

Council Annual Report

2023 – 2024

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| Forewords | 3 |
| Leader of the Council..... | 3 |
| Chief Executive..... | 4 |
| Financial statement..... | 5 |
| Introduction | 6 |
| Cross-cutting activities | 7 |
| Changing how we work..... | 7 |
| Connect for Success..... | 7 |
| Performance Excellence Project | 7 |
| Our Workspace – reducing costs and increasing efficiencies | 8 |
| ICT and Digital | 8 |
| Climate Change | 10 |
| Capital Investment and central repairs delivered | 11 |
| Housing and the Housing Emergency..... | 11 |
| Our performance..... | 12 |
| How We Compare – Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)..... | 13 |
| Delivering our outcomes | 14 |
| Corporate Outcome: People live active, healthier and independent lives | 14 |
| Corporate Outcome: People will live in safer and stronger communities | 17 |
| The Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme (MVP) | 20 |
| Corporate Outcome: Children and young people have the best possible start | 21 |
| Support and interventions for our care experienced children and young people..... | 23 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) improving writing programme..... | 24 |
| Registration Early Learning Childcare (ELC)..... | 24 |
| Nurture teaching support..... | 25 |
| Corporate Outcome: Education, skills and training will maximise opportunities for all | 26 |
| Developing the young workforce | 28 |
| Helping people into work..... | 28 |
| Corporate Outcome: Our economy is diverse and thriving | 29 |
| Supporting the economic recovery and our communities | 34 |
| Building Standards achieves maximum 6-year licence..... | 37 |
| Corporate Outcome: We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth | 39 |
| Water scarcity and air quality | 41 |
| Flood protection and marine works | 41 |
| Land Based Developments | 48 |
| Helensburgh Waterfront Development | 49 |
| Corporate Outcome: Getting it right | 50 |
| Increasing the use of our website and self-service tools..... | 52 |
| Improving our customer service | 53 |
| Supporting our Community Councils..... | 54 |
| Local Government elections and supporting new elected councillors | 55 |
| Strategic Risk Register | 57 |
| Operational Risk Register | 58 |
| Service delivery challenges..... | 59 |
| Consultations – we asked, you said, we did..... | 65 |

Forewords

Leader of the Council

Resourceful, resilient, responsive – that’s what comes to mind when I consider the contents of Argyll and Bute Council’s Annual Report for 2023 to 2024.

Argyll and Bute has particular challenges to contend with, given our unique geographic mix of rural and island communities. This means that we as a Council need to think swiftly and differently about even the most routine service delivery, in ways that few other public agencies may ever have to consider. On top of that, we deliver a number of services that other local authorities do not. We do all of that in that context of challenge – but we also do so in order to be excellent, to improve, to innovate.

This Annual Report sets out several examples of that innovative approach and some of those particular challenges. It is also full of success stories and ambition.

It is the Annual Report of a forward-thinking, aspirational organisation which is meeting the big issues head-on. Take for example the two key drivers of housing and population, where Argyll and Bute Council is leading nationally – being the first Scottish council to declare a housing emergency, and bringing together other local authorities who have population challenges to work together and ensure that our needs are firmly on the national agenda.

It is the Annual Report of a learning local authority which is constantly striving for improvement and beyond to excellence. One which is making the most of new technology, and exploring emerging technology, so that we can work with rather than against our geography – and showcasing Argyll and Bute as an ideal choice to live, learn, work and do business, while enjoying all that the area has to offer by way of lifestyle.

It is the Annual Report of a Scottish Council which is playing its part and contributing to national priorities, and which has much potential to offer at every level.

All Scottish local authorities are facing unprecedented times, with local government finance and governance in the spotlight. In that Argyll and Bute is no different, but the way we handle our business and rise to those challenges is characterised by determination and the will to succeed rather than survive.

Councillor Jim Lynch
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council

Chief Executive

We are pleased to present the Argyll and Bute Council Annual Report for the financial year 2023-2024. This report reflects the progress we have made in the face of increasingly constrained resources. Through collective effort and collaboration, we have worked tirelessly to address the key priorities that were set out in the Council's Corporate Plan while remaining committed to the well-being and prosperity of our diverse communities. I would like to thank all our staff and partners for their continued hard work and commitment to delivering the very best for Argyll and Bute.

This year witnessed challenges out with our control including the effects of climate change resulting in the devastating impact on our transport infrastructure with landslides and flooding damaging roads and bridges. The ongoing demands have tested our capacity to deliver, but they have also inspired innovative solutions. We are proud of the many accomplishments we have achieved together, which represents the strength and adaptability of Argyll and Bute.

Throughout this report, you will find information on our activity highlighting our commitment to creating a thriving, resilient, and sustainable future for our region. From critical infrastructure investments to environmental initiatives, our work has been guided by the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and fiscal responsibility. We have also continued to foster strong relationships with community groups, local businesses, and external partners, all of whom play a vital role in the ongoing success of our efforts.

As we look ahead, we remain aware of the significant challenges facing local authorities. However, our focus remains clear: we are determined to build on the progress made this year and continue to provide the best services possible with the funding available to us and opportunities for all who live and work in Argyll and Bute. With the same resolve that has carried us through the past year, we will strive to deliver on our commitments and respond to the evolving needs of our communities.

We hope this report provides you with valuable insights into the wide range of services provided by the council and our achievements over the past year.

Pippa Milne
Chief Executive, Argyll and Bute Council

Financial statement

In 2023/24 the budget gap was £13.082m, prior to any measures to balance the budget, and projected to rise to over £51m over a five-year period, with decisions made to bridge the 2023/24 gap, reduce future year pressures and protect vital services.

When agreeing the 2023/24 budget, the Council committed investment in key priorities largely due to a significant one-off Service Concession gain. These included:

£7m to safeguard future investment in priorities for Argyll and Bute establishing a dedicated fund to lever in, secure and support key strategic investments.

£6.132m investment in Rothesay Pavilion building on previous commitments to secure a future for this building.

£8.865m additional capital funding to support the repair and maintenance of roads in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

£8m investment to support futureproofing of Argyll and Bute's school estate.

£3.5m to ensure that Argyll and Bute is better able to address the challenges of the Biodegradable Municipal Waste Ban.

£2m to boost resilience in the capital programme and provide support to key projects.

£0.750m funding for footpath improvements.

£0.700m for new refuse collection vehicles.

£0.600m investment in Climate Change Projects.

£0.531m for ICT equipment to support digital resilience.

Over the course of 2023/24 almost £0.590m in Scottish Welfare Fund grants were paid to support vulnerable people and £0.895m 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; this resulted in maximised benefit income and reduced fuel costs of over £3.8m by the end of the 2023/24.

Introduction

Welcome to our annual report. This report is an opportunity to share with you how your council has performed over the past year and is part of our public performance reporting commitment.

In 2023 we outlined Argyll and Bute Council's vision and strategic direction through to 2027 via our Corporate Plan. Central to our corporate plan and highlighted throughout this report is successful partnership working with our partners, stakeholders and local communities. The corporate plan sets out the three key priorities we have identified to fulfil our vision of a prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable Argyll and Bute.

People and Places: our core business as a council

Potential and Growth: turning opportunities into reality

Partnership and Action: everyone has a part to play in Argyll and Bute's success

Further information on our corporate plan can be found in the plans and policy section of our website. [Plans and Policy | Argyll and Bute Council](#)

Our performance on these priorities over the past year was monitored via seven high-level Corporate Outcomes and a series of 47 Corporate Outcome Indicators (COIs). These indicators are strategic in nature and are reported annually to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee and Full Council.

Detail on our performance against these Corporate Outcome Indicators as well as further information on our key activities and areas of focus and successes and challenges are provided within this report.

Cross-cutting activities

Changing how we work

Under our commitment to realise continuous improvement, key change projects are underway to improve how we work and how we monitor and report on this.

Connect for Success

This initiative is dedicated to encouraging and recognising new ways of working across the Council, to make things better for everyone. We are looking to the future and are focused on advancing how we use technology, share resources and collaborate because better for us is better for our communities.

There are 7 key areas, or principles, that we are focused on developing in how we work:

1. One Council One Place
2. Purpose and Mission Focus
3. Employee Empowerment
4. Data and Evidence Driven
5. Learning Council
6. Agile Mindset
7. Maximise Useful Technology

Across the council these principles are in action and people are working on new projects and in new ways to help make things better. For example, we have reduced bureaucracy and saved time and effort by implementing a project to streamline our internal human resources systems and speed up the recruitment process. Connect for Success is about bringing the 7 principles to life by sharing ideas and looking for new ways to innovate to help us do our jobs and deliver services.

Performance Excellence Project

We are now delivering phase two of this project to review and update our performance management and reporting procedures. The aim of this project is to review and update the Council's current approach to performance and improvement to ensure that it is in alignment with our Connect for Success Principles and allow us to take a compliant and proportionate approach to measuring and managing our performance and improvement

activities whilst maximising the use of technology to support this wherever possible. The project will deliver a Performance Improvement Framework to support scrutiny of performance by Elected Members and Senior Officers.

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. Six Hub Buildings are now complete under-utilised buildings under review for repurpose or to be 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.

ICT and Digital

The Council's ICT and Digital Strategy aims to position Argyll and Bute Council as a "digital by default" authority.

This sits alongside the Digital Strategy for Scotland, which sets out measures to ensure Scotland will fulfil its potential in a constantly evolving digital world, a world in which data and digital technologies are transforming every element of our lives, and will help realise Argyll and Bute's full potential in this digital world, ensuring we all have the skills, connectivity and devices to fully participate in a digital nation.

The strategy sets out how ICT and Digital services will be designed, sourced and delivered, and how digital technologies and processes can support our people and our customers to work better together, get things done, and contribute to a better organised and more efficient council.

Microsoft365 (M365)

We led on the national project for M365, working with the NHS and Digital Office to provide shared calendars, address books, distribution lists, instant messaging and presence management across NHS and Council platforms.

