



North Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir a Tuath

Meeting of the Council

Wednesday 8 September 2021

Responses to Questions

Question

- (1) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care in the following terms:

“Smoking is one of the voluntary threats to health right across society. I am particularly interested in how smoking has impacted on our young people in North Ayrshire during the Covid-19 pandemic, because whilst the risks to young people of having the Covid-19 and variant vaccinations is reputedly extremely small, taking up smoking has lifetime health implications.

I would be pleased to receive from the cabinet member for Health and Social Care any figures which might be available in relation to young people in North Ayrshire taking up smoking during the Covid-19 lockdowns (period March 2020 – August 2021 or figures as available) and advise of what steps might be taken in North Ayrshire to encourage our young people not to smoke. Secondly please advise of any available figures on the uptake of the Covid-19 vaccination and what steps are being taken to encourage an even fuller uptake by our young people.”

Councillor Foster responded in the following terms:

Response

“Specific information in relation to young people and smoking is normally collected and collated via school health and wellbeing surveys. Unfortunately prolonged lockdown periods have meant there has been significant disruption to gathering this valuable information.

The NHS Ayrshire and Arran Smoking Cessation teams have continued to function this year. However, this service has been severely curtailed by staff members being redeployed to support the pandemic response, in particular to support with contact tracing to manage the COVID-19 cases.

Peer support is the most effective way to reduce the numbers of young people starting to take up smoking or vaping. Nicotine is highly addictive and young people require significant support to stop smoking / vaping. Working with schools, colleges or other areas where young people access to provide positive messages and cessation services is the most effective way to reduce the numbers of young people smoking. Encouraging parents, grandparents, other carers to access smoking cessation is an effective way to tackle intergenerational smoking. Many children are introduced to tobacco or vaping via their parents or other family members. A focus on the expense of smoking rather than health benefits is more effective with young people, highlighting the opportunity costs of spending cash on tobacco or vaping materials can be a powerful incentive and through consultation with young people different needs are highlighted for different areas.

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For North Ayrshire as at 7th September across adult members of the population 94.2% have had their first vaccination and 88.2% have has both doses. For our younger people aged 16 to 17 so far 47.8% have come forward for their first vaccination and 10% have had both doses, the vaccination programme roll out and promotion to the younger group continues and is planned to be completed by the end of September. To encourage uptake we have provided many drop-in vaccination clinics for young people and targeted media to encourage them to register on line and access clinics. These targeted messages have also been aimed at those young people who are clinically vulnerable or who live with someone who is clinically vulnerable.”

Question

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

“My personal view is that our Waste Management Team in North Ayrshire have done an incredible job of work ensuring continuity of uplift of bins between March 2020 and the present. I would make special mention of the front-line team emptying our bins throughout the pandemic and sincerely thank them for their service during this difficult time. It would be remiss not to also acknowledge the organisational work of our NAC Waste Management team who have had to be innovative to support the front line team through a challenging period.

Can the Portfolio Holder for Green New Deal and Sustainability advise on the current constraints faced by Waste Management in delivering a quality service during still challenging times and in particular make any comment in relation to brown bin uplifts in the Garnock Valley area which seem to be experiencing difficulty in continuity of service as detailed in the NAC calendar.”

Response

“As all Members are aware, nationally, the pandemic has resulted in unprecedented difficulties for a range of sectors over the last 18 months and waste management is no exception.

A combination of factors, including more people at home generating additional waste, physical distancing requirements in our vehicles, and the impact of self-isolation on employee numbers, has presented significant resourcing challenges.

During the first phase of the pandemic, officers were able to mitigate this resourcing impact by training and redeploying colleagues from Streetscene and Roads Services from their normal duties. This swift action meant that we were able to continue our normal waste services uninterrupted, in stark contrast with most other local authorities across Scotland who had to suspend one or more of their waste collections services for weeks and in some cases months.

