



North Ayrshire Council

Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 27 June 2018

Responses to Questions

Note - factual information is provided by Council Officers to support those Members answering questions. The final response remains the responsibility of the Elected Member answering.

Question

- (a) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, in the following terms:-

“Is the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care aware that 1 in 4 children (230,000) in Scotland were living in poverty between 2014 and 2017 and that the respected Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that this will increase by 50% by 2021, and can he:-

(1) confirm to Members the estimated number of young people in NA living in poverty in that same period (2014-17); and

(2) advise what steps NAC propose to take to ensure that we have in a place a plan for NAC to ameliorate this trend of increasing levels of child poverty.”

Response

“Based on the period stated we can show the estimates based on the National Records of Scotland mid-year population figures. The information is based on **children living in poverty, after housing costs** and shows the following:

mid year est	Dec-14	6,365
mid year est	Nov-16	7,031
mid year est	Sep-17	6,700

Child poverty is complex and relies on a coordinated strategic approach across a range of partner agencies to increase the likelihood of equity and address inequalities in our communities. North Ayrshire’s Integrated Children Services Plan (2016-2020) Getting it Right for You recognises this and aims to give children in North Ayrshire the best start in life.

For example, we now provide access to Money Matters advice and guidance via our Health Visiting Service. All families with children under 5 years old will automatically be given access to money matters advice, unless they opt out of the support. This approach enables the release of around £260,000 of additional benefits to households of children in need annually since 2015/16, this is around £4,000 per family supported.

Other interventions and supports;

We work for Families

We have also introduced the “We work for families” (WWFF) programme. This programme works with Health Visitors providing access to all families with young children a specialist employability and skills service. Offering a range of supports to parents, enabling and empowering them to enter future employment. The programme also includes assistance with debt and child care advice, housing and literacy support. Thus assisting to address barriers to entering meaningful employment or education. There is also access to funds for child care so that parents can attend training, education and work placements.

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Health start vouchers

The Universal Early Year service work with families to enable uptake through the national Healthy start voucher scheme. This scheme enables families, who have children under four or who are pregnant and on benefits or those who are pregnant under 18 years old, to free vouchers to spend on milk, plain flour, infant formula milk, frozen fruit as well as free vitamins.

Our work to ensure that children continue to have access to food over the school holiday periods continues with excellent cross-directorate collaboration, providing activities and food for many children and their families.

Despite this level of investment and prioritisation given by the Integrated Children's Services Plan, there remain significant challenges, not least of which is the attraction of investment and creation of jobs in North Ayrshire. The most effective way of addressing child poverty is to put money in the pockets of parents and despite some recent well-published disappointments, we continue to work with Scottish Government colleagues to bring investment to the area and, along with it, the jobs needed to prevent children living in poverty and to ensure they have the best possible start in life."

Question

(b) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Communities, in the following terms:-

"Can the Cabinet Member for Communities:-

(1) advise if there is any indication of the local impact being felt as a result of the closure of North Ayrshire Citizen Advice Service (NACAS) in terms of providing advice and support to our poorest residents when all the evidence points to the real benefits of having advice services readily available and accessible; and

(2) say whether there has been an assessment made of the impact on our own NAC Money Advice Service following the closure of NACAS and are there any plans to bolster this vital service."

Response

"Following the announcement of the closure of North Ayrshire Citizens Advice services, the Council issued press releases to direct people with a need for advice to contact either the Better Off North Ayrshire service or the Council's Money Matters team. During April and May, the Better Off North Ayrshire Service saw some increase in people accessing the services but it is difficult to assess whether this is as a result of the closure of NACAS or a natural consequence of growing levels of publicity about the service and word of mouth.

Contd/

Money Matters has seen an increase in enquiries to the Service with 529 in April / May 2017 compared to 619 for 2018. It is important to note that enquiries are more complex and time consuming now as we see more service users having to claim Universal Credit. There has also been an increase in Appeal work from 128 appeals in April and May 2017 to 141 appeals in 2018. The appeals are primarily in relation to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA). The Welfare Rights Officers at Appeals continue to achieve success with a 75% success rate in April 2018 and 73% in May 2018.

Over £1.2m has also been generated by the Team in income maximisation in April and May 2018.

