

23rd November 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 28th September 2023. This latest report provides an update on activity during the period to 10th November 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 for October and November 2023

3.2 Financial Services:

Finance: The department continue to monitor the 2023-24 revenue and capital budget positions, where there is currently a forecast underspend of £0.080m in revenue and a forecast overspend of £0.038m within capital. Work on next year's budget continues and an updated position was presented to the recent Budget Working Group outlining a gap of £4.670m next year, rising to £23.343m in 2028-29. Options are being considered how to bridge this gap. In addition, the Council will have to consider financial provision for the new school

campus on Mull, financial implications from recent storms, along with discovery of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete within one of the schools. Furthermore, the recent announcement by the Scottish Government regarding a Council Tax freeze in 2024-25 and uncertainty around what funding will be received in relation to this will also need to be monitored closely.

The external audit of the Council's financial statements for 2022-23 continue with officers providing Mazars with all requested information. Unfortunately, due to initial staffing issues within Mazars the audited accounts will not be available for presentation to Council on 23rd November as planned and a Special Council meeting has been arranged for December.

Local Tax Collections: The Council Tax collection rate for the current year on 31st October is 65.75% which is 0.25% down on the same period in 2021/2022. This is not concerning because we will make up this deficit.

The Scottish Government are currently legislating to allow Scottish local authorities to charge double Council Tax on second homes next year. A paper will be presented to the Council suggesting that once the powers become available in law, the Council will seek to implement this change with effect from 1st April 2024. This is expected to generate circa £4.9 million of additional Council Tax billed with recoveries in-year of around £4.18 million. Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) collections on 31st October are good at 76.43% - 2.82% up on the previous year and looking very strong this year.

Empty Property Relief: Consultation with stakeholders has been completed and new Policy Options were shared with members at a seminar on 6th November. The seminar went well, we got really positive engagement from many members and the draft new policy will be presented to the Council on 23rd November.

The proposed policy reduces the cost of Empty Property Relief by 50% in year one and a further 12.5% in year two and creates opportunities to provide empty property owners and entrepreneurs with incentives to occupy and bring properties back into use supported by a full-time Empty Business Property Officer. It is anticipated that, in time, these changes will have a positive impact on our communities and help create more vibrant town centres.

Benefits Processing: As of 31st October 2023, processing speeds for Housing Benefit have improved to 13.88 days in month. The cumulative performance since the start of the year sits at 18.05 days,

well below our 21-day target. The average time taken to process a change in circumstances is 4.82 days which is still very good and below the target of six days.

Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs): Total expenditure in SWF on 31st October 2023 is £369,903. Our programme funding allocation for 2023/24 is £458,284 and we are projecting an overspend of circa £200,000 on the fund this year. As at 31st October 2023 our spent and committed amount on the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund is £788,125. Initial DHP Tranche 1 funding allocation for 2023/24 in Argyll and Bute is £869,638. We are unlikely to require any further funding from the Scottish Government on DGHP in 2023/2024.

Flexible Food Fund: This project continues to perform well; however an application for funding from the Scottish Government's Cash First fund for £80,000, to expand the service and provide more outreach support, failed to get any award. Efforts continue to expand the service offering from existing resources despite this disappointment.

3.3 **Commercial Services:**

Excellence Award success: Following on from my previous report, where I advised that the service had been shortlisted for a number of national awards, I am delighted to announce that we have won the COSLA Excellence Award for the School Meals by Drones pilot project.

This project, which saw the Council team up with leading drone specialists Skyports last year, was nominated in the 'Service Innovation and Improvement' category. Building on the pilot that involved delivering freshly prepared meals from Oban Airport to Lochnell Primary School, work will be carried out later this year to undertake further trials to help establish the use of drones across more remote/rural parts of the area. Congratulations to all involved.



Helensburgh Waterfront – Commercial:

Retail – An update report was tabled at the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee on 12th September, which advised on the outcome of the public engagement exercise and provided a summary of the five proposals that have been shortlisted for progression to the next stage of the process. Letters have been issued to those on the shortlist, inviting full financial offers to be submitted by 6th December. Thereafter the bids will be assessed using the scoring matrix agreed by the Area Committee at their meeting on 12th September.

Skatepark – An update report was tabled at the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee on 12th September 2023. The reinstatement of the temporary skatepark facilities is due to be complete by autumn. In respect of the long term location for the skatepark, an assessment of each of the potential sites is under way – including Hermitage Park, East Bay Park, Kidston Park, and Iona Stables – Colgrain. A range of factors require to be assessed as part of this process including ownership/title conditions, planning issues, access/parking, flooding, environmental/noise concerns and the cost of development. A further update report will be prepared for the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee in due course.

Rothesay Pavilion: An update was provided to the Policy and Resources Committee held on 12th October where it was reported that:-

- the stage 1 works remain on budget and on target for completion within the agreed timescales;
- As matters stand, a decision in relation to the funding of stages 2 and 3 will be required at the budget meeting in February 2024;
- Following the decision to integrate the project into the Rural Growth Deal, the team have been working with consultants to develop the Full Business Case, which will require to be submitted and approved by the Scottish and UK Governments.
- Following the successful Parliamentary Event on 5th September, work is ongoing by the Lobbying Group to close the remaining capital funding gap through engagement with our main funding partners, both Governments, and other potential funders for the project.

3.4 Depute Leader: I continue to have regular other meetings with the Leader, Policy Leads and the Chief Executive in respect of council business and priorities.

4. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

- 4.1 Learning Estate Investment Programme:** I am very happy to report that the Council has been successful in its bid to the Scottish Government Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) for funding for a new school campus on Mull.

This is excellent news that we have all been hoping for. It is one of the biggest investments in community infrastructure on the island in many years and has potential to transform futures and economic potential. Mull is the highest priority in our Learning Estate Strategy and now we can move forward with our plans to provide generations of children and young people to come with a state-of-the-art facility that will enable them to reach their full potential. I would like to thank the local community for working in close partnership with us throughout this process.

It is important to stress, however, that the LEIP funding from the Scottish Government will only part-fund the project to less than half of the total value of approximately £35.5m total and the Council will have to make a major financial contribution to the overall cost, but exciting times lie ahead and I am delighted that by working together we can create a better future for the young people involved.

There is much work still to be done including a review of costs and programme, a preferred site requires to be selected and secured and further engagement with the communities and groups. The Council will be in touch with the stakeholders involved as soon as it has more information about the next steps.

- 4.2 Additional Support Needs (ASN) Provision:** Following my update in September, I am pleased to report that the Council have agreed to invest more than £1.7 million to establish four more dedicated Learning Centres in its schools so that children and young people with more complex ASN can benefit from tailored high level support.

Secondary Enhanced Wellbeing Hubs will also be developed within four mainstream secondary schools to address the growing social and emotional needs of a number of children and young people in a way that keeps them in the heart of their own communities and schools.

Agreement to these proposals ensures that access to Learning Centres is more equitable across Argyll and Bute, with bespoke facilities being offered, including:- accessible teaching spaces, breakout quiet rooms, low stimulus, and high stimulus sensory rooms, appropriate outdoor space, and changing facilities with the necessary

equipment. Learning Centres will also develop curriculum plans to include a wide range of flexibility to support all learners to achieve their potential.

- 4.3 MCR Pathways:** Argyll and Bute Council's partnership with MCR Pathways has had an excellent start. With all three Pathways Co-ordinators well-established in their schools – Hermitage Academy, Dunoon Grammar School and Oban High School – the work of supporting our targeted young people has begun in earnest.

Over 100 mentors from our communities have already registered, with 25 now ready to match with young people and the remainder going through the training and PVG process. Thirty six young people and their families have been approached regarding mentoring, with six already matched to a mentor. The matching process, and the identification of further young people who will benefit from mentoring, is continuing.

Additionally, across the three schools, over 30 young people in S2 have been identified for the MCR Group Work Programme, which prepares young people for the mentoring experience in S3 and beyond.

- 4.4 'Skills Development Scotland/Scottish Government Annual Participation Measure 2022-2023:** At the end of August 2023, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) published the 2022-23 Annual Participation Measure (APM) for Scotland, including information relating to each local authority. The APM measures the number of 16-19 year-olds in Scotland in Education, training or employment over the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

Participation in Argyll and Bute has risen from 93.9% in 2021-22 to 95.6% in 2022-23, which places Argyll and Bute eighth for participation of all Scottish local authorities, and maintains our place in the top ten for the eighth year in succession.

