

25th November 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 30th September 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 and Policy Lead for Financial Services and Major Projects during the months October and November.
- 3.2 **Financial Services Team:** The department continues to consider budget monitoring and Covid impact along with the future budget strategy, updating members, council and policy and resources in due course. The cross party Budget Working Group (BWG) met for the second time and will make recommendations to December's Policy and Resources Committee meeting on savings options to balance the 22/23 budget.

The timetable for the Scottish Budget (9th December) and individual local authority allocations (20th December) has been published and officers will analyse how it affects Argyll and Bute, with a likely budget

seminar for members in the New Year. With the UK Chancellor having announced a £4.6billion increase in the Scottish block grant in a three-year settlement it is hoped that the Scottish Government will consider a similar increase when they allocate monies to councils. For long term budgeting and planning, and in line with the constant refrain from Audit Scotland, it would make sense to get a similar multi-year settlement and commitment rather than a one-year budget.

3.3 Local Tax Collections: Current year Council Tax collection at 31st October 2021 is 66%, which is up 0.48% on collections at the same time last year. A number of taxpayers claimed hardship in 2020/2021 because of the pandemic and paid their April 2020 and May 2020 instalments in February 2021 and March 2021, so this increase in collection rate is inflated and could reduce in the last two months of the financial year. Comparing the collection rate to the last pre-pandemic year in October 2019 shows that we are 0.81% behind collections in that year. Works are continuing with Walker Love to target large debtors with over £10,000 of arrears but, with the end of furlough arrangements for businesses and a reduction of £20 per week in Universal Credit entitlement, some taxpayers will struggle to meet their obligations and we may find it harder to collect local tax.

The government have laid down new Council Tax Reduction (CTR) regulations which will make the CTR scheme more generous from 1st April 2022 for some claimants.

Current year Non-domestic rates (NDR) collection at 31st October 2021 is 76.85%, down 5.35% in comparison the previous year and up 1.83% on collections in the 2019/2020 year. This variation is because of movements in the level of rates relief we have been able to offer businesses between these years. There has been lower take-up of Retail Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) relief in 2021/2022 compared to the previous year and the regulations around the eligibility for Small Business Bonus Scheme (SBBS) relief changed from 1st April 2021 with properties that were businesses that own properties that are not in active use not being entitled to the relief. Both of these factors have affected the collection rates.

3.4 Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF): Expenditure in the Scottish Welfare Fund in for the year to 30th September 2021 is £327,288. The annual budget is £458,827 so we have spent 42% more than the profiled budget for the year. Expenditure compared to the same time last year is up by £82,000 or 33% although the level of spend has reduced significantly in recent months from an average of £60,000 per month in quarter 1 to £35,000 per month in quarter 2. The cost pressures are all under Community Care Grants and is related to RSL housing

allocations that were delayed due to Covid last year now being made this financial year. There is also a spike in the categories of “Person/Family facing exceptional pressure” and “Fleeing Domestic Violence”. There is money set aside in earmarked reserve should we need to use it to cover these costs and, in addition, the government has released £25 million of winter monies to tackle financial insecurities and this has previously been made available to support SWF spending pressures.

- 3.5 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs):** The total expenditure for DHPs at 30th September 2021 including commitments is £835,000 against a confirmed total budget for the year of £898,000. This should be enough funding to cover anticipated spend for the rest of the financial year.
- 3.6 Benefits processing:** As at 30th October 2021 processing speeds for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme show average processing times of 22.3 days for a new claim and six days for change in circumstances. Workloads are increasing in relation to Universal Credit changes and the removal of the £20 per week Covid-related uplift. There has also been a need to direct resources towards the Self Isolation Support Grant processing and the position in relation to processing core housing benefit claims is therefore being closely monitored.
- 3.7 Flexible Food Fund:** Good news is that Argyll and Bute Council working in partnership with Bute Advice centre and ALI Energy on the Flexible Food Fund project has been Highly Commended in the category Excellence in Innovation (Service Delivery) by the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation in their performance awards.

At 31st October the project has delivered £994,000 of additional income for 634 families across Argyll and Bute an average of £1,567 per household. Half of the households being supported are single adults living alone, 30% are single parents and 15% are families with children in the household. There is evidence to suggest that the scheme is reducing footfall at foodbanks in our area.

- 3.8 Rothesay Pavilion:** As members are aware, the impact of COVID on construction projects, including the Rothesay Pavilion, has been significant.

The Council has entered into a Pre-Construction Service Development Agreement with Robertson Construction Central West (RCCW) and, working in conjunction with our original Design Team and Cost Consultants, they are developing a costed schedule of activities for

consideration and approval by the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 9th December 2021.

It should however be noted that due to the 'heat' currently being experienced in the central Scotland construction sector, and despite the significant work and engagement of RCCW with their established sub-contractors and supply chain, it has proved difficult to obtain the level of engagement from the market that we would have preferred. This situation is being made worse by the project's Island factor, complexity, the Grade A listed building status, and because we are seeking to complete works partially completed by others, and which have sat this way for almost two years. 'Challenging' would be an understatement of what officers are trying to manage.