Better Off North Ayrshire is a Big Lottery/European Social Fund programme to support low income residents with money issues. The 3 year target is to support over 3000 low income residents, with the programme now in its second year of delivery.

The Council is acutely aware of the issues residents face, in particular in dealing with money and benefits issues. While we believe we have made an effective response to the closure of the North Ayrshire Citizens Advice, there is an ongoing need to ensure access to good quality provision is available to those most in need. With a view to this, the Council is undertaking a review of advice services including Money Matters and Better Off North Ayrshire as part of its transformation programme and will make recommendations about the future landscape of advice provision required. Discussions have also taken place with Citizens Advice Scotland to ensure that the closure of NACAS was handled as well as possible."

Question

- (c) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, in the following terms:-

"The Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care will be aware that suicide is a growing problem in men under 50 in Scotland and indeed is now that age group's leading cause of death. Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations advise that some 728 people took their own lives Scotland in 2017 - 75% of whom were male. Can the Cabinet Member (a) provide details of the number of suicides in North Ayrshire in 2017 (or 2016 if 2017 figures are not available) and if practicable give a breakdown by age and sex; and (b) give brief details of any current or planned initiatives to combat the number of suicides in North Ayrshire."

Response

"(a) NHS Health Scotland will be officially releasing the suicide statistics for 2017 on Wednesday 27 June at 09:30am when a briefing and press release will be released.

In 2016 there were 728 deaths by suicide in Scotland. There were 47 across Ayrshire and Arran as a whole, in North Ayrshire there were 21 deaths, 15 males and 6 females. The youngest was 18 and the oldest was 79 years of age. Most were between 36 and 55 years of age (full breakdown unavailable at this time).

Contd/

Between 2012 and 2016 the rate for Ayrshire and Arran was 11.7 per 100,000 population, which was the lowest of the Health Boards. North Ayrshire's rate was 13.0 per 100,000 (the national Scottish rate was 13.2 per 100,000). Suicide rates generally increase with increasing deprivation. In 2016 the suicide rate for males was more than two and a half times that for females. The suicide rate varies between different areas within Scotland and fluctuates over time.

(b) Since 2003 there has been a partnership approach to raising awareness and taking suicide prevention forward. In 2018 we continue to take forward Suicide Prevention Activity in line with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy and locally under the Health and Social Care Partnership.

A new National Suicide Prevention Strategy is under consultation and will be produced in Summer 2018. The Choose Life Manager is employed part-time to take Suicide Prevention activities forward across North Ayrshire. The type of initiatives and activities that have taken place over the past few years are:

Roll out and delivery throughout Ayrshire of 3 multi-agency training programmes (safeTALK, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and Suicide Training on Risk Management (STORM)) – jointly with East and South Ayrshire but co-ordinated through North Ayrshire.

The Choose Life Manager delivers safeTALK training directly in North Ayrshire to a range of organisations for example - 3rd sector organisations, Schools (staff and pupils), NHS staff (physiotherapists) Addictions (staff and those in recovery), local foodbank, local churches, social services and others.

Between Jan 2016 and June 2017 over 20 training and awareness events took place across North Ayrshire – promoting information and guidance to help individuals respond to help prevent suicide.

There have been 10 safeTALK training sessions delivered in the past year in North Ayrshire alone reaching over 150 people from a range of community and other organisations

Also delivered are a range of be-spoke training initiatives to 3rd sector organisations, college students, community groups and user groups as well as other services such as Fire and Rescue-all of whose teams in North Ayrshire received a suicide briefing

A range of printed resources have been developed and produced including - police sudden death.

Currently work is being taken forward in partnership with Youth Services across the summer months in 2018 where young people will be blogging information each week to encourage young people who may be struggling to seek help, talk and support each other- and sharing information about helplines and websites which can help.

Contribution has also been made to wider campaigns including World Health Organisation "Depression-Let's Talk". The annual Suicide Prevention Awareness campaign in September has involved initiatives previously-such as bus adverts and radio adverts/interviews. A briefing note is produced and shared across the council along with information on the council website and other media platforms. Contd/

In 2017 (in partnership with the North Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership) beermats were produced with relevant information and distributed across many pubs in North Ayrshire-with the “Stop Bottling it Up” message taken into the community directly especially to target men.

