
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

26 January 2021

Cabinet

Title: **Supporting North Ayrshire Together – Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and Progress Report
(Council Plan Progress Update – Quarter Two 2020-21)**

Purpose: To advise Cabinet on our response so far to the Covid-19 pandemic and performance against the Council Plan 2019-24 as at Quarter Two 2020-21

Recommendation: That Cabinet agrees to: (a) approve the performance of the Council Plan as at 30 September 2020 (b) note our response to the Covid-19 pandemic so far; and (c) submit the report and appendices to Audit and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at the next available date.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The “Supporting North Ayrshire Together – Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and Progress Report” in Appendix One replaces the standard Council Plan 2019-24 Progress Update (Mid-Year 2020-21) as it provides an overview of how the Council has worked alongside partners and communities to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic alongside the impact on progress against our strategic priority outcomes.

2. Background

- 2.1 Within our Quarter Four Council Plan Progress Update there was commitment to provide an update on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives and significantly changed our methods of working, the impact on our day to day services is included, as well as progress in delivering our strategic priorities. As a result, the report provides visibility of the scale and speed of the response and enables effective scrutiny of it and existing services.
- 2.2. This report forms part of our Public Performance Reporting commitments and complements our other reporting activities such as our Annual Performance Report, Local Government Benchmarking Framework reporting and other specific performance reporting.

2.3. Performance Summary






- 2.3.1 In the space of a few days we worked with partners to mobilise an unprecedented response to the Covid-19 pandemic. A culture of empowerment and several years of working alongside partners with shared priorities ensured we could establish support quickly and effectively, much of it on an equal partnership basis. This included Community Hubs, Childcare Hubs and Food Hubs with over 5,700 shielding residents and 690 key worker families supported.
- 2.3.2 We have provided almost 1.26 million meals and nearly 1.5 million items of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We delivered 12,407 prescriptions and 66,753 food parcels. We have administered £24,160,000 of grants to businesses and £312,000 of newly self-employed hardship grants to our residents.
- 2.3.3 The ability to be agile due to previous investment in the digital agenda and promotion of flexible working, meant our office-based teams were able to operate from home very quickly, ensuring core activities continued.
- 2.3.4 We moved significant numbers of services online, however the Contact Centre telephone service was maintained remotely to ensure our vulnerable residents or those not online could still access services.
- 2.3.5 Though many frontline services had to close or move online, we maintained critical services such as our household refuse collection. We were one of only a few councils in Scotland to achieve this.
- 2.3.6 We continued to deliver education remotely to our young people and provided IT equipment and paper-based alternatives for those unable to access the internet. We ensured significant support was available for our vulnerable young people.
- 2.3.7 Work to progress our key strategic priorities continued in many areas. This included:
 - Launching our Community Wealth Building Strategy. It is also embedded in the Recovery and Renewal Strategy, developed in response to the pandemic.
 - Responding to our extremely positive Best Value Assurance Report by Audit Scotland.

2.4. Areas of Focus for the Next Six Months

- Evolve our response to the Covid-19 pandemic to support our residents and businesses.
- Continue with preparations for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.
- Embed Community Wealth Building in our own activities and encourage the approach within our partner organisations.
- Implement our Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach.
- Implement our Financial Recovery Plan.
- Engage with communities through our "Fair Say" sessions and finalise the 2021-22 budget.
- Finalise the Ayrshire Growth Deal (this was signed on 19 November 2020, outside the timescales of this report).
- Further develop Community Hubs, looking at new ways of working to support our residents.
- Prepare for the Scottish Parliamentary Election.

2.5. Performance Indicators

- 2.5.1. Appendix 2 details the Performance Indicators (34) from the Council Plan Performance Framework. A summary of indicators against traffic light status is outlined below. Of the 27 indicators that have data and a target, **80.8% are on target** and **3.8% are slightly adrift of target** and **15.4% are significantly adrift of target**. Where an indicator is annual, the 2019-20 annual status is used.

2020-21 Mid-Year Status Summary *	
Traffic Light	Indicators
 On target	21 (80.8%)
 Slightly adrift	1 (3.8%)
 Significantly adrift	4 (15.4%)
 Data Only	1
 Data not available	7

**Of the five indicators adrift of target, two have already been reported within the Council Plan Quarter Four Progress Report. Six indicators have no data available due to expected time lags and one due to a system issue.*

- 2.5.2. Details of performance indicators adrift of target can be found in the exceptions report in Appendix 3.
- 2.5.3. Due to the pandemic some figures are lower than in previous years. This is the result of some services being closed and/or employees being redeployed to other areas to establish and continue key operations. It was expected performance would reduce this year, however we have remained on target for many of our services. This is commendable and a reflection of the dedication of our teams, as even maintaining many of these areas would have been positive in the current circumstances.

2.6. Actions

- 2.6.1 No formal actions have been established for the first six months of this financial year. This is primarily due to the pandemic and the desire for our services to have enough capacity to concentrate on delivering frontline and core services. However, the ongoing response and business as usual activities support our existing priorities of “Aspiring Communities”, “Inspiring Place” and “a Council for the Future” as well as their outcomes.
- 2.6.2 We believe the “Supporting North Ayrshire Together – Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and Progress Report” contains sufficient detail on our priorities, outcomes and activities to ensure effective scrutiny of our progress against the Council Plan 2019-24.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 Cabinet are requested to (a) approve the performance of the Council Plan as at 30 September 2020 (b) note our response to the Covid-19 pandemic so far; and (c) submit the report and appendices to Audit and Scrutiny Committee for consideration at the next available date.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 None.

Human Resources

4.2 None.

Legal

4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 The report outlines the Council's commitment to fulfilling its statutory duty in terms of Equalities and Socio-economic duties.

Environmental and Sustainability

4.5 The report highlights the Council's commitment to Environmental and Sustainability priorities as outlines in the Council Plan priorities.

Key Priorities

4.6 The report provides information on our performance progress against the key Council Plan priorities.

Community Wealth Building

4.7 None.

5. Consultation

5.1 The Executive Leadership Team discussed and approved "Supporting North Ayrshire Together – Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic and Progress Report" and appendices.

Andrew A Fraser
Head of Democratic Services

For further information please contact **Barry Tudhope, Senior Manager (Corporate Policy, Performance and Elections)** on **01294 324113**.

Background Papers
Council Plan 2019-24



Supporting North Ayrshire Together
Our Response to the Coronavirus Pandemic
and Progress Report
September 2020



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

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This section looks at our progress against the key priorities outlined in our Council Plan 2019-24. It is essential our response to the pandemic is the core priority for all our teams. We also need to maintain and progress key initiatives to support existing needs and ensure we are in a position to make a strong recovery as soon as possible.

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We would welcome your thoughts

You can contact us via:

Email: NorthAyrshirePerforms@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Hashtag: [#NorthAyrshirePerforms](#) on social media

Call: **01294 324648**

Write to us at:

Performance Feedback
Corporate Policy, Performance and Elections Team North Ayrshire Council
1st Floor East
Cunninghame House
Friars Croft
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Welcome

At the beginning of this year none of us could ever have imagined that we would be within a global pandemic and would need to mobilise an immediate response to support our residents and businesses in North Ayrshire. Yet within the space of a few days and even in some cases a few hours, that is exactly what we did. However, none of this would have been achieved in isolation and we are immensely grateful for the help of our communities, volunteers, local businesses, the third sector, our Community Planning Partners and of course our own teams within North Ayrshire Council.

Relationships with our partners have not happened overnight, we are aware that the speed of our collective response was based on many years of collaboration and shared priorities. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported us, our residents and businesses.

