



North Ayrshire Council

Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 29 March 2023

Responses to Questions

Question

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

“Can the Member give an update on the council’s renewable energy strategy for home heating in North Ayrshire?”

Response

“For our new build housing developments, officers undertake a comparative options appraisal to identify an appropriate low carbon heating solution on a project by project basis. In recent developments this has included individual air source heat pumps supported by solar panels.

Our approach to investment in decarbonisation of heating in existing Council housing stock is informed by the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing 2 (EESSH2). A report approved by Cabinet in January last year confirmed a ‘fabric first’ hierarchy of improvements (for example additional insulation) would be followed. Through the latest Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, we will invest £4.911m specifically to improve energy efficiency in housing stock during 2023/24, alongside other planned and cyclical maintenance improvements.

A national review of the EESSH2 standard was announced last year and is expected to be completed later in 2023. Our fabric first investment programme is continuing in the meantime and officers are evaluating a range of future options to shift away from gas fired heating to renewable technology options. This work will be the subject of a report to Cabinet later this year.”

Question

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

“At the time of writing, the last published Minute of an Ardrossan Taskforce meeting was on the 29 November 2022 for the meeting which took place on the 28 June 2022. My understanding is there has been at least two task force meetings since then. Given that it is taking several months for the task force to publish public minutes, can the leader of the Council, as co-chair of the said task force, advise us what has been discussed since 28 June 2022 and what progress has been made?”

Response

“Since 28 June 2022 there have been two Ardrossan Task force meetings on 23 January 2023 and 22 March 2023.

Minutes for the 23 January 2023 Taskforce meeting were approved by the co-chair and Minister for Transport Minister, Jenny Gilruth, on 22 March and have now been published on the Transport Scotland website. Minutes for the recent 22 March 2023 Taskforce will be produced, approved and published in due course.

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The Minister for Transport, with agreement of all partners (Transport Scotland, Peel, NAC, CMAL and CalMac), asked for more frequent meetings to focus on accelerating the process of issuing the invitation to tender for the marine and landside works. Progress in accelerating programme timelines was recognised at the March Taskforce meeting as was the requirement to maintain momentum.”

Question

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

“Recently the Public Finance Minister Tom Arthur welcomed the new East Coast Forth and Cromarty Green Freeports stating that the aim was for them to become “an internationally competitive cluster of excellence” and offering them various tax reliefs to boost the process.

Noting that the recent UK Government's Budget is planning to kickstart economic growth across the UK by offering secure grants and tax cuts worth £80 million for over five years to each hub to enable Scotland to set up enterprise hub, will the Cabinet Member be proactive in supporting the claim for North Ayrshire as an area of economic deprivation on the West Coast to be offered such an opportunity.”

Response

“At present the proposed arrangements for Investment Zones in Scotland are not fully known. The UK Government has stated an intention to engage with each of the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to discuss how and where at least one new Investment Zone could be delivered in each. They have also confirmed an intention to publish further information on Investment Zones in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland in due course.”

Question

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

“The Cabinet Member for Education has announced a delay in the construction of a new primary school and early years centre in Montgomerie Park via a press interview. He will be aware that new homes are currently being built at Montgomerie Park and the existing school catchment area has been dealing with capacity issues for many years, resulting in the investment in additional space at Annick Primary. Can the Cabinet Member tell us what impact the delay on a new primary school will have on existing school rolls?”

Response

“In relation to Montgomerie Park Primary School, we received the final, market tested construction costs from our delivery partner, HubSW, earlier this year, and these indicated a significant budget deficit. A comprehensive review of the tender submission was then swiftly undertaken to identify savings options and reduce the budget gap without compromising the learning environment within this new facility.

Contd/

At the Council meeting of Wednesday 1st March 2023, the additional required budget allocation of £6.430m was approved and the budget for the new school has now been set at £23.449m.

We are currently working towards concluding the contract award with HubSW and the contractor, Robertson Construction Group (RCG) in the context of a very volatile construction market.

The Education Service works closely with Planning to monitor housing completions and has carefully considered the present and potential numbers of children in the local area. Annick Primary School and Lawthorn Primary School will be able to accommodate existing and projected rolls in line with these predictions until the new Montgomerie Park Primary School is open.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Education for an update on the shocking news that toilets are being locked in Greenwood Academy and St Matthew’s Academy restricting pupils from using the toilet?”

Response

“It is important to note that in all schools in North Ayrshire, including Greenwood and St Matthew’s, pupils have access to toilet facilities and sanitary products at all times of the day. This has been checked and re-affirmed by all head teachers, and pupils have been reminded of the location of toilet facilities during class time.

In addition to reiterating these arrangements, we are keen to work directly with young people to further enhance their sense of community and collective responsibility in terms of taking pride in their school environment, seeking suggestions for improvements and using facilities responsibly. To facilitate this discussion across all school communities, this will be taken forward at the next joint Cabinet meeting.”

Question

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

“At the Council’s budget meeting on 1 March, the SNP proposed no additional funding for road maintenance, the Tories proposed an additional £1m subject to the 2022-23 year-end financial position and Labour proposed an additional £2m. Can the Cabinet Member for Finance confirm what parties’ proposal she incorporated after the recess at the budget meeting on 1 March?”

Response

Councillor Larsen will respond verbally.

Question

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

“Given the completion date for the Glen Sannox as the Arran replacement ferry is now five years late and still indeterminate, the failure to agree on economic package to adapt the berthing arrangements at Ardrossan to allow for the new ferry to dock, the plan by CalMac to move the mainland port to Troon, what will be the economic impact on Ardrossan and the wider North Ayrshire economy by such a change of port and what plans do the Administration have to mitigate such?”