3.9 Helensburgh Waterfront Development: Heron Bros has continued to make significant progress against their contract programme and the project currently remains on programme and within budget. The building structure is complete along with all the glazing installed. The flood defence walls and placement of rock armour around the site is complete, along with the installation of the flood gate to the recently completed Eastern Slipway. Car park and public realm works are well underway.

The main pool tank and studio pool have both been filled with water and have passed the pre-tiling testing. Mechanical and electrical installations are progressing at a pace to the whole of the building including to ground floor changing village, reception area, plantroom, gym, fitness studios, sauna, steam room etc. Lomond Stone walling to the bin store, electric sub-station and retaining walls are complete.

Works to the site access road (junction to Tower Place residents car park access) are nearing completion. These works were originally programmed in Phase 2 (September 2022) once the new leisure centre, car park and public realm (Phase 1) works were completed and opened in August 2022. However as granite kerbs and pavers purchased several years ago by the Council from the CHORD Contractor are being utilised as much as possible within the public realm areas of the project. This opened up the opportunity to bring forward these works by 12 months, undertaking the works now would be less intrusive and disruptive to the town, than the later original programmed date when the leisure centre and Phase 1 are fully open to the public.

Currently onsite the following activities are progressing at a pace: tiling to changing village, main pool and studio pool; fire stopping works; first floor and ground floor plant room mechanical install; electrical second fix; plastering to internal wall; kerbing and drainage channels to the car park, access road and public realm areas; granite paving to public realm areas; internal joinery; rain screen cladding; painting; installation of

integrated plumbing systems (IPS); electrical second fix; hand rails along retaining walls 1 and 2; raised access flooring; external fascia and soffit works; raised access flooring; and street lighting heads installed; external fascia and soffit works ongoing; vanity units, lockers and cubicles; grid ceiling; rain chain install; reception desk installed, heavy duty weights area to gym being installed and servery to the café being delivered.

Whilst the project has made significant progress to date, it's being delivered in the midst of a global pandemic, currently it remains on programme and within budget. However the Project Management Team recognise that issues of a commercial nature will likely emerge given the size and scale of this complex major capital project, and we continue to work closely with all parties to mitigate and minimise the potential impact of these upon the delivery of the works.

- .3.10 Depute Leader:** I continue to have regular other meetings with the Leader, Policy Leads and the Chief Executive in respect of a wide range of council business issues and priorities.

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

4.1 Legal and Regulatory Support: The Head of Legal and Regulatory Support has led the Council's Silver/Tactical Group (TG) coordinating the response to Covid-19 across Council services, reporting to the SMT/Gold Command and to the Council's Leadership Group as appropriate. The most recent meeting of the TG addressed situational awareness in relation to COP 26 and concurrent risks and provided information to be shared across the Council. COP 26 and concurrent risks are being monitored during the period of COP 26 and the TG will share information as appropriate and convene if required.

4.2 Governance:
Microsoft Teams/Hybrid Meetings/Live Streaming: the service continues to undertake significant work in respect of the implementation of new ICT systems and progressing arrangements for the introduction of virtual/hybrid meetings and livestreaming of Council meetings. This is a resource-intensive and complex area of work activity. This is also the subject of a further report to Council in November.

Customer Service Excellence: the service has successfully achieved reaccreditation of the Customer Service Excellence Standard with additional compliance plus elements. A huge thank you to those members of the team who were leading on this. The Customer Service Excellence quality mark aims to make a difference to service users by

encouraging services/organisations to focus on their individual needs and preferences, against five key criteria.

4.3 Elections:

Local Government By-Election Lomond North Ward: The Council is holding a by-election in the Lomond North ward on Thursday 16th December 2021 and the Returning Officer published the Notice of Election on Monday 1st November 2021. Voters who are registered in the Lomond North ward area only will be eligible to vote, and will be asked to elect one councillor to fill the current vacancy. The pre-election period starts immediately and there are particular requirements and restrictions for council staff during this time. This is to ensure that no individual or political party standing for election can make use of council resources – including staff - for their own political purposes.

UK Parliamentary Boundary Review for 2023 consultation: the Council is invited to consider the Boundary Commission proposals, which would see the Argyll and Bute Argyll and Bute constituency boundary spread north to incorporate part of ward 21 within Highland Council, including areas such as Ballachulish, Kinlochleven, Morvern, Ardnamurchan, Moidart and Ardgour. Responses to the consultation are due by 8th December 2021 and again this is the subject of a separate report to Council.

4.4 Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management:

Year To Date Savings: 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 that 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	£32,041	£71,600	£281,577	£59,599	£444,817
Quick Quote/Mini-Comp	£11,100	£2,758	£154,268	£561,148	£729,274
Transactional Purchasing Team	£32,778	-	£19,754	-	£52,532
HSCP	(£219)	-	-	-	(£219)

Scottish Proc. Contracts	-	-	-	-	-
Scotland Excel Contracts	-	-	£69,433	-	£69,433
Total	*£75,919	£74,358	£525,032	£620,747	£1,296,056

Local Spend: The Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management Team (PCCMT) are monitoring the level of local spend and can confirm the year to date percentage spend with our local suppliers is **29.6%**.

