

In terms of the 21/22 budget, it looks likely that the timetable will be as tight as we saw in the current year, with no formal budget announcement from the Scottish Government until late January or the start of February 2021. That announcement quantifies the local government block allocation and ultimately what the actual settlement (and conditions) we and other the interim, our budget models are reliant on various assumptions and estimates.

The cross party Budget Working Group has met virtually on two occasions so far and have offered constructive feedback to officers on the themes and ideas suggested. This group is, of course, not a decision making body, but does offer members and officers to work cohesively to consider the longer term challenges facing the council. It is envisaged at the conclusion of its work, that the group may be able to offer recommendations for wider member consideration. With the SG settlement announcement delayed, it does offer the group to further consider their work and additional meetings have been scheduled.

- 3.3 Local Tax Collections:** Collection of Council Tax for the current year at the end of October is 65.52% which is down 1.29%. This represents a reduction in income for the year of £720,000. A national benchmarking exercise was undertaken with 24 Scottish Local Authorities comparing the position at the end of September. This showed that Council Tax collections are down across the country ranging from 0.67% to 2.70% with the average across the range being 1.31%.

Collections of Non-Domestic Rates is 82.2% which is 7.18% higher than the same time last year. The reason for the increase is that most businesses are benefitting from 100% rates relief in relation to the Coronavirus regulations.

- 3.4 Benefits Update:** Processing times for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims is very good. New claims are being processed in 19.40 days on average, well below the target in the service plan. There has been a significant increase in claimants claiming Universal Credit in Argyll and Bute from 1,500 before the pandemic to 3,220 at the end of August 2020. This represents a 180% increase across the period.

Spend on the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) is £314k at the end of October against an annual budget of £765k. Therefore we have spent 70% of the profiled budget for the year to date. The number of applications being made per month peaked in April/May 2020 but is on the rise again. Spend will increase month to month going forward.

Finally, spend and commitments against the Discretionary Housing Payment budget is £805,000 for 2020/2021 against an expected liability of

£865,128. This fund will be stretched this year due to the increasing number of new Universal Credit claimants.

3.5 Helensburgh Waterfront Development:

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5.2 National Meetings: The COSLA Children and Young People Board took place on October 2nd

Efforts to achieve greater use of digital services within Health and Social Care were highlighted at an event on September 23rd. Whilst there is greater uptake now of NHS Near Me, and expansion of this within social care is being pursued, there is still a challenge of accessing these with limited internet speeds in rural areas.

- 5.3 COVID-19:** With local cases of remaining at relatively low levels, the HSCP is concentrating on delivering as many services as possible within the current guidelines. Preparation to cope with potential increases remains relevant with plans being updated as appropriate, and these can be activated again at short notice should this be necessary.

The importance of visits to care homes is being recognised, however there continue to be challenges around implementing the enhanced guidance in relation to that particularly around internal visits.

- 5.4 Human Resources (HR):** The Argyll and Bute Culture Group is now active and is now part of the process to identify and implement actions relating to culture. Improvements including weekly communications from the Chief Officer and around culture and wellbeing are established, with the Chief Officer and Senior Leadership virtual check in sessions continuing.

Monitoring of progress with culture will be important in giving assurance that the changes that have taken place are reflected in staff experiences and this is planned to be carried out in due course.

Arrangements are being made to extend availability of the Guardian

existing savings, £0.650m of additional non-reoccurring savings and being able to claim for £1.338m of COVID-19 related loss of income and undelivered savings. As of 30th September, £952k of this plan had been delivered, with £2.0m remaining outstanding.

Agreement was reached with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde over the disputed value of the Service Level Agreement for previous years. This will however continue to be a significant portion of HSCP expenditure for future years, and will require ongoing negotiations to reflect changes in the delivery of services.

6. POLICY LEAD FOR BUSINESS, REGENERATION AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT Councillor Alastair Redman

6.1 Introduction: This is my initial Policy Lead report since being appointed to the revised role of Policy Lead for Business, Regeneration and Commercial Development at the Council meeting on 22nd October. Since taking on this new portfolio I have met with the Executive Director, together with the Head of Service for Commercial Services, to discuss the key service areas included within my remit and to gain a fuller understanding of the current priorities and challenges.