Together we have **supported 5,700 shielding residents** during lockdown. We have received over **9,577 helpline calls**. We have procured and **distributed nearly 1.5 million items of personal protective equipment** - not only to our employees but to care homes and unpaid carers. We have provided **almost 1.26 million meals to families and vulnerable residents, 12,407 prescriptions and 66,753 emergency food deliveries**. We've provided **childcare to 690 families** to ensure that our key workers can continue to respond to this pandemic on the front line and **maintained education for our young people**. We have enabled **businesses to access over £24 million of grants** and **distributed £312,000 to newly self employed residents**. We were one of only a handful of local authorities in Scotland to maintain uninterrupted household waste collections, emptying **over 102,000 household waste bins each week**.

Many of our key response areas, such as Community Hubs, would usually have taken a significant amount of time to organise, yet this was established in a matter of days. This is evidence of our teams feeling empowered to make decisions. We minimised bureaucracy in favour of setting things up quickly based on the facts we had and ensured we came up with innovative solutions while not being afraid of failure. In the current situation doing something and learning as it develops is by far the best option.

We moved many of our services online while ensuring we maintained our Contact Centre remotely to ensure the most vulnerable or those without internet access could still access vital services. We launched our **Community Wealth Building Strategy** live online and made sure there were opportunities for our residents to get involved in discussions around it. At no time has this innovative approach been more important to building a wellbeing economy than now.

As a result of the changing demands on our services, this six-monthly progress report looks a little different. We are concentrating on what has been done in response to the pandemic as well as the impact it continues to have on our day to day priorities. Though Covid-19 is the central focus of all our teams just now, it is important that key areas still progress to ensure we can build back quickly and more strongly once this virus is over and ensure we deliver a North Ayrshire that is Fair For All.



Councillor Joe Cullinane
Leader of the Council



Craig Hatton
Chief Executive

Impact on North Ayrshire

This section explores how we have supported our residents, businesses and visitors. It also looks at the impact of the pandemic specifically on our Council operations.

Supporting Our Communities

Community Hubs

Through building on our existing strong relationships, by 24th March we had established a network of six Community Hubs across North Ayrshire, all of them formed as true equal partnerships. The Community Hubs proved a lifeline for many of our residents, providing essential services such as a prescription delivery service, hot meals, befriending and foodbank distribution for those unable to access food due to shielding, self-isolation or financial issues. For those not eligible for free food packages, the hubs provided essential groceries when no other help was available for our residents.



This immediate response was only possible thanks to the well-established relationships with our communities including over 600 current and new volunteers, the third and private sectors and the NHS. In the first week our Community Hubs received 1,789 calls. The Community Hubs are still providing support, as at 30th September the hubs had received 27,387 calls, made 66,753 deliveries of food and 12,407 prescription deliveries. All of this was achieved with the minimal number of our employees and volunteers working onsite on a rota basis due to social distancing regulations. Team members and vehicles were redeployed from other Council services to support our most vulnerable residents.

Many residents contacting the hubs were shielding or self-isolating. Due to this and the volume of calls that were being received, we established a data management system. The key aim of this was to enable front-line workers to be alerted prior to visiting someone who was self-isolating.

We supported the NHS with the provision of transport for patients attending Crosshouse Hospital for treatment, ensuring Covid-19 compliance. We provided transport for key workers and their children to Community and Childcare Hubs.

We provided help and advice on food access including hot food, health including mental health, statutory services, money, isolation, period poverty and offered daily welfare calls. Local bookshops provided almost 10,000 books for those shielding and these were also distributed through the hubs.

Childcare Hubs at a Glance

Opened
Immediately
on 23rd March

16 childcare
Hubs

Up to 196 young
people supported
per day

Over 13,400
school meals
provided in hubs

690 families
supported

Open every weekday until
schools returned on 12th August

Food Hubs

We quickly established food packing and distribution hubs for community food and free school meal packages, from where we distributed the equivalent of almost 1.26 million meals to families as well as the wider community in need of food support. Children of key workers and vulnerable children in our Childcare Hubs across North Ayrshire were provided with over 13,400 nutritious meals as well as snacks.

"Thank you so much for this lifeline and the quick efficient nature that it has been carried out. The weekly pack of food means so much and is making a huge difference for my family in the Three Towns.

The pack is varied and nutritious with no attention or shame being linked to it by your delivery driver or the telephone handler. It meant accessing this service was easy and non-prejudice.

Thank you so much for arranging this so quickly - without this support my family would have really went without. Thank you."

We increased our partnership working with North Ayrshire Foodbank, collaboratively working to develop a process including logistical arrangements to plan and respond to the needs of local vulnerable residents in a food crisis situation.

Childcare Hubs

We opened Childcare Hubs for the children of key workers on 23rd March, initially within our nine secondary schools before moving to six dedicated locations, one in each locality. The Childcare Hubs were operated by volunteers from across the service such as our Education and Library Services. More than 600 teaching and support employees volunteered to support the hubs during term time which enabled key frontline workers to remain at work. The Childcare Hubs continued during the school holidays as Summer Hubs. Our children and young people have spoken positively about their experiences of the Childcare Hubs.

Education

Following the national decision to close all schools from 20th March, classrooms were replaced with living rooms as teachers provided online home learning support to pupils, parents and carers. We provided over 1,000 computers and internet routers to families to support those without internet access or devices. In addition learners unable to access digital platforms were issued with paper-based learning packs.

We established online resources and virtual classrooms through Glow, the Show My Homework App and Microsoft Teams with the ability to complete and submit work and ask for advice.

Throughout the unprecedented disruption to the learning of our young people, their parents and carers were reminded not to put too much pressure on themselves or their children, as supporting everyone’s wellbeing remains extremely important. This was supported through regular and sometimes daily contact between our young people and our education and leadership teams.

While schools were closed, our learners eligible for the Education Maintenance Allowance continued to be paid as normal.

The new school term began a week earlier than normal in line with national guidance on 12th August. Prior to this considerable work had been carried out to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all our learners and school employees. Measures ensuring enhanced personal hygiene and rigorous cleaning regimes are in operation across all establishments. We ensured all catering in schools was cashless at the start of the new term and additional teaching staff were recruited through a Scottish Government education grant.

Our Young People

We worked alongside the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) to support and protect our vulnerable children and young people.

Our North Ayrshire Child and Public Protection Committee asked our communities to assist in protecting our vulnerable people by publicising details on how to report concerns about children and adults. On 27th July we launched our “Here to Help” campaign in partnership with the three Ayrshire Councils, NHS Ayrshire and Arran and Police Scotland to further publicise the support available to anyone dealing with harm or abuse.


Food Poverty

While schools were closed during term time and the holiday period, food poverty for our young people became an even greater concern. Building on our experience gained through our Holiday Hunger school meals service (Wrap Run and Fun), we ensured all pupils eligible for free school meals or clothing grants would be provided for. However, in considering this we realised that where a young person was eligible, it was very likely the family would be struggling in the current circumstances. As a result, food parcels were based on family need rather than the young person alone.

We received 4,800 eligible household registrations of which 2,300 were eligible for free school meals and 2,500 for community food packages. This meant pooling our resources to meet demand. We redeployed 151 employees and 52 vehicles from other services. Due to practicalities of distribution, £30 food vouchers for local shops were provided within Arran and the Isles of Cumbrae. Mainland distribution hubs were set up at school bases in each locality.

Approximately 80% of items within the parcels included fresh local or Scottish produce. Environmental Health were on hand to ensure food safety guidelines were followed.