Not all requirements can be fulfilled by the local supply market. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of performance, the number of tenders bid and subsequently won by local suppliers is also monitored. See below:

Process - Sept	Total No. of Tenders	No. of Tenders receiving local bids	No. of Tenders won by local bidder	Success Rate % won of those bid for
Open/ Restricted	2	0	0	0.0%
Quick Quote	10	3	3	100.0%
Total	12	3	3	100.0%

YTD	Total	81	31	22	70.97%
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Community Benefits: The PCCMT is committed to maximise Community Benefits from its procurement activities and to delivering wider benefits for its communities when purchasing the required goods, services and supplies for Argyll and Bute.

We have been working closely with our suppliers to deliver additional social, economic and environmental value to our society and the summary below shows the Community Benefits achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards and the Request List during the period from 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021.

The team have provided a helpful update table on community benefits achieved during the period, below:

Contract Title	Supplier	Benefit
Helensburgh Waterfront Development Design Team	DarntonB3 Architecture	<p>General Design Advice and Guidance HWD Design Team - Hirst Landscape Architects have been supporting the Green Action Trust with their Community Arts project for the John Muir Way and it's interface with the Helensburgh Waterfront Development, with general design advice and guidance in relation to their artworks installation brief and liaising with the Artworks consultant (Wave Particle) and GAT on the emerging thinking and consultation outcomes.</p>
Helensburgh Waterfront Development Cost Consultant	Robinson Low Francis LLP	<p>Work Experience to a Trainee HWD Cost Consultant - RLF provided work experience to a Trainee Quantity Surveyor from Argyll and Bute Council. This took the form of shadowing experienced RLF staff for valuation site visits, bi-monthly risk register meeting and monthly cost reporting meetings.</p>
Local Flood Risk Management Plan	JBA Consulting	<p>Wave Tank Demonstration JBA Consulting visited Hermitage Academy and provided a wave tank presentation to three different groups. The wave tank demonstration is a good hands-on experience found to be useful in STEM events and at inspiring children to think about the water environment and careers in engineering and science.</p>
Lochgilphead Front Green Works	Hawthorn Heights	<p>Donation of tree logs and woodchips to two local schools/ nurseries. Trunk stubs used to create a seating amphitheatre around a tree for the children</p>

		
Provision of School and Public Transport in Helensburgh, Lomond, Jura	Garelochhead Minibuses and Coaches Ltd	<p>Free Return Transport</p> <p>Transport for sponsored cycle in Millport in aid of Jean's Bothy - Garelochhead Minibuses & Coaches have agreed to provide free return transport to Millport for the group of cyclists as part of their sponsorship.</p>
Provision of School and Public Transport in: Mid Argyll/Kintyre/ Oban and Lorn/Mull/ Cowal/Bute	West Coast Motors	<p>£5,000 Donation to Kintyre Seaspports</p> <p>West Coast Motors recently donated £5k to Kintyre Seaspports, https://www.kintyreseaspports.co.uk/.</p>
Provision of School and Public Transport Services on Tiree – 1129	AJ MacLean	<p>Donation of Fertilizer</p> <p>Upgrade of Community Park, Crossapol - AJ MacLean donated fertilizer free of charge to the Community Park. As well as providing the fertilizer, they delivered and uplifted the unused material from the park.</p> <p>Free Transport</p> <p>Beach Clean, Tiree - Provided for staff and pupils to carry out a beach clean before the end of term in June 2021.</p>
Provision of School and Public Transport Services on Tiree – two	Firm of John Kennedy	<p>Free Transport</p> <p>Beach Clean, Tiree - Provided for staff and pupils to carry out a beach clean before the end of term in June 2021.</p>

contracts 1130 & 1163		
Support Services for Unpaid Carers	Helensburgh and Lomond Carers	One Young Person Employed for Six Months. Secured funding through Community Job Scotland to employ a young person who is currently unemployed for a reception/admin role for six months.
Support Services to Young Carers	Mid Argyll Youth Development Service	Employment for One Young Carer One young carer now a volunteer with the MAYDS service. One young carer supported into employment by MAYDS
Traffic Management Framework	Active Traffic Management Solutions	New Defibrillator Donation Given by the supplier as a gesture of appreciation and thanks following reinstatement.
Provision of Supported Living services	Scottish Autism	Facilitate a Click and Connect Networking Platform Scottish Autism facilitate a networking type platform called Click and Connect - this is an extension of the Winter Connections programme that was so successful in reaching people with autism throughout Scotland and globally. Scottish Autism have received additional grant funding to continue this support and have renamed it Click and Connect. Opportunities vary from dancing, online gaming, mindfulness, Lego based activities, cooking to an autistic forum. These are free to access online sessions which are hosted by a member of Scottish Autism's Centre for Practice Innovation team. Facebook Lives - Guest Q&A sessions- with leaders in the field of autism and social care have continued to be filmed and shared freely with an online audience. Guests include Peter Vermeulen a senior lecturer who specialises in Autism, Jason Leitch who is the national Clinical Director of Healthcare Quality and Strategy, and Laura Davidson, founder of oddities, supporting people to get ready for work. Affinity (One to One) - this new service aims to support autistic people and their families during Covid-19 and beyond. Involves working with a number of professionals and practitioners who can provide free,