The numbers of those not participating in Argyll and Bute has dropped from 3.8% to 3.0%, and the number of unconfirmed young people has also fallen, from 2.3% to 1.4%.

The above data points to an increasing number of young people in Argyll and Bute benefitting from education in our schools and at college and university, and achieving and sustaining positive destinations post-school.

4.5 Education – UHI Argyll Partnership: On 19th September 2023, the first annual face-to-face meeting of secondary school leaders and UHI Argyll took place at Inveraray Conference Centre. As a result of the meeting, and the ever-developing partnership between schools and UHI Argyll it represents, the scope and reach of the college's offer to young people in schools is increasing. As well as the offer of Higher National Certificates which can be studied wholly in the school setting, a 'hub' for the offer of Advanced Highers by UHI Argyll is being taken forward, as is the development of a range of skills and experience-building activities offered by the college to senior pupils both in June and throughout the year. Also planned are a range of workshops to prepare young people for the college courses they have chosen, and informative videos to form part of the options choice programme in schools.

These are just some examples of the way the proactive partnership between Education and UHI Argyll is broadening and enriching the Senior Phase Curriculum, offering increased variety and choice to ensure positive, sustained pathways for young people which allow them to achieve their full potential.

4.6 'The Exchange School Counselling Service: There has been an increased number of referrals to the school counselling service between July to September 2023. Referrals in secondary schools have more than doubled this quarter in comparison to the previous period, with the service now receiving referrals from 35 primary schools across the authority, and continue to reach rural schools, including on the Islands of Mull and Gigha.

Evaluation data has shown that 79% of secondary referrals felt less distressed at the end of counselling, and across primary referrals 81% of pupils were reporting an improvement, with 89% of parents reporting a similar picture.

4.7 'Seasons for Growth: Seasons for Growth is a peer education programme supporting children and young people who have experienced change, loss or bereavement. Seasons for Growth groups are delivered in schools by two specially trained 'companions'. The Educational Psychology Service has been leading the implementation and evaluation of Seasons for Growth since 2020.

Last year, the highest number of Seasons groups were run in Argyll and Bute with more than 60 children and young people participating. In September, we were able to train a further 11 companions who are based in education, social work and the third sector. Until recently most of the Seasons groups have been offered in the Helensburgh

and Lomond area but we were delighted to expand the offering of Seasons in Oban, Rothesay and Mid Argyll and for the first time we have trained companions in Mull.

We have committed to developing a sustainable approach by training a second Seasons for Growth trainer who is currently dedicating approximately 100 hours towards accreditation. Local evidence mirrors national data which demonstrate that children feel less isolated, are more able to understand and talk about emotions and have developed coping strategies to draw upon during adversity.

- 4.8 Addressing Non Attendance (ANA):** ANA is a significant strategic development arising as a result of a recognised need nationally, as well as locally. The aim is to implement a consistent approach to assessment, training and intervention for addressing non-attendance across Argyll and Bute establishments.

A revised guidance/framework for Monitoring and Maximising Attendance for all establishments has been written by the Maximising Attendance Strategy Group and this will be implemented this session.

The ANA training package was piloted in two of our ten secondary schools to pastoral staff and colleagues from health and social work in 2022-23. Pre and post training confidence questionnaires and evaluation data demonstrated positive impact in terms of improved staff knowledge and confidence in addressing non-attendance. Training has been delivered in a further two secondaries since August 2023 and is being evaluated. Work has started to identify the next cohort of schools with an aim to deliver training in January 2024. The team will continue to provide ongoing support with implementation and, where required, signposting/delivering further training to schools. A training webinar for primary schools will be developed this session with input from the Maximising Attendance Strategy Group.

- 4.9 Planet Youth:** The Planet Youth surveys have taken place across five of our secondary schools. The participating schools are Lochgilphead Joint Campus, Dunoon Grammar School, Oban High School, Rothesay Joint Campus and Tobermory High School. Unfortunately we have been unsuccessful in recruiting for a Lead Teacher for this work. We have been working with our colleagues in Public Health to fund an additional band 5 post to support this work. The post will be funded by the Scottish Government Grant Funding.

- 4.10 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):** The UNCRC group has been successful in securing grant funding from the CORRA Foundation Innovation Fund to take forward the promotion

of UNCRC across Argyll and Bute Council. The group has met and an action plan has been populated. A special thanks goes to Mandy Sheridan, HSCP, who led on the work, to our young people from Rights Respecting Schools who were involved in feeding into this process, and to staff for organising at such short notice. Information has been provided to the Communication and Engagement and Strategy Group.

Schools have been introducing the use of the Glasgow Wellbeing and Motivation Profile Tool (GWMPT) to help measure wellbeing within their settings. To help support the inclusion of this profiling tool across all our settings, we have translated this into Russian, Ukrainian, Arabic and Dari. Dunoon Grammar School have also translated the GWMPT into Gaelic. These were issued to schools in October.

4.11 Cabinet Secretary Visit: The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Jennifer Gilruth, visited Inveraray Primary School on 2nd October. The visit included a tour of the school led by pupils, including an opportunity to see learning and teaching in relation to literacy, numeracy, outdoor learning and STEM. Ms Gilruth also met with the Head Teacher, Sandra Clarke, as well as Jen Crocket, Wendy Brownlie and Rosie Mackay.

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Shirley-Anne Somerville, also met with MyTribe Champions from Lochgilphead Joint Campus. The pupils told the Cabinet Secretary about the period product initiative. They were supported by Head Teacher, Jay Helbert, Amy Bruce (Project Lead for Period Products) and Christine Boyle (Business Development Manager, Commercial Services).

4.12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths): Our new Primary Science Development Officer (PSDO), Paul Malcolm, has been working closely with primary schools to develop STEM.

He attended Lochgoilhead Primary for a whole day and modelled science enquiry approaches in the nursery, lower and upper school to teaching staff while working with all pupils. After this staff attended a CLPL (career Long Professional Learning) delving further into this approach and how it could be embedded in wider Inter Disciplinary Learning (IDL) context planning.

As a result of this Lochgoilhead will be piloting one of a series of STEM IDL context planners being designed, focussing on themes which connect to relevant contexts in Scotland. This will allow pupils to explore scientific enquiry and apply it through an engineering challenge which will be the culmination of the terms work. The context

also links to Learning for Sustainability themes such as outdoor learning, careers education and the Global Development Goals as well as providing rich links to the broader curriculum, especially literacy and numeracy.

The school has signed up for the Young STEM Leader Programme to develop pupil leadership within the school and opportunities for pupil led learning in STEM. The school has also decided to structure their development of a whole school approach to STEM by undertaking the STEM Nation Award.

Staff feedback was very positive:

“Very informative and practical. I am more confident with moving forward with STEM planning and the skills involved.”

“The topic planning across the school will be good for seeing progression and will help with transition information from ELC to P1”.

The PSDO and the Digital Hub also ran a whole school STEM day at Castlehill Primary. This incorporated pupil leadership of workshops and learning experiences. The PSDO attended Castlehill Primary on the day before the event and worked with Primary 7 pupils to develop science enquiry workshops based on the theme of STEM in motion.

On the STEM day the Digital Hub delivered workshops using Spheroes, exploring coding and also stop frame animation which were well received by pupils from across the school. Primary 7 delivered all of their workshops, to every other class across the school. There was a very clear impact both in the engagement of all pupils but also in how well Primary 7 pupils demonstrated confidence, knowledge and also an understanding of differentiation considering their use of language and approach to the different stages across the school.

The day was a great success with very positive feedback:

“The two days were excellent. The children learned so much both on an educational front and on a confidence building exercise. It was lovely watching children, who at the start wouldn't speak to them explaining to others and then finally using eye contact, explaining and questioning those that were at their station. A very worthwhile two days.”

As a result of their development work with the PSDO, the lead teacher has signed up to undertake Young STEM Leader training to embed

pupil leadership of STEM learning across the school as a sustainable practice.

