

COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23 (SUMMARY)

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FOREWORDS

Councillor Robin Currie, Leader, Argyll and Bute 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.

Pippa Milne, Chief Executive, Argyll and Bute Council

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 achievements 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.

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.

Our Performance

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.

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
TOTALS	47	39	8

DELIVERING OUR OUTCOMES

Corporate Outcome – People Live Active, Healthier and Independent Lives

1. A total of £659,812 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants were paid to support vulnerable people.
2. A total of £804,839 of Discretionary Housing Payments was distributed to household in need.
3. 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.
4. We allocated £4.3 million to Council tax accounts to support people with the cost of living crisis.
5. 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.
6. Argyll and Bute Council’s Employability Team and Third Sector delivery partners assist people into work.

Corporate Outcome - People Will Live In Safer and Stronger Communities

1. Online and in person training has been delivered to over 50 community councillors.
2. Building Standards exceeded all targets for the 5 key national performance targets for 2022/23
3. New operational arrangements to deliver the short-term let licensing regime were developed.
4. Over 300 Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed to Argyll and Bute through the Scottish and UK Government's sponsorship

Corporate Outcome – Children and Young People Have the Best Possible Start

1. In order to improve outcomes for children and young people a new Counselling in Schools Service was implemented.
2. A sustained low number of exclusions for care experienced children and young people continues to remain below 5.
3. Bespoke training to support practitioners to increase their skill and confidence in delivering play and learning outdoors was delivered.
4. Argyll and Bute's free period provision 'My Tribe' brand has been identified as an exemplar of good practice across Scotland.
5. We won the Health and Nutrition Award 2023 for our school meals drone delivery pilot.

Corporate Outcome - Education, Skills and Training Maximise Opportunities for All

1. Eight schools have undertaken training and participated in using a Quality Improvement approach to support writing attainment at 1st level.
2. Digital learning is supported through the deployment of additional devices which have been provided from the digital poverty initiative.
3. Twenty networked college courses now feature in Senior Phase course choices and are available virtually to all S4-S6 pupils.
4. We were ahead of all of our comparators for Leavers' Positive Destinations. A total of 90% of our Care Experienced Young People progressed to a positive post-school destination.
5. Over £14m of Rural Growth Deal (RGD) investment will directly support skills and training programmes for local people.

Corporate Outcome - Our Economy Is Diverse and Thriving

1. The positive experience for visitors has been assisted by the actions delivered through the Staycation agenda.
2. A total of 73 community benefits were achieved in 2022/23 through robust contract management.
3. We have generated over £560,000 by selling off surplus property assets.
4. We secured ongoing commercial planning / building standards work from other local authorities.

Corporate Outcome - We Have An Infrastructure That Supports Sustainable Growth

1. We have progressed our assessments, watercourse clearance works, flood incident investigation and provision of flooding advice.
2. Construction of the Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme started on site in September 2022.
3. All our ferry routes operated according to timetable with additional sailings put on to cope with increased demand.
4. During this financial year we completed over 80 individual road reconstruction schemes.
5. A total distance of 105,902 miles was travelled during our Winter Maintenance Programme.
6. We led on the national project for MS365, working with the NHS and Digital Office.
7. The completed Helensburgh Waterfront Development was a 'Placemaking' finalist in the national Planning Awards 2023 and shortlisted for "Best Construction Projects GB&I" for the Construction Employers Federation.

Corporate Outcome - Getting it right

1. The shift from expensive mediated activities to low cost digital channels in 2022/23 resulted in £940,000 worth of efficiencies.
2. Our combined corporate social media channels grew by 10% last year.
3. Our use of social media successfully signposted 80,000 people to the information they could access quickly and easily on the council's website.
4. We collected 96.72% of Council Tax exceeding the target of 96.00%.
5. We processed 98.39% of invoices due within 30 days, exceeding the target of 95.5%.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES DURING 2022/23

1. There is a national shortage of qualified professionals. We also experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff in the catering, cleaning and some areas of our Roads and Infrastructure Service.
2. The need for staff agility to being able to deliver unplanned demands.
3. Electrical grid limitations in terms of capacity/constraints continue to impact in terms of resilience and being able to deliver renewable solutions.
4. We need to ensure we are prepared to respond to a suspected or confirmed public health incident.
5. The Cost of Living Crisis impacts on our ability to deliver services across all service areas.
6. Large financial projects require staff resources from various teams across the Council. This puts pressure on our already stretched staff resources with no additional funding for additional posts.
7. The major rise in the levels of risk associated with cyber-attacks means the need for our ICT teams to be ever more vigilant and responsive has never been greater.
8. The Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) ban is due for introduction in January 2026. This will affect the current waste collection and disposal methods.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT - WE ASKED, YOU SAID, WE DID....

To help with improvements we conducted a number of consultations and surveys. Here you can view the surveys undertaken. [Consultation Results | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)