



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 31 March 2021

Responses to Questions

Question

- (1) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“Beith is often described as the last outpost in North Ayrshire being less than 1 mile from the Renfrewshire border.

The town has suffered disproportionately from the closure of shops and businesses. On 31 January 2021 there were a total of 19 shops and other business premises which had been closed for some time.

It is not without significance that Beith, unlike its near neighbours Dalry and Kilbirnie and other North Ayrshire towns, has no North Ayrshire Council offices, other than the part-time library in Main Street, to help sustain and bolster the local economy.

Although the library is part-time, it is a valued local facility and houses many other voluntary services which benefit the community.

If current plans go through, as seems likely, it looks as if the library will be transferred to Beith Community Centre. Removing this valued modern facility which is disabled-friendly throughout, from Main Street will be another nail in the coffin of Main Street.

The public are very disappointed at the prospect of losing the library, a valued community services from this central location and once again feel forgotten. I certainly don't want our wonderful library building to become No. 20 in shop and business closures in Beith and neither do local residents.

Will the Leader and Cabinet colleagues consider the genuine economic plight of Beith; examine all possible ways of retaining this vital facility as the beating heart of Main Street; in so doing give the people of Beith and District some reassurance that North Ayrshire Council is genuinely listening, caring and responsive to Beith's social problems and the wishes of its people?"

Response

“It's always helpful to start from the beginning of this long process. The North Ayrshire Federation of Community Organisations (NAFCO) wrote to the Council to request the re-establishment of a joint working to group to consider the future of community facilities given their ongoing concerns about local government funding and that future decisions may be forced upon them without their input. The Cabinet approved that request in February 2018. That short life working group had cross party membership as well as representatives from NAFCO. The working group recommended wider consultation with our communities, including the development of a proposed plan for community facilities. This is the third iteration of that consultation.

The purpose of the consultation is to gather and consider public views on a set of specific proposals which not only reflect the feedback from the previous consultations but seek to build upon the learning and effectiveness of the Covid-19 locality approach and how best to use the assets to support priorities, deliver services and build capacity in our communities beyond the pandemic.

It is important to emphasise that no group on this Council, nor individual elected member, has yet voted in favour of a preferred model of delivery for any community facility. Members will also be aware that the recent budget set no financial targets to be delivered through the current consultation. I would strongly urge residents to take part and express their views on their local community facilities. Those views will inform the paper that comes to full Council on the 9th June 2021 and it will be for every member of this Council, at that meeting, to make a decision on the outcome of the consultation and the future delivery model for local facilities.

Given the current Covid restrictions we have taken steps to ensure that as many residents as possible can participate in this important consultation. Every household has been notified of it via the recent Council Tax mailing. Members can also encourage constituents to participate in the consultation through the Consul platform <https://nay.communitychoices.scot/> “

Question

- (2) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Green New Deal and Sustainability in the following terms:

“Can the Cabinet Member advise of the number of anti-social neighbour issues dealt with by the NAC Anti-social team in: Kilbirnie, Dalry And Beith, during each of the two years viz: 2019 & 2020; also if figures are readily available, how many of the anti-social neighbours were ultimately rehoused elsewhere during that same period.”

Response

“The table below details antisocial behaviour complaints over the last two years broken down by town and complaint type:

Complaint Type	Beith 2019	Beith 2020	Dalry 2019	Dalry 2020	Kilbirnie 2019	Kilbirnie 2020
Violence	5	5	2	16	11	3
Excess noise	8	3	7	2	3	9
Threatening behaviour	4	6	10	6	12	5
Harassment (sex/gender)	1	1	3		1	
Nuisance	2	2	1			3
Neighbour dispute		3	1	1	2	
Harassment (race/Ethnicity)		2		1		1
Vandalism		1	1	1		1
Vehicles		1				
Youth disorder		1		1		2
Harassment (disability)					1	
Substance abuse/dealing					1	2
Total Complaints	20	25	25	28	31	26

The Council will pursue eviction only as a last resort. Our focus remains on prevention and early intervention, working closely with our partners to find a suitable resolution which benefits those experiencing antisocial behaviour and the wider community.

