

# Council Annual Report

## 2022 - 2023

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## Forewords

### Leader of the Council

Scottish councils are living in interesting times, as the saying goes – and that has been the case for the past decade and more. Climate change; well-documented financial challenges; the ongoing reverberation of the impact of Covid; living costs; adapting to evolving national priorities; community aspirations and ambitions; these are just a few of the major shifts and challenges which Scottish local government has to contend with.

I am not, though, going to say that Argyll and Bute is no different – because we are different. We do indeed have the same larger-scale issues to face, but we must also do so in the context of our uniqueness – our mix of remote, rural and island communities, interspersed with some larger towns, the likes of which few other public agencies have to deal with.

And, for Argyll and Bute, there are some characteristics which remain constant and which give us the ability to evolve, to innovate, to learn, to improve, to respond, to take action, to prepare, even when so much of the local government landscape around us is shifting at pace.

In this Annual Report for Argyll and Bute Council, 2022/23, you will find more about these hallmarks of Argyll and Bute Council's approach, and how they are helping us to make the most of new opportunities and deal with existing and emerging challenges.

Our track record in efficient financial management has, yet again, allowed us to continue to invest in the key areas of council business which mean the most to our communities and help us to secure success now and in the future. At the same time, we have been able to minimise the impact on jobs and services. The sterling efforts of our dedicated, agile, committed workforce are key in all of this and none of it would be possible without them.

No council can resist change – but here in Argyll and Bute we are working hard to make change work for our communities who depend on our core services. We rely on our proven strengths – like good partnership working and financial prudence – and we strive for improvement, making space to learn and ensuring we stay flexible and innovative in such a rapidly changing national environment.

This latest Annual Report highlights many of the success stories we have been able to tell over the last year, about why Argyll and Bute is such a great place to live, to work, to do business, to be. It sets the scene for our continued growth and improvement in years to come – and building on what we've achieved this year increases our determination, our drive, our ambitions for Argyll and Bute's future success.

Councillor Robin Currie

Leader, Argyll and Bute Council

## **Chief Executive**

It is with pleasure that we present the Argyll and Bute Council Annual Report for the financial year 2022/23. This report provides overview of your council's activities, achievements, and challenges over the past year. As we navigate through the evolving landscape of local government and strive to meet the needs of our diverse and vibrant communities, this document offers transparency into our actions and progress toward the collective goals we have set for the region.

The past year has been marked by unprecedented challenges, from the cost of living crisis to economic uncertainties, and through-out this it has been a time of resilience, adaptation, and innovation for Argyll and Bute.

In this report we provide examples of our progress against objectives and outcomes and these efforts would not have been possible without the dedication of our council members, employees, and the active engagement of our community members.

As we move forward into the next year, we acknowledge that our work is ongoing. Challenges persist, and new opportunities continue to emerge. Yet, with the same determination and collaborative spirit that has defined our council, we remain steadfast in our dedication to building a stronger, more inclusive, and sustainable future for all who call Argyll and Bute home.

We invite you to explore this annual report and gain insights into our journey over the past year. Your feedback and support are crucial to our success, and we look forward to continued engagement as we work together to create a brighter tomorrow for Argyll and Bute.

Pippa Milne

Chief Executive, Argyll and Bute Council

## **Financial Statement**

In 2022/23 the budget gap was £2.221m, prior to any measures to balance the budget, rising to over £37m over a five year period, with decisions made to bridge the 2022/23 gap, reduce future year pressures and protect vital services.

Furthermore, when agreeing the 2022/23 budget, the Council committed investment in key Council priorities including:

- £2.653m to undertake improvements and repairs to the Roads network
- £1m to help safeguard and support future funding for Argyll and Bute's Learning Estate Investment Programme
- £0.500m investment in Climate Change Projects
- £0.500m for active travel through further improvements of footpaths and supporting safer routes to schools.
- £0.300m to deliver a programme of street lighting
- £0.165m investment in third party organisations who support our Communities

- £0.100m invested in a litter bin replacement programme
- £0.100m to support Staycation investment

Over the course of 2022/23 the Council allocated over £4.3m to Council Tax accounts to support people through the cost of living crisis, awarded nearly £18m of non-domestic rates reliefs to support local businesses, paid almost £660k in Scottish Welfare Fund grants to support vulnerable people and over £800k of Discretionary Housing payments were distributed to households in need. During the year the Council also continued to pay grants to cover food and fuel for people in poverty and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies resulting in maximised benefit income and reduced fuel costs of over £2.5m by the end of the 2022/23.

## Cross-cutting Strategic Activities

### Changing How We Work – Our Change Programme

'Connect for Success' is our change programme that's all about us working easily and effectively together, and by doing so - making it easier for us to deliver what's needed of us. Years of multi-million pound budget cuts have made it more and more difficult for councils to deliver services and support their communities. We are developing new ways of working together that make it easier to get things done. In brief, it means that we share knowledge, effort and resources to do the best job possible for and with our communities.

There are 7 principles to the Connect for Success Programme

1. One Council One Place Approach - working with other public sector agencies and our communities to get the most from our resources.
2. Purpose and Mission Focus – we have limited resources, we need to carefully match our decisions to the council's overall vision.
3. Employee empowerment - our employees have great skills and experience, we're making it easier to work effectively.
4. Data and evidence driven decision making - we will use data and customer feedback to do more of what works well and change what doesn't.
5. Learning Council - we are improving how we work by learning and using lessons from previous experience.
6. Agile – to we have decision-making and related processes that make it easy to put effective change into action.
7. Maximise opportunities that technology offer - we use technology to enable, support and progress our work.



The following are some examples of Connect For Success in action:

- One Council One Place Approach - we have set up a Community Engagement Group that is setting out expectations for working with our communities in designing services.
- Data and evidence driven decision making - we have set up a Data Group to produce customer insight from data across the council that we can use to develop services.
- Maximise opportunities that technology offer – we are implementing one system to replace three HR systems.

We are also embarking on a series of self-assessments to identify priorities for redesigning services. Pilots of the process are currently underway. These will be reviewed prior to a decision on formal adoption or any adaptations to the pilot process.

### **Working Together To Alleviate Child Poverty**

Alleviating Child Poverty is one of the council's top priorities. We have been looking at innovative ways to combine data from multiple sources, both from within and outside the council. This enables us to better direct financial advice and guidance to households and communities to help them apply for and receive the benefits, grants and allowances available to families. We are engaged with the Improvement Service and in particular their Rural and Island Child Poverty Support Group. During the course of 2022/23 our work with the Improvement Service focused on the following three work-streams:

- Engaged with a research body called SAVVI (Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability). Following this engagement we lobbied national agencies such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Social Security Scotland (SSS) to allow us to re-use their data, which in turn enabled us to support vulnerable families.
- Developed a data model that enables us to identify the communities where the uptake of some benefits is lower than other communities.
- Seek funding from external sources to explore the option of 'buying' commercial datasets. This will enable us to enhance what we can tell from data about the needs of our communities.

We began working with the Improvement Service to incorporate the council's Revenues & Benefits data into this modelling, and also to explore the data in much more detail, such as school catchment level. This makes coordinating support easier and more accurate, rather than looking at data at a higher level where unmet need can be missed.

Progress is ongoing for each of these work-streams, which will further improve our activities to encourage uptake of benefits, grants and allowances. Alongside this we are monitoring the impact of this work over time as we aim to see uptake in these targeted areas improve.

This activity is a clear example of our 'Connect for Success' Change Programme, in which Principle 4 seeks to focus on enabling data and evidence driven decision making.

## **Rural Growth Deal**

The Rural Growth Deal (RGD) will deliver £70m of investment across Argyll and Bute for projects that act as a driver for transformation and inclusive economic growth. Throughout 2022/23 we have been working to progress the outline business cases required for the signing of the Full Deal Agreement. To date 4 outline business cases have been submitted to Government with a further 7 nearing draft completion. We plan to submit all remaining business cases to Government in 2023 and we are working towards signing the Full Deal Agreement in this financial year. Following the deal signing we will enter year 1 of delivery.

Specific outline business cases are mentioned at appropriate points throughout this report.

The 4 outline business cases that have been submitted to government are:

- Kintyre Seaports
- Marine industry training centre – UHI Argyll college are leading on this business case
- Clyde engineering and innovation centre
- Oban UAV hub

The 7 outline business cases that are nearing completion are:

- Rothesay pavilion
- Islay low carbon project
- Outline business case for housing on Islay
- Outline business case for housing on Mull
- Seaweed and shellfish innovation centre (SAMS)
- Machrihanish campus (linked with Stirling university)
- Rural skills accelerator programme (Outline business case contains 3 projects)

The website also has a specific Question and Answer section which you can access from this link [Rural Growth Deal - questions and answers | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

We also post regular project updates on the website which you can access from this link [Rural Growth Deal | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

## Climate Change

The Council has a statutory duty to report on its emissions and climate action via the annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) Report.

Regular update reports are presented to the Council's 6-weekly Climate Change Board which provides governance, oversight and discusses progress and action.

The PBCCD Report for the year 2022/23 confirms that the Council's total carbon emissions is 26,512 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>e). This represents a reduction of 1,705 tCO<sub>2</sub>e on total emissions for the previous year. Reductions are confirmed across Scopes 1, 2 and 3 emission sources.

The following is an explanation of the Scopes

- Scope 1 emission sources are direct emissions generated by an organisation itself. Examples include energy and fuel used in running boilers, and burning fuel in non-EV fleet vehicles.
- Scope 2 emission sources are emissions that an organisation causes indirectly, and comes from where the energy it purchases and uses is produced.
- Scope 3 emission sources includes emissions that are not produced by the organisation itself, but by those indirectly responsible up and down its value chain.

Projects delivered by the Council that have contributed to the reduction in emissions include:

- LED Streetlight Replacement programme
- Solar PV and LED lighting installations at Council assets
- Installation of low carbon heating systems (e.g. air source heat pumps)

Additionally, the Council's Home Energy Efficiency Team provides grants to homeowners and private-rented tenants to improve home insulation. This is via the Scottish Government's Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme.

The Council's annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Reports for previous years are available to the public via the Sustainable Scotland Network website <https://sustainablesotlandnetwork.org/reports/argyll-and-bute-council>

## **Best Value Improvement Action Plan 2020-2023**

The Best Value Improvement Action Plan is now complete. Our Annual Audit Report from Audit Scotland in November 2022 concluded that the Council has an appropriate and effective best value framework in place and continues to make good progress addressing the recommendations in Best Value Assurance Report 2020.

The Improvement Action Plan was broken down into 5 themes:

Theme 1 - Develop the transformation agenda, supported by an affordable and achievable medium to longer term financial strategy.

Theme 2 - Improve performance management reporting to provide a balanced picture of long term trends in performance against targets.

Theme 3 - Increase the pace of transformational change to deliver the business outcomes.

Theme 4 - Assess the extent to which regeneration and economic development initiatives are delivering the vision and corporate outcomes.

Theme 5 - Work with communities and community groups to improve engagement.

Delivery of the 5 themes was through 36 actions. Full detail of the actions can be found on the council website [Best Value Improvement Action Plan - Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 16/03/2023](#)

## **Audit Recommendations**

An essential element of the work undertaken by Internal Audit is to monitor and assess whether recommendations relating to its findings, and that of external audit, have been implemented by management of the Council. As part of the regular monitoring of progress, audit recommendations are reported quarterly to the Strategic Management Team and actions to complete them are recorded and allocated to the responsible officers. Supporting evidence is required from the responsible officer before being assessed by the auditor making the recommendation.

## **Strategic Risk Register**

The Strategic Risk Register (SRR) details significant challenges faced by the Council and the agreed approaches to manage them in the context of risk mitigation. These challenges can be cross-cutting across all areas of the Council, although some are very specific to a service function and tend to be long-term in nature. They each have specific interventions, subject to scrutiny at Strategic Committee Level and kept under formal review bi-annually, although the SRR can be reviewed in the intervening period should matters need to be placed on the register by the Council's Strategic Management Team. A formal report is prepared on an annual basis by the Chief Executive on risk management and is reported to the Council's Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Currently the SRR has 14 risks in total. Four are red, seven are amber and the remaining three are green.

The four red risks relate to: 1) Population, External Infrastructure and Economic Decline, 2) Waste Management, 3) Cyber Security 4) Lack of Housing Availability.

The seven amber risks relate to 1) Condition and suitability of Infrastructure & Asset Base, 2) Financial Sustainability, 3) Governance and Leadership, 4) Engagement and Understanding the needs of the Community, 5) Health and Social Care Partnership, 6) Cost of Living Crisis and 7) Impact of Climate Change.

The three green risks relate to 1) Service Delivery, 2) Civil Contingency and Business Continuity, 3) Welfare Reform.

### **Operational Risk Register**

Separate from the Strategic Risk Register we monitor Operational Risks. These largely relate to a direct impact on service deliver. Our Operational Risks are categorised into Red, Amber and Green. Key actions have been agreed to address all risks in the Operational Risk Register.

All of our Red Operational Risks are summarised here with some mentioned in more detail in our Significant Challenges section of this report below.

Executive Director Kirsty Flanagan has eleven red risks which relate to: 1) maintaining the road network for both condition and safety particularly vulnerable coastal locations, 2) non-compliance for maintaining vehicles through legislation, 3) the lack of suitable candidates particularly for routine road repairs and grass cutting on the islands where there is a lack of suitable accommodation, 4) the revaluation of buildings for non-domestic rates by the assessor, 5) the impact of Covid on environmental health enforcement with limited budgets, 6) availability of suitable temporary accommodation and housing support, 7) extreme localised weather causing loss of bridge, culvert, road or sea defence, 8) increased Winter maintenance on our roads, 9) implications of the biodegradable municipal waste landfill ban, 10) aging bridges and retaining walls requiring investment, and finally 11) the risk of cyber security breaches and attacks.

Executive Director Douglas Hendry has six red risks which relate to: 1) unavailability of capital funding for the delivery of significant projects, 2) increasing utility costs, 3) delivery failure of school kitchen supplies, 4) capital investment to keep buildings safe and operational, 5) capital receipts targets not being met, and finally 6) not satisfying the compliance conditions of all external funding to the Council.

### **Significant Challenges**

As well as our Strategic and Operational Risk Registers, we face some day-to-day that can impact on service delivery. Here we summarise these challenges.

#### **1. Staff Recruitment**

Challenge - There is a national shortage of qualified professionals, specifically environmental health officers, building standards surveyors and qualified planning professionals. We also experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff for posts in the catering, cleaning and some areas of

our Roads and Infrastructure Service. This places significant pressure on staff and reduces the capacity and resilience of teams. In turn the ability to competently deliver services and our statutory duties is put under considerable strain.

Action - Various actions have been implemented to help mitigate these challenges. These include reprioritising workloads and redesigning how services are delivered. Work is shared across a 'virtual' team rather than the traditional geographical teams. Staff structures have been reviewed and realigned creating opportunities for upskilling and career pathways to build resilience.

Importantly the combination of these actions should also support the moral and mental health of staff, as well as improve service delivery, customer engagement and communication.

## 2. Securing Contractors

Challenge - It is often difficult to secure contractors and consultants. There have been significant projects where only one tender was returned. This resulted in the need to re-tender or delay the project.

Action – Contractors are encouraged to apply to be admitted into the Council's Dynamic Purchasing Scheme. This widens the pool of contractors that are both willing and able to work in Argyll & Bute. Where possible we also use different delivery models with more emphasis on a mixed economy solution. We also use a mix of in-house resources, Small Medium Enterprises and as well as national suppliers.

## 3. Sickness Absence Due To Stress or Anxiety

Challenge - Sadly Stress and Anxiety consistently accounts for the highest proportion of days lost to sickness absence across the council.

Action - We conducted a wellbeing survey, the results showed that 29% of employees who had been absent with stress or anxiety had not accessed the structured Employees Assistance Programme that is available. We undertook a 3 month pilot with our partners who provide our Employees Assistance Programme. Unfortunately this pilot was unsuccessful and was not rolled out further. We continue to remind staff of our Employee Assistance Programme, and the ways they can access it so that they can make contact. Additionally, alternative ways to offer support are being explored and outlined.

## 4. Unplanned Demands

Challenge – We have experienced several unplanned demands. These demands increase the pressure on delivery of the statutory or committed services, additional budgetary pressure and pressure on staff to deliver unplanned demands. The agility of our staff is the key to being able to deliver these unplanned demands.

Action - To help mitigate these additional pressures where possible we have revised our processes, systems and recruited additional staff.

## 5. Emergency Resilience and Planning

Challenge - We have a continuing duty to promote or enforce standards that preserve public health, public safety and protect the environment. The remit is wide-ranging, from a suspected or confirmed outbreak of a communicable disease or an animal health incident such as avian influenza or rabies.

Action - To ensure we continue to protect the public, environment and promote public safety we are reviewing our emergency plans and arrangements. This will ensure our level of preparedness for any emergency incident is suitable and robust.

## 6. Electric Grid Limitations

Challenge - Many areas within Argyll and Bute are off grid for gas, and the electrical grid has limitations in terms of capacity/constraints. These issues continue to impact on the Council (and the wider community) in terms of resilience and being able to deliver renewable solutions, Electric Vehicle charging, electrification of heat, etc.

Action - We are lobbying the regulator to highlight the impact of these constraints. We also lobby the Electrical Network Operators, emphasising the need for them to reinforce their infrastructure.

## 7. Cost of Living Impacts

Challenge - The Cost of Living Crisis impacts on individuals, businesses and our ability to deliver services across all service areas. Price increases and supply issues are continuing across all industry sectors. We have our ambitious 10 year Rural Growth Deal projects. The project budgets are fixed for the 10 year programme period with limited capacity to build cost escalation contingency into the projects. Other significant pressures are the cost of school catering and the impact on the building sector.

Action - We continue to explore process improvements to identify efficiencies. We look at external funding to address any funding gaps and monitor our contacts and supplies on an on-going basis, ensuring the supplies are appropriate.

## 8. Managing Delivery of Large Scale Projects

Challenge - As well as financial resources for large projects, staff resources are required from various teams across the Council to deliver the projects.

Action - We are undergoing early engagement and where possible designing projects to limit ongoing staffing costs. Work has begun to identify the staff resource requirements for the projects.

### 9. Improving How We Support All Our Pupils

Challenge - There has been a significant increase in school exclusions from previous years. This increase is primarily due to an increase in dysregulated behaviour and is reflective of the national picture.

Action - We have identified this as an area requiring further attention and will provide targeted support for specific schools where exclusion rates are highest and continued universal guidance and support for all schools around alternatives to exclusion. There will be a sustained focus on Our Children Their Nurturing Education (OCTNE), Season's for Growth and Trauma Informed approaches all of which support staff to better understand and respond to distressed and dysregulated pupils, with a focus on early intervention.

### 10. Cyber Security

Challenge - The need for our ICT teams to be ever more vigilant and responsive has never been greater. 2022/23 saw another major rise in the levels of risk associated with cyber-attacks. The war in Ukraine has been accompanied by increased levels of cyber-attacks emanating from Russia and elsewhere. The public sector has repeatedly experienced significant cyber-attacks which disrupt services and has cost millions of pounds. This has been a global phenomenon.

Action - We have procured a new Security Operations Centre service. This will be implemented over the summer of 2023. This will provide a 24 hour monitoring service for the Council's network. We introduced new Cyber Awareness training from Mimecast and are actively promoting the training to all networked staff.

### 11. Improving Housing Solutions for Local People

Challenge - The housing system is increasingly complex and contains wide ranging effects on the society we live and work in. Across the UK, the housing system is now in a position commonly recognised as being in a state of emergency. Within Argyll and Bute, these problems have had a direct impact on property prices. There have been substantial increases in our area in recent years, private rental levels are rising at a substantial rate, housing availability is decreasing despite our social rent build programme and local wages are not keeping up with inflation.

Action - We have already identified improving housing solutions for local people as a priority. There is a need for the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) to consider these recent issues in more detail and examine if they can be addressed by the Council, or our partners including the Scottish Government. The LHS is updated annually, and it is proposed that this is the appropriate vehicle to do this. To support this, officers have set up an internal Housing Group with relevant senior officers from across the Council's Services participating.

### 12. Changes to Managing Our Waste

Challenge - The Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) ban is due for introduction in January 2026. This will affect the current waste collection and disposal methods. Ferry capacity to service the requirements of the BMW ban and other emerging changes need to be planned and managed.



Other merging changes including Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), Circular Economy bill, carbon reduction initiatives, and market availability particularly for Energy from Waste (EfW) feedstock.

Action - Solutions identified through the Waste Strategy with ongoing discussions with Scottish Government and other appropriate bodies around derogations and implications of the changes of various legislation and regulations will bring to the rural geography of Argyll and Bute.

## **Complaints**

In 2022/23 the number of stage 1 complaints fell to 467 from 499 in 21/22. Stage 2 complaints rose to 219 from 201 in 21/22.

Roads and Infrastructure Services continued to receive the majority of complaints in 2022/23 (stage 1 - 360) and (stage 2 - 122)

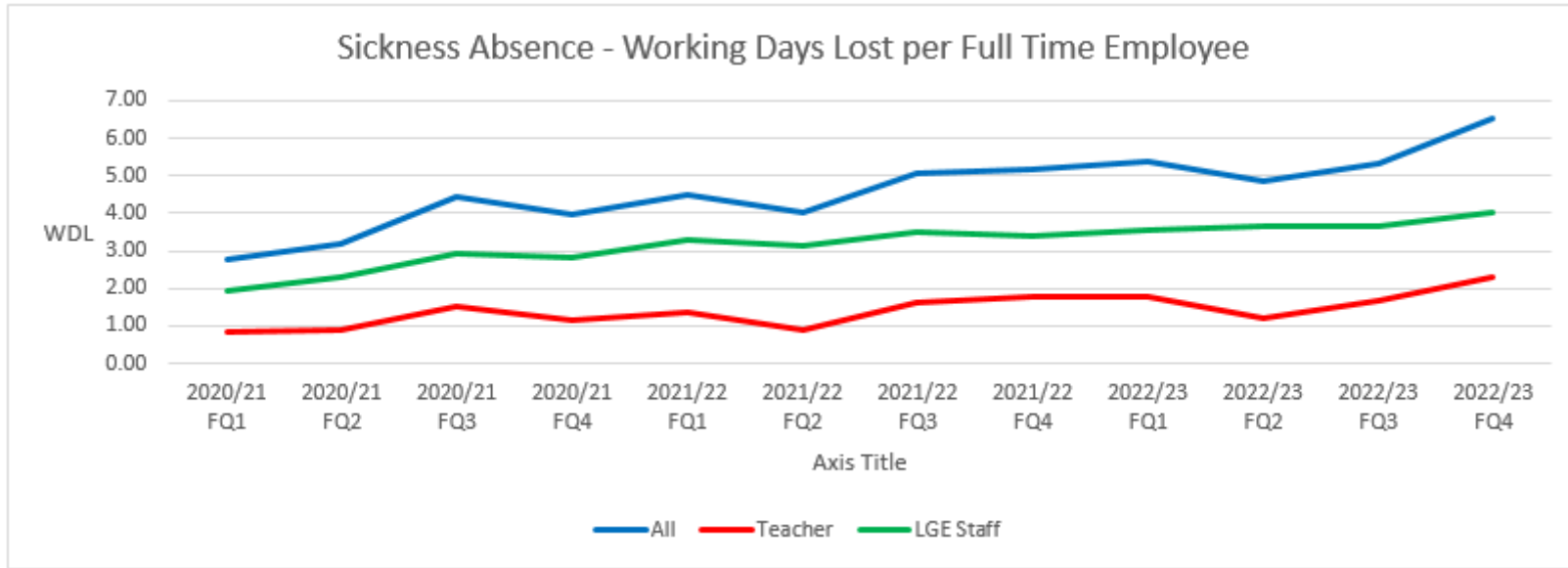
Performance within timescale has fallen in 2022/23 to 79% for stage 1 against 82% in 21/22 and 59% for stage 2 against 70% in 21/22. The Compliance and Regulatory team will continue to support services to try to improve this, through the provision of monthly reports which are sent to Executive Directors/Heads of Service and Service Complaints representatives.

All Council services follow the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) model complaint handling procedure (CHP). A requirement of this model procedure is that the Council report to the SPSO on a standard set of statutory performance indicators, and prepare an annual report for consideration by Members. You can view the Council's Complaints Annual Report 2022/23 through this web link. [Microsoft Word - Annual Complaints Report 2022-23 V0.1 \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

## **Absence**

The number of working days lost to sickness in the UK hit a record high in 2022 according to data published by the Office of National Statistics. The number of working days lost because of sickness increased beyond pre pandemic levels. The increase is a contrast from the low levels of absence at the peak of the pandemic when many workers were furloughed, working from home and social distancing led to a drop in minor illness but it also marks a reversal in the long term trend of declining sickness absence rates.

Absence data for 2022/23 saw increase for both Teachers and LGE. Teachers absence has increased by 0.60 of a day to 6.2 work days lost per FTE. LGE staff has increased by 0.90 work days lost per FTE to 14.3 days.



Working Days Lost per Full Time Employee - By staff category and financial quarter												
	2020/21 FQ1	2020/21 FQ2	2020/21 FQ3	2020/21 FQ4	2021/22 FQ1	2021/22 FQ2	2021/22 FQ3	2021/22 FQ4	2022/23 FQ1	2022/23 FQ2	2022/23 FQ3	2022/23 FQ4
<b>All Staff</b>	2.75	3.21	4.46	3.97	4.48	4.05	5.09	5.19	5.36	4.88	5.35	6.52
<b>Teacher</b>	0.82	0.92	1.52	1.15	1.36	0.89	1.60	1.77	1.79	1.22	1.70	2.28
<b>LGE Staff</b>	1.94	2.29	2.94	2.82	3.32	3.16	3.49	3.42	3.57	3.66	3.65	4.04

Figure 1: Teacher, LGE and All Staff absence trends across each quarter since 20/21

The top three reasons for absence in 2022/23 have been:

- Mental Health
- Infections
- Other musculoskeletal (e.g. broken/fractured bones, ligament damage, strains, pain)

This is a different list from the year previous where Stomach/Liver/Kidney/Digestion issues and Medical Treatment featured in the top 3 as well as Mental Health. Covid absences began to be recorded under normal sickness absence with effect from 1 July 2022 this along with no Covid restrictions is likely to have accounted for infections moving into the top 3 reasons for absence.

The following is an analysis of the reasons for absence across the service conditions of APTC, Manual and Teachers for all work days lost:

- For APTC it was Mental Health absences accounting for 32% of work days lost
- For Manual Workers it was Mental Health absences accounting for 19% of work days lost
- For Teachers it was Infections accounting for 28% of work days lost.

We have launched pilots for a number of activities in the area of Wellbeing including:

- first day assistance for those that report absence due to mental health reasons
- online physiotherapy including webinars for desk based employees and body mapping workshops for manual staff
- a 12 week programme focusing on building sustainable healthy habits to support health
- wellbeing webinars on a range of topics

Those activities that have focused on supporting employees in the workforce have been much more successful than those that focused support on employees who had already reported absent. Those that have been successful will be continued this year. Argyll and Bute Council's Wellbeing Toolkit will be launched on 13 September 2023 available on our MyCouncilWorks giving employees and managers' access to lots of health related information, sources of support and access to relevant policies and procedures to support continued good health.

Going forward additional wellbeing focus will be on:

- developing focused and targeted corporate communications on wellbeing
- continued support for managers with ongoing absence cases and team based intervention tools
- improving mental wellbeing

## Quality Conversations

Our approach to PRDs has changed. Our updated approach is based on measuring and improving outcomes from the conversations that managers and employees have about performance, behaviours and career / development aspirations. Our approach is called Quality Conversations.

Quality conversations are at the heart of how we do our business. Having the skills and confidence to engage in quality conversations with our colleagues, partners and communities is one of our key priorities.

During 2022/23 we launched the roll out our new approach, following which we conducted the first survey.

Analysis told us that 53% of responders had received a Quality Conversation.

The key findings are:

- People are clear about what's expected from them in their role.
- They know what skills and behaviours are required to achieve their objectives.
- They have the knowledge and skills to achieve their objectives.
- They know where to access help to meet their objectives.

These results will become our base survey and will be repeated and reported on annually.

## Our Performance

### Our Corporate Outcomes

Our Corporate Plan sets out our mission to deliver on the vision shared with our Community Planning Partners - ***Making Argyll and Bute a place people choose to Live, Learn, Work and do Business.*** For the Council this is delivered through the 6 Corporate Outcomes:

- People live active, healthier and independent lives
- People will live in safer and stronger communities
- Children and young people have the best possible start
- Education, skills and training maximise opportunities for all
- Our economy is diverse and thriving
- We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth

To enable us to deliver on our 6 Corporate Outcomes we have one supporting outcome 'Getting it right'. Activities within this outcome underpin our cross-cutting ways of working, efficiencies and behind-the-scenes service delivery.

Each Corporate Outcome is delivered through the Corporate Outcome Indicators.

### **Performance Management Improvements**

A project to review our performance management and reporting procedures has been undertaken with the first phase nearing completion. During 2022/23 several outputs of the Performance Management Project were implemented. One aim of the project is to support scrutiny of performance by Elected Members and Senior Officers. As a result the following changes were made – we removed Business Outcomes and identified a suite of 47 high-level indicators that directly align to the Corporate Outcomes.

These 47 indicators are known as the Corporate Outcome Indicators (COIs). Aligning the COIs to our Corporate Outcomes helps illustrate how we are delivering on our Outcomes. The indicators are strategic and long-term in nature. They are reported annually after FQ4 to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee and Full Council, and thereby presented within this report.

We continue to report other indicators of importance on a quarterly basis at each of our Area Committees. The Quarterly Area Performance Reports present a suite of indicators at a local, area level with complementary narrative, and where possible Council-wide performance is also presented alongside these indicators. All previous Area Performance Reports can be viewed on the Council Website here. [All previous Quarterly Area Performance Reports can be viewed on the Council Website here \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\).](#)

### **Delivering On Our Outcomes - Corporate Outcome Indicators**

2022/23 is the first year that the 47 Corporate Outcome Indicators have been used. Due to the nature of the change it is not possible to draw a direct comparison to previous years' performance however, where possible historic data is used to help identify the overall trend and progress on delivering our Corporate Outcomes.

Where appropriate a Target is used to track Performance and progress is identified using a Red or Green status indicator to track performance. Not all indicators have a Target, where this is the case the trend data is helpful for scrutiny.

For the majority of indicators the data is collected and presented annually, or even quarterly if this is possible and appropriate. However, in some cases the nature of the indicator means the collection of data results in a longer lag-time, or the data is collected biennially.

The following table illustrates how we have delivered on each of our Corporate Outcomes. This is followed by the detailed performance and supporting commentary for our Corporate Outcome Indicators.

## Overall Performance Of All Our Corporate Outcome Indicators

Corporate Outcome	Number Of Indicators	Number On Track / Above Target / No Target With Improving Performance	Number Off Track / Under Target / No Data
People live active, healthier and independent lives	6	4	2
People will live in safer and stronger communities	4	3	1
Children and young people have the best possible start	8	7	1
Education, skills and training maximise opportunities for all	7	6	1
Our economy is diverse and thriving	12	10	2
We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth	5	5	0
Getting It Right	5	4	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>8</b>

### How We Compare Nationally – Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

We view benchmarking as a crucial tool to help us improve as well as using a variety of improvement tools. We attend and contribute to all the national groups and networks as well as the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) which all local authorities participate in.

All local authorities participate in the [Local Government Benchmarking Framework](#) (LGBF). The aim of the Framework is to present a range of indicators that can be used to compare performance across all Scottish local authorities. There are many differences to take into account when comparing our performance with other councils. To help make these comparisons more meaningful and share good practice we are part of a 'family group' of eight other councils, with similar characteristics such as the type of area and levels of deprivation. More detail on the LGBF and 'family groups' can be found by clicking on the above link, you will be taken straight to the LGBF where you can compare our performance.

The 2022/23 data is due for release in December 2023. The latest full-year data that is available is for 2021/22.

As well as participating in the LGBF we actively engage with other sector specific organisations. This allows us to share best practice and benchmark our performance, both activities are valuable tools to help us identify improvements.

## Delivering Our Outcomes - Key Successes by Corporate Outcome

**Corporate Outcome: People live active, healthier and independent lives**

**Number of Indicators: 6**

**Number on Track: 4**

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Maximise distribution of Scottish Welfare Fund	95.30%	96.70%	85.90%	120.70%	144.00%	G	The 2022/23 overspend has been covered by earmarked reserve from 2021/2022. This has ensured that the Council has been able to continue its support to its most vulnerable citizens in the year through the provision of Crisis Grant and Community Care Grant funds.
Percentage of clients satisfied that they are better able to deal with their financial problems	90.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	G	This voluntary survey is distributed with no obligation for a client to complete or respond. All clients who expressed an opinion agreed that they are better able to deal with their financial problems following our support. It is important to note that no negative comments or responses were received.
Maximise distribution of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund	96.00%	101.60%	99.90%	98.20%	79.00%	R	Actual expenditure at yearend was £807,000 meaning a funding underspend by £172,000 in 2022/23. Looking at the detail we received less claims for bedroom tax Discretionary Housing Payment and benefit cap Discretionary Housing Payments than the Scottish Government had forecast.
Percentage of care services graded 'good' (4) or better in Care Inspectorate Inspections (HWBOI NI17)	75.20%	85.00%	87.10%	80.00%	79.50%	G	This indicator measures Adult Services rating only. The HSCP report for this measure is updated in line with Health And Care Experience Biannual schedule, however Care Inspectorate gradings are updated more frequently.
Percentage of adults receiving any care or support who rated it as excellent or good	75.30%	79.90%	78.30%	78.30%	68.60%	R	Biennial Data Periods 2017/19; 2019/21; 2021/23 There is no update to the data until Feb 2024 at the earliest. It is worth noting that performance against this target will be influenced and vary in line with the Biennial total number of

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							respondents participating in this voluntary survey. As such caution should be noted with regards to previous comparison and trends.
Percentage carers who feel supported to continue in their caring role	29.70%	35.00%	35.00%	38.00%	38.00%	G	Biennial Data Periods 2017/18; 2019/20; 2021/22 There is no update to the data until Feb 2024 at the earliest. It is worth noting that performance against this target will be influenced and vary in line with the Biennial total number of respondents participating in this voluntary survey. As such caution should be noted with regards to previous comparison and trends.

## Supporting people to deal with their financial problems

Helping residents maximise their income through claiming additional benefits or paying grants to vulnerable people assists with independent living, preventing homelessness and helps reduce the number of households and families living in all various types of poverty including extreme poverty.

The following are some headline figures illustrating how we have distributed the payments and our performance -

- A total of £659,812 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants were paid to support vulnerable people.
- A total of £804,839 of Discretionary Housing Payments was distributed to household in need.
- We paid out £133,625 in grants to cover food and fuel for people in poverty and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies.
- During the year a total of 1,810 families have been supported to maximise benefit income and reduced fuel costs to the value of £2.527m.
- We allocated £4.3 million to Council tax accounts to support people with the cost of living crisis.
- The average processing time for New Housing Benefit claims was 25.63 days and 5.60 days for changes in circumstances against targets of 21 days and 6 days respectively.
- We are delivering the Energy Bill Support Scheme and the Alternative Payment Fund on behalf of the UK government. The scheme started in February 2023 and runs until the end of May 2023.
- The results of our Welfare Rights customer satisfaction surveys show that 99% of respondents would recommend the service.
- In line with Scottish Government Policy the basic pay of carers and personal assistants who look after adults in our communities were implemented twice during the year.



- We calculated and implemented contract rates for the Council's early learning and childcare partners that enabled them to sustain their services and pay their staff at least the Scottish Living Wage.

## Helping People Into Work

Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team and Third Sector delivery partners assist people into work. There are a number of programmes available to our residents, which offer a tailored support package to suit individual needs and help participants progress towards education, training or employment.

There is a broad criteria for participants:

- Individuals between the ages of 16 and 67 years who are facing barriers in moving towards and into employment.
- Young people within 6 months of the school leaving date who require support to move towards and into work.
- Low income parents (including kinship carers) who require support to move towards, into or to increase their income in-work.
- Employers looking to host a fully funded work placement or recruit someone utilising an employer recruitment incentive.

Using a holistic approach participants have access to accredited training, work placements paying the Real Living Wage, benefits, debt and fuel poverty advice, assistance with job applications, CV creation, interviews skills and techniques. Specific items can also be purchased to remove specific barriers, for example, a digital device to access online learning or a bicycle to help address poor transport links and allow travel to and from work.

The following are some quotes from participants, explaining their views on the support offered and the outcome achieved.

- "I'm extremely grateful for the support provided by ABERTI, this gave my employer the incentive to appoint me as an adult apprentice particularly given the additional costs associated due to my age"
- "My family and I have received a lot of support since coming to Scotland. I received a bike and a laptop which has helped me work more hours and I am able to study in my free time. I hope to start up my own business in the future. The continued support I receive from my PESF worker is very much appreciated"

To find out more information please visit [Helping people into work | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/helping-people-into-work)

## Corporate Outcome: People will live in safer and stronger communities

Number of Indicators: 4

Number on Track: 4

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
The percentage of groups who say their effectiveness has increased as a result of capacity building by the community development team	75.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	90.00%	G	The results are from an annual survey of customers and community groups engaged with the Community Planning and Community Development Team
The information provided to our community groups, individuals and partners is easy to understand	75.00%	93.00%	89.00%	96.00%	90.00%	G	The results are from an annual survey of customers and community groups engaged with the Community Planning and Community Development Team
The total value of compensation settlements for vehicle damage / driver injury as a result of road / bridge faults	No Target	£4,307	£2,884	£2,807	£1,879	No Target	The sums paid out have decreased year on year which may be indicative of an improvement in road and bridge surfaces.
Percentage of adults residents stating their neighbourhood as a 'very good' place to live (CSS – survey owner)							Awaiting Survey Launch

## Keeping People Safe

The number of service requests received has increased by 60% post Covid pandemic, at a time when resources are limited. An exercise was undertaken to review the services response to specific service categories, and determine the most appropriate response. Given resourcing and our legislative powers, and to identify some additional resource. These findings have been implemented.

Avian Influenza. The UK experienced its largest avian influenza outbreak in 2022 and the outbreak has continued into 2023 with outbreaks and positive cases still being identified. Specific actions have been taken by Argyll and Bute Council to engage with commercial and domestic poultry keepers to enhance their biosecurity arrangements and other controls, to provide advice to minimise contact with wild bird carcasses which were washed upon our coastlines, and review the Councils arrangements to respond to an avian influenza outbreak in our area.

Successful prosecution cases were prepared by the Councils Regulatory Services relating to a fatality in Loch Awe against a boat hire company, who hired a boat from a local business (Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974) and for an offence against a farmer for unnecessary suffering of an animal (Animal Health (Scotland) Act)

The Councils internal audit team assessed the arrangements in place within the Environmental Health Service to carry out the Council's enforcement responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. [The audit opinion was "substantial"](#), whereby internal controls, governance and the management of risk is sound. Three minor issues were identified and an action plan is in place to address these by the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

To ensure our residents live active and healthier lives requires us to monitor elements that can impact on overall health, work closely with our Partners and when necessary take enforcement action. There has been an increase in Nitrogen Oxide levels as transportation has increased towards pre-Covid levels. An air monitoring program that assesses the local air quality was completed. It concluded that local air quality in Argyll and Bute is good and well below prescribed standards but well within national targets.

## A safer place to live, work and visit

Within the Community Safety Partnership Strategy we worked with key partners including Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, HM Coastguard, Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP), Third Sector Interface (TSI) and local groups to bring together resources to ensure that Argyll and Bute is a safer place to live, work and visit.

Two examples of this is information received from Police Scotland for the group to consider appropriate safeguarding measures to support individuals reduce their vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism and the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) programme. MVP is a peer mentoring programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin all forms of gender-based violence in our society. We have a robust 3 year MVP development plan in place. This has helped to ensure strategic direction and a focussed approach to implementation of the programme.

The programme has faced challenges within schools in terms of having the capacity to release staff for training. We will continue to work to develop the number of trainers, which will help provide schools with their own internal succession plan systems. We will also look to increase the number of partners trained so that other services can support the programme, reducing demand on teaching staff.

### **Supporting Our Community Councils**

Online and in person training has been delivered to over 50 community councillors. Community Councils from across the area were introduced to the National Standards for Community Engagement and a variety of online and offline tools.

The training led to open and rich conversations around current practices and difficulties when engaging underrepresented groups. Conversations covered issues such as the barriers people may face when engaging with local democracy, and the range of traditional and digital methods that could be used to gather a diverse and representative views.

As with most training, there were secondary benefits to both the participants and trainers, the sessions also strengthened connections and best shared practice between Community Councils and across the authority.

The course evaluated well and subsequently a 15 minute summary of the training was created as a YouTube video and the link was circulated to community councillors unable to make the training, you can access the training video from this link [Community Engagement for Community Councils in Argyll and Bute - YouTube](#)

Other training delivered during this year by the team included:

- Risk Management for Community groups
- How to write an environmental policy and an action plan for your organisation

### **Community Organisations Received Capacity Building Support**

The Lochside Champions are a group that represent people with autism who attend the Lochside Resource Centre in Lochgilphead. The group were supported and attended the Mid-Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands Area Community Planning Group meeting. On behalf of the group they represent they raised a number of issues at that meeting including:

- That the homes are lovely but often situated too far out of town causing feelings of isolation at times.
- More work opportunities would be welcome.
- The lack of transport choices in the area is constraining, this made it very hard to do things on a whim or last minute for example.

At the meeting the group was introduced to a key partner, the Third Sector Interface, who subsequently visited and talked to them about supported volunteering opportunities. Another partner, Fyne Homes, has subsequently visited the group to talk about housing and donated materials for their garden area. The group were put in touch with the strategic transport team within the Council. Work is ongoing with the group to strengthen their governance and ensure they can fundraise and lobby effectively.

### **Building Standards achieves maximum 6-year licence**

Building Standards exceeded all targets for the 5 key national performance targets for 2022/23, attained one of the best customer satisfaction rates from the national Building Standards customer satisfaction survey run by the Scottish Government and achieved the maximum six year verification licence from the Scottish Government, which allows us to vett and verify building warrants. This brings benefits to the built environment and supporting our economy. During the period 2022/23 our work in supporting the economy resulted in a total 1,377 building warrants processed.

During the year there was an increase in the number of dangerous buildings complaints with occasions for emergency action to ensure that public safety was secured.

### **Short-term Lets**

The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Order 2022 required the design and development of a new Short-term Let Licensing scheme and policy. This is to ensure short-term lets are safe, address issues faced by neighbours, enable local authorities to know and understand what is happening in their area, and to handle complaints effectively. It also aims to balance the economic and tourism benefits from short-term lets with the needs and concerns of local communities across Argyll and Bute.

New operational arrangements to deliver the short-term let licensing regime were developed. This included the development of procedures, communication and engagement with the sector, an on-line information management system coupled with an online application process.

### **Welcoming Ukrainian Refugees**

Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed to Argyll and Bute through the Scottish and UK Government's sponsorship in response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the evacuation of the civilian population.

The council's resettlement team was scaled up and the multi-agency partnership established to coordinate support. Over 300 Ukrainians have chosen to resettle in Argyll and Bute and the Ukrainian population is dispersed across the whole authority. Ukrainian pupils are supported in school, with over 100 pupils attending 23 establishments. Ukrainian adults are supported to learn English and to move into work. A wide variety of activities and events have been arranged with services across the council providing support including Housing, Regulatory Services, Business Gateway, Employability, Welfare Rights, Revenue and Benefits, Community Development, Social Work, Public Health and Education.

## Covid Recovery Strategy

To support the process of returning to normality in response to the Covid pandemic a Recovery Strategy was developed. This led to the publication of the Argyll and Bute Recovery document; [Restart, Recover and Renew](#). The document focuses on a range of areas, including economic and social recovery, building back stronger communities, public health and infrastructure.

It also recognises the importance of economic factors in driving our recovery. A thriving local economy will underpin renewal, providing opportunities for local people although population decline will continue to be a major factor in our capacity for recovery and renewal.

### Corporate Outcome: Children and young people have the best possible start

**Number of Indicators: 8**

**Number on Track: 7**

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Provide quality meals within cost margins to all pupils	+/-5%	-0.0345	-0.069	-0.04	-2.56%	<b>G</b>	Catering continues to perform well, with the variance from food costs within the +/-5% target across the area. We continue to monitor areas/locations that fall outside of the target variance
Increase the percentage of our care experienced young people that have the recommended additional tracking and monitoring plans in place	100.00%		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	<b>G</b>	Virtual Head Teacher is now in post and continues to work on updated approaches to the monitoring, tracking and progress of this cohort. Targets for Attainment, Exclusion and Attendance updated and agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board.
Percentage of children living in poverty (After Housing Costs)	No Target	23.30%	18.90%	21.70%		<b>No Target</b>	Latest Data is 2021/22. Data is taken from the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF). Since 2018/19 the percentage of children living in poverty has improved against all local authorities. Latest data indicates a relative position of 11 out of all authorities (with lowest being best). Although we are advised to view the annual figures in the longer term, it does appear that Argyll and Bute's broad

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							array of tackling child poverty actions are having a positive impact and it is important that they are maintained and built upon.
Our percentage rate for attendance across all Argyll and Bute schools is comparable or better than the Scottish national average (Biennial data)	92.00%	93.50%	93.30%	93.30%	90.55%	R	This figure is taken from provisional Attendance, Absence and Exclusions (AAE) census data and is embargoed. We have used some basic reports from the AAE census but have no way of checking that this is correct at this time. We are waiting for data to be released for Director sign off and that will be actual data. Biennial 2020/21 Data
Support the increase in the uptake of available Grants, Allowance and Entitlements	2,573	3,103	2,998	2,853	2,999	G	Education have worked with schools in relation to the take up of EMA application and have issued individual communications to eligible pupils. Public notices and social media posts have been issued to publicise other available grants including free school meals and clothing grants
A counselling service is available in all secondary schools	100.00%		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	G	The new School Counselling Service delivered by The Exchange (TCS) was launched in January 2023 and provides 100% coverage of services across all schools and localities where required. The new service offers a broader range of delivery options than the previous service and is currently managing demand very effectively.
The percentage of children with no concerns across all domains at 27 to 30 month assessment	82.10%	87.10%	85.50%	87.30%	No Data	G	This indicator is taken from the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF), the latest data is for 2021/22. The Scotland wide performance for FY 2021/22 is 82.10%. Comparatively we are second highest in our Family Group of 8 Local Authorities and one of two authorities where performance has improved. Our performance against the previous year has improved by 1.8% on the previous year.  Within the HSCP Integrated Performance Management Framework, the Child Health Measure being monitored on a quarterly basis across Argyll and Bute HSCP is as follows:

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							Reduce the % of 27 - 30 month reviews conducted out with the agreed time period, with a target of 90%.
95% of schools have a suitability rating of A or B	95.00%	95.00%	95.00%	95.00%	95.00%	G	All schools within Argyll and Bute currently have a condition rating of A or B. There are 2 schools which have a suitability rating of C (North Bute and Tobermory). Education are currently awaiting the outcome of a LEIP application to support the building of a replacement school for Tobermory.

### Providing Support for All Our Learners

To ensure appropriate support is in place for all our learners, including those with the most complex needs, we have been working closely with the CALM training organisation. This enables us to access training that helps staff understand more complex dysregulated behaviours and how to reduce and prevent those behaviours over time.

The training focusses on prevention and a reduction of restrictive responses. A section of the course examines best practice and trauma informed positive behaviour support. Staff who have completed this have provided feedback regarding the positive impact that learning from the training is already having on their practice.

Alongside this focus on the specialised training we have updated our documentation and guidance for staff. In addition to this we have delivered staff awareness raising sessions on the changes to this important guidance.

### Nurturing and Supporting our Young People

School staff are well equipped to adopt nurturing and trauma informed approaches to our most distressed young people. Our nurture teachers have provided intensive, time-limited support through coaching and capacity building. This ensures that the young people who need this most are supported. Qualitative feedback from staff in schools indicates the positive impact this work has on children, young people and staff wellbeing.

In order to improve outcomes for children and young people a new Counselling in Schools Service was implemented. The new service is delivered by 'The Exchange' (a school counselling service). Monitoring of the data and evidence gathered is showing very positive impact for children and young people where they feel listened to and supported.

Other notable activities are:



- Additional tracking and monitoring of attendance and attainment has led to targeted support and interventions for Care Experienced Children and young people. As a result, close analysis of the data has shown positive outcomes from the targeted support including an increase in positive destinations to 94%, which is above our target of 85%.
- A sustained low number of exclusions for care experienced children and young people continues to remain below 5. Interventions to support this sustained low number of exclusions includes individual work with children by Health and Wellbeing Liaison Officers, School based personalised support, Education Psychology support, health discussions and wider partnership working.
- Additional resources to support the nurturing environments provided in each Early Years setting including partner providers, which in turn enables more flexibility in how they use their environment to support self-regulation for children.
- Training sessions supported 143 practitioners engaging in dialogue around infant behaviour and how to apply nurture principles to their understanding of this. An increased number of settings reported feeling empowered by their growing knowledge around nurture to better understand and thus support dysregulated behaviour in children.
- Bespoke training to support practitioners to increase their skill and confidence in delivering play and learning outdoors was delivered. This resulted in a better understanding of how specific outdoor environments can deliver learning for children, engages and extends children's thinking and supports their connection to the natural environment. The participants all reported that they felt more confident to assess risk, engage new skills and deliver learning outdoors.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is seeing increasing demands placed on schools in relation to youth voice. There are ongoing challenges in bringing all council departments up to speed in relation to UNCRC, and we have been working to develop a cross-council Youth Voice structure. The UNCRC working group is meeting regularly to address this and using framework and guidance to inform approach. Continued engagement in the Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) programme is helping to raise community awareness of RRS.

### **My Tribe Period Product Provision**

Argyll and Bute's My Tribe brand has been identified as an exemplar of good practice across Scotland. The success has been recognised by the Northern Alliance who have asked the Project Lead to support the roll out to other Local Authority areas. As well as the provision of free period products, support has been provided in schools and Period Product Champions have been trained. There has also been engagement with community organisations and promotion of My Tribe via Social Media channels.

## Award winning School Meals Service

We delivered over 1.2m School Meals and Early Years' meals as well as winning the following awards -

- Health and Nutrition Award 2023 for our school meals drone delivery pilot
- Health and Nutrition Special Contribution Award 2023
- Cateys 2023 Public Sector Caterer Award
- ASSIST FM Community Focus Award 2023

Working closely with Education online payment and cashless catering was successfully rolled out to all our primary and secondary schools. This allows online pre-ordering which enhances the service for our children and young people. It also gives parents and carers the ability to assist pupils in ordering meals and view live fund balances for paying pupils. Importantly the system also assures the anonymity for our Free School Meal pupils.

The Catering Team won a Health and Nutrition Award for piloting the delivery of school meals via drone. The pilot was successful and will allow us to investigate the provision of meals to our remote areas, reduce the climate impact of the service and maximise the use of technology. This pilot has also been shortlisted for a COSLA Excellence Award 2023, with the awards ceremony taking place in September 2023.

The Council continues to offer fresh, healthy and sustainable school lunches, and holds the Soil Association Scotland's 'Bronze Food For Life Served Here' award. The award helps local authorities to source food from the local area for school meals so that children benefit from freshly prepared, sustainable meals. The award is a widely respected and independently assessed. It is supported by the Scottish Government and recognises Councils that serve food made from fresh ingredients, free from genetically modified ingredients and undesirable additives, using free-range eggs and high-welfare meat.

Taking into account feedback received from catering staff, education staff, parents and pupils, a new menu and a third meal option was implemented for all Early Years, Primary and Secondary school pupils. The menu is compliant with the 'Food for Life' served here Bronze award and was analysed in accordance with the Scottish Governments Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) regulations 2020. The new menu is lower in sugar, salt, red meat, processed red meat products and ensures all pupils have access to more fruits and vegetables.

**Corporate Outcome: Education, skills and training will maximise opportunities for all**

**Number of Indicators: 7**

**Number on Track: 6**

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Maintain the percentage of all young people leaving school achieving a positive destination into further education, training or employment * ACADEMIC YEAR	95.00%		94.00%	93.50%	95.20%	G	The Annual Participation Measure (APM) for 2022/23 was published at the end of August 2023 and reflects as significant increase on last year's APM of 1.7%. This figure exemplifies that the Stretch Aim set by the Education Service of 95% has been overtaken.
Maintain the percentage of successful examination presentations in levels 4 and 5 for Literacy and Numeracy by our senior phase pupils * ACADEMIC YEAR	60.00%		100.00%	97.00%	SCQF 4 87.23% SCQF 5 66.84%	G	The data indicates that the levels of passes in Literacy and Numeracy is being maintained year on year, with only a 1% difference between 2022 and 2023 in both SCQF 4 and SCQF 5 Literacy and Numeracy, measured as detailed above.
Increase the uptake of wider achievement opportunities which complement traditional SQA awards and offer alternative ways to develop learning, life and work skills	No Target				88.00%	No Target	Enhanced Wider Achievements Programmes across all Secondary Schools continue to be under development and are partially supported by UKSPF funding successfully obtained by the Education Service.
The percentage of Modern Apprentices that go on to a positive destination after completing the Argyll and Bute Council Modern Apprentice Programme	95.00%	97.40%	100.00%	96.10%	96.20%	G	The progress of Modern Apprentices onward to positive destinations remains high. We will be investigating expanding the reach of the Modern Apprentice programme through forthcoming workforce planning discussions.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
The percentage of children that achieve their appropriate developmental milestones by Primary 1	70.00%	Not Collected (Covid)	75.00%	64.00%	63.00%	<b>R</b>	Moving forward, our Strategic Plan, Early Years 2023-24, highlights collaboration with Education Scotland's Curriculum Innovation Team. This will facilitate 'live' service design project across Early level, which will start from the adult learners as they ask 'why?'; scaffolding them to take a closer look at the role of the educator within the cycle of learning, teaching and assessment.'
The percentage pass rate for the National 5 qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average * ACADEMIC YEAR	No Target	91.60%	87.50%	79.70%	77.39%	<b>No Target</b>	For session 2022-2023, the post-appeal National 5 pass rate in Argyll and Bute at grades A-C is 77.39%. The national post-appeal data will not be made available until December 2023.  Argyll and Bute's pre-appeal pass rate for National 5 was 76.93%. The national pre-appeal A-C pass rate for National 5 is 78.80%.
The percentage pass rate for the National Higher qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average * ACADEMIC YEAR	No Target	90.50%	90.20%	80.90%	77.35%	<b>No Target</b>	For session 2022-2023, the post-appeal Higher pass rate at grades A-C is 77.35%. The national post-appeal data will not be made available until December.  Argyll and Bute's pre-appeal pass rate for Higher was 77.12%. The national pre-appeal A-C pass rate for Higher is 77.10%.

### Increasing Attainment at the 1<sup>st</sup> Level

Following analysis of literacy attainment data with a specific focus on children residing in quintile 1, eight schools were invited to participate and have undertaken training in using a Quality Improvement approach to support writing attainment at 1<sup>st</sup> level. Training was originally offered by the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) Improving Writing Programme and is now being delivered within the authority, supported by allied health professionals and our Attainment Advisor. Data shows that attainment at 1<sup>st</sup> level within the first set of schools to undertake the training

has increased from an average of 56.2% in 2022 to an average of 72.8% based on Feb 23 predictions. Delivery of the programme to schools in cohort 2 has now commenced, with cohort 3 due to commence in September 2023.

### **Digital Support for Schools and Learners**

Digital learning is supported through the deployment of additional devices which have been provided from the digital poverty initiative. This initiative is funded by the Scottish Government. Our most remote schools now benefit from upgrades of bandwidth and all our Primary and Secondary schools now have Skype for Business.

We undertook a successful pilot which uses technology to help reduce and remove literacy barriers for children with additional support needs. The pilot increased engagement in education outcomes, improved wellbeing and raised attainment levels in literacy. Children involved in the pilot are now using a range of assistive technology more confidently and independently. The technology we piloted is Enhancing Literacy Skills for those with Additional Support Needs using Technology (ELSAT).

### **Supporting Learners to Realise Their Potential**

We have broadened and improved the vocational educational provision in schools, and developed strong partnerships with employers and agencies who can contribute to the development of young people's skills and prospects. Our Developing Young Workforce Co-ordinators have instigated and developed partnership agreements between schools and employers, resulting in an increased number and range of work placement opportunities for young people. In the Senior Phase (S4-S6) we have continued to develop approaches to ensure personalisation and learning choices for all pupils. Working in partnership with Argyll College we are supporting the development of an increased choice of pathways for S4-S6 pupils which allows them to attain their chosen positive destinations in the adult world. Twenty networked college courses now feature in Senior Phase course choices and are available virtually to all S4-S6 pupils. Work is ongoing to extend the Senior Phase curriculum offer to include further Foundation Apprenticeships and HNCs delivered both in schools and via partnerships.

### **Leavers Positive Destinations**

For the first time, we were ahead of all of our comparators for Leavers' Positive Destinations. This is a significant achievement and one which we hope to sustain or build on. A total of 90% of our Care Experienced Young People progressed to a positive post-school destination in 2022/23. This is above both the Northern Alliance authorities and national figures.

### **Rural Growth Deal – Skills and Training Programmes for Local People**

Over £14m of Rural Growth Deal (RGD) investment will directly support skills and training programmes for local people. This includes £7m of skills interventions to be delivered via the Rural Skills Accelerator Programme with a focus on enhancing local STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) tied to economic opportunities, targeted business skills interventions and enhancements to UHI Argyll's local estate.

UHI Argyll will also invest £7.8m via the RGD to create a marine industry training centre at Dunstaffnage which will provide the skills and training opportunities locally required by key sectors in the blue economy. This has key synergies with other RGD projects such as the SAMS Seaweed and

Shellfish Research & Development Centre which will enable growth in these nascent sectors alongside more established industries. We will work with Stirling University to expand the capacity of the Marine Environmental Research Laboratory at Marchrihanish with a focus on Research & Development activities around fish health and environmental sustainability. These interventions will grow opportunities for students to study locally.

### Carbon Literate Organisation (CLO) Bronze Status

We recognise the importance of a leadership informed and knowledgeable of climate change and sustainability will improve decision making and our ambition of becoming a net zero organisation by 2045. To support this we successfully completed a programme of Carbon Literacy Training and obtained nationally recognised Carbon Literate Organisation (CLO) Bronze status. The training offered to the Senior Leadership Team and completed by over 65% of Elected Members provides detailed training around climate change decision making, evidence and science.

### Corporate Outcome: Our economy is diverse and thriving

Number of Indicators: 12

Number on Track: 10

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Maintain the percentage of local suppliers that benefit from the awards of contracts via the procurement portal	20.00%	27.90%	27.90%	13.50%	19.90%	<b>R</b>	Due to the nature of the contracts awarded in 2022/23, meant that our local supply base was unable to bid for them. However, where the type of contracts that local suppliers are bidding for and which contracts are subsequently awarded to them is monitored, and 85.3% of local suppliers were successful in winning bids
Increase the number of community benefits that are delivered through the contracts we award locally	No Target	2	22	55	73	<b>No Target</b>	We have been working closely with our suppliers to deliver additional social, economic and environmental value to our society and 73 Community Benefits were achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards and the Request List during the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. For further detail, please visit: <a href="https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/selling-council/procurement-useful-links-and-documents">https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/selling-council/procurement-useful-links-and-documents</a>

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Number of business and industry planning applications submitted annually	No Target	25	21	19	23	No Target	This measure details the number of applications submitted to the Council for business and industry applications. The data for 2022/23 indicates increased activity in this area from the previous reporting period.
The percentage of homeless applicants who required temporary accommodation this period	No Target	44.00%	45.00%	40.00%	34.00%	No Target	The percentage reduction has to be considered in the context of an increase of 29% in the number of households presenting as homeless to the local authority in 2022/23 compared to 2021/22. The actual number of households requiring temporary accommodation increased in 2022/23 but the pro- active housing advice and information provided by the Area Teams has meant that effective prevention work is carried out to ensure that as many households as possible get a positive housing outcome and do not require temporary accommodation.
Number of affordable social sector new builds completed per annum	Actual	84	48	145	188	G	The Strategic Housing Investment Plan process is a partnership between the Council, the Registered Social Landlords and the Scottish Government ensuring that new build affordable housing is delivered across the local authority to meet need and demand.
The total number of visitor trips to Argyll and Bute (Jan-Dec, STEAM, Million trips)	No Target	2.9M	0.8M	1.5M	2.5M	No Target	This data is taken from the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) the number of visitor trips to Argyll and Bute increased from 1.5m (Jan – Dec 2021) to 2.5m (Jan- Dec 2022) – an increase of 67%. The positive experience for visitors coming to Argyll and Bute has been assisted by the actions delivered through the Staycation agenda, which included employing a temporary post to take forward specific actions on the ground, such as successful completion of the Motor Caravan Overnight Parking scheme.
The total visitor spend in Argyll and Bute (Jan-Dec, STEAM, Direct visitor spend - £/M)	No Target	£364M	£125M	£262.5M	£407.5M	No Target	This data is taken from the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) the visitor spend across Argyll and Bute increased from £262.5m (Jan – Dec 2021) to £407.5m (Jan- Dec 2022) – an increase of 55%. The positive experience for visitors coming to Argyll and Bute has been

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							assisted by the actions delivered through the Staycation agenda, which included employing a temporary post to take forward specific actions on the ground, such as successful completion of the Motor Caravan Overnight Parking scheme.
Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita	No Target	22,767	20,543	23,394	47,270	No Target	The latest figure of £47,270 is taken from the Scottish Annual Business Statistics, 2021 (excludes the finance sector and part of agriculture and the public sector). This is a marked increase on the previous figure of £23,394 (statistics are in arrears and do not match financial years). There are potentially a number of council services/interventions that directly or indirectly contribute to this productivity measure, plus external factors.
Unemployment rate - Claimant Count as a %age of working age population	No Target	2.70%	5.80%	4.00%	2.80%	No Target	The Claimant Count unemployment rate is updated on a monthly basis (one month in arrears), This figure is the unemployment rate for Argyll and Bute as a % of working age population (16-64). The downward trend is positive.
Unemployment rate - Claimant Count as a %age of the population (16-24)	No Target	2.80%	6.50%	4.30%	2.80%	No Target	The Claimant Count unemployment rate is updated on a monthly basis (one month in arrears) for 16-64 year olds. This unemployment rate for the % of population, 16-24 year olds. The downward trend is positive.
The number of business gateway start-ups per 10,000 of population	No Target	161	110	154.3	135.7	No Target	It is hoped this figure will improve as Argyll and Bute Business Gateway Team recently launched a start-up grant funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
Geographical percentage coverage of 4/5G mobile phone connectivity	95.00%	76.00%	77.00%	79.00%	81.00%	R	Each mobile network operator manages their own network as they all use different spectrum frequencies. EE has the greatest coverage as a result of the Government backed Emergency Service Network (ESN) contract and a very aggressive commercial approach. They have built in excess of 90 masts across A&B over the last 5 years. Over the next few years there will be significant improvements as part of the UK Government supported £1B Shared Rural Network (SRN) due to be completed by 2027.



## Economic Growth

The positive experience for visitors has been assisted by the actions delivered through the Staycation agenda, which included employing a temporary post to take forward specific actions on the ground, such as successful completion of the Motorcaravan Overnight Parking scheme. Details on the Staycation agenda can be found in this report [Staycation Update Paper](#)

- With reference to the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) the number of visitor trips and visitor spend increased in Argyll and Bute.
- Visitor trips increased from 1.5m (Jan – Dec 2021) to 2.5m (Jan- Dec 2022). This is an increase of 67%
- Visitor spend increased from £262.5m (Jan – Dec 2021) to £407.5m (Jan- Dec 2022). This is an increase of 55%.

## Supporting the Economic Recovery and Our Communities

The Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management Team (PCCMT) provided a strong lead to ensure we continued the percentage of Council spend that is under a contract or service level agreement, while also maintaining the percentage of all Small Medium Enterprises (SME) that win council contracts. We also worked to improve the delivery of contract management on all high risk contracts.

2022/23 Contracted Spend: 90.8%.

2022/23 SME Wins: 87.6%

We effectively planned and coordinated the release of tenders to avoid overwhelming the market, in particular the local market, by issuing invitations to tender where the regulations allowed. For 2022/23, we awarded 152 contracts and of these 123 were Quick Quotes (ITQ's).

The percentage of total bids by and contracts awarded to local and SME suppliers is monitored monthly. However, not all requirements can be fulfilled by the local supply market. To gain a better understanding of performance, the number of tenders bid for, and subsequently won, by local suppliers is also monitored and detailed below.

2022/23 Data			
<b>Total No. of Tenders</b>	<b>No. of tenders receiving local bids</b>	<b>No. won by local bidders</b>	<b>Percentage success rate of local bids won to local bids submitted</b>
152	34	29	85.3%

The level of local spend was monitored in 2022/23, and the overall percentage with our local suppliers was 37.3% - see detail below:

	<b>Total Spend</b>	<b>Local Spend</b>	<b>Local Spend Percentage</b>
<b>2022/23 – Spend Distribution</b>	£163,144,959	£60,856,127	37.3%

We recognise the importance of maximising the economic benefits from directing Council spend to local businesses in terms of benefiting the local economy. Whilst it would not be acceptable to give preference to local businesses during any particular procurement, efforts are made to ensure that local businesses are upskilled so as to have the greatest chance of being successful in winning Council and other public sector business.

We are committed to maximising community benefits from our procurement activities which in turn deliver wider benefits for communities when contractors purchase the required goods, services and supplies for Argyll and Bute. We have been working closely with our suppliers to deliver additional social, economic and environmental value to our society. A total of 73 community benefits were achieved in 2022/23 through robust contract management.

We also simplified and streamlined our procurement processes, ensuring that documentation was as straightforward as possible. To support the economic recovery and emerging priorities for Argyll and Bute we work closely with colleagues within Economic Development and other collaborative stakeholders.

The Rural Growth Deal (RGD) will result in contracts totalling £70m to be delivered over 10 years. As such, there is significant opportunity to use the RGD investment to deliver enhanced community benefits. We are working to ensure suppliers meet their obligations with regard to community benefits.

## **Business Start-Ups and Support – Two Case Studies**

The number of business gateway start-ups has dropped slightly over the financial year, but is it hoped this will improve during 2023/24 as the Argyll and Bute Business Gateway Team recently launched a start-up grant funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

During 2022/23 we worked hard to ensure that the financial help available to businesses was correctly awarded and quickly paid out. In total we awarded nearly £18 million of Non-Domestic Rates reliefs to support local businesses.

The following are two case studies illustrating how Business Gateway has supported these businesses to grow.

### **Aosdàna**

Based on the Isle of Iona, Aosdàna designs and manufactures contemporary jewellery with a Celtic influence.

Business owner, Mhairi Killin, founded Aosdàna in 2003. Having operated successfully for almost two decades, most of Aosdàna's sales were generated from its gallery on the island, where some of the jewellery ranges are also designed and made. However, like many other small businesses, pandemic closures and subsequent travel restrictions meant the main source of income for Mhairi dwindled.

During this time, however, Mhairi, together with award-winning jewellery designer Maeve Gillies, won an Innovate UK award to develop a range of jewellery based on the heritage of original Iona silversmiths, the Ritchies.

Mhairi approached Business Gateway for support and guidance on how to reach a wider audience and generate global sales for the new range, the Kist o' Ritchies. She received 1:1 support from a dedicated business adviser, as well as advice on funding, a strategic review of her business, and signposting to a wider network.

“Support from Business Gateway has been so beneficial. Not only has their assistance helped me re-evaluate my business strategy, but it has also allowed me to invest in strong product photography for my website, which will help me greatly when launching into international markets later this year. I can't thank Business Gateway enough for their ongoing support.”

The Kist o' Ritchies collection utilises the latest manufacturing technology to navigate the lack of metalworking skills on the island, preserving the key historical designs from the 19th and 20th centuries.

The modern jewellery range will launch in spring 2023 and is expected to attract international markets including the USA and Canada.

### **Argyll Yacht Rigger**

A Scottish yacht servicing business in Argyll & Bute is thriving after its owner received specialist start-up advice and grant funding from Business Gateway.

Following redundancy during the Covid-19 pandemic, experienced rigger Ian Burton launched Argyll Yacht Rigger, in June 2020. The Tarbert-based business provides a full range of services for pleasure and commercial yacht owners in the region, from complete re-rigs to installing new masthead electronics and winter maintenance.

Seeking to capitalise on this niche area of business, Ian approached Business Gateway in 2020 for advice on setting up his own business. As well as providing start up guidance, his local adviser facilitated specialist support which included employment advice and expert help on business growth and resilience. This support was crucial as Ian looked to build the business during the pandemic.

Business Gateway also signposted grant funding, helping Ian access financial support to expand. This included support from the Local Growth Accelerator Programme, funded by Argyll and Bute Council and the European Regional Development Fund (2014-20) Structural Funds Programme. With a referral made from Business Gateway, Ian was also awarded funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The grants enabled Ian to purchase higher-quality equipment, allowing him to deliver a wider range of services, increase capacity and cover a wider regional area. The growth has resulted in Ian employing a second member of staff with plans to hire an additional full-time rigger this year.

Ian said: "Starting your own business, especially in a rural area, can be daunting, however, the support of Business Gateway has been vital to a successful launch in 2020. Working throughout the pandemic, I was determined to expand the business and it was with the funding that Business Gateway helped me to secure that I was able to do this. I have now taken on my wife as my first employee to help with my bookkeeping, which has been an important function for us to maximise earning hours."

### **Mitigating the Delays for Taxi Licencing**

As the licensing authority we must be satisfied that the health of individuals issued with a Taxi Licence meets our expectations. In order to do this we contact their Doctor on receipt of an application. We realised that customers were experiencing significant delays in receiving a response from their Doctor. This in turn meant that customers could not receive their licenses timeously and therefore could not trade. This had inevitable negative economic consequences, with the frustration experienced by our customers made clear to us, both verbally and in writing.

We are committed to using all forms of customer interaction to help us identify possible service improvements and offer better choices. As a result of the clear frustration described in the communication we undertook a period of consultation. We contacted all 389 private hire/taxi drivers and operators in the area asking for their feedback on a proposed solution of engaging the services of an external agency to undertake the required medical check.

This solution was endorsed by customers and has since been implemented, we have the required confidence to issue a taxi licence, customers do not face delays in the processing of their applications and negative economic consequences are reduced.

### **Generating Income for the Council**

We have generated over £560,000 by selling off surplus property assets and generated annual income of £31,750. This is part of our strategy to divest surplus property assets and generate income from our estate.

Notable sales include:

- The former Innellan Primary School
- The conclusion of the Castle Toward sale
- The marketing of the Helensburgh Waterfront commercial site, which attracted 9 international, national and local bids for the site with a significant local community engagement exercise undertaken.
- Oban Airport marketing has generated 3 significant aviation related business interests for the business park. These will be identified with the outline business case to be completed in 2023.

We are developing a Strategic Outline Programme. This will cover potential opportunities for the Council to develop a number of its assets on a more commercial basis and will be delivered over a number of years, with the immediate focus being a new Business Park at Kilmory, and commercial developments at Helensburgh's waterfront.

We secured ongoing commercial planning / building standards work from other local authorities. Not only is this important for us to provide a balanced budget, but it also supports communities in these other Council areas.

Events and commercial catering continues to grow with the recent addition of a new commercial café this year -The Pier Point Café, Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre in late 2022. Work is well underway to open another commercial café, the Corranbuie Café, Tarbert Holiday Park in July 2023. Event and commercial income is slowly recovering from the impact of the pandemic, with a number of large festivals and private weddings having been hosted throughout the course of the year.

### **Rural Growth Deal – Two Projects Growing Visitor Numbers**

The RGD includes a tourism and place programme which will focus on 2 local projects aimed at growing visitor numbers in the region. The Kintyre Seasports project will regenerate Campbeltown Sailing Club to provide a facility which can grow marine based tourism activities in Kintyre. This will build on the successful programmes already being delivered by Kintyre Seasports which has 10% of the Campbeltown Grammar School role enrolled. This facility will also enable an uplift in local events such as community regattas and sailing competitions which will result in an estimated 700 more visitor trips to the local area per annum.

The RGD will also invest £9m in Rothesay Pavilion which will significantly reduce the funding gap on this project. The Pavilion has the scale and ambition to be transformational for Bute and will provide a key visitor attraction when complete. This will include a fully refurbished and equipped main auditorium with sprung dancefloor and a capacity of up to 800 seated and 1200 standing; a new second venue with a capacity of 80-100; a contemporary gallery space; shop and box office; café; two bars; meeting room; music and media education studio; and supported office space. In addition, there will be outdoor seating and landscaped garden areas. Programming during the high season will target visitors (short stay and day) with festival-based and themed events and high-quality unique exhibitions. Examples will include vintage fairs, comedy weekends, beer and food festivals, family shows, and dance holidays. These will link in with other tourism and cultural organisations on the island to ensure joined-up experience-based and holiday focussed marketing with an emphasis on the cultural tourist.

## **Rural Growth Deal – Mull Housing Pilot**

As a result of successful funding applications the progress of the Rural Growth Deal Housing Pilot has been accelerated. We are now able to press ahead with preparations for the delivery of much needed worker housing in Tobermory, Mull. This need was initially identified by research undertaken by the Mull and Iona Community Housing Trust. Restrictions to economic growth as a direct result of the shortage of housing for workers were identified. The Housing Service is working with Mull and Iona Community Housing Trust (MIGHT) to devise a housing type and tenure model which will, if successful allow MIGHT to operate as managers of a bespoke property leased to them by the Council.

This will then provide accommodation for workers in the local economy, either for seasonal work, and or a landing pad type accommodation for those who have arrived on the island to take up permanent positions. This is a pilot project and has the potential to be rolled out further. A site start is currently planned for April 2024, subject to securing the necessary planning, building control and roads consents.

## **Clyde Engineering and Innovation Cluster**

The Clyde Engineering and Innovation Cluster (CEIC) project will be supported with up to £7m from the UK Government. The impetus for this project comes from the expansion of HM Naval Base (HMNB) Clyde through the Maritime Change Programme (MCP). The MCP will consolidate the UK's submarine fleet and all its support services to HMNB Clyde.

The Rural Growth Deal provides a unique opportunity to support this transformational programme of change and maximise the local economic benefits. This project will deliver new, modern commercial business space. It will also represent Phase 1 of a potential business and engineering cluster at Colgrain Business Park near Helensburgh.

In developing the CEIC proposals we have been working closely with key partners including the MOD, Royal Navy, Scottish Enterprise and key industrial partners currently delivering services at HMNB Clyde.

The Rural Growth Deal investment aims to:-

- Maximise the economic opportunity from the £1.3bn investment into HMNB Clyde.
- Secure the economic opportunity for Helensburgh and Lomond and the wider Argyll and Bute area by addressing the current lack of available commercial accommodation.
- Providing modern, commercial accommodation will support the development of engineering and supply businesses.

## **West Coast Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Logistics and Training Hub**

This project will be supported with investment of up to £4m from the UK Government subject to the approval of a full business case.

This project will invest in new business park infrastructure at Oban Airport. Recent trials using drone's to provide essential services to some of the most fragile rural and island communities have been successful. The investment will enable it to become a leading innovative research and development centre for UAV technologies.

The centre will deliver Scotland's first specialised drone training and research centre. Providing enhanced Research & Development capabilities, space for UAV pilot training, laboratories, and lecture suites. The UAV Hub will also provide state of the art hangars with maintenance facilities for UAVs and general aviation aircraft. Oban Airports' position on the West Coast of Scotland will also provide enhanced capability to trial Beyond Visual Line of Site (BVLOS) flights in controlled airspace. This will support the safe integration of UAV's and general aviation traffic across the UK, future-proofing our airspace for all users.

**Corporate Outcome: We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth**

**Number of Indicators: 5**

**Number on Track: 5**

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
The percentage of waste that is recycled, composted or recovered	45.00%	43.80%	49.30%	48.30%	52.00%	G	There was an overall improvement in recycling performance in 2022 which was mainly due to an increase in green garden waste and wood waste tonnages sent by Renewi from the PPP area for onward composting and recycling.  There was also an improvement in recovery performance in 2022 mainly due to a trial carried out by Renewi in the PPP area whereby Renewi sent circa 1,500 tonnes of general mixed residual waste (mainly from their Dalinlongart waste facility near Dunoon) to an Energy from Waste (EfW) plant in the central belt
The number of tonnes of waste sent to landfill (Biodegradable)	21,500	18,577	18,435	18,772	18,165	G	The annual tonnage of biodegradable waste to landfill has reduced from previous years calculation of tonnage. Based upon the current annual tonnage, there is a significant reduction of waste to landfill. The reduction is 3,335 tonnes based upon the corporate level specified at 21,500 tonnes.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Percentage of street cleanliness	73.00%	79.00%	81.00%	79.00%	83.00%	<b>G</b>	The level of street cleanliness throughout Argyll remains at a very good standard on the areas which Keep Scotland Beautiful have highlighted for inspection. The national standard has a pass rate of 67% however the service has set its own target of 73% and remains well above this target.
The percentage of roads in need of maintenance as defined by the annual survey	No Target	54.20%	52.50%	NO DATA	49.70%	<b>No Target</b>	The covid-19 pandemic interrupted the 2019-20 and 2020-21 annual road condition assessment programmes which meant island roads were unable to be surveyed. However this year's survey results show a marked improvement in overall condition since the last normal survey from 54.4% to 49.8%. The results also show, for the first time in the last 8 years of reporting, that more than half our road network is within the green or good condition band, which demonstrates the success road maintenance teams have achieved across the authority.
Carbon emissions relating to Council activities (Council carbon footprint) tCO <sub>2</sub> e = tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent	Net Zero tCO <sub>2</sub> by 2045	28643	26619	28218	26,512	<b>G</b>	There has been a reduction of 1,705 tCO <sub>2</sub> e on total emissions for the previous year. Projects delivered by the Council that have contributed to the reduction in emissions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LED Streetlight Replacement programme</li> <li>• Solar pv and LED lighting installations at Council assets</li> <li>• Installation of low carbon heating systems (e.g. air source heat pumps)</li> </ul>

## Flood Protection and Marine Works

We have progressed our assessments, watercourse clearance works, flood incident investigation and provision of flooding advice. A watercourse inspector along with additional engineers have been recruited to assist the flooding team, these posts will help to deliver the council's obligations in terms of Flood Risk Mitigation.

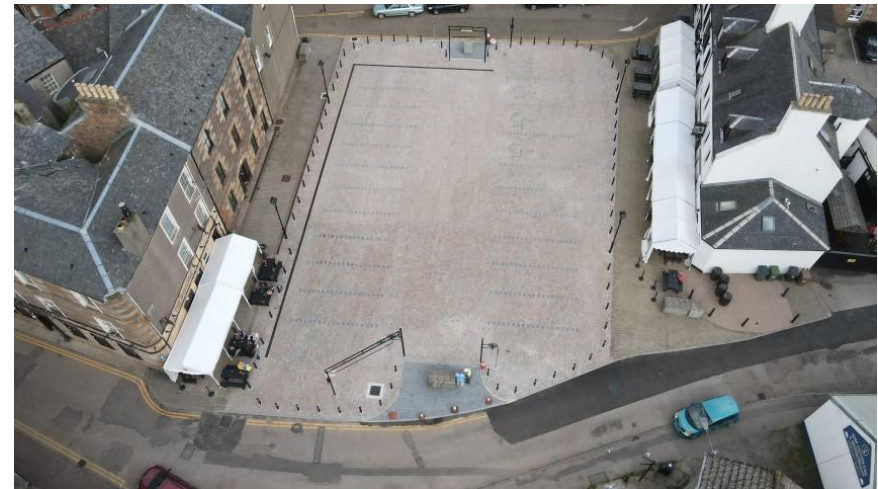


## Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme

Construction of the Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme started on site in September 2022. It is the first scheme to be promoted by Argyll and Bute Council under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. Budgeted to cost £15.215M and funded 80% by Scottish Government and 20% by Argyll and Bute Council.

There are a number of elements to this piece of work. Essentially, surface water has been removed from the combined foul drainage system, this reduces the amount of water that needs to be treated in the sewage treatment works. This required the construction of a storage tank under Burnside Square, small ponds on the “Meadows” and the construction of a reservoir to the south of Snipefield Industrial Estate were also required.

These ponds and the reservoir will remain dry for the majority of the time, and will provide holding capacity during a storm event, where water will be held and ultimately slowly discharged into the sea.



Both the “Meadows” and the “Burnside” sections of the work are largely complete with final works planned for Sept/October 2023. Burnside Square is open to the public, with car parking to be available shortly. Road resurfacing is ongoing along the streets where pipework installation has been completed. Work on the “Millknowe” section (the flood storage reservoir) is ongoing. The Contractor has completed piling works and has substantially completed the embankment and spillway structure. The “Dalaruan Street” section (for culvert upsizing) is the final phase to commence which will also enable utility works to commence.



First photo shows the reservoir which will be dry the majority of the time, only holding water during a flood event.

Second photo shows the drilling rig used to insert the steel sheet piling which forms the walls of the reservoir.

Third photo shows Burnside Square during the construction of the tank.

Additionally we have progressed to a cloud based Flood Risk Management System which enables flooding information to be held in a safe and appropriate format.

## **Piers and Harbours**

### **Marine Infrastructure and Ferry Services**

The restructure of our larger harbour infrastructure and reviewed legislation have led to an additional number of Piers and Harbours. Argyll and Bute Council is the Statutory Harbour Authority at 7 locations and a marine asset owner at a further 29 marine facilities located throughout the Council area. All remedial actions required to close out audit findings have been completed, with the ongoing audit regime visiting Rothesay later this year.

### **Ferry Services**

All our ferry routes operated according to timetable with additional sailings put on to cope with increased demand. We are reviewing the previous works and studies carried out around the ferry services we provide and the infrastructure they need now and for the future.

The replacement of the Jura ferry remains the priority and work is underway towards the installation of appropriate passenger access at Feolin on Jura. We have undertaken a topography study at Feolin with a view to tendering a design build for the passenger only access for those periods

when the vehicular vessel is not available. This will make a very significant improvement to the connectivity issues when there is a breakdown on the Eilean Dhiura and will likely be in the form of a gangway and pontoon near the existing slipway.

### **Tobermory Wall and Rails**

The council secured funding in the region of £450k to make improvements to the front rails at Tobermory Main Street and help alleviate some of the flooding issues associated with Tobermory. A new higher wall was installed to which the upgraded rails were attached to, as well as a flood barrier/gate and flat valves. As part of this project the council will also be making road surfacing improvements to the area of car parking adjacent to the wall.

Design details were discussed with stakeholders to accommodate the wishes of the pier users such as realigning the flood barrier to reduce impact to the pier stones. From this design the council obtained a listed building consent and secured a local contractor through the tendering process. The council has been physically supervising the site on a weekly basis and continue to maintain contact with the affected stakeholders as such. This has enabled revising construction sequences to address summer tourist season for directly affected businesses.

The majority of the works programme is targeted to be complete by December 2023 with the flood barrier construction across Fisherman's Pier to be completed in January/February 2024.



### **Oban Harbour Revision Order**

Informal discussion have been ongoing to finalise the Oban Harbour draft Harbour Revision Order (HRO). The draft HRO has undergone some changes to the content order, formatting and points of specific interest e.g. definitions and references.

A final draft of our Harbour Revision Order for Oban was approved for submission to Transport Scotland by the Harbour Board. The formal part of the process will now proceed, including public consultation.

The Terms of Reference for the proposed Consultative Forums have been drawn up. These are based on the guidelines and recommendations of the Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC). It is proposed to have two Consultative Forums. One will be a group consisting of the organisations with financial and legal responsibility in the bay. The other will consist of the stakeholders and communities who rely on Oban Harbour.

Recruitment has been completed to ensure a smooth first step is made in preparation for the new shift patterns once the HRO is in place.

## **Iona Slipway and Breakwater**

The Breakwater planning application is progressing with a view to tender later this year. The contract is expected to be awarded summer 2024 with a completion date of summer 2025. However, it should be noted that the present forecast of a 1 year construction period may be subject to the contractors work scope and supply chains, particularly the rock armour.

We have received a quote to complete the Slipway work started by the previous contractor. There are some issues to finalise which are being addressed. Due to the nature of some issues we initially had no returns from known contractors, this can signify problems with completing the works.

We are currently considering the issue and comments, views and thoughts from the pier users have been requested.

## **Fionnphort**

The work to progress key pieces of marine infrastructure to allow for full and unfettered access to and from Iona is ongoing. The Environmental Impact Assessment is in process including the socioeconomic assessment. Work is ongoing to address the potential issues with CalMac Marine regarding swept paths etc. Once Marine Scotland have approved the Environmental Impact Assessment we will continue with the licences, etc. with a view to tender in the summer of 2024 approx.

## **Port Askaig**

In April 2018, Scottish Ministers announced that Islay would be next in line for new vessels to replace the MV Hebridean Isles. As part of the New Islay Vessels (NIV) Project, the Port is being assessed and upgraded to accommodate the larger capacity ferry with the first vessel expected to be delivered by October 2024 and will enter service following sea trials and crew familiarisation. The second vessel will follow in early 2025.

## **Land Based Developments**

### **Road Reconstruction**

During this financial year we carried out a programme of road improvements. The Council invested nearly £10m with additional funding from the Timber Transport Fund in the region of £1m. This allowed us to complete over 80 individual road reconstruction schemes which will improve the overall road network, contributing to keeping Argyll and Bute open for business. As a result of this ongoing prudent investment and proportionate and appropriate engineering choices, the overall road condition continues to improve, and we recorded the most improved road condition in over 15 years.



## Road Condition Improvements

Continuing the trend of improvement / arresting the decline in our road network, Our Annual Status and Options Report sets out the benefits of continued investment in our road network and highlights the critical risk of underinvestment.

Although our network has seen a welcome improvement in recent years, we would need to spend in the region of £10-11million annually to maintain a 'standstill' position, and significantly more to see continued improvements. Year on year budget consultations and public feedback has shown the importance of roads to our communities – maintaining the required level of investment is likely to be challenging in future years given the predicted decline in available capital funding. This brings with it significant engineering, economic, financial and reputational risks for the Council.

We continue to deliver a range of different technical solutions that are designed to be proportionate for the use of the road and take into consideration the island and rural geography of Argyll and Bute.

## Winter Maintenance

The council is responsible for carrying out winter maintenance, the removal of ice and snow, to its 2,300km of road. There is a network of roadside weather stations which together with specialist forecasting surveys provide bespoke treatments across the council area utilising 32 separate routes.

Key facts from this winter season:

- 66 full fleet runs
- 2,238 individual vehicle runs
- Highest turned out route A819 Inveraray to Dalmally
- Total distance travelled 105,902 miles
- Salt used 12,535 tonnes
- Total spend £2,661,350.04



## Bridge Maintenance and Renewal

We previously secured £5.5m funding through the Scottish Government Local Bridge Maintenance Fund. This was a hugely competitive fund available to all Scottish local authorities. We received the second highest grant which allows us to replace / strengthen 9 existing bridges. To date each bridge has been through an assessment and design process involving various stages including Ground Investigation (GI) where new bridges are required. This GI work is being used to inform the detailed design, construction methods etc. Work will be ongoing into 2023/24 financial year

The bridges to be replaced and the work status are:

- A849-280 Pennyghael Bridge (Feasibility Report Completed)
- A816-120 Oude Bridge (Public Consultation in October)
- B844-010 Kilninver Bridge (Feasibility Report Completed)
- A846-270 Glenegeedale (2) Bridge (Public Consultation in October)



Bridges to be strengthened and the work status are:

- B842-150 Whitestone Bridge (Works to be tendered Autumn/Winter)
- B842-010 Claonaig Bridge (Under Detailed Design)
- A815-230 Cothouse Bridge (Works to be tendered Autumn/Winter)
- B839-050 Lochgoilhead Bridge (Under Detailed Design)
- B840-140 Ardchonnell Bridge (Tender Works Awarded)



Additionally during 2022/23 we carried out a total of 23 major maintenance schemes along with a number of minor maintenance works on road structures.

### **Claoniag Landslip**

This project has been progressed by a specialised geotechnical consultant. The detailed design is slightly complex as the hill is sliding / moving down towards the stream and therefore complicating the solution. A tender package is in the process of being developed alongside continuous consultation with the landowner, SEPA and Openreach. There are a number of complexities affecting this project including work consents, land acquisition and challenging ground conditions.

In the meantime the council continues to monitor the landslide.

## Tobermory Cemetery Expansion

There was limited burial capacity in Mull. To resolve this an £820K extension to the existing Tobermory site was constructed. This has increased the number of lairs by 192, with each lair being 3 deep.



## Protecting the Drinking Water Supply

In line with The Water Supply (Water Fittings) (Scotland) Byelaws 2014, Scottish Water require a number of piers under Argyll and Bute Council ownership to be upgraded. This is to ensure private and local public water supplies are protected from any backflow contamination and that harbours / terminals / pontoons etc. are adequately protected.

We are currently working on four sites - Oban, Campbeltown, West Loch near Tarbert and Carradale that require upgrade works. A Contractor has been appointed and work has commenced at three of the four sites. All four sites are expected to be completed late in 2023.



## **Deliver the ICT and Digital Strategy Action Plan - Our aims**

- Our networks and systems are secure, accessible and current
- ICT provides value, and enables and empowers both customers and staff to make tasks easier
- Our people have the knowledge and capabilities to use ICT effectively

We continue to network and engage with Scottish Local Government Digital Office, Society For Innovation Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM) and Scottish Government Digital Team. This engagement helps ensure that we achieve best practice, share our ICT and digital experience and expertise, and achieve the highest levels of value for money we can through active procurement and contract management.

The 2021-24 ICT and Digital Strategy Action Plan has approximately 100 actions. The majority of actions are progressing satisfactorily and to target. Along with highlights noted below from the 2021-24 ICT and Digital Strategy Action Plan we have managed to maintain the average time to resolve ICT incidents. We have operated well within our service level targets with service levels at or above previous levels and our response times were as good as previous years.

## **Microsoft365 (MS365)**

We led on the national project for MS365, working with the NHS and Digital Office to provide shared MS365 calendars, address books, distribution lists, instant messaging and presence management across NHS and Council MS365 platforms.

Within the Council, phases 2 and 3 of the M365 project are now being implemented. A Council-wide support network of Digital Champions has been set up to encourage more efficient and effective use of M365 across the organisation along with the introduction of an extensive M365 training programme.

## **ICT Partnership Working**

We continue to work closely with the NHS to improve efficiencies and removing work barriers. Council staff now have access to the NHS ICT system. Now both Council and NHS staff within the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) have access to systems in both organisations which greatly improves efficiencies and customer service.

We are providing an opportunity for sharing public sector resources by addressing common challenges and working together to improve outcomes for Argyll and Bute. We continue to develop and promote the use of our #abplace2b campaign. The campaign promotes the area as a great place to live, work; and to attract the people, skills and investment the area needs.

We have refreshed our abplace2b.scot website and developing the use of it by our partners, for example the HSCP is using it for its recruitment campaign.



We have also assisted Live Argyll with the ICT aspects of the new Helensburgh Waterfront Development (HWD).

### **New Ways of Working with ICT and Data**

As well as the day to day challenges of managing a high profile IT network we have implemented a raft of improvements to support working efficiencies. These include a new self-service facility with our ICT Service Desk system and working with finance colleagues to introduce the new Oracle Cloud financial management system

We are currently developing and implementing a new Data Strategy. A key aim of this strategy is to evaluate, design and implement a new Data Platform. Not only will the Data Platform enable us to measure and report on performance, importantly we will be able to combine data sets and make better use of our data to help improve decision making at all management levels, thereby ensuring that evidence based decisions are made.

### **Capital Investment and Central Repairs Delivered**

We have successfully delivered a programme of capital investment totalling £7.5M. Included within the wide variety of investment projects were 50 projects relating to energy efficiency, reducing fossil fuel consumption and renewable energy generation. This included solar panels, air source heat pumps and new automated control systems in our buildings, mainly in our schools.

As well as delivering the additional investment projects the emergency, planned and statutory maintenance programmes were successfully delivered, resulting in improved customer satisfaction. Additionally a separate large-scale project reviewed the water, waste water and drainage charges for the Council. The results of this project has delivered one-off refunds in the region of £500,000 and year-on-year savings of more than £100,000 per annum.

### **Helensburgh Waterfront Development**

The new facility features a 25-metre main swimming pool and training pool, luxury health suite with steam room and sauna, a café and shop, fitness studios and a gym with panoramic views of the Clyde. The centre, operated by LiveArgyll, is fully accessible and includes a changing places facility, a floating moveable floor in the training pool and poolside pods for anyone with mobility issues to access the pool independently. The completed leisure and public realm development was a 'Placemaking' finalist in the national Planning Awards 2023 and was shortlisted for "Best Construction Projects GB&I" for the Construction Employers Federation (CEF).

## **Our Workspace – Reducing Costs and Increasing Efficiencies**

Our Modern Workspace project is progressing well. The project is reviewing how we use our workspace, reduce costs and increase efficiency. Four Hub Buildings are now complete with two due for completion by the end of 2023. Ten under-utilised buildings have been repurposed or mothballed. The entire project (excluding Lochgilphead) is being delivered through existing capital programme budgets and Scottish Government Place Demonstrator Funding (£664K awarded to deliver Rothesay Project).

The Project has delivered significant savings from rationalising shared offices through –

- Non-Domestic Rates relief on the buildings that have been closed.
- A reduction in utility consumption.
- A reduction in cleaning costs.
- A reduction in the number of printing devices required
- A reduction in paper and the need to print as we adopt a more digital approach to Service Delivery.
- A Reduction in annual ICT network charges, such as ISDN lines and broadband charges.
- Reduced ongoing cost pressures for replacement of network equipment (Wi-Fi access points / server switches etc.), where possible network equipment has been utilised in other locations.

These savings and ease on cost pressures will continue to grow as the Our Modern Workplace project continues to deliver town by town

## **Carbon Emissions Relating to Council Activities**

In line with Government requirements, all Rural Growth Deal business cases require to include carbon management plans detailing how whole life carbon emissions on projects will be managed throughout the lifecycle of these investments. As such, all infrastructure delivered using Rural Growth Deal funding will require to be designed to be as energy efficient as possible (with the fixed funds available). The Rural Growth Deal - Programme Management Office (PMO) also chair the National PMO Decarbonisation Sub Group which is a forum including all growth deal teams in Scotland where best practise relating to decarbonisation and the journey towards net zero is shared This group includes policy leads from the Scottish Government.

## **Rural Growth Deal – Islay Low Carbon Project**

As part of the RGD we are also developing a project for Islay with a focus on the journey towards net zero. Due to grid constraints this has focused on local, domestic retrofit however, there is an opportunity to work with the distilling industry to look at using £3m via the Rural Growth Deal to undertake a larger scale project be leveraging private sector investment. Bio-gas or waste heat are options being considered but this is in the early

stages and subject to commercial sensitivities. The Rural Growth Deal will feed into the work being undertaken as part of the Scottish Governments Carbon Neutral Islands programme as Islay is one of six Scottish Islands included. This will require a whole systems approach focusing on grid, renewable energy, transport, heat, land use etc.

## Corporate Outcome: Getting It Right

Number of Indicators: 5

Number on Track: 4

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Increase the percentage of all Self-Service and automated contacts	72.00%	71.10%	71.10%	73.10%	75.00%	<b>G</b>	The target was to achieve 72% of self service or automated contact interactions through the Contact Centre and online channels, and the actual final percentage was 75% (up from 73% in 2021/22), with total interactions increasing to 598K (up from 563k in 2021/22) of which 450,440 were automated or self-service and only 147,460 were mediated. Of the mediated transactions, 67% were telephone calls, 14% face to face through service points and 11% were emails
Sickness absence days per employee (non-teacher)	No Target	12.3 Days	10.0 Days	13.4 Days	14.3 Days	<b>No Target</b>	In 2022/23 LGE staff absence has increased by 0.90 work days lost per FTE to 14.3 days. The top three reasons for sickness absence were 1. Stress/Depression/Mental Health; 2. Infections and 3. Other Musculoskeletal Problems. From 1 July 2022 Covid absences began to be recorded under normal sickness absence, along with no Covid restrictions it is likely to have accounted for infections moving into the top 3 reasons for absence. The increase in sickness absence to beyond pre pandemic levels mirrors the national picture with data from the Office of National Statistics which showed that the number of working days lost hit a record high in the UK in 2022 (calendar year).
Sickness absence days per Teacher	No Target	7.7 Days	4.4 Days	5.6 Days	6.2 Days	<b>No Target</b>	In 2022/23 Teachers absence has increased by 0.60 of a day to 6.2 work days lost per FTE. The top three reasons for sickness absence were 1. Infections;

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							2. Stress/Depression/Mental Health and 3. Stomach/Liver/Kidney/Digestion. From 1 July 2022 Covid absences began to be recorded under normal sickness absence, along with no Covid restrictions it is likely to have accounted for infections moving into the top 3 reasons for absence. The increase in sickness absence to beyond pre pandemic levels mirrors the national picture with data from the Office of National Statistics which showed that the number of working days lost hit a record high in the UK in 2022 (calendar year).
Level of employee satisfaction	TBC						Awaiting Survey Launch
Level of customer satisfaction	92.5% (Combined)	93.40%	95.60%	92.00%	97.60%	G	The Customer Engagement Team closely monitors all aspects of customer satisfaction across the various channels and services used by customers and the 2022/23 outcomes were very positive: - The Customer Service Centre had 967 survey respondents to its survey of telephone callers and averaged 96% customer satisfaction - The Registration Service had 333 respondents to its service satisfaction survey with a 98.7% satisfaction rating - There were 975 users of the Customer Service Points who completed a survey and 95.8% of them were satisfied, with a very small number of comments about walk in opening hours. - The corporate website had an 86% overall satisfaction rating with the transactional forms element being higher at 92% and the new marriage website at 96.4% of satisfied visitors. Naturally all returns were analysed to determine if any improvements were needed, but comments were overwhelmingly positive and where staff were named the feedback was passed on to them.

## Responding to our Customers on Time

Where possible the Targets for Freedom of information requests, Subject Access Requests and Complaints Resolved at Stage 1 were met. All of which have been impacted by Covid and high volumes of requests.

## Increasing the Use of our Website and Self-Service Tools

The target to increase the percentage of all Self-Service or automated contacts through the Contact Centre and online channels was 70%.

The actual percentage achieved was 75%, this is up from 73% in 2021/22. The total number of interactions increased to 598,000, up from 563,000 in 2021/22.

<b>2022/23 ALL TOTALS</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Total for Year</b>	<b>% for Year</b>
Mediated Transactions (CSC/CSP)	39166	37574	33921	36799	147460	25%
Automated Information (voice and web)	124072	84151	60485	66844	335552	56%
Automated Transactions (voice and web)	26463	30969	28964	28492	114888	19%
<b>Automated Information + Transactions</b>	<b>150535</b>	<b>115120</b>	<b>89449</b>	<b>95336</b>	<b>450440</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>189701</b>	<b>152694</b>	<b>123370</b>	<b>132135</b>	<b>597900</b>	

**Table showing the volume of all transactions by financial quarter during 2022/23**

Many of the automated and self-service interactions were driven by the high usage of the corporate website, which for the first time had over 4 million page views in a year and over 35,000 online forms were submitted.

During the year the Web Team were very focused on the building of the new corporate website ready for launching in 2023/24. Even so, there was a raft of new features and services that encouraged the continued shift to digital, including:

- The roll out of the online webchat bot 'Abbot' and Smart Assistant to all web pages which was used 5,733 times.
- The launch of the new Google smart speaker system, complementing the existing Alexa service. Together they have been activated by more than 2,000 customers; largely to receive bin day related information and alerts.
- The creation of a range of online, interactive, cost of living support resources. These include the Scotland Loves Local Card, the Flexible Food Fund and the preloved school uniform recycling initiative.

- The continued roll out of new School websites, so much so that at year-end 43 schools have live sites with a further 22 schools at various stages of completion.
- Three new online processes in relation to Primary and High School pupil registration and the Summer Schools Activities Programme.
- A very significant set of online resources for the new Short Term Lets licensing laws with online application form and register of applications.

We continued the focus on making the online resources as accessible as possible. The website averaged a score of 98 out of 100 on the independent Silktide index. This index is the global accessibility league table of all public websites. To further support access to our online resources by our customers that have visual and language related issues we invested in upgraded “Reachdeck”, which is supported browsing technology.

Our voice automated services also continue to be very popular with 46,000 switchboard and payment transactions totalling £1.5M were made using the service.

Overall the shift from expensive mediated activities to low cost digital channels in 2022/23 resulted in £940,000 worth of efficiencies, continuing to build on the efficiencies of the previous years:

Year	Channel Shift Transactions	Efficiency Value
2018/19	267,018	£464,865
2019/20	390,234	£670,710
2020/21	440,165	£914,871
2021/22	418,316	£915,172
2022/23	467,482	£939,607

**Table showing the volume of transactions that have shifted to digital and the total value of monetary saving by financial year**

## Improving Our Customer Service

Being informed and involved about issues, services and opportunities affecting them plays an important part in customer satisfaction. Officers are supported with developing the survey content and promoting surveys on different topics.

The Customer Engagement Team closely monitors all aspects of customer satisfaction and the 2022/23 outcomes were very positive:

- The Customer Service Centre had 967 survey respondents to its survey of telephone callers and averaged 96% customer satisfaction.

- The Registration Service had 333 respondents to its service satisfaction survey with a 98.7% satisfaction rating.
- There were 975 users of the Customer Service Points who completed a survey and 95.8% of them were satisfied, with a very small number of comments about walk in opening hours.
- The corporate website had an 86% overall satisfaction rating with the transactional forms element scored 92% and the new marriage website scored 96.4% satisfied visitors.

All returns were analysed to determine if improvements could be made, but comments were overwhelmingly positive and where staff were named the feedback was passed on to them.

We are continually working to improve our customer service. Both Building Standards and Legal and Regulatory Services not only achieved reaccreditation but increased the number of Compliance Plus elements awarded.

Other ways that we are improving our customer service experience is the digital “User forum” for Building Standards customers to highlight issues with the service, changes to the Technical Standards, how this impacts on the customer and an opportunity to discuss their issues.

### **Supporting our Community Councils**

We oversaw the successful delivery of Community Council Elections in October 2022. A review of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils was also undertaken and agreed at the end of September 2022. A total of 54 of a possible 56 Community Councils are now formed and the team attended all 54 inaugural meetings to formally set up the Community Councils.

We continue to develop social media to help communities get the support they need, for council and communities to work together through engagement exercises, and promoting council and area challenges and opportunities. Our combined corporate social media channels grew by 10% last year. Our use of social media successfully signposted 80,000 people to the information they could access quickly and easily on the council’s website.

### **Local Government Elections and Supporting New Elected Councillors**

We delivered the Local Government Elections in May 2022 and the subsequent induction process for our 36 Elected Members. These elections resulted in a turnover of more than 50% of Members. This posed a significant challenge to ensure that all Members are prepared and able to carry out their roles. Along with delivering the Local Government Election in May a review of Political Management Arrangements was concluded in advance of the new Council being elected. Post-election activities include relevant training for those appointed to the Regulatory Cohort, the Audit and Scrutiny Committee and supporting the new Policy Leads into their roles.

The Elected Member case management system has been reviewed. This has resulted in a new, more self-service system being introduced called “Member Zone”. The new system is more user friendly and enables our Elected Members to operate the system to manage their constituent queries.

## Looking After our Financial Assets

- The Council's Counter Fraud Team is in place in order to enhance the Council's zero tolerance to fraud and protect the public purse. During 2022/23 the team rebilled £877k as a direct consequence of their work and have recovered £684k of that total to date.
- We collected 96.72% of Council Tax exceeding the target of 96.00%.
- Positive External Audit Annual Audit Report received and reported to Council in November 2022.
- Financial monitoring packs and Budget Outlook were submitted to each Policy & Resources Committee.
- The average investment rate for 2022/23 was 2.149% and the investments generated £2.178m of interest during the year.
- We processed 98.39% of invoices due within 30 days, exceeding the target of 95.5%.
- The 2022/23 internal audit plan was fully completed and reported by the target date of the June Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The external audit of the Housing Benefit subsidy claim of £16.792m was completed by the statutory deadline and an unqualified audit letter was received.
- The external audit of the Council's Non-Domestic Rates Income (NDRI) Notified Return of £34.886m was completed by the statutory deadline with an unqualified audit certificate being received.

## Retaining Our Skilled Workforce

The council is a large employer in Argyll and Bute and the majority of our workforce live in Argyll and Bute. Redundancies of council staff may therefore affect the overall unemployment figures for our area. In 2022/23 80% of employees who were at risk of redundancy were successfully redeployed by finding suitable alternative roles for them within the council. This helped us to keep people in employment, retained valued skills within our workforce and saved the council £1.7million in severance costs.

## Consultations – We Asked, You Said, We Did

We want to ensure that proposed developments are what our citizens and communities want. To help us obtain your views we post our consultations on our website. The following link will take you to the 'closed' consultations which relate to this reporting period. [Consultation Results | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)