Response

“CalMac has indicated that they currently expect to take possession of the Glen Sannox in Autumn 2023. There will then be an extensive period of sea trials and testing before it can go into service. It is currently estimated it will be early into 2024 before the new ferry is operational. Works at Troon are underway and are programmed for completion before the Glen Sannox is in service. It is understood that Ardrossan will remain the ferry port until the Glen Sannox is in service.

There will be an economic impact from the temporary relocation of the ferry to Troon. This has not been quantified, however, the extent of the economic impact will depend on the duration of the re-location to Troon. It is important to ensure the impact is reduced as far as possible by ensuring the temporary re-location is for the minimal time possible. Officers will continue to work with the Ardrossan Harbour partners, Transport Scotland, CalMac, CMAL and Peel Ports Group, to ensure this is the case.

The reduced footfall in Ardrossan arising from the temporary relocation to Troon will impact on local businesses. The Council’s Business Support and Development Team will engage with affected businesses to offer support during the relocation and also to assist them realise potential opportunities arising from the return of the ferry to Ardrossan, which will see an increased footfall due to greater passenger numbers.

The ability of people to commute effectively will also have an economic impact. To mitigate these impacts locally, officers are advised that appropriate measures to facilitate travel to and from the temporary Troon port from Ardrossan will be put in place. This will see the provision of a shuttlebus service to and from the Troon port from Ardrossan. CalMac are engaging with local bus companies to discuss the available options to support ferry users. This will be particularly important for local residents employed directly through the ferry services and commuters accessing employment via the ferry.”

Question

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

“Your recent budget paper included a £4m jobs cut fund under the guise of workforce planning, how many employees are you planning on leaving due to this decision within the next financial year?”

Response

“To help address the significant financial challenges faced by the Council, we continue to review what we do and how we do it and our workforce planning programme supports this. The 2023/24 budget included financial provision to support this programme.

As a reminder the Council has a no compulsory redundancy policy.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for the number of workers currently working from home?”

Response

“At the 1st Tier JCC on 2 September 2021, the Council, in conjunction with the Trade Unions, agreed four workstyles attributed to each post. These are - In Building, Mobile, Agile and Home.

4319 employees are classed as In Building and therefore they spend more than 90% of their time in the office.

1661 employees are classed as Mobile which means that they spend more than 90% of their time working across multiple locations.

1912 employees are classed as an Agile workstyle, which allows them to work from home, office or multiple locations. Those employees within this workstyle are required to work a minimum of 2 days per week within the office.

Four employees have a Home workstyle, which allows them to spend more than 90% of their time working from home with the requirement to attend Council locations as the role requires.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance whether continued support for community Christmas Lights was included in the SNP budget proposals on 1 March at 2.15pm or the Conservatives’ Budget proposal which she incorporated in her revised motion at 4pm on 1 March?”

Response

Councillor Larsen will respond verbally.

Question

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

“Can the Member give me an update on the tenant housing consultation for this year, with specific reference to public consultation on the allocation system?”

Response

“Officers in Housing Services are currently working with our three North Ayrshire Housing Register partners - Riverside Homes; Cunninghame Housing Association; and ANCHO – on the review of the North Ayrshire Common Allocation Policy. Consultation with existing tenants, housing applicants, wider members of the public and all elected members is critical to the success of the review. Matters to be consulted on continue to be developed for inclusion in the consultation which is planned to take place during summer/autumn 2023. The review is expected to conclude in late 2023 with the recommendations presented to the Council’s Cabinet and RSL Boards for approval thereafter.”

Question

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

“There have been reports of ambulances queued outside Ayr and Crosshouse hospitals over many months. I am led to believe that this was a particular issue on Monday 13 March 2023 when, at one point every ambulance serving our area was parked outside Crosshouse hospital for several hours. As the Council representative on NHS Ayrshire and Arran, what reassurances can the Council Leader provide that with such a circumstance, our health board will be able to respond to an emergency call, for example a cardiac arrest call?”

Response

“The reassurance around capacity and the ability to respond by the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) to emergency calls is a question for the SAS not for NHS Ayrshire and Arran.”

Question

- (13) a question by Councillor McLean to the Leader of the Labour Group in the following terms:

“The Labour group has made a public stand against what it has described as ‘re-mortgaging’ of school PFI deals undertaken by the Council’s Finance Department and confirmed in the budget for 23-24. Can the Leader of the Labour Group please tell me how much they believe the value of this re-mortgage loan to be, the associated interest rate and financial risk to the authority?”

Response

Councillor Cullinane will respond verbally.

Question

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

“As the Council’s representative on NHS Ayrshire and Arran, can the Council Leader tell us what funding gap Scotland’s Health Secretary has left the health board facing in 2023/24?”

Response

“Similar to other Public Bodies, it is for individual Health Boards to plan for resource allocation at a local level in line with the overall funding available. NHS Ayrshire and Arran considered the Revenue Plan for 2023/24 at its meeting on 28th March 2023. All NHS Board meeting papers are publicly available and accessible online, I have included a link to the web page in my response for ease of access - [NHS Ayrshire & Arran - Home \(nhsaaa.net\)](https://www.nhs.uk/about-us/our-organisation/nhs-ayrshire-and-arran/)”

Question

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

“In 2019, Councillor Gurney opposed the Council introducing advertising on Council-owned assets, such as roundabouts. Earlier this month he said “The high demand and participation of local businesses in local advertising and sponsorship opportunities has been clearly demonstrated across North Ayrshire. We will always aim to provide affordable opportunities that will be of benefit to our local businesses and residents.” Can the now Cabinet Member for Place explain his U-turn?”

Response

Councillor Gurney will respond verbally.

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance what impact in her opinion will balancing the Council budget with £970k from HSCP debt repayment have on HSCP services in 23/24?”

Response

Councillor Larsen will respond verbally.