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During 2021, the challenge has shifted up a gear. The easing of restrictions nationally created visitor management challenges due to good weather and high levels of demand particularly in our coastal areas, and resources have had to be returned to Streetscene to manage this effectively. In addition, the recent increase in positive cases has had an inevitable impact on levels of self-isolation absence. A continued factor is increased tonnages of waste for us to manage due to more people being at home.

All employees have worked tirelessly to ensure waste collections remain as uninterrupted as possible and in the main, our grey, blue and purple bin collections have been largely uninterrupted, with the occasional instances of brown bins being uplifted the day after their allocated day. To counter this, several Saturday shifts have been working during the summer period to ensure that brown bin service delivery is up to date by the end of the working week. Officers have sought to keep members and the public up to date with regular service updates being provided where areas have been affected.

Officers continue to monitor waste management activity on a daily basis and are responding dynamically to the challenges as they develop. As garden waste tonnages naturally reduce now as we move into autumn, we expect this to ease the recently experienced service pressure significantly.”

Question

(3) a question by Councillor Donald L. Reid to the Cabinet Member for Participatory Democracy in the following terms:

“NAC Connected Communities have been “cautious in their approach to reopening community centres and halls.” They are now open. Whilst this approach is understood, concern has been expressed by some voluntary groups about the detailed form that each group is required to submit, signed by an office bearer on behalf of each group, before they are allowed to resume activities in NAC community centres and halls.

The form, drafted by NAC, headed: “*Conditions for Letting During Covid-19 (Version 6 – August 2021)*” has 28 individual sections which require to be completed. Issues raised by voluntary groups about this form include:

Item 8. I have read, understood and agree to the general terms of let provided to me. This requires once person to comply with the rest of the document.

Item 9. Relates to stopping people entering the hall. An individual volunteer has no right to stop anyone entering any NAC premises or indeed send anyone home who develops Covid-19 symptoms. Nor can a volunteer force anyone to wear a mask.

Item 12. A volunteer involved in running a group may have no knowledge about exemptions for wearing masks.

Item 13. A volunteer can have no control over individuals with regards to maintaining social distancing and has no control over NAC staff on the premises.

Item 14: How is this one individual who has to sign the form, the ability to promote the NHS Test and Protect app with service users?

Item 15: This asks for far too much information. At best it should be a simple contact number for one person.

Item 16: How can one person be expected to keep up with Government guidelines. A volunteer helping to run a group or club based in the community centre has a difficult enough job. It has been suggested that better wording for the section might be: "We can agree to endeavour to keep the guidance issued by the Community Association and North Ayrshire Council. As this is already different from the Government guidelines then it should be only these guidelines we are asked to follow."

Item 17: A volunteer has no rights to control people entering an NAC building. A volunteer can only advise people to abide by rules set by the Community Association. People can be invited to leave the building in certain circumstances, but a volunteer has no right to evict them.

Item 18: A volunteer has no authority or medical knowledge to question or assess vulnerable people..

Item 19: For reasons already outlined above, a volunteer cannot force people to use the hand sanitiser, only request them to do so. It might be possible to promote the requirements, but difficult to control how this might operate in different parts of the building. Control the use of catch kill it Bins. How do you do that?

Items 20 & 23: A volunteer cannot spray or sanitise all equipment as this could damage the equipment viz camera club equipment. They can only use reasonable endeavours to ensure equipment is safe to use.

Item 25: Contact insurance holder to see if the group is covered for the let. This implies that the volunteer is legally responsible for any claims that might arise by individuals with reference to Corona-virus. Moreover, is there any insurance company that covers claims for Covid-19?

The whole document transfers the responsibility for covid-19 virus control to one individual who may not be knowledgeable about covid-19 and has no medical qualifications. In addition the document applies standards of control that appear to be contrary to government expressed requirements. To comply each group would in reality have to set up a control group who would be monitoring the behaviour of all the members in all parts of the hall during a club meeting.

Although the document is initially stated as a survey it also states "Conditions for letting during Covid 19," implying it is part of the leasing contract. This is reinforced by statements within the document.