During the 2 years detailed above, 11 tenants engaging with the Antisocial Behaviour Team left the area:

- 4 households were moved out of their tenancy for their own safety
- 4 households terminated their tenancy
- 1 tenancy was ended due to imprisonment
- 1 household was moved from their temporary accommodation within the area due to their antisocial behaviour
- 1 tenancy was recovered following the terms of a Short Scottish Secure tenancy agreement as antisocial behaviour did not improve”

Question

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

“Will the Leader provide Members with a breakdown of the unitary charge payment of 13,618,155 million pounds in respect of PPP funded schools as agreed in the budget of 2021/22 (the finance lease creditor payment, the finance lease creditor interest, the lifecycle maintenance profile, the contingent rentals and the cost of services)?

Will he also inform Members of the Lease interest as a percentage of the total unitary charge?”

Response

“The full PPP budget breakdown for 2021-22 includes the following:-

Finance lease creditor repayment	1,936,043
Finance lease creditor interest	3,929,585
Lifecycle maintenance profile	1,196,220
Contingent rentals	1,245,327
Operating costs / Services	5,310,980
Total	13,618,155

The Finance Lease Creditor Interest as a percentage of total unitary charge is 28.9%.”

Question

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

"Pupil Equity Funding has provided targeted support for children and young people affected by poverty to achieve their full potential. North Ayrshire Council has received Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) for five years from 2017 at approximately £4.5m per year and as a result has managed in some instances to reduce the Attainment Gap between pupils in SIMD 1&2 and SIMD 3-10. A welcome initiative.

Given that this Academic year has been a lost year of schooling:

- a. what proposals does the Portfolioholder have to ensure that the gains achieved by PEF are not lost for pupils in SIMD 1&2; and
- b. what measures will be put in place to reverse the decline in standards of literacy and numeracy for all pupils."

Response

"An unprecedented year in education

During the past year, our teachers, support staff and pupils have worked hard to make a success of remote learning, including the distribution of digital devices, connectivity solutions and the development of resources.

Education Recovery Plans were welcomed by Cabinet and these detailed the extensive and comprehensive remote and blended learning measures put in place by our staff to ensure that there was no "lost year of schooling" for pupils in North Ayrshire.

During the remote learning period from January, there was a balance of live learning, independent activities and pre-recorded lessons, including activities which encouraged learning to take place outdoors. Engagement levels were monitored by individual schools and additional supports were put in place for those young people who had been making the least progress in their learning, for whatever reason.

Throughout the pandemic, the Education Service has maintained a clear focus on health and wellbeing as a key priority and has continued to develop resilience in learners to enable learners to engage with learning in this year's challenging circumstances.

We acknowledge that the disruption to the academic year is likely to have an impact on learner outcomes for some more than others, and the service has considered how to support schools to target specific groups and individuals in the months ahead to maximise opportunities for learning and progress.

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Part A: Ongoing focus for PEF Resource

Members will recall that a paper was presented to Cabinet on Tuesday 23 March which gave details of the innovative and creative ways that schools had used Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) this year in particular to meet the wide range of specific additional challenges presented by the pandemic. Head Teachers have reconsidered budget expenditure due to the Covid-19 pandemic and have redirected budgets during the current financial year to such areas as:

- Outdoor learning to promote health and wellbeing.
- Support to children and young people on remote learning.
- Additional resources to support home learning.
- Purchase of digital software and IT equipment.
- Online activities and personalised support for the most vulnerable.
- Targeted interventions for Primary 1-3 in response to poor engagement with remote learning.
- Practical science resources to enable more focus on health and wellbeing.
- Purchase of e-Books.

The Education Service has had a significant focus on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap since the Attainment Scotland Fund was introduced a number of years ago. The Service has recently produced its draft improvement plan for next year, which has a continued focus on the important twin priorities of improving attainment for all as well as further reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Priority 2 of the Education Service Improvement Plan for session 2021-22 outlines our key areas of focus in this regard. Further detail about the specific improvement activities under each action will be published in the coming weeks, following a full consultation and engagement phase across the Service.

