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28<sup>th</sup> April 2022

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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 25<sup>th</sup> November 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 is my final report and provides members with an update on my activities as Depute Leader and Policy Lead for Financial Services and Major Projects during 2022. Firstly, may I personally extend my appreciation and thanks to all the officers that I have worked with in both roles over the past five years. Whatever questions were asked, or solutions sought, officers' unfailing courtesy, dedication and support was warmly appreciated and is a hallmark of the very ethos of the council itself.
- 3.2 **Financial Services Team:** The last quarter has seen a significant amount of Financial Services' time spent on the budget preparation process for 2022/23. This included the provision of financial information to other service areas and Elected Members which helped ensure the Council approved a balanced budget on 24th February.

Attention has now turned to the production of the 2021/22 Financial Statements with initial preparatory work well under way. Again this year we will deal with the complexities of reporting the COVID-19 funding in an appropriate manner. This year will be particularly challenging with the ongoing work around the replacement of Oracle, our key financial system, but planning has played a significant part to mitigate any risks associated with the impact of this.

**3.3 Local Tax Collections:** The current year council tax collection rate at 31st March 2022 is 96.20%. However, prepayments and accruals have still to be processed so there will be further movement before the year end position is finalised. This position is up 0.43% on the same position in 2021/2022 and even 0.15% up on the pre pandemic year 2019/2020. The main reason for the improved performance is that we paid out around £988,000 in Scottish Government Low Income Pandemic Payments (LIPP) to people who receive certain categories of benefit and with certain council tax discounts and exemptions. A substantial part of those funds, some £373,000, were directly credited to council tax accounts and this has boosted income receipts for the year.

Through the UK government's £9.1bn support package for rising energy costs, around 29,000 households in Argyll and Bute have now received £150 reduction in their council tax liability for the 2022/23. New Council Tax Reduction (CTR) regulations will make the CTR scheme more generous from 1st April 2022 for some claimants. These changes will see entitlement levels of households in receipt of Universal Credit being adjusted to ensure that nobody is worse off than they would have been on the legacy benefit, Council Tax Benefit.

The current year non-domestic rates (NDR) collection rate at 31 March 2022 is 96.53%, down 1.44% in comparison to the previous year and 0.69% 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.

**3.4 Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF):** Expenditure in SWF for the year to 31st March 2022 is £553,815. The annual budget is £458,827 and therefore we are overspent by £94,988. Year-end adjustments have still to be processed, however the council has an earmarking to cover this overspend. In the previous year the council spent £654,000 on SWF and therefore this year has seen a £100,000 reduction in the level of expenditure incurred. The Scottish Government have advised that the council will receive £529,000 of funding for SWF in 2022/2023.

- 3.5 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs):** The total expenditure for DHPs at 31st March 2022 including commitments is £882,322 against a confirmed total budget for the year of £898,000. There will be an adjustment to make at year end but we will come in just under the budget.
- 3.6 Benefits processing:** As at 31st March 2022 processing speeds for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme show average processing times of 25.19 days for a new claim and 4.41 days for changes in circumstances. The target in the service plan for processing new claims is an average of 21 days. The reason we have been unable to achieve the target is due to additional workload related to the delivery of Self Isolation Support claims which continue to come in at a very high rate of around 120 claims per week. It was not possible to recruit temporary staff to support this, and therefore staff continue to work overtime in order to mitigate delays and administer these grants within satisfactory timescales.
- 3.7 Flexible Food Fund:** The Flexible Food Fund project has been extended for a further year given the current crisis in relation to the cost of living and the increase in energy costs. At 28<sup>th</sup> February the project has delivered £1,241,872 of additional income for 955 families across Argyll and Bute - an average of £1,300 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.
- 3.8 Poverty Awareness Training:** The Poverty Alliance and Child Poverty Action Group have delivered training to around 500 members of staff across the council and its Community Planning Partners. The training has been extremely well received by staff across all organisations. The main objectives of increasing the understanding of poverty in Argyll and Bute, its routes and causes, how to support people experiencing poverty and where to go for resources to assist them were achieved. Two sessions are set aside for elected members as part of the overall induction to the council. An e-learning module has been developed and is currently be tested before being released to all staff on the council's new e-learning suite.
- 3.9 Rothesay Pavilion:** As members will be aware, the projected final cost of the Rothesay Pavilion Adaptive Restoration has identified a significant shortfall in available funding, requiring us to take a 'pause' to investigate how we might close the gap. I am pleased to advise that a cross-party lobbying group has been constituted to take forward our concerted efforts to lobby at a national level for the additional funding that will be required to complete this important project. This project will

be supported by officers from the council, as well as external specialist and licenced lobbyists, along with support and advice from our current funding partners, including: the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Historic Environment Scotland; and the Rothesay Pavilion Charity. At the same time our in-house Project Manager continues to work with our Design Team and Robertson Construction Central West to consider which of the identified works packages it might be sensible to progress in the interim period with funds that we do have available, to ensure that there is no further degradation of the buildings condition.

We recently hosted a visit to the building by representatives from our funding partners so that they could see for themselves the difficulties that we are facing, and to receive a presentation from Robertson Construction in respect of the specific buildability and construction sector pressures that the project is facing. We are under no illusion that the difficulties that the project faces are significant, but we remain confident that we have in place the necessary skills, expertise and capability to mount a concerted and professional exercise to lobby for the funding support necessary to complete the project.

- 3.10 Helensburgh Waterfront Development:** Heron Bros have continued to make significant progress in the delivery of the construction works. A focus at a senior level at the moment is monitoring and addressing issues in relation to statutory utility providers, with discussions ongoing.

Currently onsite we are focused on completing the following outstanding activities which are progressing well: tiling to main pool hall floors and walling, movable floor install to studio pool, glass balustrade to main stairs and café viewing area; metal louvers to first floor plant room; completion of tiling to changing village, changing places and dry changing rooms to the first floor; painting and decorating; cycle stand install, surfacing to carpark and footways; and completion of electrical enabling Works to secure permanent power supply.

Once we have a permanent power supply to the new leisure building towards the end of April. Heron Bros can proceed with the final finishes; snagging; testing and commissioning as we work towards an opening, later in the summer.

- .3.11 Depute Leader:** I have continued 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 Introduction:** This is my final Policy Lead report and, as I am also stepping down as a councillor this year, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff across the council, in all departments, and in our community planning partners, who have provided support over the years. We have excellent officers who are extremely committed to the organisation and the area itself and along with my thanks I leave them with my very best wishes.

**4.2 Legal and Regulatory Support:** The Head of Legal and regulatory Support led the council's Silver/Tactical Group (GP) coordinating the response to Covid-19 across council services and reporting to the SMT/Gold Command and to the council's Leadership group. This continued from February 2020 through until the current time. Tactical Group are currently stood down but continuing to share information on infection rates, staff absences and other relevant information for situational awareness.