Within the Council, phases 2 and 3 of the Microsoft 365 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 training programme. We have created an online programme using our own brand AB 365 to support our adoption of Microsoft 365. The programme focuses on showcasing how changing behaviours and using the opportunities which are provided through technology can generate benefits not only for the employee, but for the whole organisation. It acts as an enabler to ensure that employees feel in control of their workload, are more efficient and assists them in their role by saving time and reducing internal emails. It introduces employees to a set of principles that they will work towards to ensure we are getting the most out of the Microsoft 365 platform. These principles have been adopted by the Council as our new way of working that strongly links to our Connect for Success programme.

Partnership working

As part of our Connect for Success principles and adopting the “Themes not Teams” approach, we continue to work with colleagues across all teams and services, and where appropriate external partners and stakeholders to achieve a common goal.

This approach to partnership working assists in improving efficiencies and removing work barriers, helping fully utilising what we have, connecting staff through technology, connecting services in delivering change and services, while connecting with communities and working together to improve outcomes for Argyll and Bute.

New ways of working with ICT and Data

Data is at the heart of key decision-making and improving outcomes for Argyll and Bute’s residents and communities.

A key benefit of the Data Strategy & Action Plan 2024-2028, which will work alongside the council’s existing ICT and Digital Strategy, will be to focus attention and resources on the most relevant data challenges and opportunities.

That will require us to maintain our track record of investment in software, data platforms and digital infrastructure, evaluating, designing and implementing a new Data Platform to allow us to measure and report on performance and making better use of our data, to assist in evidence-based decision making.

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 Climate Change Board which provides governance, oversight and discusses progress and action. The PBCCD Return for the year 2023/24 is due to be submitted by 30/11/24.

Action is informed by the Decarbonisation Plan 2022-25 which maps out actions required to achieve net zero by 2045. The Plan identifies groups actions into six themes, one of which relates to the preparation and adaptation for impacts of climate change.

- Waste
- Energy and Water Consumption
- Transport emissions from our commercial fleet like buses, bin lorries, vans and cars.
- Preparing and adapting for impacts of climate change
- Offsetting our emissions through partnership and innovation
- Telling you about it and encouraging the community to do their bit

Argyll and Bute Climate Action – Community Planning Partnership Climate Change Strategy

Argyll and Bute Council and other Community Planning Partnership partners have jointly provided funding for a Project Manager for two years to support and undertake a climate risk assessment for Argyll and Bute as a region, and to develop a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan comprising an integrated set of adaptation, mitigation and engagement actions.

Carbon Neutral Islands Programme

The Scottish Government Carbon Neutral Islands project aims to support six islands (Islay, Barra, Great Cumbrae, Hoy, Raasay and Yell) to become carbon neutral by 2040. Argyll and Bute Council is a member of the newly formed Local Authority Advisory Group, which aims to support the implementation of the Carbon Neutral Island's project, ensuring alignment and co-ordination with wider Local Authority activity, and reciprocal sharing of information.

Carbon audits have been carried out for each island, and community climate change action plans and climate change investment strategies have been developed; these will identify learning and good practice that can be shared with other Scottish islands.

Capital Investment and central repairs delivered

We have successfully delivered a programme of investment in our property assets 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, emergency, planned and statutory maintenance programmes were successfully delivered, resulting in improved customer satisfaction. Additionally, a separate large-scale project reviewed the water, wastewater and drainage charges for the Council. 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.

Housing and the Housing Emergency

The pressures on the housing market in Argyll and Bute are recognised both nationally and locally. Whilst we are not the only local authority to be experiencing these pressures, the diverse geography of our area means that we experience a range of impacts that other authorities do not need to consider, such as the cost, infrastructure, and transport challenges of delivering services in our Island communities.

Against a backdrop of real-time financial cuts to public services, and the pressures from the rising cost of living on our residents, volunteer organisations, and businesses, there are significant pressures on the local authority and partners to deliver housing services in a cost effective and efficient way.

The delivery of housing and related services remains a high priority for the Council. In June 2023, the Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee declared a 'housing emergency in Argyll and Bute'. This is based on the acute shortage of housing across the area, reflected in high homelessness and waiting list numbers, together with the pressures partners are experiencing trying to secure housing. The housing emergency impacts on our ability to recruit and retain people in the area, and our capacity to deliver services within the area.

We held a housing summit in the autumn to bring partners together to highlight and discuss the shortage of housing, the cost impacts, and to identify how we can address the challenges by delivering more collaborative, innovative, and affordable housing across the area. One outcome from the summit was that the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) acknowledged the need for actions and agreed to set up a CPP Housing Sub-Group (led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise) to explore what and how the CPP might contribute.

Through our Local Housing Strategy, the council is striving to minimise the impacts on services for our customers and residents. We have reassessed the Local Housing Strategy's action plan to ensure that the aims and objectives of the strategy are still relevant to meet identified needs. We have considered the changing needs and demands for housing, related services, and support that our residents require, and also what is needed to attract people to the area and promote Argyll and Bute as a place to live and work.

Our performance

This table illustrates how we have delivered on our 7 Corporate Outcomes. This is followed by detailed performance and supporting commentary for our Corporate Outcome Indicators.

Overall performance of 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 | 2 | 2 |
| Children and young people have the best possible start | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Education, skills and training maximise opportunities for all | 7 | 1 | 6 |
| Our economy is diverse and thriving | 12 | 8 | 4 |
| We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Getting it right | 5 | 2 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 47 | 26 | 21 |

We continue to report other indicators of importance on a quarterly basis at each of our Area Committees. 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. These can be found in the Performance and Improvement section of the Council website. [Performance and Improvement | Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/performance-and-improvement)

How We Compare – Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

In addition to monitoring our corporate outcomes we use a variety of improvement tools. A key aspect of this relates to our engagement with the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF).

All local authorities in Scotland participate in the [Local Government Benchmarking Framework \(LGBF\)](#). The data is collected and presented in ways to ensure consistency and enabling comparisons between councils to be made, as levels of performance are affected by differences in local circumstances and local priorities.

Because of the variations between council areas, the LGBF divides councils into 'family groups'; each group is made up of eight councils which share similar characteristics, enabling more relevant comparisons to be made. The selection of family groups is based on types of area and levels of deprivation. More detail on the LGBF and 'family groups' can be found by clicking on the above link.

LGBF data is updated monthly, with some indicators being updated throughout the year. However, data for the most recent year will not be complete until after the full twelve months has passed. The majority of the 2023/24 data will be published by the end of 2024.

In addition to 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

Below we provide detail on our performance against each of our Corporate Outcome Indicators and further context on the activities that have taken place to support delivery in that area.

Corporate Outcome: People live active, healthier and independent lives

Number of indicators: 6

Number on track: 4

Number no target / no data: 2

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|---|
| Maximise distribution of Scottish Welfare Fund | 95.30% | 85.90% | 120.70% | 144.00% | 128.56% | G | The 2023/24 overspend was covered by remaining ear marked reserves from 2022/23. This ensured the continued support for the Council's most vulnerable citizens during the year through the provision of Community Care Grants and Crisis support. |
| Percentage of clients satisfied that they are better able to deal with their financial problems following our support and intervention | 90.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | 100.00% | G | A voluntary survey is distributed. All clients who expressed an opinion agreed that they are better able to deal with their financial problems following our support. |
| Maximise distribution of | 96.00% | 99.90% | 98.20% | 79.00% | 84.30% | R | |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|---|
| Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund | | | | | | | Total expenditure at the year-end was £894,000 which is less than the £1.061 million provided by Scottish Government for the year. New DHP guidance has been issued to Scottish local authorities in 2024/25 and we will conduct a policy review with a view to ensuring our expenditure is maximised in line with the grant award in the future. |
| Percentage of care services graded 'good' (4) or better in Care Inspectorate inspections | 75.20% | 87.10% | 80.00% | 79.50% | 77.30% | G | This indicator is captured within the Local Government Performance Framework. Performance exceeds target and the latest Scotland national level, reported as 77%. |
| Percentage of adults receiving any care or support who rated it as excellent or good | 75.30% | 78.30% | 78.30% | 68.60% | 74.00% | R | This indicator is captured within the Health and Care Experience Survey 2023/24. Performance noted as below target however, it exceeds the latest Scotland figure, reported as 63%. |
| Percentage carers who feel supported to continue in their caring role | 29.70% | 35.00% | 38.00% | 38.00% | 38.00% | G | This indicator is captured within the Health and Care Experience Survey 2023/24. Performance exceeds target and the latest Scotland national figure, reported as 31%. |

Helping people live active, healthier and independent lives

We have helped residents maximise their income through additional benefits or accessing grants. This work has supported vulnerable people with assistance with independent living, preventing homelessness and helping reduce the number of households and families living in all types of poverty, including extreme poverty.

- A total of £589,168 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants was paid to support vulnerable people in our communities who are in desperate need of financial support. This made up of Scottish Government programme funding (£458,28) and funding by Argyll and Bute Council (£131,000).
- Discretionary Housing Payments totalling £894,477 were distributed to households in need to prevent homelessness and assist vulnerable members of our communities to maintain their tenancies. As a result of new guidance issued from Scottish Government, the Council's policy will be reviewed to maximise further use of the fund in future years.
- We paid out £144,105 in grants to cover food and fuel for people in poverty and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies.
- 2,500 families have been supported to maximise benefit income and reduced fuel costs to the value of £2.527m.
- The average processing time for new housing benefit claims was 16.41 days and 3.17 days for changes in circumstances against targets of 21 days and 6 days respectively.
- We assisted residents to claim £4.45 million in additional benefits that may have otherwise remained unclaimed, assisting independent living and preventing homelessness. This was supported through partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and the Welfare Advice and Health Partnership.
- 99% of respondents in our welfare rights customer satisfaction survey would recommend the service. 99% rated their overall experience of using the service as excellent or good and 97% said the time taken to respond to their initial enquiry was excellent or good.
- In line with Scottish Government Policy the basic pay of carers and personal assistants who look after adults in our communities was 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.
- Full allocation of the council's Supporting Communities Fund to 58 community groups across Argyll and Bute for a range of projects addressing, social, environmental and cultural and economic outcomes.