In essence this entire document is problematic for the individual required to sign on behalf of a club, group or organisation. Put simply it can be sorted by simplifying that the club etc will make its best efforts to comply with the general requirements of the community centre.

Can the Cabinet Member for Participatory Democracy advise if this complex document can be simplified to reduce the onerous duties placed on the individual signing the NAC 'Regular Lets' booking form?"

Response

"We are currently reviewing the toolkit and form as part of the next stage of the phased return of Community Facilities and will take these comments into account.

The NAC 'Regular Lets' booking form is part of the service restart toolkit. When a 'let' is agreed it forms a legal contract with the individual signing it. As such, the individual signing the contract must be completely clear about their responsibilities with regard to preventing the spread of COVID-19."

Question

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

"Can the Cabinet Member confirm if any child has been assessed and placed in Early Years at Lockhart Campus?"

Response

"Assessment of current need in the early years' population is ongoing and assessment already undertaken has established that, at present, our local early years centres and classes can appropriately meet the needs of the children beginning this stage of their education.

Therefore, no child under the age of 5 is accommodated in Lockhart Campus at this time."

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet portfolio holder for Education to advise this council how many primary and secondary school children in North Ayrshire have received a free laptop or a tablet, and a free internet connection as per the SNP election promises made in May 2021?”

Response

“During session 2020-2021, a total of 1734 devices were distributed to children and young people in North Ayrshire and a further 509 connectivity solutions. These devices were funded by the Scottish Government Digital Inclusion Grant Funding and do not form part of the SNP Election commitments from May 2021. We are still awaiting further detail around the arrangements for academic session 2021-2022. In addition to Scottish Government funding, NAC has invested in additional devices for pupil home use by creating a digital families fund and has committed £250,000 per year to provide access to devices and connectivity for online learning and activities.”

Question

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

“To ask the Cabinet portfolio holder for Education how many school-aged children have received a free bike in North Ayrshire as per the SNP election promises made in May 2021?”

Response

“None, the Scottish Government has announced the first six pilot projects selected to offer free bicycles for school age children who cannot afford one. North Ayrshire Council is not one of the initial pilot projects selected.”

Question

- (7) a question by Ferguson to the Cabinet Member for Green New Deal and Sustainability in the following terms:

“To ask the Cabinet portfolio holder for Green New Deal and Sustainability to advise this council how many trees have been planted by the council in North Ayrshire since this council declared a climate emergency in 2019?”

Response

“This Council declared a climate emergency in summer 2019. Recognising the vitally important role of trees in tackling climate change, in March 2020 the Council allocated £500,000 of funding for a major tree planting programme. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, work progressed on a detailed Tree Planting Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in January 2021. This set out our ambitious plans to plant 108,000 trees across North Ayrshire this decade as part of the Council’s commitment to be ‘net-zero’ by 2030.

Officers have been working closely with our community partners, and together we have already planted 2,660 trees at a variety of locations since the climate emergency was declared. Officers are also continuing to collaborate with partners on a large pipeline of various projects, ranging in scale from a few hundred trees to tens of thousands. One of the larger projects will be as part of our major Community Wealth Building regeneration initiative at Lochshore in Glengarnock and this is scheduled for planting to commence in this coming growing season with an anticipated 20,000 trees being planted overall when completed. Officers are also engaged with a number of local schools to develop local planting initiatives with young people which will see 4,000 saplings donated by Woodland Trust for school tree planting sites across the whole of the school estate. This planting will commence shortly. The overall tree planting programme will create a new woodland resource in North Ayrshire by 2030, with an ambition to complete all the planting required by the 2025/26 growing season to ensure that saplings are well on their way to maturity by the 2030 target.”

Question

(8) a question by Councillor Billings to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“It has been reported that the Scottish government does not agree with the proposed funding arrangements for the development of Ardrossan Harbour. Reports indicate that the Scottish government wants the port’s owner to take a greater responsibility for the funding of the work. At the meeting of North Ayrshire Council in February 2021 we were told that if the work on the development of the harbour didn’t start by this summer there is no way that the port would be ready to take the new Glen Sannox ferry, which we are told will come into service in 2022.

