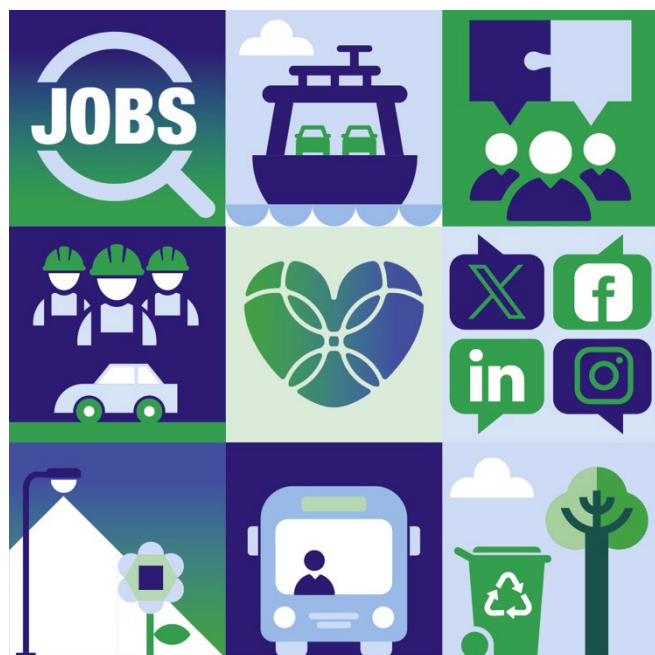


Council Annual Report 2024 - 2025



Contents

Forewords	4
Leader of the Council	4
Chief Executive	5
Introduction	6
Financial statement	7
Council priorities	8
Communities	8
Children and young people.....	8
Environment	8
Speaking up for Argyll and Bute	8
Sustainable service delivery	8
Transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity	8
Housing, economic growth and population.....	9
Cross-cutting activities	9
Connect for Success.....	9
Our Workspace – reducing costs and increasing efficiencies.....	10
Performance Excellence Project.....	10
ICT and Digital	11
Climate Change	12
Capital Investment and central repairs delivered	13
Housing and the Housing Emergency.....	13
Our performance	15
How We Compare – Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)	16

Delivering our outcomes	18
Corporate Outcome: People live active, healthier and independent lives	18
Corporate Outcome: People will live in safer and stronger communities	21
Supporting our communities	22
Corporate Outcome: Children and young people have the best possible start	24
Support and interventions for our care experienced children and young people	26
Addressing non-attendance.....	26
UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting School Programme	26
Children living in Poverty	26
Award winning school meals service	28
School Counselling Service.....	28
School suitability ratings	28
Corporate Outcome: Education, skills and training will maximise opportunities for all	29
Developing the young workforce.....	31
Helping People into work	31
Literacy and Numeracy	32
Play on Pedals	32
Attainment	32
Corporate Outcome: Our economy is diverse and thriving	34
Supporting economic recovery and our communities	37
The Rural Growth Deal (RGD).....	40
One council: property income	43
Housing Services Partnership with Home Argyll	43
Corporate Outcome: We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth	44
Council Carbon Footprint	45

Flood Protection	46
Marine infrastructure	46
Ferry services	48
Road Condition improvements	51
Corporate Outcome: Getting it right	54
Increasing the use of our website and self-service tools.....	55
Improving our customer service	56
Award Recognition for Outstanding Innovation and Service.....	56
Supporting our Community Councils	57
Local Government elections and supporting new elected councillors.....	57
Committee Support and Member Services	58
Looking after our financial assets	59
Supporting attendance	59
Supporting Our People: Insights and Wellbeing Initiatives	60
Strategic Risk Register	60
Operational Risk Register	61
Service delivery challenges.....	61
Consultations – we asked, you said, we did	64

Forewords

Leader of the Council

It is a privilege to introduce Argyll and Bute Council's Annual Report for 2024-25. Within this document you will find many examples of the achievements and successes that this council has delivered for its communities in the past year.

The past year has also seen the council going through some changes, with a different Administration in place from April 2024. With this has come a refreshed and renewed set of strategic Priorities for the remainder of the council term up to 2027, and these underpin the council's decision-making, its work and the action it takes.

Our updated Priorities set out our aspirations for the area and our determination to see it thrive. They must, though, also frame how we tackle challenges, and something that remains a constant for every Scottish local authority is the financial climate in which we must operate and deliver for our communities today while seeking to plan ahead for tomorrow.

Sometimes meeting those challenges requires making equally challenging decisions. While easy solutions or quick fixes almost never come along, something that can help in that context of challenge is to work in partnership – whether with other agencies or with our communities. That is why engagement is a key element of our Priorities, harnessing the knowledge and the commitment of our incredible communities where there is an increasing understanding that councils can no longer do all that they used to do or all that they would like to do, and that different approaches are required in today's climate.

Now, more than ever before, it is vital to work together where we possibly can. We may well have differing views from time to time, but we also have much common ground to be found and there are issues on which we can not only collaborate but where we can join our voices together to speak up and stand up for Argyll and Bute.

I opened by saying it is a privilege to open this report. I close by saying that is an even greater privilege to represent this area, its people and its communities. Local government in Scotland continues to cope with change and to look towards transformation. Here in Argyll and Bute we are embracing that head-on and seeking to get ahead of the game, using the knowledge and experience we've had to build up in order to successfully deliver services and investment across one of Scotland's most unique geographic environments. That, coupled with the determination of our workforce and the tremendous community spirit and resilience for which Argyll and Bute is renowned, stand us in good stead for as bright a future as possible.

Cllr Jim Lynch
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council

Chief Executive

Welcome to Argyll and Bute Council's Annual Report for 2024–25. This report provides an overview of the work we've undertaken over the past year, the progress we've made, and the challenges we continue to face. It reflects our commitment to transparency, accountability, and to delivering the best possible outcomes for our communities.

As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to 2025–26, I want to begin by recognising the continued dedication and resilience of our staff, who remain at the heart of everything we do. Their commitment has enabled us to deliver vital services in the face of ongoing challenges and change. This year, we have had to make some difficult decisions about the future of service provision. These decisions are never taken lightly, and they reflect the complex financial landscape we continue to navigate. However, they are also part of our commitment to ensuring that we can sustain essential services for the people of Argyll and Bute in the years to come.

We know that the best decisions are made together. That's why we have continued to engage with communities across the area, listening to what matters most to them and working in partnership to shape the future. This collaborative approach is central to our vision for a stronger, more resilient and thriving Argyll and Bute.

Despite the challenges, there is much to celebrate. From delivering key infrastructure projects to supporting local businesses and investing in our young people, we have achieved a great deal together. We have also responded to new national requirements, adapting our services and systems to meet evolving expectations and responsibilities.

The increasing impact of climate events continues to test our resilience, and we are responding with urgency and innovation. Whether through our climate adaptation work, investment in sustainable infrastructure, or support for community-led initiatives, we are committed to building a greener, more secure future.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on tackling the challenges that lie before us. We will continue to work with our communities, partners, and staff to find solutions, embrace opportunities, and deliver for Argyll and Bute.

Together, we can shape a future that reflects the strengths, aspirations, and potential of this remarkable area.

Pippa Milne
Chief Executive, Argyll, and Bute Council

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.

Argyll and Bute Council's vision and strategic direction is set in our Corporate Plan. Central to our corporate plan and highlighted throughout this report is successful partnership working with our partners, stakeholders, and local communities. In 24/25 the corporate plan set out three key priorities 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

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.

Financial statement

In 2024/25 the budget gap was £10.167m prior to any measures to balance the budget and projected to rise to over £55m over a five-year period, with decisions made to bridge the 2024/25 gap, reduce future year pressures, and protect vital services.

When agreeing the 2024/25 budget, the Council committed to provide funding for additional leisure, tourism, regeneration, and other initiatives totalling £0.248m which included funding for the following organisations:

£0.010m for the International Eight Metre Association World Cup.

£0.075m for the Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative.

£0.075m for the Culture, Heritage, and Arts Assembly (CHARTS).

£0.028m for the Screen Machine mobile cinema.

£0.030m for the Mid Argyll Community Pool in Lochgilphead.

£0.030m for the MacTaggart Leisure Centre on Islay.

Over the course of 2024/25 almost £549,134 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants were paid to support vulnerable people and £968,036 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 £109,920 by the end of the 2024/25

Council priorities

In 2024 the council administration announced our priorities for 2024-2027. Our aim is clear: Argyll and Bute's economy and population need to grow, and our seven interconnected priorities contribute to that. The themes that underpin these priorities and the actions to deliver these can be found on our website: [Priorities of Argyll and Bute Council | Argyll and Bute Council](#)

Communities

Our communities are as diverse as our geography and have varying needs, challenges, and opportunities. We want to harness local knowledge and work together to develop shared priorities.

Children and young people

Giving young people the best start in life and ensuring we have the right skills for a prosperous future, are key elements of making Argyll and Bute an ideal choice for families to stay or to relocate.

Environment

The Council has already declared a climate emergency continues to keep this a primary consideration. Recognising the importance of climate change is a key factor when we consider how we do business. We are committed to achieving 75% carbon reduction by 2030 and net zero before 2045.

Speaking up for Argyll and Bute

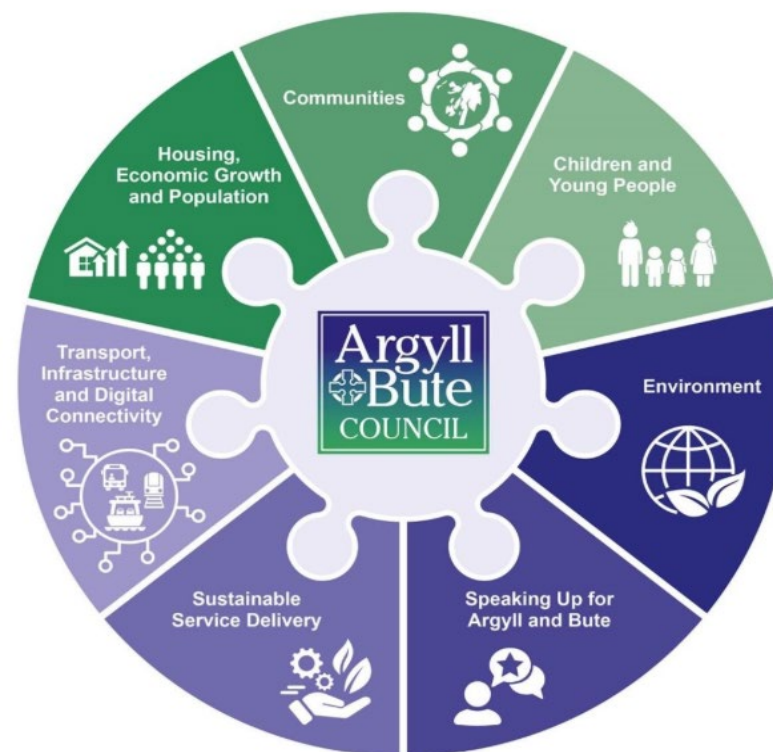
Collective, as well as collaborative, action is necessary to deliver growth on the scale that Argyll and Bute needs. No single agency alone can deliver on Argyll and Bute's overarching aim of significant, vital population and economic growth.

Sustainable service delivery

We want to provide the best services we can for the money and resources available – and make clear the standards that our communities can expect. We know that this is important to local people.

Transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity

Argyll and Bute's mix of rural and island communities mean that transport, infrastructure, and digital connectivity are crucial in the drive for growth. We need effective and reliable ways to bring people, goods and services to Argyll and Bute – and to carry our own products. Reliable, resilient digital



links have a highly significant contribution to make to growing the population and the economy. They can add considerable value to Argyll and Bute's position as an ideal choice to locate to.

Housing, economic growth and population

Access to housing is a factor in almost every aspect of Argyll and Bute's crucial growth agenda. It contributes to the success of economic development, recruitment, employment opportunities, service delivery and much more. Population growth is crucial to our economic success as decline impacts on our ability to sustain and deliver services in the future. We value the impact and return on investment that effective, targeted economic development can have.

Cross-cutting activities

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.

Partnership working

As part of our Connect for Success principles 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, 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.

Our Modern Workspace – reducing costs and increasing efficiencies

The Our Modern Workspace project is reviewing how we use our workspace, reduce costs, and increase efficiency. Six hub buildings are now complete and under-utilised buildings under review for repurpose or to be mothballed. The entire project is being delivered through existing capital programme budgets and Scottish Government Place Demonstrator Funding (£664K awarded to deliver Rothesay Project).

Our largest Office footprint is in Lochgilphead, and a project has been ongoing throughout 2024 and 2025 to create a new vision for the Council headquarters at Kilmory Castle by creating a modern public sector and democratic hub. The aim is to create a better and more sustainable place to collaborate and do business. We have been working with other public sector agencies, and an implementation plan is evolving to take the project into development in 2025/26.

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.

Performance Excellence Project

We are continuing to improve the way that we measure and report on our performance as a Council, in line with Connect for Success. We aim to make it clearer for Councillors to scrutinise our service performance and easier for the public to see what we deliver.

This year we have begun to align our strategies and plans with the new council priorities and are making full use of the technology available to us through M365. We are designing new planners and dashboards to best show the data we hold, which will support review and evaluation of our performance so that we can ensure continuous improvement. We are designing this with a pilot group of team managers.

Microsoft365

With Education colleagues now being introduced to Microsoft 365 (M365) and Teams, the move to using Teams for Telephony for all staff will be completed well before the retirement of Skype for Business in October 2025. The continued development of existing and new apps has added many more options for staff in how they use M365, and they are now also supported by having access to a nationally resourced M365 Skills Hub. The Digital Champions programme is being reviewed and refreshed to ensure the most is made of our investment in M365 and that staff have the support they need from within their own services. The opportunities that MS Copilot presents will be evaluated in a pilot of 100 staff prior to decisions being taken on the significant additional investment that a rollout to even a proportion of staff would represent. It's anticipated Copilot will further enhance the benefits to staff and customers of using M365 in their daily work.

ICT and Digital

The Council's ICT and Digital Strategy aims to position Argyll and Bute Council as a "digital by default" authority. The strategy resulted in the development of an action plan containing almost 100 activities designed to lead to further efficiencies, savings, and improved services for Council staff and customers.

We outlined a vision to provide digital technologies and processes to support our people and our customers, to encourage collaboration, get things done and contribute to a better organised and more efficient council.

The Accounts Commission's April 2025 report on Best Value in Argyll and Bute Council found that "Given its remote and rural characteristics, the council is ahead of the game in terms of achieving efficiencies, including through its use of digital technology, with exciting examples of innovation within service areas."

This improved position hasn't happened by chance. Our ICT and Digital Strategy over the last 4 years has focused on delivering key outcomes for our customers, simplifying, and improving our processes, providing secure and fit for purpose technology solutions and creating an agile culture for our workforce.

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. Our new Data Platform is now live, and the Data Advisory Group and the data team are dealing with a variety of exciting new data challenges.

Examples of data challenges in 2024/25:

- The Climate Change Officer produces reports to both the Scottish Government (against national targets for 2030 and 2045) and quarterly reports to the Climate Change board. These reports require extensive data collection, analysis, and projection modelling. Using new data models, the council's Climate Change Board can now visualise the challenge of meeting the Scottish Government's statutory emissions goals. It is also now possible to perform fairly complex scenario planning to consider different strategies for reaching these goals, and aiming to reach them sooner, based on a better understanding of the potential long-term impact of working to reduce specific carbon emission sources more quickly.
- As part of our aim to bring as many empty business properties back into use as possible, we used our PowerBI reporting tool to extract and analyse Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) data. This gave us information on rates of business change, business types, rateable values etc which the Empty Business Property Officer can use to target actions to for businesses, seek inward investment or coordinate other interventions such as a change of use for a property to make it more attractive to business in the local area.

Climate Change

The Council continues to meet its statutory duty to report on emissions and climate action through the annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report, with strategic oversight provided by the Climate Change Board. We are developing a comprehensive Net Zero Route Map to provide a detailed pathway for Council operations to achieve net zero emissions by 2045.

Operational Achievements

Significant progress is being made across the organisation through investments in building energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, and fleet decarbonisation. Independent analysis confirms the Council successfully managed its energy use to outperform national benchmarks during a year of unprecedented electricity grid challenges.

A major milestone was reached in October 2024 with the completion of an 86kW roof-mounted solar PV system at Cardross Primary School, representing the culmination of the Non-Domestic Energy Efficiency Framework (NDEEF) programme. The system joins the Council's expanding renewable energy portfolio, which now includes 27 solar PV installations across the area with a combined capacity of over 1.3MWp.

Another significant achievement was the innovative stabilisation of the Grade A-listed Burnet Building in Campbeltown. The Council implemented a cutting-edge geopolymer resin injection solution involving 250 injection points reaching depths of two metres beneath the building structure. This non-invasive method allowed the building to remain operational throughout the works and delivered approximately 78% lower carbon emissions compared to traditional concrete underpinning - an estimated carbon saving of 50.7 tonnes.

The Council's LED streetlight replacement programme has achieved remarkable results, with over 14,000 luminaires replaced. Annual CO₂ emissions have dropped from 3,140 tonnes in 2015/16 to a projected 264 tonnes for the full 2024/25 financial year (based on performance to September 2024) – a reduction of 92%.

Partnership and Community Leadership

The Community Planning Partnership has made substantial progress in developing the Argyll and Bute Climate Action Strategy, funded by CPP partners including Argyll and Bute Council, with the project lead hosted by Argyll Countryside Trust. This comprehensive strategy represents a region-wide, community-led approach to achieving net-zero and climate resilience, developed through extensive engagement with communities and stakeholders across Argyll and Bute. The strategy establishes the vision that "We make Argyll and Bute climate ready by acting together to understand and adapt to our changing climate".

Carbon Neutral Islands Programme

Argyll and Bute Council supports the Scottish Government's Carbon Neutral Islands (CNI) Programme through the Local Authority Advisory Group and accessing the Carbon Neutral Islands Capital Fund. Highlights for 2024/25 are: Governance and Alignment – Membership of the Local Authority Advisory Group ensures island plans mesh with wider council and national policy and that good practice is shared with mainland communities. Strategic Foundations – Community Climate Action Plans are in place for Islay, Great Cumbrae, Hoy, Raasay, and Yell. Comprehensive carbon audits have established baseline emissions for each island. Investment and Delivery – Tailored climate-change investment strategies have been completed to guide project selection and funding bids. £1 million of capital funding allocated for 2024/25 to kick-start priority net-zero projects. For Islay this is supporting the installation of solar PV and battery technology across 7 community buildings as well as supporting the Islay Forestry Initiative through the purchase of equipment for wood fuel processing and creation of a community orchard. Overall, the programme has moved from planning to implementation, giving every island a clear emissions baseline, an agreed action plan and the first tranche of capital to put projects on the ground—all aimed at achieving carbon neutrality by 2040, five years ahead of Scotland's national target.

Capital Investment and central repairs delivered

We have successfully delivered a programme of investment in our property assets totalling £10.5M. Included within the wide variety of investment projects were 53 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 £570,000 and year-on-year savings of more than £160,000 per annum.

Housing and the Housing Emergency

In June 2023 the Council's Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee declared a Housing Emergency due to a persistent reduction in the supply of housing, a steady increase in demand for housing across all tenures and increasing levels of un-affordability.

In November 2024, Members of the Scottish Government, Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, visited Oban. They met with the Council's leader Jim Lynch, CEO Pippa Milne, other senior council officials, and representatives from the Link Housing Group together with a

representative from the Colonsay Community Development Company. The day also included a visit to the Dunbeg Corridor housing development. The Scottish Government has produced a report of the visit which can be accessed here: [A report on Committee visit to Argyll & Bute Council, 25th November 2024](#)



In January 2025 consultants were engaged, to develop the Strategic Development Framework for Oban (OSDF) and Helensburgh (HSDF). Both are intended to identify long-term 20-40 years strategic development opportunities.

The Council has continued to develop Business Cases for the proposals for a worker accommodation pilot on Mull, and market housing for principal home occupation on Islay. In addition to the £3m Rural Growth Deal investment allocated to these projects, further funding is being sought to enable housing projects.

The Council has employed local contractors and is working with Mull and Iona Community Trust to deliver worker housing in Tobermory. Work is underway to procure tender costs for construction of the worker housing which will provide 12 units. It is anticipated a site start for building construction in spring 2026.

A Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) was approved by Council in November. This sets out a policy framework that assists in reducing fuel poverty in the long term. Officers will now work to identify deliverable projects and use the LHEES to support funding applications.

The Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland (HEEPS) allows homeowners and private rented tenants to reduce their energy bills, assists with the cost-of-living crisis, and reduces energy consumption contributing to a reduction in climate change. The Council fully utilised HEEPS funding of £1,979,827 for 24/25.

Our Empty Homes Officer project, working with the HSCP solely to assist empty homes owners to bring back properties in to use for HSCP staff has received national recognition through an award from the Empty Homes Network. This project is directly supporting the retention and recruitment of the key workforce required to sustain essential services and making the best use of existing stock. The role has directly enabled homes and bed spaces for use by HSCP workers in Coll, Connel, Tiree & Islay."

Our performance

This table presents our progress in delivering the seven Corporate Outcomes outlined in the previous Corporate Plan (2022–2027). It is followed by detailed performance data and supporting commentary for each Corporate Outcome Indicator."