The economic impact of Covid-19 is likely to increase levels of inequality experienced by children and young people. Those children and young people affected by poverty and deprivation will require a whole systems approach to ensure they achieve positive outcomes. We recognise that inequalities must be addressed and that services across the council and other partners all have a role to play.

Part B: Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy

A fuller picture of local literacy and numeracy performance will be presented in a Cabinet report in May 2021. However, in summary, literacy and numeracy levels continue to follow a positive trend for all learners in North Ayrshire, both at SCQF Level 4 and SCQF Level 5, the two national benchmarks for school leavers.

Equally, achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels shows that the proportion of younger learners in our primary and secondary schools who achieved the expected level in literacy and numeracy has increased for all learners in North Ayrshire since this measure was introduced in 2016.

In North Ayrshire, we therefore do not recognise the decline in standards described in the question.

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Nevertheless, in recognition of the specific challenges the pandemic has presented for some learners, a range of additional measures will be put in place to enable schools to provide further targeted support to maximise progress in the months ahead for those who need it most. This support will be across all curricular areas as required, including literacy and numeracy. Support strategies may involve, for example, the provision of temporary additional staffing to facilitate small group work, extra tuition etc. but these strategies will be tailored to the individual needs of the learners and their local context.”

Question

- (5) a question by Councillor Murdoch to the Chair of the Planning Committee in the following terms:

“Can the Chair of Planning please explain why the planning permission for the Caisson Gates, Jetty Extension and Decommissioning Site at Hunterston Parc are not Null and Void?”

Response

“Section 237 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland Act 1997 provides that unless planning decisions are challenged within 6 weeks in the Court of Session, they shall not be questioned in any legal proceedings whatsoever. The current planning permissions for Hunterston have not been the subject of any challenge in court, let alone a successful one. Therefore, they are valid.”

Question

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

“What have North Ayrshire Council done to improve and protect the environment since declaring a Climate Change Emergency?”

Response

“The Council’s Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy 2017-20 set a target to reduce both Council estate and area wide emissions by 40% by 2030 (against a baseline year of 2005/06). The Council surpassed this target, achieving 40% across the Council estate by 2018/19, and 41% area wide.

Since declaring a Climate Emergency in June 2019 and committing to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, the Council has continued to significantly reduce carbon emissions, achieving a 44.6% reduction by 2019/20.

An annual reduction of between 7-8% has been achieved since 2016, with the 2020/21 figures so far heading in the same direction, despite the challenges faced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The impact of COVID-19: some carbon reduction projects have paused following government guidelines, for example the Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme (EES:ABS) to install external wall insulation on domestic properties; the installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) on domestic roofs; and energy saving heat control measures in public buildings (due to the requirement for natural ventilation in occupied spaces).

However, **since declaring a Climate Emergency in June 2019, significant progress has been made on our journey to net-zero carbon**, with the third Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy under preparation for Cabinet consideration in June 2021.

Some key highlights are provided below:

Affordable Warmth

- We have successfully secured approximately £10.5million of funding to provide **external wall insulation (EWI), and have installed EWI on 441 properties since 2019 (worth £3m)** through the Home Energy Efficiency Programme: Area Based Scheme to reduce heat loss and subsequent heating requirements.
- **Installation of our first low carbon heat networks** fuelled by biomass boilers during the redevelopment of two sheltered housing units in Dalry and Stevenston.
- **Installation of solar PV panels on the roofs of 290 Council houses**, saving tenants on average £188 per year which puts us well on the way to reach our target of 500 homes which will be achieved by March 2022.
- In December 2020 the Council approved the HRA Capital Investment Programme of £109.756m for 2021/22, which includes **£5m investment in regeneration projects and sustainability measures, to reduce fuel poverty.**