Please could the Leader of the Council provide members with an update on what is happening with the Ardrossan Harbour project?”

Response

“Discussions between Transport Scotland and Peel Ports Group continue on the commercial arrangements for the delivery of the project. Scottish Ministers continue to advise us that they are committed to the ferry service operating from Ardrossan and that they are working to secure a cost-effective solution that delivers the upgrade of Ardrossan Harbour. NAC remains in on-going dialogue with officers in TS and the Minister to try and bring this to a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible enabling these much-needed works to progress.

Given the significant delays that have been caused to this project because of the failure to conclude satisfactory agreements on the Harbour redevelopment, it is virtually impossible that construction works at Ardrossan could be completed in time to accommodate the new Glen Sannox when it comes into operation between July 2022 to September 2022.”

Question

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

“Consequent on the power-sharing deal between the SNP and the Greens the latter have been empowered to bring forward proposals for rent controls in the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

What benefit, if any, will accrue to the PRS in North Ayrshire?”

Response

“Rent controls can take many different forms and there are currently no details as to what mechanism will be proposed. The member will be aware for example that the Scottish Government previously responded to Living Rent’s campaign for rent controls with the legislative power for local authorities to introduce rent pressure zones – a mechanism which has proven completely ineffectual with not a single local authority in Scotland introducing a RPZ due to the hurdles placed in front of them by the Scottish Government’s legislation.

Last year, we did respond to Labour MSP, Pauline McNeil’s, Fair Rents (Scotland) Bill consultation in which we supported, in principle, proposals to include caps on annual rent increases in the private sector at CPI plus 1%, and the introduction of a mechanism to allow a tenant in a private residential tenancy to apply to have a ‘fair open market rent’ determined by a Rent Officer.

The benefits of proper, meaningful, and effective rent controls would be felt by tenants. This would particularly be the case in a locality such as Arran where the housing situation is very pressurised making it much less affordable for the islands young people and those who rely on the islands tourism industry as their principal employment.

Only once we have seen the detail of the proposed mechanism of rent controls will be able to fully assess their impact on the local housing market.”

Question

(10) a question by Murdoch to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“Does the Leader of the Council agree that an Elected Member should represent their constituents, constituency and local environment, as best they can, asking questions and raising concerns on subjects that may have an impact or affect on public and environmental wellbeing?”

Response

Councillor Cullinane will respond to this question verbally at the meeting.

Question

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

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

Response

“Procurement is one of the key pillars of the Community Wealth Building Strategy. From Council spend analysis in 2019/20, 20% of total procurement spend, equating to £43.2m, was spent on a total of 851 local suppliers. Spend data covering the 2020/21 financial year is currently in the process of being finalised and we would anticipate a further improvement on this position as we work towards the Council Plan target of 26% of spend to local enterprises by the year 2024. Public sector procurement do not operate a tendering list as such, this is something which occurs in the private sector. Public sector procurement is represented by various procurement exercises including quick quotes and tenders for each individual contract and framework. Procurement spend includes a range of activity and the type of procurement route is determined by the contract value, with lower value spend of up to £10,000 governed by verbal and written quotes, contracts up to £50,000 for supplies and services and £100,000 for works being the area where Quick Quotes operate and tenders operating above these thresholds. The procurement route for Sole Traders and small businesses is determined by their scale and capacity to deliver (usually measured by turnover) and relevant insurance thresholds. To set some additional context around procurement frameworks, a total of 7 frameworks were put in place during 2020/21 with a value of £39.9m. This included 151 suppliers of which 108 are local suppliers.

Examples of procurement awards specific to small businesses across a range of procurement activities from April 2020 has been provided to elected members for information. Based on the way data is captured this includes 26 small local businesses recorded as having up to 4 employees. It is also recognised however through spend analysis that local businesses of all sizes benefit through high volume, low value spend (under £10,000).