Schools also registered for the Eat Out to Help Out Initiative which allowed pupils to benefit from half price meals when they returned to school in August.



We recognise that for some, home is not always as safe as it should be. Our North Ayrshire Child Protection Committee published guidance for our young people who felt unsafe at home. School counsellors were also available to provide support.

We worked with Children’s Hearings Scotland and the Scottish Children’s Reporter Administration to support volunteers within the Children’s Hearing system by implementing virtual hearings and the reintroduction of some face-to-face hearings.

During lockdown we visited 5,969 children. This includes 991 visits made to families identified as particularly vulnerable. Over 5,000 telephone calls were made to support families within the same period of time. Many of our HSCP employees were redeployed into critical areas such as: hospital wards, Child Protection teams, Children’s Houses and the Summer Hubs (Childcare Hubs). Their flexibility and willingness to do so enabled vital support to be provided at the right time to children and families who required it.

The facilitation of face-to-face family time for Looked After and Accommodated Children and their parents has been a critical area of practice, ensuring their needs are met and the impact of separation from their family lessened. Colleagues from across the service have been engaged to ensure this face-to-face family time is promoted positively. There has been incredible creativity shown such as providing arts and crafts activities for young people and families to enjoy within these supervised visits.

A number of initiatives and interventions were taken forward to limit the impact of inequality and poverty. This ranged from establishing the Get Connected Fund for a number of children and families to enhance participation in learning, through to providing ongoing connections with those offering them essential support. We assisted a further 82 care experienced young people to get connected.

For some of our more vulnerable families we assisted online applications for food provision and electricity cards. We supported access to IT through providing mobile phones, SIM cards, tablets and Wi-Fi dongles.

Applications to the Cash For Kids Emergency Grant Fund provided £10,500 for our most vulnerable families to provide them with essential items during the lockdown period. Individual applications were made on behalf of families resulting in funding for items such as trailers for bicycles which enabled parents to get out for daily exercise with their young child and thus promoted positive mental health.

Donations of toys, games and bicycles to our HSCP were distributed to families, providing them with mobility and outdoor opportunities to enhance their health and wellbeing. Donations of children’s clothing were also collected and distributed to families.

Social restrictions and isolation were particularly difficult for our young people. Youth Services moved their activities online. #DigiDrEAM was launched and included Monday Minds, DigiQuiz Wednesday, Fakeaway Friday and Tuesday Tik Tok Challenge. There were new challenges every day which featured a whole range of activities from different services including KA Leisure, Active Schools and our North Ayrshire Ranger Service.

Each day at 11am a programme of events was announced on North Ayrshire Youth Services Facebook page.

Our Family Learning Team provided learning packs for our children which were delivered to their homes. Our Information and Culture team provided our children with a variety of online events including; storytelling, Titanic virtual tour and the MacDougall’s music and theatre company.

With most social interaction now taking place online, we published advice on how to stay safe online.

Impact on North Ayrshire

Financial Support

As a result of some of our residents facing financial hardship due to the pandemic, we suspended Council House evictions, except those relating to anti social behaviour, in line with Scottish Government directions. Private tenants with three months of arrears would not face eviction and arrears were extended to six months. Flexibility in Council Tax payments were introduced. All recovery of debt from benefits was suspended.

Our Welfare Reform Advice Team were available via telephone or email for advice and support for residents. Work for Families in partnership with Lennox Partnership was available for families who needed help with debt, childcare, housing or returning to work.

Our Money Matters Team were available online or by phone to provide free, confidential, advice, information and support to residents.

Working from home, our Debt Recovery Team successfully implemented a system which enabled them to continue to offer support to any of our residents experiencing difficulties with the payment of Council Tax or other monies owed to us.

We issued guidance on how to report phishing emails, doorstep callers, phone calls and bogus visitors to protect our residents against fraud.

Trading Standards promoted their “call-blocker” initiative to prevent fraudulent calls.

“I just wanted to thank you very much following on from the installation of the Telephone Blocking System at my mum’s. That’s her had it a week now and what a difference it has made to her already. My sincere thanks to you and your team for the provision of this system.”

We worked with the third sector and our Community Planning Partners (CPP) to secure £1.22m of funding to support local charities, community and voluntary organisations.

Social Interaction

As Community Centres had to close we launched Virtual Community Centres to ensure our communities maintained those crucial social networks and could continue to support each other. As well as tackling social isolation, they provided online information and local community activity updates on a wide range of local services. After lockdown restrictions started to ease, the Virtual Community Centre continued.

With no access to our buildings to use technology or free Wi-Fi, 180 digital devices were made available to eligible adults to allow them to order essentials and keep in touch.



- Child Winter Heating Assistance
- Scottish Child Payment Scheme
- Best Start Grant for new parents
- Best Start Food Scheme
- Best Start School Age Payment
- Free school meals and clothing grants
- Support for young carers
- Kick Start Scheme
- Job Retention Scheme
- Mental health support
- Energy savings advice with Citrus Energy
- Mortgage holidays
- Funeral Support Payment
- Free online financial workshops including maximising income from entitled benefits
- Recovery of unpaid benefits
- PIP appeals
- Reimbursement of arrears
- Pension Credit
- TV Licence Fee changes
- Hardship support
- Migrant rights

Supporting Our Businesses

We immediately published support for our businesses during the first week of lockdown. This included financial advice and support, online business continuity support (including changing production), supply chain mapping and publicising soon to be available business rates relief.

We administered the following national business grants:

- **Phase 1 - Small Business and Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grants:** £10k and £25k grants were available to NDR ratepayers.
- **Phase 2 - Multiple Property Small Business and Multiple Property Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants:** £7.5k and £18.75k grants were available.
- **Phase 3 - Tenants who are not the named ratepayer on NDR Bill:** £10k grants were available to non NDR ratepaying tenants.

In total we received 2,484 applications and distributed £24,160,000 of grants to 2,237 businesses across North Ayrshire.

The Newly Self-Employed Hardship Fund was launched on Thursday 30th April and enabled newly self-employed residents to claim a taxable grant of 80% of their trading profits

up to a maximum of £2,500. As a result, 147 residents received grants totalling £294,000.

Bed and Breakfasts not previously eligible for other support were able to apply for business grants from Monday 15th June. Six businesses received £3,000 each.

In total we distributed £312,000 of hardship funds to self-employed residents.

In the first week of April, we launched our Business Gateway webinars hosted by our Business Development team. Spread over several weeks, subjects included short term funding and planning, crisis public relations management and remote working. Businesses completing two funding modules were also given access to an online business planning tool, providing a further four modules and ability to download a full financial forecast and business plan template. This support was in addition to the national Business Gateway support provided.

A business support helpline was launched as a joint initiative between North, South and East Ayrshire Councils on 17th June to help local businesses navigate the extensive support and funding opportunities available to them. Callers were automatically routed to advisers in their area. Our Business Development team remained fully contactable for advice and signposting to other services.

£24,160,000 of business grants distributed

One year business rates holidays

£312,000 of newly self employed hardship grants distributed

School Transport contracts paid despite school closures (75% value during closures)

Our supplier invoices paid immediately (changed from 30 days)

Approx 80% of food parcel contents sourced from local or Scottish suppliers

Impact on North Ayrshire

We immediately published support for our The Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 adapted licensing protocols to support businesses. This included accepting scanned documents such as driving licences rather than originals and accepting phone payments only. Decisions by the Licensing Committee were suspended though decisions delegated to officers continued.

Licences including liquor and temporary licences for some taxis were extended as renewing a licence is quicker than reapplying for an expired licence, which would have prevented some residents working. We extended the refresher training deadline for Alcohol Personal Licences by 15 months. Relaxations were introduced to support taxi operators.

