological therapies waiting lists. Additionally, and with the expectation that some of this funding is to become permanent, a recruitment plan to support implementation of national service specifications and expansion of services up to the age of 25 years is being progressed.

Argyll and Bute Child Protection Committee was one of seven participating in an analysis of performance data during the pandemic. This was carried out by Social Work Scotland (SWS) in association with the Centre for Excellence for Children's Care (CELCIS) at Strathclyde University and the Care Inspectorate. The first draft report noted trends of decreases across Scotland, including Argyll and Bute, in children and young people assessed as at risk of significant harm and becoming care experienced. It is expected however that these numbers will gradually return to pre-pandemic levels over the course of the next year.

Work of the Child Protection Committee has included monitoring and reviewing implementation of the Children (Equal Protection from Assault)(Scotland) Act 2019 which came into effect on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Also being progressed is planning for the Scottish Child Interview Model. This aims to reduce the numbers of children and young people required to appear in court as witnesses. Argyll and Bute, along with other rural and island areas are participating in groups supporting the introduction of new

national standards of interviewing, and a training programme for Social Workers and Police Scotland colleagues.

- 5.7 Criminal Justice:** Justice Social Work Services are continuing using a blended approach of face to face and telephone contact depending on assessed levels of risk, need and vulnerability. During the pandemic work has been affected by restrictions on opening of courts, home leaves, and prison visits.

With lockdown easing demand for services has increased, while courts continue to deal with a reduced level of business. As a result backlog has formed which it is expected may take a number of years to clear.

To speed up business reports are being submitted to Court 48 hours in advance, which has reduced the time available to complete these. At present this has been working well, but this will continue to be monitored. Additional Court days are to be scheduled from September onwards also, which will increase workload of the Justice Social Work Service.

Unpaid Work being carried out as part of a Community Order was impacted by COVID restrictions, however is now underway again following risk assessments. A reduction of 35% in the hours to be worked, apart from domestic or sexual offences has been implemented in legislation to address delays in completing orders.

£176k of Government funding has been received to support the service during recovery from COVID, including £30k to be used in commissioning services from the Third Sector.

In 2020/21 the Scottish Government gave £47k new funding to Argyll and Bute to introduce additional justice services. This include supporting structured deferred sentences, and although delayed, a bail supervision and support scheme which is now being launched.

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) continue to operate virtually. A case file audit was completed on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021, with three cases reviewed using a national template covering areas of Risk Assessment, Risk Management, Multi-Agency Arrangements, Interventions, Outcomes for Offender, Further Offending and Overall Scoring. In one case a measure was affected due to a delay in an Environmental Risk Assessment being completed. However all three cases were assessed to have been 'completely met'. This audit demonstrates the excellent joint work undertaken with partners in the MAPPA process which contributes to public protection and good outcomes for service users.

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

**6.1 Introduction:** I continue to meet on a regular basis with the relevant Executive Directors and Heads of Service who oversee the council departments that contribute to this portfolio.

### 6.2 Business Support:

**COVID-19 Business Support Grants:** Since the start of the pandemic, officers in Economic Growth have administered Scottish Government grant funding of over £46.65m to businesses in Argyll and Bute (working closely with the NDR, Internal Audit and Customer Service teams). There is likely to be a number of Government economic recovery initiatives coming forward and the Business Gateway Team will have to play a prominent role here to get businesses started, survive and grow.

**Local Growth Accelerator Programme (LGAP), Phase 2:** Recognising that many SMEs have shifted from a growth agenda to a survival agenda, Business Gateway has secured approval from the Scottish Government (autumn 2020) to flex the LGAP support to allow the programme to also help businesses build their resilience to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and changing economic climate. The programme now includes recovery grant support (from £1k up to £5k). To date, just under £28.5k of recovery grants have been provided.

