
27th April 2023

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 Policy Leads report was considered by Council at its meeting on 24th November 2022. This latest report provides an update on activity during the period to 7th April 2023.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the report.

**3. POLICY LEAD FOR FINANCE AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES –
Councillor Gary Mulvaney**

- 3.1 **Introduction:** This report provides members with an update on my activities as Depute Leader and Policy Lead for Finance and Commercial Services during the period from January to March 2023.
- 3.2 **Finance:** The last three months have seen a significant amount of time spent on the 2023/24 budget setting process, including supporting the various service areas of the Council and Elected Members to ensure a balanced budget was presented at the Council meeting in February. Initial planning meetings have already begun for the 2024/25 budget setting process.

There has also been a high volume of work for the payroll team in recent months in relation to the pay awards.

In the next few months, the key area of work will be the production of the financial statements for 2022-23. While this is always a busy time of year it will be particularly challenging this year with new external auditors in place and the anticipation is that this first year of audit will take up significantly more of our time. Initial planning meetings with external auditors have started.

- 3.3 Local Tax Collections:** The Council Tax collection rate for the current year as at 20th March 2023 was 96.61%, which is 0.43% above the collection rate at the same time the previous year. The projected outturn has been incredibly hard to predict this year given the increased collection early in the year due to the injection of the £4.33 million cost of living award (where £150 was allocated directly to circa 30,000 Council Tax accounts at the start of the year).

The Non-domestic rates (NDR) collection rate for the current year at the end of February 2023 is 95.67%, down 0.75% in comparison to the previous year. There are two large debtors with liability of over £100,000 in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector that have failed to pay their NDR for 2022/2023. Efforts continue to recover these arrears.

In January significant changes to rateable values of Council properties were reported when the Assessor released their draft values for 2023/2024 onwards. The anticipated additional cost to the Council at that stage was £589,000 in NDR charges in 2023/2024. Estates continue to negotiate agreement with the Assessor for a reduction in the rateable value increases for the schools to reduce this increase.

In relation to Empty Property Relief the service will run a report in April by administrative area to show businesses and premises currently benefitting from Empty Property Relief in their area. This report will incorporate the NDR revaluation figures after annual billing and will provide members at a local level information to help them consider what might work well for their area going forward.

- 3.4 Benefits Update:**

Benefits Processing: As at 28th February 2023 processing speeds for Housing Benefit have improved over recent months. The average cumulative processing times for the full year are 25.81 days for a new claims and 5.67 days for change in circumstances. The team continue to look at ways to improve process and performance.

Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs): Expenditure in SWF is projected to be overspent by £170,000 reaching just under £628,000 by year end against programme funding budget of £458,000. The Council has earmarked reserves from the previous year's Covid related underspend to offset the increase in spend this year. Spend on DHP is steady and within this year's budget. The Scottish Government have decided to mitigate the Benefit Cap in Scotland using DHP from January 2023 onwards and have just increased funding to cover these costs.

Flexible Food Fund: As at 31st January 2023 the project has supported 1,658 households who are suffering from food and fuel insecurities in Argyll and Bute, with a combined client gain of £2,381,461 which is an average gain of £1,436 per household. The project has attracted funding of £204,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for each of the next two financial years and we have identified the funds to make up the shortfall to allow the project to continue for at least the next two years.

Energy Support: The Council Tax team are currently processing applications from customers for the Energy Bill Support Scheme (EBSS) and Alternative Payment Fund (APF) on behalf of the UK government. These schemes are open for three months and are for people who do not have a direct relationship with an energy supplier and therefore haven't benefitted from the £400 grant that reduces energy bills or the £200 for those using oil or gas central heating. The government has given the Council programme funding of £531,000 so we anticipate around 1,600 applications. Application levels have not been high and once we get into the new financial year we will consider a campaign to increase take-up. Typical beneficiaries are those living permanently in caravan/park based accommodation and those in care homes.

3.5 Commercial Services:

Helensburgh Waterfront: I am delighted to report that phase 2 of the £23 million investment to Helensburgh's waterfront is officially complete and open to the public. Following on from the huge benefits that are being realised from the investment in the leisure centre and swimming pool, these further works create a vibrant and attractive waterfront for the community, including new seating areas, all-ability access to the pier and resurfacing, an additional 100 parking spaces and a new footpath. I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to everyone involved in this incredible project, in particular the Commercial Services team, as it has been a team effort to get to this stage. We now move into the third and final phase of the development,

which will bring commercial and employment opportunities to further support the town centre.

Rothesay Pavilion: The Council, at their budget meeting held on 23rd February 2023, agreed the recommendations from the Policy and Resources Committee held on 16th February for a continuation of the project as set out in the accompanying Financial and Contractual Issues report, including:

- Approval of up to £89,099 in revenue funding from previously earmarked reserves to fund the day-to-day operational costs of the Rothesay Pavilion Charity (RPC) in 2023/24;
- Principle of a three-staged approach to the completion of works;
- An additional £3.102m capital funding be made available to the project, over and above previously committed capital/borrowing;
- That the previously agreed prudential borrowing up to £3.114m, now only requiring £3.030m, is replaced by additional capital funding to mitigate the year-on-year revenue impact of repaying the borrowing;
- Agreed the implementation of stage 1 works by Robertson Construction Central West to ensure that the main building is wind and watertight. The contract has been signed and it is anticipated that works will commence on site in May.

3.6 Depute Leader Update: I have regular other meetings with the Leader, Policy Leads and the Chief Executive in respect of council business and priorities. In addition, I have deputised for the Leader at COSLA meetings.

4. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

4.1 Official Opening of Dunoon Primary: Since my last report in November the official opening of Dunoon Primary took place on 6th December, following a £10.8 million investment to transform the school into a state of the art teaching and learning facility, whilst maintaining its building status. The refurbishment, which included £5.08 million funding from the Scottish Government, saw the school's capacity rise to 300 pupils and 30 early learning and childcare (ELC) places, and includes a new family centre, gym hall, library, ELC Centre, and staff development area.

4.2 Coronation Flag Competition: Primary School pupils across Argyll and Bute have been given the opportunity to take part in a special competition to design and create a unique flag to mark the Coronation of King Charles III. Pupils had until 31st March to get their entries in via

the Head Teacher and we were overwhelmed by the huge response, with over 1,000 entries being received. All designs have been reviewed by the Judging Panel who had an incredibly difficult task of selecting only one winner from each of the Council's four administrative areas. One overall winner has also been selected, whose design will be made into a full size flag to be flown at Argyll and Bute Council Headquarters, Kilmory, on 5th May 2023.

The overall winner and their school will each receive a framed replica of their flag to keep, with an extra prize for the school too. Area winners will also receive framed replicas of their designs and special Certificates of Commendation.

Thank you to every pupil who took the time to submit an entry, we certainly have a lot of talented young artists in Argyll and Bute.

4.3 Minimum Annual Learning Hours: The Scottish Government published a consultation on 21st March 2023 in respect of proposals to set in law the minimum annual number of learning hours that local authority and grant aided schools must provide. Learning hours are the period of teaching that learners receive within the school day and in most cases excludes lunch and other break times or extra-curricular activities.

Scottish Ministers propose to:-

- Prepare regulations that prescribe the minimum number of learning hours that must be provided in local authority and grant aided schools in an academic year;
- Prescribe the number of learning hours at 950 hours for primary schools and 1045 for secondary schools; and
- Prescribe the circumstances where fewer than the prescribed number of learning hours may be delivered.

Officers are currently in the process of preparing a response to the consultation, which poses six key questions, and will bring a paper to the Community Services Committee on 8th June 2023. A final response will be submitted in advance of the consultation deadline on 13th June 2023.

4.4 Virtual Head Teacher Post: There are around 17 local authorities in Scotland with a Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) in post. The VHT post provides us with a senior member of education staff who will work at a strategic level, but not in a physical school building.

The VHT responsibilities focus on improving the educational experiences and outcomes of care experienced children and young people in the whole local authority area. VHTs also provide key links between multi-agency teams and advocate for the needs and rights of care experienced children and young people.

We have completed the recruitment process for a VHT in Argyll and Bute. This is a new post and will replace the previous Principal Teacher for Care Experienced Children and Young People post. Making this post a Head Teacher post raises the profile of the role and allows the post holder greater credibility. Our expectation is that the post holder will work collaboratively with Head Teachers in each establishment and offer support and robust challenge around data and the strategies in place to secure better outcomes for each and every one of our care experienced children.

