



North Ayrshire Council

Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 21 June 2023

Responses to Questions

Question

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

“According to the Corporate Health and Safety Group Meeting dated 25 May 2023, Appendix 1 records Aggression and Violence Incidents in NAC Secondary Schools in Quarter 3 as 52 compared to 31 last year a rise of almost 70% in a comparable quarter. How many of these incidents involve teaching staff and what steps are being taken to address this problem?”

Response

“The way the statistics are recorded means that all incidents are collated into one figure. To break this down, the three categories are:

- Physical violence
- Threatening/intimidating behaviour
- Verbal abuse

The figures for the first two categories remain at similar levels. The rise reflects rising numbers of cases of verbal abuse being recorded with 7 recorded in Q3 of 2021 and 24 recorded Q3 2022.

A working group has been convened, comprising a range of local authority and school staff to work in partnership with trade union colleagues. This reflects the commitment of the Education Service to analyse, learn from and respond to incidents which happen in North Ayrshire schools.”

Question

- (2) a question by Councillor Montgomerie to the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy in the following terms:

"The Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy made a strong and robust argument in favour of Town Centre parking charges back in February, despite the campaign waged against them by local businesses and residents. Given his and the SNP Administrations unequivocal vote to impose parking charges on people shopping in North Ayrshire Towns, does the Cabinet Member believe it is fair that he has claimed parking costs on his Council expenses?"

Response

Councillor Gurney will respond.

Question

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

“According to recently released Public Health Scotland statistics, between 2017 and 2021 there were 111 deaths by suicide in North Ayrshire. Can the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care please give an update on what work has been undertaken by NAC to reduce the number of deaths by suicide?”

Response

“Every death by suicide is a tragedy. There are evident challenges in reducing suicide and as such an extensive range of work is being undertaken in North Ayrshire across the whole system in response to this.

Examples of focussed areas of work and multiagency forums include:

- Strategic Suicide Prevention Group - chaired by the Independent Chair of Adult Support and Protection and Child Protection Committees. This group oversees and provides direction across a range of agencies.
- North Ayrshire Young Peoples Suicide Taskforce - established in 2017 in response to a number of deaths by suicide by young people, includes representation across a number of agencies including education, health, social care, police and public health. This group was formed primarily to develop a co-ordinated response by agencies following the death by suicide of a young person within North Ayrshire. A key development from this group has been the co-ordination of a Crisis Response Plan which is reviewed and updated in response to any death.
- The Suspected Death by Suicide Review Group was established in January 2022, to undertake an early review of suspected deaths by suicide and to respond in partnership to any support and follow up as well as considering issues and trends which may be emerging and which will help target work and training. It can also identify key services, groups or communities which may have been impacted and help provide resources, information and support.
- North Ayrshire has been fortunate to be part of the National Pilot for a Suicide Bereavement support service delivered by Penumbra which supports families impacted by suicide.
- Locally in North Ayrshire the Choose Life Manager and Suicide Prevention Lead continues to offer training and awareness raising across a range of settings.

An update report was presented to the IJB in May this year, and this report can be accessed by members and the public to provide additional information on this critical area of work.

In September 2022, The Scottish Government and COSLA launched their new joint National Suicide Prevention Strategy; “Creating Hope Together”.

Contd/

The Pan Ayrshire Suicide Prevention Group held a launch stakeholder event in December 2022 with the purpose to creating a new Ayrshire Strategy. The event was held in North Ayrshire supported by NHS Public Health and the pan Ayrshire group are following up on the requirements to deliver this plan locally and to build on the work already underway in North Ayrshire.”

Question

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

“Pre-Inspection bully surveys have highlighted issues with bullying in Greenwood Academy and the lack of confidence parents and carers have in the school to handle any problems that have been raised by a child. What can the Cabinet Member do to reassure all parents in North Ayrshire that all schools and staff are equipped to deal with bullying in schools?”

Response

“The issue of bullying is taken very seriously by Greenwood Academy and all schools in North Ayrshire.

Referring specifically to Greenwood Academy, it should be noted that pre-inspection questionnaires are one source of information used in an inspection. The overall inspection feedback was very positive about the work being undertaken in the school. Greenwood Academy carried out a full consultation with all stakeholders, which included parents, regarding bullying in April 2021 and launched their new Anti-bullying policy in May 2021. Parents were surveyed and their views shaped the policy along with other stakeholders.

