



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 14 December 2022

Responses to Questions

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet portfolio holder for Education how many primary and secondary school children in North Ayrshire have received a free laptop or tablet as per the SNP election promises made in May 2021”

Response

“In the academic session 2021-22, North Ayrshire Council distributed 1000 Chromebook laptops to pupils across all schools who needed them most in P5 and S2. The methodology for calculating the distribution model began with an analysis of indicators of personal deprivation, including Footwear and Clothing grants and free school meals, and was refined at school level to ensure that everyone in these year stages who needed a device was able to receive one. These devices enable children and young people to access digital learning at home (a stock of connectivity devices is also available for anyone who does not have wi-fi at home).

The exercise has been repeated for session 2022-23 and again 1000 Chromebook laptops have been ordered for this year’s P5 and S2 cohorts and will be ready for distribution after the Christmas holidays.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for an update on the delivery of the 2022/23 roads, structures and street lighting maintenance programme.”

Response

“The Roads, Structures and Street Lighting Maintenance Programme for 2022/23 is progressing well.

The carriageway maintenance investment programme is nearing completion. Of our carriageway resurfacing projects 96% of the works are complete, with works currently ongoing in Milton Quadrant and High Street Kilbirnie. Bathville/Parkview/Pundeavon Avenue/Lynne Drive, Kilbirnie and Gigha Terrace/Gigha Wynd, Irvine are outstanding and will be completed before the end of March 2023. Carriageway resurfacing in Stanley Road and Galloway Place, Saltcoats has had to be rescheduled into 23/24 to enable an assessment of the existing drainage infrastructure following a flood event in September this year. Our footway resurfacing programme is underway and all remaining works are programmed for completion by 31 March 2023.

Contd.

Structures are well on target to spend the approximate £1m budget allocated for 22/23. Works are about 75% complete and the full budget allocation will be expended by the financial year end.

Likewise, the Street Lighting Capital Programme is currently on schedule to spend all of the £1.58m Physical Infrastructure Renewal Investment and the £490k lantern energy efficiency allocated through the NAC Investment Fund by the end of March 2023."

Question

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

"Does the Leader agree with me that the leaking of confidential papers shows a complete lack of integrity and respect towards all North Ayrshire Council staff, fellow Elected Members and the voting public?"

Response

The Leader will respond.

Question

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

"To ask the Cabinet Member for Place if they could update the Council on the action that will be taken to fix the recently vandalised toilets at the Braes in Saltcoats."

Response

"The Public Conveniences (PCs) at the Braes suffered some recent fire damage through vandalism. The fire damage this time was limited. The FM team provided a deep clean of the affected area and noted that some remedial painting would be required to bring the site up to a reasonable standard. The FM team sourced the required painting materials and carried out the work as quickly as possible. The PCs were then reopened to the public on Friday 2 December.

Unfortunately, the site was again targeted with antisocial behaviour within 48 hours of reopening. By Sunday 4 December, the site had all toilet roll and soap dispensers kicked off the walls, the disabled bin emptied into the street outside with the addition of graffiti added to the walls. The FM team have cleaned all possible areas and requested that replacement dispensers be fitted again as soon as possible."

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member what prelims were set to take place on Wednesday 7 December 2022?”

Response

“On Wednesday 7 December, Arran High School was open to all pupils, Auchenhavrie Academy and Largs Academy were open to S5/6 pupils enabling any planned prelims to take place in these schools.

Whilst Garnock Community Campus (secondary), Irvine Royal Academy, Kilwinning Academy and St Matthew’s Academy were closed to pupils on Wednesday 7 December, no prelims were affected.

Prelims were planned at Ardrossan Academy and Greenwood Academy as follows:
Ardrossan Academy:

- National 5 and Higher Music (practical)
- National 5 Cookery (practical)

Greenwood Academy:

National 5 Music Technology
National 5 Sociology
National 5 Chemistry

In both of these schools, arrangements have been made to reschedule these exams for another date.”

Question

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

“The National Improvement Framework interactive Evidence Report Statistics for Local Authorities published in 22 November 2022 recorded the percentage of combined P1,P4 and P7 pupils achieving the expected grade in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) combined.

For North Ayrshire the numeracy levels recorded in 2018-19 was 79.4% and in 2020-21 was 67.4%. A drop of 12 points or 15%.

Given that this now means that fully one third of these pupils are failing to achieve the expected grade in Numeracy in CfE what plans do the Administration have to rectify these unacceptable figures?"

Response

“Nationally published attainment statistics in numeracy for North Ayrshire Council primary aged pupils declined in 2020-21 (during the pandemic). Prior to this North Ayrshire learners performed better than the national cohort in terms of the percentage who achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence level in primary numeracy.

It is widely accepted that the pandemic had a significant impact on pupil learning, and even more so in the areas of highest disadvantage across Scotland. As a result, attainment levels declined in North Ayrshire (as they did across Scotland) in 2020-21 in primary numeracy. Locally, Head Teachers have identified the principal reasons for this as a high level of interrupted learning, pupil and staff absence and periods of national lockdown as a direct result of the pandemic.

In its attainment report in June 2022, the Education Service confirmed it had introduced additional interventions in numeracy throughout session 2021-22, with significant efforts in every school to recover from the impact the pandemic has had on attainment. On 27 September 2022, it was reported to Cabinet through the “Education Service Standards and Quality Report 2021-22,” that numeracy attainment for session 2021-22 had increased to 75%, a recovery of 8 percentage points in one year.

