



North Ayrshire Council

Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 26 June 2019

Responses to Questions

Question

(1) a question by Councillor Burns to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:-

“I welcome the decision of the First Minister and subsequently the Leader of the Council to declare a climate change emergency. This Council has taken a pro-active approach to tackling climate change since the publication of the first Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy (ESCCS) in 2014 and I welcome the process, set out in the recent Cabinet paper, which will initiate the preparation of an updated ESCCS for publication in 2020. If we are to take the climate change emergency declaration seriously, can I ask the Leader to review the decision to remove climate change from the Council’s risk register as recently reported to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee?”

Response

“The Strategic Risk Register forms part of the Council’s risk management processes and has clear links with the Council’s Internal Audit Plan which was recently approved by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Risk Register allows Council Services to identify actions to help mitigate against strategic risks.

The assessment of risk carried out by officers is based on the Council’s risk matrix which considers the likelihood of occurrence and the significance of the impact should it occur, both on a scale from 1 to 5 with a maximum score of 25. Only those risks rated as high or very high (10 or above) feature on the Strategic Risk Register to ensure a focus on managing the most significant risks.

Using the scoring matrix, officers risk scored Climate Change as 9 in 2019-20 – broken down as likelihood 3 and impact 3. This compared to 12 in 2018-19 when impact was scored higher at 4.

The most significant risk associated with Climate Change in North Ayrshire at this time is flooding with the areas at most risk being Millport and the Garnock Valley. The controls currently being developed by the Council, through the design of flood protection schemes in these areas, were the reason why the risk score was reduced as they will lower the impact of any incidences of major flooding. This is in line with our Flood Risk Management Strategy and local Flood Risk Management Plan.

Our decision to declare a climate change emergency in North Ayrshire is not linked to a scoring matrix of perceived risk to Council Services but is a clear demonstration of our consideration of the magnitude of this issue, its impact on the planet and on future generations.

The approach we have taken, through the Climate Change: Just Cool It consultation, and the acceleration of the next Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy demonstrates our wider commitment to ensuring that the Council continues to provide civic leadership in tackling climate change.”

Question

- (2) a question by Councillor Dickson to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:-

“Can I ask the Leader how he feels local businesses, community groups and political parties are best able to promote events in North Ayrshire?”

Response

“The Council is currently engaged in improving the coordination of its processes to advise and support event organisers as a result of the Council Motion in 2018. Aspects of events support have already been improved and processes across departments and inter-agency partners are now being improved by a member/officer group supported by the Transformation team.

We have recognised that audiences for events seek their information in many different ways. We therefore encourage and work with event organisers to take advantage of multiple channels to promote their events.

Ayrshire Social media campaigns are the preferred method for many but there can still also a role for leaflets and flyers in local shops and venues, as well as promotion through local newspapers and media. North Ayrshire Council support local events, often through our communications team promoting them via our social media channels. For larger events, we can also direct partners to support through Visit Scotland and their forward events calendar. For events that the Council are advancing, we aim to ensure maximum local buy in and support by working directly with local groups and the locality planning framework.”

Question

(3) a question by Councillor Gurney to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:-

“It is now policy to allow large swathes of council land to revert to their natural state in the hope of encouraging biodiversity.

What steps are being taken to ensure that the resultant foliage achieves that goal and does not simply become overtaken by a weed monoculture or, worse, non-indigenous invasive species?”

Response

“The Council has a Biodiversity Action Plan which encourages relaxed grass cutting for environmental benefits. We also know from the very successful participatory budget approach to grounds maintenance that communities also want to see more wildflower areas and naturalised areas.

The Council’s Streetscene service has a wealth and depth of knowledge of managing our landscape. Areas identified for relaxed cutting (wild flower meadow creation) have been chosen for their appropriate location and to ensure they complement the existing maintained grounds the people of North Ayrshire enjoy. Relaxed grass cutting and the promotion of biodiversity still requires areas to be monitored and maintained, with at least an annual grass cut to ensure seed dispersal and growth to provide a good mix where wild flower species can grow.

In respect of the question on weeds, the un-predictability of relaxed grass cutting means that weeds may appear, as well as many other wild species, that’s nature - but areas will continue to be monitored to ensure attractiveness and appropriate appearance.

In respect of non-indigenous invasive species the Council will take all appropriate measures to control this as it does at the moment for its land, including spraying, stem injection and indeed any other appropriate measures to ensure its controlled and/or eradicated.

The new and tested relaxed grass cutting approach will continue to be monitored as the wild flower meadow species continue to develop.”

Question

- (4) a question by Councillor Hill to the Cabinet Member for the Economy in the following terms:-

“Can the Portfolio Holder explain why the consultation from Peel Holdings in respect of the Hunterston site was passed to the Planning Committee for comment rather than Cabinet, and why no views were sought from local Elected Members?”

Response

“The Peel Ports Master Plan is not a formal document within the Planning Regulatory System, but it was felt that it would be appropriate, in the interests of openness and transparency, for both the company and for the public of North Ayrshire, to put on record the Council's position on the content of the Master Plan.

While the consultation response could have gone to either Planning Committee or Cabinet, on balance it was thought preferable to take it to Planning as the proposed masterplan raised issues which were relevant to the developing LDP2 as well as other issues, which the Planning Committee was familiar with through planning applications and consultations. The wider economic regeneration context was fed into the report. An updated response will be prepared in the light of the comments from the planning committee.

There were opportunities for views on the masterplan to be communicated directly with the Peel Ports senior management team at a briefing specially arranged for local members held on 15 May 2019 at Cunningham House. In addition, public consultation events were held by Peel Ports Group at Fairlie Village Hall (4-6 June) and Garrison House, Millport (6 June). Peel Port Group's consultation runs until Friday 28 June.”

Question

- (5) a question by Councillor Murdoch to the Chair of the Planning Committee in the following terms:-

“Can the Chair of Planning confirm that no councillor or officer at North Ayrshire Council suggested that the Oil Rig Decommissioning Planning Application should be lodged in three parts?”

Response

“The question arises from a meeting between a Planning Officer, Scottish Natural Heritage and representatives of Peel Ports. The meeting was not minuted and the Planning Officer has since retired. It is not known who proposed lodging three applications. It was the applicant's decision to submit three applications. The approach was accepted and the application determined by the Planning Committee on the 25th April 2018.”