

COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22 (SUMMARY)

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FOREWORDS

Councillor Robin Currie, Leader, Argyll and Bute Council

We are emerging from the demands of the Covid-19 pandemic and looking to focus again on turning our ambitions for the area into reality. And, as we do so, we can draw significant encouragement and inspiration from what this council has delivered over the past year. Our staff have proved their flexibility, agility and skills when they had to manage the pandemic, deliver new services and maintain an eye on the future. Alongside the sterling efforts of the workforce are key investments in priority issues like connectivity of all kinds, physical and digital; infrastructure; skills development; economic growth; and much more. We continue to focus on the vital everyday services that our communities value and the needs of the people who live, work and do business here. And we are playing our part in contributing to wider challenges like climate action.

Pippa Milne, Chief Executive, Argyll and Bute Council

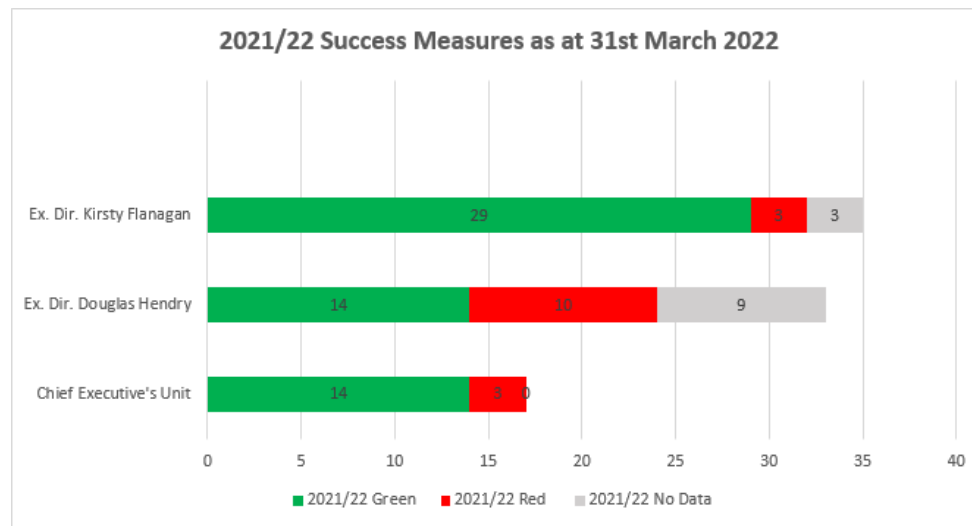
This has been another year of challenge, change and progress. As CEO I wish to convey my thanks to all staff for their continued dedication during these unprecedented times and in particular my colleagues who have gone the extra mile working very long days over a long period to support our communities. I also want to thank all the volunteers, without their commitment we couldn't have achieved as much as we did. It is this strength of spirit and community which makes Argyll and Bute a great place to live. We continue to progress investment in regenerating our economy. We continue to work, as a council and with our partners, in achieving the goals that will together attract the people and jobs our area needs. This report highlights just some of our achievements over the past 12 months, many of which have been achieved in partnership with others, in spite of the pandemic. This is something we take great pride in.

Financial Statement

In 2021-22 the budget gap, including previously agreed savings was £0.164m rising to over £28m over a five year period, with decisions made to bridge the 2021-22 gap, reduce future year pressures and protect vital services. Furthermore, when agreeing the 2021-22 budget, the Council committed investment in key Council priorities.

Our Performance

In 2021-22 we tracked our progress on delivering our Corporate Outcomes through 17 Business Outcomes and 85 success measures which are recorded on the Council's scorecard. It should be noted that Covid has had an impact not just on our performance but also the ability for collecting and collating data. As a result the status of some measures that are currently displaying red, off-track or no data may change in due course as data becomes available.