The school celebrated Anti-bullying Week and revisited the policy with pupils in November 2022. This was discussed during HWB/Reg across every year group. The policy was reviewed again when the school were working towards the LGBT Silver Charter this session.

The school believes that pupils are now clearer about how to report bullying and they are proud to have introduced the Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme (MVP) this year with S1. This will be rolled out further in 2023/24.

PSE inputs focus on developing positive peer relationships and this year the Area Inclusion Worker has reinforced this with P7 in partnership with S1 volunteers. The above demonstrates Greenwood Academy’s ongoing commitment to making further improvements in this area.

In line with our ongoing commitment to taking this important matter seriously, similar work focusing on minimising or preventing and responding to bullying behaviours is taking place across all schools in North Ayrshire.”

Question

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

"NHS Ayrshire and Arran has not set a balanced budget for 2023/24. As the Council's representative on the local health board, what assurances can the Council Leader give that the health board has a plan to sustain and indeed improve health services for the people of North Ayrshire?"

Response

"NHS Ayrshire and Arran considered the Revenue Plan for 2023/24 at its meeting on 28 March 2023. Unlike the Council and the IJB, the NHS Board does not have a legal obligation to balance its budget and the Board has a budget deficit of £56.4m which has increased annually over the last few years.

The budget which was set by NHS Ayrshire and Arran constitutes its spending plan for Health Services across the area during the current financial year. The Board has a baseline budget of £850.2 million for 2023/24 and further earmarked funding for specific purposes of £131.0 million, giving £981.2 million of revenue funding to deliver services either directly or via services delegated to the three Integration Joint Boards.

Given the Health Board has not yet set a balanced budget I cannot provide any assurances at this time of the impact on health services, the implications of addressing the budget gap is subject to ongoing discussions at both a local and national level."

Question

- (6) a question by Councillor McLean to the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy in the following terms:

"What has made the Member change their mind regarding investment zones?"

Response

Councillor Gurney will respond.

Question

(7) a question by Councillor Kerr to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“With the resignation of the sixth Transport Minister to have held the position since the reformation of the Ardrossan task force in 2017, does the Council Leader believe the appointment of a seventh will have any impact on the Ardrossan Harbour project?”

Response

Councillor Burns will respond.

Question

(8) a question by Councillor Inglis to the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy if the Council has been in contact with the owners of Rankins pub in Stevenston to ask what their intentions with the building are as it is a blight on Stevenson town centre?”

Response

“Officers within Regeneration Services identified that the former Rankins pub was sold in July 2022. A letter was issued to the new owner making them aware of support available via the Repurposing Property Grant Scheme, and inviting them to share their intentions for the site with the Council. No response or funding application has been received from the owner to date. Officers will make contact again with the owner to establish their intentions regarding the property and encourage, an application to the Repurposing Property Grant Scheme.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care what impact the NHS Ayrshire and Arran budget deficit will have on the IJB?”

Response

“NHS Ayrshire and Arran considered the Revenue Plan for 2023/24 at its meeting in March 2023 and has a budget deficit of £56.4m.

The Scottish Government funding settlement requires the NHS Board to pass on an appropriate share of any increase in funding it receives to the IJB. The IJB is then required to make appropriate provision for the entirety of the delegated resource from the NHS Board and North Ayrshire Council.

Contd/

Following resource allocation from both partner bodies, the IJB had a budget gap for 2023/24 of £6.215m and set a balanced budget in March 2023 through the delivery of planned savings and the non-recurring use of reserves.

The NHS budget deficit does not therefore have a direct impact on the IJB, due to the requirement to pass through an appropriate share of funding, and for the IJB set a balanced budget in line with the resource allocation. However, the Heath Board's financial position does reduce the opportunity for the IJB to seek any additional funding from the NHS Board and impacts on the service and financial pressures across the wider health and social care system."

Question

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

"In May 2023, the Accounts Commission published the report 'Local Government in Scotland – Overview 2023. The report contained some dire warnings about the fragility of local services in Scotland and made a number of very challenging recommendation on how to mitigate the effects of under-funding of local authority services and the staffing difficulties we are currently experiencing. What approach does North Ayrshire Council's Administration intend to take to implements the Account Commission's recommendations?"