Our Environmental Health team worked closely with a variety of businesses including takeaways, supermarkets and local stores to ensure food was being handled, stored and produced hygienically and in compliance with legal requirements. In the midst of a global crisis the team wanted to assure residents that the food supply chain in North Ayrshire is well-regulated and safe. Our Trading Standards team offered support to food retailers to ensure they were compliant with regulations

prior to the return of customers. Both teams worked closely with Police Scotland to ensure regulations were complied with.

At the end of March, our Planning Team immediately supported the Scottish Government Chief Planner in relaxing enforcement of public houses and restaurants to enable temporary provision of takeaway services even if their licence did not cover it.

We continued to make decisions on applications. Timescales were longer than usual due to the circumstances. Photographs could be submitted with applications in place of site inspections. Major applications were suspended. Updated guidance was regularly provided on our website.

School transport operators were supported during the school closures, with all contracted providers paid 100% of the contract until 31st March 2020, followed by 75% from 1st April to 30th June 2020 (end of the school term). From April this equated to £753,808, ensuring that employees continued to be paid and businesses remained solvent until the schools reopened in August.

We helped suppliers manage their cash-flow by reducing our payment terms from 30 days to immediate, so payment was cleared as soon as possible.

In May, we urged our residents and businesses to "Keep It Local" in line with our Community Wealth Building Strategy and purchase goods and services from local companies in order to support them and their employees, many of whom are local residents. This included encouraging businesses to review their supply chains to harness local skills and produce.

North Ayrshire Council @North_Ayrshire · 11 Jun

Our Trading Standards Team have been receiving enquiries about what businesses can open during this Phase. Take a look at their quick guide below. If you have any questions you can contact them at tradingstandards@north-ayrshire.gov.uk 🙌

The following retail businesses can be open as long as they have appropriate social distancing and hygiene measures in place for the safety of their customers and staff:

- Takeaway food
- Supermarkets, food shops, newsagents & off licences
- Medical Services and pharmacies
- Bicycle shops
- Homeware & hardware
- Vets & pet shops
- Agricultural shops
- Laundrettes & dry cleaners
- Post offices
- Car rentals
- Car garages and MOT centres
- Banks
- Garden centres

Tradespeople can work in people's homes if they are doing essential repairs and maintenance and follow social distancing and hygiene measures.

This isn't an exhaustive list, if you're unsure please contact us: tradingstandards@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Supporting Tourism



At the beginning of lockdown we became increasingly concerned about the large numbers of residents and visitors gathering at parks, seafronts and other locations across North Ayrshire. As a result, from 23rd March we agreed to close all playparks, Largs Seafront Car Park, all public toilets in our ownership and closely monitored the usage of Eglinton Country Park and Irvine Beach Park.

From 3rd April we took the decision to close car parks at our most popular tourist locations to discourage non-essential travel. The facilities themselves remained open for our residents to walk around while practising safe social distancing measures. However, as soon as it was safe to do so they were reopened in stages from 18th June with all reopened by 3rd July to coincide with the five mile journey restrictions being eased.

Our Island communities are particularly exposed to the impact of Covid-19 on the tourism and hospitality sector. In July we approached the Scottish Government with four asks: that methods of increasing ferry capacity

were explored, journeys were prioritised based on economic and social recovery for the islands, for financial interventions to support the tourism sector and requested the creation of a bespoke Island Fund.

To coincide with this, we commissioned research by the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) at the University of Strathclyde into the disproportionate economic impact of Covid-19 on the island economy. 'The Impact of Covid-19 on the Arran Economy' report published in September, showed that Arran has a unique mix of industries relying on social spending and is particularly exposed to the long-term impact of Covid-19. In cash terms the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the island is estimated to have decreased by £9.3m in the first half of this year compared to 2019 and a large number of businesses remain reliant on government support despite eased lockdown measures at the time the report was written.

We worked with Crown Estate Scotland to identify opportunities for regeneration and investment in our area.

Impact on North Ayrshire

Both organisations share a vision to unlock the potential of North Ayrshire's unique marine and coastal resources, helping to stimulate the social, economic and environmental regeneration of coastal and other communities.

Many events due to be held in North Ayrshire were cancelled including the Making Waves festival which was launched days prior to lock down. However, as restrictions eased, we continued to support marine tourism including working with the local community and partners in September to re-lay the 54 free visitor moorings at Arran and Cumbrae to provide responsible opportunities for tourism for the remainder of the sailing season. In addition we supported the #RespectTheDestination campaign launched by our partners Sail

Scotland, the Royal Yachting Association Scotland, British Marine Tourism and Wild Scotland.

In September we invited tourism and hospitality businesses to share their thoughts and experiences of Covid-19. We worked with East and South Ayrshire Councils and VisitScotland to conduct a research programme to understand the impact of the pandemic on individual businesses, what extra support the public sector could provide, actions taken and an approach to the recovery of the sector and Ayrshire as a responsible tourism destination. The impact on the sector was discussed at the Ayrshire Regional Partnership meeting that month.



Our Council Operations

Democracy and Leadership

Within days of the pandemic the Emergency Management Team, chaired by the Chief Executive, was established. Our Council and Committee meetings were suspended. Emergency Governance power arrangements allowed our Chief Executive, in consultation with Political Group Leaders and a representative from our Independent Elected Members, the ability to consider and deal with urgent matters.

Emergency Governance arrangements during the pandemic were logged and decisions taken by the Chief Executive reported to Cabinet. We quickly resumed committee meetings by remote means, ensuring the readiness of Elected Members' devices and providing them with extensive support. This included establishing protocols and software solutions for remote meetings and making arrangements for future hybrid meetings.

Elected Members have been incredibly supportive with many volunteering within our frontline activities such as delivering food parcels to our most vulnerable residents. In response to the pandemic and our focus on Community Wealth Building new Cabinet roles were created for: Green New Deal and Sustainability; Community Wealth Building; Education; Participatory Democracy; Post Covid Renewal; and Health and Social Care Partnership. These will support open decision making that includes wider participation by residents through building on our successful Community Investment Fund and mainstreaming participatory budgeting approach.

Our Legal Services have provided our leadership team with updates on coronavirus legislation, regulations and

guidance, assisting our colleagues with the delivery of services in a compliant manner in difficult circumstances. This also included negotiation on behalf of the three Ayrshires to secure a storage facility at Prestwick Airport.

Informed decision making is key to ensuring effective action and to monitor impact. It is especially challenging during a fast-moving situation such as the current pandemic. Our Corporate Policy, Performance and Elections Team worked in partnership with our Data Team and across all services including the Health and Social Care Partnership to ensure our Emergency Management Team, the Scottish Government, CoSLA and statutory stakeholders had full oversight of the demand for and impact on our services.

Our Workforce

Our investment in our digital agenda, the implementation of Microsoft Office 365 and the promotion of flexible working for many of our teams has proven invaluable during lockdown. It has allowed the majority of our employees to work from home, connect with each other via Microsoft Teams and continue to provide services to our communities and businesses.

We set up methods for all office-based employees now working from home to have access to the materials they needed to work safely including ICT equipment.



Impact on North Ayrshire

We moved from providing remote access to just over 100 users per day to over 1,200. This included employees who had never worked from home before.

The ICT Team introduced virtual handovers enabling our colleagues to collect their new devices safely. Remote connectivity was used to complete the virtual handovers as well as any other support required.

