



North Ayrshire Council

Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 2 November 2022

Responses to Questions

Question

- (1) a question by Councillor Marshall to the Cabinet Member for Education in the following terms:

"Noting that Dunoon Grammar has adapted its Curriculum to provide 50 courses which reflect key sectors of the local economy such as tourism and marine studies as well as community projects and as a result was named ahead of runners-up in Brazil and India to win a \$50,000 prize as the T4 Education World's Best School for Community Collaboration, what lessons can the Council learn to apply to its rural and coastal Academies and High School to mirror the success of Dunoon?"

Response

"We extend our congratulations to Dunoon Grammar on its achievement in this interesting and novel award. It will be interesting to see the advantage in terms of attainment and positive destinations of these additions to the school's curriculum.

In North Ayrshire, our schools are regularly reviewing their curricula and have been doing so for several years. The purpose of these curriculum reviews is to ensure the curriculum provides a broad and balanced range of activity and subject and that these enable the children and young people to develop knowledge, skills and experiences which lead to recognised and valuable qualifications.

Schools across North Ayrshire have developed their curricula significantly, similarly to Dunoon Grammar, to provide an extensive range of qualifications to improve the educational experience of young people and reflect the needs of the local labour market intelligence. This extended curriculum offers qualifications in a broad range of areas including, but not limited to, Travel & Tourism, Rural Skills, Retail, Hospitality, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Leadership and Personal Development providing young people with a wide variety of skills to access positive pathways beyond school and support the local economy.

The educational experience of our young people is further enhanced through individual and unique rural and outdoor experiences, including Arran Outdoor Education Centre which also exploits the local rural and coastal resources to provide the best possible experiences for young people in North Ayrshire.

School curricula are supported through our work with local partners such as Ayrshire College, SDS, Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce and local businesses. For example, schools and Ayrshire College work very closely to develop their curriculum offering to ensure provision of courses which meet the needs of our young people and local labour market intelligence. The Ayrshire Chamber of Commerce work closely with all schools and local businesses to provide an extensive work experience programme to support skills development for young people and support future labour market growth. This is obviously underpinned by the Ayrshire Growth Deal which seeks to provide the strategic overview and direction for any future partnership working or curriculum developments.

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As an authority and across the whole of Ayrshire we have begun a fresh review of our curriculum which will be a major feature of our service improvement plan for the next three years. This work will build on the recent OECD report on Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence. Indeed, all our Head teachers alongside their counterparts from across East and South Ayrshire met on 7 October 2022 with representatives of Ayrshire College and local businesses to advance our discussions and to plan next steps in a collaborative and innovative way.

As always, the Education Service continues to look outwards and learns from our colleagues' best practice wherever that may be to maximise the potential of all young people across North Ayrshire."

Question

(2) a question by Councillor Montgomerie to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:

"After 100 years on Saltcoats High Street local businesses Gregor Watsons recently announced that it will close, potentially leaving Saltcoats with another vacant retail unit on our Hight Street. Does the Cabinet Member believe the introduction of parking charges will make it easier or harder for local businesses to survive in the current economic climate, and for the Council to bring vacant properties back into productive use?"

Response

"A key desired outcome of introducing DPE and parking charges is the improved regulation of traffic in our town centres, by directing long stay patrons to free parking slightly further out while providing chargeable and short stay parking close to retail and other town centre services. This will provide enhanced access to parking close by to retail and other businesses within towns and in so doing, encourage greater footfall from patrons within towns and villages.

Recent monitoring of our town centre car parks has shown that they are extremely busy with workers by 9 am making it difficult for visitors and shoppers to find parking spaces. It is also clear that disabled parking bays are being abused by non blue badge holders thereby restricting access for disabled people to find an accessible parking space.

The introduction DPE and parking charges should therefore provide a turnover of parking spaces for visitors and shoppers within our town centres thereby improving opportunities for local businesses. DPE will also give us the powers to tackle irresponsible drivers who abuse the use of disabled parking bays."

Question

- (3) a question by Councillor Collier to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care in the following terms:

“What work is being carried out by HSCP to support individuals in accessing residential rehabilitation?”

Response

“The national mission to reduce drug related deaths and harms has set out the ambition to save and improve lives. Access to Residential Rehabilitation is a key part of the National Mission, the vision being that residential rehab is available to everybody that wants it, and for whom it is deemed to be clinically appropriate, at the time they ask for it in every part of Scotland.

Locally the HSCP has been working closely in partnership with the ADP to ensure appropriate and timely access to residential rehabilitation in North Ayrshire. £5m of funding has been provided nationally, the North Ayrshire share of this being £136k, this funding is to support the development of rehab pathways and an increase in the number of people being referred to residential rehabilitation.