Overall performance of our Corporate Outcome Indicators

Corporate Outcome	Number of Indicators	Number On Track / Above Target with Improving Performance	Number Off Track / Under Target / No Data	No Target
People live active, healthier, and independent lives	6	3	3	0
People will live in safer and stronger communities	4	3	0	1
Children and young people have the best possible start	8	5	2	1
Education, skills, and training maximise opportunities for all	7	1	3	3
Our economy is diverse and thriving	12	0	2	10
We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth	5	3	0	2
Getting it right	5	2	0	3
TOTAL	47	17	10	20

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)

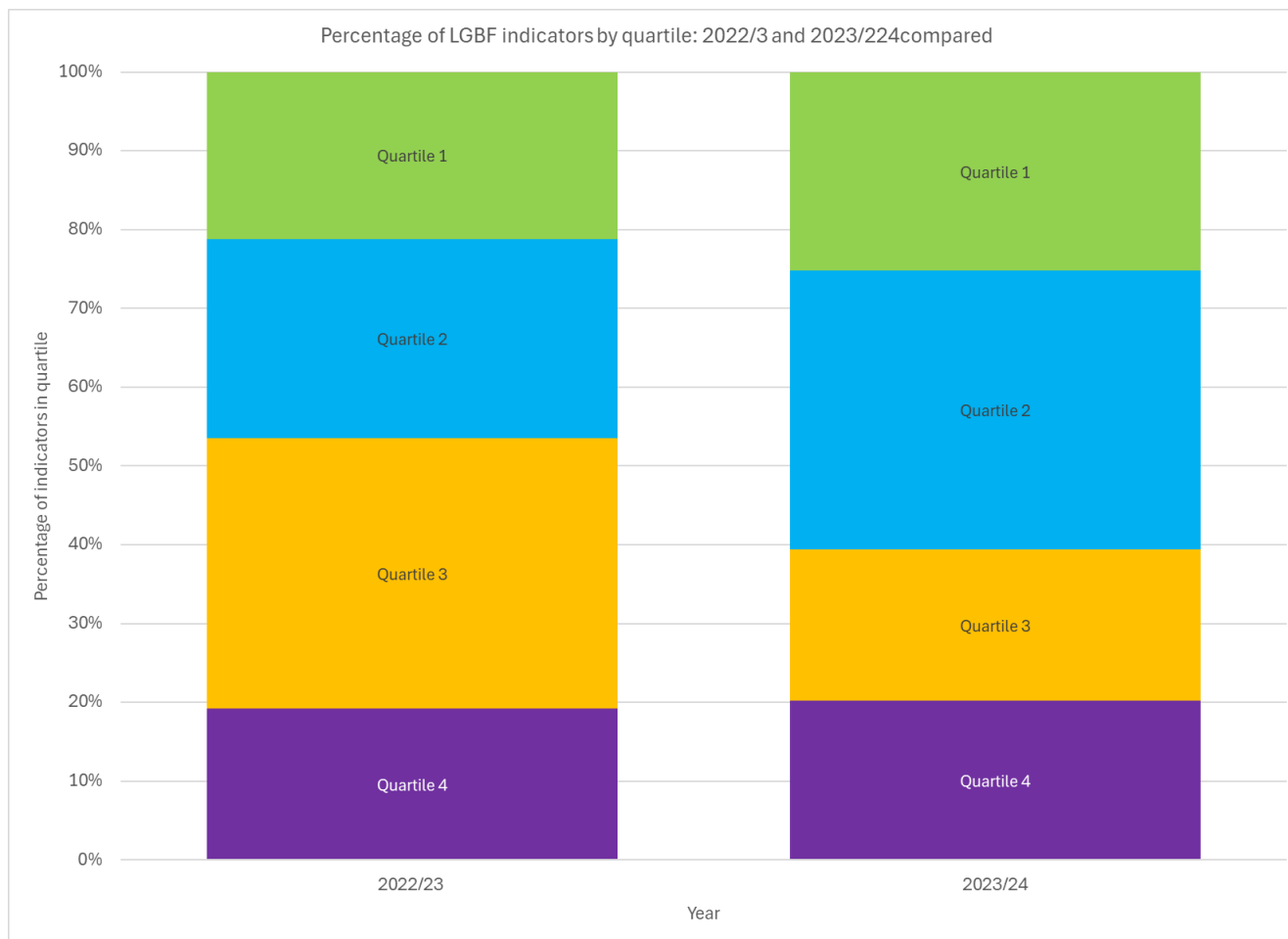
How We Compare – Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

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. Data for the most recent year will not be complete until after the full twelve months has passed. The majority of the 2024/25 data will be published by the end of 2025.

The chart below shows how our performance compares relative to other Scottish local authorities; overall, our performance has improved. In the last year, 60% of indicators for Argyll and Bute were in quartiles 1 and 2, where performance is above the Scottish average. This compares to 46% of indicators falling in quartiles 1 and 2 in the previous year.

Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, 23 indicators (out of 99 for which direct comparisons could be made) moved to a higher quartile, 65 indicators stayed within the same quartile, and 11 moved to a lower quartile.



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: 3

Number no target / no data: 3

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Maximise distribution of Scottish Welfare Fund	95.30%	120.70%	144.00%	128.56%	119.80%	G	The Scottish Welfare Fund provides vital support to vulnerable households across our community. During 2024/25 a total of 1,134 households were supported, enabling individuals to remain safely in their communities and avoid crisis situations. We have maintained a high standard of delivery and responsiveness.
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%	97.00%	G	Following their interaction with advice services, clients are invited to participate in a customer satisfaction survey. In the 2024/25 reporting period, 97% of respondents indicated that they felt better equipped to address the financial challenges they were facing.
Maximise distribution of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund	96.00%	98.20%	79.00%	84.30%	89.20%	R	The Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund continued to serve as a vital mechanism for supporting low-income households facing housing related financial hardship. Although our actual expenditure fell short of the 96% target, a total of 729 households were successfully assisted in sustaining their tenancies and avoided housing instability.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Percentage of care services graded as 'good' (4) or better in Care Inspectorate inspections	75.0%	80.00%	79.50%	77.30%	84.20%	G	The percentage achieved is also above the reported Scotland Rate (81.9%). Next years target will be uplifted to 80%.
Percentage of adults receiving any care of support who rated it as excellent or good	75.30%	68.60%	68.60%	74.00%	74.00%	-	Data available biannually, next survey data available 2025/26
Percentage of carers who feel supported to continue in their caring role	29.70%	38.00%	38.00%	38.00%	38.00%	-	Data available biannually, next survey data available 2025/26

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 £549,134 in Scottish Welfare Fund grants was paid to support 1,134 vulnerable households in our communities who are in need of financial support. This made up of Scottish Government programme funding and funding by Argyll and Bute Council.
- Discretionary Housing Payments totalling £968,036 were distributed to 729 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 £109,920 in grants to cover food and fuel for people in poverty and successfully referred them for support to advice agencies.

- 965 families have been supported to maximise benefit income and reduced fuel costs to the value of £1.357m.
- The average processing time for new housing benefit claims was 14.67 days and 3.35 days for changes in circumstances against targets of 21 days and 6 days, respectively.
- We assisted residents to claim £5.4 million in additional benefits that may have otherwise remained unclaimed, assisting independent living and preventing homelessness. This figure included £821,127 for individuals and families affected by cancer and supported through partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support and the Welfare Advice and Health Partnership.
- The Welfare Rights Advice in Health Partnerships Initiative and referral pathway has built on existing links with GP practices and has made a positive difference to these rural and island communities. Financial gain for 2024-25 for clients referred via this pathway was £418,453.
- 98% of respondents in our welfare rights customer satisfaction survey would recommend the service. 95% rated their overall experience of using the service as excellent or good and 96% said the time taken to respond to their initial enquiry was excellent or good.
- In line with Scottish Government Policy, we implemented an uplift in the basic pay of carers and personal assistants who look after adults in our communities and Early Learning and Childcare workers employed by Partner Providers to ensure payment of at least the Scottish Living Wage.

Corporate Outcome: People will live in safer and stronger communities

Number of indicators: 4

Number on track: 3

Number no target / no data: 1

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 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%	90.00%	100.00%	100.00%	G	The results are from an annual survey of customers and community groups engaged with the Community Planning and Community Development Team.
Information provided to our community groups, individuals and partners is easy to understand	75.00%	96.00%	90.00%	93.00%	93.00%	G	We recognise the importance of ensuring accessible communication when engaging with community groups.
Total value of compensation settlements for vehicle damage/driver injury as a result of road/bridge faults	No target	£2,807	£1,879	£1,956	£2,147	No target	Initial claims are recorded by our Roads team using Oracle system, with a supplementary record maintained in the designated directory on the shared network.
Percentage of adult residents stating their neighbourhood as a 'very good' place to live	70.00%	-	69.00%	No data	74.00%	G	The figure for 2022 was 69% so the new figure of 74% is a significant improvement.

Supporting our communities

In 2024/25, funding from the Supporting Communities Fund (SCF) was awarded to 64 groups across Argyll & Bute for the delivery of projects spanning sport, transport, music, the arts, and environmental initiatives.

Walking and Cycling in the Dark

The Community Development Team successfully secured funding through the Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme to support active travel initiatives in Dunoon. Darkness was identified as a key barrier preventing children and families from choosing active travel over motorised transport. In response, five reflective and glow-in-the-dark craft workshops were delivered in local schools to promote safe travel during darker hours.



A public workshop was held at Dunoon Pier on Saturday, 5th October, coinciding with the launch of the Dunoon Bothy. The event attracted over 83 attendees, who shared valuable feedback on what would encourage them to walk and cycle more.



These insights were shared with the Active Travel Team. The project was delivered in partnership with Community Police, Cycling UK, and the Dunoon Development Trust.

Following the workshops, 70% of pupils reported they would be more likely to walk or cycle in the dark. Feedback from children, staff, and parents was overwhelmingly positive. The activities were inclusive, accessible to all ages and abilities, and fully adapted for pupils with complex needs.

Oban Community Council – Local Place Plan & Flood Resilience

Ongoing engagement with Oban Community Council has focused on their Local Place Plan (LPP) and the work of their Flood Resilience Subgroup. A joint meeting was facilitated between Oban Community Council and an internal colleague involved in the Oban Strategic Development Plan, to explore opportunities for collaboration and ensure alignment of efforts, helping to avoid duplication.

Victory Hall, Benderloch – Community Engagement Project



Victory Hall successfully secured SCF funding to support a local community engagement initiative.

A meeting was held with the group to discuss the scope and aims of their project and guidance was provided using the VOICE Community Engagement Toolkit to help align their approach with the National Standards for Community Engagement.

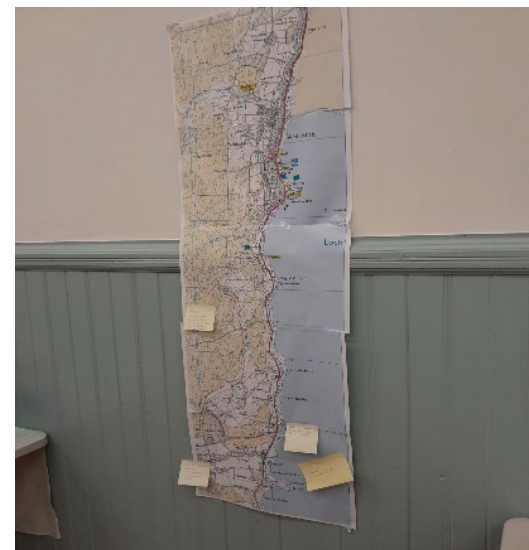
Good practice for engaging with children and young people was also discussed and ongoing support is being provided as the project progresses.

Ardrishaig Community Council – Local Place Plan development

Following attendance at a community-led plans training session in December 2023, Ardrishaig Community Council progressed their intention to develop a Local Place Plan (LPP).

They were advised to establish a steering group and a facilitated workshop once the group was in place. The group was signposted to relevant funding opportunities, including the Community Led Local Development Fund and Awards for All and agreed to focus on person-to-person engagement, recognising their own skills and capacity to lead the process.

The group developed ideas for community outreach and proposed forming a diverse working group of residents, with clear lines of accountability through designated representatives.