Corporate Outcome: People will live in safer and stronger communities

Number of indicators: 4

Number on track: 2

Number no target / no data: 2

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|---|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|--|
| 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% | 90.00% | 100.00% | G | <p>We surveyed groups we had been working with for them to self-assess whether they felt that their effectiveness had increased as a result of capacity building by the Community Development team. Comments from the survey (in responders' own words):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of one-to-one advice, attendance at meetings and leading strategic focus groups. • They have provided help and support regarding funding for our group. They were really helpful and responsive and provided good straightforward advice. Very approachable. • Funding advice and assistance with Council funding applications. • Advice on Participation Request process and help with engagement between LCC and Council officers responsible for the service. • Advice around recruitment and changing our charity from unincorporated to a SCIO. |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|--|
| Information provided to our community groups, individuals and partners is easy to understand | 75.00% | 89.00% | 96.00% | 90.00% | 93.00% | G | <p>We provide information on queries about Community Empowerment and Community Development (Assets, Participation Requests). We also provide information on general funding and training opportunities, and on how to take things forward in community and partnership projects such as developing action plans and engaging to develop these.</p> <p>The Communities and Partnership Team send out regular information bulletins. The different bulletins each have a different audience cohort and a different editorial style. Every effort is made to use plain English, and checks are made to ensure accessibility compliance.</p> |
| Total value of compensation settlements for vehicle damage/driver injury as a result of road/bridge faults | No Target | £2,884 | £2,807 | £1,879 | £1,956 | No Target | The sums paid out have remained at a similar level year on year which may be indicative of an ongoing improvement in road and bridge surfaces. |
| Percentage of adult residents stating their neighbourhood as a 'very good' place to live. | 70.00% | - | - | 69.00% | No Data | - | This figure is derived from the Scottish Government's Household Survey and results are released a year in arrears. The figure for 2022 is the last available. |

Argyll and Bute Community Safety Strategy

We are further developing the Community Safety Strategy, which underpins the Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan and sets out strategic priorities in relation to:

- We live in a safe and positive community.
- We encourage safer road and water use.
- Our natural and built environment is protected.
- Our communities are supported and included.

It also identifies how we will work 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.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator continues to work in partnership with several outside agencies to manage an increase in anti-social related incidents across Argyll and Bute and works closely with Police Scotland in the management of the CCTV network across the area.

Prevent

The Council's approach to Prevent was refreshed with the Prevent Multi-Agency Panel, which was reformed to assess the information received from Police Scotland and consider appropriate safeguarding measures in supporting individuals to reduce their vulnerability of being drawn into terrorism.

Building Standards Balanced Scorecard

The Building Standards Balanced Scorecard provides details of achievements and performance and service priorities until 2025. Good progress is being made on the following:

- Exceeded all targets for the 5 key Building Standards National Performance Targets in 2023/24.
- Attained one of the best customer satisfaction rates from the national Building Standards Customer Satisfaction Survey run by the Scottish Government.
- Processed a total of 1690 warrants, compared to 1844 in 2022/23. Argyll and Bute generated warrants increased from 1262 to 1355 in 2023/24
- Responded to 104 dangerous / defective building cases at various properties across Argyll and Bute, acting where appropriate, to remove imminent risk to public safety.
- Implemented the new requirements of the Scottish Governments Technical Standards for Building Standards.

The Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme (MVP)

This peer mentoring programme gives young people the chance to explore and challenge attitudes, beliefs, and cultural norms that underpin all forms of gender-based violence in our society. We have a robust 3-year development plan in place, which has helped to ensure a strategic direction and focussed approach to implement the programme.

The programme has continued to be developed across our secondary school settings and a further 17 members of staff have been trained with a further training session planned for 2024. So far 7 of our secondary schools trained to deliver this programme and further training will allow those remaining schools who have not yet participated in training to engage.

We have continued to increase partner engagement and are developing the School Support Services contract to ensure that this is embedded in our partnership approach. This development is in line with our Mentors in Violence Prevention Action plan. We are currently planning to pilot approaches to introducing the transition materials into Primary Schools.

Supporting complex needs

To ensure appropriate support is in place for learners with the most complex needs, we have been working closely with CALM organisation to access training that helps staff understand more complex dysregulated behaviours and how to reduce and prevent those behaviours over time. Staff who have completed this have provided positive feedback regarding the positive impact that learning from the training is already having on their practice.

We have updated our documentation and guidance for staff on exclusions, distressed behaviour and violence and aggression towards staff and delivered staff awareness raising sessions on the changes to this important guidance. 252 members of staff have completed the CALM online theory course which focusses on prevention and a reduction of restrictive responses with training secured for a further 75 staff. 4 Physical Intervention instructors successfully completed their reaccreditation course and will undertake an instructors training course. There is a training plan to roll out targeted Physical Intervention training to relevant establishments starting on the August in-service days.

88% of our care experienced young people eligible to leave in 2022-23 sustained a positive destination. Destinations include remaining in education, employment and further training. Educational outcomes for 'looked after' children 2022-23 have yet to be published to facilitate national comparison.

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

Number of indicators: 8

Number on track: 6

Number no target / no data: 2

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|---|
| Provide quality meals within cost margins to all pupils | +/-5% | -0.069 | -0.04 | -2.56% | 0.48% | G | 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% | 100.00% | G | Each care experienced child and young person enrolled in an authority school has tracking and monitoring plans in place via our education management information system known as Seemis. Data collated includes attendance, exclusion, progress and attainment and wellbeing information. |
| Percentage of children living in poverty (after housing costs) | No Target | 18.9% | 21.7% | 23.5% | No Data | - | The 2022/23 figure (latest data) is 23.5%, a small increase in keeping with figures from across Scotland and still below the Scottish national average of 24.0%. |
| Percentage rate for attendance across | 92.00% | 93.30% | 93.30% | 90.55% | 92.85% | G | |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|---------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|--|
| all Argyll and Bute schools is comparable or better than the Scottish national average (biennial data) | | | | | | | Final data for 2023/24 is still unavailable and as much as it is a biennial uplift nationally, locally we track and submit this annually. |
| Support the increase in the uptake of available grants, allowance and entitlements | 2,573 | 2,998 | 2,853 | 2,999 | 3,125 | G | Education has 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% | 100.00% | G | Referrals have been received from each secondary school. There has been an increase in referrals since the service was launched in 2023. The service is currently managing demand well. The number of referrals is aligned to what would be expected and what the capacity of the contract can manage. |
| Percentage of children with no concerns across all domains at 27 to 30 month assessment | 82.10% | 85.50% | 87.30% | 85.3% | No Data | - | This measure is captured within the Local Government Benchmarking Framework and exceeds the latest Scotland national level reported as 82.1%. Data is not yet available for 2023/24. |
| 95% of schools have a suitability rating of A or B | 95.00% | 95.00% | 95.00% | 95.00% | 95.00% | G | |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|--|
| | | | | | | | Work is planned for summer 2024 to upgrade the suitability of two schools which will leave only one school with a suitability rating of C. |

Support and interventions for our care experienced children and young people

Regular tracking and monitoring of attendance and attainment and designated manager meets has led to targeted support and interventions for our care experienced children and young people (CECYP). Attendance figures for CECYP across primary, secondary and special settings is 85.33%, nationally the comparative figure is 87.5% These figures align with a national area of focus on attendance. Health and Wellbeing Family Liaison Officers continue to support young people and families across the authority.

- Additional resources to support nurturing environments in each Early Years settings to enable flexibility in how these environments to support self-regulation for children.
- Training sessions supported 143 practitioners in engaging in dialogue around infant behaviour and how to apply nurture principles.
- Bespoke training to support practitioners to increase their skill and confidence in delivering play and learning outdoors. Specific outdoor environments can engage and extend children’s thinking and support their connection to the natural environment. Participants reported that they felt more confident to assess risk, engage new skills and deliver learning outdoors.

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 this including an increase in positive destinations to 94%, which is above our target of 85%.

Personalised support has been put in place to maximise attendance for this cohort; attendance data aligns to the national picture. There is a sustained low number of exclusions for care experienced children and young people. Interventions to support this sustained level of low number of exclusions this include individual work with children by Health and Wellbeing Liaison Officers, School based personalised support, Ed Psychology support, health discussions and wider partnership working.

Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) improving writing programme

27 schools have undertaken training in using a quality improvement approach to support writing attainment, with a further 16 signed up to undertake training next session. This includes all our Gaelic medium schools. The percentage of pupils on track across P3-P7 has increased from an average of 61% to 76%, based on Feb 24 predictions.

Our Children, Their Future

The current Education Vision and Strategy, 'Our Children, Their Future', was developed in 2016 and remains a robust and meaningful document, however in response to impacts of a global pandemic and a changing national landscape and changing national and local policy contexts in regards to Education, a planned and informed refresh is underway.

Consultation on the strategy was carried out with pupils, parents and carers, staff and wider partners to gather views and define what was important to them for education in Argyll and Bute. The consultation included opportunities for in-person and online group sessions along with an online individual questionnaire and was supported by parent and pupil groups as well as school staff. And the questionnaire was also offered in Ukrainian, Russian and Gaelic.

The refreshed strategy will shape the future delivery of an Education Service which will support our children, young people and communities to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Award winning school meals service

Following the successful pilot in 2022-23 for the delivery of school meals via drone, the project has moved onto the next phase, and we will soon be piloting the delivery of school meals from one school to another.

The Council continues to offer fresh, healthy and sustainable school lunches and hold the Soil Association Scotland's 'Bronze Food for Life Served Here' award. The award is 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, and using free-range eggs and high-welfare meat.

Registration Early Learning Childcare (ELC)

The Customer Engagement Digital Service Team and Education Service worked together to review and update the annual registration processes for Early Learning Childcare (ELC), Primary School Enrolment and Secondary School Enrolment.

This included a streamlined and efficient online application form for parents and an assisted caseload management and approval system for use by Education administrators, with features such as automated reminders and notifications to parents.

This greatly reduced the administrative burden for officers and significantly sped up the process for parents. In total 502 ELC applications, 840 P1 applications and 950 secondary school applications were processed in under a fortnight for each cycle.