Twilight sessions for education staff to highlight the multi-agency self-harm/suicide guidance (developed in partnership with CAMHS a few years ago) have been delivered across schools in North Ayrshire jointly between Penumbra, Choose Life NA and local CAMHS staff.

Choose Life NA also work with the 3rd sector organisation Touched by Suicide Scotland in North Ayrshire who provide support and self-help groups for those bereaved by suicide.

Plans are underway to develop a pilot pathway with the police and the Adult Concern Hub at Kilmarnock Police station where those immediately affected by a death by suicide can access relevant information appropriately and quickly. This involves developing a pack of information and identifying and organising training for the staff involved.

Finally there are multi-agency Strategic and Operational Groups currently co-ordinating suicide prevention activity for young people. These are co-ordinated through the Child Protection Partnership with information card, general information leaflet, young people resource sheet, small information card, newsletters and desk calendars.”

Question

(d) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, in the following terms:-

“The Portfolio holder (H&SC) may be aware that in Scotland recent research has shown that over 15,000 people fell into arrears for their care home costs over the past two years. Of the 15,733 found to be in debt, 6,443 were registered with local authorities as being the subject of debt management procedures for non-payment of social care charges. Can you portfolio holder comment on the current situation as it applies to North Ayrshire and in particular advise if anyone in North Ayrshire has ended up in court for non-payment in the past two years.”

Response

“It is worth noting that CoSLA have formally stated that, with diminishing resource and increasing demand, it is particularly important that those who are able to pay for their care, do so.

Many arrears are in respect of people in care who have sufficient capital assets to pay for their care. If that capital is tied up in a house, the Council will pay for the care costs and secure these through a charging order. That avoids any need to sell a house, and ensures that when the house is sold, the care costs are refunded to the Council. We successfully manage social debt and have not required to raise court action to recover this.

Contd/

The financial assessment process relating to care home placements is robust and has been developed and is reviewed annually by HSCP and Financial Services. Training is available for HSCP staff in relation to Income Maximisation to ensure that service users are in receipt of all relevant benefits. If any staff have queries, Money Matters is available to provide specialist knowledge.

Financial Services will calculate service user contributions based on all information received and this is subject to an annual review to ensure that the amount continues to be correct. Charges are based on the CRAG (Charging for Residential Accommodation Guide) guidelines which are devised by Scottish Government.

Service users within care homes are subject to an annual review and their financial situation is a standing agenda item for the review. This ensures that if there are any arrears in care home fees, this can be addressed as soon as possible. Also, if there are any other issues, for example, availability of personal allowance, this can be dealt with timeously.”

Question

(e) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Leader of the Council, in the following terms:-

“The Leader will be aware of the ‘Local state we’re in 2018’ report which recently surveyed 81 local authority chief executives and leaders across the UK, along with a poll of over 2,000 members of the public. Almost three-quarters (74%) of council leaders are expecting some local authorities to plunge into a “serious financial crisis” next year. A whopping 74% of council respondents said that they expect some councils to get into **serious financial crisis** in the next year – a 20% increase in the level of failure compared to last year.

Whilst it is appreciated we are living through challenging times, can the leader reassure members that NAC is not one of the local authorities likely to get into serious financial crisis this year or next and highlight what steps the executive is taking to ensure the long-term financial stability of this authority.”

Response

“The Council is focused on the long-term financial stability of North Ayrshire, this was reflected in the development of the Long Term Financial Outlook which was considered at Council on 4 October 2017. This is an important document as it gives Council sight of the potential scale of the financial challenge and provides sufficient time to develop medium and longer term solutions. The Financial Environment is one of the highest risks identified in the Council’s strategic risk register.

The Member raises an important issue but for me frames it wrong. North Ayrshire Council will not plunge into serious financial crisis this year or next, the issue is what will the public services we deliver look like after this level of austerity is imposed on us by our Parliamentarians?

Contd/

Central Government austerity has saw £82m of cuts from this Councils budget since 2010 yet when the Council set its budget for 2018/19, the gap for 2019/20 and 2020/21 exceeded £25m. Beyond 2020/21 the Long Term Financial Outlook report identifies potential future funding gaps of the order of £12m per annum.

The question members should be asking is therefore not whether the Council will be financially stable, as it will, but what will this level of austerity mean for our schools, health and social care services, CLD services including Youth Services, our libraries, local community centres and all the other vital services that this Council delivers. The challenge is – what will members across this chamber say and do to defend local government, to fight for a fair funding deal and protect services and jobs for the people of North Ayrshire?”