Green Economy

- In recognising the need to continually tackle climate change, and to achieve the ambitious target of becoming net-zero carbon emissions by 2030, the Council dedicated an **£8.8m Investment Fund** at its budget setting meeting in 2020 to support climate change, sustainable infrastructure investment and Community Wealth Building. Part of this investment (**£500,000**) **was specifically allocated to tree planting in order to remove carbon emissions from the atmosphere.**
- The Investment Fund was recently increased to £10.2m in total at the Council's budget setting meeting earlier this month.
- In September 2020 the Cabinet approved an Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach to build back better, fairer and greener. The approach is based on the foundation of the Community Wealth Building approach and **sets out a Local Green New Deal.**
- The Cabinet also recently approved an ambitious five-year Regeneration Delivery Plan which sets out plans to **deliver physical regeneration** and regenerate strategic regeneration sites and places by working together with our communities.
- In February 2021, plans for a **£500,000 Green Jobs Fund were approved.** This innovative Fund has been set up to support economic recovery and tackle climate change as part of the Council's Green New Deal.

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Transport and Travel

- **81 vehicles** (over 13%) within the Council fleet have been replaced by **modern fuel-efficient vehicles since June 2019**
- The **EV fleet** currently consists of **22 vehicles**, which is 3.74% of the fleet. This will be increased by an additional 11 vehicles in Q1 of 21/22, increasing our overall EVs to over 5% of the current fleet and rising.
- Around 12% of total mileage in our successful **CarClub pool car scheme** has been travelled in EVs
- Installing a **46 of publicly accessible electric vehicle charge points** to support and encourage the uptake of electric vehicles across North Ayrshire.

Natural Environment

- **The Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) 2019-2031 has been published** online and contains a range of actions under the following six key priorities
 1. Ecosystem restoration
 2. Investment in natural capital
 3. Quality green space for health and education benefits
 4. Conserving wildlife in Scotland
 5. Sustainable management of land and freshwater
 6. Sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems.
- The introduction of **relaxed grass cutting initiative** in Streetscene **to promote biodiversity and reduce the associated operational carbon emissions**, following a participatory budget engagement exercise with our communities
- Partnership work through the Garnock Connections (GC) - a Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS): **The Garnock's Buzzing project has created wildflower meadows, planted pollinator friendly trees and established bee banks at community sites**. This project continues to successfully involve the community through pollinator identification events, ecological surveys, and raising awareness of the importance of supporting and enhancing biodiversity in North Ayrshire.
- Other projects include the formation of a **Green Network Training Programme in partnership** with East Ayrshire Woodlands and Forestry Commission Scotland to deliver environmental improvements. This has provided 6-month placements and vocational and practical training to local young unemployed people whilst delivering a range of projects including new paths, woodland management and wildflower planting.

Sustainable Operations

Renewable Energy

- In January 2021, **Cabinet approved proposals for the development of a solar PV farm on Nethermains former landfill site** which will require an estimated total investment of £6.768m, with an anticipated annual reduction in CO2 emissions of 501 tonnes per year.

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Waste management

- Household **waste recycling performance increased** from 54.6% to **56.3%** for the 2019 calendar year
- Ongoing promotions to encourage participation in our newly enhanced waste and recycling system through ‘Right Stuff Right Bin’ **waste awareness campaigns**
- **Introduced a free ‘birth-to-potty’ reusable real nappy scheme in October 2019** to reduce and divert additional waste from landfill
- **Commenced the Clyde Valley Residual Waste Partnership Contract in January 2020**, diverting grey bin waste from landfill and recovering additional recyclables and creating sustainable energy through an energy-from-waste facility

Lighting

- The Council has approved an **additional programme of LED replacement** to be implemented over 2021/22 for previous white light sources that are now within cost effective scope for replacement. This represents an **annual reduction** in energy demand of 46% and of **259 tonnes of CO2** across the 4,500 units in scope.
- Further benefits in reduced emissions resulting from fewer unplanned repairs activities due to longer life LEDs

Non – Domestic buildings

- Investing nearly **£1m in energy efficiency measures** such as boiler replacement, LED lighting and enhanced controls to **non-domestic properties** through the Non-Domestic Energy Efficiency framework.