In October 2021 Legal and Regulatory Support competed its annual reaccreditation of the Customer Service Excellence Award successfully with additional compliance-plus in four areas. Key areas for recognition were:

- Health and Safety for the quality of their continuing engagement and commitment to services across the council while coming out of lockdown and moving beyond level zero;
- Trading Standards for their engagement with partners and the public in call blocking and scamming initiatives;
- Governance for their commitment to accessibility for council meetings and flexibility in adapting policies and procedures to facilitate that;
- Procurement and Contract Management team for their flexible and can-do attitude in continuing to support services in difficult circumstances with sometimes new and challenging demands;
- Welfare Rights and their commitment to work flexibly throughout the pandemic and continue to provide a service to maximise income for vulnerable people;
- Legal and their work to remain accessible, continuing to support council services and working flexibly to assist the public and trades in licensing issues;
- Civil Contingencies for their work to support the resilience structures we have and ensure a continuing and structured response to the challenges during the pandemic;

- Election team for delivering by-elections and a national election and maintaining the integrity of the election process and accessibility for all in difficult times;
- Governance Risk and Safety core team for their commitment to maintain high performance standards in our response to FOI, DP and complaints in challenging circumstances.

**4.3 Governance:** The work of the Committee Support team in partnership with colleagues in IT, in rolling out the use of Microsoft Teams, supporting virtual meetings and working up arrangements for hybrid meetings, has been highlighted in my previous Policy Lead reports but it is worth mentioning again - there is very considerable work going on behind the scenes to ensure that these meetings run smoothly and that elected members are able to participate effectively.

Since the start of the year, in addition to normal business, the team have supported the PPSL Committee in holding two virtual Planning Hearings: Garelochhead Housing Development on 28 February 2022 (approved) and Port Ellen Playing Fields Development on 24 March 2022 (approved).

The council and its strategic committees (Policy and Resources, Community Services, Environment, Development and Infrastructure and Audit and Scrutiny) have livestreamed their meetings since January 2022 using the technology in place in the council chamber.

The team have also supported the Children's Panel Annual Recruitment Campaign, which has now concluded with 13 candidates appointed across Argyll and Bute to undertake pre service training before joining the rota in August 2022.

**4.4 Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management (PCCMT):** The council website is helping suppliers with local recruitment efforts by providing an additional platform to advertise their job vacancies - this incentive arising as a result of good and improved supplier engagement.

The corporate roll out of the standard, streamlined Contract and Supplier (CSM) framework has allowed PCCMT to build better relationships with both our service departments and key strategic suppliers. Quarterly CSM meetings, now undertaken via Teams/Skype, provide the opportunity to review supplier performance and allow the team to capture the Community Benefits (CBs) being delivered in a much more effective way.

In Sept 2021 the Argyll and Bute Council Community Benefits webpage was revised with a new interactive map showing locations of

community group requests and CBs completed by our suppliers. The Community Planning and Development department sent out a mailshot to local communities to promote awareness of the community benefits scheme and encourage community groups to submit projects.

The regular supplier review meetings with the council's seven general term maintenance contractors provide updates on the continual benefits and support being delivered to local communities, where most of these suppliers are recruiting a new apprentice on an annual basis and thereby assisting with growth in our local economic recovery.

Work is ongoing in supporting the Older Adults Service Providers with incentives for recruitment and retention of staff - this includes use of technology for older people to engage with families and upskilling care staff to support reduction in acute admissions. A number of care providers are supporting and donating to local places including schools, pre5's, nursery, other providers (charities), local football teams etc.

The NPDO contract is monitored on an ongoing basis by the PCCMT. The project agreement (PA) includes provisions regarding the capital costs of funding any change in law requirements. This fund has never been required and the team has negotiated a variation to the PA to alter the provisions so that risk for general changes in law that require capex would move from the current risk-share between the council and SPV, to the Council alone. This brings a potential return of up to £1.8M to the council which is expected to be delivered in the next financial year.

#### **4.5 Legal Services Activity:**

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis: In November 2021, the PPSL Committee agreed with officers' recommendation to publish a list of wheelchair accessible taxi and private hire vehicles, designated in terms of section 167 of the Equality Act 2010. If such a list is published, it triggers specific legal duties on the drivers of listed vehicles (in terms of Section 165 of the Act) to carry wheelchair passengers, not charge any extra for doing so, provide those passengers with assistance, and not to discriminate against them. Relevant operators have now been consulted in relation to the proposals, and if the finalised list of designated wheelchair accessible taxi and private hire vehicles is agreed by members, it will be published on the council's website on or around 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022. This publicly available list, and supporting information will be helpful for operators, prospective applicants and the general public. Most importantly, it will assist any wheelchair users planning journeys in the

area by taxi or private hire car and will give them a clearer picture as to the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Taxi Private Hire Fund: The Scottish Government have provided financial support to taxi and private hire drivers and operators affected by the pandemic with the said support funds administered by licensing authorities. The Licensing Team have therefore processed numerous applications under various cycles of this fund and the support given to the trade in Argyll and Bute to date can be summarised as follows:

Taxi/PH Drivers

1st Tranche - £301,500.00  
2nd Tranche - £301,500.00  
3rd Tranche – £147,000.00  
**Total = £750,000.00**

Taxi/PH Operators

1st Tranche - £146,000.00  
2nd Tranche - £119,500.00  
**Total = £265,500.00**

Final Tranche (to date)

Drivers - £5,250.00  
Operators - £1,500.00

Easing of Lockdown and Opening of Businesses Working Group: The Legal Services Manager was a member of the above Working Group which was established in June 2020. The group comprised representatives from various council services and external agencies including Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and the business community. The remit of the group was to provide advice, guidance and support to the business community and to look at measures to assist businesses as the easing of lockdown progressed. This included identifying public realm spaces which could be made available on a temporary basis and fast tracking applications for the licensing of these areas as required. Legal Services prepared the necessary agreement to regulate the use of these spaces. The group also issued newsletters and published information through social media on the implications and effect of the range of measures introduced by the Scottish Government.

**4.6 Welfare Rights Team:** The Welfare Rights team play an important role supporting the vulnerable in our communities and assisting them to maximise their benefit income. This helps not only those individuals to ensure they receive full entitlement but also assist the local economy as much of the sums maximised are spent locally. During the life of



this Council the team have helped vulnerable individuals by recovering or maximising the sums below;

WR income generated	2016 - 2021
2016/17	£3,439,468
2017/18	£2,940,225
2018/19	£3,666,621
2019/20	£2,988,393
2020/21	£3,364,133
Total Income	£16,398,840

In addition, from 2018/19 benefit entitlement has been maximised for people and families affected by cancer in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. For the first three years of the project this has resulted in £731,606 in additional income for those affected by cancer. This amount has been included within the total income in the table above.

- 4.7 Trading Standards:** The team have been working closely with Police Scotland and local dementia support groups, installing 'TrueCall' call blocker units into the homes of vulnerable residents protecting them from nuisance and scam phone calls. There are currently 208 units in use across Argyll & Bute.

127 of these units were installed during 2021/22. During their operational life, these units will block 95,019 nuisance calls (of which 26,073 will have been scam phone calls), prevent 154 scams, save vulnerable households £454,101 and lead to a reduction of £421,797 in public service costs (NHS, social care & police).