The same digital enablement approach was also applied to the application process for Under 22-year-old Travel Cards and 1,531 were awarded, raising the take up rate to 70% of those eligible. This will be further enhanced in 2024/25 with robotic updates via an integration into the Education system, SEEMIS.

School Counselling Service

The School Counselling Service delivered by The Exchange (TCS) provides 100% coverage of services across all schools and localities. Referrals have been received from each secondary school, and support provided. Attendance and engagement at counselling by young people in Argyll and Bute is high, and above The Exchange's national average rate. There has been an increase in referrals over the past 2 quarters in comparison to when the service was launched in 2023. The service is currently managing demand well. The number of referrals is aligned to what would be expected and what the capacity of the contract can manage. There continues to be quarterly reporting meetings with The Exchange. There has been an increase in the contract capacity to allow support to younger children, and ongoing monitoring will ensure that capacity continues to be able to meet the demand.

Nurture teaching support

Where our most distressed young people have been identified, nurture teachers continue to provide intensive, time-limited support through coaching. Capacity building ensures staff are well equipped to adopt nurturing and trauma informed approaches and support the young people who need these most.

Qualitative feedback from staff in schools indicates the positive impact this work has on both staff wellbeing and children and young people: *"...Nurture teacher support has made a huge difference across the board. Targeted support for pupils ensured needs were met, particularly for emotional regulation. This facilitated inclusion and wellbeing of individuals, peers and adults involved. The Nurture Teacher being on site increased our sense of being supported and was an integral part of the approach. Having this support across schools is an essential resource..."*

We have implemented a new a Counselling in Schools Service to improve outcomes for children and young people. Impact of the new service is being tracked and monitored and data gathered so far is showing very positive impacts for children and young people. 453 young people have been supported by a school counsellor over the past 12 months, with 82% reporting improved outcomes following support.

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

Number of indicators: 7

Number on track: 1

Number no target / no data: 6

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | 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% | 94.30% | R | The slight decrease on 2022/23 is due to a change in the way HMRC data was included. Overall, we are positioned 9 th out of 32 local authorities for this measure. |
| 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% | SCQF4 87.23% SCQF5 66.84% | SCQF4 84.08% SCQF5 66.59% | R | At SCQF level 4 there has been a decrease of around 3pp. This data has been shared with schools and there are processes in place to ensure rigorous tracking and monitoring. Broadly, we have maintained attainment level at SCQF 5. However, we are continuing to support and challenge our establishments in order to ensure that attainment is raised. |
| Increase the uptake of wider | No Target | - | - | 88.00% | 100.00% | No Target | |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|--|
| achievement opportunities which complement traditional SQA awards and offer alternative ways to develop learning, life and work skills | | | | | | | All secondary schools have developed an enhanced Wider Achievement Programme for young people in S1 to S6. These additional opportunities are being supporting and funded by the UKSPF. |
| Percentage of modern apprentices that go on to a positive destination after completing the Argyll and Bute Council Modern Apprentice Programme | 95.00% | 100.00% | 96.10% | 96.20% | 94.55% | R | The slight decrease is due to a small percentage of Early Years Modern Apprenticeship students withdrawing prior to completing the qualification. We will continue to explore the use of Modern Apprentices as part of the ongoing workforce planning process. |
| Percentage of children that achieve their appropriate developmental milestones by Primary 1 | 70.00% | 75.00% | 64.00% | 63.00% | 61.00% | R | Although below target this result is reflective with the national picture in relation to child development across Scotland. |
| Percentage pass rate for the National 5 qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average *ACADEMIC YEAR | No Target | 87.50% | 79.70% | 77.39% | 75.60% | No Target | The national pre-appeal A-C pass rate for National 5 is 77.2%. The authority post-appeal pass rate will not be available until October 2024. The national post-appeal data will not be made available until December 2024. |
| The percentage pass rate for the | No Target | 90.20% | 80.90% | 77.35% | 72.00% | No Target | |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|--|
| National Higher qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average *ACADEMIC YEAR | | | | | | | The national pre-appeal A-C pass rate for Higher is 74.9%. The authority post-appeal data will not be made available until October. The national post-appeal data will not be made available until December. |

Developing the young workforce

We have continued to focus on broadened and improved work-based vocational learning opportunities for young people, improving vocational educational provision in schools, and developing strong partnerships with employers and agencies who can contribute towards equipping young people with the skills and qualities they need to succeed in life and work. As a result of the implementation of a Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) strategic action plan for 2023-24, and continued proactivity and dedication of the DYW School Coordinators, DYW Argyll and Bute have increased engagement with employers by nearly 70%, young people by 411% and implemented an additional 250 DYW-related activities across the Authority in the year 2023-24.

Helping people into work

There are several programmes delivered by Argyll and Bute Council's Employability Team and third sector delivery partners available to residents to help participants progress towards education, training or employment. Participants have access to:

- a tailored support package
- accredited training
- work placements paying the Real Living Wage
- benefits, debt and fuel poverty advice
- assistance with job applications, CV creation and interviews skills and techniques.

Items to remove specific barriers can also be purchased, such as a digital device to access online learning or a bicycle to help address poor transport links and allow travel to and from work.

A childminding programme enables parents to develop skills, confidence and accreditation in childcare, which in turn supports their journey to starting up and providing much needed local services as a registered childminder.

Support is offered to people who meet one or more of the following criteria:

- People between the ages of 15 and 67 years who are experiencing barriers to employment.
- Young people over the age of 15 years who are within 6 months of the school leaving date and who are identified as being at risk of not moving on to a positive destination.
- Parents on a low-income whilst in-work, with a specific focus on the six priority family groups. Our service eligibility also recognises different family structures, such as a grandparent or guardian caring for a child.
- Employers looking to host a fully funded work placement.
- People ages 16 to 67 who are unemployed or underemployed looking to undertake accredited training.

The following are some quotes from participants, giving their views on the support received.

“Just to let you know I passed my HGV driving test this afternoon!! It still feels like a dream. I’m still in shock. Just wanted to say thanks so much for what you did. I couldn’t have done this without you. I’ve finished reading the book you recommended so it’s onwards and upwards for me now!”

“Thank you so much for the support I have received to date. There is no way I would have been able to afford to pay to put myself through this course, and the fact that you paid for all the resources I needed to help me through my course was amazing. It was also great to know my PESF support Worker was only a call away if I had any queries or needed help with anything. Thank you!”

To find out information on all the support options available, 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: Our economy is diverse and thriving

Number of indicators: 12

Number on track: 8

Number no target / no data: 4

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|---|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|---|
| Maintain the percentage of local suppliers that benefit from the awards of contracts via the procurement portal | 20.00% | 27.90% | 13.50% | 19.90% | 17.80% | R | From the 116 contracts awarded during 2023/24, 37 contracts received local bids. The nature of the types of contracts awarded can impact on submission from local bidders. Of the 37 contracts, 22 were awarded to local suppliers (59.5%) with an estimated total contract value of £4.1m. The Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management team will continue to support local suppliers by providing useful information on the Council's website. |
| Increase the number of community benefits that are delivered through the contracts we award locally | No Target | 22 | 55 | 73 | 74 | No Target | The Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management team is committed to maximising community benefits from its procurement activities and to delivering wider benefits for its communities when purchasing 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. |
| Number of business and industry planning applications submitted annually | No Target | 21 | 19 | 23 | 21 | No Target | This measure details the number of applications submitted to the Council for business and industry applications. The data for 2023/24 indicates a slight decrease to activity in this area from the previous reporting period. |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|---|
| Percentage of homeless applicants who required temporary accommodation this period | No Target | 45.00% | 40.00% | 34.00% | 29.00% | No Target | The percentage reduction should be considered in the context of a reduction of 4% in the number of households presenting as homeless to the local authority in 2023/24 compared to 2022/23. The actual number of households requiring temporary accommodation increased from 136 households in 2022/23 to 141 households in 2023/24, but the pro-active housing advice and information provided by the Area Teams has meant the 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 | 48 | 145 | 188 | 70 | G | The Strategic Housing Investment Plan process is a partnership between the Council, Registered Social Landlords and the Scottish Government to ensure new build affordable housing is delivered across the local authority to meet need and demand. This included 54 units for social rent, 11 properties for New Supply Shared Equity (NSSE) and 5 properties for Mid-Market Rent. |
| Total number of visitor trips to Argyll and Bute | No Target | 0.8M | 1.5M | 2.5M | 2.8M | No Target | This data is taken from the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor. The number of visitors trips has increased as the region |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|---|
| | | | | | | | continues to recover from the impact on visitor numbers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. |
| Total visitor spend in Argyll and Bute | No Target | £125M | £262.5M | £407.5M | £461.5M | No Target | This data is taken from the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor. Visitor spend has increased as the region continues to recover from the impact on visitor numbers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. |
| Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita | No Target | £20,543 | £23,394 | £47,270 | £47,270 | No Target | The latest figure is still £47,270 taken from the Scottish Annual Business Statistics 2021 (excludes the finance sector and part of agriculture and the public sector). The latest data is for 2021 as the 2022 data has yet to be finalised. Please note these statistics are in arrears and do not match the financial years stated. GVA is an indicator of wealth creation. GVA per capita measures the contribution to the economy made by each individual employee/producer. The latest GVA per capita figure for Argyll and Bute is 86% of the Scottish average. This shows that on average Argyll and Bute's economy, with many low skill and low pay employment opportunities, is performing less strongly than Scotland as a whole. However, this is only one measure and does not take into consideration issues such as wellbeing. |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|---|
| Unemployment rate - claimant count as a %age of working age population | No Target | 5.80% | 4.00% | 2.80% | 2.50% | No Target | This indicator is based on working age group 16 to 64. The downward trend over the years is positive. |
| Unemployment rate - claimant count as a %age of the population (16-24) | No Target | 6.50% | 4.30% | 2.80% | 0.41% | No Target | This indicator is based on age group 16 to 24. The downward trend over the years is positive. |
| The number of Business Gateway start-ups per 10,000 of population | No Target | 110 | 154.3 | 135.7 | 135.0 | No Target | 135 start-ups were supported during 2023/24. |
| Geographical percentage coverage of 4/5G mobile phone connectivity | 95.00% | 77.00% | 79.00% | 81.00% | No Data | - | <p>The latest data we can access (Jan 2024) is that currently geographic coverage from one operator sits at 85% an increase of 4% however the coverage from all operators has increased to 37%, with a decrease of no coverage to 15%.</p> <p>The Mobile Mapping Project procurement is currently underway with the closing date for returns due late September with project commencement early November.</p> |

Supporting the economic recovery and our communities

We continue to ensure that we maintained 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.