For the overall Phase 2 programme the total amount of committed grant funding is over £339k against a target of £450k by the end of 2022 i.e. 75% of the target. Work is underway to contact all approved applicants who have not yet claimed their grant to establish whether they still wish to go ahead. Any decommitted funds will be available to award during the remainder of the programme. Furthermore, focus is being given to the promotion of the recovery support, now that officers have capacity to support applicants following the closure of the Scottish Government COVID-19 grant schemes.

**Digital Boost Programme:** A total of circa £161k of Digital Boost funding from the Scottish Government since 2019/20 has supported 48 workshops, 51 webinars and intensive 1-to-1 support for 20 businesses. The Business Gateway Team is currently awaiting confirmation of the funding for Phase 6 of Digital Boost to support more SMEs in developing digital skills. Another key component of the Digital Boost service is a five-minute online health check businesses can undertake to assess their digital strengths and weaknesses.

### 6.3 Commercial Services:

**Our Modern Workplace:** Commercial Services have recruited a Change Manager to lead on the 'Our Modern Workspace Project', which will focus

on how we will use our office spaces in future, taking account of Covid related measures and recent budget decisions that will eventually see us using fewer council buildings.

A Project Board has been established, with Terms of Reference, governance structure, and a stakeholder engagement strategy having been agreed.

An implementation plan is currently being prepared by the Board, which will be heavily influenced by the outcome of the recent staff survey undertaken in May 2021. The results of the survey are being analysed and a programme of engagement meetings will be arranged with Heads of Service, 3<sup>rd</sup> tier managers and team leaders throughout June and July to better understand individual service/team needs moving forward. Engagement with TUs will also be arranged as part of this process, which will allow detailed designs to be started to determine office layout and set up.

**Universal Free School Meals:** The service have set up a Project Team to begin putting in place arrangements for implementing Universal Free School Meals. At present all P1 to P3 pupils receive free school meals and this will be extended to P4 from August 2021 and then for the remainder of primary pupils from August 2022. Capital and revenue funding will be made available from the Scottish Government to assist with implementing this policy, however the service will need to review capacity, equipment and operational/staffing arrangements within each school. It is likely that a number of school kitchens will require to be developed to cope with the increased provision of meals. At the higher end of the spectrum it is forecast that meal numbers could increase from 8,000 to 16,000 per day.

**Connected Kitchens:** The Catering and Cleaning Service have been approached to participate in a 'Connected Kitchen' pilot, which focusses on using wireless monitoring within kitchens to provide a number of benefits to staff and customers, while tackling climate change, improving food safety and delivering cost savings.

For a remote and rural local authority like Argyll and Bute, the benefits could be instant, for example, if meals are delivered to an Early Years Partner Provider, we require them to monitor and check the food temperatures when reheating and serving the meals to children, to ensure that the food is safe. By monitoring the temperatures remotely, the safety of food can be assured and, if issues are identified, staff can be supported or trained to prevent future issues. A working group has been set up with up Falcon Foodservice and Koolzone, with a view to identifying some test

areas for monitoring, prior to deciding whether to progress on a long term basis.

**One Council:** The service continue to make good progress in terms of proactively managing property development, rent reviews the efficient use of heritable property. During the last period a number of leases and sales have been concluded on surplus property/assets, including Blairvadach House, Cabbies Rest in Rothesay, Chalmers Street Ardrishaig, land on Tiree and Tobermory. The total income from capital receipts over the last 3 financial years is £5.5M, which meets the capital target set for this period.

#### **6.4 Projects and Regeneration:**

**Hermitage Park** – delighted that the lease has now been signed for the Hermitage Park Pavilion Café and the café is up and running and proving very popular with visitors to the park. A Service Level Agreement has been developed with UHI to deliver the practical element of their horticultural training in the Park and the first trainee is already in and using the Park. The recent funding request submitted to NLHF has been successful. This will allow a 1year extension to the project end date to allow full delivery of all outcomes including the activity plan. The Friends of Hermitage Park ran an Azalea Festival in the Park in April, raising funds for the Park. The Park continues to be exceptionally well used.

**Rothesay Townscape Heritage/Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) project:** Physical building works are now complete on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Priority Building at 39-43 Victoria Street.