User feedback includes:

*"My wife and I are more confident in actually answering the phone instead of letting it go to voicemail first"*

*"TrueCall has become a vital part of our defence against all these calls and was particularly helpful over the lockdown"*

*"I was getting phone calls during the night and when you suffer as I do from a broken sleep pattern these calls tend to aggravate the problem thus causing anxiety, anger and frustration in my household characteristics that very often spoil the rest of our day."*

During the Covid lockdown, TS provided business advice relating to restrictions and operating procedures to all non-food businesses in Argyll

and Bute. This involved keeping up to date with rapidly evolving legislation, which was often amended on a near daily basis, and effectively communicating both compulsory restrictions and “best practice” guidance to retailers and service providers across the county.

We used intelligence from various sources, including both business and consumer complaints to identify breaches of Covid requirements and brought non-compliant businesses into compliance through advice, rather than via formal enforcement action.

We worked together with the Competition and Markets Authority to resolve “frustrated” contracts, where holiday letting agencies relied on unfair contract terms to retain monies paid by consumers for holiday homes that they were unable to use. Refunds amounting to tens of thousands of pounds were secured for consumers.

Following changes to Animal Feed enforcement duties, we successfully contracted with Food Standards Scotland to provide animal feed enforcement across Argyll and Bute. This has resulted in increased income for the service, and a higher level of interventions and sampling from business. This additional income has allowed us to appoint a new enforcement officer, who has been heavily involved in feed, tobacco and call blocker duties.

We have worked successfully with Food Standards Scotland both in the run-up to the contract beginning, and during the first year of providing a full Feed service. During the run-up, we were one of three authorities that trialled the iPads that are used to record enforcement activities, and our feedback allowed the recording procedure to be refined. During the first year of operation of the contract, we successfully completed both our visits target and our sampling target. Food Standards Scotland have commended us for our activities, as these results were achieved despite Covid restrictions.

Our membership of the North Trading Standards Partnership has allowed us to coordinate our project activity both across the North of Scotland, and across national projects (both Scotland and UK). It has also allowed joint working with other authorities when demand has been overwhelming (we gave two officer days to assist Aberdeen TS with Covid duties, Highland gave Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar assistance due to retirals/maternity leave). We have not needed assistance to date, but the North Partnership ensures that it will be available if required.

One Scotland –wide project of particular interest is the Enhanced Tobacco Sales Enforcement Project (and the associated Nicotine Vaping Products project). A key Scottish Government priority relates to reducing

tobacco and nicotine use in Scotland, and resources are made available to HSCP and Education to reduce tobacco use. Trading Standards also have our part to play, by carrying out test purchases from and making advice visits to retailers.

In 2021/22, even with Covid restrictions in place, we successfully visited over a fifth of tobacco/NVP premises to provide advice (target 20%), and conducted a limited number of test purchases. We need to carry out more work in this area, however, as 33% of tobacco premises tested and 66% of NVP premises tested failed the test purchase. These are the highest figures recorded in a number of years, and suggests that the drop in enforcement work due to Covid may be responsible for higher non-compliance.

- 4.8 Civil Contingencies:** The Civil Contingencies Manager has attended, on request, both the Gareloch and Helensburgh Rotary Club and Tarbert and Skipness Community groups meetings in 2020 and 2021. The purpose of these meetings was to provide a Q&A session on resilience and an insight into the impact the pandemic has had on the council. Following this, word of mouth has resulted in further requests for similar sessions with other community groups and hopefully these will be face to face as we move away from restrictions. This all adds to an increase in awareness of and improving and building on existing resilience within our communities.

The council has still been able to meet its statutory duties under the Radiation (Emergency preparedness and Public Information) Regulations (REPPiR) 2019. The triennial exercise to demonstrate off-site response to a radiation emergency at HM Naval Base Clyde which was due in 2021 could not take place due to pandemic restrictions. The Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) agreed to a demonstration via a gap analysis by evidence from COVID response and has supported us through the process.

Many emergency planning exercises and training events in whole or part have been successfully facilitated via MS Teams. This good practice and new way of working will be repeated going forward and embedded into our planning process. Our geography poses many challenges to multi – agency partners in relation to attendance at the various events in Argyll and Bute so this has been a significant breakthrough and will alleviate resource challenges going forward - a positive aspect and useful lesson from the pandemic for resilience practitioners.

- 4.9 Compliance Team:** The Subject Access Request process was quickly moved to fully electronic at the start of the pandemic, to ensure this service could continue while staff were working from home.

The team supported colleagues across the council to maintain good quality Freedom of Information responses and performance levels, during challenging times of staff absences.

The new Model Complaints Handling Procedure was implemented successfully and on time, as required by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. Training was prepared and made available to all staff, and online training sessions delivered by the team to key staff groups.

The team have also continued to provide support and guidance to colleagues throughout the organisation in relation to data protection and information governance, through various projects and day-to-day matters.

All members of the team have studied for and achieved relevant qualifications - Practitioner certificates in FOI, and Public Sector Records Management.

#### **4.10 Community Planning and Community Development:**

Supporting Communities Fund 22/23: Over £90,000 of funding has been awarded to support community projects across Argyll and Bute. 65 applications were received and following a robust assessment [47 projects were successful](#) in securing an award through agreement with Area Committees. Contracts have been issued to the successful community organisations and projects will begin to deliver activities from April.

The Community Development Team has provided bespoke funding searches and support for those who were not successful in securing an award.

Access Panels: Disability Equality Scotland have inducted all new panel members in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. Community Development will continue to link with the Access and Engagement Officer at Disability Equality Scotland to offer additional support to the Panel as required.

Community Development: The Community Development Team has provided a range of support and information to help build the skills and capacity of community organisations across all areas of Argyll and Bute. This has included:

- The provision of a fortnightly Community Development bulletin including information on training and funding opportunities, consultations and useful resources. A recent survey told us that 96% of recipients of information from the team say that it is useful and easy to understand.
- A face to face Equality and Diversity course was successfully delivered for Trustees of Garelochhead Station Trust on 22nd March. In

addition to this training, we also have an [online Equality and Diversity training module](#) available which can be accessed independently and free of charge on the council's website.

- Direct support to community organisations based on identified need, included providing information on Community Led Action Plans and help to form links with partner organisations. Some examples of the organisations supported are Crossroads Caring for Carers Bute and Cowal, Tیره Community Council, the Dochas Centre and Kirkmichael Community Development Group.

Community Development Officers have continued to support the council's Covid-19 response by processing and referring on requests received for food and medication delivery from those isolating. As part of this work, we have been engaging with community organisations providing a response and meet on a monthly basis to share information and identify needs.

The Community Development team has supported staff from National Records for Scotland (NRS) to reach key population groups who have been identified as requiring additional support to participate in the Census. The team worked in partnership with Live Argyll and Argyll and Bute TSI to organise and host an Argyll and Bute specific session for community organisations interested in finding out how to support their service users and wider communities. The session took place on 24th February, 20 representatives from community organisations attended and positive feedback was received.