Community Wealth Building aims to continue to build capacity within the small business base and the Business Development Team this financial year have provided over 120 instances of support for businesses from ranging from specialist consultancy, support to access new supply chains, specific help in bidding for local work, access to training support and introduction to new businesses.”

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

“Can the Leader of the Council please provide details of any future tourism related investment in the North Coast other than the Millport Flood Defence or Largs Seawall- related projects?”

Response

“The Ayrshire Growth Deal contains a programme related to marine tourism, which provide £9.5m investment for expansion of Ardrossan Marina (£5.5m) and the remaining £4m to support development of transit or destination marinas on Arran and Cumbrae. Council officers are currently working to develop the transit marina projects. Progress to date includes appointment of marine tourism manager, co-funded through the Council’s partnership with Crown Estate Scotland; engagement with the Millport flood protection scheme team to identify project interdependencies, preparation of a technical brief to identify options for the transit marina facilities, engagement with communities to identify priorities and discussions with Crown Estate Scotland to identify potential funding support for the projects. Although there is significant project development work to take place, it is currently targeted that the marina developments will be implemented shortly following the completion of flood protection works, which is understood to be the optimal development phasing.

A Visitor Management Officer Group has been set up to identify external funding to address the impact of increased visitor numbers. A successful application to NatureScot’s Green Recovery Better Places Fund has enabled the Council to provide additional Street Scene services (operatives, volunteer litter picking packs and additional bins) to cover the summer season at key tourism sites. An application is currently in progress to the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund to provide a network of visitor service hubs around Arran and Cumbrae that aims to alleviate visitor pressure points and provide facilities for motorhome facilities. If successful, additional funding will be sourced to extend this project at other visitor pressure point sites along the coast.

In June 2021, Cabinet approved initial investment proposals totalling £900,000, specifically related to play park, park and other public realm improvements. Officers have been working up detailed project proposals for expenditure of this funding to help improve amenities for both residents and visitors to North Ayrshire.

For the North Coast ward, this will involve a share of this investment, and officers have already scheduled ward by ward discussions with members to discuss draft proposals for feedback and finalisation. The projects include upgrades to play parks, and new street furniture, including bins and benches. Decorative lighting columns at Largs and Millport shorefront are also scheduled for repainting.

The project to replace the sea front car park charging infrastructure is well advanced, and discussions are progressing with regards to investment proposals for upgrade of the Gallowgate toilets and other toilet blocks in Largs.

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Millport CARS: Millport Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS), due for completion in March 2022, is supporting Cumbrae's tourism economy by investing in the community, local businesses and heritage assets and by delivering physical improvements to the conservation area and its environs. The overall scheme represents a total investment of approximately £2.2M.

Millport Town Hall: The Regeneration of Millport Town Hall will deliver further investment on Cumbrae, totalling approximately £2M and including grants from the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) (£1.5M), Crown Estates (£0.118M) and £50k from the Town Centre Fund. This community led project will be delivered in partnership with Connected Communities and Regeneration. It will deliver 3 holiday lets, a café, performance venue and community facilities including Men Shed. This project is currently at tender stage, and once a contractor is formally appointed, it is hoped that works will commence on site at the end of September 2021, with completion anticipated in June 2022.

Largs Promenade: Officers are developing a brief to procure a consultant to undertake a feasibility and design exercise to inform the upgrade of the Promenade to support active and sustainable travel and tourism. This will identify a coherent route for the National Cycle Network (NCN) through the town going forward. It will be developed through extensive community and stakeholder consultation and inform future funding applications for implementation.

Place Framework Pilot Project: A funding application was submitted to the UK Government's Community Renewal Fund for a pilot project to develop Place Frameworks for Largs and Saltcoats. This is aligned to a £40k allocation under the Place Based Investment Programme recently approved by Cabinet. This will build on earlier planning and community engagement work and will progress from the identification of need and issues, to the generation of solutions and new initiatives. They will inform Council and community led action to create attractive and successful places through:

- A new future and strengthened position for our town centres;
- Town Centre living that meet our residents' needs;
- Development on strategic regeneration sites for direct economic benefit and to signal positive change;
- Responding to derelict land and property in town centres;
- Articulating and developing the Town Centre First approach; and
- Applying the Place Principle and 20 minute Neighbourhood concept
- Supporting environmental, economic and social recovery of our coastal communities.