**Dunoon CARS:** Construction works to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Priority Building, 35 Argyll Street are now complete. Of the additional £20,000 Town centre Fund shopfront improvement grant pot for Dunoon a further 16 businesses have secured grants in Dunoon. Seven of these shop front projects have been fully completed to date and six are currently onsite.

**Town Centre Fund Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme:** Over 100 businesses in total have been supported across the area via the Town Centre Fund Shop Front Improvement grant scheme providing support to our businesses and Places. This investment combined with the suite of regeneration projects, 28 in total, being supported via the £1.6million Town Centre Fund pot will significantly assist in the recovery process. One such regeneration focused project is the Refurbishment of Helensburgh pier which is now fully complete

**Scotland's Town Partnership:** Following the successful delivery of the bespoke shop local promotional material for each of our towns further funding has been secured from Scotland's Town Partnership for the

delivery of a series of google my business workshops and one to one sessions to assist retail businesses in raising their profile, reinforcing the shop local approach and assisting in the ongoing recovery process.

**Lochgilphead Front Green:** this project has now commenced on site with works expected to continue until January 2022.

**Strategic Events and Festivals Grant:** A total of eight grants have been awarded to organisations for the running of events from this year's Strategic Events and Festivals Grant round and whilst there is no doubt that this continues to be a very challenging time for our events sector it is hoped that this funding will assist these events if they are able to go ahead this year. In addition the council has agreed to funding for a fourth round of SEF which will enable support to events in 2022/23.

- 6.5 Broadband:** 93.5% of Argyll and Bute premises are connected to the fibre network with 84.5% can access speeds greater than 24Mbps - this hasn't changed since my last report as we are between government contracts. The full intervention area for the Governments R100 programme has still not been released, however this should be available in the coming months when we will see where further intervention is required.

The Jura Gigabit programme is progressing with an anticipated completion date of autumn 2021. Construction has started on the mast fibre backhaul route funded by the Scottish Government 4G Infill Programme. This fibre is the backbone of the island wide fibre network which is an Openreach Community Fibre Partnership and funded through UK and Scottish Government vouchers.

One very good piece of news that was released by Openreach on the 28<sup>th</sup> May is the extension of their commercial programme which will see an additional 20,000 premises connected to a full fibre solution in some of our major towns like (Helensburgh, Dunoon, Oban and Lochgilphead) this is on top of any government funding through R100.

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

- 7.1 Introduction:** This is my second Policy Lead update I have presented since taking up the role as Policy Lead for Roads and Infrastructure Services. The update below provides a general overview of the work that has been carried out in the service area.

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

**7.2 Roads Capital Reconstruction Programme:** This year's £10M Roads Capital Reconstruction Programme is well underway with works being delivered across many locations. As per previous years, the model the Council has adopted is the mixed economy model where the council carries out the majority of the work directly and uses specialist contractors for surface dressing together with local SMEs for specific pieces of work and also to supplement the Council's workforce as and when required.

It is worth reminding colleagues across the chamber that this year's programme is significant and includes over 140 individual schemes across the four administrative areas which will see improvements to roads across the area.

**7.3 Northern Roads Collaboration:** Along with Cllr Good I will be attending a further meeting of the Northern Collaboration on 25 June and will be progressing further the fifth core cable and high resolution video surveys mentioned in my last briefing. For convenience I have included a summary of these to two work streams below:

- 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.

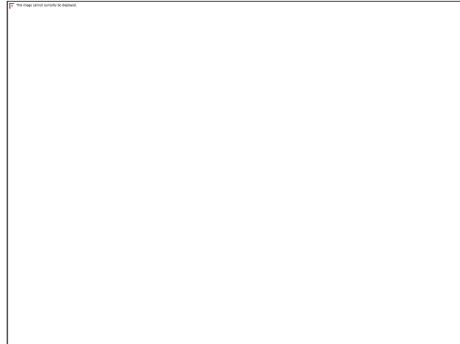
**7.4 Traffic Regulation Orders:** Area Committees by now will have received an update for their area in relation to TROs and TTROs. I am pleased to note the progress being made and a further report will be provided to ED&I in December.