Following a strong leet of applications and a competitive interview process Louise Chisholm was appointed. Louise has previously been a Head Teacher in Argyll and Bute and within another local authority and brings substantial leadership experience to the post. Louise has experience in leading strategically and also has experience of internal and external scrutiny processes and will start the secondment on 17th April 2023.

4.5 MCR Pathways Pilot: The Education Service are pursuing a new partnership with MCR (Motivation, Commitment, Resilience) Pathways which would see Oban High School, Hermitage Academy and Dunoon Grammar School in 2023-2024, engaging in a programme of mentoring for our most disadvantaged young people. This approach, if progressed, would see mentors sourced from across Argyll and Bute, including from within the council, to meet weekly with mentees. The programme aims to support young people to understand and develop their talents and capacities, and therefore their confidence and resilience, through their relationships and interactions with trained, committed mentors and a range of personalised taster experiences.

4.6 Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Employability Conference: Planning for the inaugural Argyll and Bute Employability Conference in the Queen's Hall, Dunoon on 19th May is progressing well. 125 delegates have confirmed their attendance, with a number of responses still to be received. The five workshops – of which each

delegate will attend three – are being planned, and young people from across our schools, and each engaging with DYW in a different way, are being recruited to share their experiences and thoughts with delegates. Discussions are ongoing with Scottish Government to secure a replacement for the former Depute First Minister as one of keynote speakers.

- 4.7 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):** Following our UNCRC focus at the Head Teachers Conference in November there has been steady progress with Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) Awards. Overall, accreditations within Argyll and Bute consists of 11 registrations, 31 bronze (including one partner nursery), ten silver (including one partner nursery) and four gold awards. A professional learning event for RRS leads in schools is being developed to support the completion of the action plan that will help schools secure Bronze accreditation.
- 4.8 Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) Improving Writing Programme:** Five schools have now taken part in the first cohort of the CYPIC Improving Writing Programme. Practitioners are reporting a clear impact of the programme through children's work and projected attainment data is reinforcing this with increased attainment forecasts for all schools who have taken part. We have now launched Cohort 2 of the programme, with staff embracing the intervention and providing evidence of positive impact.
- 4.9 Addressing Non-attendance:** The Educational Psychology profession hold an annual conference, organised jointly by the Scottish Division of Educational Psychology, the Association of Principal Educational Psychologists and Education Scotland. The conference, this year entitled "All our children: Inclusive practice in education", was held on 24 March 2023 and was attended by education colleagues across Scotland. We are delighted that our Educational Psychology Service was selected to share our work on Addressing Non-attendance nationally at this event. It was anticipated that there would be around 20 delegates for our workshop - however almost 60 colleagues from across the country joined to hear about this exciting work.

The team, led by Lisa Myburgh, Educational Psychologist, with Alison Munro, Principal Teacher and Chulainn Ledsom, Research Assistant, presented the details of our work to maximise the school attendance of children and young people through an evidence informed, structure approach with schools and partners.

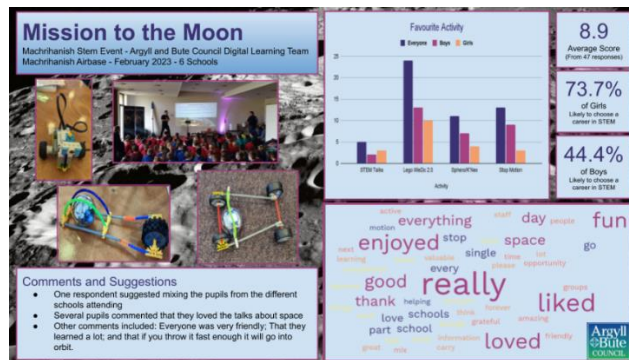
4.10 Digital Learning

During February and March this year, the Digital Learning Team has delivered digital inputs to over 160 pupils. These workshops aim to help inspire children and young people to learn digital technology skills through high quality learning.



Several primary schools have enjoyed a new, exciting cyber security workshop. The workshop focused on keeping data safe with strong encryption. Pupils used a variety of methods, including scytale and a Caesar cipher, to decrypt puzzles and reveal a pin that unlocked a custom-designed Micro:Bit safe.

Over 100 pupils from across the peninsula of Kintyre gathered at the Machrihanish Airbase Community Company (MACC) for a fun and informative day at the “Mission to the Moon” STEM event.



The event was hosted by Argyll and Bute Council’s Digital Learning Team, who led several workshops including building a Lego science rover, an engineering challenge to create a Sphero Bolt powered chariot using the K’Nex, and a Stop motion workshop. Pupils were able to engage with each of the activities in small groups.

The pupils were asked to complete a short evaluation at the end of the event, and it scored 8.9 out of 10. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with pupils praising the workshops for being fun, engaging, and informative. The team was delighted with the feedback, and they are looking forward to running similar events in the future.

4.11 Early Years

Kilmartin Primary School took delivery of a bespoke, modular build Early Learning Centre in February, which allows the children to access their full 1140 entitlement within their own setting.

Feedback from the children, families and staff has been glowing in terms of the flexibility, spaciousness and outdoor capacity this new build brings to the setting.



We have made significant investment to all settings as an Early Years Team this term to support our practitioners to more effectively to use their indoor and outdoor spaces to ensure our children are within environments which inspire and engage them as learners but which also nurture and sustain them when they want calm, rest and stillness.

In March, the Early Years service were one of just two local authorities in Scotland to host a professional learning day with Dr Sandra Duncan, an American Early Years researcher whose research work centres upon how the natural environment should influence classroom/playroom design, a field of thought which sits very well alongside our Argyll and Bute, Three Assets approach to curriculum design. Initial feedback from attendees has been overwhelmingly positive and, more importantly, changes practitioners are making within settings are beginning to have positive impacts upon the children and the natural rhythm of their day.

4.12 Leadership and Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL)
Argyll and Bute Teacher PRD and PU Guidelines: The Professional Review and Development (PRD) and Professional Update (PU) Guidelines for Teachers have been refreshed in line with the 2021 General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Standards. The Education Management Team and Head Teacher Advisory Group were involved in the review process and the updated Guidelines were shared with all teaching staff, including supply teachers, in March 2023.

Engaging in Professional Update is a requirement for GTCS registration and is a key part of maintaining teacher professionalism. A one page infographic about the PRD and PU process has been

created in the Guidelines and this is accompanied by a range of self-evaluation tools which encourage teachers to engage with the Standards.

4.13 Celebrating Success

Port Ellen Primary – School of Year: Following on from my Policy Lead update in September 2022, I am delighted to report that Port Ellen Primary School have trumped their Silver award by securing Gold in the Pearson National Teaching Awards for Primary School of the Year. The award came as part of a week-long celebration of teaching which cumulated in a prestigious ceremony on 26th November 2022.

Port Ellen Primary have been honoured for their approach to the curriculum, which is designed around island life and has already seen them win a number of awards around STEM and entrepreneurialism. Despite the challenges of its rural location, the school makes the best use of the local environment and technology to creatively tackle these barriers. Staff have been recognised for the links they have built with other island schools around the world to build a global community for pupils, and the way in which the school values and harness their Gaelic heritage.

A huge congratulations to Maureen Macdonald, Head Teacher, and all her colleagues who go above and beyond to shape the future of the school's children and young people. Well done!

Updated 2022 Exam Results: Following the appeals process, updated results published by the Scottish Qualifications Association (SQA) show that young people in Argyll and Bute are performing above the national average. Advanced Higher Passes have risen by 1.8% to 85.5%, which is 2.9% higher than the average across Scotland. Higher passes have also increased by 1.4% to 80.9% - 1.6% higher than the national average.

Nurture Achievements: A further seven schools in Argyll and Bute have been accredited for their achievements in developing nurturing cultures in their school communities, bringing the total number across the area to 27. The accreditation forms part of the Council's 'Our Children, Their Nurturing Education (OCTNE) Strategy', which aims to ensure that children and young people have the emotional support they need to thrive.

The schools that have achieved bronze accreditation in this round are Carradale Primary, Castlehill Primary, Drumlemble Primary, Dunoon Grammar, Glenbarr Primary, Rockfield Primary, and Strone Primary. Well done to everyone involved.