DELIVERING OUR OUTCOMES

Corporate Outcome – People Live Active, Healthier and Independent Lives

1. In 2021/22 a total value of £521,815 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants were paid to support vulnerable people.
2. The amount of Discretionary Housing Payments distributed to households in need was £906,187
3. We paid out £269,950 in grants to cover food and fuel for people in poverty and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies.
4. Administered the Argyll and Bute Flexible Food Fund with our partners Bute Advice and ALLenergy. The Fund supported 1,007 applicants to achieve financial support totaling £1.324m.
5. Over 500 empty homes brought back into use.
6. Winner of outstanding team and Scottish Empty Homes Conference 2022.

Corporate Outcome - People Will Live In Safer and Stronger Communities

1. The Environmental Health team carried out 862 Covid interventions and investigated 773 business enquiries and complaints.
2. The Council continues to provide support to the national effort as it continues to improve communication infrastructure across our rural areas.
3. During 2021/22 active travel projects totaling £1,279k from various funding streams were delivered.
4. The Community Development Team have sourced and delivered a range of training courses in response to identified needs within communities across Argyll and Bute.
5. Building Standards service was successful in obtaining commercial work from Scottish Borders and East Lothian Council.

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

1. All 100% of our looked after young people that presented for Literacy and Numeracy qualifications at both National 4 and National 5 levels were successful.
2. We are pleased to report that the number of formal exclusions continues to be low and remains below our upper limit of 5.
3. The catering team serves 4,300 Food for Life accredited meals a day.
4. The Beach Café in Oban has opened and is being run by the catering team. This has been a hugely successful operation.
5. We were awarded the Footprint Foodservice award for the Community Food Project.
6. Since the service started in February 2021 the Counselling in Schools Service has been available in all 10 Secondary schools and 24 Primary schools.
7. The provision of 1140 hours of pre-school education was fulfilled.

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

1. Digital video conferencing equipment is now installed in all Secondary schools. Consequently, young people disadvantaged by the remoteness of a locality now have access to the same curriculum offer as those in more populated areas.
2. A total of 1,067 young people gained a Wider Achievement Award at SCQF levels 4-7 during 2020/21. This equates to 90% of all entries.
3. A total of 95.02% of young people left school into a positive destination. This is an increase of 2.7% on the 2020/21 figure.
4. The level of participation in education, training or employment for 16-19 year-olds is 93.5%, we remain in the top 10 Scottish local authorities for participation levels.
5. The NOLB (No One Left Behind) employability programme was revised to accommodate learners. As a result some adult learners use a blended approach of online and distanced learning.

Corporate Outcome - Our Economy Is Diverse and Thriving

1. As part of the continuing easing of lockdown measures, agreements were put in place to enable businesses to utilise public spaces identified by the Council.
2. We awarded nearly £24.5 million of Non-Domestic Rates reliefs to support local businesses.
3. Support provided from Business Gateway via DigitalBoost (Scotland's national digital upskilling programme) and grant support from the Council helps local jewellery maker.
4. A total of 1,284 export health certificates were issued to businesses for exporting to non-EU countries (e.g. China, Middle East etc.) and 195 certificates for export to EU countries.
5. A Rothesay Townscape Heritage (TH) grant of £311,601 supported the comprehensive repair of a prominent listed building.
6. Our #abplace2b Instagram account is the most followed of all of Scotland's councils.
7. We developed and promoted our 'Have a great time. Be a great visitor.' message and campaign.

Corporate Outcome - We Have An Infrastructure That Supports Sustainable Growth

1. We maintain the average time to resolve ICT incidents at less than 2 hours, which is well below the target of 4.5 hours.
2. The scheme to rationalise our Oban depots was fully completed this year.
3. Progressing a £20m scheme to replace/renew key pieces of marine infrastructure to allow for full and unfettered access to and from Fionnphort/Iona.