Question

(f) a question by Councillor Brahim to the Cabinet Member for Place, in the following terms:-

“Can the Portfolio Holder for Place advise what support is given to residents across North Ayrshire who are bereaved and require financial assistance organising funerals?”

Response

“Financial assistance for funerals where families are in financial hardship is available through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Funeral Payments scheme. This helps people on benefits and tax credits pay for some of the funeral costs.

When registering a death staff provide advice re the DWP Funeral Payment and contact details for this are provided on the letter that is issued to the customer as part of the Tell Us Once Process. Information is also available on the Deaths section on our website.

There are also a number of support organisations to which the HSCP direct people who have experienced bereavement.

The current DWP payment is being replaced by the Funeral Expenses Assistance scheme, a consultation exercise is currently underway in respect of the scheme. Funeral Expense Assistance will provide a one off payment to support people on low income benefits who need to pay for a funeral.

There is also provision for funerals through the National Assistance Act 1948. This makes provision for local authorities to deal with the dead indigent or unclaimed bodies where there was no next of kin.

The Scottish Working Group on Funeral Poverty (SWGFP) has produced an information booklet on 'Planning Your Own Funeral' which includes guidance on paying for your funeral. This is available to download and read on the Council's website and hard copies are available in public buildings.

Free training is also available for those who support people who plan funerals such as third sector organisations and the Council is considering how staff can take advantage of this training to increase and share knowledge.

Contd/

In respect of funeral charges our current fees are set at the 2017/18 national average. Bereavement fees for the under 16s are provided free of charge, this is being extended to under 18s.

The Council has developed a Bereavement Charter which has been signed up to by Council officers, elected members, funeral directors and clergy. This provides a clear set of commitments for each party to adhere to with the objective of improving the Bereavement process for families.

There is a Bereavement Working Group in place, consisting of elected members, clergy, funeral directors & Council staff, which meets quarterly. The group has an objective this year to review funeral poverty and this will be undertaken in line with the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016."

Question

(g) a question by Councillor McTiernan to the Cabinet Member for Place, in the following terms:-

"Disabled people have an equal right to live an independent and fulfilling life in North Ayrshire.

"With this in mind, and following enquiries from constituents in my ward, I ask the Cabinet Member for Place if he can provide me with information on what he is doing to improve accessibility to our pavements for people with disabilities, people who are infirm and users of wheelchairs or mobility scooters in North Ayrshire."

Response

"Condition assessments of all our footways are undertaken on an annual basis, this information is input to an assessment matrix for scoring and ranking our footways for inclusion in our resurfacing programme. This year we will be spending £250,000 on our footway resurfacing programme with an additional £75,000 being spent on routine repairs.

Whilst the large majority of the area has appropriate crossing points there are a number of historical footways that do not have dropped kerb crossing points and as a matter of course we will provide these when carrying out footway resurfacing works.

Further improvements to the path network are detailed in the Active Travel and Transport External Funding Report to Cabinet on 19 June 2018 will improve the paths to an all abilities access standard. This will improve the paths for all users including wheelchair and mobility scooter users.

An officer from Roads regularly attends the North Ayrshire Access Panel and when issues of accessibility are raised these are fully investigated and works are generally undertaken to address the concerns.

Contd/

Similarly if any issues of accessibility are raised directly with the Roads Service, officers will investigate these concerns and will take steps to resolve them. Concerns raised directly with the Service can vary from lack of dropped kerb access, obstructions in the footway from parked cars, bins or advertising signs. All reported issues are investigated and steps are taken to address the concerns raised."

Question

- (h) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care, in the following terms:-

"The Cabinet Member will be aware of changes about to be actioned with regard to the contract for the provision of hearing (audiology) services to NAC by Action for Hearing (SAC lead authority for three Ayrshires). Several volunteers who provide key services in terms of manning audiology drop-in clinics in the Garnock Valley area advise that the first class services currently provided in North Ayrshire will drop from 7 clinics to 3 and that no home visits or care home visits will take place after July 2018. Such visits are absolutely vital, especially for older folk and those with disabilities. He will be aware that this service is provided mainly by volunteers whose commitment and professionalism is first class. I would ask the Cabinet Member to explain how local folk in North Ayrshire with hearing issues will be impacted by this reduction in service and outline how local people with hearing issues can be supported in future."