The HSCP and ADP are jointly committed to supporting individuals to access residential rehab and have engaged with a range of services, clinical and care leads, and individuals, families and staff from across services to successfully develop the North Ayrshire residential rehabilitation pathway. This pathway has now been published and promoted on the HSCP web site and shared across services.

The North Ayrshire Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service (NADARS) is an integrated health and social care service and anyone can refer to this service - individuals, families, carers, primary care, prison or any support service. Individuals seeking to access external Residential Rehabilitation (RR) support can do so through NADARS who will support the development of a care plan, identify a residential rehab provider and then support individuals into, through and after their external placement.

There are a range of residential rehabilitation support opens now available to North Ayrshire residents in addition to access to external provision. This includes access to our local 10 bedded ward in Woodland View which provides hospital-based alcohol and/or drug and mental health related detoxification, rehabilitation and day attendance support. Since April 2020 114 individuals from North Ayrshire have been supported to access residential rehabilitation support with a further 229 individuals supported to access detoxification support in Woodland View.

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In addition, locally we are fortunate to be working closely with Phoenix Futures to plan for the opening of the National Specialist Family Service, Harper House which is based in Saltcoats. The HSCP have been closely working with Phoenix Futures to ensure our local services are able to support and complement the service and also to ensure robust referral pathways and criteria for local families to access support at Harper House, due to local services and wrap around support available in North Ayrshire our residents and their families will benefit from more complex needs being supported in the facility. This is an exciting development which will build on the range of rehabilitation supports and interventions available to our residents.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance how much new capital investment has been made into Springside Primary school since the decision to keep the school open in 2008, not including maintenance and repairs, and not including monies spent on the new Early Years Centre?”

Response

“The Property Management and Investment (PMI) team undertake a rolling programme of Condition Surveys across the corporate estate, including all educational establishments. We have a statutory duty to report on the condition of schools through the “Core Facts Return” which is submitted to the Scottish Government. Springside Primary School has been assessed as having a “B” (Satisfactory) rating at the most recent survey (2019).

All general maintenance, statutory compliance and reactive repairs have been carried out to ensure the property is maintained to the appropriate standard. From the financial records available which date back to 2013/14 a total of £152,289 has been invested across these areas. Investment in the Early Years extension totalled £566,752 across 2019/20 to 2021/22. This expenditure included freeing up and refurbishment of a general purpose area within the school and drainage infrastructure improvements to benefit the whole building.

The Condition Surveys, alongside information gathered by the locality Maintenance Officers, allow us to prioritise investment across the estate. At present, there are no elements within Springside Primary which have been identified as a priority for investment.”

Question

- (5) a question by Councillor Donald Reid to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet Member how many applicants are on the North Ayrshire Housing Register with Kilwinning within their choices of area to be considered.”

Response

“The North Ayrshire Housing Register is a shared register which is jointly operated by North Ayrshire Council and our RSL partners - Riverside Homes; Cunninghame Housing Association; and ANCHO. It is a live system that changes daily as new housing applications are registered and other applications are updated or cancelled. Applications are held in one of the seven ‘needs’ groups and awarded points and consequential priority that reflect the applicant’s housing circumstances. If no points are awarded, it means the applicant does not have an assessed housing need as defined by the Housing Allocations Policy.

Applicants can choose as many areas as they wish from the 63 letting areas across North Ayrshire. Staff carry out housing options interviews with applicants and actively encourage them to include several areas to maximise their likelihood of receiving an offer.

As at Wednesday 26 October, I can confirm we have a total of 6,715 applications on the North Ayrshire wide register, of which 3,346 applications have been allocated points. This equates to 50% of applications.

Again at 26 October, the total number of applicants who have included at least one of the 8 Kilwinning letting areas within their preferences is 1,922. Of these there are 1,081 applicants who have been awarded points/priority. This equates to 56% of all applications for Kilwinning.

359 applicants have chosen Kilwinning areas only, with 197 of these applicants having points/ priority awarded (54%).”

Question

- (6) a question by Councillor McTiernan to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care in the following terms:

“Given the current pressures which have been widely reported in the media for Health and Social Care Services across Scotland, there are significant concerns on how the system will cope with the impending winter period. Can the Cabinet Member for H&SC provide an update to Council on the local position and a reassurance on any winter plans in North Ayrshire?”