4. Road improvements totaling over £10m of council funding together with an additional £1.4m from the Timber Transport Fund were delivered.
5. Over 100 individual road reconstruction schemes were improved, contributing to keeping Argyll and Bute open for business.
6. Successfully carried out the winter maintenance programme which includes the removal of ice and snow to our 2,300km of road.
7. After the Bute seawall was washed away we worked with external contractors to put in place a temporary sea defence using interlocking concrete blocks.
8. The council's harbour board agreed to progress the municipal port for Oban.
9. The new vessel that was commissioned and built to connect Port Appin with the Isle of Lismore came in to service in May 2022.
10. Five major projects from the Council's Capital Plan were being delivered - Oban Transit Berthing Facility, Rothesay Pavilion, Helensburgh Waterfront, Kilmory Business Park and Lochgilphead Front Green.
11. Our carbon footprint will reduce by circa 460 tonnes per annum as a result of investing in carbon friendly energy solutions.
12. We have progressed a number of schemes which contribute to reducing our carbon footprint and provide for cleaner, greener transport options.
13. We continue to work with West Dunbartonshire Council on a joint procurement solution for municipal waste after December 2025.
14. We collect refuse and recycling from over 48,000 households and 3,400 commercial premises.
15. We are consistently achieving high marks in the street cleanliness index which is administered by Keep Scotland Beautiful.

Corporate Outcome - Getting it right

1. We have implemented a new Counter Fraud Team to enhance the Council's zero tolerance to fraud and protect the public purse. During 2021-22 the team rebilled £659k as a direct consequence of their work and have recovered £572k of that total to date.
2. The average investment rate received for 2021-22 was 0.418% compared to the average 7-day LIBID (London Interbank Bid Rate) rate of -0.74%.
3. We processed 96.6% of invoices due within 30 days, exceeding the target of 95.5%.
4. The harnessing of new technology developments has resulted in new ways of working, enabled a shift to paperless processes, on-line Councillor surgeries, virtual meetings, seminars and training events.
5. The value of efficiencies attributable to use of online services during 2021/22 was maintained at £912k.
6. Launched the council's Alexa smart speaker service with its "when's my bin day?" service, which now has 1216 subscribers who used the service 7,257 times last year.
7. The Scottish Living Wage was consolidated into the pay scale.
8. We extended the Customer Service Excellence Award to more areas of service.
9. To connect the council and its employees better a new website was launched - www.mycouncilworks.co.uk

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES DURING 2021/22

1. The Social Work Finance Team continue to deliver a financial sustainability scheme on behalf of the Scottish Government. The scheme provides financial support to local care providers to help them deal with the cost pressures placed upon them by the pandemic.
2. A significant challenge is emerging in relation to the statutory provision of suitable temporary accommodation for households presenting as homeless.
3. A national shortage of qualified environmental health and food safety officers is presenting a challenge to deliver the official food safety programme.
4. Several challenges face the catering and cleaning service. In addition to price increases there have been on-going supply issues in the food industry.
5. There has been an unprecedented increase in the level of risk associated with cyber-attacks. This has been a global phenomenon. The need for our ICT teams to be ever more vigilant and responsive has never been greater.
6. Our Road network requires a spend in the region of £10million annually to maintain a 'standstill' position, and significantly more to see continued improvements.
7. There are significant ongoing pressures on the Council's cemeteries, with some critical sites in Kintyre and on Mull approaching their capacity.
8. Financing and delivering the Craignure and Iona/Fionnphort marine infrastructure schemes will pose significant resource challenges.
9. The cost of completing the Rothesay Pavilion works would significantly exceed the available and approved budget, by some £12m. We are lobbying for additional capital funding support from external organisations, including the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments.
10. We continue to have access to only a limited number of contractors. Additionally, our contractors are suffering from the nationwide skills shortage which also causes difficulty in being able to deliver a service within the desired timescales.
11. The journey to net-zero requires the delivery of more complicated solutions which are more costly and there is challenge in balancing the need for carbon reduction at a time when budgets/resources are reducing.
12. The Biodegradable Municipal Waste ban will pose a significant and ongoing financial risk to the Council.
13. We are putting mechanisms in place to succession plan and to reduce the overall age profile of our workforce. Of particular concern is the age profile of our operational squads and within our middle management positions.
14. For some Services there are serious resourcing issues due to the national shortage in qualified professional officers and the inability to attract.

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

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