This is a major cultural transformation which would have seemed impossible at the start of the year but only took days to implement. This enabled our core support services to continue, including but not limited to; Human Resources, Payroll, Finance, Procurement, Legal Services, Health and Safety and Communications. All of which are essential to our day to day operations and mobilisation of critical front-line support.

We created and implemented an alternative approach to meetings and developed guidance on a variety of topics including working from home and shielding. We initiated surveys to inform current and future working patterns and environments. The wellbeing of all our teams remains paramount and we ensured employees had access to information, guidance and support which was regularly updated and promoted.

To ensure minimum disruption during the pandemic, we introduced online recruitment interviews. A webinar, video and guide were developed for recruiting managers to ensure the integrity of existing recruitment requirements.

Our Treasury Management service seamlessly managed the Council's cash flow requirements throughout the pandemic to ensure that funds were available to support services at all times. We responded to several legislative changes to the Freedom of Information (FOI) process from the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner, adapting to changes and keeping managers updated.

Education

Our senior learners were unable to take their Scottish Qualification Authority Exams. Schools were issued with guidelines on how grades would be calculated based on classwork. Schools submitted these on 28th May and results were issued to pupils on 4th August.

Our plans to increase our Early Years provision to 1,140 hours from August 2020 were put on hold and remained at 600 hours. We are currently looking to review and introduce the 1,140 hours entitlement as soon as the situation permits.

We developed a Local Phasing Delivery Plan and established an Education Recovery Board. Pre-populated education establishment Covid-19 risk assessment templates were created, taking into account:

- Mental health and wellbeing resources provided for headquarters teams working from home.
- Guidance for blended learning contingency plans, online digital learning and the recovery curriculum.
- Established forums for Headteachers to discuss school recovery.

Health and Social Care

Care at Home Service capacity was increased to support individuals getting home from hospital without delay and we completed a risk rating for each case ensuring the most vulnerable service users continued to receive home visits and face-to-face contact through lockdown.



Psychological Therapies continued via telephone and NearMe video call consultations.

As part of the Scottish Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Health and Social Care Partnership were set a target of having no delayed discharges from all acute hospital settings and we have achieved significant reductions in delays.

Our Addiction Services Team continued to support residents relying on prescribed treatment for substance dependence with their mental and physical health and helped with access to medication and care.

Our Sensory Impairment Team provided a video and contact details to publicise that we were still available to assist residents and carers of those who are deaf, blind, hearing or vision impaired, or deaf blind.

On Arran our previously employed healthcare and social care workers were asked to come forward and provide their details for a bank/relief register as part of the pandemic preparations.

We continued with child immunisations and our Universal Early Years service to support children and families through the pandemic.

Health Protection Guidance and NHS Ayrshire and Arran's Infection Control Guidance is adhered to by all staff attending home visits.

Keeping Everyone Informed

The fast-moving nature of the pandemic and its impact means high quality immediate communication with our residents, businesses and employees continues to be essential. Our website was constantly updated with the most recent information. As well as utilising local media, our social media channels saw substantial growth during this period in terms of followers and engagements, reaching as many of our residents as quickly as possible.

Our Council Leader and Chief Executive hosted a live Question and Answer Session on Facebook to deal with questions and concerns from local residents regarding Covid-19, the session was viewed by over 13,000 people.

Our Twitter followers increased to 22,753 and we issued 340 Tweets which were seen over 1.9 million times. We gained over 2,800 new Facebook page likes, bringing our total likes to 7,362. We issued 311 posts which were seen over 3.3 million times.

COVID-19 Q&A on LIVE

7PM, Wednesday 8 April

Tune in on the North Ayrshire Council Facebook page to ask our Chief Executive and Council Leader your questions about what we are doing during the COVID-19 pandemic and what it means for you.

Craig Hatton
Chief Executive

Joe Cullinane
Council Leader



Impact on North Ayrshire

We developed Community Planning Partnership communication channels as a reliable and accessible source of information about support and services in relation to Covid-19. During lockdown over 140 locality updates were provided, community books were developed, and six Locality Partnership Facebook pages were refreshed with posts reaching 8,600 people. Launch of the Community Planning Twitter account received 24,000 impressions in the first month.

During the pandemic, our internal communications reached a record number of employees. The average number of monthly visits to our internal news site during this period was 20,399 compared to 7,065 average monthly visits for the same time period in 2019.

We established a Covid-19 section on our website so all information relating to specific temporary changes in services could be found in one place.

Our frontline Customer Service Centres and Local Offices closed to the public. Our Contact Centre team were able to work from home and maintain our central telephone contact number. A large proportion of our services moved online and due to high volumes of calls we prioritised our most vulnerable residents and encouraged others to use our website where possible report missed bins, fly tipping, lighting and roads faults as well as make Council Tax payments, view Council Tax and Rent accounts and request extracts from our Registration Services.

Our Registration Services remained open by appointment only for death registrations and our residents could still phone and use our online service. Restrictions continue to be in place for funerals, with some of our providers offering online streaming of the funeral ceremony.

We recommenced accepting and processing paperwork for marriages and civil partnerships from 22nd June. Ceremonies continue to have restrictions in place relating to the number of people able to attend.

Following its temporary closure, a phased birth registration service began from 29th June.

"I would like to thank Largs housing department for their phone calls checking up on our welfare during these strange times. Fortunately, we have not needed any help so far but their gesture is much appreciated."

We redeployed eight Housing employees to make welfare calls to our most vulnerable residents. We made 50,000 calls including 13,221 to those in our 26 sheltered housing units.

In response to the national shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), our Procurement team took the lead on setting up a new process to ensure we had the required PPE to protect employees. We worked with service representatives to agree a rationalised product list. A PPE store was established within Building Services and the Procurement team worked with suppliers to secure available PPE at the best price.

1,484,976
items of PPE provided to
care homes, unpaid carers,
care providers and personal
assistants

Our schools donated science goggles and 3D printers to produce face visors to the NHS. Local businesses and residents donated hand sanitiser and face visors, funds to buy PPE for frontline services and infrared thermometers for care homes and Community Hubs.

Our residents who were looking for employment could no longer access our Employability Services in person at our five Employability Hubs. Residents were advised to contact us or CEIS Ayrshire, who specialise in supporting social enterprises, by phone or email for assistance. Job seekers who needed access to digital devices were provided with support to complete online applications. Our Employability Team approached local businesses about the national Kickstart programme which provides funding for employers to create job placements for 16-24 year olds.



Though our buildings were closed, we maintained a library service through a combination of online access to our digital library service offering ebooks, magazines, audio books and music, with the new addition of Bookbug sessions and author talks. We maintained our home delivery service for vulnerable residents through the Community Hubs. Some of our library buildings were repurposed as Community Hubs.



Impact on North Ayrshire

The Harbour Arts Centre’s (HAC) online programme continued while the building was closed. They provided their first virtual online art exhibition and looked for households across North Ayrshire to take part in free online drama sessions. The Heritage Centre in Saltcoats embraced Facebook and Twitter to showcase the Titanic exhibition and fascinating local history.

KA Leisure facilities were closed with subscriptions and fees suspended, however some free exercise classes moved online for everyone to use. An online booking system was introduced as services reopened, with most indoor leisure facilities, including swimming pools and gyms available by early September.

“Can I just compliment all the employees at Bartonholm Recycle Centre for their help and assistance. My husband is visually impaired and each time we visit the place, these guys cannot be any more helpful. Well done NAC for employing them.”