A programme of six-weekly meetings have been scheduled with the Executive Director and Head of Service to provide regular updates on all service matters and I look forward to working with them closely over the coming months.

6.2 Business Gateway: Business Gateway and Economic Growth officers are administering the Scottish Government Business Hardship Fund, which was formally launched on 20th October. Members should note that the implementation of the scheme is highly dependent on guidance from the Scottish Government. This guidm

6.4 Economic and Social Recovery: The council is continuing to look to economic and social recovery with the Argyll Economic Resilience Forum continuing to meet every second week. Items of discussion include business support and grant aid, implementing Scottish Government job support programmes and the Rest and Be Thankful need for a permanent solution. The Officer Advisory Group, which has been established to support the Forum, now meets on a regular basis looking to take forward key actions. The key focus has been on the discussions around the Economic and Social Recovery Plan. However, it is recognised that businesses and communities are still in the response stage as the second wave of the pandemic hits, with ever tightening restrictions, including the -level COVID-19 response system/approach which came into force on Monday 2nd November 2020.

6.5 Digital: The council is continuing to coordinate investment in our digital infrastructure that is being delivered by the private sector, HIE and the Government. The latest figure for broadband is 93.3% of Argyll and Bute premises are now connected to the fibre network.

With regards to R100 no contract has been signed yet but the Scottish Government are confident that this will happen before the end of the year. It is hoped that following the agreement of the contract greater clarity will be provided on where Government investment will be targeted delivered by BT across Argyll and Bute.

With regards to the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, these vouchers can be pooled with other eligible premises with a possible £1500 through the DCMS RGC vouchers.

7. POLICY LEAD FOR ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES Councillor Rory Colville

7.1 Introduction: I am really pleased to take on the Policy Lead role for Roads and Infrastructure Services. This is a service which delivers vital services for the council – cleaning the streets, emptying bins, managing landfill, operating ferries, running port and harbours, managing and maintaining the road network, transporting children between home and school, supporting public transport and keeping public open spaces safe and attractive. The services is also at the forefront in caring for the environment with initiatives such as LED lighting, hybrid and electric vehicles, electric vehicle charging ports and recycling.

As I take on this role for the service, winter is upon us and I am pleased to see a winter fleet ready to respond to the adversities winter can bring. I am also pleased that new gully cleaners are on order, this being an initiative of the Administration at the last budget setting.

In the future I will report in more detail in terms of the services and have already embarked on the first of a programme of meetings with officers.

8. POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION Councillor Yvonne McNeilly

- 8.1 Kilmory Outdoor Nursery:** Work has been carried out for the Kilmory Outdoor Nursery, which is within the Walled Garden, to ensure that the site can start operating as an outdoor nursery, and which will increase space and choice in Mid Argyll for ELC and 1140 hours. The site will be handed over to MAKI Pups in November and I wish them all the very best in their new environment.
- 8.2 Preparation for National 5 Qualifications session 2020/21:** Plans for ensuring quality moderation with schools working in their existing trios and agreeing a number of pieces to be moderated are underway following expected National Advice. Secondary Schools will also have the opportunity to link with appropriate schools in the Northern Alliance and receive support from Peter Havilland, Attainment Advisor, and Education Scotland.
- 8.3 Out of School Care Group Grants:** Grant funding from the Education Service has been made available to all out of school care groups operating across Argyll and Bute to support their increased running costs due to COVID. This will ensure continuity of care is available to parents during holidays and after school in these challenging times.