Response

"There has been no intimation received by the Health and Social Care Partnership that the services and supports currently provided are to be reduced in any way. South Ayrshire currently lead on the contractual arrangements and are scheduled to meet with Action for Hearing this week. North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership offices have raised the issue and await assurance that services will not be affected.

If there are any issues arising from South Ayrshire's meeting, which suggest any impact on the services, particularly in the Garnock Valley, I will update Councillor Reid as soon as possible."

Question

- (i) a question by Councillor Murdoch to the Cabinet Member for Place, in the following terms:-

“Why is it necessary to have an assisted crossing / lollipop person within the grounds of the new Largs Campus? Was there a survey carried out in advance and if so what was the result?”

Response

“During the construction process for the Campus positions for reallocating the existing four school crossing patrols were examined in collaboration with the Roads Safety Officer, Facilities Management Team, Head Teachers and the project team. The positions were identified to facilitate access via the suitable routes to the Campus. The position inside the Campus was not subject to a PV square assessment, but would by its nature and position have the greatest concentration of vehicles and pedestrians of any of the crossing points. It was considered that an unsupervised crossing at this point could lead to congestion both in and outside the Campus whilst a steady stream of pedestrians crossed or that the traffic would not stop to allow crossing. The need for this crossing patrol will be reviewed after the summer break as the campus will have had several months' full operation by that time.”

Question

- (j) a question by Councillor Murdoch to the Cabinet Member for the Economy, in the following terms:-

“How much revenue was lost to the Largs Seafront Car Park Fund between Good Friday 30 March 2018 and Tuesday 15 May 2018 due to cars being unable to access spaces as a result of the location of a construction compound?”

Response

“It is difficult to quantify the exact amount of lost revenue due to the location of the construction compound as car park income is variable and can be affected by other factors e.g. weather. However, when reviewing income for the same period over the last 2 years, the difference is less than £2,000.”

Question

- (k) a question by Councillor Murdoch to the Cabinet Member for the Economy, in the following terms:-

“Why is it necessary to have an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed development at the Arran Ferry Terminal within Ardrossan Harbour and not for the Oil Rig Decommissioning Yard at Hunterston?”

Response

“The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations outline the screening process and circumstances in which new development may require an EIA. There is a set screening process which must be followed to determine whether an EIA is required to support a planning application. The Regulations explain the process in detail referring to two types of development, Schedule 1 and Schedule 2.

Schedule 1 Development always requires EIA, Schedule 2 Development requires EIA **only** if it is likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location.

In the case of Hunterston Construction Yard the proposals were screened in May 2017 by the Council as Planning Authority and were considered to be a Schedule 2 Development. Whilst accepting that the proposed development had the potential to result in adverse environmental effects, in considering the operations and activities already authorised by an existing planning permission for the site, it was not considered that significant environmental effects would occur and instead an Environmental Appraisal submitted along with the planning application(s), would allow further detailed assessment of any potential environmental issues. The proposals were also screened by Marine Scotland, under their own EIA Regulations, where it was determined that EIA was not required.

With respect to Ardrossan Harbour a Harbour Empowerment or Revision Order is local legislation that governs a port. It is made by Scottish Ministers. An Order can allow certain projects. Where a project is proposed a screening process must be undertaken in line with Schedule 3 of the Harbours Act 1964. Scottish Ministers are responsible for screening the development to determine whether EIA is required. In considering whether an EIA is required Scottish Ministers will consult with SEPA, SNH and the Council as Planning Authority. The instruction to appoint the relevant specialist to prepare the work for screening has just been made by Peel Port.

Further information regarding Harbour Orders can be found at <https://www.transport.gov.scot/transport-network/ports-and-harbours/>

Question

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

“The i3 business area, Scotland’s Life Sciences Enterprise Zone, is situated within my ward. I am dismayed at the recent decision to snub i3, and consequently North Ayrshire, as the location for the new Medicine Manufacturing and Innovation Centre, a project that officers of this Council have worked on for some time and which formed a key part of the Ayrshire Growth Deal. Can the Leader advise Council what action is being taken following this most recent investment snub for North Ayrshire?”