- 4.11 Customer and Support Services - Excellence Awards:** The annual excellence and learning awards present an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the achievements of our employees. The annual excellence awards involve awards for excellence in areas linked to each of the council's Corporate Outcomes including partnership working, local matters service innovation and improvement, tackling inequalities and improving health. Teams submit applications outlining work they are proud of relating to one of the categories and a scoring panel made up of senior managers, elected members and trades union representatives score each application to decide the winners in each category. The awards also include categories for nomination including Argyll and Bute Manager of the Year, and Employee of the Year and Apprentice of the year.

Below is a picture of Bob Millar and Jamie Robertson accepting the award for Local Matters for the implementation of the Council's Keep in the Loop Service.



The Learning Awards celebrate the completion of qualifications by our employees throughout the year. The awards play an important part in recognising the achievements of our employees and the efforts they make to ensure their knowledge and skills remain at the cutting edge of their respective areas of expertise.

Sponsorship from partners is generally secured to allow the annual awards ceremony to take place in the council chambers. Due to the council's response to the Covid 19 pandemic, the awards were paused in 2020. The learning awards returned in 2021 with an amended format, which saw them held entirely online. The ceremony was conducted via Microsoft Teams and the overall feedback received on the event suggests this was a positive change. The online format allowed more people to attend due to a reduction in travel, and allowed for interaction via the chat function with colleagues and line managers able to congratulate the recipients of each award in real time. A well done to all the award recipients, and those nominated.

**4.12 Customer Service Excellence (CSE) and Digital Transformation:** I was not surprised to learn that the Customer Support Services team retained its CSE accreditation, and is compliant with the CSE standard in every one of the 56 assessed criteria. Furthermore, it has increased the number of criteria that have the highest compliance plus status from 13 to 20 (with eight of these being in the quality of service delivery category). In addition, the service has helped Building Standards and Legal and Regulatory increase their assessed scores and guided Planning and Regulatory Services to

achieve the standard in 2019. I was pleased to attend one of the stakeholder events, and to hear how the service is so respected and deserving of their reaccreditation. It also highlighted to me how the staff across different services of the Council continue to be proud to do the jobs that they do, and how proud they are of their colleagues too.

There have also been a number of significant enhancements in the Customer Contact side of the house, some of which are:-

- Implementation of the Keep in the Loop notification service, which currently has 10,500 subscribers and was shortlisted for a Better Connected Award and won a COSLA Bronze Award
- Added significant new functionality to the website including:-
  - web chat, 24/7 web chat bots,
  - bin day look up services, downloadable calendars and an Alexa bin day request service,
  - enhanced accessibility features (that have us rated in the top 20 of all UK Council websites in the Silktide Index of for the past year),
  - roll out of 70+ school websites and a number of specialist council websites, including addition of a suite of Coronavirus webpages that have had over 600,00 page views,
  - upgrade of the Capita online payment site so it now collects £4.5m a year and built the MyCouncilWorks staff website.

The Contact Centre systems have been continually updated so they handle inputs from all channels through a single distribution and fulfilment hub. This was crucial in the Covid emergency response when over 20,000 support requests were managed and a dedicated Helpline, integrated to the national Helpline was established. The CSC then moved to doing outbound support calls in support of the Shielding programme (3,300 shielded citizens), then Test and Protect with 5,600 households contacted and latterly when we supported NHS Highland in taking nearly 3,000 vaccination related enquiries. Many satellite services have been digitally enhanced, from the Blue Badge Application process, to Commercial Waste contractual enquiries and the integration to the Carefirst and UK Government Gov.Notify services.

The Registration Service operations have been digitally transformed from doing death registration and citizenship ceremonies remotely, due to Covid, to moving the wedding diary and booking to a single central system. The team have a dedicated marriage website and introducing hugely popular social media services (1505 Facebook and 1624 Instagram subscribers), which helped the service perform its highest ever number of civil ceremonies in 2021. From delivering online services to our registrars climbing mountains,

such as Ben More in Mull – our staff have continued to provide a first class service and going the extra mile, and caring for our customers.

It is clear that there has been a progressive improvement in customer service delivery in recent years, supported by digital innovation and this is reflected in the consistently high customer satisfaction ratings of 95%+ and that increase in CSE Compliance Plus criteria.

Our staff, from across all sectors, go above and beyond in their duties, and I want to thank each and every one of them for their dedication and hard work, which has not gone unnoticed – thank you.

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

**5.1 HSCP Leadership:** I am delighted that Fiona Davies has been appointed as Chief Officer of the HSCP on a permanent basis. Over the time she has been acting in this position she already made a significant difference to the organisation and am sure she will continue to build on this over the coming years.

**5.2 Local Activities:** I have been present at IJB meetings in November, January and March, and at Finance and Policy Committee meetings on a monthly basis. Updates from Public Health in relation to COVID-19 have continued to feature prominently, and there has been ongoing scrutiny over financial performance and delivery of savings.

In addition meetings of the Audit and Risk Committee, Clinical Care Governance Committee, and the Strategic Planning Group have taken place.

**5.3 National Meetings:** I attended COSLA Children and Young People Board meetings on 19th November, 18th February, and 8th April. Topics on agendas included kinship care, age criminal responsibility now fully in effect, child poverty, early learning childcare, and The Promise.

COSLA Health and Social Care Board has met on 10th December, 4th February, and 18th March. Over these meetings forensic medical services, suicide prevention, and the National Care Service were some of the items discussed - the latter with the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care in attendance.

Over the last five years I have found these COSLA boards to be important conduits to ensure that remote, rural and island issues are



highlighted in national planning, and have learnt from comparing experiences with those in other authorities.

I have also continued to participate in the National IJB Chairs and Vice Chairs network and executive. These have met regularly, particularly regarding the National Care Service with concerns being raised at the timings for engagement over this coinciding with the Scottish Local Government Elections.

**5.4 Finance:** With Scottish Government Funding for the non-delivery of savings due to COVID-19, it has been possible for the Health and Social Care Partnership to end 2021/22 with a small £250k budget surplus. Repayment of sums earlier than timelined to the council has also occurred, with reserves in place to deal with future COVID-19 related expenditure.

**5.5 Reflections:** The last five years have seen the Health and Social Care Partnership mature from a newly integrated structure to one that has been able to weather a global pandemic, a multitude of changes in leadership and amicably resolve a significant dispute with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

I know none of this would have been possible without the hard work and dedication of staff at all levels in the organisation. There's not space to list them all - but my greatest thanks go in particular to Fiona Davies, and before her Joanna MacDonald and Christina West as chief officers, and for finance to James Gow, Judy Orr and Caroline Whyte. A succession of Heads of Service have left to well-deserved retirement or through promotion but have been ably replaced by our current team.

Lastly and by no means least I'd like to extend my appreciation to Sarah Compton-Bishop and Robin Creelman who as my health counterparts have tolerated me as Chair or Vice-Chair of the IJB.

The future remains uncertain, with changes in governance, accountability and delivery of services all likely to arise from the National Care Service. I know that it is in good hands though, and wish all the best to everyone in the organisation, our partners in the third and independent sectors, and the incoming councillors to the board after May.

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

6.1 Looking back in my time as a member of the present Administration, I suddenly realised that whilst I had held two other policy lead roles since 2017, it is only in my present role that all my reports have been delivered at virtual meetings. Whilst we, as Councillors have operated in the relative safety of our own homes, the same cannot be said for so many of our staff in Roads and Infrastructure. I have been approached by numerous members of the public praising those who deliver all our essential services and I hope that you will join with me in offering our warmest appreciation for all those front line staff who have given so much during the pandemic delivering services, in no particular order:-

- Street sweeping public footways
- Maintaining our public road, and public footways
- Maintain 15,000 streetlights
- Managing six civic amenity sites, and contract managing another five
- Household kerbside bin collections
- Grass cutting and other amenity services
- Cleaning and maintaining 57 public toilets
- Maintaining 131 cemeteries and one crematorium
- Managing 39 piers and harbours
- Providing four lifeline ferry services
- Managing and maintaining the Council's fleet, from pool cars to bin lorries – a fleet of 500 vehicles operated across five main workshops
- Manage 77 separate local bus and home-to-school transport contracts

6.2 **Roads and Footway Reconstruction Programme:** I would like to acknowledge the collective decisions taken by Councillors that allowed the department to deliver a record investment of £18million in our roads capital programme over the last two years. As well as council capital, we are also a partner in the Argyll Timber Transport Group, which has delivered around £2.555M of additional Strategic Timber Transport Scheme (STTS) co-funding on public road improvement schemes. In addition a further £1.575M is with STTS for consideration in April/May, for award June 2022.

The nationally accepted Road Condition Index Survey shows that there are now more roads in the area in a green (good) condition, and

crucially in terms of community resilience, fewer roads in a red (poor) condition.

We have also delivered improvements to our local footway network – a combination of Capital and Active Travel funding in 2021-22 produced a £760,000 programme on footway improvements throughout Argyll and Bute.

As a result of the recent budget, the new Administration can look forward to £200,000 investment in new road signage, £100,000 investment in replacement street bins and an extra £300,000 for street lighting.

- 6.3 The Oban Depot Rationalisation Scheme:** The scheme to rationalise our depots in Oban and Lorn was completed despite the construction delays caused by COVID – the project reduces the council's operating costs by moving from three depots to one, and has created local job/economic opportunities through subcontracts from the main contract delivered by Luddon Construction.



The site is now almost 1,000 square metres larger and includes a new office facility; new hardstanding; drainage; a state-of-the-art four bay fleet workshop; new material storage and an external fuelling area. This fuelling area is separate but linked to the depot providing options for easier, safer refuelling and provision for new EV chargers to meet the needs of our modernising fleet.



The site also includes modernised staff welfare facilities and a new horticultural workshop. The two vacated depot sites now provide opportunities for local firms or developers looking to access suitable business and industry land, with the council currently considering possible options for lease, which will support local businesses, the local economy, and provide an income for the council to support future asset sustainability projects.

- 6.4 Lochgilphead Public Realm Project:** The Mid-Argyll Roads Operations team delivered £500,000 of public realm improvements to Colchester Square and Argyll Street in Lochgilphead creating new, wider footways; improved pedestrian crossings; new cycle parking; new street furniture and special tactile surfaces for those with mobility issues.

As well as the aesthetic benefits, the team also co-ordinated with Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE) to allow them to undertake infrastructure improvements to ensure increased resilience for the properties in the works area by replacing old, out-dated 5<sup>th</sup> core cabling. While this was more disruptive in the short-term it was logical to co-ordinate this work while the excavations were already underway.

- 6.5 Major Marine Transport Connectivity Schemes:** I note the huge investment delivered by the Harbour Boards Asset Management Plan, we have moved forward with a number of ambitious marine engineering schemes, designed to guarantee safe and sustainable future transport connectivity for our island communities.

These include:

- **Craignure:** Developing business cases for both short and long-term options for Craignure Pier. Due to its age, the infrastructure at the Pier is increasingly unsuitable for modern traffic patterns, volumes and ferry developments.
- **Fionnphort/Iona:** At this location we are progressing a £20million scheme to replace/renew key pieces of marine infrastructure to allow for full and unfettered access to and from Iona.
- **Port Askaig slope stabilisation and road resurfacing:** At Port Askaig on Islay, we are guaranteeing future access to the Islay/Jura crossing by improving road access through a resurfacing scheme. We have also taken forward significant works to remove a risk to the access route, by performing a complex slope stabilisation project to a high standard, on time, and to budget.

- 6.6 New Lismore Ferry:** We have provided a brand new ferry for the people of Lismore, ensuring this essential service can continue to be reliably provided. The new ferry cost £500,000 and was funded by Transport Scotland.

The new vessel has arrived and passengers will start to use her once the handover process is complete.

The local community and primary school pupils chose the name Lady of Lismore following a poll organised by the Community Council.

The new all-steel vessel, designed by Keel Marine is 39ft, accommodates 23 passengers all year round and will have a crew of two.

- 6.7 Council progressing Statutory Harbour Authority for Oban:** In response to concerns raised by the community, the council is taking forward a Statutory Harbour Authority for the unmanaged section of Oban Bay. This will provide a proper framework in order to manage and co-ordinate the whole of the bay.

Working alongside the other public bodies, which have responsibility for other parts of the bay, we are currently in the process of preparing the documentation for the formal submission of a Harbour Revision Order.

The whole process will be subject to a detailed consultation process, which will involve all communities who rely on and use Oban Bay, which is a key strategic asset for the West Coast.

- 6.8 An expanding Electric Vehicle network:** Work has been ongoing since 2020 to develop a strategy for managing and developing the council's public and business use electric vehicle (EV) network. Members will recall this piece of work from the Members Seminar delivered by the service in September 2021.

We now have a logical set of criteria in place, which provides for a possible future 55 public sites, in addition to the existing 28 sites, which will shortly be going out to consultation.

The team are presently working with HiTRANS to deliver £400,000 worth of EV chargers in this financial year at key locations along the road network.

- 6.9 Low emission vehicles:** Working towards de-carbonising our fleet, since 2020, we have increased our number of hybrid/low emission vehicles from 4 to 70, reducing our carbon impact and contributing to the Council's overall drive towards creating a net-zero region.



- 6.10 Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme:** Tender submissions are being appraised, and this has been fed into the Business Case. The Council's Environmental, Development and Infrastructure Committee were provided with an update at their meeting in March 2022, and the full business case is currently with Scottish Government for approval.
- 6.11 Roads Liaison Meeting:** I have found it beneficial attending the Roads Liaison quarterly meetings where the council hosts Transport Scotland, Police Scotland and BEAR Scotland. The purpose of these meetings is to help to improve the experience of the travelling public whether they are using the trunk or local road network. This is achieved by collaborative working, mutual aid, sharing of knowledge and experience, co-ordinate roadworks to minimise disruption to the travelling public, better understand and prevent collisions and to also pick up and deal with relevant issues raised by local members.