We prioritised our household waste collection service, and are proud to be one of the few local authorities to continue all those services uninterrupted throughout lockdown, despite significant resource challenges and increased amounts of waste. We increased patrols to deter and reduce incidences of fly-tipping and were one of the first councils to resume our special uplift service, with additional capacity. This eased pressure on households who were unable to access Household Waste Recycling Centres due to the nationwide closure. We successfully re-opened our sites from 1 June onwards, overseeing exceptionally high levels of demand, with extensive traffic management and safety measures in place to protect visitors and our employees.

Our Roads Service continued to attend to dangerous and urgent road defects throughout lockdown. As a result of several flooding incidents in July and August, we worked in partnership with the emergency services and Scottish Water to respond quickly and effectively.

Our Housing Repairs Service was temporarily paused with only emergency repairs provided during the lockdown period. Non-emergency housing repairs restarted on 6th July. Our Homeless and Community Safety Service continued throughout to ensure our homeless residents and those requiring temporary accommodation continued to be safely housed.

In line with most other councils, our grass cutting services focused only on essential areas during lockdown, including junction sightlines and cemeteries. This allowed us to redeploy colleagues from this work to other essential services such as waste collection and food deliveries for vulnerable residents. Following lockdown, teams worked tirelessly over a period of eight weeks to clear the backlog of grounds maintenance work.



Our play parks, tourist car parks and public toilets were closed to discourage visitors to the area. Eglinton Country Park and Irvine Beach Park remained open to allow residents to have socially distanced exercise. The use of the two parks was continually monitored.

Our car parks reopened in phases from 19th June with reminders to our residents to adhere to national guidance. Our play parks reopened on 29th June and our public toilets opened on a phased basis from 11th July. The Tournament Café and toilets at Eglinton Park reopened on 24th July.

We received £100,000 from Sustrans to support the reopening of outdoor recreational spaces and assist residents to exercise in a socially distanced way.

We worked with contractors and the construction supply chain to ensure construction work on our school build and house build projects was appropriately wound down and secured prior to lockdown and that the re-start was achieved in a safe and efficient a manner as possible, in line with Government and industry guidelines. Our house build projects resumed in June.

Our Digital Evolution

Due to our investment in rolling out Office 365 during recent years, the majority of our office based workforce could immediately work from home with access to almost all of our systems. This ensured we could help and support our residents and businesses quickly and effectively during the pandemic.

In addition, we maintained our telephone Contact Centre to ensure our most vulnerable residents or those without internet access could still access services and support.

A summary of our digital activities is below:

- Online launch of Community Wealth Building Strategy
- Virtual Community Centres on Facebook, one for each locality
- Daily updates to the online Community Books
- Adult learning online – English to Speakers for Other Languages (ESOL)
- #DigiDrEAM – a popular online platform by Youth Services – Drop Everything and Move (online!) The Wednesday night quiz was especially popular

- Active Schools online – via Facebook and Twitter – a range of activities for physical and mental health, including TikTok competitions
- KA Leisure offered online activities and motivational programmes
- More than 1,000 iPads and other devices provided for digitally excluded families, those shielding and care-experienced young people, through Connecting Scotland and third sector partners.
- E-Sgoil and other learning platforms to support remote learning
- Online applications for business grants and hardship funds
- Online recruitment and interviews with guidance for candidates and recruiting managers
- Online registration for weekly food packs including delivery day information
- Licensing accepted scanned documents
- Free waste special uplift online registration
- Closely managed social media presence
- Our website was updated regularly and publicised as support where possible for enquiries, reporting issues or faults and online payments.

Delivery of Our Council Plan

It is essential our response to the pandemic is the core priority for all our teams. We also need to maintain and progress key initiatives to support existing needs and ensure we are in

a position to make a strong recovery as soon as possible. This section looks at our progress against the key priorities outlined in our Council Plan.

Performance Indicators

Mid Year 2019-20

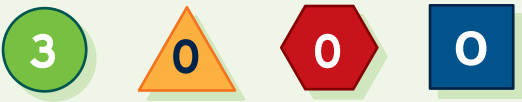
Aspiring Communities



Inspiring Place



A Council for the Future

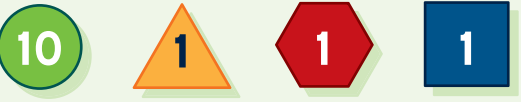


Mid Year 2020-21

Aspiring Communities



Inspiring Place



A Council for the Future



● On target ▲ Slightly Adrift of Target ■ Significantly Adrift of Target ■ Data Not Available/Data Only

The graphic above shows how our performance indicators compare with the same period last year. Due to the pandemic some figures are lower than in previous years. This is the result of some of our frontline facilities being closed and/or employees being redeployed to other areas to establish and continue key operations.

Of the five adrift indicators, two have been previously scrutinised through Quarter Four reporting and a third relates to 2019-20 with data only recently being made available. Of the

two that relate to the first half of this year, both have been directly impacted by the pandemic.

It was expected that performance would reduce this year, however we have remained on target for many of our services. This is commendable and a reflection on the dedication of our teams, as even maintaining many of these areas would have been positive in the current circumstances.

Full details of performance indicators are listed at the end of this report.

Aspiring Communities

North Ayrshire has active and strong communities

Our 'Substance of Our Communities' participatory budgeting event was postponed to June and moved online to allow our communities to take part. Residents were empowered to decide which of the projects, aimed at preventing drug related deaths should be awarded funding. Community projects were able to bid for grants of between £8k and £10k. Six projects were successful.

North Ayrshire's children and young people have the best start in life

Our Children's Services Planning includes our Children's Rights Report and our Child Poverty Action Plan, all of which have been redeveloped for the next three years.

We published our Children's Services Plan 2020-23, outlining our aims and priorities to safeguard, support and promote the well-being of children and to make North Ayrshire the best place in Scotland to grow up

Our Children's Rights Report 2020-23 was finalised which emphasises our commitment to promote and protect children and young people's rights in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Our Child Poverty Action Plan 2020-23 for North Ayrshire was launched, taking account of the initial analysis of the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Key priorities include the establishment of a cross party working group to develop a co-ordinated approach to reduce the cost of the school day, develop early preventative action, support mental and physical health and develop a North Ayrshire Food System.

North Ayrshire's residents and communities are safe

In order to meet our statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for our homeless people, we very quickly created additional temporary furnished flats dispersed across North Ayrshire as a result of the closure of Victoria House hostel. This ensured continuity of service and support provision to homeless residents, a particularly vulnerable client group, during a difficult period.

Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Building Standards continued to work with multiple stakeholders to ensure public health and safety. The service also contributed at a national level through significant involvement with Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) and both Societies of Chief Officers for Environmental Health and Trading Standards.

Two very positive audits on Protective Services were completed. An internal audit looked at the financial management of the building warrant and planning application process where it was found that 'substantial assurance' was given to the auditors. The second, conducted by the Scottish Government's Building Standards Division stated they were encouraged to see our proactive approach to ensuring our verification service sustained its position as a strong performer.



Delivery of Our Council Plan

North Ayrshire has an inclusive, growing and enterprising economy



Our Community Wealth Building (CWB) Strategy, the first in Scotland, was formally launched with a Facebook event in May 2020, attracting 276 live viewers and over 10,400 video views. It sets out how we will work in partnership with local communities, businesses and wider regional anchor institutions to create a fairer local economy that tackles poverty and inequality. It will embed a new economic model focused on wellbeing and inclusion.

Key Community Wealth Building highlights in the first six months of this year include:

- Formation of an Expert Advisory Panel.
- We became first Scottish Council to become a member of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance.
- A CWB Coordinator started in July with eight related roles starting in September and October.
- Proud to Keep It Local campaign launched to encourage communities to shop local and support local businesses.
- Currently co-producing CWB plans and activities with communities through workshops and developing an Anchor Charter agreement to embed CWB across anchor institutions.