Response

“I am extremely disappointed at the decision to base the Medicines Manufacturing Innovation Centre (MMIC) at Inchinnan. The UK and Scottish Government’s, and their agencies Scottish Enterprise and Innovate UK, have overlooked Irvine as a location despite the compelling socioeconomic case for North Ayrshire, even though the project had significant public sector investment, including from Scottish Enterprise and Innovate UK.

I have written to both the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, Keith Brown MSP, and the Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell MP to outline my frustration at this decision and have also instructed the Council Chief Executive to meet with the new Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise. I have asked for a full disclosure of the MMIC site assessment made along with the justification that led to the award of £15m by Scottish Enterprise.

I believe this is a clear contradiction to the Scottish Government policy of inclusive growth – meaning all people and places can participate in growth – and also the UK Government’s Industrial Strategy which aims to rebalance the UK economy given stark regional inequality.

Our life sciences proposal in Irvine is very strong, and i3 is Scotland’s Life Sciences Enterprise Zone, a status recognised by both the UK and Scottish Governments. This decision completely undermines the Enterprise Zone status.

Furthermore, £10million of investment has already went in to i3 and the area has been chosen by the Scottish Government to propose a £5million Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) initiative. This one decision called into question this investment.

All of this and the support of large multi-national businesses, already located there, would have allowed the MMIC project to get up and running at i3 immediately.

This is the second decision that has recently been made which conflicts with the Scottish Government’s policy of inclusive growth. North Ayrshire was recently overlooked as a location for the new Social Security Agency, where the local economy could have benefited from around 750 much needed new jobs. This was despite the Scottish Government’s own analysis showing North Ayrshire would benefit most from these jobs. That snub was made on the unproven grounds that workers with the necessary skills couldn’t be recruited here in North Ayrshire – a shocking assessment for any Government to make against any area.

Contd/

The Member is correct to highlight that this project formed a key component of the Ayrshire Growth Deal proposals and I have asked both the Scottish and UK Government to clearly outline how they will now support North Ayrshire, an area where a third of children live in poverty, with one of the lowest job densities in Scotland, and an area that consistently has one of the lowest employment rates in Scotland. It's time for action not words."

Question

(m) a question by Councillor Sweeney to the Leader of the Council, in the following terms:-

"Universal Credit Full Service was rolled out in North Ayrshire on 22nd November 2017. Evidence from other areas where UC Full Service has been introduced have shown a sharp increase in rent arrears of UC claimants. Can the Leader of the Council give an early indication of the impact UC Full Service has had on North Ayrshire Council rent arrears?"

Response

"Similar to other areas, North Ayrshire has seen an increase in rent arrears as a result of the introduction of UC Full Service on 26 November 2017.

On 26 November 2017, 3,640 tenants were in arrears, totalling £875,475.07. On 28 May 2018, 4,112 tenants were in arrears totalling £1,107,768.41.

The number of tenants claiming Universal Credit rose from 464 on 26 November 2017 to 1,366 on 28 May 2018. In comparing arrears for UC claimants only, this has risen from £129,337.56 to £467,509.86 during the same period. North Ayrshire Council are receiving direct rent payments from the DWP for almost 600 tenants claiming Universal Credit.

North Ayrshire has performed well in arrears recovery throughout 2017/18, with gross rent arrears (including former tenant arrears and write offs) of 3.59% in comparison to the 5.3% Scottish average for 2016/17. The Welfare Reform Advice Team continues to make contact with each tenant claiming UC to assess and provide support to manage the claim, maximise income and make rent payments to avoid arrears."

Question

- (n) a question by Councillor Marshall to the Leader of the Opposition, in the following terms:-

“The well respected and independent Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have recently commented that the blueprint for independence laid out by SNP’s Growth Commission implies at least another decade of the sort of restraint on public spending that Scotland is currently experiencing.

If true and with UK public expenditure expected to grow at a greater rate, assuming an Independent Scotland, what cuts to public services would the SNP Opposition Group on North Ayrshire propose or support over the next 10 years to balance the budget?”

Response – Councillor Burns will respond verbally.

Question

- (o) a question by Councillor Marshall to the Leader of the Council, in the following terms:-

“Is the Leader of the Council still of the view that investment by the Council in the purchase of a private sector retail businesses guarantees a return on capital?”

Response – Councillor Cullinane will respond verbally.