The Council's nurture teachers have been involved in delivering training through Argyll and Bute's probationer teacher programme and will present a session as part of the University of Highlands and Islands Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Programme.

Education Scotland also recently featured the strategy in its national thematic review around Health and Wellbeing, and it is set to be included in their National Improvement Framework scrutiny report to exemplify Teacher and Practitioner Professionalism.

Argyll Schools Piping Success: Lochgilphead Joint Campus excelled at this year's Scottish School Pipe Band Championships, with the school's A band being crowned the Quartets Champions, and the B band getting fourth in the same section.

Kintyre Schools Pipe Band also celebrated success, coming fourth in the Novice A section.

I would like to congratulate all the talented musicians, who were up against some of the best in the country.

Thematic Inspection of Curriculum Design at Oban High School: On March 7th and 8th 2023, His Majesty's Education Inspectors (HMIe) conducted a Thematic Inspection of Curriculum Design at Oban High School. The findings of the inspection were extremely positive, highlighting the clear rationale for the curriculum and the way it is led effectively by staff, pupils, parents and partners across the whole local community. They also highlighted the innovative and creative nature of the curriculum in promoting equity for all young people, and its effectiveness in creating individualised, flexible pathways for pupils, leading to positive post-school destinations.

Assessment and Moderation: A series of training twilights has been available for all teaching staff, with a focus on our digital approach to moderation. Feedback from practitioners has been positive and staff have commented on their developed understanding of standards and ease of moderating with other schools, using the support provided. A recent inspection from one of our schools, Lochdonhead Primary, graded Learning Teaching and Assessment as **Excellent**, please see bullet point below, lifted from Education Scotland Summarised Inspection Findings.

'Teachers engage regularly in collaborative, high-quality moderation activity with their partner school, other local schools and local authority

moderation processes. Staff are regularly moderating their innovative approaches to planning and assessment as well as agreeing standards across a range of curricular areas. Staff have a deep understanding of the process and apply this highly successfully. The principal teacher is an experienced Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer, sharing expertise and supporting practice in other schools. Teachers' robust moderation focused on listening and talking is being shared beyond the school to support system-wide improvement.'

Lochdonhead Primary Inspection: In January 2023 a team of Education Scotland inspectors visited Lochdonhead Primary. The school received very positive feedback from the Managing Inspector with specific reference to the compassionate, articulate, independent children who display an enthusiasm for learning, the highly effective leadership and direction of the Headteacher and principal teacher, very high quality teaching and learning provision and, the very well-established, high-quality community and partnership working and its significant impact. Overall the school achieved 3 'very good' and one 'excellent' grading.

5. POLICY LEAD FOR ROADS AND TRANSPORT - Councillor Andrew Kain

- 5.1 Introduction:** Roads are Council assets used by the vast majority of residents in Argyll and Bute for everyday living and all manners of business; essential for economic success. While there will always be aspects which should and can be improved the network in Argyll and Bute has been improving over the last few years. Prudent investment has resulted in a much improved network. There is much more to be done and with £8,000,000 committed in the budget for this year and next, more will be done.
- 5.2 Road Improvements:** More than 86% of Argyll and Bute's roads are in a good or fair condition according to the latest survey of the area's network. Despite normal maintenance work in some areas badly affected by the pandemic, more than 50% of the region's roads network, which covers more than 2,300 kilometres, is within the 'green' or 'good condition' band, whilst 36% are amber.

This is the first time in the last eight years that the results of the Annual Status and Options Report (ASOR) have reported more than half the area's roads network as green, which demonstrates the success that roads maintenance teams have been able to achieve despite challenging conditions. The survey of the roads network takes

place annually to provide information about which sections the Council should consider for maintenance.

As well as roads, the ASOR provides details on a range of other infrastructure assets including footways, bridges, street lighting and traffic signals, street furniture and electric vehicle chargers.

Our roads support thousands of journeys every day and are a vital component of the local economy, providing access for leisure, business, education and tourism as well as supporting vital services such as energy supplies, communications and the digital network. Road networks are a significant economic enabler for all areas. Available and safe roads, both local and trunk routes, are particularly important for the economic prosperity of rural mainland and island communities of Argyll and Bute.

Thanks to prudent investment and sensible engineering solutions our road network has improved and, while there is no doubt that increasing traffic levels and Scotland's challenging climate can have a detrimental effect, it is great news for our local communities that our maintenance programme is paying dividends with more than half of our roads in a good state of repair.

5.3 Bridge Funding: - this has also been secured, following a successful bid, for over £5.5M which will see four key bridges replaced and a further five strengthened. Ground investigation works has been carried out for the four replacement bridges and this data is being used to determine the best locations and designs for the replacements. Design work is underway for the five bridges to be strengthened. This additional investment is very much welcomed and will see nine bridges either replaced or strengthened. Once the design work is further progressed I will ask officers to share the programme with Members.

5.4 Oban Municipal Harbour Authority: The Council's plans to establish a Municipal Harbour Authority in Oban are continuing to move forward. The Council is already the Harbour Authority for Oban North Pier, and while CMAL/CalMac and Northern Lighthouse all have responsibility for separate areas within the bay, the approaches into and out of the bay are currently unregulated.

The Council and Stakeholder Communities want to establish a Harbour Authority to enforce positive safety measures and, on 22nd December last year, the Council submitted a draft Harbour Revision Order (HRO) to Transport Scotland. Since then, positive discussions have taken place between the council and Transport Scotland, and the

Scottish Government's legal team will now review the draft HRO. We are now awaiting approval of the draft HRO from the Scottish Government.

Once this has been done, the HRO will need to be approved by the Argyll and Bute Harbour Board before we then begin the statutory 42 day public consultation. Oban Bay is very busy with marine traffic, particularly during the summer months, so it is vital that we establish a Municipal Harbour Authority for this area so that people have safe and regulated access within the bay.

While there are differences of opinion as to some of the operational detail there is, I believe, unanimous support among Stakeholder Groups for addressing greater safety and future development of Oban Harbour through the establishment of a Municipal Harbour Authority.

- 5.5 Port Marine Safety Code:** the Council remains on course to achieve a national good practice standard for its ports and harbours – something that very few others in the UK have secured. The Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC) sets out a national safety standard covering different aspects of running ports and harbours, and represents 'good practice' as recognised by a wide range of industry stakeholders.

The Department for Transport publishes a list of compliant ports every three years, and Argyll and Bute is on schedule for inclusion in the next edition that will be compiled next year for publication in 2025. The current list of more than 230 ports, published by The Department for Transport as complying with the Code, represents around 14% of UK ports and 30% of Statutory Harbour Authorities.

Achieving the standard involves an independent assessor, or Designated Person, carrying out assurance audits of ports and harbours. During their assurance audit in Argyll and Bute, the Designated Person highlighted three examples of 'Best Practice', including operations at Oban Harbour. It is intention to drive to be recognised for Best Practice in all areas!

Our ports and harbours play a key part in marine connections to and from our island and mainland communities. Although the Port Marine Safety Code is not an official requirement, it is something we want to achieve in Argyll and Bute and I am delighted to see the progress that we are making.

5.6 Kilcreggan Upgrade: we are encouraging more people to have their say on plans to upgrade the ferry infrastructure in Kilcreggan. In order to improve the reliability and resilience of the ferry service between the village, the wider community and Gourock, plans are being explored with service users and communities to take advantage of the investment being made in new vessels, helping to bring new economic opportunities to the area.

Transport Scotland is close to confirming the designs for new passenger ferries coming into operation on the Gourock, Dunoon and Kilcreggan routes, and concerns for the existing B-listed pier at Kilcreggan having capacity to accommodate them safely have led to plans being developed for new accessible infrastructure that will see the service into the future.

The Council's preferred option would see a pontoon built to the west of the existing pier. The existing, historic timber pier remain in place as a supplementary facility for leisure and recreational use by others, and the Council would continue to maintain it for the benefit of the local community. Detailed drawings of the preferred option are available on the [Council website](#).

Ferry users need reliable vessels; they need certainty that crossings will run; and our preferred option means that can happen. Not only that, this design will help bring economic opportunities to the area for years to come. We know that weather can present an issue on the current service as vessels approach the berth. This has a huge impact on the reliability of sailings so, in order to alleviate that risk and ensure vessels can berth safely and reliably in all conditions, a breakwater is included in the preferred option.