4.13 Early Years and Childcare (ELC):

Tiree Primary ELC: The sun was most definitely shining over Tiree Primary ELC, during their recent visit from the Care Inspectorate, securing evaluations as follows-

- How good is our care, play and learning? 5 - Very Good
- How good is our setting? 5 - Very Good
- How good is our leadership? 5 - Very Good
- How good is our staff team? 5 - Very Good

Meadows Under Fives: Meadows Under 5's in Campbeltown have received a Scottish Enterprise Award 2023, 'Childcare and Education Centre of the Year, 2023' - Western Scotland. They were nominated for this by colleagues within Care Inspectorate. Well done!

Learning outdoors in Oban, Lorn and Isles: We are delighted to report completion of works to strengthen the settings' immediate environment for learning outdoors, within both Lochnell Primary ELC and Park Primary ELC.



'Play on Pedals': In an unprecedented step, 'Play on Pedals' have awarded Argyll and Bute the full grant to extend our programme of implementation into the Oban area, in recognition of the strength of the work across Mid Argyll, Kintyre and Islands.

This success has been realised as a consequence of wholehearted effort by Pamela Wilson, Early Years and Family Support Worker (EYFSW) who applied for additional funding. She will now influence at a distance as she supports colleague, Aileen Cameron, to build success within Oban area.

The aim of 'Play on Pedals' is to give every pre-school child the opportunity to learn to ride a bike before starting school.

Investing in Community: Aileen Cameron, Early Years and Family Support Worker, was invited along to one of the community groups in Oban that she has been supporting for an ELC information sharing session. The session was well attended and provides the opportunity to inform parents of what they are entitled to and how to prepare for upcoming events such as January registration week. The invitation has been further extended to a forthcoming date in January 2024.

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

5.1 Introduction: This month my focus will be on the recent flood events and their impact on Argyll and Bute and what needs to happen to promote and encourage a resilient and growing economy.

The strategic importance of the road network, into and across Argyll and Bute, was brought into stark focus during the floods of October. For a period, much of Argyll and Bute was separated from the rest of Scotland with no routes in.

The economic impact was considerable, affecting every business from local to strategic, including the Whisky industry. Indeed Argyll and Bute reverted to the isolation of the era pre construction of military roads and central control. The floods also shone a light on the needs of governments, both Holyrood and Westminster, regarding current and future investment needs for infrastructure to support our communities and economy.

Whatever the political complexions of the governments of Scotland they must focus on the strategic necessity of developing the resource rich potential of the Blue economy that exists in Argyll, off the coast and around the islands. The potential, here in Argyll and Bute, competes with many international locations but the luxury of time is not with us, while limitations of access compromise competitiveness in attracting investment.

Businesses require to make a return on their investment a large part of which will be the certainty of getting their goods to market. An effective road network will help deliver, in attracting business and it will likely help reduce insurance premiums. Not addressing these strategic issues will leave us stumbling on while investment will find more attractive locations. There is no time for debate or consultation the situation demands action to capitalise on the potential that exists now.

Roads are National and Council strategic assets used by the vast majority of residents in Argyll and Bute for everyday living and all manners of business; and are essential for economic success. While there will always be aspects which should and can be improved, the network in Argyll and Bute has been slowly improving over the last few years. Previous prudent investment resulted in a much improved network. However, recent events have reversed some of the good work and put repair beyond the resource capability of the council.

These events also shone a light on the vulnerabilities associated with strategic access to the region and as National strategic assets governments have a responsibility to step-up; indeed there is a commercial imperative in order to maximise the economic potential that exists.

- 5.2 Road Conditions:** More than 86% of Argyll and Bute's roads were, prior to recent floods, in a good or fair condition according to the most recent 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, was within the 'green' or 'good condition' band. This is a positive outcome based on the Council's investment over recent years.

However, without the damage from recent floods it would still have required in excess of £100m (in 2021 figures) to get us to 100%. As everyone, will appreciate this would not be possible within ever constrained budgets even prior to the floods.

The importance of an effective road network is obvious to all. 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.

As ever there is much good work underway in my policy area. However, given the enormity of the impact of the October rain event I have decided to focus this report on that event.

On Saturday 7th October there was an unprecedented weather event where around a month's worth of rain fell in a 36 hour period in a number of areas across Argyll and Bute. This rain fell onto already very wet, and in places saturated ground.

This rain event resulted in localised flooding, land slips, damage to bridges and roads across much of Argyll from Helensburgh in the East to Oban and Mull in the West.

Police Scotland declared a major event and issued 'do not travel' advice for our council area on the Saturday.

The situation was so extreme that for a short period all road routes into and out of Oban and Lorn, Mid Argyll and Kintyre, Bute and Cowal were closed together with severe disruption across the Clyde. Thanks to a multi-agency response and great community effort the majority of routes were very quickly reopened and work continues at pace at a few locations across our area.

Both the Trunk and Local road networks were affected with thousands of tonnes of 'debris flow' material being washed onto many of Argyll's roads, often in places where similar events had never been recorded. Whilst the flood water receded over several hours there was significant damage left to infrastructure across our area

Whilst the cost of the above is still being calculated as some works continue the overall cost is expected to run into several millions. In the current climate of constrained budgets these are amounts this council will find, with reducing budgets and increasing demands, impossible to find. There needs to be recognition and proportionate funding made available from Governments to ensure that key infrastructure repairs are fully funded.

Indeed I would argue the importance of the access network to Argyll and Bute is of strategic economic importance to the economies of both Holyrood and Westminster now and most importantly for realising future economic development potential.

The Positive: There has been a fantastic multiagency response, along with huge support from many communities both during the event and in the subsequent recovery phase. The great communications and twice daily service disruption briefings together with the amount of progress made is truly fantastic given the scale and magnitude of the problem.

The service along with the support from communities must be commended and I personally thank all for their contributions and commitment.

This rain event should be a wakeup call in terms of the likely future impact resulting in a growing trend for extreme weather events linked to climate change.

A safe and reliable transport network provides the most significant economic enabler there is. Without reliable and resilient transport

networks the economy will be severally compromised. Numerous historic weather events and particularly this most recent flooding shows just how fragile and vulnerable our transport network can be across all of the UK. Whilst we see improvements to the Road Condition Index through forward thinking and investments made by Council the recent weather event shows that it is not just the road surface which needs investment but also our bridges, structures, flood prevention, costal protection, drainage systems all need significant investment in order to make these key infrastructure networks climate resilient.

Going forward there needs to be major investment to our infrastructure. Without this Argyll and Bute will not be able to meet the increasing attrition brought about by more severe weather and vehicles many, many, times larger than most of our infrastructure was ever built (or even evolved) to carry.

5.3 Greater involvement - Roads Reconstruction: The Environment, Development and Infrastructure committee on 1st June endorsed proposals for additional member and Area Committee engagement for the development of the annual roads capital programme. This will create better focus on priorities and potentially have a positive impact on time and resources. The intention is to engender a more effective collaboration between members and the Service with the objective of enabling us to be focussed on priorities and do more for less and in timely manner. I remind again on the considerable shortfall that does exist across Argyll and Bute to get all roads to A1 condition; and stress this greater engagement must not be seen, or driven, to be an area competition. The final say will always be based on facts such as; safety, economic benefit and in the end engineering / resource realities; and for the benefit of all Argyll and Bute as a whole. While the recent flooding has put this back we will still move forward; although as a result of events the commercial challenges are now even greater.

Indeed recent events have stressed the budgetary challenges and the absolute need for an Argyll and Bute strategic focus.

5.4 New vehicles procured from additional funds following Budget Meeting: I am pleased to note that a low mileage, ex-demonstrator jetpatcher has been secured and will be delivered in the coming weeks. Additional operator training has been taking place to increase the number of users that our Operations Team will have. Having seen the jetpatcher in use I can attest to its effectiveness. This technique helps to provide proportionate repairs not only filling any defects but also sealing hairline cracks and other voids which, if not treated, would lead to further deterioration of our road network.

Our teams are also in the process of procuring a road marking machine. Unfortunately they have not been able to find a suitable vehicle already built so this will take longer for the vehicle to be delivered due to its specialist nature and build time. However, when achieved this vehicle will add value to operations and possibly provided a revenue earner.