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

Number of indicators: 8

Number on track: 5

Number no target / no data: 3

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Provide quality meals within cost margins to all pupils	+/-5.00%	-0.04%	-2.56%	0.48%	-1.73%	G	Delivered 1.2m early years, primary and secondary school meals.
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 (CECYP) enrolled in an authority school has tracking and monitoring in place via our education management system. Data collected includes attendance, exclusions, progress and attainment and wellbeing information. The Virtual School adds an additional layer of scrutiny to this process through a series of attainment meets and partnership working, helping to ensure our CECYP have the supports required. We continue to work with partner agencies and other local authorities to support our CECYP hosted out with Argyll and Bute
Percentage of children living in poverty (after housing costs)	No target	21.7%	23.5%	No data	No data	No target	Data collated by End Child Poverty, 2024/25 data not yet published. Last data available 2022/23.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Percentage rate for attendance across all Argyll and Bute schools is comparable or better than the Scottish national average (biennial data)	92.00%	93.30%	90.55%	92.85%	90.80%	R	Maximising attendance remains a key strategic priority, with ongoing liaison with Education Scotland colleagues to ensure alignment between local policy and national recommendations.
Support the increase in the update of available grants, allowance, and entitlements	2,573	2,853	2,999	3,125	3,750	G	The implementation of online grant processing has enabled staff to exceed targets.
A counselling service is available in all secondary schools	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	G	The service has supported 472 young people in secondary schools and 216 children in primary schools. The most common reasons for referral include anxiety, low mood, family difficulties, and emotional regulation. 83% of young people and 81% of primary-aged children completing support reported positive clinical outcomes, including reduced psychological distress and improved emotional resilience.
Percentage of children with no concerns across all domains at 27-to-30-month assessment	82.10%	87.30%	85.30%	No data	No data	-	No data is available for 2024/25. This measure is taken from SOLACE LGBF indicators but has not been reported since 2022.
95% of schools have a suitability rating of A or B	95.00%	95.00%	95.00%	95.00%	98.00%	G	The overall position for suitability scores is 61% have a rating of A, 37% were rated as B.

Support and interventions for our care experienced children and young people

Each care experienced child and young person (CECYP) enrolled in an authority school has tracking and monitoring in place via our education management system, SEEMIS. Data collated includes attendance, exclusion, progress and achievement and progress over time. Scrutiny of this data has led to early interventions to support our CECYP, in some cases positively impacting attendance and attainment. To date we have zero exclusions of CECYP. This is a major success that can be attributed to supportive policy, collegiate and partnership working and greater awareness of the needs of our CECYP community.

The Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) links to Designated Managers across settings where CECYP are enrolled to both support and challenge the learning experience for our CECYP. We continue to explore the information arising from our data, ensuring our Health and Wellbeing Family Liaison Officers target those most in need. We are supported by wider colleagues in education to meet this target.

Addressing non-attendance

Seven out of ten secondary schools have completed the Addressing Non-Attendance training programme and continue to implement this with support from Educational Psychology Service. Training for primary school staff has been developed and implemented in some settings. Across the authority, the Maximising Attendance policy is supporting a more consistent and data-informed approach to monitoring attendance and intervening early to help children, young people, and families overcome barriers to school attendance. Maximising attendance remains a key strategic priority, with ongoing liaison with Education Scotland colleagues to ensure alignment between local policy and national recommendations.

UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting School Programme

Apple Tree Nursery in Rothesay became the first nursery in Argyll and Bute, and only the third in Scotland, to receive a prestigious gold award from UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting School programme.

Children living in Poverty

We are one of the lead players on a national level identifying those who are not in receipt of full benefit entitlement, working to identify ways of using data to identify those in need. Work is ongoing with the Improvement Service and Scalable Approach to Vulnerability Via Interoperability (SAVVI) to find the best approach and legal gateways to allow use.

Reducing poverty with the power of right advice

Our Welfare Rights Team has a significant impact in the outcomes for families by helping them maximise their uptake of available benefits grants and allowances, securing Client Financial Gain in excess of £4 million per year. Key to success is the close working of statutory and voluntary sectors. Examples include:

Flexible Food and Fuel Fund – our benefits team, ALI energy and the Bute Advice Centre manage this innovative scheme that sees considerable grant aid to people every year, coupled with benefit and fuel poverty solutions advice.

Infant Food Insecurity Pilot – a one-year pilot study is taking place to assess the level of crisis need for baby formula, where there is no other immediate solution. Supermarket vouchers are placed with Midwives and Health Visitors and a picture of the nature of this need is being identified.

Safe homes for families who need them most

The Local Housing Strategy (LHS) aligns with the aims and objectives of our Child Poverty Action Plan and outlines a series of actions to address disadvantage and alleviate poverty. These include preventing families and young people in certain situations from incurring rent arrears, from becoming homeless, assisting families with a disabled family member, and assisting larger families.

In 2024/25, 476 homeless cases were closed, of which 121 involved households with dependent children (amounting to 199 children) and 86 of these households received a positive outcome.

There has been a slight reduction in homeless applications between the 1st of April 2024 and the 31st of March 2025. During that period, 459 homeless applications were made, a decrease of 34 applications (7% down) in the same period in the previous year.

Making life more affordable for families

Pre-loved School Uniform Project - The two-year funded pre-loved school uniform project has come to an end. The project was set up to focus on the reuse of good quality preloved school uniform and the recycling of uniforms that are no longer fit for purpose. Working with schools, community groups, and parent councils across all seven of our main settlements to support eco-friendly reuse school uniform schemes that cover school uniform for Early Learning Centres, Nurseries Primary and Secondary Schools linked to each school cluster. We investigated, supported, and promoted taking donations of uniform from parents and pupils, ways to launder them and methods of redistributing them as and when they are required.

The project has achieved many of the goals we envisaged and many more that developed during the project in a positive and meaningful way. It also highlighted that more work is needed to keep this momentum moving forward. Much of the work and schemes will continue and the project has shown that with further support and encouragement much more could be achieved. For full details of the project report, when published, will be available from [Pre-loved School uniform scheme | Argyll and Bute Council](#).

My Tribe Free Period Product Initiative - our free period product initiative, plays a vital role in tackling child poverty by ensuring that no child misses out on education due to lack of access to essential items. By providing free period products in over 150 community locations and through a user-friendly online ordering system that delivers directly to any household in Argyll and Bute, My Tribe helps ease financial pressures faced by families.

Schools Share and Recycle - Gigha Primary school have a community fridge, which they keep fully stocked with fresh items of food. They have been very surprised at the uptake and need to restock very regularly. Dalmally Primary School are actively involved with the charity Mary's Meals and pupils fundraise and raise awareness. Most of our schools have a Uniform Bank where pupils can access pre-owned items of school uniform. Pupils, staff, and parents spoke of the Uniform Swap Shop, with children learning that not everything needs to be bought new.

Award winning school meals service

We delivered 1.2m early years, primary and secondary school meals, with new menus introduced in August 2024 receiving positive feedback. The Catering Team wowed judges at the Public Sector Catering Awards with their wild venison school meals, earning them the Sustainability Award. Early years and primary meals were awarded a recertification for Food for Life Served Here - Bronze award.

School Counselling Service

The service has supported 472 young people in secondary schools and 216 children in primary schools. The most common reasons for referral include anxiety, low mood, family difficulties, and emotional regulation. 83% of young people and 81% of primary-aged children completing support reported positive clinical outcomes, including reduced psychological distress and improved emotional resilience. This is further supported by positive parent feedback, with 100% of parents feeling more confident in supporting their child's emotional and developmental needs and 94% observing positive changes in their child's wellbeing.

School suitability ratings

Through the Capital Programme only Tobermory 2-18 school still has a C rating for suitability. There are plans for a new school on Mull through the LEIP programme which will ensure 100% of our schools will have a suitability of A or B. The four-year planning for the new school building in conjunction with the Hub North, will ensure that the new school have both a condition and suitability scoring of A.

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	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 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%	93.50%	95.20%	94.30%	No data	-	The data supplied for 2024/25 will not be available from the Scottish Government until February 2026.
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%	97.00%	SCQF4 87.23% SCQF5 66.84%	SCQF4 84.08% SCQF5 66.59%	64.82%	G	The percentage of Argyll and Bute school leavers who achieved Level 5 literacy and numeracy was 64.8%, above the target of 60%

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Percentage of modern apprentices that go on to a positive destination after completing the Argyll and Bute Modern Apprentice Programme	95.00%	96.10%	96.20%	94.55%	90.00%	R	The target was narrowly missed due to a small number of applicants not completing the programme however, 70% have successfully secured employment within the Council.
Percentage of children that achieve their appropriate developmental milestones by Primary 1	70.00%	64.00%	63.00%	61.00%	61.00%	R	As a result of developmental effects of covid lockdowns, we continue to work collaboratively with health and allied health professionals to ensure that we are addressing developmental concerns as early as possible.
Percentage pass rate for the National 5 qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average *ACADEMIC YEAR	No target	79.70%	77.39%	75.60%	77.20%	No target	The Argyll and Bute A-C pass rate of 77.2% is in line with the National figure of 77.4%. The A-D pass rate of 89.9% is slightly above that of the national figure 989.2%)
Percentage pass rate for the National Higher qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average *ACADEMIC YEAR	No target	80.90%	77.35%	72.00%	73.40%	No target	The Argyll and Bute A-C pass rate of 73.4% is slightly behind the National pass rate of 74.8%. However, the A-D pass rate of 89.9% is slightly above that of the national figure (89.5%)

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Increase the uptake of wider achievement opportunities which complement traditional SQA awards and offer alternative ways to develop learning, life, and work skills	No target	-	88.00%	100.00%	9.98%	No target	In 24/25, 9.98% of all senior phase pupils completed a wider achievement award as part of their overall attainment profiles.

Developing the young workforce

Analysis of 23/24 attainment data has been completed and demonstrates a continued growth in the presentation for and passing of wider achievement awards. Data shows that the percentage of senior phase pupils who presented for a wider achievement award has grown from 7.3% in 22/23 to 9.9% in 23/24. This figure also surpasses the 5 years high of 9.8% in 2019/20. The average tariff points awarded to Argyll and Bute pupils (52) who passed wider achievement points is also above the virtual comparator (35) and national figures (36). This average was also an increase on the 22/23 figure (46). These two figures show that a higher proportion of our pupils are engaging with high quality wider achievement awards. We received the Insight raw data set in November which allows us to explore at a pupil level which wider achievements were achieved, and in which centres they were presented. Analysis of the data is underway to ensure the relevant Education Officer is equipped with the best insight possible to support and challenge our schools.

Further analysis of Insight leavers data, published in February 2025, shows that wider achievement made up 11.4% of all attained entries for our S6 leavers. This was the highest it had been in the last 5 years and higher than both the virtual comparator and the national figure. This data shows that wider achievement is increasingly becoming part of a revised curriculum which complements traditional SQA awards.

Helping People into work

Education and DYW have worked in partnership with Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the 3rd Sector and a wide and increasing range of employer partners to develop young people's skills, formulate personalised learning pathways and track young people's progress, both towards and within positive destinations. As a result, 94.8% of school leavers in 2023/24 entered positive destinations and 94.3% of all 16–19-year-olds were in education, training or employment, which equates to Argyll and Bute ranking 9th out of Scotland's local authorities.