This will enable vessels to berth in more difficult conditions, therefore improving the reliability of the service. The location and size of the breakwater has not yet finalised - this will be done during the detailed design stage.

To find out more about the project, including our list of Frequently Asked Questions, visit [Kilcreggan Ferry Terminal \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

5.7 The Rest and Be Thankful: At the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in March, officers presented an update report on the Rest and Be Thankful. I am pleased to hear that in December the Transport Minister announced that the Scottish Government would make improvements to the Old Military Road as a medium term

solution to improve the resilience of the temporary diversion route to the A83, and said it will make an announcement on the long-term solution in the spring and it is understood that a date for the beginning of the first phase of this work has still to be confirmed.

The Rest and Be Thankful is a key element of Argyll and Bute's infrastructure and plays a vital role in the local economy. The ongoing issues around the route undoubtedly have a severe impact on local people, businesses and the area's profile as a popular destination for visitors. The planned improvements to the Old Military Road will help to provide a solution in the medium term to alleviate some of the problems but I'm sure I speak for the local community when I say that we are greatly looking forward to the announcement of the permanent solution by the Scottish Government in the spring.

We will do all necessary to ensure the new Transport Minister is fully aware of the Strategic importance of the Rest; and that commitments made are honoured. However, I am, sure he must be aware of its importance to the Scottish transport network and the economy.

5.8 Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2): STPR2 is highly significant for the future of transport investment in Scotland for the next 20 years and the recommendations for our communities are particularly disappointing in light of the initial assurances we were given and how engaged the Council was throughout the entire process. Indeed it is my view that some of the outcomes are likely to have unintended, negative and potentially damaging consequences. We will be seeking further discussions with both Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government to both express our major concerns about the review and to seek further clarification on a number of issues.

5.9 Flood Prevention: It is great to see the Campbeltown Flood Prevention Scheme well underway. This £15M investment, funded 80% by Scottish Government, as part of the first cycle of the national flood prevention programme will help to significantly build resilience against flooding in Campbeltown. I met with other councillors, our staff and staff from the contractor and consultants in September last year prior to the works commencing where we received a presentation about the works followed by a tour of the extensive site. I'm looking forward to a return visit late spring/early summer to see the works physically on the ground. It will also be an opportunity to meet with Ward councillors from Campbeltown.

Further study work has been undertaken and for some locations is still underway. This study work will be used to bid for cycle 2 of the Flood Prevention Scheme. Sites include Dunoon, Oban, Lochgilphead, Rothesay and Helensburgh. Cycle 1 was highly competitive with cycle 2 expected to be equally competitive with several councils likely to be bidding for limited (yet to be confirmed) funding. The study work will help officers to put forward robust bids for additional flood prevention funding.

- 5.10 Active Travel:** Investment of over £684,000 to widen pedestrian routes, build a new cycleway and improve bus stops will make it safer and easier for pedestrians, cyclists and bus users to travel between Ralston Road and Meadows Avenue in Campbeltown. Work started in January to construct the new cycleway linking Ralston Road, Campbeltown Hospital to Limecraigs Road, Meadowpark and Meadows Avenue. The route will also link key community facilities including Campbeltown Grammar School and Castlehill Primary School.

In addition to the new cycleway, work to upgrade sections of the existing footway and bus stops will start. The Council is delivering the project, funded by Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Partnership (HITRANS) and Transport Scotland's Cycling Walking and Safer Routes Fund. Work is due to complete by early summer 2023.

This significant investment in delivering active travel and bus accessibility will have far reaching benefits for residents and visitors to Campbeltown. As we improve and link pedestrian and cycle routes, we open up more opportunities for children to cycle to school or people working at the hospital to cycle there. As we do everything we can to create a climate friendly Argyll and Bute, we hope more people will take advantage when the route completes and travel by bike or foot.

- 5.11 Future:** While much has been achieved the challenges remain as resources become further strained. Within these constraints officers are looking to effectively 'do more with less' or to look at greater use of technology and purchase of specialist equipment. On a recent visit to Islay I witnessed a very impressive demonstration of a Jetpatcher by an experienced and professional operator. Technology will not solve every problem; but technology applied with expertise and professionalism will contribute greatly.

6. POLICY LEAD FOR CARE SERVICES – Councillor Amanda Hampsey

6.1 Integration Joint Board: I have now taken up the position of Chair of the Argyll and Bute Integration Joint Board and look forward to continuing to work closely with members. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the previous chair, Sarah Compton Bishop for the hard work and time she has dedicated to the IJB over the past two years and wish her well in her new role as Chair of the NHS Highland Board.

6.2 Kintyre Care Home: I was delighted to attend Kintyre Care Centre in Campbeltown for the formal handover into Council property. It was a privilege to speak with residents and their families, as well as meet and experience first-hand the excellent care that is provided by Kintyre Care Centre. The care home will be run by Argyll and Bute HSCP, whilst continuing with the dedicated team of staff previously employed there.

In purchasing the care home, we acknowledge and understand the importance of families having their loved ones as close to home as possible. I am therefore delighted that the hard work of the HSCP and Argyll and Bute Council has achieved saving this vital facility.

6.3 Adult Services:

Winter Planning and Pressures: The HSCP Senior Staff have a winter oversight group which looks at weekly escalations including the overall delayed discharge figure and rationale for delays and complex delays. Argyll and Bute residents in Greater Glasgow NHS Board and in Argyll and Bute hospitals is captured in delayed discharges figures and performance. The numbers of delayed discharges is gradually reducing.

Urgent and unscheduled care remains the focus of redesign on community services and the avoidance of admission.

Interim Care: Scottish Government Funding for interim care (where an individual in hospital cannot get a care at home package and who is offered a placement in a care home without charge of between three days and six weeks) ended on 31st March 2023. The HSCP and Council Finance are looking at the options for this transitionally and longer term.

This is creating intensive work to develop a fair and equitable service to both reduce delays in hospital but also manage budget pressures. A policy direction will be required from the HSCP and will come through the Senior Leadership Team and Finance and Policy.

Care Home Collaborative Arrangements: Oversight arrangements for care homes during the pandemic are transitioning to collaborative arrangements with additional funding to support. In Argyll and Bute there remains a Care Home and Care at Home Weekly Escalation Group.

Palliative Care: There is development of a national strategy of Palliative and End of Life Care. At a local level, there is a short-life working group on palliative care to provide clarity on services and pathways.

Adult Social Work: There remains a national shortage of social workers and national discussions on how to focus on this challenge. In Argyll and Bute HSCP there is a focus on grow your own, staff development and retention. Additionally there is a short life group for adult social work looking at the services social work provide and reviewing our current delivery model.

6.3 Children's Services:

Children's Resources: The service is responsible for ensuring high quality care for children who need it.

Overall there remains very limited availability of residential and foster homes for children. In anticipation of this we previously extended the Family Placement Team into the recruitment and support of kinship carers, which is helping ease this pressure. In addition a recruitment campaign for new foster carers is commencing.

Inspection reports were published in respect of Dunclutha – graded very good; Shellach View - graded good; and East King Street – where a number of concerns led to a grading of weak. An improvement plan has been in place for East King Street with additional resources approved. While progress has been made, staffing difficulties have hampered improvements in some areas. The Care Inspectorate recently undertook a follow up visit and have agreed to support us in delivering on outstanding improvements.

Child Protection:

Implementation of the updated National Child Protection Guidance: Multi-agency focus groups in two localities have considered the draft updates to the Child Protection Committee Website which will align Argyll and Bute's policy, procedures and guidance with the updated National Child Protection Guidance. Further tweaks to the draft site will be completed before a roll out of awareness raising and training on the updated guidance for all partner agencies will be progressed. The

Implementation Plan remains within the projected timescale for full completion and launch by the end of 2023.

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM): The multi-agency SCIM Implementation Group, which is coordinating partnership implementation of the new model for joint police and social work interviewing of child witnesses/victims of abuse across Police Scotland L Division, and both West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute Council areas, continues to progress the implementation plan with meetings on a fortnightly basis. Social Workers and managers are attending the first training modules throughout March with a target date for implementation of the new model in May 2023.