5.5 Route Optimisation: As reported to the June Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, the Council now has a supplier in place to provide route optimisation software. Whilst the first project to be rolled out is to be around waste collection which sits within the portfolio of the Policy Lead for Climate Change and Environment, there will be a number of opportunities which will be explored across the Roads and Transport portfolio where there are many cyclic activities that have the potential to benefit from this type of system. Having had a short demo of the system I can attest to its potential and look forward to further demonstrations and operational deployment.

5.6 Oban Municipal Harbour Authority: The Council's plans for establishing a Municipal Harbour Authority in Oban are continuing to move forward albeit, (outside our control) slower than we would like. 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. It is likely that a special Harbour board will be convened in December.

While there are differences of opinion as to some of the operational detail there is expressed, and 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.

5.7 Marine Issues:

Port Marine Safety Code: the Council remains on course to achieve this 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.

Kilcreggan Upgrade: we visited Kilcreggan Community Council in June, to brief and engage more fully with residents and local members on the ferry replacement / infrastructure proposal as there had clearly been some confusion as to intentions and indeed the Council’s role. As has been the case throughout the objective is, and will remain, to improve the reliability and resilience of the ferry service between the village, the wider community and Gourock. This is within the constraints under which we must operate.

After a frank and constructive discussion I believe we have an opportunity to more fully engage with the community and that when confirmation of ferries is achieved. The community have done considerable work in outlining an holistic vision on how to improve the attraction, facilities and economic future of Kilcreggan. Part of this vision is reliable ferry services that will better enable developments in tourism and improved access for locals.

Transport Scotland is (hopefully) close to confirming the designs for new passenger ferries coming into operation on the Gourock, Dunoon and Kilcreggan routes.

I am confident, once it is clear on vessel design that, working with the community the service can deliver a solution that is sympathetic to Community vision with our objectives aligned. A solution that will enable berthing in more difficult conditions provide greater resilience, contribute to economic benefit and enhance local communications.

5.8 The Island of Luing: For some considerable time there have been issues raised by the community in relation to school transportation. These were raised and led by Councillor Mackenzie along with other ward Councillors. Behind the Scenes Both Roads and Education Service officers have been working towards addressing community concerns. This was with the backdrop of an already legal and

compliant service; and limited resources. It was also a desire to look to a solution that would help address more strategic Island and community issues. In June Officers and members met with the community on Luing and the basis of what could be an elegant solution for school transport and greater community flexibility was agreed in principle. The community sent their proposals, as suggested, to the Head of Roads and Transport who coordinated with Education Service as to how to achieve delivery. Despite some initial confusion I believe we are working towards effectively addressing issues within the constraints of budgets. We will continue discussions on supporting sustainable economic development on Luing.

- 5.9 Rest and Be Thankful:** While the announcement by Scottish Government earlier this year for permanent works to be progressed at the Rest and Be Thankful A83 are very welcome, it is now evident that more will need to be done. As part of the October rain event several apparently 'new' land slips occurred. In addition to material flowing into the catch pits and bunds already constructed at the R&BT and along the A83 it is understood that several thousand tonnes of material blocked parts of the A83 between the R&BT and Cairndow with these sections of road remaining closed along with the northern section of the A815 (council road) whilst a co-ordinated clean up took place. It is clear that significant additional mitigation works over and above those proposed at the R&BT are very much necessary to enable reliable and safe life line routed into and out of Argyll and Bute can be maintained.

I would ask that all councillors who have previously lobbied on the Rest and be Thankful continue to support this.

- 5.10 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.

My view is that some of the outcomes if progressed, as suggested, will have unintended, negative and potentially damaging consequences. We will be seeking further discussions with both Transport Scotland and the Transport Minister of Scottish Government, as soon as possible, to both express our major concerns about the review and to seek further clarification on issues of a strategic nature impacting Argyll and Bute.

Indeed recent events demand a more realistic approach towards the strategic links to access Argyll and Bute and its island communities.

- 5.11 Flood Prevention:** It is great to see the Campbeltown Flood Prevention Scheme nearing completion. 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. This is an impressive project with a professional construction company. We have other areas of potential flooding needing attention and resource commitment.
- 5.12 Future:** The challenges facing Argyll and Bute for the future have grown significantly since the 7th October. Indeed events have highlighted the isolation of Argyll and Bute and the historic economic ineptitude of governments. Communications routes first constructed to give central government 'military' access to the peoples of the highlands and islands in the 18th century, for the purpose of control have seen little development since. Whether by policy design, neglect or just old fashioned incompetence, the resulting failure to develop communications links continues applying unwarranted pressure on inhabitants while hugely limiting the economic contribution of Argyll and Bute to the economies of Scotland and the UK.

We haven't got ten years to repair strategic infrastructure; the world will not wait 'sympathetically' until we get our acts together. We need to address our failings head on and look abroad as to how others build and develop; the engineering skills developed in Scotland and adopted by many overseas are no longer easily available here. There must be an acknowledgement that many well-intentioned projects have more to do with vanity and idealism than with economic development. If we do not collectively wake up and smell the coffee we can forget contributing to net zero as we will condemn ourselves to achieving only 'economic zero'.

Addressing these issues is beyond politics, it's about economic development and future prosperity; we can't wish away decline because it is somehow unfair nor can we isolate ourselves from the realities of the global economic system.

6. **POLICY LEAD FOR CARE SERVICES – Councillor Amanda Hampsey**

- 6.1 **Severe weather incident:** An Amber weather warning was received across parts of Scotland on Friday 6th October which had a significant impact across our communities and with potential to impact on access to health and social care.

Working with public sector and volunteer partners as part of the Local Resilience Partnership, led by Police Scotland and with communities the Integration Joint Board through the HSCP delivered the Caring for People response. Thanks are offered to the multi-agency staff, volunteers and community members who participated to keep communities safe over the weekend while dealing with significant impacts to service delivery.

The HSCP is now participating in the council-led recovery process and looking forward to developing the response in future through the lessons learned.

- 6.2 **The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:** The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children is a legally mandated scheme designed by the UK Home Office. Argyll and Bute as a Local Authority are required to take 0.1% of our children's population. Locally this equates to 14 young people under the age of 18 years old. When a young person within this scheme reaches 18 years old they no longer count as part of our quota of 14 young people, although we continue to have responsibilities towards them through Scottish child care law. Home Office financial support drops significantly once a young person reaches 18 years old.

The combined work of Council staff, HSCP services and our housing providers has allowed us to meet this need for the moment - however reflecting the experience of other local authority areas such as Glasgow, current resources are not adequate to sustain the level of demand being experienced at the moment.

Officers are aware of these risks and are working to ensure we have in place organisational structures to co-ordinate our response. A further briefing will be provided for subsequent meetings.

6.3 National Recruitment of Social Workers: Research has been published which indicates a national shortage of social workers throughout Scotland. The SSSC published their findings on 31st October 2023.

[New report shows most Scottish local authorities find it difficult to recruit social workers \(sssc.uk.com\)](https://www.sssc.uk.com)

(note the Argyll and Bute figures have not been included in this report, however this is due to issues within the Scottish Social Services Council. This will be rectified and the report republished.)

The report considers pay, conditions and remote working which combine with a complexity of other factors leading to this situation. At a local authority level certain areas and particular specialisms are under particular pressure. It is harder to recruit into our remote and island areas. Equally disparity in salary creates a competitive market causing frequent movement and can cause a strain in retention in our further east areas.

Work is being undertaken by Scottish Government and with other parties such as COSLA and Social Work Scotland on the potential formation of a National Social Work Agency. Indications are that the NSWA will be included within the National Care Service Bill. Once this work begins to crystallise into a firm proposal elected members will be given a fuller briefing.

6.4 Vaccinations and community treatment services:



The Autumn/Winter campaign is under way after a successful 're-phasing' ask from Scottish Government (SG), with 41% delivery rate which is ahead of trajectory at this point in the campaign. All care homes have been completed.

Successful transfer of all adult immunisations across mainland practices has been achieved.

We have been working with the NHH web team to 'map' all active clinic locations, so it is much clearer that we have appointments close to everyone.

Community and Treatment care services are now delivering approximately 75% of required capacity. We are working with the Scottish Government to bid for funding to extend this. Premises remains a risk across Argyll and Bute due to increased demand on GP surgery and hospital clinical space.

6.5 Dental: Recruitment and redesign have secured further provision of the Campbeltown outreach (i.e. student teaching) centre. This is a big success.

There are continued pressures on dental access owing to changes in the general dental sector. A new contractual framework has been announced, with a national publicity campaign to follow.

We are continuing to monitor pressures on the Public Dental Service in Dunoon given the increase in unregistered emergencies.

A new contractual structure has been agreed with dentists, which also impacts upon the charges which patients may be asked to pay as part of their treatment.

The clearest information on this is on the NHS inform website, link below- <https://nhsinform.scot/dentist>. There is information here on registering with a dentist, understanding your dental treatment, dental treatment costs and complaints process.

- 6.6 General Medical Practice:** All practices are at Level 1 of the escalation framework, operating normally. Two practices have closed lists. Four practices are operating under 2C arrangements (directly managed). Improvement works are ongoing in all four. There are some regular contingencies in all four practices owing to the supply of GP locums.
- 6.7 Sexual Health:** A risk around sexual health service provision has now been realised, in that there is no specialist sexual health service in Helensburgh. A paper has been escalated through the Senior Leadership Team and clinical governance, with a board-board conversation requested between NHS Highland and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to recover this situation. Local discussions are underway around risk mitigation.
- 6.8 Locality Planning:** The IJB Locality Planning Groups (LPGs) have proposed local 12-month plans to the Strategic Planning Group. This is based on locally volunteered priorities and actions which are in line with the main strategic plan. These were supported pending completion to allow for the key actions to progress.

Preparation for the next Strategic Plan will commence in January 2024 with the intention that the LPGs will participate in the three-year planning cycle which will aim to support longer term goals which will continue to develop the coproduction approach.

Meetings of the Integration Joint Board can be found at the following link.

[Argyll and Bute HSCP Integration Joint Board \(IJB\) - Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk)

- 6.9 Winter Planning:** Winter Planning is traditionally undertaken to reflect changes in demand between the months of October and March. A systems impact approach is undertaken in Argyll and Bute and we work with partners to ensure that we have a broad spectrum of service and response resilience.

The Scottish Government this year provided a winter checklist and sought a response from each area on levels of preparedness.

Structures are in place via planning and performance to ensure that HSCP collaborates with all partner organisations, including in Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Care at Home and Care Home Assurance functions are in place on a multi-disciplinary team basis with clear escalations and management of risk.

Daily Huddle meetings will take place at system level and can be adjusted in line with demand. Any escalations relating to workforce/capacity are logged, directed, and managed via that process. Once a week, System Pressures Oversight Group (and by way of this, direct access to SLT) is in place. Heads of Service and Professional Leaders from across the HSCP are attendees. These will link very closely with acute/hospital based ward rounds/virtual wards to ensure flow is maximised and maintained, with appropriate escalation management where required.

In terms of communication, Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Winter Planning communications include working closely with partners, stakeholders, third-sector organisations, and staff members to ensure all our networks will be well-informed and engaged. A range of proactive communications activities is utilised to ensure our networks and communities across Argyll and Bute are well informed. These include social media platforms, media outlets, stakeholder briefings to elected members and key partners; and regular public health messages and public information communicated through appropriate external and internal communication channels and systems.

Business Continuity Plans are in place across areas and services. A piece of work is underway to ensure that these are updated, visible and practicable. This work is due to be finalised by the HSCP in the coming weeks. Links with the Local Resilience Partnership is clear.

6.10 Mental Health and Psychological Therapies development:

Reflective of the national shortage of Registered Mental Health Nurses, recruitment remains a challenge - however some headway has been made by the recruitment of three new nursing staff for the inpatient service. A new induction handbook has been developed by the Associate Lead Nurse for Mental Health to support our new employees. The ward continues to facilitate student nurse placements and recruitment is ongoing. We are currently working with North Highland on international recruitment and four international recruits have been identified to come to work in Succoth Ward on their arrival in the UK.

Core mental health standards for secondary care were launched in September 2023 and these will underpin both our inpatient and community services moving forward.

We have now appointed a new Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Lead for Psychological Therapies. This person will take up post early in 2024 and will lead on scoping and developing a sustainable model to deliver the standards set out within the revised national matrix across Argyll and Bute.

6.11 Adult Support and Protection (ASP): The Scottish Government published an [updated code of practice](#) in July 2022. In response to this, the West of Scotland ASP procedures have been updated and Argyll and Bute's Professional Lead for ASP is currently in the process of updating our local procedures to reflect both these documents.

The Care Inspectorate has indicated that they intend to facilitate some "light touch" ASP inspections early in 2024 and we are in the process of reviewing our ASP action plan in preparation for this.

6.12 Learning Disability and Neurodiversity: The first iteration of Argyll and Bute's Dynamic Support Register was submitted to Scottish Government on 11th October 2023. This is in line with the recommendations from the [Coming Home Implementation Report](#).

In February 2021, the Scottish Government allocated a £20 million Community Living Change Fund to Integration Authorities via NHS Boards to:

- Reduce the delayed discharges of people with complex needs.
- Repatriate those people inappropriately placed outside of Scotland.
- Redesign the way services are provided for people with complex needs.

To effectively deliver this we will be working with third sector colleagues to commission services and delivering staff training to increase capacity.

There is an emerging trend nationally within Boards and Authorities to develop a Neurodevelopmental Pathway which is a specialist service responsible for the assessment of neurodevelopmental conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in adults.

A Programme Manager has been in post now since August 2023. He has made significant headway in terms of scoping, meeting with key stakeholders and the development of a project plan.

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

7.1 Introduction: Since my September report I have chaired PPSL meetings and civic government hearings on the 20th September and 18th October, and a Local Review Body on 30th October. Additionally I have attended COSLA Culture Convenors Meeting on 21st September, COSLA Justice Convenors Meeting on 8th October, and an information session on Firework Control Zones organised by COSLA on the 26th September. I was present for the COSLA Community Wellbeing Board on 20th October where agenda items included; Near Me video conferencing to support social justice work in prisons, Illegal Money Lending, and an integration strategy for refugees arriving in Scotland.

7.2 Development Management: With the Validation Team now meeting the target of five days, work has commenced on scoping the ability to utilise capacity within this team to provide support for officers determining applications. Difficulties are continuing in recruitment, and there remain vacant positions, with major applications particularly affected. Agency cover is being utilised where possible, although this is often not continuous.

Through ongoing efforts to improve processing FQ2 saw determinations match the volume of submitted applications, however there remains a substantial backlog which will require additional resources to reduce significantly.

A consultation is underway around pre-application advice seeking feedback from customers around content, format and cost.

An audit on efficiency of processes and improving customer communication is being conducted which will be reported to Audit and Scrutiny in December 2023.

7.3 Development Policy: Following approval by council of the revised Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) and submission to Scottish Ministers, this is due to be adopted on 20th November. Technical guidance is being produced to support the plan, with the first of these on sustainability, sustainable buildings, and simplified landscape and visual impact assessments having already been approved by committee.

7.4 Building Standards: Building warrant income remains on target for 23/24 although commercial work for other authorities has been decreasing. Performance targets for July to September were all met, with 99.23% of requests for building warrants responded to within 20 days and 97.32% issued within six days, and completion certificates being issued on average in two days. Therefore 100% of users are either satisfied or very satisfied.

The White Hart Hotel in Campbeltown has also been subject to a Dangerous Buildings Notice with good progress being made by the owners to carry out repairs to the property.

7.5 Regulatory Services: The Food Control Law Enforcement Plan was approved by committee on 18th October 2023. Whilst there is insufficient resources to deliver the Food Law Code of Practice, the plan effectively deploys our available resource targeted at high-risk priorities including the approved (export) sector.

With a UK outbreak of Listeriosis, work is underway to assess issues and risks in fish smokeries within Argyll and Bute.

The migratory bird season leads to increased risk of avian influenza, and there have been outbreaks in the north of Scotland. Updates have been given to poultry keepers to ensure enhanced biosecurity measures to protect their flocks, and there remain no reported cases or outbreaks in commercial or domestic poultry flocks in Argyll and Bute.

Environmental Health issued communications following a diesel spill from a private vessel at Rosneath Bay, which was contained using booms by the Royal Navy and subsequently dispersed naturally.

The annual Local Air Quality report has again confirmed that this is good in Argyll and Bute.

7.6 Short-Term Lets: A total of 3,201 applications for Short Term lets licences were received by the deadline of 1st October compared to a forecast of 3,500. Over 200 have been issued so far, with processing of these continuing. Applications for new premises, where a license is required prior to trading, are being prioritised, and staffing levels are under review with the aim of increasing throughput.

As previously reported, the decision on whether to introduce control areas for short term lets within the Argyll and Bute Planning Authority Area will be evidence-based. With this data beginning to be available, and recognising the declaration of a housing emergency for Argyll and

Bute made earlier this year, work is now progressing on this matter. Further information will be brought before members in due course on this prior to any decision being taken.

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

- 8.1 Tackling Climate Change:** Argyll and Bute Council has installed solar panels at a number of its sites and offices as part of its ongoing commitment to tackle climate change and become a net zero organisation, saving £150,000 in electricity costs each year.



Funded by the Scottish Government's 'Non-Domestic Energy Efficiency Framework (NDEEF)', the council has installed roof-mounted solar panels at Graham Williamson IT Centre in Helensburgh; the Blackhill Roads Depot in Helensburgh; Rothesay Swimming Pool; Kintyre House in Campbeltown; and Lochgilphead Learning Resource Centre.

Plans are also underway for roof-mounted solar panels at Cardross Primary School. However, the largest of the projects to date has been the installation of 100 freestanding solar panels at the council headquarters in Lochgilphead. These panels produce 45,000kWh of electricity per year, saving the council £9,800 alone in electricity costs per year at the current electricity rate.

In addition to those funded through NDEEF, the Council has also installed solar roof panels at Rothesay Joint Campus; Hermitage Academy; Tobermory High School; Islay High School; Hermitage

Primary; Parklands School; Tarbert Academy; Dunoon Grammar School; Inveraray Primary School; Lochgilphead Joint Campus; Taynuilt Primary; Park Primary; and Oban Joint Campus.

The Council is committed to doing everything it can to reduce carbon emissions in Argyll and Bute. Installing solar panels at our premises is not only helping to reduce our carbon footprint, but it is also helping us to achieve energy savings and cut electricity costs.

As a Council, we are taking action to create a climate-friendly Argyll and Bute, to develop sustainable ways of working and living, and to become a net zero carbon emissions organisation by 2045.

8.2 Reducing emissions and driving forward change: The Council's Climate Change Board provided an update to the Policy and Resources Committee on some of the recent activity aimed at ensuring Argyll and Bute meets its Net Zero targets.

A variety of projects and initiatives are under way, all of which are aiding the drive to reduce emissions. These include:-

- 281 homes have been insulated across Argyll and Bute as part of the Scottish Government's Energy Efficient Scotland Scheme, contributing to a reduction in harmful carbon emissions and reducing fuel costs for householders.
- A joint project between the council and Argyll Community Housing Association (ACHA) has delivered a programme of insulation works on properties in Tarbert, Bute, and Cowal, using Scottish Government funded grants of £722,000.
- A new 50kW Solar PV ground array system at the council's headquarters at Kilmory Castle is now online and generating energy.
- Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust (ACT) is hosting a Climate Change Manager on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership. Andy Macpherson started in post on 30th October, and will be responsible for leading the delivery of a new regional Argyll and Bute Climate Action Plan.
- ACT is also working with partners to submit a proposal to the Scottish Government to host a new Argyll Climate Action Hub.
- The Council's 'Green Summer' campaign promoted a range of initiatives including a school uniform recycling scheme, plastic-free picnics, International Plastic Free Bag Day, shop local, reduce fast fashion, active travel maps, National Marine Week and World Conservation Day.



As part of the Council's overall climate change strategy, its Decarbonisation Plan sets a three-year framework for the area's climate journey and route map to Net Zero. The plan highlights the council's clear commitment to be a Net Zero organisation by 2045 – full details are available on the [council website](#).

You can read the full report presented, here:

[CLIMATE CHANGE DECARBONISATION.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

8.3 Waste Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs): In my last Policy Lead Report, I made mention of Persistent Organic Pollutants, also known as POPs. We are all sure to have POPs in our households – POPs are generally found in items such as sofas and mattresses, etc.

SEPA have been working closely with local authorities and waste operators over the course of the last year to highlight the emerging concerns and to seek feedback on their developing guidance on how these Waste Upholstered Domestic Seating (WUDS) should be managed. Regulations are very clear that this waste must be managed in such a way as to destroy or irreversibly transform the POPs content, and this means that the landfilling of WUDS must stop and this type of waste must instead be sent for incineration. My understanding is that the draft guidance will make clear, at the point at which an item of upholstered domestic seating becomes waste (WUDS), it is an offence for it (or any waste arising from its treatment) to be disposed of by landfilling, or in any other way that is not one of the appropriated disposal routes.

The Council have been advised, following confirmation from SEPA in October 2023 that SEPA's intention is to publish their guidance on POPs on 31st October 2023 – officers are preparing a report to the November 2023 Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee on waste, which will include an update on POPs, with a copy of this guidance once it has been published.

SEPA have confirmed that they will also publish information which clearly signposts the regulatory support available to enable operators who currently have a waste management authorisation to continue to store and treat WUDS containing POPs whilst working towards full compliance with the requirements outlined in the guidance document.

8.4 Play Park Funding: Communities across Argyll and Bute have provided the Council with feedback on their local play parks following a recent survey. More than 1,000 adults and 400 young people took part in the Council consultation, which invited play park users,

Community Councils, Disability Forums and pupils to consider priorities for their local park.

The consultation followed the award of Scottish Government funding of £938,000 for play park renewal, which the Council will allocate to 28 play parks in the area: 11 in Helensburgh and Lomond; 11 in Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the islands; five in Bute and Cowal; and one in Oban, Lorn and the Isles.

Once the Council has fully reviewed the results of the consultation, a report will go to each Area Committee to agree the priorities for each play park in their area. On top of presenting information to each Area Committee for decision, officers have commenced Area Business Days to provide Elected Members with details, which will inform the information presented to the Area Committee Meetings in December.

The Council are committed to providing a safe, fun and high-quality environment and experience for children and young people across the area's play parks.

The excellent response from our communities to the consultation demonstrates the high value which local people place on these and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to let us know their thoughts. We look forward to reviewing all the responses and further enhancing the facilities on offer.

8.5 Recycling Infrastructure Fund: I was delighted to hear that the Council submitted an application to the Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF) which is managed by Zero Waste Scotland and in October were advised that they had successfully secured funding, totalling £891,945.12.

In summary, the application was for funding from the Recycling Improvement Fund to support improvements to recycling infrastructure at six Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) on the islands and the Helensburgh and Lomond area of the Argyll and Bute Council area. The improvements will increase the quality and quantity of recycle material captured by the Council and provide further re-use opportunities for items deposited at these sites – well done to everyone involved in securing this substantial amount of monies.

8.6 Other works: There are a number of works ongoing within the Service, which I also wanted to highlight, such as:-

- Grass cutting – grass cutting for the season ceased at the end of October, and I wanted to pay my thanks to staff for their efforts in keeping our area looking great this year;
- Burials/Crematorium – the number of burials and cremations remain manageable, with numbers in line with seasonal averages. Crematorium Superintendent and Operators posts were vacant and I was delighted to hear that these have now been filled;
- Bin collections – following the weather incidents in early October, operatives have tried their best to deliver to schedule, while managing other conflicting demands which arose from the recovery from the weather incident. You can check on any service disruption to your bin collections on the Council's website here [Rubbish and recycling | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](http://Rubbish and recycling | Argyll and Bute Council (argyll-bute.gov.uk))

I would also want to put on record my thanks to all staff for their efforts following the weather incident and the recovery process which is underway – there is a lot of hard work going on, a lot that is often unseen – well done to everyone involved.

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

9.1 Support for businesses during the recovery from weather incident: Officers have been in touch with local businesses to share information following the impacts of extreme weather events which are affecting communities across Argyll and Bute, and Scotland as a whole.

Businesses were offered advice and information through our Business Gateway service. Business Gateway can provide one-to-one support from a business adviser and can link business owners to an expert help adviser for support with particular aspects such as marketing, to help business recovery. Their support is free of charge and is open to every business owner to contact them on 01546 604555 or email business.gateway@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Updates on progress concerning the reinstatement of our transport infrastructure can be found on our website at www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/weather-recovery

I would want to express my sincerest thanks to all of the officers involved in the recovery works, there have been a lot of well-deserved positive comments on social media regarding staff and their efforts – well done.

Helping local businesses to thrive with free events: Entrepreneurs and people in business across Argyll and Bute are being offered the chance to attend a free event designed to help them expand their business activity.

Argyll and Bute Council's Business Gateway and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) are jointly hosting a series of 'Thrive and Transform' events, designed to help local businesses expand their activity.

The series kicked off in Dunoon on 20th September, with 30 attendees. Sessions were also held in Tobermory on 4th October and Oban on 26th October with further sessions (at the time of writing) scheduled for Helensburgh on 2nd November, Campbeltown 29th November and Lochgilphead 7th February. There will also be a virtual event on 24th January 2024 for anyone unable to get to an event in person.

Local businesses are integral to Argyll and Bute's long-term economic success. We know that the last couple of years have been incredibly challenging for many business owners. The Thrive and Transform series is a great opportunity to network and hear from industry experts on the range of support available

Plenty of support can be provided virtually but these events are a great excuse to get together and meet face to share ideas and best practice.

The events start with networking, followed by short presentations from Business Gateway and HIE on the different types of support each organisation can offer.

Each event will also include a selection of expert partners able to offer advice on reducing costs, minimising waste and optimising operational efficiencies in a business.

Full details and registration are available online at www.ticketsource.co.uk/unlockyourbusinesspotential

UK Shared Prosperity Fund – business support: Promotional activity via email, social media and press releases is now generating increased activity - 27 applications have been received to date.

For the small business development grant, nine applications have been approved, four are in progress and one rejected as ineligible. For the start-up grant, one application has been approved, three are in progress and three rejected as ineligible. One Trade Fair, Training or Accreditation grant has been approved and one other is in progress. One expert help session has been approved.

9.2 Islands Issues:

Argyll Islands Sounding Board: At the August EDI committee it was agreed that the Council's formal response to the National Islands Plan (NIP) consultation be prepared and shared with members of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board for their views and input, prior to the final response being submitted. The original closing date was 9th October; however, the Scottish Government advised local authorities on 20th September 2023 of an extension to the response deadline to 7th November.

The Argyll Islands Sounding Board met on 19th October 2023, to discuss the consultation response to the Scottish Government's National Islands Plan Review and a response for submission is in hand.

Islands Programme (IP) 2023/2024: The Council submitted two applications to the IP 2023/24 and successfully secured funding for both projects. £700,000 has been awarded to Tobermory Worker Accommodation project, as part of the Rural Growth Deal, and £450,000 awarded to the HSCP for the Tiree Community Care Hub project.

The formal contracts from the Scottish Government have been received, signed and returned and procurement work is now underway.

9.3 Regeneration activity:

Tarbert Heritage Regeneration Scheme: An Area Partnership Group has been formed and all contracts have been signed. The Project Officer is currently working with National Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Environment Scotland to get the briefs for the Architects and Community Engagement out on Public Contracts Scotland (the portal for tenders in the public sector). An office in Tarbert has been sourced for the Project Officer in Tarbert Library for three days a week. This started from Monday 2nd October and will allow the project to move forward substantially having a base in the town.

Rothesay Townscape Heritage (TH): Rothesay TH is now expected to complete by the end of 2023 due to delays with contracts for completion of the last remaining projects. 69-72 Victoria Street is the last remaining priority building with the shopfront on ground floor being the last shopfront restoration project. There has been a great social media response to the completion of 1 Tower Street, with many members of the public commenting on the improvement it makes to the seafront.

Lochgilphead Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme: Lochgilphead CARS is a £2m programme in its fourth year – due to end March 2026. Two priority buildings have works under way on site. The remaining two priority buildings are scheduled to start in spring 2024. A repair project is underway on Lochnell Street with a number of other projects in the development phase. A Tenement Maintenance and Retrofit event took place in September which seventeen people attended.

Film and TV production in Argyll: The number of film enquiries and productions filming in the area has been a steady stream. There has been one large scale Netflix production in the area and another medium sized production based outside Oban for six weeks.

For more information on filming in Argyll and Bute, please have a look at the dedicated Film in Argyll website - [Whats New | Film in Argyll | Filming in Scotland](#)

9.4 Employability:

Fair Start Scotland - 16 to 67 year olds: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/jobs-and-training/helping-people-work>

Ten additional starts have signed up to Fair Start Scotland, bringing the total to 397 participants since the service commenced (73 Helensburgh, 95 Campbeltown, 48 Rothesay, 77 Dunoon and 104 Oban). Key Workers have supported 148 people into work.

PeoplePlus continues to set targets. Referral numbers from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have picked up slightly following attendance by our keyworkers at recent 50 years plus events.

The Scottish Government has granted a one year extension to allow referrals to be received up to 31st March 2024.

Officers continue to complete the Marketing Action Plan detailing the activity carried out to promote the service.

No One Left Behind (NOLB) - Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) 25+ Years : Applications have now ceased utilising 22/23 funding. This funding allowed unemployed people aged 25+ years the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

Seven employers recruited nine employees - of these, five employees have reached the end of their subsidised period/left early; one has been retained in employment with the employer accessing the subsidy; two have moved into self-employment; one has secured alternative employment with an employer and one has moved to London to be closer to family.

Parental Employability Support Fund (PESF) - Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) 16 to 67 Years: https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/sites/default/files/migrated_files/participant_leaflet_pesf_eri_22.23.pdf

Applications continue to be accepted in respect of the ERIs of up to £6,000 per person. This allows unemployed parents aged 16 to 67 years the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

Parental Welfare Fund: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/jobs-and-training/helping-people-work>

This fund is aimed at parents receiving support through the PESF (see above) who successfully secure employment. It helps with the transition to work and can alleviate any worries.

Up to £1,000 is claimable and paid in three instalments over the first 13 weeks of employment. This fund will help with the transition to work and can alleviate any worries around costs of work wear, travel to work, etc, helping to balance between receiving salary and Universal Credit payments.

The Young Person's Guarantee - 16-24 year olds: The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) has now ceased as the 23/24 All Age Employability Service will now support people ages 16 to 67 years.

Employer Recruitment Incentives (ERIs) are still available to employers under the YPG general revenue grant. Employers can apply for grants of up to £6,000 per participant. This will allow a total of 90 unemployed young people the opportunity to move into permanent or a fixed term employment contracts of up to 18 months or more.

To date 86 young people have commenced an ERI. Of these 62 have now completed or left early; 38 remain employed with the same employer; six are employed with a different employer; four are in further education; five are not in education or employment and nine are whereabouts unknown

NOLB All Age Service and Child Poverty 2023/24: Local authorities received their grant offer letters on 30th May this year from the Scottish Government in respect of funding from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

A grant allocation of £443,000 is available to fund delivery and staff costs for pre-employment All Age Employability Support. A further allocation of £543,000 is available to help fund the tackling of child poverty. All monies are subject to a hard stop spend at 31st March 2024.

At the Scottish Government's request an Annual Investment Plan has been created. The Argyll and Bute Employability Partnership (ABEP) endorsed this plan on 5th July 2023. The plan details all delivery by the Employability Team and Third Sector Partners.

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) are in place with two Third Sector partners InspirAlba and WorkingRite. InspirAlba, the consortium lead, along with their partners will deliver pre-employment support across the whole of Argyll and Bute. A total of 110 participants will be supported including 20 work taster placements and four work placements. WorkingRite will also deliver 25 pre-employment places in Mid Argyll, Lorn and the Isles.

In respect of child poverty, InspirAlba will deliver support to 140 parents; 110 of which will access specialist support with Bute Advice and Alienergy. There will also be four opportunities for interested parents to be fully supported to set up their own childminding business. This intervention will help tackle the shortage of available childcare in the area. A further 24 parents will be involved in budget cooking where they not only gain budgeting skills but also coaching and accredited training in the food and drink industry. Completion of the course will allow parents to be best placed to secure employment in the hospitality sector.