Partnerships between schools and employers have continued to increase and as a result, a total of 387 work placements – a 60% increase on 2023/34 – have supported young people to plan their individual vocational pathways and develop skills for life and work, confidence and resilience.

Forty Flexible Learning Plans (FLPs) have been in place across all secondary schools. FLPs have continued to provide bespoke curricula for young people who require such provision. All secondary schools have demonstrated increased capacity for and commitment to planning individualised curricula and timetables for young people. As a result, vulnerable young people at risk of disengagement have re-engaged with education and are entering sustained destinations in employment and training/apprenticeships.

Frequent and regular 16 Plus meetings are being held in secondary schools in partnership with SDS and DYW. As a result, all secondary schools have robust frameworks for intervention to support school leavers at risk of not entering a positive destination, and to track young people post-school to ensure positive destinations are sustained.

Our number of Modern Apprentices employed has remained consistent over the last few years, but to improve our approach we have included evaluation in our Growing Our Own framework. Modern Apprentices and their managers will be encouraged to provide feedback in this respect to ensure that the programme remains fit for purpose as a pipeline into longer-term employment.

Literacy and Numeracy

Full analysis of 23/24 literacy and numeracy data has highlighted the varying levels of attainment across all schools which will allow for interventions to be designed and implemented. This information, along with other relevant measures, has been organised into secondary attainment meeting packs which will be used to support improvement meetings. S3 BGE data for 23/24 shows increases at the fourth level, which should logically flow into improvements at National 4 and 5 awards in 24/25. Insight data for leavers, which included post appeal data, was published in February 2025. The percentage of leavers who left with Level 4 literacy and numeracy was 83.2%. The percentage of leavers who left with Level 5 literacy and numeracy was 64.8%. Both are above the target of 60%.

Play on Pedals

Our Play on Pedals collaboration with Bike-ability Scotland is now operating in 3 of our 4 localities, including one island, enabling young children to achieve their gross motor milestones, through learning to balance and pedal a bicycle. We are currently awaiting our most up to date development data, however, initial qualitative data indicates that for children involved in the scheme, achievement of gross motor developmental milestones is above average, and as an additional benefit, stronger parental engagement and confidence in cycling with their children has been reported.

Attainment

Attainment data for the 2023/24 academic year has been reviewed at both the authority and individual school levels. At the authority level, Argyll and Bute recorded a National 5 pass rate of 75.9%, slightly below the national average of 77.2%. Notably, five out of ten secondary schools in the area achieved pass rates above the national figure. Further analysis revealed that in 15 National 5 courses, Argyll and Bute's pass rates exceeded national performance.

At the Higher level, the authority-wide pass rate was 72.0%, again slightly trailing the national average of 74.9%. However, three secondary schools outperformed the national pass rate. Additionally, Argyll and Bute achieved higher pass rates than the national average in 16 Higher courses.

Schools have received detailed data to support targeted improvements at the subject level. Information from the results machine has been shared, enabling schools to identify subjects that are performing above or below national averages. This insight allows for focused attention on specific course components to enhance overall performance.

Schools have also been provided with data on the accuracy of their grade estimates for the 2023/24 exam diet. This will support improvements in assessment and moderation practices, helping schools more effectively track learner progress.

Corporate Outcome: Our economy is diverse and thriving

Number of indicators: 12

Number on track: 0

Number no target / no data: 12

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Maintain the percentage of local suppliers that benefit from the awards of contracts via the procurement portal	20.00%	13.50%	19.90%	17.80%	18.70%	R	During 2024/25, 183 tender/quick quote contract awards were placed with 203 successful suppliers, 38 of which were local suppliers (18.7%).
Increase the number of community benefits that are delivered through the contracts we award locally	No target	55	73	74	75	No target	31 Community Benefits have been achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards and the Request List .44 Community Benefits have been achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards, and the Request List.
Number of business and industry planning applications submitted annually	No target	19	23	21	13	No target	Although applications submitted during 2024/25 have decreased, these include some significant new investments in Argyll and Bute.
Percentage of homeless applicants who required temporary accommodation this period	No target	40.00%	34.00%	29.00%	29.00%	No target	29% of new homeless applicants required temporary accommodation in 2024/25.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Number of affordable social sector new builds completed per annum	No target	145	188	70	54	No target	Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners completed 44 new affordable housing units across Argyll and Bute.
Total number of visitor trips to Argyll and Bute	No target	1.5M	2.5M	2.8M	3.312M	No target	Data provided by Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) on an annual basis (calendar year). The significant increase from 2021 to 2024 is due to the number of visitors recovering from extremely low numbers during the Covid-19 pandemic period.
Total visitor spend in Argyll and Bute	No target	£262.5M	£407.5M	£461.5M	£566M	No target	Data supplied by Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) on an annual basis (calendar year). The significant increase in the total economic impact of tourism from 2021 to 2024 is due to the number of visitors recovering from extremely low numbers during the Covid-19 pandemic period.
Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita	No target	£23,394	£47,270	£47,270	No Data	No target	Data supplied by Office for National Statistics (ONS). Data not yet available.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Unemployment rate - claimant count as a %age of working age population	No target	4.00%	2.80%	2.50%	2.70%	No target	In April 2025, 2.7% of the working age population in Argyll & Bute were claiming unemployment benefits – lower than the national average for Scotland of 3.1% and significantly below the UK average of 4.1%.
Unemployment rate - claimant count as a %age of the population (16-24)	No target	4.30%	2.80%	0.41%	0.43%	No target	As of April 2025, 0.43% of the population aged 16-24 in Argyll & Bute were claiming unemployment benefit. While no target has been set, the key focus remains to maintain low unemployment levels and to ensure that individuals are engaged in sustainable and meaningful employment, rather being under employed.
The number of Business Gateway start-ups per 10,000 of population	No target	154.3	135.7	135.0	152.0	No target	During 2024/25, Business Gateway successfully supported the creation of 152 new start-ups.
Geographical percentage coverage of 4/5G mobile connectivity	95.00%	79.00%	81.00%	85.00%	89.00%	R	According to latest Ofcom report update (Jan 25), 57% of Argyll and Bute Geographic Area has 4G coverage all 4 operators, this rises to 89% coverage from at least 1 operator, however there are geographic variations dependant on mast locations and level of investment, 11% of Argyll and Bute Geographic area has no 4G coverage from any operator.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
							Currently Argyll and Bute 0% 5G coverage from all 4 operators, however some operators have started upgrading infrastructure to incorporate 5G technology. 26% of Argyll and Bute has 5G coverage from at least 1 operator.

Supporting economic recovery and our communities

During 2024/25, 183 tender/quick quote contract awards were placed with 203 successful suppliers, 38 of which were local suppliers (18.7%). From the 53 awards that received a local bid, 37 tender/quick quote awards were awarded to a local supplier (69.8%). 31 Community Benefits have been achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards, and the Request List during the period from 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024. 44 Community Benefits have been achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards, and the Request List during the period from 1st October 2024 to 31st March 2025. 31 Community Benefits have been achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards, and the Request List during the period from 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024. 44 Community Benefits have been achieved through Contract Management, Contract Awards and the Request List during the period from 1st October 2024 to 31st March 2025.

Affordable social sector new builds

The 44 new affordable housing units completed by Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners included 38 units for social rent and 6 properties for New Supply Shared Equity (NSSE).

In addition, Trust and West Highland Housing Association both acquired a property on the open market, whilst following transfer of stock to Fyne Homes they completed the renovation works to eight affordable flats in Rothesay raising the annual completion total to 54. The challenges of housing delivery are well-articulated in the work surrounding the Housing Emergency, particularly infrastructure constraints, construction skills shortages, materials inflation, financial costs.

Business Support – case studies

Lochawe Hardwoods



An Argyll-based business has achieved significant business growth, including a boost in turnover, after accessing support from Business Gateway.

Ian McAdam established Loch Awe Hardwoods in 2017 along the south shore of Loch Awe. The business operates its own sawmill to supply a range of products to customers across the region.

Ian's business journey has been supported by a Business Gateway adviser, who linked him up with a digital expert for a fully funded digital review to give guidance on growing Loch Awe Hardwoods' digital presence to reach new customers. Using the recommendations from the digital review, Ian plans to enhance the company's online presence even further, with an updated website and increased engagement on social media platforms such as Facebook to better showcase Loch Awe Hardwoods' products and services.

Through Business Gateway, Ian has also accessed funding towards machinery from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which has enabled the business to expand its product range, leading to an increased customer base and improved turnover.

Lomond Clinic, Helensburgh

A Helensburgh healthcare clinic has been given a boost after receiving digital support from Business Gateway in Argyll & Bute. The Lomond Clinic supports locals through its range of healthcare services, which include medical and alternative treatment options encompassing health, beauty, massage, physiotherapy, acupuncture, counselling, exercise and nutrition.

Founder Jill Du Toit has been supporting Helensburgh residents since 2002, when she first launched her clinic with Business Gateway start-up support.

Throughout her business journey, Jill has been supported by her local Business Gateway team, who has provided expert guidance and advice as she has grown and developed The Lomond Clinic.

One-to-one support from Business Gateway has helped Jill to develop her business plan to keep up with client demand. As part of recent efforts to improve The Lomond Clinic's online presence, Jill participated in a one-day digital review with Business Gateway, which gave her a clear action plan on improvements to her website and social media. This has enabled Jill to effectively reach and communicate with new customers, supporting The Lomond Clinic's continued development. Jill has also previously received advice on routes to funding and accessed grants that have helped her to expand her team and secure medical diagnosis equipment.



Green Cup, Lochgilphead

A Ukrainian national who relocated to Scotland has brought a taste of her homeland to Lochgilphead by opening Green Cup, a coffee shop. Owner Inna Arnautova offers specialist coffees and teas and accessed support from Business Gateway to help turn her passion for coffee into a thriving business.



Inna, her husband and their three children moved to the area from Ukraine in January 2023 amidst Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Keen to establish her roots in Argyll and Bute further, Inna had an idea to launch her very own coffee shop and approached Business Gateway for support earlier this year. She was soon connected with Donald Melville, a business adviser.

Drawing on Donald's expertise and resources, Inna successfully navigated the challenges of starting a new venture in a foreign country. Inna benefitted from advice on taking on a new premises and routes to funding. Through her local Business Gateway, Inna also benefitted from a specialist adviser surgery which taught her more about using social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram to market her business to the right audience.

Since its opening, Green Cup has proved popular with locals, and visitors alike, gaining positive attention for its new and unique offer in the town.

Inna told us "I'm incredibly grateful for the support I have received from Business Gateway. Starting a new business was a long haul but Donald helped me along the way with any questions that I had. I'm looking forward to what's to come in the future."

Donald Melville, Business Gateway adviser, said: “The success of Green Cup highlights the opportunities available to budding business owners in Scotland, especially to those who bring diverse perspectives and new ideas to the local economy. Inna’s story serves as an inspiration to other aspiring business owners looking to make their mark.”

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND – Business Support Programme

Between June 2023 and March 2025 Business Gateway delivered a programme of additional support worth £516,521, fully funded through the UK Government Shared Prosperity Fund:

- 87 small business development grants
- 16 training, trade fair, accreditation or digital grants
- 75 start-up grants
- 9 expert help (1 to 2 days support)
- 6 participants in intensive business support programme

Of the 51 clients followed up to date, turnover has increased from a combined £10.7m at approval to £15.7m 12 months after the support (47% increase). The number of employees has grown from 96 to 136 (41% increase). Across the 165 unique businesses approved for support, turnover is predicted to grow by 32% to £32.8m and FTEs to grow by 47% to 468 within 12 months, so it is encouraging to see growth actually delivered from the early beneficiaries. Impact data will be mature in May 2026. £200k has been secured for the UKSPF Transition phase, to continue grant and expert help support in 2025.