2023/24 Contracted Spend: 91.9%.

2023/24 SME Wins: 82.9%

We effectively planned and coordinated the release of tenders to avoid overwhelming the market, particularly the local market, by issuing invitations to tender where the regulations allowed. For 2023/24, we awarded 116 contracts and of these 84 were Quick Quotes (ITQ's).

Our procurement processes were simplified and streamlined, ensuring that documentation was as straightforward as possible, and we engaged with local Economic Development colleagues and other collaborative stakeholders to support emerging priorities that will support the economic recovery within Argyll and Bute. The level of local spend was monitored in 2023/24, and the overall percentage with our local suppliers was 35.8% - see detail below:

| | Total Spend | Local Spend | % |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------|
| 2023/24 – Spend Distribution | £183,347,604 | £65,716,826 | 35.8 |

The team recognises the strategic 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 to have the greatest chance of being successful in winning Council and other public sector business.

We are committed to maximising community benefits from procurement activities and to delivering wider benefits for our communities when purchasing goods, services and supplies. We have worked closely with our suppliers to deliver additional social, economic and environmental value to our society. A total of 74 community benefits were achieved in 2023/24 through robust management of contract awards and matching requirement to the Request List.

Business Support – case studies

In June 2023 Business Gateway launched a new range of support for businesses through the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund. This range of support includes:

- Small Business Development Grant of up to £10,000
- Business Start-up Grant of up to £1,000
- Trade Fair, Training, Accreditation and Digital Grants of up to £1,000
- Fully funded expert help 1-2 days of support from a subject specialist
- Intensive Support Programme focused on building resilience and exploiting business opportunities to help businesses make a step-change.

Support provided included:

- 122 grants awarded totalling £346,243
- 60 small business development grants
- 39 start-up grants
- 10 trade fair, training, accreditation and digital grants
- 6 expert help (1 to 2 days support)
- 6 participants in intensive business support programme

Ardardan Estate

Through Business Gateway, Ardardan Estate (a family run business), received one-to-one guidance from a dedicated business adviser and signposting to various funding opportunities to support their new 'Highland Cow' experience.

The family-run business employs 70 locals who share their passion and farm experience with visitors. Determined to continuously improve; while keeping food, farming and family at the heart of their business, the family has worked with Business Gateway over the last few years to help improve their product offering and also recently benefited from assistance to source further grants, which funded a new oven, coffee machine and equipment to introduce seasonal events.

Sue Aikman, Director of Ardardan Estate, said: "Our strong heritage lies at the heart of our estate, but we're always on the lookout to introduce new products and services, so we are really excited to be introducing a 'Highland Cow' experience. Business Gateway has been a great source of support over the last few years, and we're very grateful to have been able to benefit from their expertise."



Islay Sea Adventures



Thanks to support from a dedicated business adviser and advice on funding opportunities, Islay Sea Adventures has introduced new seafood trips where customers can enjoy on deck, a selection of locally caught fresh and smoked seafood by the team.

Born and bred on Islay, founder and Managing Director Gus Newman is passionate about showing off the best of the island and approached Business Gateway for support in developing this new venture. Business Gateway helped to source grant funding towards the costs of a Safety Management System and HACCP food safety management course.

Gus Newman, Managing Director and Skipper, Islay Sea Adventures, said: “We’re really proud to be able to offer our customers the unique chance to enjoy the scenery and wildlife that Islay has to offer, all while sampling some of the best local produce available. “Business Gateway allowed us to invest in our ability to smoke quality Scottish seafood, which may not have been possible without their support.”

Building Standards achieves maximum 6-year licence

Building Standards have achieved the maximum six-year verification licence from the Scottish Government, which allows us to continue to vet and verify building warrants. This brings benefits to the built environment and supports our economy. During the period 2023/24 our work in supporting the economy resulted in a total 1,690 building warrants processed. Argyll and Bute generated warrants increased from 1262 to 1355 in 2023/24

Building Standards User Forum

We delivered a digital “user forum” for customers to highlight issues with the service, changes to the Technical Standards, and how these impact the customer and used this as a platform to discuss their issues. Presentations were given to stakeholders and contractors regarding the new updates to the Domestic and Non-Domestic Technical Handbooks, which were well received by our customers.

One council: property income

We have generated over £680,000 from disposals and generated new annual revenue income of £25,500 driven by our strategy of divesting of surplus property assets and generating income from our estate.

Notable sales include:

- Glencreran School House
- The former Ashfield Primary School & Bridge of Orchy Primary School.
- The marketing of the Helensburgh Waterfront commercial site, which attracted 9 international, national and local bids for the site which have been assessed by the Property Development Working Group with a preferred developer to be selected in August 2024.
- Oban Airport marketing has generated 3 significant aviation related business interests for the business park. An Outline Business Case was completed in 2023/24 with the full business case due for completion in 2024/25.

We are developing a Strategic Outline Programme. This will cover potential opportunities for the Council to develop several 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.

Housing Services Partnership with Home Argyll

Housing Services, in partnership with the Council's Home Argyll partnership have delivered amendments to the Common Housing Register Allocation Policy. Crucial changes have been made to assist in finding permanent tenancies for homeless applicants, to allow single person households allocation of two-bedroom properties in certain circumstances, and to create the flexibility to accommodate other identified housing market pressures when identified.

Cultural and leisure events

2023-24 saw the creation of a new centralised approach to the authorisation of major cultural and leisure events across Argyll and Bute, that has dramatically improved the previously fragmented and siloed processes. This makes it easier for those organising a major event to find out what is expected of them, easier for them to make an application and simpler for those approving such events to control the application and supporting evidence so that speedier decisions can be reached.

The new design includes:

- A single [online Events page](#) with all the resources needed by applicants in one place.
- A definitive online Guide as to what is required of applicants.
- An easy to use “smart” [online application form](#) that only asks the questions needed for a particular type of event and allows the upload of supporting documentation.
- A highly automated application management back-office system, that also controls the inputs needed by various stakeholders such as Fire and Police Services and manages key deadlines.
- A streamlined approval process that packages together the application and evidence for the approving officer and issues the certification of approval to proceed or rejection notice.

Since going live, 2953 applications have been approved using the new digital cultural and sporting events management process and 8 rejected. Further enhancements are being made to the system.

Corporate Outcome: We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth

Number of indicators: 5

Number on track: 3

Number no target / no data: 2

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|--------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|--|
| Percentage of waste recycled, composted or recovered | 45.00% | 49.30% | 48.30% | 52.00% | 58.20% | G | The overall improvement was mainly due to an increase in green garden waste, soils and rubble tonnages recycled by Renewi from the PPP area. In addition during Q4 (Jan-March 2024), all of Helensburgh and Lomond’s |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|---|
| | | | | | | | general waste was disposed of as refuse derived fuel (RDF)/energy from waste (EFW) instead of landfill. |
| Number of tonnes of waste sent to landfill (biodegradable) | 21,500 | 18,435 | 18,772 | 18,165 | 17,406 | G | The decrease is mainly due to FQ4 (Jan-March 2024), when all of Helensburgh and Lomond's general waste was disposed of as refuse derived fuel (RDF)/energy from waste (EFW) instead of landfill. This significantly reduced the council tonnage to landfill during that quarter and in turn reduced the 2023/24 financial year tonnage. |
| Percentage of street cleanliness | 73.00% | 81.00% | 79.00% | 83.00% | 84.00% | G | The level of street cleanliness across Argyll and Bute remains high and exceeds the national service standard of 67%. The service continues to set a target of 73% to challenge the operation. |
| Percentage of roads in need of maintenance as defined by the annual survey | No Target | 52.50% | No Data | 49.70% | No Data | No Target | We have not received an accurate Roads Condition Index figure from the supplier as they were unable to access most of our islands. This has been raised at a national level as two other Scottish local authorities were in a similar position. We are unable therefore to report on this outcome. |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|--|
| Carbon emissions relating to Council activities (Council carbon footprint) tCO2e = tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent | Net Zero tCO2 by 2045 | 26,619 | 28,218 | 26,512 | No Data | - | There are no figures available until after the submission of the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Compliance Report which is due by the end of November 2024. |

Water scarcity and air quality

Our Environmental Health team supported a Scottish Government scheme to assist private water supply users when their private water supplies run dry, by coordinating a response and provide bottled water to affected properties.

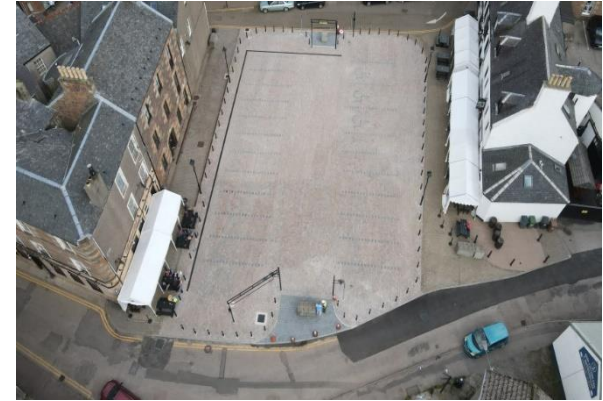
We completed and assessed our air monitoring program to conclude that local air quality in Argyll and Bute is good.

