



North Ayrshire Council

Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 17 May 2023

Responses to Questions

Question

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

“Noting that the Scottish Government is consulting on a proposal to permit Councils to double Council Tax on second homes from 2024 and to apply larger multipliers in subsequent years, does the Member support this proposal and can she outline both the benefits and disbenefits of such a policy?”

Response

Councillor Larsen will respond.

Question

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

“The Administration failed to secure the purchase of the former Lonsdale pub site in Stevenston, with the site being sold to a new private owner. Months later and following a promise from the Cabinet Member that the Council would approach the new owners to discuss their plans for the site, the “sold” sign is still up and the site remains in a state of disrepair. Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on plans for the site?”

Response

“Ownership of the site was identified by Officers in early April 2023 when a Planning application (reference 23/00260/PP) was received proposing the redevelopment of the site as a car wash facility. The application is pending consideration. Officers will continue to monitor the condition and status of the site and contact the new owner if appropriate, to establish their intentions for the site.”

Question

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

“I asked the following question at the Full Council Meeting held on Wednesday 8 September 2021:

“Can the Leader of the Council please provide any examples of a North Ayrshire Sole Trader winning a tender for work with NAC through the Community Wealth Building Initiative and can you please provide details of how many North Ayrshire Sole Traders or small businesses with one or two employees are on the tendering list?”

Can the Leader of the Council please inform me what the current answer to this question is and what has changed in the Community Wealth Building process since 8 September 2021?”

Response

“In the period from 9 September 2021 to present, there were 28 micro enterprises awarded a contract under the tender and Quick Quote processes. This included 17 sole traders, 3 businesses with up to 4 employees and 8 businesses with between 5 and 10 employees. The contracts awarded included:

- Early learning and childcare;
- School transport;
- Graphic design services;
- Multi reactive trades framework;
- Roof repair works;
- Building refurbishment works;
- Printing services;
- Community services;
- Cabling works;
- Signage; and
- Roads Winter Assistance

Sole Traders and small businesses are actively encouraged through the Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to bid for lower value procurements such as Quick Quotes and inclusion on frameworks for larger value contracts. CWB aims to build capacity within the small business base, and saw the Business Development team support 134 business during 2022 to enhance their procurement capabilities.

The Council does not operate a tendering list. Procurements are either open to all suppliers registered on Public Contracts Scotland (Tenders) or are by invitation via the quick quote process depending on the value of works or services. When instigating the Quick Quote process, Service Teams, Procurement and Business Growth identify local suppliers to invite to quote. This includes consideration of small businesses and sole traders where applicable.

The Quick Quote process is less onerous than a tender process and should encourage local bids.

The following changes were made to the CWB Quick Quote(QQ) process in April 2022 to support local businesses to bid for work:

- The ‘works’ Quick Quote limit was increased from £100K to £500K increasing the level of quick quote procurement.
- A local suppliers only Quick Quote process was introduced where there are 4 local suppliers (3 suppliers for the islands). Previously this process required 5 suppliers. Clearly suppliers need to have capability and capacity to deliver the contract.
- An open Quick Quote process was introduced between £500K and £1M where 2 or 3 local suppliers are interested in bidding.

The procurement changes and support provided by Business Development has resulted in significant success for local suppliers. This is illustrated in the value of local QQ awards which in 21/22 was £663,270.80 and in 22/23 rose to £2,723,228.87. This equates to over 4 times the level of awards to local suppliers.

Contd.

An annual Procurement Activity report was presented to Cabinet on the 29 November 2022. This covered all procurement activity for the financial year 21/22. The report shows that North Ayrshire Council spent a total of £223.7m with 3,564 suppliers. Further analysis shows £51.2m (or 22.93%) of this total expenditure was spent locally with 735 North Ayrshire suppliers, which is an increase of £6m from the previous year. This spend is vital in supporting the procurement pillar of the Community Wealth Building Strategy. A further report covering the financial year 22/23 will be produced later in the year to assess any further progress.”

Question

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

“For the period from April 2021, can the Cabinet Member please list the names of Consultants employed by the Council the value of contract awarded, the specification or purpose of contract, name of the authorising Service and source of the budget?”

Response

“Analysis of consultancy contracts live from the period from 1 April 2021 has been provided in response to this question (and circulated/ published separately). This includes contracts awarded through the Council’s Procurement team and call-off contracts against consulting lots within the Council’s professional services framework.”

Question

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

“At the budget meeting on 1 March, the SNP Administration voted against raising the amount the Council give in holiday meal entitlement to £4 per day, yet two weeks later raised the amount by a paltry 5p per day. Can the Cabinet Member advise Council how they managed to do this given Standing order 15.4 which states “A notice of motion or amendment shall not be deemed competent for inclusion or consideration on the agenda if, in the opinion of the Solicitor to the Council the motion or amendment is: the same or similar to a motion determined at Council in the previous 6 months”?