The Rural Growth Deal (RGD)

The Rural Growth Deal (RGD) is a partnership approach to rural economic development which will deliver £50 million of investment equally funded by the Scottish and UK Governments where it will best develop Argyll and Bute as an inclusive, sustainable, economically successful region and driver for Scotland and the UK. Argyll and Bute Council, along with key stakeholders, will seek to contribute at least £20 million of match funding throughout the 10-year programme to accelerate inclusive economic growth for the region.

The RGD will provide a catalyst for inclusive economic growth that will retain and attract working-age people in the area. It will create opportunities that can help to anchor the future prosperity of some of our key employment sectors. The programme comprises seven themes with key interdependencies between many projects, bringing together partners from the public, private, and third sectors who are all committed to delivering inclusive economic growth that benefits the whole region. The seven themes are:



- Tourism – Creating a World Class Visitor Destination
- Creating a Low Carbon Economy
- Rural Skills Accelerator Programme
- Housing to Attract Economic Growth
- Clyde Engineering and Innovation Cluster
- West Coast UAV Logistics and Training Hub
- Marine Aquaculture Programme

Over the programme lifetime, it is estimated that the RGD will:

- Generate over £5 million per year across its 10-year duration. This figure reflects the annual capital funding drawn down as part of the RGD, with a total of £50 million being provided by the Scottish Government and UK Government over the full-term equating to approximately £5 million per annum. In addition to this financial investment, the deal will deliver wider economic benefits, which will be clearly mapped out as individual projects progress.”
- Directly and indirectly create over 300 additional jobs associated with the economic benefits accrued from growth RGD projects.
- Attract more than 70,000 tourists to the area.
- Assist the transition towards a net zero economy.
- Deliver skills and training opportunities to more than 6000 students / workers.
- Create an enhanced culture and leisure offering for local people to make Argyll and Bute a more attractive place to live and work.
- Construct housing and worker accommodation in some of our remote and fragile island communities as part of wider efforts to address our local housing emergency.



The Full Deal Agreement was signed in March 2025, at a ceremony in Rothesay, Isle of Bute signed by Cllr Jim Lynch on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council, Kate Forbes MSP, Deputy First Minister for the Scottish Government and Ian Murray, Secretary of State for Scotland for the UK Government. This event was a key milestone in RGD delivery and marked the beginning of the 10-year programme of investment across Argyll and Bute.

Strategic Transportation

Strategic Transportation were successful in securing £100k from the SG Islands Infrastructure Fund to engage, supply and support 4 communities to establish Digital Hubs on their Islands. The Islands were Coll (An Cridhe), Tiree (Development Trust Building), Iona (Community Hall) and Islay (Kilarrow Hall). All 4 locations have an additional 3-year extended warranty and a direct line to the supplier for technical advice.

Scottish Futures Trust

Argyll, and Bute Council in partnership with Scottish Futures Trust were the first LA in Scotland to begin this full-scale area wide mobile coverage mapping project. Several others have followed suit. The data that is being received provides an actual coverage rather the assumed coverage data that was previously available. Data received through this ongoing project challenges the assumed data which is provided by the current 4 Mobile Network Operator.

One council: property income

We have generated over £956,000 from disposals and generated new annual revenue income of £40,500 driven by our strategy of divesting of surplus property assets and generating income from our estate.

Notable sales include:

- Eaglesham House in Rothesay, Isle of Bute
- Housing development site at Burns Brae, Lochgilphead as part of housing emergency actions.

Notable projects include:

- The marketing of the Helensburgh Waterfront commercial site, with a preferred developer selected in August 2024, site investigations completed, and utility connections secured.
- Oban Airport Business Park has seen the completion of the full business case, funding secured for the site infrastructure and first building, Tier 1 contractor appointed, design team appointed, planning consent received, and site preparation works commenced.

We are developing a strategic outline programme which will cover potential opportunities for the Council to develop several of its assets on a commercial basis and will be delivered over a number of years, with the immediate focus being a new Business Park at Kilmory, Oban Airport Business Park 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 service staff continue to work proactively with clients to offer support and identify solutions which avoid people needing to present as homeless and require temporary accommodation. Similarly, staff are working hard to ensure Housing First Tenancies are successfully sustained, and that Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) increase the number of offers they make to homeless clients.

The number of tenancies created by RSLs annually has dropped and the number of offers made to homeless applicants is not reaching the agreed levels creating a continuing need to rely on the sporadic use of unsuitable accommodation types for temporary accommodation. We continue to engage constructively with RSLs & Scottish Government, COSLA and Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership to focus on the issues and delivery.

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	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Percentage of waste recycled, composted or recovered	45.00%	48.30%	52.00%	58.20%	68.30%	G	The figures provided represent a combined total, with an annual rate of 68.3% for recycling, composting and recovery. This includes 41.5% from recycling and composting and 26.8% from recovery. The target figure will be revised once the landfill ban comes into effect.
Number of tonnes of waste sent to landfill (biodegradable)	21,500	18,772	18,165	17,406	14,716	G	Since general waste from Helensburgh and Lomond is no longer sent to landfill and is instead processed through refuse derived fuel and energy from waste methods, there has been a significant reduction in the tonnage of waste going to landfill.
Percentage of street cleanliness	73.00%	79.00%	83.00%	84.00%	80.00%	G	The nationally recognised pass rate is 67% The average achievement across all areas is 80%, with every team exceeding the target set.

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Percentage of roads in need of maintenance as defined by the annual survey	No target	No data	49.70%	No data	50.77%	No target	The latest Road Condition Index (RCI) for 2023-25 indicates a decline in network condition. This figure is derived from the updated two-year average of completed survey data. Despite the recent dip, the RCI still reflects a continued improvement since the 2018 – 2020 period.
Carbon emissions relating to Council activities (Council carbon footprint) tC02e = tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent Net Zero tC02e by 2045	No target	28,218	26,512	No data	27,515	No target	Both the Council and Scotland as a whole, are committed to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2045. Since the baseline year, we have achieved a 31% reduction in carbon emissions. However, current progress – both locally and nationally – falls short of the trajectory needed to meet the interim target of a 75% reduction by 2020 and the goal of Net Zero by 2045.

Council Carbon Footprint

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

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

Flood Protection

Campbeltown Flood Protection Scheme

- The main works contract was certified Complete in May 2024,
- The Property Flood Resilience (PFR) element of the project is progressing through 2025 to 2026.

As the scheme is largely complete, the only known remaining financial risk at this stage is that of the tender return costs of the Property Flood Resilience works contract. Tender costs are expected to be available in the third quarter of 2025/26 and, if required, the adequacy of the available £350k secured funding shall be reviewed at that stage.

Marine infrastructure

Oban Harbour

For some time now there has been agreement that the Oban Bay area should be formally controlled for maritime safety, we took the step to assume the responsibility for managing the area through an extension of its Statutory Harbour Authority area around North Pier. We are now at the end of an extensive formal process and Transport Scotland continue to work on completing a submission and recommendation to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport.

Craignure Terminal

Our Harbour Board Members met on 20 March and approved the completion of the Outline Business Case (OBC) and a continuation of the project to the Final Business Case (FBC) pre-construction stage costing c.£3million.

The Project Objectives include:

- Replace the existing terminal infrastructure, parts of which are in poor condition, deteriorating or have limited structural capacity.
- Increase berth capacity at the new ferry terminal to allow the full range of design vessels to be safely accommodated.
- Ensure vessels can reliably berth year-round at the new ferry terminal, including in challenging weather conditions and overnight, to reduce weather-related cancellations and improve the winter timetable.
- Increase resilience of the new ferry terminal operations.
- Allow safe and efficient embarkation and disembarkation for both vehicles and foot passengers, including those with impaired mobility and wheelchair users.
- Increase capacity of the new vehicle marshalling area in line with industry standards, addressing congestion on the A849.
- Provide a new terminal building with modern facilities, meeting staff and passenger requirements.
- Provide access for RNLI lifeboat, which is used for medical evacuations from Mull to mainland.
- Avoid and minimise disruption to the ferry service as far as practicable during the construction works.

This next stage will develop more accurate construction costing estimates as the design and methodology become more informed, with the current construction phase projection cost estimated at c.£96 million.

Campbeltown Old Quay



sheet piles, 50 metres of cope installation.

The Campbeltown Old Quay steel sheet piled walls, particularly wall 'A,' was showing accelerated low water corrosion, had holes in the sheet piling, and was showing loss of infill material behind the sheet piling wall. The pier is operational with the Royal National Lifeboats Institute commercial /retail fishing vessels, leisure/private boats, and tourism.

The Marine Operations and Infrastructure Design teams have been working together to facilitate the replacement the old steel sheet piles.

Infrastructure Design undertook outline designs and costs of 8 Options from which a preferred option to design and construct a deep-water berth was selected.

A contract was awarded in March 2024 and works on site began in June 2024. Since then, of ground anchors, backfilling between the old and new



The remaining works are the completion of cope installation, installation of quay furniture (bollards, ladders, fenders), completion of dredging works, site reinstatement. The completion date for the project is 04 October 2025.

Ferry services

Iona Breakwater

A contractor is now established on Iona to deliver a major infrastructure project that includes the construction of a breakwater, a new public toilet block, and slipway enhancements. These works are designed to protect the island's vital ferry service and prepare for the arrival of new CalMac vessels on the route. The construction phase is expected to last approximately 17 months.

This investment will significantly improve the reliability of ferry sailings during adverse weather conditions—an essential upgrade for a community that depends on consistent access to medical care, education, waste collection, and business deliveries. The lack of resilient infrastructure in the Sound of Iona has long impacted daily life for residents, with even a single day without ferry service disrupting essential services.

The breakwater will provide critical protection, enable more reliable and frequent crossings, and support broader economic development opportunities on both sides of the Sound.

In addition, the existing public toilet block on Iona is no longer fit for purpose. Frequently out of order and unable to meet demand—especially during the busy tourist season—the current facility fails to serve both residents and visitors. A new, accessible, and compliant toilet block is being constructed to provide reliable public amenities. The contract for the project was awarded in November 2024, with on-site works commencing in February 2025. These improvements are the result of extensive local consultation and careful environmental planning, ensuring that the project respects the unique character of this iconic location on Argyll's coastline.

Fionnphort

Fionnphort overnight berthing facility is progressing to follow on from the Iona works, for c. 18 months construction. Preparation is progressing to ensure:

- Overnight berth
- Safe access for crew
- Sheltered berthing
- Charging and supply facilities
- Traffic survey to enhance the passenger road user interface at the terminal

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is in process including the socio-economic assessment.



Port Askaig

Port Askaig has been made ready to receive the new Islay vessel being completed in Turkey and represents a collaboration between Argyll and Bute Council and CMAL who carried out the waterside enabling works. Council works to enhance existing facilities, consisted of relining, signage, parking allocation, CCTV and traffic access control installation.