The Place Frameworks will identify actions under the Regeneration Delivery Plan going forward and for implementation under funding streams such as the Place Based Investment Programme. The outcome of the application is anticipated in Autumn 2021. A member/officer Tourism Forum is to be established, and officers are conducting a round of ward member discussions to explore issues arising from increased domestic tourism and priorities for development a wider visitor management and tourism strategy."

Question

(13) a question by Murdoch to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“When will North Ayrshire Council have a Policy in place on Motor Homes and Camper Vans?”

Response

“The Council intends to develop a strategic position relating to the use of motor homes and camper vans. It is noted that there has been an increase in domestic tourism over the summer of 2021, due to the global pandemic. While this is having a positive effect on North Ayrshire visitor economy business base, it has also presented operational challenges related to place management through additional pressures.

It is currently targeted that a visitor management strategy will be developed in advance of the 2022 peak summer season. The strategy development will be guided by an operational steering group comprising officers from a cross-representation of related services.

A series of meetings with all members (grouped by ward) have been arranged to establish issues and priorities within each ward and this will inform the establishment of a visitor management and tourism member forum to guide strategy development.

In advance of the establishment of a clear policy position, promotion materials will be published to encourage responsible tourism and the Council has been successful in early funding rounds of VisitScotland’s Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund designed to support the management of the impact of increased domestic tourism in rural areas. Additionally, specific issues have been addressed at Bowencraigs Car Park adjacent to Largs yacht Haven, and fronting the water, to install a temporary height barrier to manage the location of motorhomes at this site.”

Question

(14) a question by Murdoch to the Leader of the Council in the following terms:

“Will North Ayrshire Council be reconsidering how public toilets are funded maintained and accessible to members of the public as a result of Covid-19 and the need for public facilities to assist with public hygiene, health & wellbeing and tourism?”

Response

““Under the previous Administration, the annual budget meeting in 2016 considered a proposal to close all remaining public toilets. This followed a previous year’s budget decision to remove all automated public conveniences. Two separate amendments to the 2016 proposal were put forward and accepted at the meeting: firstly, to retain the public toilets in Largs through recurring funding from the Largs Car Park Fund for their upkeep and maintenance; and secondly to retain the facilities in Saltcoats and Ardrossan by making savings in other General Services revenue budgets.

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Since the budget meeting of 2016, the financial position of Scottish Local Government has continued to be challenging with disproportionate cuts to core Council budgets. In light of this challenging financial climate, no Councillor, of all political parties and of none, has proposed to invest more general revenue funding in public toilets by cutting budgets in other areas of service provision.

I can confirm that all available budgets for managing our public conveniences are fully committed and that in addition, recognising the challenges presented by COVID-19 and the unprecedented footfall in our coastal towns over the summer months, additional staff resources have been deployed to provide more frequent cleaning. Temporary support was also arranged over the summer period for facilities operated by local community groups.

Options are currently being explored for the upgrade of the public conveniences in Largs, which will require the use of cash available from Largs Car Park Fund. Officers are also working with local community groups who manage public conveniences to pursue opportunities for external grant funding to enable the upgrade of their premises. Officers continue to monitor the public toilets in Saltcoats/Ardrossan to determine required maintenance needs.

Officers will also continue to work with partners to ensure that adequate signposting is available – both physical and virtual - to direct the public to their nearest available facility.

The budget process for 2022/23 will commence in the coming months. Elected members may choose to use this process to change the current level of provision. Any such motion or amendment would require to be fully costed, equality impact assessed, and a corresponding level of savings identified in order to return a balanced budget. Council officers are available to support elected members through this process.”