- 8.4 Online Learning:** Following the success of online learning during lockdown, Lucy Blake, Joint Head Teacher for Achahoish and Clachan Primary Schools, has decided to build on this success and is delivering online learning. Children from both schools join the same class online and this has proved to be very successful, showing how digital learning can link rural schools effectively.
- 8.5 Silver Rights Respecting School Award:** Kilcreggan Primary School achieved their Silver Rights Respecting School Award and as a result Fran Bretman, Head Teacher has been invited to join the panel for an online European Conference to discuss the award and its impact with other Educationalists.
- 8.6 What Scotland Learned:** Gayle Gorman, HMI Chief Inspector of lockdown and dealing with the pandemic. This will illustrate successes, achievements and challenges. Interviews will be carried out with academics and educational leaders. Education Scotland have expressed their wish to interview Peter Bain, Executive Head Teacher of Oban and Tiree High Schools and Tiree Primary School, to seek views from an Argyll and Bute perspective, and whose contribution will inform this piece of work. Four key questions form the basis for the interview that centre on learning and teaching, challenges/silver linings and leadership in dealing with the pandemic.
- 8.7 Investors in Young People:** Hermitage Academy has received glowing feedback from Investors in Young People (IYYP), 18 months after becoming the first school in Scotland to gain the national accreditation. In a follow-up report on recruiting, developing and retaining young staff, students, and probationary teachers.

When Hermitage Academy received IYYP accreditation in February 2019 it was the first school in Scotland to do so. Eighteen months later and Hermitage is still the only school in the country to have this prestigious accolade to its name. This in itself is a remarkable feat, but to then receive such a fabulous follow-up report is just amazing. Hermitage is recognised as an employer of choice and the IYYP acknowledges the large number of practices that the school has put into place that result in positive outcomes

comes to providing opportunities for young people, particularly those in its workforce, and I look forward to seeing what they achieve next. I have a strong feeling that they might be going for gold next. Watch this space!

8.8 Gold Award by Woodland Trust: Ulva Primary School on the Isle of Mull has been awarded a gold award by the Woodland Trust for taking an
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outdoors, wildlife and green issues into the classroom.

To achieve this award, pupils planted new trees on the Isle of Ulva; created artwork using natural materials; visited local woods; and completed woodland workshops with Countryside Ranger Jan Dunlop. The children also increased recycling; created tree champions to be a voice for woods and trees; and held an assembly based on the uplifting story of The Man Who Planted Trees, whilst also discussing climate change and the importance of trees to everyone. Pupils also explored the traditions of tree dressing around the world and held their own tree dressing ceremony, decorating one of the trees in the school grounds with Christmas wishes for the future and homemade fat balls for the birds. It is great to see that even during these difficult times, our young people remain resilient and are gearing up with their Christmas spirit, well done to everyone involved.

8.9 Rights: I was pleased to be asked to speak by video to our young people on their rights. The Scottish Government has asked for all Local Authorities to produce a report on how they are taking forward the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Education Service have created a website for our children and young people to find out more about what Argyll and Bute has been doing to
schools in Argyll and Bute,
with fantastic staff, but the most important part of schools and the thing that makes our schools wonderful is our children and young people. The UNCRyooof Mull

showing an anticipated slippage of adoption of LDP2 by 5 months to spring 2022.

It should be noted that until LDP2 is adopted the statutory status of the current Local Development Plan remains as well as the associated Supplementary Guidance.

Details of the proposed LDP2 and the updated DPS can be viewed at the following link:

this year. As stated previously local participation is a priority in conducting hearings and so far tests carried out by officers using Skype with up to 80 participants, some using the Council network and some using VPN, have proved successful with no major issues identified. This, together with a new procedure in place for conducting hearings virtually it should allow all participants to be heard in an open, fair and impartial way.

- 9.6 Regulatory Services:** Covid-19 enforcement work remains the main priority within Regulatory Services at the moment and resources are being diverted into this type of work to deal with the significant workload that is being placed upon the service at this time.

With the introduction of the new tier system enforcement strategies have been reviewed and there has been an enhanced focus on specific work in relation to the new measures.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1** This report provides members with an update on each of the Policy Lead portfolios. Policy Lead Councillors will be happy to discuss any particular issues with colleagues as required.

Argyll and Bute Council Policy Lead Councillors Report 12th November 2020

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