Flood protection and marine works

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

Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme

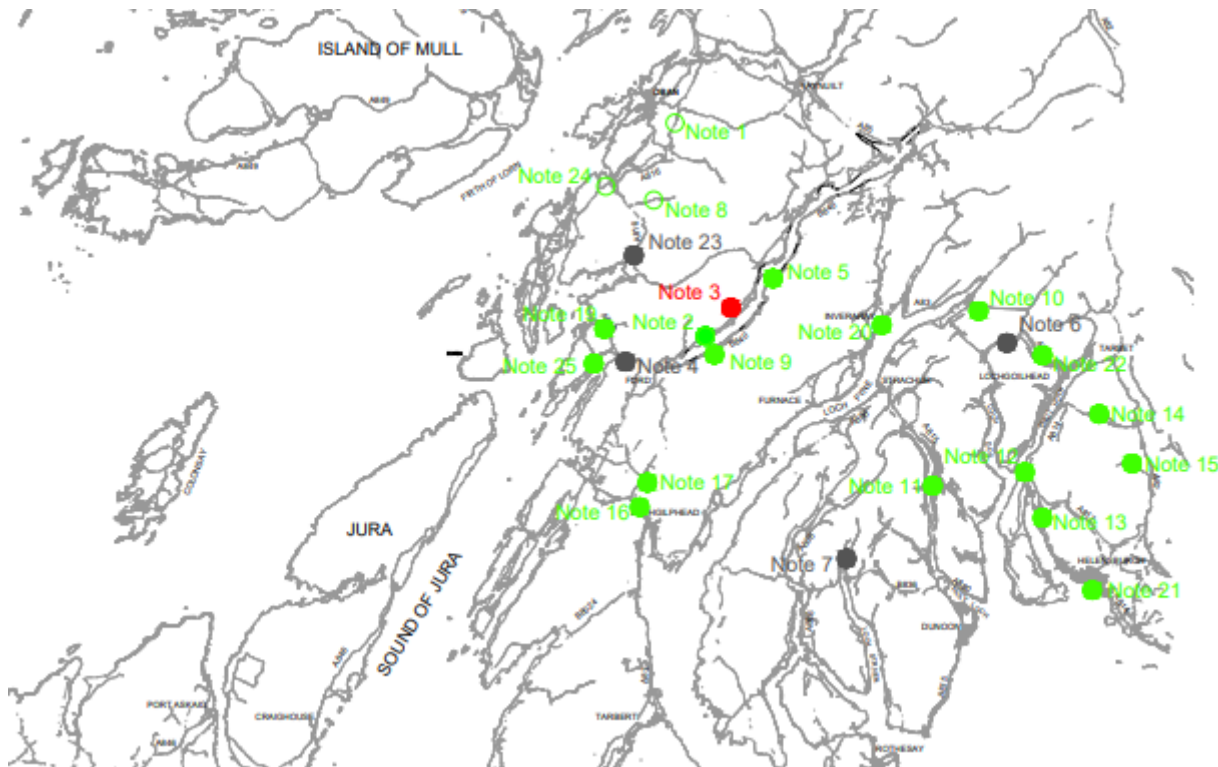
Construction of the Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme started on site in September 2022. It is the first scheme to be promoted by Argyll and Bute Council under the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009. Budgeted to cost £15.2M, it is being funded 80% by Scottish Government and 20% by Argyll and Bute Council.



Works progressed well throughout 2023/24 with full completion expected in 2024. Road resurfacing is ongoing along streets where pipework installation has been completed. Surface water has been removed from the combined foul drainage system, reducing the amount of water that needs to be treated in the sewage treatment works. This required the construction of a storage tank, small ponds and a reservoir.

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. 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.

Flood event



Following a period of wet weather which left ground conditions very wet and, in many cases saturated, more than a month's worth of rain fell over a 36-hour period, starting Friday 6 October 2023 and running into Saturday 7 October 2023. Conditions were so severe that Police Scotland declared a major incident, and a multiagency tactical response was assembled.

Public infrastructure and transport connections into and out of Argyll and Bute were severely compromised and for a period all trunk roads and many local roads were impassable. The compromised roads are illustrated by the dots on this map. The damage and disruption to the transport network included:

- Roads unpassable due to excessive surface water
- Bridges washed away or significantly damaged
- Carriageway and footway damage
- Numerous landslides

Numerous people became stranded due to flood waters, landslips and damaged structures and the Council response was significant with reception centres and catering put in place to accommodate individuals who were stranded. Many communities were also isolated and cut off, with lifeline routes served and alternative home to school transport provided by boat.

The response resulted in communities being reconnected, a significant amount of repair to storm damage and adaptation works designed to mitigate future disruption should another similar event occur. The images below show the impact of the event and repair and mitigation works.





PRCA (Public Relations & Communications Association) Scotland's In-house Communication Team of the Year

This award recognises the work we did to support communities following significant weather disruption in October, in accessing the council support services they need. We did this by informing and involving communities in different aspects of the council's work, by listening and responding to their concerns, and by promoting the area to raise the profile of Argyll and Bute's challenges, needs and opportunities.

Marine infrastructure and ferry services

The restructure of our larger harbour infrastructure and reviewed legislation have led to a 'new' 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. Since the last Annual Performance Review, the Council is now fully compliant with the Port Marine Safety Code.

Oban Harbour revision order



Informal discussion has 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.

Formal statutory consultation has taken place and representations have been received by the Council, which has carried out due diligence and responded in accordance with the relevant legislation. The next stage of the process will take place 2024/25 which will largely be down to Scottish Government/Transport Scotland to consider any outstanding representations and take forward the HRO.

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.

Ferry services

All our ferry routes operated according to timetable with additional sailings 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.



Replacement of the Jura ferry remains a priority and work is underway towards the installation of appropriate passenger access at Feolin on Jura. We have undertaken a topography study with a view to tendering a design build for passenger only access when a vehicular vessel is not available. This will likely be in the form of a gangway and pontoon near the existing slipway and is expected to make a very significant improvement to the breakdown-related connectivity issues.

Iona slipway and breakwater

The Breakwater planning application is progressing to tender. The forecast of a 1-year construction period is subject to 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 these issues, we initially had no returns from known contractors; this may 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 has approved the Environmental Impact Assessment we will continue with the licences, etc. with a view to progressing to tender.

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.

Land Based Developments

Road Reconstruction

During this financial year we carried out a programme of road improvements with an investment of £8m of council funding together with additional monies from the Timber Transport Fund in the region of £387k. This allowed us to complete over 65 individual roads reconstruction schemes, which will improve the overall road network, contributing to keeping Argyll and Bute open for business.

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 £10-11 million 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, but 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.

Claoniag landslip

The B8001 is a lifeline route to both the Claonaig ferry slip and the Skipness community. A significant landslide has compromised the road, albeit access has been maintained using traffic management. The detailed design to provide a long-term solution is complex, as the hill is sliding/moving down towards the stream and therefore complicating the solution. This has been progressed by a specialised geotechnical Consultant. Works tender package is in the process of being assembled, alongside continuous consultation with the landowner, SEPA and Openreach. There are several complexities affecting this scheme, including works consents, land acquisition and challenging ground conditions. In the meantime, the council continues to monitor the landslide.

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).

Corporate Outcome: Getting it right

Number of indicators: 5

Number on track: 2

Number no target / no data: 3

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|--|-----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|---|
| Increase the percentage of all self-service and automated contacts | 72.00% | 71.10% | 73.10% | 75.00% | 76.70% | G | The figure represents 660,938 interactions made using the digital self-service. This is an increase of 61k on the previous year. Our approach of making digital easier to use and better quality is supported by an updated corporate website that conforms to accessibility standards, a new online payment system (that took 43.7k payments worth £6.5m) and numerous new online services, from pupil registration to major Events applications. Person to person interactions also grew by 2.5k. |
| Sickness absence days per employee (non-teacher) | No Target | 10.0 days | 13.4 days | 14.9 days | 14.6 days | No Target | The top three reasons for sickness absence were 1. Stress/depression/mental Health, 2. Other musculoskeletal and 3. Infections. It is noteworthy that stress/depression and mental health have exhibited a steady and consistent increase. Infections remain high as strains of Covid have joined influenza as major causes of absence. |

| Corporate Outcome Indicator | Target | 2020/21 Actual | 2021/22 Actual | 2022/23 Actual | 2023/24 Actual | Status | Commentary |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|--|
| Sickness absence days per teacher | No Target | 4.4 days | 5.6 days | 7.2 days | 9.0 days | No Target | The top three reasons for sickness absence were 1. Stress/depression/mental health, 2. Infections and 3. Stomach. liver, kidney and digestion. The absence is predominantly a number of long-term cases for stress related reasons, though infections and Covid has continued to be a significant absence reason. This will feed into our Wellbeing Action Plan. |
| Level of employee satisfaction | TBC | - | - | - | - | - | The Council's employee experience survey was run during the month of May 2024 capturing a snapshot of employee the employee experience at that point in time and will provide the indicator for the period 2024/25. The survey will be rerun in 2025. |
| Level of customer satisfaction | 92.5% (combined) | 95.60% | 92.00% | 97.60% | 96.95% | G | This outcome measures the customer satisfaction of citizens contacting the council's contact centre and websites. The outcomes for 2023/24 were again very positive. |

Community Planning Partnership

Development and publication of the new Community Planning Partnership, 10 year, Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan (ABOIP)

Building standards customer services excellence

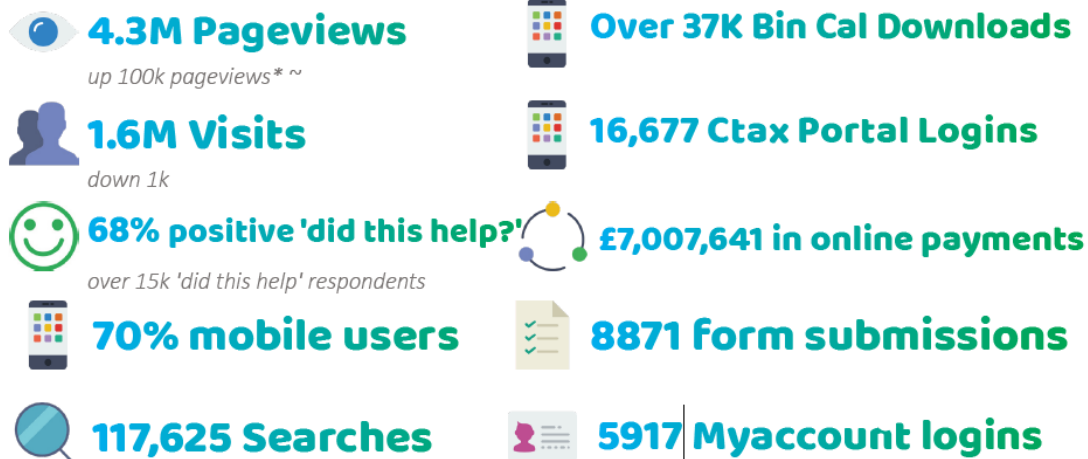
The service was reaccredited with the Customer Services Excellence (CSE) Award on the 23 April 2024, increasing the number of compliance-