**6.12 Northern Roads Collaboration:** I have attended a number of meetings of the Northern Roads Collaboration which consists of: Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City, Angus, Argyll and Bute, Moray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and the Highland councils. The purpose of the group, which is a formally constituted group consisting of elected members and senior officers, is to share information, collaborate on projects and where possible share resources across the roads and marine work streams.

One piece of work which I have initiated is a review of 5<sup>th</sup> core street lighting electricity cabling to see if there is a way to speed up repairs from energy companies. This is being picked up by SCOTS who will report back in due course.

I was pleased to see that Argyll and Bute's contract for its Designated Person (DP), to help ensure compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code has also been used by Angus Council. Being the Chair of the Harbour Board I really do appreciate the benefits of having an accessible and informative DP in place. I'm sure Angus Council will benefit from this as much as this council and particularly its Harbour Board has.

**6.13 Conclusion:** Over the term of this council, as I noted at the start of my update, I have been in a couple of different Policy Lead roles and have experienced the determination and commitment of staff across all departments and services of the council.

In addition to all of the above, can I add my appreciation for the tremendous support I have been shown by the many back room staff and senior officers, during my present term of office. It has been a privilege and a pleasure.

## **7. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly**

**7.1** As this is my final report I would like to reflect upon and celebrate some of the key highlights from across all teams within the Education service during my five-year term as Policy Lead. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank everyone within the service for the support they have provided and for making me feel so welcome in this role. A special thanks must also be provided for the way in which our staff, Head Teachers, pupils and parents/carers have dealt with the many challenges that Covid 19 has put upon us. The continued hard work and resilience shown by all throughout the pandemic never ceases to amaze me and I am very proud to have been the Policy Lead for Education.

**7.2 School Support Team:** I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to the school support team for their outstanding dedication in terms of dealing with the Covid Pandemic, which has seen them work evening and weekends on a regular basis during the last couple of years. The team have established robust systems of work for dealing with the many work streams brought about due to Covid, for example Hub Schools, summarised Government Guidance, compiled risk assessments, carried out visits to schools to advise on new social distanced class layouts, PPE co-ordination for schools, establishment of rotas for Hub schools, daily reporting to Senior Leaders, Councillors, Scottish Government on positive cases and co-ordinated communication with Public Health.

The introduction of the Education Procurement Team (EPT) has also been of huge benefit to both the service and the wider council ensuring streamlined processes and resulting efficiencies.

During the summer of 2021 the Scottish Government advised local authorities to provide summer activities for an identified cohort of children and young people who would benefit from some support following the impact of covid-19. The School Support Team were instrumental in organising these activities, working in partnership with other council services, Live Argyll, schools and third sector organisations to pull together a programme over three weeks of the summer holidays.

**7.3 Educational Psychology Service (EPS) activity:**

Children, young people and families: For the three-year period August 2018 to July 2021, the Educational Psychology team became involved in support for 593 children and young people across Argyll and Bute. It is interesting to note that whilst this time frame covers the two periods of lockdown necessitated by the pandemic, there was no reduction in the level of service provided to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals. Over the last eight months, there have been a further 138 referrals to the service.

EPs contribute to the multiagency assessment of autism across Argyll and Bute with between 60 – 70 diagnostic assessments carried out each year. This is one way in which services contribute to the delivery of the outcomes within the Scottish Strategy for Autism. There is a growing emphasis on collaboration with children and young people to develop effective services to meet mental health needs at an early stage. EPs are working creatively with young people and partners to ensure their voices inform service developments.



Educational Establishments: The EPS continues to provide a named link EP to all primary and secondary schools across Argyll and Bute working in close collaboration with school staff, early years' staff and partner agencies to understand the needs of children, young people and families within their local context.

Each year, the EPS develops and delivers high-quality training and workshops to enhance the skill and understanding of staff. For training attended from 2019–2022, 1236 evaluations have been completed by participants. On a scale of 1 – 5, this year participants showed an average score of 4.44 on how useful they found the training and 4.25 on their confidence in applying what they learned to their practice.

Strategic developments: EPs are uniquely placed to ensure that strategy to improve outcomes for learners is informed by direct work with children, young people, families, educational establishments and partners.

Over the last 4 years very good progress has been made across the following key objectives:

- At the heart of the work of the EPS has been supporting staff to understanding, recognise and respond effectively to mental health needs including Building Mentally Healthy Schools, working in partnership to develop the document and resource Hub *Our Children Their Mental Health* and co-leading the work to build a Trauma Responsive workforce across Argyll and Bute.
- Our Children Their Nurturing Education (OCTNE) is the authority wide education strategy that brings together nurture, adverse childhood experiences and trauma-informed practice. The implementation of the strategy is being led by the EPS, with 29 schools now engaged with the intervention.
- Addressing non-attendance (ANA) is the EPS response to the significant increase in non-attendance at school following the pandemic, with the aim to build the knowledge and skills essential to professionals working at all ages and stages of intervention, and all types of non-attendance. Implementation is being progressed collaboratively with the Maximising Attendance working group.
- The EPS has supported the development of the Counselling in Schools Service in line with Scottish Government expectations. This service is directed at providing support for children and young people with mental health and wellbeing needs from the age of 10 years upwards and to date has been accessed by 351 pupils.

- Seasons for Growth is an evidenced based peer education programme which aims to support children and young people who have experienced change, loss or bereavement.
- EPs work to support the needs of vulnerable groups. Research has found that mental health difficulties are more prevalent in the LGBTQ+ community, being disproportionately affected by suicidal ideation and self-harm behaviours potentially due to perceived stigma. The aim of this work is to gather the views of children and young people from the LGBTQI+ community in our secondary schools, to inform best practice recommendations including changes to policy and guidance.

**7.4 Inclusion and Equality Team:** The 2018/19 ASN review group, led by the then Head of Education: Life Long Learning and Support, considered the range of challenges facing the service and sought to implement a number of changes to the way in which the service is managed and delivered. The review activity focused on how best to achieve improved educational outcomes for children by delivering effective support interventions. The review set out an ambitious programme of change with 11 key areas identified, despite the restrictions and challenges of the pandemic all areas of the review have been achieved.

Argyll and Bute Council was awarded £88,000 from the Scottish Attainment Challenge – Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund for session 2018/19 to take forward improved outcomes for our care experienced children and young people. A Principal Teacher for Care Experienced Children and Young People was appointed in January 2019 to support improved educational outcomes. Since the introduction of the role data on attendance, exclusions and attainment has been provided quarterly to the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Family Liaison Officer Post for Care experienced children and young people was also created with some of the first workers being allocated in February 2020. Recruitment and training of staff is ongoing and was adapted during the COVID lockdown to ensure that a team of trauma-informed and qualified mentors were available in each locality to facilitate the transition out of lockdown for our Care Experienced Children.

The service have continued to improve the leadership opportunities for staff across the authority and within the team new posts have been developed to allow career development and progression for support assistants in schools in line with the recommendations

from the Scottish Government ASL Morgan review 2020, including HWB Liaison Officers for Care Experienced Children and Young People and a new Lead ASN post.