Feedback from Police Divisions and Local Authority areas where the new model has been implemented over the past three years reports better planning and co-ordination of interviews, leading to better outcomes both in terms of evidential utility and improved wellbeing of children and young people who become involved in these processes. Implementation will be on a staged basis in line with available capacity within police and social work.

Activity: Consistent with data reported across Scotland through the National Minimum Data Set for Child Protection, child protection activity is recovering from the period across the pandemic years where the trend across all indicators was a reduction in activity. Argyll and Bute has seen an increasing volume of initial referrals, Initial Referral Discussions, investigations and Registrations from December 2022 onwards. This is also consistent with a significant increase in the volume of referrals being received by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, who continue to manage capacity challenges around decision-making and scheduling of Children's Hearings.

Social Work Out-of-Hours Service: The new model of out-of-hours Social Work support to the community and partner agencies replaced the existing Social Work Emergency Service on 3rd April. This will see a continuation of the call handling service and overnight response provided by commissioned partners Carr Gomm, alongside a reduction in the numbers of geographic rotas for social workers on call from five to two. This will remove the previous significant out of hours responsibilities experienced by island resident staff, and reduce the overall frequency of out of hours duties for all social workers by 50%.

The new service will improve the match between the actual activity out of hours to capacity, and the change in emphasis encapsulated in the name change better reflects the continuation of planned daytime activities into overnight carried out by the call handling provision.

Child Health and Maternity:

Children and Young People's Service Plan (CYPSP) and Getting It Right For Every Child: Both consultations for the Children Young Person Service Plan are now complete, and the draft is currently with the graphic designer. Once in a dressed form, dates will be requested from the IJB then further circulation.

Neurodevelopmental Service: Argyll and Bute are progressing well with scoping and future plans of the Neurodevelopmental Service after having a recent multiagency process mapping day. Further needs analysis is still required to be undertaken.

Justice Social Work:

ViSOR (Violent and Sex Offender Database): ViSOR is a Home Office system that operates across the UK which provides a central store for up-to-date information about individuals managed under MAPPA including registered sex offenders, restricted patients and other risk of harm offenders.

ViSOR is due to be replaced in October 2024 by a new Home Office System MAPPS and work is ongoing on a national basis to resolve the issues of Non Police Personnel Vetting for Justice Social Work staff and the additional workload placed on the service.

Bail Supervision and Electronic Monitoring of Bail: The Scottish Government updated its guidance and policy on Bail supervision in 2022, with the expectation that this service be made available in all courts across Scotland. Development work has been ongoing to implement this in Argyll and Bute, with the service now fully operational, although the remote and rural geography of the area has presented some challenges.

Bail Supervision is a social work service whereby people who would otherwise be held on remand are released on bail on the condition that they meet with a bail supervisor a specified number of times a week; the aim of these meetings being to support the individual to comply with the conditions of their bail. It is intended to provide a robust and credible alternative to remand where people are assessed as needing a level of supervision and support to meet their bail conditions. It also helps to ensure that remand is only used where necessary and appropriate.

6.4 Strategic Planning, Performance and Technology:

Strategic Planning:

- Joint Strategic Plan and Commissioning Strategy – Year 1 monitoring: Processes are in place to ensure that this is effectively monitored with scope for strategic leads to revise Year 2 priorities to ensure they are appropriate, achievable and linked to the financial strategy.
- The Women’s Health Plan (2021–2024) was published by the Scottish Government in September 2021. The plan outlines improvement and change in areas that affect women, including menopause, endometriosis, heart health, menstrual health and sexual health. The HSCP has identified an executive lead and established a small group to start mapping what is currently in place and what are the gaps in the Argyll and Bute context.
- Reviewing the Service Level Agreement principles with NHSGGC – The Planning Team and Chief Officer are working to refresh and re-establish the critical working partnership and relationship between Argyll and Bute and Greater Glasgow and Clyde. We aim to reintroduce the principals of the Argyll and Bute and GGC SLA to establish a better understanding of the pathways and agreements in place and examine what requires to be refreshed to ensure these are maintained and the obligate networks reinforced.

Performance and Improvement:

- Delivery and go live of the new Integrated Performance Management Dashboard is on track for April - this will replace the previous Pyramid balanced scorecard. The new performance dashboard development has utilised a fully collaborative approach and integrated model to ensure full engagement with Heads of Service and Service Leads with oversight from the Strategic Leadership Team. The focus of this work has been to ensure that key performance indicators are able to respond to national reporting requirements whilst remaining focussed on what is important locally for manages, staff, community and strategic planning.

Technology: A key aspect of integration of health and social care services is the development of a person centred approach and a single health and care team. A single information system and ideally a shared record has been identified by front line staff as key operational requirement to achieve this from the inception of the HSCP.

The HSCP Digital Modernisation Strategy and action plan captures this aim and details how we are to achieve this. The Strategy has now been approved and included in the HSCP Strategic plan 2022-2025. The following outlines the current status of some of the projects.

- Implementation of the ECLIPSE system replacing Carefirst for social work and community nursing and community AHP health services go live date later in 2023.
- Implementation of Orion Portal allowing primary care and hospital systems to view ECLIPSE community health record later in 2023.
- Scanning of all general health Medical records at across the HSCP is well underway and will be completed by the summer 2023.
- Telecoms – eHealth continue to deploy “AB Connect”, our new Maintel IVR (Interactive Voice Recognition) automated service within hospitals across the HSCP. This new service has already been successfully enabled within Campbeltown, Islay and Helensburgh hospitals, followed by Mull due to go live by April. Dates are currently being arranged for the remainder sites Dunoon, Lochgilphead and Oban. All of this will benefit our staff and service by providing the very best digital telephony service to the HSCP.

7. POLICY LEAD FOR PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES – Councillor Kieron Green

7.1 Introduction: Following from my previous Policy Lead Report I have chaired monthly Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee meetings, the Argyll and Bute Licensing Board and as required Local Review Bodies.

I have also sat on the panel for the Argyll and Bute Sustainable Design awards, which has seen shortlisted developments in all parts of our area. Site visits are now underway and the public vote is now open.

I continue to attend Clyde Marine Planning Partnership meetings where, alongside issues raised by users, there is an ongoing review over governance and representation.

I was invited to the online Building Standards User Forum on 29th March where agents and architects were updated on changes and revisions to standards.

Input from members has been sought to enable the Council to respond to the Scottish Government consultation on Highly Protected Marine Areas.

7.2 Development Management: Planning validation timescales have been brought down to seven working days, which is close to the target of five. However determination, which was already longer than target, has unfortunately continued to increase as officers become familiar with the approved National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and its implications for planning policy in Argyll and Bute. NPF4, following adoption by the Scottish Government, is now a statutory policy consideration that impacts on all applications in the planning process.

Planning income at the end of January was £514k over target, which has enabled some additional temporary resource to support large scale applications in particular. This level of fee income reflects the high case load officers are having to deal with, including a high number of major applications that take a consideration amount of staff resource to deal with.

Recruitment is ongoing with some recent success in filling vacant posts at a time when there is a national shortage of qualified planning officers. In addition to further recruitment efforts, officers are looking to take forward an action plan to improve the planning process following a meeting with a number of planning agents.

Positive overall feedback from Government was received regarding the Planning Performance Framework for 2022/23, although determination and age of Local Development Plan were still rated red.

7.3 Development Policy: The adoption of the Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) has been delayed due to approval of NPF4. Reporters have requested further information on renewables, wild land, flooding, and housing land supply to ensure that there is conformity between the plans. Depending on the final report there may be further steps required before final agreement can be reached and the plan adopted.

Major planning applications are due to be submitted to allow development at Dunbeg to be continued, with work continuing with the Scottish Government over Tax Incremental Financing and with Transport Scotland on the A85 junction design.

It has been confirmed that emergency services do not, at this time, want to be located on site as part of the 'Strategic Delivery and Development Framework' for the Faslane Maritime Change Programme. Development costs are being modelled to feed into the Rural Growth Deal Outline Business Case.

Following the demolition of the former Lochgilphead Primary School options are being considered to halt the Simplified Planning Zone

(SPZ) in Lochgilphead due to issues arising from statutory planning consultees particularly in relation to flooding impacting on a portion of the site.

7.4 Building Standards: As at the end of February income was £38.5k over target. While East Lothian Council is continuing to make use of capacity available, the contract with Dundee City is coming to an end and no interest has been received from elsewhere in Scotland. As such reduced income is being anticipated for 2023/24. Performance is exceeding all key measures - there is however reduced capacity due to vacancies and staffing, and so if necessary Argyll and Bute work will be prioritised.