Response

"The Accounts Commission report recognised the significant cost pressures facing councils which have been fuelled by high levels of inflation and set out a number of recommendations for both the Scottish Government and Councils. When we set the Budget back in March this included an anticipated budget gap of over £16million for next year. This presents a significant challenge and in order to deliver a balanced budget will require a range of measures to address. The budget process for 2024/25 and beyond has already started and members will be provided with updates on progress and to get your input and feedback following the summer recess. It is recognised that in order to live within our available resources and to support investment in our key priority areas, as outlined earlier in the development of the new Council plan, we will likely be faced with difficult choices. A number of significant areas of focus are currently being progressed and they include:-

- Further engagement with Scottish government in progressing a New Deal across a range of areas, including more fiscal flexibility to councils in areas like council tax, tourist visitor levy and non-domestic rates,
- Similarly, more collaboration with Scottish Government for greater fiscal autonomy and developing joint outcomes across key areas of our budget which link to national policies and priorities, including the deployment of our learning resources and our health and social care funding,

Contd/

- Progressing our change programme across the areas of land and property, sustainability, Accessing our Council and Waste Services. The more financial efficiency we can generate in these areas, the greater level of protection we can provide to support our key priorities,
- Development of our Workforce Planning programme in order to align our available resources to support our key priorities,
- We also appreciate that using council reserves is not a sustainable solution, however, through the controlled and limited use of council reserves across the medium-term, this will provide vital financial flexibility to help navigate through the next few years and for this to run in parallel with more sustainable measures, and finally,
- We will continue to work with our communities, partners, 3rd sector organisations and neighbouring authorities to look at the way we deliver services and for this to be considered within the context of the outcomes we aim to achieve.”

Question

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

“In 2022, it was agreed to pilot on Arran the use of self-employed carers for people choosing self-directed care. Please could the Cabinet Member provide an update on this pilot, including the number of self-employed carers that the service makes payment to and the number of residents making use of this service?”

Response

“The use of self-employed carers on Arran has been developed as a test of change which arose from the HSCP’s learning review into the application of Self Directed Support (SDS) and in response to the particular challenges with access to care and support on Arran.

Self Employed Personal Assistants have not been supported in North Ayrshire due to complexities of HMRC, Tax, NI, holidays, insurance, and public protection concerns. With the development of a supportive policy and a balanced perspective on public protection it was agreed to explore if this development would be welcomed by communities.

A project group with representation from Social Work, Ayrshire Independent Living Network, In Control Scotland and Arran Community and Voluntary Service led on developing a policy which will support this approach and test of change.

There are 3 key aims, firstly a reduction of waiting times for support, secondly an increase in choice and control with people feeling they have more options and finally an increased confidence for staff in the offer of support options.

Practice guidance and the SDS systems have been amended, it is anticipated that this pathway will go live in July 2023 and will be supported with communications and guidance to allow residents can make an informed choice and understand the associated roles, responsibilities, and risks of using a self-employed PA.

Contd/

As the pilot is due to launch in July 2023 there have been no self-employed carers to date, there have also not been any requests in the planning phase for support, if a request arose there would be due consideration of support for this arrangement given the work already progressed around policy and practice.”

Question

- (12) a question by Councillor McLean to the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy in the following terms:

“Does the Cabinet Member believe that the current funding allocated the roads budget is sustainable, considering the recent report the Irvine Locality Partnership showing that there is a backlog of carriageway maintenance that is currently 7 times the annual roads budget allocated in 23/24?”

Response

Councillor Gurney will respond.

Question

- (13) a question by Councillor Marshall to the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy in the following terms:

“To ask the Portfolio holder for Green Environment and Economy to:

- a. Visit and sit for 30 minutes on the newly installed black seating benches either on the Seafront in Largs or in Ardrossan and rate their comfort on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being uncomfortable and 10 being comfortable.
- b. State the cost of one bench.
- c. State who placed the order for such and what other options were considered.
- d. Confirm that the benches meet relevant safety standards.”

Response

Councillor Gurney will respond verbally to point a.

- “b. Due to the recent letting of the contract, this information may be regarded as commercially sensitive. I am happy to share the information with the Elected Member on a confidential basis outwith the meeting.
- c. I will not. And I never will. It is not for this chamber to expose officers to public opprobrium.
- d. I can confirm that they do.”

Question

(14) a question by Councillor Gallacher to the Cabinet Member for Green Environment and Economy in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet Member how many cases of Japanese knotweed have been reported in Irvine in the past 2 years?”

Response

“We have recorded two new reports in that time..”