In September our **Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach** was approved by

Cabinet. Our CWB Strategy is central to this new approach. It sits within a suite of key strategies within our Council Plan. It focusses on our priorities of CWB and climate change as well as within these the need to create an inclusive local and regional wellbeing economy.

The transformational **Ayrshire Growth Deal** is continuing to progress, with £251m of business cases developed and strong relationships built to help deliver the ambitious projects. The approach will include the roll out of a new £660,000 Community Wealth Building Business Fund to provide assistance to local business including supporting the development of co-operatives, employee ownership and social enterprises. It will help establish local supply chains, fair employment, digital adoption and the transition to a green economy.

The overall Ayrshire Growth Deal investment in capital projects provides significant leverage in terms of attracting further investment, skills and additional capacity to deliver CWB and Green New Deal objectives. This will be achieved through targeting strategic placemaking and key sectors which will particularly support the economic renewal process, as referenced in our Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach. In addition we are participating in the Covid-19 recovery workstreams through the Ayrshire Economic Partnership. These workstreams are exploring a strategic pan-Ayrshire overview of recovery and renewal processes and will further support partner activity and attract additional resources.

Our Business Development team have developed a locality-based approach and proactive operating model which focuses on the delivery of CWB objectives. CWB staff are now in place and up skilling of advisers is ongoing. We are developing specific mechanisms of support for Green technologies and Digital offers. Our new approach will be rolled out in November.



In the first six months of this year, our supported employment service for residents with a disability 'Equal' has supported 13 residents into employment. This support has been vital during lockdown, with the team developing new ways of engaging with and supporting clients.

We have continued to deliver our Modern Apprenticeship programme this year, receiving 200 applications. We adapted the programme to ensure that it is flexible, providing additional places to services who can still provide support the programme despite pandemic restrictions. As a result we:

- Aim to create the planned 50 apprentice opportunities by the end of this year, with 23 started in September and a further 17 scheduled for October.
- Continue to support disadvantaged groups, with two care experienced and seven young people with disabilities securing apprenticeships.
- We successfully recruited ten, four-year craft apprentices this year, as well as retaining all of our qualifying apprentices in full-time employment. This provides our young people in North Ayrshire with employment and helps to secure the longer-term sustainability of areas such as Building Services by creating our own skill base.



North Ayrshire's residents and communities enjoy good life-long health and well-being

Our move to Trindlemoss House, our new complex needs unit, was delayed until 8 June 2020. It is now operating with five of the six spaces occupied.

One young person has been successfully moved to his own tenancy from one of our Children's Houses and we have submitted a further two housing applications. We are continuing with 'virtual' Fostering Panels and Adoption and Permanency Panels. Since launching our communication campaign 12 foster carers have been approved this year and the number of in-house foster carers has increased to 101.



Delivery of Our Council Plan



Inspiring Place

North Ayrshire is well-connected with effective infrastructure

We signed a formal agreement with Crown Estate Scotland in June which will increase opportunities for regeneration and investment. Particular focus will be given to projects that maximise wider value, deliver sustainable and inclusive economies, promote Community Wealth Building and maximise the impact of our Ayrshire Growth Deal investment alongside other major capital investment programmes.

In addition to our funding commitments, we have secured £1.5M from Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Fund and £500,000 from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority for the Lochshore community and leisure hub. This will allow construction of the £3.6M facility to commence in spring 2021. A masterplan is being developed with the local community and partners including Scottish Enterprise, the Green Action Trust and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

Sustrans awarded funding of over £400,000 to allow the creation of a new western gateway to the site and to help develop active travel routes within the site. Investment in the wider site will see overall funding commitments of over £5M.

Funding of £1.35M has been secured from the European Regional Development Fund to allow a programme of works within Ardrossan including development of a National Cycle Network route coastal path, electric vehicle charging points and improved public realm links. We are promoting a wider programme of investment of over £150M within the town including the new community campus at Ardrossan North Shore, new housing and commercial developments and the redevelopment of Ardrossan Harbour. This is one of the largest regeneration programmes in Scotland and will not only transform the local area but also re-establish Ardrossan as one of Scotland's most important coastal destinations.

Funding has been approved to construct new office buildings at Annickbank and as part of the Ayrshire Growth Deal, £15m has been secured to develop new industrial space to support the expansion of our businesses.

Our plans for the closure of Garnock Valley Early Years Centre and relocation to St Bridget's Primary School Early Years have been agreed.

North Ayrshire has homes that meet residents' needs

Our comprehensive house building programme was delayed due to the virus but resumed in June. Two sustainable demonstrator homes have since been completed which will help reduce carbon emissions and the impact of climate change. These homes include some of the features that could be included in the build of our 1,575 new homes.

We started on site in September to deliver new affordable housing in Kilwinning and are currently building new generation council houses in Irvine, Largs, Millport and Arran.

A preferred bidder has been identified for the sale of land at Montgomerie Park, Irvine for housing development. The process was supported by Scotland's first housing

Simplified Planning Zone. The sale of the site will help to fund a new primary school within the masterplan area.

North Ayrshire is a sustainable environment

We have seen a 48% reduction in overall carbon emissions in the first quarter of this year compared with the same period last year. This includes the impact on travel and building use due to coronavirus restrictions.

We have established a partnership with the University of Strathclyde to support innovation and climate change action in North Ayrshire. The first action undertaken by the University is to support the development of solar farm proposals by modelling potential energy use scenarios.

We launched our 'Local Green New Deal' to plot the economic recovery from Covid-19 with an investment fund of £8.8M. The deal includes a focus on building a better local economy, fairer and greener in line with our Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach. This will ensure economic, social and environmental justice for our communities moving forward. We are creating a new £500,000 Green Jobs Fund as well as investing another £500,000 in a tree planting programme and exploring ways to create employment and training opportunities for local young people. In turn our investment will create income that we can invest in further local projects.

SEPA verified the household waste recycling performance for the calendar year 2019 as 56.3%, which has increased from 54.6% (+1.7%) compared to the 2018 calendar year performance.

Community consultations continued in relation to our Flood Prevention Schemes. Two options were consulted on with Millport residents to agree a final option. A construction contract was awarded for the £18M Upper Garnock Valley project which will aim to reduce the flood

risk to properties in Kilbirnie, Glengarnock and Dalry from the River Garnock, Powgree Burn and Rye Water. We have completed coastal defence works at Pirnmill on Arran.

North Ayrshire is a vibrant, welcoming and attractive environment

Following on from an excellent Local Environmental Audit Management (LEAMS) report from Keep Scotland Beautiful for 2019/20 which gave an average score of 94.6% for street cleanliness, we continue to maintain essential street cleaning throughout the pandemic. The Enforcement Team have issued 239 Fixed Penalty Notices compared to 129 for the same period last year. We increased patrols to deter and reduce incidences of fly-tipping and were one of the first councils to resume our special uplift service, with additional capacity.



Delivery of Our Council Plan

A Council for the Future

The Best Value Assurance Audit considers the Council's compliance with its statutory duty of Best Value as set out in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003. It is the core Council-wide audit by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Accounts Commission.

The Accounts Commission published their extremely positive findings in June. The audit took place prior to the pandemic and found overall, despite significant economic and demographic challenges, we are performing well, sector leading for community empowerment and an early adopter for national pilots.