7.5 Regulatory Services: Capacity within the environmental health service is an issue with six vacancies and two long-term absences, allied with a national shortage of qualified environmental health officers. As a result, work is being actively managed and reprioritised which may result in delays in response times, an increase in the provision of information to support individuals taking their own actions and a reduction to programmed works. This will be reviewed as resources increase and an external contractor has been appointed to support our food safety inspections.

A budget pressure for 2023/24 has emerged due to export health certificate income being 40% below budget, as businesses move to the commercial hub for services or are using private vets.

The Scottish Authority Food Enforcement Re-Build (SAFER) is changing food safety priorities in Scotland to reflect the current resource issues and changes to the food sector. Control procedures for approved food sector (exporters and manufacturers) came into place on 1st April 2023. These are more resource intensive than previously. Argyll and Bute have 52 approved premises with three under application and 43 other high risk manufacturers, which is one of the highest across all Scottish local authorities.

The Short Term Lets team is in place although the Scottish Government have extended the deadline for applications for existing hosts to October 2023. To mitigate the risk that hosts will wait until near that deadline hosts are being actively encouraged to apply now. As of March 2023 there had been 303 applications and 604 enquiries, with 7 licences issued and 30 valid applications being considered.

7.6 Biodiversity: NatureScot have launched a draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy at <https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity-strategy-2022-2045> with further work underway for an Action Plan estimated for

completion by Summer 2023. This will shape future work on Invasive Non-Native Species.

Consideration is being given nationally as to how to measure positive action to protect and enhance biodiversity following development – this could in time be linked to planning biodiversity net gain through an agreed metric.

New signage has been agreed and is to be installed by a contractor at the Holy Loch Local Nature Reserve.

A demonstration project is being developed for the Argyll and Bute Shoreline Management Plan in conjunction with roads.

8. POLICY LEAD FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES - Councillor Ross Moreland

8.1 Cardross Crematorium Inspection: The Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities Services has rated the services of Cardross Crematorium as excellent following a recent inspection. A range of aspects of the facilities provided by Cardross were examined including cremation, grounds and memorials, service and staff and overall quality of the premises.

The Crematorium Inspector reported an excellent level of service provision, giving the facilities a score of 411 out of a possible maximum of 455 and achieving over 90% compliance. The crematorium scored particularly well in the administration, premises and facilities, and grounds and memorialisation categories and the report made no further recommendations for improvements to the services provided.

The services and facilities provided by Cardross Crematorium have historically been of a very high standard. This latest inspection report is an excellent outcome and our congratulations go to the retiring Crematorium Superintendent and his team, as well as all other staff involved in this important service.

8.2 Waste: In my last Policy Lead update, I advised that a report would be presented to the Council's December Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee and that a Members Seminar had also been scheduled. The December report provided an update on external consultancy works to review the options available to the Council in relation to the Waste PPP contract and the BMW ban – a further report will be presented to the Committee in June.

The Council Leader wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport on the Council's arrangements for the forthcoming ban on landfilling biodegradable municipal waste (BMW) due to be implemented in 2025, and the Minister has offered to meet with the Council and arrangements are being made.

- 8.3 Route Optimisation:** The Council are implementing a new route optimisation system – software which will improve the operational management of certain services which are operated via vehicles providing specific services. This is a joint remit which I share with the Policy Lead for Roads and Transport.

The system will consider all aspects of the waste collection service from the number of households, assisted pull-outs, additional bins to staffing, shift patterns, location and availability of onward processing/disposal/landfill sites (including travel off islands. The system also requires to be flexible with the ability to take into account new housing developments. The system will provide a range of efficient routing options enabling the Council to consider current and future alternative service provision, including development of "what if" scenarios to establish preferred future options.

- 8.4 Recycling:** Reusing items, donating them or selling them is a much better option than sending them to landfill because not only does it reduce waste, it helps to cut down on carbon impact.

This is particularly important because the average piece of each items of furniture dumped generates around approximately 47 kilogrammes of carbon dioxide equivalents – that's the same amount of greenhouse gases produced by burning around 5.3 gallons of petrol.

The [council website](#) has lots of useful information about recycling and donating unwanted household goods, as does [Zero Waste Scotland](#). I would urge you to have a read and see what small changes you can make that will have a long-lasting impact.

- 8.5 Play Parks:** In August 2022, the Scottish Government confirmed a full five-year funding package to all Scottish Local Authorities from 2020/21 through to 2025/26. Argyll and Bute Council will receive a total of £938k for Play Park funding which will cover our 28 Play Parks which are in need of upgrading. All Scottish Councils have received funding through the Capital Allocation for Renewal of Play Parks Fund for investment in play park equipment. The Scottish Government commitment was to ensure that all children have access to quality play in their own

community and the budget was specific in that the funding was for renewing play parks. Officers are getting ready to engage with community groups, education colleagues and disability forums to ensure proper facilities are discussed. Roads and Infrastructure Services presented a report to the March EDI Committee, which can be found at the link below for anyone wishing to read more about the funding. Officers will bring forward a further report to a future meeting.

[PLAY PARK FUNDING UPDATE REPORT.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://argyll-bute.gov.uk)

- 8.6 Bid for Bronze CLO submitted:** I was delighted to be informed that in February 2023, the Council achieved bronze Carbon Literacy accreditation. Argyll and Bute Council are one of three Local Authorities in Scotland to hold this. We are committed to being a net zero organisation by 2045 and continue to work with community planning partners to tackle climate change across the region in a bid to safeguard our area for the future.

9. POLICY LEAD FOR ISLANDS AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT- Councillor Liz McCabe

- 9.1 Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Funding - Support for Island Communities:** The cost of living crisis continues to affect many of communities across Argyll and Bute. Our island residents are seeing a significant increase in costs with many goods and services more expensive than the mainland. With costs much higher than the UK average, many residents are struggling. Funding from the Scottish Government means that we as a Council can take urgent action and help provide support and essential services to those who require it.

Households in receipt of council tax reduction will have received a £120 card to spend in local island businesses. This ensures that households who do not have access to a local food bank, or who would not wish to use the food bank, have some additional support. The council has a list of recipients and cards were issued from 13th February.

Other support includes £5,000 food bank grants for each of the four island community food organisations including Islay Foodbank, Bute Oasis, Tiree Food Project and Mull and Iona Community Trust. The Council will also pay an additional £1.60 per day for every secondary school pupil, in receipt of free school meals, every day between 14th February 2023 to 30th June 2023. This includes school holidays. The payment means that pupils in receipt of free school meals will also have additional funding for food throughout the day such as snacks, if

9.2 Strategic Events and Festivals: Calls for grant funding for Strategic Events and Festivals Fund (round 5.2) opened on 10th March until 17th April 2023, for events and festivals that had not secured grant funding from Round 5 and whose events and festivals are taking place between 17th May 2023 and 31st March 2024.

9.3 Film: In Argyll and Bute, we are proud to be able to offer some of the world's best scenic backdrops to the screen industry. Filming in the area not only brings a welcome economic boost to local businesses and services, it also provides opportunities to market the area and boost visitor numbers through increased film tourism.

Accommodation providers, local shops, caterers and services are all benefitting from an increase in filming across Argyll and Bute. Large-scale productions from the BBC and Disney are helping the local economy and helping to promote the area and encourage film tourism.

Argyll and Bute Council's Film service continues to work with production companies and Screen Scotland to attract inward investment across the area. From 2021 to 2023, 89 productions filmed in Argyll and Bute, with an estimated local production spend of £1.1 million. The sector continues to recover from the impact of the pandemic with a substantial rise in filming requests now starting to come in.

Productions include Top Gear at Oban Airport; BBC drama 'Float', filmed at the former Helensburgh Swimming Pool; Murder Island, a drama written by Iain Rankin – filmed on Gigha; Disney, Star Wars Andor, filmed in and around Cruachan Mountain; BBC Martin Compston's Highland Fling, filmed in Dunoon, Loch Lomond, Strathlachlan and Strachur; and Cbeebies, Ranger Hamza and the Ramblers, filmed in Oban, Connel and Mull.