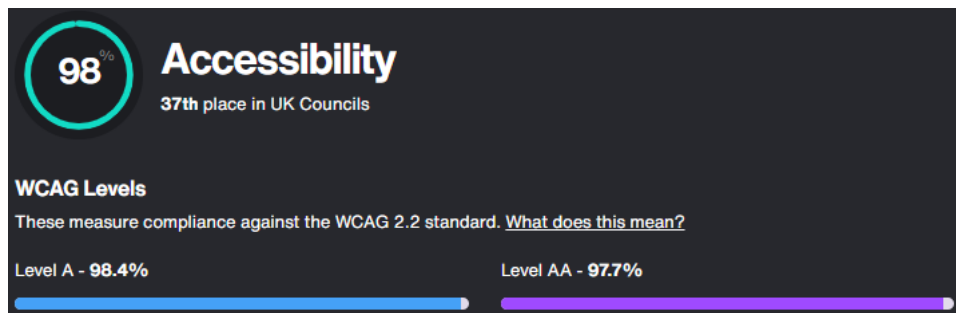
plus criteria to 26, the highest across all Council services. This reflects the excellent “customer-focus” across the team and the auditor concluded that “you clearly remain at the forefront of excellence and the recommendation for retention of the CSE Standard is well deserved”.

Increasing the use of our website and self-service tools

In June 2023, following a long period of thorough preparations, the Customer Engagement Team’s Web Team launched the wholly new Council website. This was based on the latest Drupal Local Gov best practice structure, derived from shared working across councils and on the free Drupal Content Management System. There were two separate user testing exercises participated in by over 400 customers to fine tune everything from colour palette to navigation layouts, and the final design was based on what customers told us they wanted to see rather than what the council wanted to tell them. The website is the fulcrum of online information and transactional services with 1.6million visits and 4.3 million page views in 2023-24. 8,871 online forms were submitted for a host of services and over £7million in online payments made by customers; over 70% of whom used mobile devices to view the website.

The new website allows us to comply with the very latest international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 standards, where we reached 98% compliance – top 40 out of all UK councils and 4th ranked in Scotland.





The Council's Registration Service pioneered the move to a remote, digitally enabled registration of deaths and Citizenship Ceremonies during Covid and saw a tremendously high (97%) take up of the 'Tell Us Once' digital death notification service.

Building on that expertise the council was chosen by National Records of Scotland to be one of eight councils to pilot the paperless digital registration service titled "Calling in the Pages". This project tested the systems and processes that allow customers to no longer appear in person to register births and deaths, but to provide electronic signatures and evidence. It no longer requires registrars to send signed paper copies of registers to Edinburgh each year. This is more convenient for customers, allows more flexible use of scarce registrar resources to meet peaks in demand across our challenging geography, and reduces paper and transport costs. The new way of working was rolled out nationally from February 2024 and Argyll and Bute was in the first cohort to go live.

Our Registrars have registered 1,180 deaths, 593 births and 985 marriage and civil partnerships. They officiated at 507 civil weddings / partnerships raising £226k in income and held 55 Citizenship Ceremonies.

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 264 respondents to its service satisfaction survey with a 96.6% satisfaction rating.
- There were 972 users of the Customer Service Points who completed a survey and 96.7% of them were satisfied.

- The corporate website had an 98% overall satisfaction rating, 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 dedicated to the highest levels of customer service and via the Customer Excellence Accreditation Award, 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.

Our new corporate website scored 98% satisfactory achievement against WACG accessibility standards.

We introduced new visitor experience surveys to help inform improvements to the website and 68% of the 15k+ respondents confirmed that their visit to the corporate website helped them; there were 1.6m visitors to the website in 2023/24.

13,267 of them submitted an online request using a council built webform and 83% of survey respondents (177), said they had a successful visit using these forms.

The outcomes for 2023/24 were again very positive, with 100% of 264 respondents to our Registration Service survey rating the service good or excellent, 96.6% of 1637 telephone customers satisfied with their Contact Centre experience and Service Point customers marking 96.7% of 972 elements of their experience satisfactory or better.

Supporting our Community Councils

We listened to feedback from our Community Councils and arranged for a session with the Executive Leadership Team in June 2023 which allowed them the opportunity to speak to the Chief Executive and Executive Directors to raise concerns and issues directly. We have also taken forward a number of Community Council By-Elections, which ensures that our communities are appropriately represented.

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 to promote council and area challenges and opportunities. Our combined corporate social media channels grew by 10%

last year and 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

Following the resignation of a sitting Councillor, we delivered a By-Election ensuring that the new Elected Member was fully briefed and ready to undertake their duties.

We have taken forward the Elected Member Development Framework which utilises the Political Skills Assessment tool from the Improvement Service. We also arranged a development session for Senior Councillors and one for Officers on "Working with Councillors," which were delivered by the Local Government Information Unit.

The Elected Member case management system has been reviewed. This has resulted in a new, 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.

We conducted a review of the equipment in the Council Chambers in Kilmory, which is used to facilitate our Council and Committee meetings. Following the review, we undertook a procurement exercise, and the equipment and microphones were largely replaced, which is much more robust and reliable. We also have a new maintenance contract in place which gives us stability for the next few years.

Looking after our financial assets

The Council's Counter Fraud Team is in place to enhance the Council's zero tolerance to fraud and protect the public purse. During 2023/24 the team rebilled £1.04m as a direct consequence of their work and have recovered £777 of that total to date.

- We collected 96.43% of Council Tax exceeding the target of 96.00%.
- A positive External Audit Annual Audit Report was received and reported to Council in March 2024.
- Financial monitoring packs and Budget Outlook were submitted to each Policy & Resources Committee.
- The average investment rate for 2023/24 was 4.832%, and the investments generated £2.178m of interest during the year.
- We processed 97.7% of invoices due within 30 days, exceeding the target of 95.5%.
- 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.
- The Payroll Team processed the 2023/24 SLGE Staff and the Teacher's pay rises in the next available pay run following settlement, with the SLGE Staff pay rise being agreed and paid in two tranches in November 2023 and February 2024.

Supporting attendance

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework allows us to compare the number of days lost to absence with other Scottish local authorities. Our position in the overall rankings has improved from 17 to 10 for teaching employees and from 26 to 22 for local government employees and shows that we are not experiencing as sharp a rise in absence compared to other local authorities. We continue to work with other councils to share good practice in absence management.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's annual Health and Wellbeing at Work report showed the highest sickness absence rates across the UK for over a decade, and average rate of employee absence now stands at 7.8 days per employee per year, a considerable increase since before the pandemic in October 2019 where it was 5.8 days. The report reminds us that it has been a challenging few years for many individuals and organisations and that has impacted on employee health and wellbeing. Experts advise that the pandemic would have a long tail in terms of mental wellbeing for some, and uncertainty and disruption has continued with further events, including economic turbulence, a cost-of-living crisis and war.

The top three reasons for employee absence in 2023/24 at Argyll and Bute Council were:

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

Under the category of mental health, most days lost were due to stress. The highest absence reason under infections was Coronavirus and within other musculoskeletal it was fractures.

Employee wellbeing

One of the ways we are meeting the challenge of rising absence rates was the launch of our new Employee Assistance Programme. The programme provides independent, confidential support and information to all employees and eligible family members. The services available to our employees include:

- A 24/7 confidential helpline for emotional and practical support, as well as financial and legal support
- The service extends to eligible family members (partner and children up to 18, or 24 if in full-time education)

- Consultation available for mental health support (for mild to moderate issues) from qualified mental healthcare professionals.
- Support from a practitioner and an appointment within 4 days of referral
- Access to 24/7, unlimited remote GP appointments for fast access to a doctor
- Cancer Assist, a service provided by cancer support experts
- Online physiotherapy, up to eight sessions a year per family group

Other services include on-demand wellness content packed with podcasts, articles, webinars and more to help manage wellbeing. Reminders on the services available are communicated to employees, to ensure that they are aware of the assistance that is available to them and to their families.

We continue to focus on wellbeing of employees through a number of activities and interventions.

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

Argyll and Bute Council's Wellbeing Toolkit gives employees and managers access to health-related information, sources of support and 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

Strategic Risk Register

The Strategic Risk Register (SRR) details significant risks faced by the Council and the agreed approaches to manage them in the context of risk mitigation. These 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 Committees, and are formally reviewed bi-annually, although the

SRR can be reviewed at any time should matters need to be placed on the register by the Strategic Management Team. A formal report is prepared on an annual basis by the Chief Executive on risk management and is reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

Currently the SRR has 13 risks in total, 4 are red, 8 are amber and the remaining 1 is green.

The red risks relate to: Population, External Infrastructure and Economic Decline, Waste Management, Service Delivery - Cyber Security, Lack of Housing availability

The amber risks relate to: Condition and suitability of Infrastructure & Asset Base, Financial Sustainability, Governance and Leadership, Engagement and Understanding the needs of the Community, Service Delivery, Health and Social Care Partnership, Cost of Living Crisis, Impact of Climate Change

The green risks relate to: Civil Contingency & Business continuity

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 three red risks which relate to: 1) Environmental Health Resource availability and income shortfalls to the service from reduced license applications, requests for export certificates and other sources of income 2) Environmental Health, dealing with Public Health / infectious disease / food related incidents and emergencies, which have significant financial implications for the Council in terms of sampling / monitoring costs, employment of experts and storage and disposal costs, 3) availability of suitable temporary accommodation and housing support.