		personalised support online to address specific challenges, worries or concerns. Support can be around assisted decision making, managing stress and problem solving. Feedback has been positive with 90+% able to utilise support methods successfully following sessions. Set 4 Autism and Scottish Autism's Live Chat service have continued throughout this quarter also.
Helensburgh Waterfront Development	Heron Bros. Ltd	<p>One Work Placements (in Education)</p> <p>Nine Jobs Created by NSAfC Projects (Apprentices)</p> <p>Six Jobs Created by NSAfC Projects (New Entrants)</p> <p>50 Training Weeks on Site (Apprenticeships)</p> <p>31 Training Weeks on Site (Traineeships)</p> <p>13 Training Weeks on Site (New Entrants)</p> <p>One Qualification Gained (equiv. NVQ2 & above) (Main Contractor)</p> <p>One Industry Certification Gained (Main Contractor)</p>

4.5 Customer Support Services:

Communications: The Communications Team continues to deliver messages to our communities about Covid 19, new developments and business as usual. Our followers on all channels continues to grow and our weekly roundup is continuing to prove very popular. If you have not already signed up, just visit our website here [Newsletters \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/newsletters) and get news about what is happening around the council every week, straight into your email inbox.

Our campaigning for recruitment continues to highlight what is good about living and working in Argyll and Bute, using #abplace2b and using our theme of 'award winning Argyll and Bute' and some of the great visuals we have of our amazing area. We continue to provide a mix of information to support different elements of people's lives, for example: World Poverty Week – [details about support available](#), [new Rothesay school run designs](#) and [flood risk management plans](#). We have also promoted Regeneration: promoting signs for optimism and economic recovery continues, for example, [council to develop ambitious infrastructure projects](#).

Responsible tourism: we continue to receive a good response to information issued encouraging people to '[have a great time, be a great visitor](#)'.

Customer Service: The Customer Service and Engagement Team continue to be heavily involved in supporting activities around Covid, most recently picking up a request from NHS/HSCP colleagues to route vaccination clinic calls and information through our Customer Service Centre. Members will recall the speed with which the CSC was able to adapt to the needs of Covid at the start of the pandemic, providing an early response, facilitating Scottish Government actions and payments and liaising with community groups to provide support where it was needed most. This is all based on the ongoing digital and skills development that the team is working on daily to improve our services. The team continue to deal with requests for the Low Income Pandemic Payment and Self Isolation Support Grant.

Registration: Our registrars remain very busy with 274 registration events in October. We remain delighted that so many people want to get married in beautiful Argyll and Bute! Feedback on the experience that people have when interacting with the team remains very high and we aim to keep it that way.

HROD: HROD have continued to be extremely busy implementing a range of improvements and new initiatives. The online learning tool LEON is being improved and will be relaunched shortly.

We continue to monitor absence very carefully, particularly as Covid cases fluctuate. Twice weekly absence reports are shared with management to ensure that we are aware of trends and impacts. Wellbeing remains high on the agenda and we have reviewed the attendance management policy and procedures to make them easier to use for employees and managers. The Wellbeing Team continue to work to support as many employees back to work as possible and Wellbeing Wednesday is a regular and popular feature, sharing information about a wide range of wellbeing issues [Wellbeing Wednesday \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](http://argyll-bute.gov.uk) .

ICT and Digital: The ICT and Digital Team have been focussing on the rollout of MS365, with new tools set to be launched soon. We will be recruiting Digital Champions from the workforce to become knowledgeable in particular areas of MS365. These are not paid positions, but keen employees who use the software regularly and are keen to learn more and share with colleagues.

Digital Security remains a high priority – remember if you receive a suspicious email – do not click the link. You can find out more here [Phishing – can you spot it? Do you know what to do? | The Hub](#). The team remain busy supporting all services to adopt and improve their options for digital service delivery.

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

5.1 HSCP Leadership: I am pleased that Evan Beswick has joined the Health and Social Care Partnership and welcome him as Head of Primary Care.

5.2 Local Activities: On 7th October I attended a Strategic Planning Group Workshop on the future priorities of the Joint Strategic Plan 2022-25. The HSCP Finance and Policy Committee met on 22nd October, considering regular items on budget monitoring, outlook, risks, and development of transformational savings.

The IJB prepared a response to the Scottish Government consultation on a National Care Service at a development session on 27th October. Ongoing development of the new Autism Strategy recommenced with a meeting on 29th October.

5.3 National Meetings: I attended COSLA Children and Young People Board on 1st October, discussing Equally Safe At School, The Promise and redesign of the Children's Hearings System. On 18th October the Health and Social Care Board Anne's Law, supporting visitors for care home residents, and an action plan for Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing were on the agenda. Both boards continued to discuss the National Care Service and the potential impacts of partnerships with other local services.

The national IJB Chairs and Vice-Chairs Remote and Rural Subgroup met on 7th October, primarily looking at how a National Care Service would impact areas of Scotland outwith the central belt and seeking to avoid previous issues, for example with the new GP contract.