Campbeltown Harbour

Campbeltown Harbour continues to be very busy commercially. Harbour improvement in the form of the replacement of 'Wall A' at the Old Quay is well underway and due for completion in October this year.

Business opportunities include using Campbeltown as a strategic supply hub for aquaculture and planned offshore wind projects are being explored. The continuation of cruise visits as well as military traffic represent a real opportunity to develop the port and secure long-term work in and from Campbeltown Harbour.

Rothesay Quay

Preparations continue for phase 3 of works, which will see a strengthening of the east roundhead and includes fendering upgrades. This work is currently at the design stage and is planned for tender in 2025.

Feolin

We will be installing a passenger only access at Feolin, for those periods when the vehicular vessel is not available and the service would otherwise be cancelled. Although these occasions are relatively rare, we have recognised the need for a replacement to the ladder access used at present. A plan for concrete steps between the existing dolphins following a more traditional design has been drawn up and approvals are now underway.

Gigha and Tayinloan

Planning is well underway to upgrade the marine infrastructure at Gigha and Tayinloan to accommodate new vessels for the CalMac route. Public consultation has been carried out at both sites as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment process. Ground Investigation work has also been completed at the locations, and this will help with refining the construction plans, methodology and costs.

Gigha Ferry Terminal



To facilitate the arrival of a new ferry as part of the Small Vessel Replacement Project (SVRP), the Council's Marine Operations and Infrastructure Design teams have been working to upgrade the existing infrastructure at Gigha and Tayinloan.

A consultant has been commissioned to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), design drawings, and tender documents. The designs include a new pier/breakwater at Gigha to allow overnight berthing of the new vessel by the slipway, and an extension of the existing breakwater at Tayinloan.

A Ground Investigation was carried out in April 2025. This included boreholes, vibrocores, grab samples, bathymetric surveys, and sub bottom profiling. The results of this investigation will provide information to allow designs to progress and a Marine Directorate consent to be secured for both construction and dredging.

Argyll & Bute Council Ferry Services

The first of our Ferry Stakeholder Forums held its initial meeting in June on Luing. Thanks to the enthusiasm of the local Community Council, it has begun to shape the available resources to better fit the islands needs and to better understand the constraints the service works within. It is now our intention to roll out this template and attend regular meetings for the remaining services for Jura, Lismore and Easdale and we look forward to involving the local communities alongside us to get the most out of their service.

Vessel Priority Strategy

The lag in increasing ferry capacity through new vessels is limiting the benefit of cheaper travel costs and impeding mainland travel to islands. New vessels and the associated marine infrastructure to accommodate them at our ports are both expensive and have lengthy lead times. It is therefore important for us to not only have a long-term strategy for vessel replacement but also to look at the longer-term needs of the island communities served by our ferries. A vessel strategy, which represents a realistic and Best Value approach to gain the most benefit from resources as they become available is as follows:

1. On-site accommodation at Port Askaig. The present situation requires Officers and crew to be residents of Islay as well as suitably qualified. Along with the market supplement and the 7-day rota, this will allow the recruitment of suitably certified crew required for resilience and new vessel minimum manning levels.

2. Concept design to 'Keel Ready' for a new Jura vessel to identify capacity levels; fuel type; crew size and infrastructure upgrade requirements. This also allows for a more accurate assessment / estimate of build & certification costs.
3. Jura Ferry replacement and associated infrastructure at Feolin and Port Askaig.
4. Eilean Dhiura re-deployed to the Cuan / Luing route with associated slipway modifications on the route.
5. Easdale work boat replacement with landing craft type vessel.

The vessel strategy uses the available resources and maximises the return from investments on vessel life extension works. It gives a service improvement in terms of redundancy and resilience while minimising the new build timescales. This will also allow time to assess future needs and fixed link opportunities for each community.

Council vehicle ferries

Major work during dry dock periods has now been completed to further extend the working lives of the Eilean Dhiura and the Belnahua. The work continues each year as an investment in the resilience of the vessels as important links to the island communities they serve. Works included engine replacement, extensive steel works, hydraulic and control systems as well as fire safety installations.

Road Condition improvements

The 2024 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 £11-£14million annually to maintain a 'standstill' position, and significantly more to see continued improvements. 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

To facilitate the arrival of a new ferry as part of the Small Vessel Replacement Project (SVRP), the Council's Marine Operations and Infrastructure Design teams have been working to upgrade the existing infrastructure at Gigha and Tayinloan. A consultant has been commissioned to produce an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), design drawings, and tender documents. The designs include a new pier/breakwater at Gigha to allow overnight berthing of the new vessel by the slipway, and an extension of the existing breakwater at Tayinloan.



A ground investigation was carried in April 2025. This included boreholes, vibrocores, grab samples, bathymetric surveys, and sub bottom profiling. The results of this investigation will provide information to allow designs to progress and a Marine Directorate consent to be secured for both construction and dredging.

Significant Work was carried out with SEPA and the owner of the surrounding land, to enable improvement to a nearby old borrow pit site using excavated material from the Works site. This helped to reduce the impact on the environment and the roads network of transporting large quantities of unsuitable (for engineering fill) excavated material away from the site. Work outside the road corridor will take place during 2025 to complete aspects required by SEPA such as the topsoil and seeding of the improved ex borrow pit area.

Balliemore Bridge

The original Balliemore Bridge was demolished following its partial collapse during the October 2023 severe weather event. The next critical stage in replacing it included installing six precast, 15 metre long, concrete deck beams onto the reinforced concrete abutments. A 130 tonnes capacity crane was required to consider the safe working radius and capacity of the lifting operations. Further work includes installing pre-cast wing walls and deck reinforcement in preparation for the in-situ concrete deck pour. With the cooperation of Ardtaraig Estate a [diversion road](#) was put in place through a field to the north west of Balliemore Bridge, which allowed a temporary bridge to be placed slightly upstream of the existing bridge and reopening of the road.

Tigh Dearg Road in Kilcreggan.



Civils works were completed as part of the flood alleviation scheme to improve the surface water drainage, as well reducing sewerage overflow into the River Clyde, at Tigh Dearg Road in Kilcreggan.

This scheme involved de-coupling a 220m combined sewer which took the surface water (rain runoff) and sewerage in one pipe which was connected to the Scottish Water main sewer. This pipe lacked capacity and was a contributor to the ongoing issues faced by locals.

The improvements include a new much larger surface water pipe (600mm in diameter) and a new sewer pipe connected only to properties. Improvements have also been made in the road surfacing which has been completely renewed – which provides a drastic visual improvement to the area.

To accomplish these works significant logistical and geophysical challenges had to be overcome – such as the high rock road that was present at the site as well as the narrow nature of the street. This added complexity and time to the works but were managed and successfully overcome.

Corporate Outcome: Getting it right

Number of indicators: 5

Number on track: 2

Number no target / no data: 3

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
Increase the percentage of all self-service and automated contracts	70.00%	73.10%	75.00%	76.70%	79.30%	G	In FQ4 there were 190,503 interactions across all Customer Engagement Team channels. Of these 150,986 were digital self service, which was 79.3%, so the target was comfortably met.
Sickness absence days per employee (non-teacher)	No target	13.4	14.9	14.6	15.4	No target	Employee absence is showing an increasing trend. This is a feature across the entire public sector in Scotland and is concerning. The main reasons for absence in this employee group are Mental Health and back and neck issues. Officers are working in partnership with other councils to ensure we have the best approach possible to analysing data, managing absence and providing the most appropriate support to staff. Our older workforce profile has an impact on our absence but does not account for it all. We continue to focus work with managers to improve this.
Sickness absence days per teacher	No target	5.6	7.2	9.0	9.6	No target	Absence amongst our teaching staff has increased significantly since 2021-22. The main reasons for absence in this employee group are stress and infections. Workload and pupil behaviour have been identified as contributing factors to stress, both of which are nationally recognised issues. Officers are working in partnership with other councils to

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	2021/22 Actual	2022/23 Actual	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Actual	Status	Commentary
							ensure we have the best approach possible to analysing data, managing absence and providing the most appropriate support available to staff.
Level of employee satisfaction	No target	-	-	-	3.5	No target	Employees were asked to rate on a scale of 0-5 stars their overall experience of working at Argyll and Bute Council. The indicator is the average score and will be monitored on an annual basis.
Level of customer satisfaction	92.5% combined	92.00%	97.60%	96.95%	93.00%	G	FQ4 outcomes were: 97.7% Satisfied for Customer Service Points (455 question responses), 96.4% satisfaction for Contact Centre (from 403 survey respondents), 100% satisfaction with Registration Service from 85 survey respondents and 78% Web Visit satisfaction, giving an overall satisfaction score of 93%.

Increasing the use of our website and self-service tools

In 2024/25 there were 638,863 customer interactions dealt with via all channels by our Customer Engagement Team (up from 661k in 23/24). Of these 155,257 were handled in some way by Customer Service Agents (23%) and 528,606 were automated or self-service transactions (77.3%).

This was increase of 18,000 on the previous year and so the % of digital transactions rose from 76% and thus the target was achieved. Website page views increased by over 5%.

Improving our customer service

We have two main measures of customer satisfaction at a corporate level, that on satisfaction with the Customer Engagement Team (Contact Centre, Service Points, Website, Registration) and that measured independently through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. The former showed high levels of success, averaging 96% for Contact Centre and Face to Face, 99% for the Registration Service and 98% for the accessibility aspects of the website, where we now rank second highest amongst all Scottish Councils.

It is important to note however that this reflects satisfaction with how the initial customer contacts are handled. Some services then have their own measures for how the fulfilment of those requests are done by the back-office teams. The LGBF also measure this for some services and out of the 11 indicators four had improved, with overall satisfaction increasing from 55% in the base Year to 82% last year.

Award Recognition for Outstanding Innovation and Service

We're proud to share that our teams have received prestigious recognition for their work in 2025.



Our Housing Services Team has won the Innovation Award at this year's Empty Homes Network (EHN) Awards, for its project aimed at bringing properties back into use.

Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) staff and were highly commended in Meeting the Challenge Award and the Best Partnership Award, highlighting their creative and impactful approach to housing solutions.

At the Scottish Local Authority Building Standards Scotland Awards, our Building Standards Team received the Outstanding Service and Commitment Award in recognition of their exceptional support to other local authorities.

Over the past nine years, the team has led commercialisation efforts on behalf of eight partner councils, processing 3,409 building warrants for projects with a combined works value exceeding £166 million.



Supporting our Community Councils

We continue to support community councils both from a governance perspective and also regarding some of the more unique queries that come directly to the Community Council Liaison Officer. We've seen questions about charitable status, VAT registration, issues with Service Level Agreements which previous community councils had entered into and are supporting a community council who have a binding legal agreement signed from the 1980s which they had no prior knowledge of as nobody involved in those contract negotiations remained on the community council. We successfully re-established a community council which was dormant since 2022 and commenced the necessary project planning required for our periodic review of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils to plan around key committee dates and national standards for engagement on this piece of consultative work.

Local Government elections and supporting new elected councillors

2024 saw a snap UK Parliamentary Election called on 4 July 2024 catching the whole electoral community by surprise. In normal circumstances we would have commenced planning for the election at least 6 months prior to a scheduled election taking place.

