



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 13 December 2023

Responses to Questions

Question

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

“49% of secondary pupils in North Ayrshire had more than 10% absences in 2022-23. What is that statistic for each of our secondary schools?”

Response

School Name	% of pupils with more than 10% absence during the full academic session
Ardrossan Academy	50.5%
Arran High School	25.9%
Auchenharvie Academy	42.4%
Garnock Community Campus-Secondary	50.0%
Greenwood Academy	53.3%
Irvine Royal Academy	52.4%
Kilwinning Academy	48.4%
Largs Academy	48.7%
St Matthew's Academy	50.0%
All North Ayrshire secondary schools	49.2%

Question

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

"To ask the Cabinet Member for the current level of school meal debt?"

Response

“Current school meal debt is £22,731 across the Primary sector and £3,897 across Secondary schools. We continue to support parents through this process in accordance with COSLA’s Good Practice Principles for School Meal Debt management.”

Question

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

“Can the Cabinet Member please provide a definite/confirmed time and date for the introduction of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement in North Ayrshire?”

Response

“The application for Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) was submitted to Transport Scotland on 2 April 2022. Following a review of the application by Transport Scotland and drafting the Scottish Statutory Instrument for Scottish Ministers sign off, the transfer of powers to North Ayrshire Council happened on 3 November 2023.

A Parking Enforcement Supervisor and 5 Parking Enforcement Wardens have been recruited and start employment in January 2023. A further advert for the remaining post will be advertised early January 2024.

The team will undergo an induction process including on-site street and town familiarisation, system training, dealing with customers training and legislation awareness. This will take place during January and February and will also include a soft launch with formal enforcement activities commencing March 2024.

A communications plan will operate parallel to this including social media posts to raise awareness.”

Question

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

“Can the Portfolio Holder provide an update on progress with the renovation of Marress House and indicate when completion of the building is expected?”

Response

“The Marress House Early Years Centre was due to open earlier this year. Prior to the expected opening date of the facility, the Council was unable to accept handover of the building from the contractor due to a number of outstanding defects.

Further investigation of these items confirmed that extensive remediation works are required.

The contractor has accepted responsibility for these defects and has prepared a schedule of works to address them. Activity has resumed on-site, and officers are now in receipt of the contractor’s plan to complete the outstanding works, with handover of the building to the Council currently anticipated to be during spring 2024.

A further update to parents and carers was issued this week, and we will continue to keep all stakeholders up to date as the remediation works progress.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member how many people have completed the online budget challenge so far?”

Response

“This year, North Ayrshire Council gave every resident the chance to have their say on how the Council spends its budget. The online ‘Budget Challenge’ allowed residents to set their own ‘virtual budget’.

The budget challenge tool launched in late October with **172** responses and comments received so far, with the closing date for the survey on the 15 December 2023.

The survey was promoted via local press, social media campaigns and internally to staff. An invitation to participate in the survey was also issued by our Business Development Team to their extensive list of North Ayrshire businesses and by our Connected Communities Team to their network of community and voluntary organisations. Members will be provided with the results of the exercise early in the new year to consider as part of the Budget process.”

Question

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

“During a Glasgow City Council, Full Council Meeting held on 9th December 2022, the following motion, as adjusted, was unanimously approved:

“Council notes the campaign launched by Radio Clyde calling for lighting to be installed along the main routes of Glasgow’s Parks: notes that this renewed call follows on from experiences during COP26: and notes that this campaign is supported by a wide range of individuals and organisations. Women’s safety requires a multi-agency response, which includes cultural and societal change.”

It also states,

“Council therefore resolves to instruct officers to prepare a paper to the relevant City Policy Committee within 2 committee cycles on the necessary infrastructure to provide sensitive lighting solutions in our parks, including the wider implications: and specifically, the equality and climate impacts of such an undertaking to ensure that the widest range of health, social and climate benefits can be realised.”

My concern is for everyone’s safety using the unlit footpaths within North Ayrshire.

Does North Ayrshire Council have any plans to light up the many footpaths across North Ayrshire that are not currently covered by street lighting of any kind?”

Response

“There are many popular areas of open space that can be utilised for outdoor recreational activity within North Ayrshire which are illuminated during the hours of darkness. These are, but are not limited to:

- Promenade areas within Largs, Irvine, Saltcoats and Ardrossan
- Nethermaines Footpath, Kilwinning
- Jack’s Road Footpath, Saltcoats
- Stanley Burn Footpath, Ardrossan
- Orr’s Trust Park, Beith
- Dalry Public Park
- Kilbirnie Public Park
- Low Green, Irvine
- Riverwalk, Irvine

At present, there are no budgets available to invest in the introduction of lighting to currently unlit areas.

If the member wishes he could propose a budget growth proposal for additional lighting at the Council’s budget setting.”

Question

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

“Does the Portfolio-holder accept that anti-social behaviour is a real problem in North Ayrshire Schools and how does he suggest that the Education Minister's announcement of £900,000 funding for Councils (allowing £360 per school) be used to tackle the problem?”

Response

“We recognise the issues which have arisen around pupil behaviour across Scotland, particularly since the pandemic. This has attracted a significant amount of media attention. However, research shows that issues experienced within our establishments are no more significant than elsewhere in Scotland.