Response

“Similar to other areas in Scotland the Ayrshire and Arran health and social care system remains under immense pressure. The impact and legacy of the pandemic is ongoing alongside the continued stresses placed on the workforce and increased demand for services. The pressures are most visible at the hospitals where emergency access performance standards are not met, there are ambulance delays to hand over patients, there is an increased length of stay, all of which lead to poorer outcomes for our citizens.

Despite efforts, continued pressures to date have not enabled the de-escalation of either acute Hospital in Ayrshire and Arran and there has not been the closure of any of the additional beds opened to support the surge in Covid inpatient numbers. A further HSCP sponsored focussed intervention is planned for two weeks from 7th November which will involve the three HSCPs deploying community teams into the acute sites to support patient discharge.

There is a continued focus on prioritising packages of care for individuals in hospital. However, the impact of this is the continued risk posed to those in the community who have been assessed as requiring support. In North Ayrshire 85% of the current hours of unmet need for care at home services are for individuals on the community waiting list and a significant number of individuals are awaiting assessment and review.

In October 2021 over £300m of investment in hospital and community care was announced to support a range of measures with the overarching aim being to reduce risks in community settings and supporting flow through acute hospitals. A total of £3.4million was allocated to North Ayrshire specifically for interim care, Multi-Disciplinary Teams and Care at Home capacity, the majority of this funding has now been provided on a recurring basis.

The North Ayrshire HSCP Winter Funding Plan was approved by the IJB in December 2021. This focusses on a whole system approach to bolstering the care workforce by increasing numbers of staff in key areas of community services, with a longer-term focus on increasing capacity across our system and to invest in services which focus on early intervention and prevention and the alternatives to hospital admission. When the plan was approved it was with the caveat of the scale and pace of the impact being wholly reliant on successful recruitment.

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Recruitment is ongoing with a number of key posts now appointed to including additional Social Workers and Social Work Assistants, Community Occupational Therapists, Health Care Support Workers and a range of roles within Care at Home services. For Care at Home there has been a constant focus on recruitment and these efforts have led to a net increase in the workforce over the period. This has led to a significant improvement in the Hospital waiting list which in North Ayrshire is now sitting at the lowest position it has been, this also allows our in-house respite facility to return to fully providing respite support over the winter period. The position with commissioned care providers remains fragile with many citing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of staff and therefore are unable to offer sustainable care provision and an inability to support new services.

In terms of providing the reassurance of any winter plans in North Ayrshire I can reassure members that the HSCP have an investment plan in place to increase capacity and there are business continuity and escalation plans in place across services. I can also reassure members that the HSCP will continue to take all the necessary steps to manage and escalate the risk in the system, however despite this there is no doubt we are heading for a very difficult winter period for health and care services."

Question

(7) a question by Councillor Gallacher to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:

"Will the new Administration commit to reinstating the disabled fishing platform behind Lamont Drive in Irvine?"

Response

"The previous angling platform was removed following complaints from the Angling Club that it was in a dangerous condition. After removal, officers have continued to support the Club, and assisted by seeking bids from contractors for a replacement platform. Unfortunately, the bid received was not affordable. Although the Council does not have funding nor any responsibility for the replacement of the platform, it is anticipated that the Angling Club will qualify for grant funding the Council would not have access to. An officer will contact the group to discuss opportunities that may be open to them and will assist through the provision of professional services with the specification design for a new angling platform and with engaging a contractor, if required."

Question

- (8) a question by Councillor McPhater to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Climate Change in the following terms:

"How many of our residents have received travel passes from the "Public Transport Travel Scheme", approved by Cabinet in June 22?"

Response

"The Active Travel and Transport Team are engaging closely with the Council's Employability Team, the Lennox Partnership, Skills Development Scotland and CEIS to identify appropriate beneficiaries for the travel assistance scheme. This has been successful with the first cohort of travel passes and bespoke travel plans being issued this week."

Question

- (9) a question by Councillor T. Ferguson to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

"To ask the Leader of the Council what discussions have taken place with the business sector to promote and attract employment opportunities to North Ayrshire?"

Response

"The Economic Development and Regeneration Teams have strong connections with the local business base and continue to provide significant support and advice on a daily basis. During the pandemic these links were further strengthened as officers provided essential guidance and advice to assist businesses during unprecedented economic times and administered a wide range of business support grants.

The Community Wealth Building Strategy, the Recovery and Renewal Approach, the Green Jobs Fund and the Local Employability Partnership Delivery Plan all provide a range of approaches and mechanisms designed to support business growth and investment into North Ayrshire.