## 7.5

**Key Developments in Broad General Education** Learning and teaching across Argyll and Bute has experienced unprecedented change across the time of this Council with the impact of Covid 19 and resulting periods of lockdown. Our school leaders and teaching staff responded quickly and in innovative and creative ways during the intervals of time when learning was delivered remotely. This was in conjunction with managing school hubs during lockdown periods to support children of key workers as well as our most vulnerable learners. Notable to our schools' ability to move to a new virtual model of learning has been the Digital Learning team who have supported groups, schools and individuals through professional learning and bespoke support to enable the best use of digital tools for teaching and learning.

The curriculum across Argyll and Bute schools, whether virtual or in person, includes a broad range of experiences which are planned for children and young people throughout their education to help every child and young person to develop knowledge, skills and attributes for success in learning, life and work. Central to this is the quality of teaching and learning in all of our establishments and the endorsement by Education Scotland of Argyll and Bute's Guided Approach to Pedagogical Enquiry (GAPE).

The Central Team have continued working closely with schools to provide a number of professional learning opportunities to develop pedagogical approaches to best meet the needs of learners. In literacy some of these approaches that have shown positive impact on teaching and learning over the last council session have been:

- Emerging Literacy for our learners at Early Level and Storyline Scotland approach to motivate writing at First and Second Level.
- In numeracy, for our younger learners; Stages of Early Arithmetical Learning (SEAL) and for learners across all stages; Number Talks to improve mental agility and Cognitive Guided Instruction to develop problem solving strategies.
- The Gaelic resources developed for the Primary One Literacy Assessment and Action Resource (POLAAR) have also received national recognition.

## 7.6

### **Performance and Improvement:**

#### School Improvement Planning and Standards and Quality Reporting

Following consultation with HTs and representatives from Professional

Associations, the templates and associated suite of materials to support improvement planning and reporting were revised and launched for use in session 2020-2021. The templates have been highly rated by HTs – a high percentage noting that the documents support self-evaluation and school improvement.

Using Data to Support Improvement: The use of data to support school improvement has been a strong focus for the Performance and Improvement Team. Training has been provided in a number of key areas listed below:

- Tracking and Monitoring – An Argyll and Bute Tracking and Monitoring programme was launched for primary schools in session 2020-2021. Training sessions were well attended and highly rated and most participants are making very effective use of the programme to support the review and analysis of data
- Data Console – This was launched in November 2021 to provide schools with an overview of key data and support standards and quality reporting. The Consoles will be issued annually at the start of each session from 2022-2023
- BGE Toolkit – Support is being provided to help schools use the recently refreshed Scottish Government BGE Toolkit
- Data Champions – Approximately 40 Data Champions represent their respective schools, working collaboratively to use data effectively and support school improvement.

Broad General Education Progress and Achievement: Over the last four years, an Education Data Team has been created that supports the extraction, presentation and analysis of data across the service. Authority Progress and Achievement (P&A) data sets are provided for schools and the Central Education Team at three key points throughout the session. These are used to promote discussions around pupil progress, interventions and school improvement.

This session P&A area training has been delivered to provide opportunities to peer review data and support further development of HTs' data analysis skills. These sessions have been well attended and rated highly by participants.

Support for Schools: From January 2022, schools who were highlighted as needing specific support in improving learning and teaching have been working closely with an Education Officer to look at quality practice and track progress of pupils. This has included using local authority produced resources in developing good pedagogy with staff.

## 7.7

**Secondary Education, Senior Phase, 16 Plus and Developing the Young Workforce:** Covid-19 has had a significant effect on both the health and wellbeing, progress and assessment of young people. Secondary schools have put in place a wide range of adjustments and interventions, many of them bespoke and personalised, and have engaged with multiple partners to support young people's wellbeing.

Recovery work has also focussed on young people's progress and attainment. Within the Senior Phase, supports including mentoring, engagement with partner agencies, close liaison with families and an extensive programme of supported study have been implemented, with particular focus on young people with Additional Support Needs, those who come from the least advantaged backgrounds and pupils whose progress has been most affected by Covid-19.

Attainment in National Qualification over the years for 2020 and 2021, when there were no examinations, improved in relation to 2019 data, and there was a marked recovery in wider and non- or alternatively-certificated wider achievement in 2021 from 2020, which was significantly affected by Covid-19.

To address the requirements of the heavily altered SQA assessment arrangements over the last two years, a digital moderation framework has been put in place to allow teachers across the authority to work with colleagues in their own and other schools in agreeing consistent, robust standards of assessment to allow the accurate communication of attainment grades to the SQA in the absence of examinations.

In terms of our provision to those leaving school, Argyll and Bute has remained in the top ten authorities in Scotland for those in work, training or education, as measured by the Annual Participation Measure. The appointment of four government-funded Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Co-ordinators has enhanced links between schools and employers, offering a wider, more bespoke choice of work placements to young people, and offering more vocational and skills focussed learning within the curriculum.

Additionally, as of session 2022-23, the DYW Regional Lead, previously employed by Argyll College, will now be part of the council's Education Team, creating more coherence in leadership, management and delivery of schools' DYW and work-based vocational learning.

Schools' self-evaluation and planning for improvement have improved as a result of the revised Standards and Quality Report and School Improvement Plan procedures and the associated framework of support from the Central Team. As a result, engagement with

secondary schools by Education Scotland/HMIE since the end of lockdown have been positive, and strong practice and/or significant improvements have been recognised in four of our secondary schools over the last three years.

- 7.8 Wellbeing, Rights and Relationships:** Argyll and Bute schools have continued to demonstrate a commitment to becoming Rights Respecting Schools, with 38 primary schools on their accreditation journey to achieve with UNICEF. To date, 19 have achieved Bronze, 7 silver, 1 gold and a further 10 have registered.

Schools have been encouraged to engage with Poverty Awareness Training. Ten Primary staff (teaching and non-teaching) have participated in this training, with a further session delivered in partnership with Education and social work to explore ways to engage with pupil voice in relation to Child Poverty.

The National Parental Involvement and Engagement Census has seen a 7.6% increase in returns from primary school parents and carers compared to the pilot that took place in 2020. This survey concluded recently and further analysis will provide the local authority and our schools with valuable information with regards to reviewing engagement as part of Covid renewal plans.

- 7.9 Early Years:**  
Progress towards full implementation of 1140hrs: Early Years Education has been dominated within this preceding council term by delivery of the Scottish Government's policy to provide funded ELC entitlement to all 3 and 4 year-olds, and eligible 2 year-olds, for 1140 hours per year. Argyll and Bute Council were successful in delivering the policy by the initial deadline of August 2020. The Scottish Government had subsequently moved the implementation date to August 2021 to take account of the impact of Covid-19.

Education and Property Services have continued to work closely throughout the past four years to progress the related renovation and new build plans required to deliver 1140 in as far as Covid restrictions allowed and will seek to be in a position to complete all initial capital projects by August 2022.

The 1140 hours of ELC will be offered by a range of providers across Argyll and Bute, including Local Authority, Private, Voluntary, Independent and Childminders.