It is well documented that there are issues with the short timetable for this type of elections, and ability for specialist printers to prepare the number of postal packs required given any person can now request a postal vote. These increasing numbers of advanced voters, ongoing issues with Royal Mail, and the timing of the election being during Scottish school holidays caused huge pressure not only on the election team but also on wider council resources.

The holiday period meant we required to have new staff appointed on election contracts causing additional work for the election team and human resources teams. Issues with delays in postal votes led to significant enquiries with our team and the contact centre staff. Bespoke arrangements

were made to try to ensure that postal voters could collect replacement voting packs and complete these if they were going to be out of the area when the main issue of postal votes were due to be delivered. This involved staff from the wider Legal and Regulatory team being asked to receipt and ensure these were handled in accordance with the law.

This election saw us taking on part of the Highland Council area within our constituency following the review of Parliamentary boundaries which required us to work with multiple Electoral Registration Officers. It was also the first election requiring voter ID for polling station voting, and the first election where postal votes could not be returned by hand without completion of a form.

Committee Support and Member Services

In April 2024, a new Council Administration was formed. This required a number of additional special Council meetings and significant preparatory work to pick up and process changes in appointments to internal committees, representation on statutory bodies and a wide range of other external organisations at both strategic and area level, and the development and administration of a new committee and Council meetings programme. Alongside this sat the development and provision of dedicated support for elected members in a period of transition and for those adjusting to new senior roles, again at strategic and area level.

The team have also supported the Council's election team in the administration of a by-election in July 2024 following the passing of the late Cllr Robin Currie. Following the election, they provided induction support for the new councillor and have added to their learning and preparation for the significant 2027 Scottish Local Government Elections administration and larger-scale councillor induction programme which will be required.

The Elected Member Development Framework is ongoing throughout the term and includes work with individual councillors using Improvement Service resources to identify personal development needs and potential resources. We have worked with our colleagues in Human Resources & Organisational Development to facilitate access to the Council's online learning platform for all Elected Members and a "Learning Community" has been established.

The team have also delivered another extensive Members Seminar programme over the course of the year. The programme was wide-ranging and included topics such as renewables, tourism, islands strategy, data and technology and other focused sessions on key issues like the A83 Rest and Be Thankful, exploring a Single Authority Model and the housing emergency.

Building on the success of previous events and in response to member feedback, the team have supported additional externally delivered sessions offered in partnership with the Local Government Information Unit, including seminars and workshops on advanced communication skills for elected members, conflict resolution and mediation.

Following the previous year's review of the councillors' caseload management system and the establishment of the Member Zone self-service system, team representatives now participate in the Member Zone Sounding Board which brings together stakeholders to look at how the system is performing and where improvements may be possible.

Looking after our financial assets

The Council's Counter Fraud Team works alongside Revenues and Benefits, Treasury, Creditors, Payroll and Corporate Debt Recovery to protect the public purse and ensure strong financial stewardship. During 2024/25 the Counter Fraud Team contributed to the identification of £1.48m of Council Tax that required rebilling due to fraud or error. The collection of these amounts is managed through the Council's normal recovery processes, led by the Corporate Debt Recovery Team.

Key achievements across these services during the year include:

- We collected £64.5 million in Council Tax during 2024/25, £1.2 million more than was budgeted.
- A positive External Audit report was received and presented to Council in December 2024, following completion of the 2023/24 Annual Accounts audit.
- Financial monitoring packs and Budget Outlook were submitted to each Policy & Resources Committee.
- The average investment rate for 2024/25 was 5.07%, and the investments generated £2.549m of interest during the year.
- We processed 97.9% 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 £45.415m for 2023/2024 was completed by the statutory deadline with an unqualified audit certificate being received.
- Following agreement of the 2024/25 pay awards for Teaching and Non-Teaching staff by October 2024, the Payroll Team processed the uplifts and backdated payments during December 2024.

Supporting attendance

The aims of the Council's Supporting Attendance policy is to support employee wellbeing and minimise sickness absence through fair, consistent, and compassionate procedures. The policy promotes early intervention, open communication, and tailored support, including access to Occupational Health, the Employee Assistance Programme, and wellbeing initiatives. It emphasises a preventative approach, values good attendance, and ensures that all employees are treated individually and respectfully, in line with the Council's core values.

Increasing absence rates are a national trend across local government in Scotland. Since the introduction of our wellbeing strategy in 2019 the council has improved its ranking in relation to sickness absence by 10 places. Therefore, while our absence rates are increasing and there will be targeted work by the Human Resources & Organisational Development team to continue to tackle this, they are increasing at a slower rate than the national picture.

The team are preparing to review the Supporting Attendance at Work procedures in the next 12 months to further enhance its effectiveness in addressing high levels of staff absence and to strengthen support for employee wellbeing.

Supporting Our People: Insights and Wellbeing Initiatives

We conducted an employee survey to gather feedback from staff across all services on their experiences working with the council. The survey explored key areas such as leadership, workplace relationships, workload, wellbeing, and the overall working environment. Follow-up focus groups were held to delve deeper into the findings. Analysis from these sessions has been completed and will be presented to the Senior Leadership Forum in 2025. A comprehensive report, including recommendations and proposed actions, is currently being drafted.

We continue to prioritise employee wellbeing. Our enhanced Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) now offers services previously unavailable through our former provider, including physiotherapy and GP appointments. These additions are helping staff access essential support more quickly than through traditional NHS routes. We are also reviewing our Mental Health First Aiders service to ensure it meets current needs. Once approved the updated service will be promoted to all staff, aiming to provide timely support for mental health concerns and help reduce absence durations.

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 crosscutting 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.

Further information can be found within the Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting area on the council website. [Audit and Scrutiny Committee - Argyll and Bute Council \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

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

Executive Director Kirsty Flanagan has eleven red risks which relate to: 1) 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, storage and disposal costs (food) etc; 2) Availability of Suitable Temporary Accommodation and Housing Support; 3) Road Maintenance Culverts under 1.5m where extreme localised weather may result in loss of culvert or road loss; 4) Winter Maintenance in respect of adverse weather conditions which require greater than budgeted number of gritting runs; 5) Waste Disposal in relation to the Biodegradable Municipal Waste Ban (known as the BMW Ban); 6) Aging bridges and retaining wall assets which require a level of investment which is currently unaffordable, to ensure a resilient road network; 7) Cyber Security in managing the Council's assets to ensure they are available to users and meet the needs of the business; 8) vulnerable roads near to the coastline; 9) vulnerability of access to and from Argyll and Bute during severe weather events and/or RTCs where roads or routes are closed; 10) non-compliance with state subsidy regulations with regards to Council and externally funded projects dealt with by the Transformation Projects Team; 11) Roads reconstruction capital funding will be significantly reduced in the coming financial year.

Executive Director Douglas Hendry has nine red risk in relation to 1) Failure to maintain the school estate 2) Failure to ensure that Council offices, depots and other properties are improved 3) Increased utility costs 4) Resource – unavailability of Project Management, Professional Services and/or Contractor resources 5) Finance – unavailability of internal capital funding 6) Compliance with conditions of all external funding 7) Capital receipts targets are not met or revenue generating projects not delivered 8) Commercial Catering and Events not meeting financial targets and 9) Challenges within HSCP in identifying budget savings within timescale due to work required to ensure service standards are being met.

Operational Risk Registers are monitored on a quarterly basis at Departmental Management Team meetings and are managed accordingly.

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.

Challenge - Allocation of the Scottish Welfare Fund

A key challenge was managing high demand within the limitations of the Scottish Government's initial programme funding, which was insufficient to meet local needs.

Action

In response to a projected overspend, the Council allocated an additional £250,000 early in the year to ensure continued support for vulnerable residents. Through careful budget management and a focus on high and medium priority cases, we successfully reduced the Council's actual contribution to £90,000, maintaining a strong level of support throughout. Although a one-off additional funding allocation

was issued by the Scottish Government in January, we did not need to use it in-year. However, the need for this additional allocation highlighted the inadequacy of the original funding levels. This funding will be carried forward into 2025/26 to mitigate potential future overspends.

Challenge - Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

Key challenges include difficulty to identify Universal Credit (Housing Costs) claimants affected by the Bedroom Tax without direct Department of Work and Pensions data and barriers reaching tenants in the private rented sector, where DHP take-up remains low. This resulted in DHP spend at 89.2% and below the 96% target.

Action

Planned improvements for 2025/26 include closer collaboration with Registered Social Landlords within GDPR guidelines to proactively identify and support vulnerable tenants and enhanced information-sharing and joint working with housing colleagues. We are planning for greater promotion of DHP availability to private sector tenants. Introduction of a revised DHP policy, currently under consultation, to be brought to Council in 2025/26 to improve strategic targeting and delivery.

Challenge - Welfare Rights Advice in Health Partnerships Initiative

Through this new partnership and referral pathway we have been building links with GP practices. Due to rural locations, it was initially difficult to identify GP practices where an adequate number of referrals could be achieved.

Action

We have identified two additional surgeries where we will be offering this service to reach more clients.

Challenge – Access to financial support for those that need it most

Due to the cost-of-living crisis and Welfare Reform changes some clients will continue to struggle financially even after intervention from advice services. Some clients, particularly vulnerable individuals and families can be hard to reach and engage with and may have unmet needs.

Action

We have planned increased community engagement with partners and community groups in 2024-25 to increase awareness of the Welfare Rights Service and what we do. It also ensures clients and partners know how to access the service for support.

Challenge - Achieving and sustaining positive destinations for young people

Young people across Argyll and Bute face several barriers to achieving and sustaining positive destinations. Remote rurality and transport links, routinely involve dislocation from home to attend further and higher education establishments. Additionally, post Covid-19, a higher proportion of young people are finding engaging with full time education or employment challenging. The requirement to develop young people's confidence,

resilience and agency is as important as ensuring they are developing the skills to engage with Argyll and Bute's local economy and skills gaps and the national employment landscape.

Action

Education, Developing the Young Workforce and partners are working to identify key areas of future employment - e.g. tourism, hospitality, renewables, construction, social care, aquaculture and inform and facilitate young people's engagement with these industries.

Challenge - Impact of COVID on young children's speech, language and communication development

Impact of COVID lockdowns on young children's speech, language and communication development continues to be mirrored within our own data with reports that children present in greater numbers with underdeveloped speech and reduced vocabulary than in previous years. In addition, the number of children with underdeveloped communication and emotional regulation difficulties appear to have increased. Difficulties recruiting HSCP allied health professionals, presents an increasing challenge for ELC staff in supporting children's development, and for us to meet developmental milestone targets across our authority.

Action

We are working with health and allied health colleagues, nationally and locally, to support the development of early language and literacy through targeted block model interventions which allows for deeper focus in the areas where it is required.

Challenge – Modern apprenticeships with Argyll and Bute Council

Opportunities for Modern Apprenticeships has remained consistent however there is a need to create more and varied apprenticeships and ensure we can offer the best possible support for young people in the workplace.

Action

In 2024/25 we published our Growing Our Framework which outlines the organisation's ongoing commitment to attracting the workforce of the future and will be taking forward further activities to understand and address barriers to modern apprenticeships.

Challenge – website customer satisfaction

Website satisfaction measures were difficult to collate and review as the tools to do this were no longer compatible with the new website.

Action

The web team has now fully re-engineered these to follow Govmetric principles, and we now have improved customer data to report on for 2025/26.

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 \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://argyll-bute.gov.uk/consultation-results)