In addition to supporting the existing business base, there is extensive work ongoing to attract inward investment to the area. There are currently 24 live inward investment enquiries ranging from new technology to secondary company investment proposals. A significant upturn has also been observed in enquiries based on new green technologies wishing to invest in the area which will assist in ensuring a Green Economic Recovery."

Question

- (10) a question by Councillor Bell to the Cabinet Member for Finance in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance if staff have received the backdated 2022/23 pay award in their pay packets?”

Response

“The Scottish Joint Council (SJC) Circular from COSLA has been received which outlines the pay award for 2022/23. This will be implemented and paid to the local government workforce by December 2022, this will include arrears from 1st April 2022.

Communications, including FAQs, will be issued to the local government workforce to confirm the details, arrangements for pay and provide guidance and support should this be required.”

Question

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

“How can North Ayrshire Council help support the Arran Ferry Committee in its efforts to encourage Transport Scotland, Peel Ports and Calmac to provide a speedy permanent solution to the damaged fenders at Ardrossan which are causing continued cancellation of key early and late ferry sailings?”

Response

“North Ayrshire Council has recently engaged directly with Peel Ports and CMAL regarding the condition of the fenders at Ardrossan Harbour. Peel Ports advised that the fenders were damaged however they were replaced to full working order in September 2022. The replacement fenders fully conformed to Transport Scotland’s specification. These have subsequently been damaged within that last 4-6 weeks.

Peel Ports have advised that Transport Scotland do not have any fender plates across the network that are the correct dimensions for at Ardrossan Harbour. Replacement faceplates were ordered several weeks ago and are expected to be delivered in approximately 4 weeks’ time. In the meantime, they are trying to fabricate a faceplate that if successful they will fit weather dependent over the coming weekend.

North Ayrshire Council will continue to liaise with all stakeholders (TS, Peel Ports, CMAL, CalMac) regarding the ongoing maintenance and operation of Ardrossan Harbour to support the resilience of the services.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member where North Ayrshire Council was ranked for recycling performance amongst Scottish local authorities in 2016?”

Response

“Thank you for your enquiry regarding the Council's recycling performance for the year 2016. SEPA publishes annual figures of all local authorities on a calendar basis. I can therefore confirm that for 2016 North Ayrshire Council were ranked 5th performing council in Scotland for recycling, with a household recycling rate of 55.3% for 2016.”

Question

- (13) a question by Councillor T. Ferguson to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet portfolio holder for Place to provide an update on the investigation into the paused roll out of Facial Recognition software in our schools.”

Response

“The matter is still with the Information Commissioner's Office and the outcome is awaited. Members will be advised when the Commissioner's decision letter has been received.”

Question

- (14) a question by Councillor McDonald to the Cabinet Member for Economy and Climate Change in the following terms:

“North Ayrshire Council agreed its budget for 2022/23 eight months ago. Included in the budget was £1.726million for an energy support fund, now called “Energy Smart”, to help residents through the cost-of-living crisis. Eight months on, can the Cabinet Member advise us how many residents have received support from the “Energy Smart” scheme?”

Response

“As at the end of October, 460 households have received support through the Energy Smart scheme.”

Question

(15) a question by Councillor McLean to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Place if he is concerned about the state of the old Dreghorn Primary School building on the Main Street and the incessant vandalism to the site?”

Response

“The property has suffered extensive vandalism. The property owner, has advised that they have taken preventative measures to reduce the potential for vandalism on site. The owners are currently engaging with the Council's Planning, Regeneration and Business Growth Services. This is with a view to identifying potential options for the repurposing and redevelopment of the building.

The property owner is in the process of preparing an application to the Council's Repurposing Property Grant Fund for a feasibility study on the building. Officers have provided support and guidance to the owner to prepare a brief and enable them to obtain the required tenders to support their application. We anticipate receipt of an application over the next month and subject to funding, completion of the study in the current financial year.

Officers will continue to support and liaise with the property owner.”.

Question

(16) a question by Councillor Kerr to the Cabinet Member for Finance in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance what impact the current instability in economic markets is having on the Council’s Capital Financing Requirement for the approved Capital Programme, and what subsequent impact that will have on the Loans Fund Principal Repayment?”