Developing the Workforce: To support the quality of deliver of 1140 hours, the Early Years Team has continued to offer an extensive training

catalogue free to staff working in Local Authority and Partner Providers, with the aim of supporting high quality delivery within all settings year on year. This work will continue to be delivered and will be supplemented and enhanced by collaboration with national and regional Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) offers from Northern Alliance colleagues.

In addition, we have developed our own successful 'Growing our Own', programme, whereby we fund and train our own Modern Apprentices, Graduate Apprentices and, in collaboration with our Secondary colleagues, Foundation Apprentices, to ensure we are seeking solution-focused practices towards staff recruitment, retention and capacity issues.

**7.10 Empowering Our Educators:** the service undertook an extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, from November 201 to March 2022 with regard to school leadership proposals. This engagement programme is one of the most ambitious undertaken by the Council, with a clear aim of ensuring that all stakeholders had the opportunity to understand the proposals and to input to the process from an informed perspective. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Officers involved for their hard work and to everyone who has taken the time to engage with the process and submit their views. All feedback received will now be analysed and used to inform a report to the Community Services Committee in autumn 2022.

**7.11 New/Improved Schools and Establishments:** During my term as Policy Lead for Education there has been a number of improvements and new builds across the school estate, including:-

- New Kirn Primary School – opened November 2017
- New Campbeltown Grammar – opened February 2018
- New Oban High School - opened April 2018
- Official handing over of Dunoon's newly refurbished Primary School – November 2018
- New ELC setting at Kilcreggan Primary – opened December 2018
- Kilmory Outdoor Nursery (MAKI Pups) – Opened November 2020
- Silverbirch Outdoor Nursery opened August 2021
- Willowview indoor ELC opened in August 2021 with an extensive outdoor area

**7.12 Concluding remarks:** I have been amazed by the efforts of the service as a whole in their dedication to continuous improvement. I am delighted that the hard work and dedication shown by staff and pupils has been recognised nationally via a number of awards. I would like to round off my final report by highlighting just a few of those that have been received over my term as Policy Lead:-

- Learning Places Scotland Awards 2021 – Winner of the Early Years and Childcare Development category for our Early Years Outdoor Spaces submission. 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.
- Hermitage Academy – Gold Accreditation from Investors in People – making them the first school in the Scotland to gain national recognition at bronze, silver and gold levels. Assessors visited Hermitage in January 2022 and praised the schools for their continued commitment to engage and develop its young workforce.
- Dunoon Grammar awarded UKs European Entrepreneurial School of the Year – the school were crowned winners in October 2019 at a ceremony in Helsinki, in recognition of them championing entrepreneurship in education, with over 650 pupils from the school acting as key players in their success.
- Quality Improvement Awards - Argyll and Bute GIRFEC/Quality Improvement group won the Team Award for its approach to Getting It Right For Every Child, and the “Quality Improvement Faculty” by Argyll and Bute Council and NHS Highland was shortlisted for the Achieving Results at Scale Award.
- Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative Quality Improvement Youth Improver Award 2021 - Argyll and Bute Youth Advisory Panel received this award for their enthusiasm and commitment to developing engagement and co-design of the Argyll and Bute’s Children and Young People’s Service Plan with young people.
- FilmG Awards - Pupils from Sandbank Primary School’s Gaelic 5-7 class scooped Best Film Production in the under 12 category, while Islay High School’s entry won Best Film (Learners). FilmG is an annual event organised by MG ALBA, which celebrates Gaelic screen talent and attracts hundreds of applications each year.



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

- 8.1 Introduction:** This is my final policy lead report for this council term and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the council officers I have had the pleasure of working with over the past five years, their dedication and commitment to the challenges we have faced, especially over the last two years, is unquestionable and I am grateful for their support during this council term.
- 8.2 Planning Applications:** Submission rates for new applications continues to be high. In the ten months from the 1st April 2021 to the end of January 2022 submission rates for planning applications have exceeded pre-pandemic rates with 1,696 applications received.
- 8.3 Planning Fee Income:** Planning fee income received to the end of January (the last figures available), was £12k below the forecast budget. However it was expected that following receipt of 2 S36 windfarm consultations that planning fees could be in surplus by the end of the financial year.
- 8.4 Planning Performance Framework 2020/21:** The feedback from the Scottish Government of the 10th Planning Performance Framework (PPF) report was considered by the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee at their meeting on 23rd February 2022.

The PPF is the principal performance measure for Planning Services (Development Management and Development Policy – within Planning and Regulatory Services) and is submitted to the Scottish Government annually for scrutiny and scoring. The council's 2020/21 PPF was submitted in July 2021 and was independently reviewed by the Scottish Government.

Overall the feedback was considered to be positive registering eight 'green', two 'amber', and three 'red' outcomes across thirteen performance indicators assessed. Whilst it is disappointing to have any 'red' markers at all, it was noted that these relate to performance measures which have been directly impacted by the pandemic and its impact upon working arrangements, our ability to engage with the public, staff availability (absence and vacancies), and workflow. It was further noted that even where performance markers have fallen below the national average the deviation is marginal, and/or there is valid justification for that position.

The positive feedback received supports the council's 'open for business' ethos and is warmly welcomed in the current economic

climate. Whilst the feedback from the Scottish Government did not identify any improvement actions this year, the service must not be complacent with the focus being on continuous improvement year on year.

- 8.5 Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2):** The necessary documentation for the next stage of the LDP2 process, the Examination, was submitted to the Scottish Government's Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) at the end of December, although it has only shown as live on the DPEA website recently and a reporter has still to be appointed. This means that the clock on the examination process is not yet ticking, although it is anticipated a reporter will be appointed in the near future and the Examination process will begin.
- 8.6 Building Standards Income:** Building Standards income for 2021/22 to the end of February was £816,777, of which £91,057 was commercial income from East Lothian and Scottish Borders. This was behind budget with a projected shortfall for the year end of £80k.
- 8.7 Commercialisation:** Reliance on commercial work continues and the service continues to seek external work from other local authorities although as stated in my last report this is likely to be unsustainable in the longer term. At present East Lothian Council continue to use our services and a decision on whether another authority want to use our services is awaited.
- 8.8 Development Plan Scheme:** The Development Plan Scheme which is updated annually and sets out the anticipated timeline for the production of a Development Plan was presented to the March meeting of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee.  
The DPS is anticipating that the Examination process for LDP2 should be completed by October 2022 with the Adoption of the plan scheduled for February 2023 although this is indicative as the Examination process is out-with the council's control.
- 8.9 Regulatory Services:** Much of the work carried out by Regulatory Services staff over the last two years has been focused on Covid-19 compliance. However, with restrictions now eased and enforcement powers removed, any Covid related work will be picked up by the Covid Compliance Officer which frees up capacity across the Environmental Health team to re-commence paused work and reinstate services - in particular in relation to private water supply risk assessments, reactive EH work and the restarting of food safety interventions.

## **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 – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022**

**For further information please contact Aileen McNicol, Leadership Support and Member Services Manager, telephone 01546 604014 or email [aileen.mcnicol@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:aileen.mcnicol@argyll-bute.gov.uk)**