**7.5 Integrated Transport Team:** The integrated transport team are now back to full service delivery providing home to school transport for around 3000 pupils on a daily basis.

Public service buses are delivering near pre-COVID timetables with only a small number of routes not fully reinstated. As part of the ongoing public transport review, works is being progressed towards demand responsive

services which would help to maintain service provision in more rural and isolated areas with a model which is likely to be more cost effective.

- 7.6 EV Charging:** I was delighted with the Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy that was considered and approved by the ED&I Committee on 3 June. Whilst there is still much work to do in this emerging area, we now have an excellent framework in place in which to build. The photos below provide examples of some of the electric/hybrid vehicles which have recently been introduced to the fleet.



- 7.7 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. Through the Craignure Marine Infrastructure Liaison Group (CMILG) a public realm and design sub group has been set up which includes a locally based retired architect and officers are working with this group and are in the process of producing 3D photo montages which will present to the wider community how the various proposals will fit within Craignure Bay.

- 7.8 Port Marine Safety Code:** On 14 May, The Harbour Board members and officers received a three hour development session by Montgomery Smedley, the Council’s Designated Person. This session was well received by all attendees and was both informative and incredibly interesting.

- 7.9 Staycations:** Roads and Infrastructure are playing a very proactive role in supporting the council’s staycation effort. The service are producing

weekly newsletters for members providing updates on activity over the past week and also looking forward to any significant events in the coming week.

- 7.10 Flooding:** A detailed report regarding the Campbeltown Flood Prevention Scheme (CFPS) was considered and approved by the ED&I Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> June which takes this welcome project s stage closer to delivery.

In addition to the Campbeltown Flood Prevention Scheme, the June ED&I Committee also considered and approved a report based on local flood risk management which in effect takes forward the next phase of flood prevention schemes for Argyll and Bute.

- 7.11 Jackson’s Quarry, Oban:** The main element of Jackson’s Quarry is now complete, the photograph below provides an image of this purpose built modern facility. A further contract has been let with a local contractor to refurbish an existing building within the depot.

- 7.12 JCB Pothole Machine Demo:** A demonstration of the JCB pot hole fixing machine was provided by JCB with their demonstrator driver/operator on Friday 23 April. The demonstration was attended by myself, a number of our technical team and roads operatives. The machine is an impressive piece of kit in terms of its appearance combining a small planer, hydraulic breaker and sweeper. The machine operates similar to a 360<sup>o</sup> wheeled excavator in terms of its movement around a site.

The significant difference to conventional patching is that all the functions other than compaction and laying are built into the one machine. The advantage of this is that you only need one piece of kit. The disadvantage is that economies of scale are lost in that only one operation can be carried out at any one time.



## 8. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

- 8.1 SQA:** The First Minister announced on 4 January and 6 February 2021 that schools would be closed to most learners until at least 22 February and that remote learning would take place during this time. Consequently, the SQA developed a revised plan for the delivery of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM), with the submission date for provisional results being moved to the 25 June 2021.

In contrast to last year's Alternative Certification Model, schools are required to undertake 'a holistic review of a candidate's performance as indicated by assessment evidence' with final grades being based upon teacher estimation and supporting evidence.

As part of the Alternative Certification Model for the 2021 session, teaching staff in our secondary and 3-18 schools are working hard to support our young people generate the required assessment evidence in order to submit their provisional results to the SQA by 25 June 2021. All of our schools report that they are on track to submit by the 25 June 2021.

- 8.2 Mental Health Support for Pupils:** Following the return to school after lockdown, the Education Service have put in place measures to ensure that our young people feel supported. As part of this a nurture training programme is being delivered across schools and, to date, twenty primary and secondary schools have signed up and began their journey to becoming a nurture and relationship based community. The scheme has been very successful and, as a result, will be rolled out to other groups.