This year’s Education Service Improvement Plan seeks to improve outcomes further through high quality learning, teaching and assessment and, importantly, the development of a new three-year raising attainment strategy. Based on an analysis of attainment so far this year, the Education Service currently projects that the primary numeracy attainment figure will continue to recover this year, rising to 77% for session 2022-23, although this figure will continue to be refined in the coming months prior to the final submission of attainment data in June 2023.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member how much individual schools have used of their devolved budgets to pay off school meal debt to the Council?”

Response

“In secondary schools, debt has been absorbed either through core school budgets, the school fund or PEF budgets in the following amounts over the last 5 years (or as far back as records are available), totalling approximately £12,400.

School	How much school meal debt has been absorbed by the school in last 5 years*	Number of years given if not 5 years
Ardrossan Academy	£2349.48	3 years
Arran High School	£0.00	1 year
Auchenharvie Academy	£929.70	2 years
Garnock Secondary	£1,012.70	4 years
Greenwood Academy	£198.00	2 years
Irvine Royal Academy	£5,635.00	2 years
Kilwinning Academy	£924.40	2 years
Largs Academy	£1,598.00	2 years
St Matthews Academy	£2,080.00	5 years
TOTAL	£12,377.80	

Question

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

“Given the future funding constraints placed on the Authority, can the Cabinet Member for Finance indicate (i) areas where they believe the Council should cut back on, in order to balance the budget; (ii) if their administration will take any steps to pay back any debts that the authority has, over and above the interest rate?”

Response

- (i) Councillor Larsen will respond.
- (ii) “Borrowing activity is incorporated in the Council’s Treasury Management and Investment Strategy which is presented to Council each year. Within this strategy the Council’s borrowing is measured against a number of prudential and treasury indicators to consider the affordability and impact of capital expenditure decisions. These indicators help the Council to demonstrate public accountability in relation to borrowing and investments. Within the context of this Strategy, the Council manages the Loans Fund in accordance with statutory regulations and maintains a range of debt arrangements, including maturity loans, equal instalment loans and temporary loans, all of which are repaid in accordance with their specific terms and conditions.”

Question

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

“Does the Cabinet Member agree with Council Directors of Finance, including our own Head of Service, who have written a joint letter to the Deputy First Minister stating that the financial pressures faced by Scottish Local Government are “unprecedented”, that the choices we face “come down to reducing services.....and reducing the number of jobs”, and unless “funding for Local Government is fair, sustainable and flexible”, “there is not a path to delivering balanced budgets”?”

Response

Councillor Larsen will respond.

Question

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

“Can the Cabinet Member Education tell me what specific programmes(s) exist in North Ayrshire in order support children who are academically gifted, and if none exist, if they intend to create one?”

Response

“The remit of the education service is to meet the needs of all pupils and Curriculum for Excellence allows for planning at pace and with challenge.

There are currently no specific authority-wide programmes to support the most able learners in North Ayrshire. Nevertheless, we have invested in ensuring that we continue to develop a very highly skilled teaching workforce through, for example, our Professional Learning Academy. Our teachers are adept at differentiating the learning to ensure that pupils can progress at an appropriate level of pace, depth and challenge. We aim to ensure there is no ceiling on learning and our evidence shows a broad trend of improvement over time in learner outcomes across the wide range of abilities of our learners across North Ayrshire. Whilst there is always room for further improvement, there are no current plans to focus on the most able alone. Rather, our focus will continue to be on raising attainment across the board, at the same time as reducing the gap between the attainment outcomes of the most and least disadvantaged learners.”

Question

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

"To ask the Cabinet Member how many Carers Assessments have been conducted in the last year and how many (as a %) have been conducted within the 1 year period set out in the Carers Act"

Response

“In the 2021-22 year there were a total of 52 Adult and 55 Young Carer’s Assessments undertaken. There are no prescribed timescales to complete an Adult Carer Support Plan or Young Carer Statement unless the cared for individual is diagnosed with a terminal illness, in which case there are directed timescales for the offer and completion of a Carers Assessment. Assessments should be completed within a reasonable timeframe in line with carers individual set of circumstances, assessments are completed in a timely manner from the acceptance of the offer or at the point of request, there is no waiting list in North Ayrshire for a carers assessment to be completed.”

Question

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

“The BBC recently reported on house prices and rents throughout Scotland, in this report it was found that the Ayrshires collectively were the only place where prices and rents contracted, every other area had an increase. Why does the Member think that Ayrshire is considered less desirable than the rest of Scotland?”

Response

Councillor Davidson will respond.

Question

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

“To ask the Leader of the Council if the Ardrossan Ministerial Task Force has met again since its meeting on 28 June 2022”

Response

“There has not been a meeting of the task force since June 2022, the minutes of which have now been published by Transport Scotland. The next Ministerial Task Force meeting is due on the 24 January 2023.”

Question

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

“Does the Leader of the Council believe that Scotland is a colony of England, and that comparisons can be made between Scotland and Kosovo as the Scottish Government attempted in the Supreme Court earlier this month?”

Response

The Leader will respond.

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member when the Council last met Scottish Futures Trust to discuss the Ardrossan Campus project?”

Response

“The most recent meeting was on 12 December 2022.”