Response (to be provided by the Cabinet Member for Education)

“At Cabinet on 21 March 2023, a report was presented which dealt with the method of delivery of free holiday meal provision which had up until then been by way of a voucher scheme. The report recommended a change in delivery approach, taking into account the recommendations from poverty organisations which reflect that cash payments are the most compassionate and dignified way to provide support to those who need help. Cabinet agreed to move from the voucher system to a cash payment system which resulted consequentially in a small saving on the administrative costs of the voucher system which could in turn be redistributed to recipients as it fell within the agreed financial envelope allocated at the budget meeting in March.”

Question

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

“The SNP Administration’s budget made cuts to school meals which would remove the Council’s Food for Life accreditation. Can the Cabinet Member tell us the impact on the nutritional standards of school meals?”

Response

“The move away from the Food for Life Accreditation will not impact the future compliance with the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations and we will continue to offer freshly prepared food and a diverse range of menu options which will be informed in part by pupil feedback. Two inspections have taken place in 2023 at a primary school and a secondary school. These were positive and no areas of concern were identified.”

Question

- (7) a question by Councillor McPhater to the Economy and Climate Change in the following terms:

“Can I ask can the Cabinet Member how much more rent did a tenant at Redburn Grove pay to the Council 22/23 in comparison to Housing Revenue Account tenants?”

Response

“Redburn Grove tenants’ weekly rent charge for 2023/24 is £99.86, before award of any benefits for housing costs. The rent charged to the sixteen tenants at Redburn Grove reflects the cost of dedicated on-site support provided by a member of staff as well as maintenance of common outdoor and indoor areas, including the residents’ community room. Rental income funds approximately 50% of the cost of operating the site, with the remaining 50% financed from the Council’s wider General Fund.

The average rent for a council house (HRA) tenancy is £82.75.”

Question

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

“The new First Minister has announced a £4.5million capital fund to support Councils in providing after school and holiday clubs. Can the Cabinet Member advise us whether the Administration intends to submit a funding bid that could improve access to out of school services in North Ayrshire?”

Response

“Details of the fund have just been announced (10 May 2023). Officers are currently engaging with Scottish Futures Trust to determine the most appropriate focus of an application from North Ayrshire Council.”

Question

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

“The toilets at the Melbourne Park have been closed to approaching two years now. Can the Cabinet Member tell me when this toilet block will be repaired and opened back up for public use?”

Response

“We are committed to reinstating the service but are currently using the opportunity to explore options to maximise community impact. Local members will be invited to a meeting to discuss proposals shortly.”

Question

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

“In September 2020, the Fraser of Allander Institute published ‘The impact of Covid-19 on the Arran Economy’, a report commissioned by the last Administration. Included in the report was an assessment that the ferry is worth around £170,000 per day to the island’s economy. Can the Cabinet Member tell us how much the Arran economy has lost due to cancelled ferry services since the report was published?”

Response

“It is not possible to determine the precise extent of economic loss to the Arran economy due to cancelled ferry services. Within the Fraser of Allander Institute study published in September 2020 referred to, it was estimated that between August and December 2019 a single ferry journey on average contributed circa £13,200 to Arran’s economy.”

Question

(11) a question by Councillor Foster to the Provost in the following terms:

“Given the role of the Provost as civic head of the Council and the supposed role as impartial chair of Council meetings, does the Provost regret amplifying views on her social media account stating that Anas Sarwar is a “hypocrite for celebrating Pakistan’s separation from India”, that “the SNP came out just fine after the Salmond fiasco”, that “it’s a witch hunt for Peter Murrell and Nicola Sturgeon”, that “we trust the SNP to get us there, whatever way the money is spent is good as far as I’m concerned” and that “Police leaks are behind the press being given information about the investigation into the SNP”?”

Response

The Provost will respond.

Question

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

“Can the Cabinet Member tell me how many breakfast clubs there are in our schools and early years centres?”

Response

“Running total: 36 schools (31 primaries and 5 secondaries) have formal arrangements in place for breakfast clubs. Some are funded through targeted funding from the Devolved School Management Scheme (14) and the rest are funded either through PEF, school funds, the local church or community groups, parents/carers or a combination of these.

The remaining schools do not have a formal breakfast club but these schools have all confirmed that they have informal arrangements in place to ensure that no child arrives at school hungry and would receive something to eat on arrival.”

Question

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

“The SNP Administration has now launched its job cuts fund. Can the Cabinet Member now advise us (a) what roles the Administration aim to cut and (b) the annual savings they expect to achieve?”

Response

“There is no such thing as a job cuts fund.”