In my last update I advised that a number of school counsellors were now in place across primary and secondary schools, and I am very happy to report that this resource is proving beneficial. The service, which was funded through the Scottish Government's 10 year Mental Health Strategy, has resulted in the appointment of a team leader and 7.5 FTE experienced counsellors, one of which was funded via the Argyll and Bute Alcohol and Drug Partnership to provide a dedicated resource for primary school children aged 10 years and over.

The Council's Principal Educational Psychologist is also working collaboratively with HSCP colleagues from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to progress a range of mental health and wellbeing objectives within the Children and Young People Service Plan 2020-23.

- 8.3 St Columba's Primary – Health and Wellbeing Curriculum:** Since returning to school, the staff and children at St. Columba's have been busy

refreshing their Health and Wellbeing curriculum. In order to develop this, the pupils looked at diverse case studies of children around Scotland which allowed them to identify the many different influences on their health and wellbeing. This stimulated discussion (and some debate!) around what makes them unique and allowed them to identify the skills, knowledge and key topics which are most important to a child growing up in Oban.

All the children from Primary 1 – 7 worked in co-operative teams to share their key topics and learning experiences relevant to their age and stage, and then consulted with their families on these. The feedback was very encouraging and the staff and pupils were delighted that so many parents, carers and family members commented on how evident their children's voices were in the document and how relevant it is to the children in our school.

- 8.4 National Children's Day:** The Northern Alliance regional improvement collaborative (which involves joint working across Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands Councils) organised a number of events during the month of May, in recognition of National Children's Day, which was celebrated on 16<sup>th</sup> May. These events focussed on the theme of 'Include Me: Promoting the Participation of Children and Young People' and included opportunities for teachers and practitioners across each of the 8 local authorities to take part in short sessions on how best to engage children and young people in the planning and decisions that directly affect them.

The week also saw the launch of the new 'INCLUDE' guidance, co-produced by Northern Alliance practitioners in partnership with young people from Nairn Academy, providing 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Guidance and Self-Evaluation for Educational Settings'.

- 8.5 A Celebration of Outdoor Learning:** Pupils across Argyll and Bute have been enjoying the great outdoors as part of their learning and teaching since the start of May. The Council have teamed up with Scout Adventures Lochgoilhead and Ardroy and Benmore Outdoor Education Centres again, to develop an itinerary of outdoor learning activities, focussing on positive health and wellbeing.

Following the success of similar activities for the council's school hubs during last summer's lockdown, the trio have been asked to deliver further outdoor learning for all Argyll and Bute pupils from now until the summer break. Outdoor learning has many benefits for our young people, it helps physical and mental health, and encourages independence and confidence; all things that are vital as we move into this recovery phase.

Feedback from schools and pupils has been very positive, with drinking hot chocolate, and building dens and fires being some of the highlights.

**8.6 Summer Programme:** Planning is underway to provide summer activities for young people that would benefit from some support following the impact of covid-19. Education will be working in partnership with other Council Services, Live Argyll, schools and third sector organisations to pull together a programme over 3 weeks of the summer holidays.

**8.7 Dalintober Primary School:** Dalintober Primary School welcomed Judy Murray, OBE and Laura Middleton, tennis coach, for a coaching session with staff and pupils on Wednesday 26th May 2021. The visit came about after an ASN Assistant, Mairi Campbell, tagged Judy on Twitter, sharing some of the school's great work on tennis, pupil equity and access to opportunities. Judy got in touch as a result of the connection on Twitter and offered to travel down to Campbeltown to work with pupils.

**8.8 STEM Success for Islay Schools:** Port Ellen and Bowmore Primary Schools on Islay continue to progress Digital Literacy and STEM (sciences, technologies, engineering and mathematics) across both schools. They have previously been awarded with the STEM Nation Award, which demonstrates commitment to leadership, family learning, employability/partnership working, curriculum and learner pathways, and equity and equality. Port Ellen has achieved their Cyber Resilience and Internet Safety Award and their Digital Schools Award, and Bowmore are currently awaiting the decision of their application for the Digital Schools Award which is hoped to be a positive result!