The Directorate has established a short life working group which includes senior education leaders and corporate health & safety working in partnership with Trade Union colleagues to review and refresh the policy on violence and aggression in the workplace. This revised policy will complement the original corporate policy whilst recognising some of the unique challenges within education services.

Our schools have well-established Promoting Positive Relationships policies which are rooted in the principles of nurture: understanding behaviour developmentally and establishing boundaries. These approaches are proven to have the greatest impact.

The Scottish Government has stated that funding will be provided directly to local authorities to train support staff to respond to new challenges and develop behaviour management strategies in schools post COVID. As this funding has only just been announced, it would be advisable to wait until further detail is communicated prior to making decisions about spending.”

Question

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

“It was recently reported in the national press that in August this year, the UK Government offered cross-border support for those on long waiting lists in Scotland – including having individuals receive treatment out with Scotland – this was rejected by the Scottish Health Secretary. What impact will continued long NHS waiting lists have on HSCP services and finances?”

Response

“A link to the NHS Ayrshire and Arran performance report which is published on their website is included for ease of access to local information for planned care and outpatient waits – nhsaaa.net/wp-content/uploads/2023-12-04-BM-P18-Performance-Report.pdf

There will inevitably be some impact on the wider health and care system for additional support needs for some individuals awaiting planned care. This may include ongoing input from General Practice, Social Care supports and medication, for example for pain management. Clearly it is difficult to project into the future the extent of the impact upon HSCP services and budgets, and it is difficult to identify the direct impact of waits, however we will continue to provide regular updates on the overall position through performance and budget monitoring reports to the IJB and its Committees.”

Question

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

“What is the normal maximum occupational capacity for staff in both of Cunninghame House and Bridgegate House and how many staff attend each House on a minimum of two days per week?”

Response

“Cunninghame House has a capacity of 1,050. The average level of daily occupancy is 336, which equates to 32%. Bridgegate House has a capacity of 450. The average level of daily occupancy is 109, which equates to over 24%. These figures are averages and occupancy can fluctuate across weeks with Cunninghame House peaking at a daily level of 359, which equates to over 34% and Bridgegate House peaking at 137, which equates to over 30%. All staff with an agile workstyle are expected to attend the office for a minimum of two days a week and the data also takes into account part-time staff and periods of annual and other leave.

Work is being progressed on a locality based property review. This work will develop options around how we best utilise our property assets within a Best Value context that takes account of the needs of our communities, staff workstyles and climate impact.”

Question

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

"Regal Court residential complex in Dalry now has 6 empty housing units. Some of these housing units have been empty for more than a year. It has come my attention that this complex may not be let out before the scheduled refurbishment work takes place, but with no date being given for works to commence this is being left open. Could the portfolio holder please provide an update to the situation at Regal Court?"

Response

"In advance of each of our sheltered housing refurbishment projects starting on site, we hold a number of properties when they become vacant as this creates the opportunity for tenants to be decanted whilst work takes place within their own property. The COVID pandemic has had a significant impact on the original timescales for the sheltered housing refurbishment programme. Furthermore, project specifications have required to be updated to reflect changes to building standards / regulations and service requirements. As a result, work on-site at Regal Court is now anticipated to commence in late 2025. A cost/ benefit analysis is currently being undertaken to assess whether some of the six void properties should be brought back into use."

Question

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

"Do you know how much of North Ayrshire Council's budget is split between Statutory and Non-Statutory Spending – overall and by department?"

Response

"Any assessment of a budget split between statutory and non-statutory spending would be somewhat subjective in so far as many services will have statutory duties, however, the extent to which these duties are required to be discharged can be a matter of debate.

In general terms a statutory duty means that the Council must comply with the requirements of relevant legislation. A statutory power means that the Council has discretion whether or not to exercise the power. In practice statutory duties and powers are used to provide a range of services which combine both mandatory and discretionary elements.

A high level assessment of aligning relevant legislation across Council services is currently being progressed by officers and will be issued to Members shortly. This will help Members understand the complexity of this landscape."

Question

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

“Previously I had brought a motion to council regarding the Housing Allocation policy. You may remember I accepted an amendment from your group on the grounds that the points I had put forward would be put towards the tenant consultation. I then asked you on 29 March for an update on this and you informed Council that the consultation was moving forward and would be taking place in the ‘summer/autumn 2023’ and the review would ‘conclude’ in late 2023.

It is now December and that has not happened. I am now led to believe that the consultation will now take place ‘some time next year’ – spring/summer. If summer is the case that will be a full year after you had previously told us.

Can you now provide confirmation of when the tenant consultation will take place?”

Response

“The North Ayrshire Housing Register (NAHR) Officers’ Working Group (which consists of members of the four social landlords in North Ayrshire: North Ayrshire Council; Cunninghame Housing Association; ANCHO; and Riverside Scotland) began work on the review of the Common Allocation Policy in January 2023.

Between January and November 2023, the group met regularly to assess the current policy and agree the key areas for review from an officer perspective, prior to the commencement of NAC elected member, RSL Board and wider public consultation. Unfortunately, this initial stage took longer than expected, primarily because the group was awaiting further information on the content of the forthcoming Housing Bill in respect of the proposed Homelessness Prevention Duty and changes to domestic abuse legislation. The latter consultation document was issued by Scottish Government on 29 September and discussed at the NAHR Working Group in October, enabling their proposed areas for review of the Allocation Policy to be finalised and the next stage (NAC elected member consultation) to commence.”