The key messages were;

- We have a strong culture of continuous improvement. We have significantly improved and continued to make progress since the last Best Value report in 2011. Council priorities, plans, actions, and outcomes are clearly linked. Employees play an active role in identifying and driving improvement and we are delivering improvements for communities and residents.
- There is a strong culture of collaborative working. Elected Members and officers work well together, and we work effectively with a wide range of partners including the Community Planning Partnership (CPP), the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) and private business. There is joint ownership of, and commitment to, delivering agreed strategic priorities. The Council Plan, the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan and Locality Plans are all clearly aligned and focussed on addressing North Ayrshire's key challenges.
- Our financial planning and management arrangements are good overall and we have significantly improved our asset management and procurement arrangements since the last Best Value

Best Value Assurance Audit

Report. While we have made clear progress with our transformation agenda, including setting aside money to fund projects, our savings plans fall short of the estimated funding gap.

- We are committed to community empowerment and is recognised by the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA) as a sector leader. Our approach is focused on embedding community empowerment in every-day business. We work well with a wide number of communities and groups including young people and tenants.

The four recommendations were:

- Accelerate the scale and pace of transformation ensuring the right resources and skills mix support this and that benefits are tracked
- Fully embed workforce planning
- Clarify intended impacts across all Locality Plans
- Improve North Ayrshire Performs, the online performance data portal, to make it more user friendly and accessible

"The core of this progress has been a good sense of self-awareness: The Council has been clear on how and where it can improve, has a well-defined strategy, and shares with its partners a strong vision for North Ayrshire.

This strategic direction is reinforced by a record of collaboration: between Elected Members and officers; in engaging with staff in improvement; and in the empowering approach taken by the Council in its relationship with its communities."

(The Accounts Commission – North Ayrshire Best Value Assurance Report 2020)

An efficient Council that puts residents and communities at the heart of what we do

With partners, we mobilised an instant response to the pandemic. The flexibility and innovation of our approach is outlined in detail earlier in this report.

An efficient Council that maximises resources and provides value for money

The Accounts Commission published their extremely positive findings from our Best Value Assurance Audit. (See Best Value Assurance Audit feature.)

Despite the restrictions of lockdown, the Financial Services Team successfully completed the preparation of our annual accounts within statutory timescales and received a positive report from our external auditors.

We have completed our Asset Management Plan process regarding illuminated sign units and Non-Road lighting assets. This will allow integration into our maintenance processes and result in improved budgetary planning and control.

A valued workforce that delivers high quality services

Our Welfare Reform Advice Team continue to have a positive impact on tenants' lives. During the first six months of 2020/21 we have helped improve tenants' incomes with overall financial gains of £907,817.20. This is an increase of £74,342.80 (9%) from the same period last year.

We disclosed 558 Freedom of Information and Environmental Information requests

during the first six months of the pandemic with 89% disclosed within the legislative timescales.

A powerful and respected voice

Our final Report on the Feasibility of Citizen's Basic Income Pilots in Scotland was submitted to the Scottish Government and shared with the UK Government in May/June 2020 and we provided evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee on the report in August 2020. Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities described the report as a 'pioneering study'. The concept is based on offering every individual, regardless of existing welfare benefits or earned income, an unconditional, regular payment.

Between April and September we have actively contributed to a Carnegie UK Trust "Covid and Communities" UK-wide research project to capture learning and good practice from the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report, due to be published in December, aims to identify new ways of working that can help shape future policy, projects and services to ensure community and societal wellbeing.



Areas of Focus

Over the next six months we will be focussing on a range of immediate and longer term actions to support our communities and economic recovery.

Over the next six months we will:

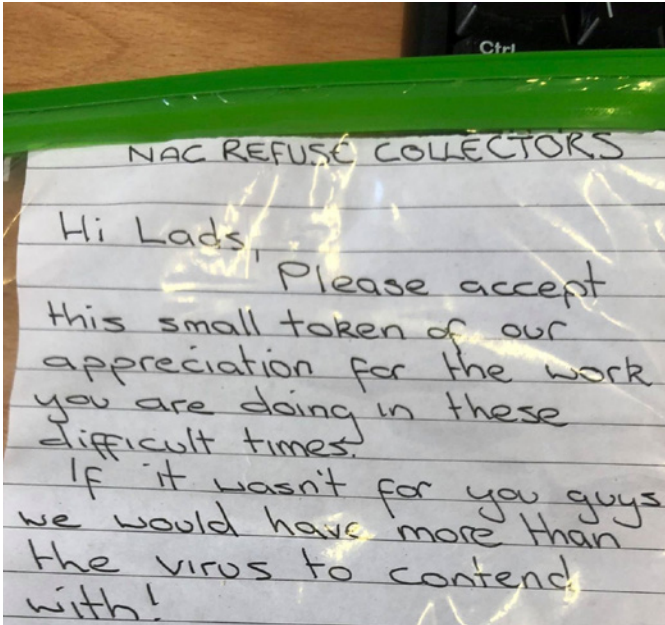
- Evolve our response to the Covid-19 pandemic to support our residents and businesses.
- Continue with preparations for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union through our Brexit Working Group.
- Embed Community Wealth Building in our own activities and encourage the approach within our partner organisations.
- Implement our Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach.
- Implement our Financial Recovery Plan.
- Engage with communities through our "Fair Say" sessions and finalise the 2021-22 budget.
- Progress delivery of the Ayrshire Growth Deal, following ratification of implementation and financial arrangements in November 2020.
- Further develop Community Hubs, looking at new ways of working to support our residents.
- Support Community Associations in preparation for letting provision restarting using the newly developed "Restart Toolkit" as restrictions ease.
- Progress the 1140 hours Early Years Childcare expansion programme.
- Progress development of the new Ardrossan school and community campus.
- Consult on the new Montgomerie Park Primary School.
- Progress the New Green Deal to ensure we meet our commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Roll out our new locality-based Business Development approach focussing on Community Wealth Building objectives in November.
- Establish a Better Off Hub, building on our Better Off North Ayrshire approach.
- Conduct an Open Space Audit to identify and address any gaps or deficiencies in the quality or quantity of open spaces across North Ayrshire.
- Review our 2020/21 Capital Programme to identify adjustments to the scope and timing of individual projects and revisit our current Construction Programme, where any delays and potential opportunities for acceleration are being considered.
- Prepare for the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in May.
- Progress improvement actions from the Best Value Assurance Audit in terms of workforce planning, transformation, locality plans and access to performance data.

Your Feedback

We continued to receive feedback from our residents throughout the pandemic. Our teams have really appreciated the numerous compliments received through what continues to be an exceptionally challenging time. Comments received are included throughout this report with additional information provided below.

"Pass on thanks for the vital service being provided by the Partnership's care at home staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a fantastic service with personal care support as well as offering emotional support at a time when family are unable to visit."

Resident



We received 5.8% fewer complaints compared to the same period last year. Of the 1,300 complaints received 9% related to changes in policy due to the necessary restrictions brought in due to the pandemic. For example the majority of complaints related to lack of grass cutting which was a direct result of our response to the pandemic. There were a high number of missed bin pull outs however this should be noted in the context of being one of the few local authorities who maintained their waste collection service throughout the pandemic.

We have seen a 26% reduction in the number of compliments received, however it is unlikely this reflects the current situation. Logging of compliments has been necessarily a low priority for many teams as they are delivering frontline services. Anecdotal evidence through social media especially shows that the services we have provided have been exceptionally welcomed by our residents.

"Just wanted to say I think the Council is doing a wonderful job during the lockdown. The specific information on your website about all the services and support available is so comprehensive and helpful. The speed with which you set up the Community Hubs is amazing. The Q and A session held by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive was so comprehensive and helpful too. Thank you so much for all the good work you are all doing."

Resident



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North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath