



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 21 September 2022

Responses to Questions

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member whether the Administration intends to transfer Redburn Grove to the Housing Revenue Account?”

Response

“Redburn Grove is currently owned by the Council’s General Fund, however a review of the operating/ funding model – including the site’s future maintenance and development needs - is included in Housing’s 2022/23 Operational Plan. This review is currently underway and will consider whether the Council should approach the Scottish Government to seek permission to move the site from the General Fund to the HRA.

Question

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

“The people of Kilbirnie and Glengarnock are very concerned that burial space is very quickly running out in Kilbirnie cemetery for and, in light of this, can the Cabinet Member for Place provide an update on the assessed current capacity of that cemetery and highlight what plans for land acquisition are being considered for a cemetery extension?”

Response

“The Council is actively looking to see if capacity can be increased.

Property Management & Investment have been looking for a suitable site for a Cemetery but feasibility studies have not identified a suitable location due to issues with ground water and the need to meet Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) regulations issued in 2017 .

This stipulates that any new burial ground should not be considered if it is on land prone to flooding, it must be at least 50m from a watercourse/spring etc. Whilst acknowledging the strong environmental and health grounds for the issuing of this guidance, it does however reduce the number of sites that may be suitable for a burial ground.

The Burial and Bereavement officer recently undertook an extensive review to identify potential areas within the existing cemeteries.

We currently have approximately 2 years capacity remaining and we have identified some areas in Kilbirnie New Cemetery that could be laid out to provide additional lairs which will increase capacity to an estimated 2.5 to 3 years based on demand for burials remaining constant.”

Question

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

“Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the measures which the Council is putting in place in support of the Miscarriage Association Pregnancy Loss Pledge, which aims to provide a supportive work environment for those who have experienced a pregnancy loss?”

Response

“The Council has fully committed to the Miscarriage Association Pregnancy Loss Pledge.

The Pregnancy Loss Pledge is a new campaign by the Miscarriage Association which urges employers to commit to supporting their staff through the distress of miscarriage. The pledge asks employers to create a supportive work environment, to have a policy or guidance in place, to ensure line managers have access to resources to help them manage a difficult situation and to support people back to work by showing flexibility wherever possible.

Over the past few months, the HR Team with support of Trade Union colleagues have been developing an **HR Guide: Pregnancy Loss**.

The new HR Guide will provide our employees and managers with lots of support and guidance and this also introduces up to **10 days** paid leave for parents who experience pregnancy loss.

This new HR Guide will be presented at the 1st Tier Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) on the 22nd September with launch and communication to employees planned for the 9th October 2022. The launch date of the 9th October coincides with the Miscarriage Association Baby Loss Awareness Week which is 9-15th October 2022.

We are pleased to be able to support such an important pledge, and anticipate that this will be welcomed by our employees.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member how much capital investment has been made in Ardrossan Academy over the last decade?”

Response

“Analysis of the Council's historic financial transactions is limited to the retention periods in place for information. Available information on investment in Ardrossan Academy dates back to 2015/16 and I can confirm that from 2015/16 to 2021/22 a total of £686,779 was invested in repairs and maintenance across this period.”

Question

- (5) a question by Councillor Robertson to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Islands in the following terms:

“What avenues has this SNP Administration taken to encourage a higher uptake of the Scottish Government’s free bus travel passes for young people under the age of 22?”

Response

“Since the launch of the free travel scheme for under 22’s on 31st January 2022, 15,762 Travel Cards have been issued within North Ayrshire.

The application process is in the main a digital process, however a manual process and dedicated email address is available to provide alternative methods of application. On receipt of application, the Customer Services Team turn this around in 5-10 days.

In addition to the national campaign, promotion of this new scheme has mainly been via social media. In person events have been held throughout North Ayrshire in libraries, at Youth Events, Ayrshire College, and Community Centres. The events have received positive feedback from attendees with families expressing their appreciation.

Engagement with our Schools has been key to increasing uptake. An easier and smoother method of application for parents was introduced in April 2022 and this has seen over 9000 cards for free travel being produced.

Enhancements to the application process will evolve to ensure ease of application and the promotion and hosting of events will continue to ensure we reach young people far and wide who have yet to apply.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member how much flexible advanced manufacturing space the Council intends to build at i3 as part of the Ayrshire Growth Deal project?”

Response

“An outline business case for the i3 advanced manufacturing flexible space programme was approved in June 2021 by governments as part of the Ayrshire Growth Deal programme. The business case approves Ayrshire Growth Deal funding for delivery of 97,000sqft of advanced manufacturing space. A Full Business Case is currently being developed for Phase 1 of the programme, which will develop 18,000sqft of advanced manufacturing space.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member the revenue and capital costs of rolling out Universal Free School Meals to all primary school children in North Ayrshire and confirm how much funding the Scottish Government has provided to deliver that now delayed manifesto commitment?”

Response

“Through engagement with Scottish Government in late 2021 officers in North Ayrshire Council carried out an assessment of dining facilities across the primary school learning estate and identified an indicative capital works cost estimate of £10.357m, being the impact on the learning estate infrastructure to deliver this policy. It is recognised that more recent cost volatility in the construction sector could further increase this estimate.

In terms of capital funding, included in the 2022/23 Budget settlement, an initial sum of £30m was set aside by the Scottish Government to support capital works nationally. These funds have yet to be distributed and the Scottish Government has committed to further engagement with local authorities as part of the planning for extending the universal provision to all primary 6 and primary 7 pupils.

From a prudent financial planning perspective the sum of £10.357m was included in the Capital programme approved at Council in March 2022, however, the report noted that discussions were ongoing with Scottish Government to seek further capital funding.

Scottish Government revenue funding for 2022-23 to support the full year impact of the Primary 4 (from August 2021) and Primary 5 (from January 2022) universal free school meal expansion totalled **£990,000**. Although yet to be confirmed, we would anticipate a similar allocation to cover the Primary 6 and Primary 7 roll-out. Based on current uptake levels there is sufficient financial resource to cover costs, however costs can fluctuate as they are influenced by various factors such as food prices and uptake levels.”

Question

- (8) a question by Councillor Sweeney to the Cabinet Member for Communities and Islands in the following terms:

“With the Ardrossan Campus delayed for at least 12 months, can the Cabinet Member advise whether the Council remains committed to retaining the swimming pool at Auchenharvie Leisure Centre until any school campus is opened?”

Response

“The Council’s strategy in relation to the swimming pool at Auchenharvie Leisure Centre is maintenance of the existing facility and its components until the school and community campus opens.”

Question

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

“In their response to June’s Council motion on the changes to the X34/36 bus services, Stagecoach stated that they were due to meet the Council Leader on 19th August. Can the Leader of the Council confirm that the meeting of the 19th August with Stagecoach took place and can they advise Council what outcomes they secured?”

Response

“I can confirm that the meeting with Stagecoach took place on 19 August 2022. Stagecoach agreed that, whilst the X36 does remain under review, there will be no change to the current service provision for six months. A series of actions were discussed that may help sustain bus routes and make services more attractive to passengers. Stagecoach have committed to regular meetings with the Council to consider service performance, identify any opportunities to improve services and enter into discussions on proposed service changes. Stagecoach have agreed to work in partnership with the Active Travel and Transport team to promote bus travel including raising awareness of ticketing options to provide best value for its customers.”

Question/

(10) a question by Councillor Montgomerie to the Cabinet Member for Place in the following terms:

“Last November, a woman was tragically killed in a fire in one of the public toilets in Saltcoats. Today, the toilets remain closed and fenced off. Can the Cabinet Member advise when the Council intends to repair this toilet block and reopen it?”

Response

“Following the tragic fire last year, the public toilet facilities at Melbourne Park, Saltcoats were closed. Following examination of the extent of the fire damage, the building has been confirmed as beyond economical repair. The building has been fenced off to ensure public safety and compliance with our insurance requirements.

The Council’s Property Management and Investment and Facilities Management teams are currently assisting insurance colleagues and the loss adjuster in the determining options for reinstatement of the facilities. Proposals will be presented to local Elected Members as soon as this work is concluded.”

Question

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

“At the last Council meeting, the Leader of the Council advised that the Ardrossan Ministerial Taskforce was due to meet on the 28th June. At the time of submitting this question, minutes of any taskforce meeting on 28th June had not been published on Transport Scotland’s website. Can the Leader of the Council confirm that the taskforce met on 28th June, and can they advise Council what was agreed?”

Response

“I can confirm the taskforce met on 28 June. The minutes and actions have not been published yet on Transport Scotland website. A representative from Transport Scotland has confirmed that both minutes and actions cannot be shared publicly until approved by Transport Scotland. The documents will be published as soon as reasonably practical.

The link to the site can be issued when the documents become available.”

Question

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

“To ask the Leader of the Council for an update on the Ardeer STEP bid, including whether the planned parliamentary reception at Westminster has been arranged?”

Response

“UKAEA has concluded their assessment of all five sites in contention for STEP and submitted their report to UK Government Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in May 2022. All five sites have been reported on and remain in contention.

With the support of Patricia Gibson MP, a delegation comprising the STEP Ardeer nomination team, North Ayrshire Council elected member representation, and Scottish Enterprise had arranged meetings with key UK Government influencers and decision makers to take place at the Palace of Westminster and House of Commons on Monday 11th and Tuesday 12th July 2022.

Following events of Wednesday 6th and Thursday 7th July, culminating in the resignation of the Prime Minister and resulting in a subsequent Conservative party leadership contest, the decision was taken to postpone these meetings. It was agreed to review options once a new Prime Minister was in place and a new Cabinet convened. The new cabinet was announced on Tuesday 6th September.

The death of HM Queen Elizabeth II on Thursday 8th September has resulted in all such considerations being placed on hold.

We currently await the outcome of the STEP assessment process, with a decision and announcement expected by the end of 2022.”

Question

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

“In 2020, the last Administration used savings of £8.8million on refinanced loans to establish the Council’s Investment Fund with the aim of providing upfront investment to support Community Wealth Building, climate action and improved local infrastructure. The Investment Fund has subsequently been topped up in the following two years. With money in the Investment Fund already committed to several projects such as the council-owned solar farm at Nethermaines, can the Cabinet Member advise how much remains uncommitted to a specific project in the Investment Fund?”

Response

“I can confirm that all funds held in the Council’s Investment Fund are fully committed to specific projects.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet Member whether the Council has contacted the new owners of the former Lonsdale site in Stevenston?”

Response

“It has not been possible to make contact with the new owners so far. No change of ownership has been recorded on the Scottish Land Register for the former Lonsdale Site to date. When this position changes, the Council will make contact with the new owner to discuss their intentions for the site.”

Question

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

“The Ship Inn at Irvine Harbourside has been closed since the start of the Covid pandemic. Renovation work on the building is ongoing with some reconfiguration of the business use within it. Despite being closed for more than two years, and a different use for parts of the building, the business rates assessment remains £71,000 a year.

What support will the Council provide to secure a reassessment of the business rates by the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board given the historical significance of the Ship Inn to Irvine and the role the building will play in the Great Harbour project?”

Response

“The assessment of the extent of any business use and rateable value of the property is a matter for the Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board and the ratepayer.

In terms of available supports, as the property has listed building status, 100% Empty Property Relief is available and has been awarded from the 1st April 2021 until the present time. Prior to this, as part of the pandemic support measures, during the full year of 2020/21, the property automatically received Retail, Hospitality & Leisure relief, again at 100%. At the point when the property reopens for trade, the ratepayer would be entitled to apply for 12 months Fresh Start Relief which again is available at 100% from the first date of trade.”