**8.9 Lochgoilhead Primary School:** Lochgoilhead Primary School has been awarded the Silver Rights Respecting School Award by UNICEF UK.

This represents two years of learning about children's rights and putting children's rights at the heart of the school. The impact has been that the children value themselves and others more, their self-esteem has increased, and they are aware they have a voice and will be listened to. It is a great example of how the school has been at the heart of the community during the Covid pandemic, working with parents and carers to make sure that children's rights have been upheld."

The Award recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of a school's planning, policies and practice.

**8.10 Eco Schools Scotland Success:** Cardross Primary School have just been awarded their 5th Eco-Schools Scotland Green Flag Award. The

feedback received from Eco Schools Scotland was excellent and highlighted the wonderful work undertaken by their ECO Committee and the whole school community, even during lockdown. The chosen topics selected by the school were litter, food and the environment and health and wellbeing. Examples of work from the school have been highlighted as good practice and may be used on the Eco-Schools' Website.

Pupils at Dalintober Primary School and ELC have also been busy achieving their 6<sup>th</sup> Green Flag from Eco Schools Scotland. This has been achieved through their sustainable education work, both as part of the daily curriculum and through extra-curricular activities.

A huge well done and congratulations to all involved.

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

**9.1 Planning Applications:** Submission rates for planning applications has remained higher than anticipated throughout the year since lockdown and 1950 formal applications were received up to 31st March 2021, this represented 96.4% of the volume of submissions received for the same period in 2019/20 when 2022 applications were received and was an increase of 3.1% in volume from my last report.

This year has started well and April has seen an increase in the number of formal submissions over previous years with 179 submissions received during the month compared to 121 for the same period in 2020 and 172 for 2019.

**9.2 Planning Fee Income:** Planning fee income for the year 2020/21 under recovered by £448k, as previously reported a couple of factors which contributed to this were there were fewer 'major' applications than the previous financial year and £120k additional fee income which would have been received from amended fee regulations which were due to commence in June 2020 were not implemented by the Scottish Government.

**9.3 Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2):** Since my last report work has continued by officers on the preparation of Schedule 4s in line with the Development Plan Scheme and the item is due to be considered later in the Agenda of this meeting.

- 9.4 Consultation Update:** The feedback from the recent on-line consultation in relation to the Argyll and Bute Technical Working Note has still to be considered by officers and when completed will be reported to a future meeting of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee (PPSL).
- 9.5 PPSL Training:** PPSL training recommenced on 21st April 2021 with Peter Bain, Development Manager delivering a session on Covid-19 and changes to Development Management practices - this was followed the following month by a presentation by Scott Ferrie, Interim Chief Reporter, who provided members with an introduction to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) of the Scottish Government. The training sessions are open to all elected members and I was delighted on both occasions to welcome a number of elected members who do not sit on the PPSL Committee.
- 9.6 Customer Service Excellence (CSE) Award:** The CSE reassessment for Planning and Regulatory Services took place on the 28th April 2021 and resulted in a positive outcome with the service retaining the award with significant improvements in 6 areas. Congratulations goes to all those involved in retaining this award which reflects the hard work of the teams within Development Management, Development Policy and Regulatory Services.
- 9.7 Building Standards Income:** Building Standards income levels for 2020/21 were £140k down from projected budget due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The commercial work that the service has been carrying out for other Local Authorities in recent years reduced dramatically over the year and due to resource issues in the Helensburgh office were paused during April/May to provide capacity to “catch up” however work for East Lothian Council was due to recommence this month.
- 9.8 Regulatory Services:** Covid-19 work remains a key priority within Regulatory Services at the moment and is very resource intensive. Business compliance levels have been generally high with only 19 warning notices and 4 Prohibition Notices served from over 4600 interactions by the service since the inception of Covid-19 regulations.

## **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 – 14<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

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