As Vice-Chair of the national IJB Chairs and Vice Chairs I was a panellist at a virtual round table organised by the International Foundation for Integrated Care on 22nd October. Titled Integrated, Local and Personal this brought together a variety of perspectives from across Scotland and internationally with the aim of informing discussion around the proposed National Care Service.

5.4 Children and Young People:
Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) – a £4500 grant application was successful to support up to 75 care experienced young people to engage with a refresh of GIRFEC. This recognises strategic role young people across Argyll and Bute can play in developing policy, procedure and services.

Scottish Government Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative Quality Improvement Awards – Argyll and Bute have been shortlisted in three categories:

- Most Inspiring or innovative project - The Voice of Children and Young People in Strategic Planning - this is set out in the 2020 - 23 CYPSP
- Improver of the Year - Argyll and Bute Youth Advisory Panel
- Strategic Champion - Patricia Renfrew

Corporate Parenting - a new agreed multiagency Corporate Parenting Plan can be viewed at https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/nhs_cpp_2021-sm.pdf. Over the next three years the four strategic improvement priorities will be:

1. We respect and include our children and young people - helping ensure they shape and inform all we do, and that we promote approaches that build on their families' and carer's strengths and assets.
2. We ensure our children and young people grow up in safe, secure, nurturing and loving homes and we promote and maintain positive relationships.
3. We support our children and young people to achieve their potential through lifelong learning, growth and development and the enjoyment of positive mental and physical wellbeing.
4. We help ensure our young people move to a positive more independent life when they are ready and we support them on their journey to independence.

These key areas in change and improvement for, and with care experienced children, young people and adults were developed from self-evaluation work and are consistent with The Promise and the Care Leavers Covenant.

The Promise – through community based support and early intervention it is aimed to reduce the number of children entering the care system. Where support is required, planning is underway to reduce reliance on residential care in Argyll and Bute and elsewhere by increasing family based options. Also important is increasing the proportion of siblings being placed together, and further developing partnership working with colleagues in education and the third sector.

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) – this has been developed by Social Work, Police Scotland, SCRA, The Faculty of Advocates and the Crown Office. Initial training of police officers and social workers undertaking Joint Investigative Interviews (JII) with children is now

over seven weeks rather than five days. With improved planning, preparation and the practice in JIIs, the aim is for the experience of the children to be recorded in the interview, and for this statement to become their evidence in court.

As 48 interviews a year are needed for workers to be deemed to be competent, it is unlikely that a viable team could be formed in Argyll and Bute. These and other challenges to introducing the model locally have been raised with the national implementation group, and remote and island subgroup with input from our Chief Social Work Officer.

To implement SCIM a regional or national hub supporting remote and island communities will be required. Issues of transport, distance, workforce skill dilution and disproportionate financial burden would remain for authorities such as Argyll and Bute.

Age of Criminal Responsibility (ACR) – with the act in force, children under the age of 12 (and 14 in due course) can by definition no longer commit a crime. Instead, to investigate the matter an ACR investigation is required. As the number of investigations needed each year within Argyll and Bute are likely to be very low or none, the police and social work personnel trained to conduct these are again likely to be part of a regional hub for west central Scotland.

Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – two agency nurses have now been employed to address the waiting list pressures across Argyll and Bute. This will allow changes in the care pathway necessary to meet national service specification to be tested and developed further. CAMHS Occupational Therapists (1.8 whole time equivalent) and Advanced Nurse Practitioners (1.8 whole time equivalent) have been recruited, however other vacant posts remain, including Consultation Psychiatrists (1.7 whole time equivalent), with cover continuing from Highland.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children – Argyll and Bute is expected to receive around two young people a year through the National Transfer Scheme, with a preference being for these to be at the same time. Proposed Home Office funding for the scheme drops significantly when a young person reaches 18, and does not factor in Scottish requirements of continuing, through and after care. Plans are being developed by Social Work and Education to accommodate two young people aged over 16 each year. These will be presented to council for approval if required along with a business case and risks.

Recruitment – staffing pressures continue to be a significant concern, with recruitment hampered by national competition for limited numbers

of suitably qualified staff, and difficulty in successful applicants securing accommodation locally.

5.5 Adult Services:

Autism Strategy Group – an initial meeting has been held with a range of officers who will be involved in the development of a new strategy. As a first step a scoping survey is being produced to gain public and stakeholder feedback about what areas should be included in a refreshed Autism Strategy.

Older Adults and Dementia – a reference group was established to provide views of lived experience and feed into the Planning Group. There was a lively first meeting in October, with the Independent Chair being Victoria MacLeod from Alzheimer Scotland.

Following the completion of the current phase of the Dementia Redesign process, a Dementia Strategy is to be developed.

Care Homes and Housing – the Programme Board is analysing and summarising the refreshed data for four scenarios. Work is ongoing to procure a consultant to review the environment and comfort of all our internal care homes whilst a more strategic long term vision is developed.

Care at Home – there remain gaps in service provision due to recruitment challenges and increased need across all providers. Working together, care is being prioritised, sometimes leading to a reduction in care delivered to individuals. An improvement plan is being progressed as required for the internal care home service. Regular communication is to be put in place for families and all relevant stakeholders.

Place Based Review Rothesay and Dunoon – the HSCP has been working with other public sector organisations to look at available assets and how these can be best used to deliver services.

Hospitals/Unscheduled Care – hospitals remain under considerable pressure as do all our community services. COVID impacts, staff close contacts and general absence continue to be pressures along with increasing presentation at hospital. We have appointed an Unscheduled Care Lead for 6 months and are working on all aspects of winter flow; escalation plans and the co-ordination of the use of funding streams.

5.6 Finance: As of 30th September there has been a welcome improvement in the HSCP forecast outturn for the current year. The forecast overspend has reduced to £785k, of which £425k relates to Social Work budgets. Management continue to address the overspend position and are committed to operating within budget during the year.

The Scottish Government recently announced a significant increase in funding to support winter pressures in Health and Social Care, with further detail to be confirmed for allocations locally. This announcement will enable additional staff, including Health Support Worker, to be recruited urgently to assist with current and anticipated service pressures. It will also fund increases in pay necessary for all workers delivering adult social care, employed by external care providers, to receive a minimum of £10.02 per hour from 1st December.

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

6.1 As we head into the winter period, my role as Policy Lead for Roads and Infrastructure continues to be busy and varied. Below is an overview of some of the activities the service has been delivering over the last couple of months.

6.2 Waste Disposal in Helensburgh and Lomond: You may already be aware that Barr Environmental, who provide a waste disposal service for refuse material collected in the Helensburgh Lomond area, have been subject to a recent tax tribunal which was found in favour of Revenue Scotland. We are currently in contract with Barr for treatment of our residual waste, green waste and timber and are working to our current contract.

6.3 Capital Roads Reconstruction Programme: I am pleased to remind Members that this year our teams are delivering one of the largest capital programmes in roads reconstruction which includes £10M worth of capital investment announced as part of the budget process in February, £1.29M of Strategic Timber Transport Funding and £900k of active travel and footway improvement schemes. Please see the full programme and details on progress here: [Roads Capital Programme \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](http://argyll-bute.gov.uk)

6.4 Winter Maintenance: Winter maintenance standby rotas commenced on Friday 29 October. This follows the current in season policy agreed at the September meeting of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee. At the time of writing at the beginning of

November, we have over 10,500 tonnes of rock salt, which is our normal start of season operating tonnage.

Colleagues across the Council Chamber will be very much aware of the national shortage of HGV drivers. Whilst we have not lost a significant number of drivers, this does have an impact on recruitment of HGV drivers. This is being compounded by some absence being experienced through Covid.

6.5 Lismore Ferry: I am pleased to confirm that by the time the Council meeting takes place, the new Lismore ferry will have completed its sea trial and in the process of receiving its MCA certification. The vessel is due to arrive at Port Appin late November/early December

6.6 Electric Vehicles: Officers are currently in the process of finalising a draft long list of potential future sites for public electric vehicle chargers based on the asset development criteria agreed at the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in June. Since then a Member Development Session was held in September to discuss the draft list and feedback from that session is being used to finalise the list. This will be reported to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in December with a view to undertaking a public consultation early in the New Year.

A further report on the consultation feedback is planned in March, with that meeting then finalising the list and priority ratings for the future. This should tie in with Scottish Government Electric Vehicle Charging funding announcements which are expected around the spring of 2022.

In developing a published list of sites this should ensure community buy-in and full visibility to the plans, as well as making funding bids easier as sites will have been pre-agreed, meaning the programme should then be able to move forward at greater pace.

As well as developing the strategy, other work is underway such as installing electric vehicle charging points at Council sites with the support of colleagues in Property – so far electric vehicle chargers have been installed at the Corran Halls, Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre, Blackhill Depot and High Street Depot, and new installs are planned for Argyll House and Jackson's Quarry depot. These sites are being taken forward to align with the office and depot rationalisation programmes. We are also progressing a pre-agreed scheme at Tighnabruaich via Transport Scotland funding.

There are also plans (through a new pilot scheme via Strathclyde University) to install chargers at Dunoon Grammar School and Oban High School to facilitate the transition to electric school transport vehicles. There are site meetings planned to move this scheme forward in early November.

Officers also continue to support HiTRANS in developing plans for further electric vehicle chargers at sites in Argyll and Bute via another funding stream. A full update on all development work will be provided to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in December.

- 6.7 Craignure and Iona Pier Projects:** I was delighted to be able to join the latest meeting of the Craignure Marine Infrastructure Liaison Group, admirably chaired by Councillor Mary-Jean Devon, and hear first-hand about the excellent community involvement as work continues to finalise the outline design of the new pier at Craignure. The Council is working closely with the Liaison Group and the Design Sub Group to help to ensure that the aesthetics of the project are influenced by the community.

Works are progressing with Iona and some asset sustainability works are currently being carried out on the slipway –this is being carried out in conjunction with the design of the new breakwater facility for Fionnphort. There have been delays with the Environmental Impact Assessments due to some technical issues which are still ongoing. These two significant island infrastructure projects are overall, progressing well and will provide resilience for island connectivity.

7. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

- 7.1 Early Years:** Two ELC providers (one Local Authority setting and one of our commissioned Partner Providers) were inspected by the Care Inspectorate during recent months, with both being found to meet the new National Standard which came in to force in August 2021.

As part of one of these inspections, the Care Inspectorate trialled their new draft Quality Framework, which allowed the Inspectorate to gather data around their new approach and also allowed our setting and our Early Years team to learn more about the impending Inspection Framework. This experience will assist the Early Years team to support all settings effectively in relation to preparation for Inspection using the new Framework when it is launched later this session.

7.2 Outdoor Spaces Award: As part of the 1140 Hours roll out, Argyll and Bute have been shortlisted in the Outdoor Spaces Award under 2 categories as follows:-

- **Early Learning and Childcare**

Across Argyll and Bute our Early Years Curriculum is focused on partnership, culture and outdoor learning and play. Our unique spaces support this delivery providing opportunities for risky play and exploratory drive whilst building life skills that create excellent foundations for formal learning when our children start school.

- **Innovation in Delivering a Sustainable Learning Space Awards**

We have developed high quality, unique sustainable spaces that support delivery of quality play-based learning experiences that are positive, challenging and playful. These sustainable spaces provide a wealth of opportunities for intergenerational activities, enhancing community cohesion and help us build inclusive, resilient communities whilst delivering high quality ELC.

The establishments included are: Kilmory Gardens, Lochgilphead; Silver Birch, Dunoon; Salen Primary School, Mull and Willowview Early Years, Oban. The awards take place on 22nd November 2021.



7.3 The Voice of Children and Young People in Strategic Planning: The work of the Argyll and Bute Youth Advisory Panel has been shortlisted for two Quality Improvement Awards through the Children and Young People's Improvement Collaborative. The whole team (adults and youth members) were shortlisted for the 'Most innovative or inspiring project' and the youth members were shortlisted for 'Improvers of the year'. There will be a short film clip recorded for the event for all of the shortlisted projects. The awards will be held virtually this year on 30th November 2021.

7.4 Psychological Services:

Our Children, Their Nurturing Education (OCTNE): This was officially launched at the start of the year, led by the Educational Psychology Service including the Principal Teacher for Nurture, and has made excellent progress over the last months with the engagement of 16 educational establishments across the authority. This significant piece of work has been enhanced by the employment of two additional nurture teachers to support the establishment of robust interventions around our most distressed children in schools where there may be a risk of school placement breakdown. This support is targeted and more intensive in response to needs arising from the impact of the pandemic. This work also supports the delivery of our wider aim to become a trauma responsive workforce.

The appointments are the result of several months of careful planning and liaison with the Scottish Government, who have funded the posts as part of a national initiative. All four Cluster Leads, who each cover the schools in a different geographical area of the authority, have shown themselves to be enthusiastic, creative and self-starting in their first three weeks of work, which have included a varied induction programme.

Trauma Training: Argyll and Bute continues to be one of the three pilot authorities for the national Trauma Training Plan. The work is now developing to ensure that this learning translates in to changes to practice that improve outcomes for children and young people, using the Model for Improvement. This week the Principal Educational Psychologist and Service Manager for Resources in Social Work met with representatives from Scottish Government (SG) to update on the significant progress of this work. This was very well received and recognised the commitment and significant progress over the period of a global pandemic. The SG representatives are keen for further information to be made available to ensure that the good practice is recognised and shared more widely with other local authorities.

Bereavement and Loss Interventions: The Educational Psychology Service has reinvigorated the approach to Season's for Growth, an intervention relating to bereavement and loss, across the authority through a systematic programme of training and support for Companions. This has included training for schools on our remote islands where access to direct specialist services can be less consistently available. This work has enhanced the skill and confidence of staff to respond to bereavement and loss timeously using this group approach led by adults with whom children and young people are familiar. The approach also includes collaborative support for the companions who lead groups.

Attendance: It is recognised that school attendance has been adversely affected by the pandemic, including non-attendance as a result of increased anxiety. The Educational Psychology Service has developed a range of evidence informed assessments, training materials and resources to support schools to address non-attendance at school. A multiagency short life working group has been established to consider the available data, reflect on early intervention and consider an effective implementation approach to ensure that children and young people are attended to engage with learning and reach their potential.

School Counselling Service: The school counselling service established in line with Scottish Government requirements has progressed positively. The service started on 8th February 2021 with 7.5 FTE Counsellors and a Team Leader. There has been steady engagement with this service and an increase in referrals recorded from August 2021. In one instance, 25 referrals were received during the course of a single week. To meet the increased demand the Council has allocated money for a 12-month period for a further two Counsellors, who are currently in the process of being appointed.

A research assistant is involved to ensure robust reporting of outcomes. Analysis shows that there is a relatively even balance across males and females being referred, and that there are a wide range of reasons for referral, including anxiety, relationships, trauma and emotional regulation, bereavement, bullying, low mood and self-injury/self-harm. Early indications also show that young people with particularly vulnerabilities, such as having additional support needs, being care experienced or being a young carer, are being supported to access the service. It is clear that this is a necessary and valued service.

- 7.5 Digital Learning:** £80,000 has been invested on video conferencing (VC) equipment for secondary schools (this funding has also been used to replace obsolete VC equipment in the schools). The VC equipment will be used to enhance curriculum choice, support Senior Phase pupils and ensure equity of provision, such as by giving pupils the opportunity to attend lessons and engage with subjects they may not otherwise be able to. The flexibility offered by the VC equipment will also allow the curriculum offer delivered by partners to be incorporated into the common timetable for the Senior Phase. Delivery of the VC equipment will start over the next few weeks and will be completed before the end of February 2022. Training and support will be provided to teaching staff and secondary school technicians by the Digital Learning Team.

7.6 Dunoon Grammar School Shine at COP26 Event: Pupils and staff from Dunoon Grammar School took to the global stage this week when they made a passionate contribution to a high-profile COP26 event. Hosted by Accenture and T4 Education, the organisers of World Education Week, the school were invited to showcase their innovative approaches to Climate Education to a world-wide online audience which included leaders from the business, education and policy sectors.

Accenture are one of the world's biggest companies, offering professional services to a diverse range of businesses – including to 91 of the top 100 businesses in the world. The 90-minute-long event was hosted in a purpose built studio in Glasgow and young people from Dunoon Grammar opened the show with a rousing entertainment medley which included musicians and highland dancers from the school.

After a studio panel discussion, Dunoon Grammar's Head Teacher David Mitchell, delivered a presentation on climate education at the school, which included illustrations of the innovative approaches adopted by many departments across the school.

The school's contribution was extremely well received, with positive feedback by the organisers and many people viewing from across the globe. I am very proud of the young people who took part in this prestigious event, and the school as a whole, in helping to shape future climate education across the world.

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

8.1 Planning Applications: Since 1st April 2021 submission rates for planning applications have remained high with 1,040 formal submissions being received up to 1st October 2021. This is an increase of 171 applications for the same period last year when 869 applications were received and is close to the number received in 2019 when 1060 applications had been received for the same period.

8.2 Planning Fee Income: Planning fee income to 1st October 2021 was £93k below the forecast budget despite a continuing high volume of applications. A £77k fee for a major application has still to be collected which should boost the income for October/November.

8.3 Planning Performance Framework 2020/21: As advised in my last Policy Lead report the tenth Planning Performance Framework (PPF)

report has been prepared and submitted to the Scottish Government for review.

We still await the feedback from the Scottish Government which will be reported to the Planning, Protective Services & Licensing committee when to hand.

- 8.4 Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2):** Submission of the necessary documentation to the Scottish Government's Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) for the Examination process has been delayed till the autumn as the cross referencing and background information preparation is proving to be an onerous task and although the DPEA have been offered the schedule 4s to start the examination they have advised that they require all documentation before commencing the Examination process.
- 8.5 Building Standards Income:** Building Standards income for 2021/22 to the end of August was £364,289 from 666 applications which is 96% of projected income. This is an improvement from 20/21 but down 15% from income levels in 19/20 and although income is dependent upon the building market and economy the situation is being closely monitored.
- 8.6 Commercialisation:** Reliance on commercial work continues and the service continues to seek external work from other local authorities although in the longer term this is likely to be unsustainable. In my last report I advised that East Lothian Council continue to use our services although this work is reducing and is expected to finish in quarter 4. On the plus side work for Scottish Borders Council commenced on the 19th October for a 12-week period.
- 8.7 Local Air Quality Report:** The latest Air Quality Annual Progress Report for Argyll and Bute was reported to the October meeting of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee. This report concluded that local air quality continues to be good and that nitrogen dioxide levels are below air quality objectives at the ten monitoring sites throughout Argyll and Bute. The report also looks at planning applications that have the potential to affect air quality objectives and assessments are undertaken to ensure they will not have any impact on local air quality objectives.

The full report can be accessed at the following link:

[Appendix 1 Argyll Bute Council LAQM APR 2021 F.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/Appendix%201%20Argyll%20Bute%20Council%20LAQM%20APR%202021%20F.pdf)

8.8 Regulatory Services: Regulatory Services including Licensing Standards and Environmental Health continue to adopt the enforcement strategy of the 4 Es in relation to Covid-19 – Engage, Educate, Encourage and Enforcement.

- **Engage:** Communication; via Newsletter, Pubwatch, Individual calls and visits and virtual visits.
- **Educate:** via service requests, complaints, proactive and reactive contact, and guidance via personal contact, virtual tour and personal visits.
- **Encourage:** Reviewing risk assessments, identifying gaps and advising where improvements can be made, passing on good practice and continuous contact on frequent changes to guidance.
- **Enforcement:** Formal enforcement, although powers are reduced.

Regulatory Services have also adopted a proactive approach to the introduction of vaccination certification and have been providing advice to businesses impacted by the new requirements.

9. CONCLUSION

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

Argyll and Bute Council – Policy Lead Councillors Report – 8th November 2021

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