9.4 Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) updates:
Rothesay Townscape Heritage: The final priority building 69 to 72 Victoria Street is now on-site and progressing well. Works to 1 Tower Street are progressing with the lead roof, slating and windows almost complete. 39 to 43 Victoria Street has now reached practical completion. A planning application has been submitted for a further shopfront restoration project within Victoria Street.

Dunoon CARS: Dunoon CARS is a £2m programme, due to complete on 31st March 2023 although an extension to the spend to complete the training and final priority building has been asked for from HES. The final priority building at 104 to 110 Argyll Street is starting onsite in

March 2023. This will be the final grant to be awarded under the scheme. We have commissioned Caroline Thompson Consultants to carry out the Dunoon CARS Evaluation to conclude the project.

Lochgilphead CARS: Lochgilphead CARS is a £2m programme in its third year. The first priority building project is on site with second building due to start in the spring. The third priority building is in the development phase. Working with key partners, a number of traditional skills training and education events are being held from April to June.

Helensburgh CARS: Helensburgh CARS is a £2.4m programme in its second year. Two priority buildings have contracted with the architect and a grant application is expected in May 2023. Small repairs are ongoing. One grant application has been received for a shopfront and is being progressed. Training events are being planned and promoted for June 2023 and discussions are ongoing regarding an apprenticeship.

9.5 Employability:

Fair Start Scotland - 16 to 67 year olds: Ten additional starts have signed up to Fair Start Scotland, bringing the total to 352 participants since the service commenced (72 Helensburgh, 79 Campbeltown, 41 Rothesay, 69 Dunoon and 91 Oban). Key workers have supported a total of 118 people into work. 85 of these job starts have occurred since March 2020.

PeoplePlus continues to set targets - referral numbers from DWP are better from some Job Centre Plus offices than others. This is linked to the availability of other employment provision available to claimants which involves shorter, sharp support rather than the 52-week programme FSS offers.

Officers continue to complete the Marketing Action Plan detailing the activity carried out to promote the service. One of our key workers attends the now monthly Resettlement Group meetings and this, following attendance at a recent Welcome Fayre in Dunoon, has resulted in five potential referrals.

Argyll and Bute Employer Recruitment and Training Incentive (ABERTI) – 16 to 67 year olds: Applications for this fund ceased at 31/03/22. A total of 37 participants and 28 employers were supported. To date 35 participants have completed the 52-week funded period or left early; 28 (80%) are in employment, 21 (75%) of which retained by the employer accessing the funding; and seven (25%) have moved to another employer. The remaining two continue to do well in their

subsidised employment, and it is highly likely they will be retained post funding.

No One Left Behind - Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) 25+ Years: Applications are invited in respect of the ERIs of up to £6,000 per person. This allows unemployed people aged 25+ years the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

This funding has attracted five employers who have recruited a total of seven employees utilising this funding. It is encouraging to note two of these employees are aged 60 years plus.

No One Left Behind – Pre-employment support Phase 1 to 3: A further grant allocation of £228,017.65 in respect of 22/23 is available. Three Local Employability Partners (Inspiralba, WorkingRite and the Clyde Fishermen's Trust) have been delivering support to unemployed residents of Argyll and Bute until 31st March 2023. SLAs are in place for each of the phases. To date 58 people aged 25 plus have commenced support; six are in employment and one in self-employment.

Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) - 16 to 67 year olds: This service, funded by the Scottish Government, is designed to support low income families to increase their income through work, both through supporting parents to access paid employment and in helping those in lower paid jobs to progress to higher income.

Our Engagement Worker continues to deliver intensive in and out of work employability support, including person-centred support to upskill, apply for jobs, gain progression whilst in employment, money advice, health support, motivational support, etc. A total of 65 parents have now joined the service, 28 of which have ceased support. Thirteen have moved into work and two into self-employment.

A further grant allocation of £149,219.53 in respect of 2022/23 is now available.

An SLA is now in place with our partner Inspiralba and provision commenced in December 22. It is anticipated a total of 31 target group parents will be supported by 31st March 2023. Inspiralba have formed a partnership with Alienergy and Bute Advice. Given the cost of living and fuel crisis, their expertise will be extremely beneficial to parents. Delivery is going exceptionally well and places are almost filled.

9.6 Digital Update:

Current stats are as follows:-

- 94.3% of Argyll and Bute premises are connected to the fibre network
- 86.1% can access speeds >30Mbps
- 0.8% are between 24 and 30 Mbps
- 2.3% are between 15 and 24 Mbps
- 1.8% are between 10 and 15Mbps
- 5.8% are between 2 and 10Mbps
- 3.3% are below 2Mbps
- Full Fibre availability is currently at 6.4%

These figures show that there has been a slight increase in access to Superfast Broadband and the availability of Full Fibre across Argyll and Bute.

Build was due to commence on Mull in the second half of this year, however the delivery schedule for the R100 fibre network has been adjusted again due to a combination of local delivery and planning issues, encountered by Openreach, on the current phase of the contract. The delivery dates are now end of March 2025 for Pennyghael and Ross of Mull and Iona by the end of September 2024.

Build is continuing across the Oban area (North Lot) with Full Fibre Connection available to 1,089 premises from Appin in the North, to Dalmally in the East and Bragleenmore at Loch Scammadale in the South.

There have also been 834 connections in the Helensburgh and Lomond area (Central Lot), in Coulport, Cove, Kilcreggan, Rosneath, Garelochhead, Shandon, Helensburgh, Craigendoran and Arden.

It must be highlighted that the numbers provided are the connections through the R100 contract - additional connections are also provided through overspill premises and Openreach commercial investment which in many instances can see an additional 20% connection availability.

On top of Openreach build Virgin Media are investing in the Helensburgh area through 2023, and officers attended a Virgin Media O2 (VMO2) investment event at the Scottish Parliament on 8th March to hear more about these plans.

10. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, COMMUNITIES AND CORPORATE SERVICES - Councillor Alastair Redman

10.1 Economic Growth and Communities:

MACC Spaceport: In February, children and teachers from six local Kintyre primary schools spent time at Machrihanish Airbase learning about space, gravity, with STEM-based workshops including Lego robot - Milo the Science Rover, Sphero K'nex - robot machine challenge, and Stop Motion - animation workshops. MACC are also considering a new business plan to cover the site which offers high potential for further employment growth in a number of key industries such as renewables, space and distilling. The base is also an important site for Film and TV work which helps promote Argyll and Bute.

Love Local Card: Love Local Cards is a joint part of my remit that I share with the Policy Leads for Strategic Development and Islands and Business Development. It is great to see that nearly 300 businesses have registered to accept the Argyll and Bute gift card. The gift card scheme encourages people to keep spending local to support businesses and jobs. The card works the same as a gift voucher and offers recipients a wide range of businesses to choose from including restaurants, gifts, experiences, accommodation and services.

We are incredibly lucky to have fantastic independent businesses and local produce here in Argyll and Bute. From farmers markets and restaurants to gift shops and outdoor activity providers, the gift card is helping to support businesses and jobs. By gifting the card, you are providing a much-needed economic boost to the local area and helping to showcase what Argyll and Bute has to offer. With more people using the card as a method of payment, we would love more businesses to sign up to the scheme.

To register, businesses must have a physical presence in Argyll and Bute and fall under one of five categories: health and beauty; shopping; leisure attractions; food and drink and accommodation.

Registering to the Argyll and Bute gift card scheme is free and only takes a couple of minutes. It is open to any business with a physical presence in Argyll and Bute. You can register at <https://lovelocal.scot/register-your-business/>.

Oban BID: A financial boost of £842,00 to the Oban business community and an increase in customers and visitors are just some of the benefits resulting from the Oban Business Improvement District (BID) extending to another five years. Following Council approval of BID4Oban's business proposals in September, local businesses were

balloted to gain support. The result was a clear majority meaning that businesses will invest and work together to focus on improving Oban as a commercial and tourist destination.

BID4Oban has delivered a number of projects and initiatives. They include financial support for 51 events; 700 hanging baskets and flower arrangements; additional Christmas lights throughout Oban; funded firework displays in November and Hogmanay; wifi installed in the Little Bay area; and Love Oban brand created.

As we continue to support growth across our local economy, it's fantastic to see businesses working together to generate ongoing investment for Oban.