Carbon Absorption

- Recognising the vitally important role of trees in tackling climate change, in March 2020 North Ayrshire Council **dedicated £500,000 of resource to tree planting**. This project is progressing and currently work in identifying available land with suitable soil types, the most appropriate tree species to plant, and partnership opportunities. Work has commenced in the implementation of a tree planting strategy to **plant 108,000 trees** in collaboration with community groups, which will absorb carbon emissions, as well as creating job and training opportunities for young people and aligning with Community Wealth Building objectives.

Climate Change Adaptation

In October 2019, an Elected Members’ event was held to highlight the value of adapting to the impacts of climate change. The event, facilitated by Adaptation Scotland, focussed on how climate impacts are affecting North Ayrshire communities, and how to identify local priorities. It was recognised that by taking a strong, proactive approach we will ensure that vital public assets, infrastructure and services are fit for current and future generations and able to deliver positive outcomes across North Ayrshire.

- **Our flood protection schemes** are designed to protect our environment and communities against climate change. **We are at the construction stage with our £18.5m Upper Garnock Valley Flood Protection Scheme**; and expect to be on site next year with our **£27m Millport Flood Protection Scheme**. Further schemes are in development.”

(7) a question by Billings to the Cabinet Members for Health and Social Care in the following terms:

“At the meeting of the full council on 4th March 2021 I proposed that £285,000 was passed to the North Ayrshire’s Health and Social Care Partnership to enable them to establish a community based mental health initiative specifically to address the rise in mental health issues due to the Covid restrictions. However, my proposal was not supported and the money was allocated to the Investment Fund for some as yet undefined future project. At last week’s meeting of North Ayrshire’s Integration Joint Board we agreed the HSCP budget for the coming year. It was clear that the HSCP is very tight for money and will be using over £1million of its reserves to balance its budget, and it was clear that there was no spare money to bring forward a community-wide mental health initiative. Does the Member now regret his decision not to support the HSCP to develop its community mental health service that would address our current health crisis?”

Response

“I would like to thank Cllr Billings for making the exact same point in his question that I made at the budget meeting regarding this year’s underspend in the HSCP.

Cllr Billings keeps misrepresenting the financial position of the partnership for reasons I don’t understand. For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure all Members are aware I will set out the decision we made unanimously as an IJB at our budget meeting earlier this month.

There is a projected underspend of £3.497m during 2020-21 which will be carried forward in the general fund reserve of the IJB, it is proposed that £1.116m of this balance is earmarked to achieve a balanced budget for the IJB for 2021-22 on a nonrecurring basis. £500k will be used as a challenge fund to assist with driving forward our transformation and change agenda. For the first time since integration was introduced the North Ayrshire HSCP can put £1.881m into our reserves which is 0.7% of our budget. We also paid back £1.484m of the debt to the council as agreed.

Members will be aware the NAHSCP has responsibility for the delivery and co-ordination of Mental Health services across Ayrshire and Arran, North Ayrshire HSCP have submitted a Pan-Ayrshire Plan for Mental Health service recovery for 2021-22 as part of the Health Board’s re-mobilisation plan which was submitted to the Scottish Government at the end of February. This plan outlines areas of recovery including inpatient wards, CAMHS and our community mental health services and seeks funding of £1.9m across Ayrshire and Arran. The Scottish Government have not confirmed an allocation of funding yet in line with the mobilisation plan submission. The Government have announced a Mental Health Recovery and Renewal Fund of £120m as part of the budget plans for 2021-22, this will be focussed on 4 key areas – CAMHS improvement to meet the requirements of the service specification, CAMHS and Psychological Therapies waiting lists, Primary Care to expand on multi-disciplinary MH teams in GP clusters and Community services to build on an expansion of community support services. The headline areas for investment from this fund were provided only last week and we are currently awaiting further information and clarity on funding and priorities in due course.

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To answer the question, no, I do not regret the decision I made at the Council budget meeting and I do not regret the decision that the IJB made at its budget meeting either.”