Executive Director Douglas Hendry has two red risks which relate to: 1) short term let licensing 2) Non-compliance with state subsidy regulations with regards to the council and externally funded projects, dealt with by the Transformation Projects.

Operational Risk Registers are monitored on a quarterly basis at Departmental Management Team meetings and are managed accordingly. This has resulted in a number of the risks improving their risk rating from red to amber'.

Service delivery challenges

As well as our Strategic and Operational Risk Registers, we face a number of challenges that can impact on service delivery. This is a summary of challenges we have encountered over the year and the actions we have identified and are putting in place to address them.

1. Recruitment and retention

Difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff are an ongoing area of focus particularly within professional and technical disciplines, catering and cleaning and responding to spikes in demand in specialist areas.

Actions

- We are reviewing our Growing our Own activities associated with promotion of career paths into the council and developing our workforce and are developing a revised framework and action plan
- Our People Strategy is in development and will deliver further initiatives under the themes of 'attracting and keeping talented people', 'providing a positive employee experience' and 'supporting learning and growth'
- We are implementing targeted projects focused on resourcing and agility to better understand and address the issues in this area
- We are utilising recruitment fairs and social media to highlight careers with the Council
- The Argyll and Bute Aspiring to Headship programme has been updated for session 2024/25 to ensure access to a range of Professional Learning opportunities

2. Securing contractors

The current competitive marketplace and our rural location means it can be difficult to secure contractors. In turn, this creates difficulties in delivering programmes of works. In some instances, significant projects have only received one tender.

Actions

- We are encouraging contractors to apply to be admitted into the Council's Dynamic Purchasing Scheme to widen the pool of contractors that are willing and able to work in Argyll and Bute.
- We are considering different delivery models with more emphasis on a mixed economy solution, using a blend of in-house resource, SMEs and national suppliers.

3. Partnership working

We are committed to working with other public sector agencies and our communities to get the most from Argyll and Bute's resources, though working to timescales and competing demands can be challenging.

Action

- We are mitigating this by considering communications and structured planning in our approach to our partnership activities.

4. Changes in legislation and compliance

- a) The introduction of the Elections Act (2022) has brought forward several changes to the way that UK Parliamentary Elections will be conducted and a change in boundary for the UK Parliament Constituency which will now cover areas of South Lochaber in the Highland Council area.

Actions

- Dedicated resource has been allocated to focus on taking forward the Elections Act requirements and we have already undertaken a lot of preparatory work.
- We have been working closely with our colleagues in Highland Council to ensure a transition for boundary changes.

- b) Several changes are being introduced to the building standards system, through the work of the Building Standards Futures Board Programme. This follows recommendations made by the expert review panels on Compliance and Enforcement and Fire Safety, (due to the aftermath of failings in Edinburgh School buildings and the Grenfell Tower fire), to strengthen the Building Standards system in Scotland. The changes to strengthen the system will require additional verification compliance capacity and financial resources for local authority verifiers over the coming years.

Action

- A 3-year Action Plan is currently being developed to strengthen building standards regulation in Argyll and Bute.

- c) The Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) ban is due to be introduced in January 2026. This will affect current waste collection and disposal methods. Other emerging challenges relate to Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), the Circular Economy bill, carbon reduction initiatives, and market availability, particularly for Energy from Waste (EfW) feedstock. Argyll and Bute is in a unique position in that we have a public-private partnership contract which runs until September 2026, nine months after the introduction of the BMW ban. The PPP contract covers the mainland area of Argyll and Bute excluding Helensburgh and Lomond, and this contract needing to be varied to enable compliance with the BMW ban.

Actions

- Ferry capacity to be planned and managed to service the requirements of the BMW ban and other emerging changes.
- Solutions have been identified through the Waste Strategy, with ongoing discussions with Scottish Government et al around derogations and how the changes of various legislation and regulations will be affected by the rural geography of Argyll and Bute. There are ongoing discussions with Scottish Government regarding a £1.5M additional cost which will be incurred through a contract variation.

5. Asset management

The network which provides access for our CCTV cameras is changing with the removal of analogue and being replaced by an IP (Internet Protocol) system. This will have a significant cost impact as it affects most of our cameras. Our current CCTV maintenance contract is also nearing the end of its' term.

Actions

- We are working to identify options and funding sources for replacement of the cameras and infrastructure in our main towns and liaising with colleagues in Police Scotland
- We have utilised procurement processes to identify market options for the provision of maintenance services for our CCTV systems.

6. Financial Implications

Budget uncertainty and access to funding is an ongoing challenge in number of areas and impacts on how we are able to maintain a number of assets.

Actions

- We are maximising funding opportunities for asset sustainability works to support the long-term safe use of a complex and varied portfolio of assets and designing and assembling works packages with proportionate treatments based on affordability.
- Funding opportunities are being explored with Transport Scotland and other partners for replacement vessels for the Council's internal ferry services
- To fully understand the scope and budget implications of the roll out of free school meals to primary 6 and 7 pupils we are engaging with national groups and Scottish Government.
- To address the reduction in the number of requests for building warrants we are liaising with other local authorities and the Building Standards National Hub, to promote the availability of our service.
- We are pursuing other opportunities around commercial work including looking at efficiencies and the use of additional fees to strengthen building standards regulation
- We will undertake a review of the Supporting Communities Fund in 2024/25 to establish how it can best meet the demands for funding in communities.

7. Community engagement

We require a consistent and effective approach to support our engagement work with communities.

Action

- We will develop an engagement framework informed by best practice and national guidance and embed the framework across the organisation.

8. Managing pressures out with our control

- a) We must be satisfied that the health of those we issue a Taxi License to meets our expectations. Customers were experiencing significant delays in receiving a response from their doctor which delayed the issuing of licenses resulted in negative economic consequence.

Action

- We undertook a period of consultation with all 389 private hire/taxi drivers and operators in the area which resulted in securing the services of an external agency to undertake the required medical check.

- b) The appointment of new auditors is always challenging as new working relationships begin and an understanding of how each other operates is gained. Issues including delays in recruitment within newly appointed auditors Mazars caused significant delays in the process.

Action

- A lessons learned meeting was held with Mazars to highlight the issues identified during the process and how these will be addressed.

- c) Increase in the number of special diet requests, both medical and non-medically prescribed and an increase in International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) and neurodivergent amended diet requests.

Action

- The special diet procedure was reviewed. A new system to assist in monitoring and providing special diets, with on-going monitoring of requests is underway
- We are working with NHS Dietetic teams to implement procedures for special diet requests and requests for children with additional support needs

9. Emergency resilience and planning

- a) We are experiencing difficulties in engaging external providers to assist with the delivery of a future-proofed Net Zero route map for the Council.

Action

- We will Issue a Request for Information (RFI) to assess what the wider market may be able to offer and receive input/feedback from relevant parties that will help to inform future Net Zero plans.

- b) Many areas within Argyll and Bute are off gas grid while the electrical grid has limitations in terms of capacity/constraints. These ongoing issues continue to impact the council and the wider community in terms of resilience and delivering renewables solutions.

Action

- We will continue to lobby electrical network operators and the regulator to highlight the impact of constraints on the capacity of the grid and emphasise the need for them to reinforce their infrastructure within Argyll and Bute.

10. Cost of living impacts

- Inflation and cost of living increases continue to have a detrimental effect on procurement, service delivery and on project budgets due to them being fixed over a number of years. There is limited capacity to build contingency into projects to account for cost escalation.

Action

- We continuously review products used and where necessary test and roll out new products. We design projects around budgets available, look at external funding to address funding gaps and value engineering projects as necessary.

11. Digital investment to ensure we keep pace

The scope of new robotic and AI technologies is fast developing and with it the demand to improve efficiency and quality of services, particularly those that are customer facing.

Action

- We have invested in a robotic process automation (RPA) platform. This provides us with the ability to build our own applications and to harness RPA to automate and integrate new applications across the Council. We have a pipeline of developments, and several solutions have already been implemented. These include a Food Health Certification system and an online yacht berth booking and payment system.

12. Cyber security

2023/24 saw a continued and major increase in the levels of risk associated with cyber-attacks.

Action

- We have implemented a Security Operations Centre service for the corporate and education network to provide a 24-hour monitoring service
- We have created a new IT Engineer post to work alongside the ICT Compliance and Security Officer
- All network users are issued with Cyber Awareness training to increase understanding of the dangers we face from cyber security attacks.

13. Addressing the housing emergency

Argyll and Bute Council was the first local authority in Scotland to declare a Housing Emergency in June 2023 due to a consistent reduction in supply of housing, a steady increase in demand for housing across all tenures and increasing levels of unaffordability.

Actions

- The scale of housing emergency in Argyll and Bute is greater than the capacity of any one agency to address, we committed to hold a Housing Summit to bring partners together to identify potential solutions with regards to housing shortages in our area.
- A key outcome of the Housing Emergency Summit was the creation of a shortlist of priority actions and interventions to address housing shortages, to act as the catalyst for collective action.
- Council officers (working with consultants engaged to facilitate the Housing Summit) developed a final list of action points under each housing emergency priority, which reflects the options appraisal and prioritisation carried out by the delegates attending the Housing Emergency Summit.
- The Argyll and Bute Local Housing Strategy will be updated to outline the vision and investment priorities for tackling housing need between 2022 and 2027
- The Community Planning Partnership (CPP) acknowledged the relevance and need for the identified actions and agreed to set up a CPP Housing Sub-Group (led by Highlands and Islands Enterprise) to explore what and how the CPP might contribute.

14. Provision for our children with the most complex needs

We have experienced Increased demand across Argyll and Bute for specialist provision for our children with the most complex needs.

Action

- We have adapted buildings, increased the staff compliment in relevant areas, put in place minor environmental adaptations and developed 4 new learning centres in Mull, Islay, Kintyre and Helensburgh.

15. Pupil attendance

Pupil attendance continues to be a challenge across the authority.

Action

- Reporting of progress against individual school level stretch aims will be put in place. There will be a focus on attendance from Principle Teacher Attendance and Engagement, the Educational Psychology Team and Education Managers through Quality Improvement Team visits.

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 \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)