An additional letter in respect of £213,000 general revenue grant (GRG) monies to fund Child Poverty staff costs was received on 12th July 2023. These monies will be paid in March 2024 and are permitted to be accrued to 2024/25.

As well as the overall management of partner delivery, the Employability Team continues to deliver support to low income employed parents and unemployed parents. We will also shortly be advertising work.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund: We are offering work placement and training interventions. There are 29 opportunities available in 2023/24. Eighteen unemployed people have commenced a work placement paying the Real Living Wage. A further five employers have shown interest and may have potential starts.

Interest in the training intervention has picked up. Eight participants have had their funding application approved and seven are pending.

Fifteen of the interventions have now started delivery. The remaining four expect to start delivery before the end of the year.

The Multiply programme has been tendered, and the contact will be awarded in October.

Approval has been granted for underspends from 2022/23 to be carried forward into 2023/24. Payment of the 2023/24 allocation is expected to be received in October.

9.5 Digital/R100:

In terms of an update on Digital/R100 I have been kept informed by officers, and note the latest statistics:-

- 94.7% of Argyll and Bute premises are connected to the fibre network
- 87% can access speeds >30Mbps
- 0.8% are between 24 and 30 Mbps
- 2.3% are between 15 and 24 Mbps
- 1.7% are between 10 and 15Mbps
- 5.2% are between 2 and 10Mbps
- 3.1% are below 2Mbps

Full Fibre/Ultra-Fast Broadband (>100 Mbps) availability is currently at 8.21% -

- Openreach 8.1%
- Virgin/KCOM 0.18%

A meeting is scheduled with Scottish Government representatives and Executive and Senior management to take place before the end of this year to discuss the progress of the R100 programme across Argyll and Bute.

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

10.1 Economic Growth and Communities:

Tarbert Heritage Scheme: Ambitious plans to regenerate Tarbert are taking shape, following the announcement of new funding for the project. Argyll and Bute Council has launched the first phase of the Tarbert Heritage Regeneration Scheme, with the restoration of historic buildings being one of the key aims of the initiative.

The Council has awarded £60,000 to the project, while the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic Environment Scotland have each committed £40,000.

Priorities in the coming months are the development of an application for the next phase of delivery as well as plans to engage with the local community on their aspirations for the area. The Council also plans to carry out cost analyses of potential priority buildings, conduct a skills audit in the local area, and develop an energy efficiency scheme.

The aim with the Tarbert Heritage scheme is to replicate the success of other regeneration projects already launched in areas such as Rothesay, Dunoon, Campbeltown and Lochgilphead.

The restoration and refurbishment of historic buildings and enhancement of the local culture and heritage of our communities is a key priority, boosting the wider economic health of Argyll and Bute, generating employment, enhancing skills and attracting more people to live and work in the area.

Love Local Cards – Photography Competition: A new photography competition has taken place with the dual aim of helping to support local businesses while highlighting the area's stunning scenery.

Argyll and Bute Council is looking for iconic landscape images of the area, with the winning entry featuring on the new Argyll and Bute Gift Card design. As well as seeing their work on the new cards, the winner will themselves receive a £50 Argyll and Bute Gift Card.

Local businesses are the beating heart of our communities and communities are encouraging more people to show support and shop local. From amazing experience days to the best local produce and bespoke gifts, purchasing the Argyll and Bute gift card not only makes a great present but you're also supporting local jobs.

Launched in 2021, the gift card encourages people to support local businesses by shopping local. The card works just like a gift voucher with over 300 independent shops, experiences and services to choose.

The competition looked for a stunning landscape image to feature on the gift card, one that really captures what makes Argyll and Bute so special.

The competition launched on 2nd October and closed on 20th October - the Council will make an announcement on the winner soon and I look forward to seeing all of the entries and the winning picture.

Below are a couple of pictures which I took while out Portnahaven which showcases the wonderful landscapes we really do have in Argyll and Bute. I would encourage everyone who uses social media to use our hashtag when uploading their images of our beautiful area **#abplace2b**



10.2 Customer and Support Services:

Registrar Funeral Services: Residents and undertakers in Kintyre can now ask Argyll and Bute Council Registrars to conduct non-denominational funeral services following a successful pilot programme.

The decision by the Council means that people in the Kintyre area will have a greater choice of funeral service provider from within their own community. It also removes any potential need to travel outside their local area or the need to bring in officiators.

Local undertakers approached Argyll and Bute Council for help, due to the long-term decline in the number of available Church of Scotland Ministers to conduct funerals. The Council launched a six-month pilot in 2022 to enable registrars based in Campbeltown, who already officiate at marriage ceremonies and register deaths, to deal with funeral arrangements including conducting services.

It is great to be able to offer the support of our experienced registrars to deliver this important service to families at very challenging times. During the pilot, a number of positive responses from families, mourners and undertakers were received. It was clear that the Kintyre community would welcome making this move permanent. It now gives people a wider choice locally and helps to support our local undertakers.

At present, there would not appear to be a demand to widen out the service into other areas of the Argyll and Bute region but officers will continue to monitor the views of registrars in other districts to assess if there is a need elsewhere.

Council Website: Argyll and Bute Council's new-look website now makes it even easier for residents, businesses and visitors to access information and keep up to date with all the latest news. The new website offers the same huge range of online services as before, as well as some new ones, to make connecting with the council quick and convenient.

The website also has a number of "[Request It](#)" and "[Report It](#)" functions that allow 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 [My Council](#) section is the gateway to a host of council information from current fees and charges to all the papers from council and committee meetings and councillor related information.

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. It also enables you to engage with the council by taking part in [consultations and surveys](#). You can hear from the council's Chief Executive Pippa Milne on a wide range of topical subjects in [Pippa's Podcasts](#).

The site also has a Digital Assistant called Abbot, web chat and improved search function, to help you get the information you need around the clock, and if you are planning a journey, you can even check the roads before you go by taking a look at our [roads cameras](#).

The new streamlined website not only looks great, it offers a huge variety of resources that could save you time and money.

The team are committed to delivering new and useful digital services, and the website makes it even easier to navigate these. I would urge everyone to have a look at the new site to see how it can benefit them. Visit www.argyll-bute.gov.uk

The Council's Web Team are always keen to improve the content and usability of the website, so constructive [feedback is very welcome](#).

Customer Engagement Team: The team continue to deliver on a number of different platforms, and the following gives a flavour of what the team have been working hard on:-

- Webchat re-applied to the website in September along with the Drupal 9 compliant version of our Web Bot Abbot and the team are developing an equivalent for the MyCouncil Works pages too.
- The increase in the call abandon rate from 3% last August to 5.1% this August and reduction in resolution at first point of contact from 89% to 88% is indicative of the influx of new Agents and loss of experienced ones over past months. Mediated contacts also rose adding to the strain on team resources.
- Marriage activity is still buoyant, although down on the post pandemic peaks of last year and it is notable that for the year to date there have been 368 civil and 338 religious ceremonies.
- The number of page views on the new website in August was 42,000 up on the old website last August and it looks like the visitors to the site are having a good look around it. The web team have been working to ensure that recording measures and external website scoring reflect visitor/view levels, including challenging some metrics successfully which mean that our monthly scores should improve from the current, very respectable 96/100.

- The external facing staff website called [My Council Works](#) has had a significant facelift by the Web Team under the direction of the Comms Team and has new HR and Wellbeing pages.
- New content has also been developed for the Health and Social Care Partnership on the [abplace2b site](#) which is now being linked to from all their recruitment adverts. Stats are being monitored and provided to the HSCP to monitor effectiveness.

Business Support web pages: Following the recent weather events and the large scale recovery which is underway, I would encourage all business owners to take a look at the Council's website, which provides a range of support which is available to them - [Business support | Argyll and Bute Council](#)

10.3 Corporate Services:

By-election – Ward 1 South Kintyre: The team administered the by-election in Ward 1, South Kintyre on Thursday 2nd November, with five candidates standing for election. There will be a separate report to the November meeting of the Council in relation to the result. An electronic count was carried out in Campbeltown immediately following the close of poll at 10pm on 2nd November.

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 – 10th November 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