Response

“Work to assess the affordability of the capital programme commenced in August of this year. The anticipated cost of borrowing from the capital expenditure plans over the duration of the capital programme to 2030/31 was based on advice from the Council’s Treasury Management Advisors and was set at a flat 3.30% interest rate forecast across the life of the plan. The general construct of this borrowing from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) was based on a 20 Year Gilt yield at 2.50% plus 0.80% to produce a PWLB Certainty rate of 3.30%. At this time, to support the current level of capital investment and provide headroom of up to potentially £25 million of additional cost pressures from the cost volatility in the construction sector, this required an additional £5.550 million revenue investment to be added into the loans fund between 2023/24 to 2030/31. From the events that followed the mini-budget announcement on the 23 September 2022, the Council’s Treasury Management Advisors provided updated PWLB rate forecasts of 5.05% for 2022/23, 4.80% for 2023/24 and 4.60% for 2024/25 onwards. The consequence of this increase was a change to the projected financial position from a previously anticipated additional £5.550 million to £38 million additional revenue investment required. There remains a level of turbulence around the rates. On 28 September the PWLB certainty rate rose to 5.74%, however, the published position at 25 October reflects a PWLB certainty rate of 4.74%. Work will continue with our Treasury Advisors to update the forecasts and cost impacts.”

Question

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

“Will the Leader agree to organise a Members’ Update on the progress that KA Leisure is making to refocus its activities on exercise as a means to aid health and wellbeing, and to be less reliant on subsidy from North Ayrshire Council for its core exercise facilities?”

Response

“The Leader will make arrangements for a Members’ Update on the progress that that KA Leisure is making to refocus its activities on exercise as a means to aid health and wellbeing in North Ayrshire. Regular updates are also part of the ongoing CPP Board discussions and delivered through an annual Cabinet report which is scheduled for annually for February 2022. Progress to date includes securing CPP Board support for KAL to lead a Wellbeing Alliance to lead the delivery of the Wellbeing priority of the new LOIP. KA Leisure continues to work towards recovering its business with its membership now at just under 8000. Additional capacity for reviewing financial systems and processes has been provided by the Council and this work is ongoing.”

Question

- (18) a question by Councillor Foster to the Leader of the Conservative and Unionist Group in the following terms:

“What does the Leader of the Conservative Group believe will have the worst impact on North Ayrshire residents - the rise in mortgage repayments, the run on pension funds or the imposition of austerity 2.0 arising from the Tories “mini-budget”?”

Response

Councillor Marshall will respond.

Question

- (19) a question by Councillor Marshall to the Cabinet Member for Education in the following terms:

“Does the Education Portfolio holder support the proposal in the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill as debated at Holyrood that will allow people as young as 16 to legally change their gender?”

Response

Councillor Macaulay will respond.

Question

(20) a question by Councillor McDonald to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care in the following terms:

“It has been reported that the Scottish Government want to “reclaim” reserves from Health and Social Care Partnerships. Can the Cabinet Member tell us how much funding for health and social care services in North Ayrshire could be grabbed back by the Scottish Government under this move?”

Response

“At the end of February 2022, the Scottish Government wrote to Integration Joint Boards to advise that significant additional funding was being made available to meet Covid costs and the ongoing impact of the pandemic, this resulted in the North Ayrshire IJB carrying forward an earmarked Covid reserve of £13.321m into 2022-23.

This funding is to be utilised by Health and Social Care Partnerships to cover additional Covid-19 related costs associated with delegated services, to support any loss of income as a result of services being closed, and to support commissioned care providers for additional costs incurred. During 2022-23 the funding can only be utilised to fund the same costs and areas which were funded in previous years and not any new areas of expenditure.

Further communication was issued by Scottish Government in September, noting that “There have been a number of significant changes to Public Health policies in relation to Covid over the summer, resulting in the profile of Covid spend reducing significantly compared to when funding was provided to IJBs for Covid purposes. In response to this, the Scottish Government will reclaim surplus Covid reserves to be redistributed across the sector to meet current Covid priorities”.

At the end of September, the projected utilisation of this funding by the HSCP for the 2022-23 financial year is £5.118m. This is significantly less than the previous two financial years, due to a reduction in additional costs as well as the provision of new funding by Scottish Government to support areas of additional expenditure which were covered by the Covid funding in previous years, for example additional funding for investment in Care at Home capacity.

This underutilisation of Covid funding is consistent across all IJBs in Scotland.

On this basis, it is anticipated that the amount reclaimed by Scottish Government from North Ayrshire IJB would be £8.203m.

The Scottish Government plan to retain this funding in the health and social care system as Health Boards locally and nationally also continue to incur additional costs as a result of the pandemic in services which are not delegated to IJBs and have not yet received any additional funding to meet these in 2022-23. The Covid funding which is reclaimed from IJBs will be redistributed to Health Boards across Scotland, including NHS Ayrshire and Arran, to meet these additional costs.”

Question

(21) a question by Councillor Foster to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“To ask the Council Leader whether they “detest the Tories”?

Response

The Leader will respond.