

FINANCIAL SERVICES - Service Annual Performance Review 2021/22

DELIVERING OUR OUTCOMES – Our case studies help illustrate the positive contribution the Service has made to our communities and provides examples of good service delivery.

Corporate Outcome – People Live Active, Healthier and Independent Lives

Business Outcome BO102: We Provide Support, Prevention And Opportunities To Help People Make Better Lifestyle Choices

- a) £521,815 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants were paid to support vulnerable people.
- b) The average processing time for New Housing Benefit claims was 25.19 days and 4.41 days for changes in circumstances against targets of 21 days and 6 days respectively.
- c) £906,187 of Discretionary Housing Payments was distributed to households in need.
- d) We have paid out £269,950 in grants to cover food and fuel for people in poverty and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies. As at the year-end 1,007 families have been supported to maximise benefit income and reduced fuel costs to the value of £1.324m.
- e) Our Social Work Team successfully delivered two rates changes during the year in line with Scottish Government Policy to increase the basic pay of carers and personal assistants who look after adults in our communities.

Corporate Outcome - Our Economy Is Diverse And Thriving

Business Outcome BO110: We Support Businesses, Employment and Development Opportunities

Success Measure: FIS110_01-Increase the total value of Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) relief awarded

- a) We worked alongside other Council colleagues to support the payment of £2.7 million to support local businesses, protect the local economy and jobs, prevent business closure and promote economic recovery as lockdown restrictions eased and businesses started to re-open.
- b) We awarded nearly £24.5 million of Non-Domestic Rates reliefs to support local businesses.

Corporate Outcome - Getting it right

Business Outcome BO115: We Are Efficient And Cost Effective

- a) We have implemented a new Counter Fraud Team on a two-year pilot basis 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.
- b) We collected 96.28% of Council Tax exceeding the target of 96.00%.
- c) The External Audit of the 2020/21 Annual Accounts was completed by the statutory deadline and an unqualified Audit Certificate received.
- d) Positive External Audit Annual Audit Report received and reported to Policy and Resources Committee in December 2021.
- e) Financial monitoring packs were submitted to each Policy & Resources Committee.
- f) The average investment rate for 2021-22 was 0.418% compared to the average 7-day LIBID (London Interbank Bid Rate) rate of -0.74%. The investments generated £0.485m of interest in 2021-22.
- g) The Creditors Team processed 96.6% of invoices due within 30 days, exceeding the target of 95.5%.
- h) The Payroll Team processed the 2021/22 Teacher's pay rise within 1 month of being notified of the pay settlement, one of the few Councils to do so by April 2022.
- i) The 2021/22 internal audit plan was fully completed and reported by the target date of the June Audit and Scrutiny Committee.

- j) The service closely monitored the financial impact of Covid on the Council throughout the year, regularly updating assumptions and projections, to ensure that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) returns were robust, and the Council would receive the appropriate levels of Covid specific Scottish Government funding.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES – These are the significant challenges faced by the Service during 2021/22. These challenges either created pressures on the Success Measures or impacted on delivery. Specific additional activity or mitigating actions were carried out to reduce the negative impact on service delivery.

Corporate Outcome - People Live Active Healthier And Independent Lives

Business Outcome BO102: We Provide Support, Prevention And Opportunities To Help People Make Better Lifestyle Choices

- a) Due to financial impact of Covid on social care providers the Income Max team were under increased pressure to get contracts and payments to providers for delivering care home services. The Social Work Finance Team continued to deliver a financial sustainability scheme on behalf of the Scottish Government to provide financial support to local care providers to help them deal with the cost pressures placed upon them by the pandemic which is an ongoing piece of work.
- b) The 300% weekly increase in the volume of Self Isolation Support Grants (SISG) received from December 2021 through to April 2022 due to Omicron caused a significant challenge for the service. Benefit Assessor staff had to be redeployed to help with the administration of SISG and this introduced delays in processing Housing Benefit. The service therefore failed to process new claims for Housing Benefit in 21 days. We were unable to recruit additional Benefit Assessors locally to assist the service.

Corporate Outcome - Our Economy Is Diverse And Thriving

Business Outcome BO110: We support businesses, employment and development opportunities

- a) Significant resource requirement to administer a range of Covid related Business Support Grants which required redeployment of staff in Revenues and Benefits and Internal Audit and created increased pressure on Creditors and Treasury Management officers to manage the volume of payments and movement in funds.

Corporate Outcome - Getting it right

Business Outcome BO115: We Are Efficient And Cost Effective

- a) The service has continued to deliver business as usual whilst undertaking additional work to manage and report on the wide range of additional Covid funding provided by the Scottish Government to our front-line services.
- b) During the year, the service started a project to implement a new financial management system to replace Oracle system which had been in place for several years and was reaching the end of its supported life. This is a substantial project which has been undertaken at pace to ensure that the new Oracle Fusion system is in place before the existing system must be decommissioned at the end of July 2022.
- c) The service has been actively involved with ICT in exploring the benefits which could arise from the analysis of the data which the Council holds to help identify vulnerable people who could benefit from support from the Council and/or our partners. We are also exploring how the data could be used to support evidence-based decision making and service provision.
- d) The Revenues and Benefits Teams administered the Argyll and Bute Flexible Food Fund with partners Bute Advice and Allenergy. During the year, the Fund supported 1,000 to achieve a client gain of £1.325m and were highly commended by the Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation at their annual performance awards in the category Excellence and Innovation (Service Delivery).
- e) The Revenues and Benefits Team worked in partnership with the Social Work Finance Team and colleagues in Adult Social Care to implement an improved process to support people entering care homes and their families through the assessment of their entitlement to funding towards their care home placement.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT - WE ASKED, YOU SAID, WE DID....The following are all the consultations and resulting actions that the Service has carried out during this period.

- a) We asked what could be done to reduce the numbers of people relying on foodbanks for support during the pandemic. Foodbank providers advised us through the Argyll and Bute Community Food Forum that more welfare rights and fuel poverty related support and advice for people with food insecurity attending the foodbanks would be beneficial.

- b) We continued to deliver the Argyll and Bute Flexible Food Fund which incentivises people in hardship to get this professional advice by making two monthly payments to families, the first one before the referral is made for professional support and the second one after the support has been delivered. This maximised engagement and helped find significantly more benefits for families in hardship.
- c) In response to increasing energy costs, we have built on the success of the Flexible Food Fund to introduce an additional support called Heat Your Home, Manage Rising Costs to work in partnership with advice agencies in the area to provide a joined-up support service for families living in fuel poverty.
- d) We are engaging with the Scottish Government across several work streams aimed at supporting the sustainability of social care and reducing social care charges for service users. These are related to the proposed introduction of the National Care Service and a review focussed on a proposal to remove charging for non-residential care, both of which came out of the Review of Adult Social Care.