Business Start Up: Ambitious start-up businesses across Argyll and Bute will receive additional support following confirmation of new grant funding. Due to strong demand for the New Enterprise Support Grant, councillors approved an additional £35,000 to support 12 start-up businesses. The fund, designed to help ongoing economic recovery from the pandemic has supported 40 businesses to date with £120,000 of funding in total. Support from the COVID Recovery Fund will focus on new businesses in Campbeltown, Lochgilphead, Isle of Bute and Dunoon, the areas of Argyll and Bute hit hardest by the pandemic.

The pandemic had a major impact on many of our local traders and we want to continue to support the sector as it continues to recover. Successful businesses are the lifeblood of the local economy and this new funding will provide start-ups with the support they need to realise their ambitions.

Encouraging responsible tourism: Car park upgrades, new signage and overnight parking for motor caravans are just some of the measures the council is planning to deliver to help protect Argyll and Bute's scenery and promote responsible tourism.

Councillors agreed the latest steps in response to increasing numbers of visitors choosing to staycation in the region. The plans will help support the local economy and encourage responsible tourism, and these include motor caravan overnight parking; Glenmorag car park in Dunoon; new signage; and temporary toilets introduced at popular visitor hotspots across the region will continue throughout 2023.

The new measures are in addition to a wide range of initiatives already introduced to address concerns about the impact of staycation visitors

on key tourism areas, and include enhanced waste disposal facilities for camping/campervans at campsites across Argyll and Bute; introduction of temporary toilets at various locations including Westport, Bridge of Orchy, Glen Orchy, Kilchurn Castle and Victoria Bridge, funding to support four community wardens and recruitment of additional wardens; and creation of the abplace2visit website (<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/abplace2visit>)

The website includes an interactive map of locations of car parks and caravan touring sites and information on waste disposal facilities. Tourism is a major contributor to the local economy, and the increase in visitors choosing to staycation in Argyll and Bute is extremely welcome. Thousands of visitors come to enjoy everything the area has to offer and the vast majority of people are responsible. However, we are fully aware of concerns and have listened to our local communities regarding the impact of litter and anti-social behaviour. We want everyone to have a great time and be a great visitor, which is why we have introduced new measures and extended those already in place to encourage responsible tourism.

Regeneration: A historic Lochgilphead property will benefit from a major regeneration thanks to new funding from the Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) with a grant of more than £241,000 to deliver a major repairs project for the building at 3-17 Colchester Square, Lochgilphead.

The CARS programme focuses on the regeneration of historic buildings as well as promotion of traditional skills training and community engagement. The programme is jointly funded by the Council and Historic Environment Scotland (HES). The aim is to safeguard Lochgilphead's heritage by supporting property owners to return their buildings and shopfronts to a good state of repair and boost the town centre's visual and visitor appeal.

A key element is promotion and delivery of traditional and construction skills training amongst Lochgilphead High School pupils, Argyll College students, local contractors, building professionals and public sector staff involved in the repair and maintenance of historic buildings.

This latest funding award from Lochgilphead CARS is further evidence of our commitment to supporting the continuing regeneration of Argyll and Bute. As well as helping to restore and preserve this historic priority property, this project plays a significant part in further enhancing the town centre, promotes traditional skills and helps encourage our young people to consider a career in construction.

New Homes at Oakhill, Tarbert: I was delighted to attend ACHA's official opening of the new Oakhill, Tarbert phase 2 housing development and privileged to officially open the four new family homes which increases the supply of affordable housing, on behalf of the Council Leader. These new homes will be put into good use by the residents of Tarbert and I wish them all the very best in their homes.



With partners and new tenants at the official opening of Oakhill

10.2 Customer and Support Services:

Customer Service Centre Audit: The Council's Customer Service Centre has had an audit, the scope of which was to review customer contact handling in the Customer Service Centre. It is of no surprise to me that the team has received a high audit opinion and there is a sound system of control designed to achieve the system objectives is in place and being applied consistently. Well done to the team!

Council Website: Did you know that Argyll and Bute Council's website contains lots of useful information for residents, businesses and visitors and also offers a huge range of online services that make connecting with the council quick and convenient? The website has a range of services from "Request It" and "Report It" that allows people to report lighting and road faults; tell us if they have moved house; make and comment on planning applications; order a new bin; change the name of their house; or request a copy birth certificate.

The website allows you to sign up to our "**Keep In The Loop**" service, which keeps you up to date via text or email about **disruptions**, service changes, events and news that affect you and I would encourage everyone to sign up to the keeping in the loop service.

Our Virtual Assistant (**Abby**) feature and improved search function, are geared towards helping you to get the information you need around the clock and there is also a wide range of **social media channels** to keep you informed. The sister website **abplace2b** focuses on all that is great about our area and if you are thinking about getting married in one of our beautiful locations the **marriage website** will inspire you.

The council website offers a huge range of useful resources that could help save you time and energy. Why wait in a phone queue or travel to a service point in the middle of winter when almost everything you need to contact the council about can be done online? I would urge everyone to take a look at the website and see all the services we now offer online. **www.argyll-bute.gov.uk**

Cyber Security: ICT staff have now submitted the council's PSN reaccreditation documentation. Access to the PSN network allows staff and Elected Members to interact with other users and services in a secure manner such as HMRC, the DWP, Police Scotland and the National Registrar for Scotland.

As an example of the continued scale of the threat to the Council network, in the last month our systems:

- Blocked 30,489 critical or high threats;
- Blocked 89,725 Denial of Service attacks;
- Quarantined 28,498 emails including 276 viruses.

All employees and Elected Members will receive regular emails from the Security Team, to participate in security awareness training videos – this ensures that all staff and Elected Members are up to speed with all aspects of security for their devices.

I would encourage anyone who receives or sees a suspicious email or activity, to report it – you can report it to the UK Government at **[Report internet scams and phishing GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/report-internet-scams-and-phishing)**

Remember to keep all of your passwords secure in the interest of protecting the Council and your own information.

10.3 Corporate Services:

Elections: Work is underway in preparation for future electoral processes and as part of this members of the team will be observing proceedings at local elections in England to view the use of Voter ID. From 4 May 2023 voters in England will be required to show photo ID to vote at polling stations in some elections including local elections,

Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, UK Parliamentary by-elections and Recall petitions. From October 2023 it will also apply to UK General Elections. A wide range of forms of ID will be accepted including passports, driving licence, blue badge, Older Person's Bus Pass, Scottish National Entitlement Card, National Identify Card etc. Further details can be found on the Electoral Commission website [here](#).

Member Development Programme: The Elected Member Development Framework has now been updated. The programme will consist of a range of training, including development sessions which will focus on skills, roles and responsibilities. Members will be asked to provide their views on what they would like to see in terms of development topics and the team would welcome all suggestions. The regular Elected Member Seminar programme will continue with input from services, covering a range of strategic areas. In terms of individual development, officers will be working with the Improvement Service to utilise their self-assessment tool. As part of this, councillors will be asked to complete a skills assessment, which will be followed up by one to one discussions with a member of the Governance Team to identify individual training needs and to produce a Development Plan.

Welfare Rights: The Welfare Rights Team work hard to ensure that residents of Argyll and Bute maximise their entitlement to both UK and Scottish Government-administered benefits and other related help. Members of the team are also funded by MacMillan Cancer Support and provide an enhanced Welfare Rights Service for people affected by cancer. The service continues to illustrate excellent performance, generating income of £816,120 during the latest reporting period. The overall target for the financial year is £2.5M, however the team anticipate exceeding this target with forecasts sitting at £2.8M.

Procurement and Contract Management:

Contracts - As at 31st January 2023 the team have awarded 383 contracts. As part of the ongoing monitoring of performance the number of tenders bid for at a local level and subsequently won by local suppliers is monitored. Of the 36 tenders receiving local bids for the year to date, 29 (80.6%) of these were won by local bidders.

Community Benefits - the Council is committed to maximising Community Benefits arising from procurement activities and to delivering wider benefits for its communities when purchasing goods, services and supplies for Argyll and Bute. The team have been working closely with suppliers to deliver additional social, economic and environmental value to the area. A Community Benefit Scheme

has been running since September 2020 which allows community groups to request help in achieving their goals, for example sponsorship for a local sports club, donations of labour or materials, work experience etc. More information on the current community benefit wish list and details of those requests that have been fulfilled can be found on the Council website [here](#).

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1** 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 – 14th April 2023

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