Council Annual Report

2022 - 2023

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Forewords

Leader of the Council

Scottish councils are living in interesting times, as the saying goes – and that has been the case for the past decade and more. Climate change; well-documented financial challenges; the ongoing reverberation of the impact of Covid; living costs; adapting to evolving national priorities; community aspirations and ambitions; these are just a few of the major shifts and challenges which Scottish local government has to contend with.

I am not, though, going to say that Argyll and Bute is no different – because we are different. We do indeed have the same larger-scale issues to face, but we must also do so in the context of our uniqueness – our mix of remote, rural and island communities, interspersed with some larger towns, the likes of which few other public agencies have to deal with.

And, for Argyll and Bute, there are some characteristics which remain constant and which give us the ability to evolve, to innovate, to learn, to improve, to respond, to take action, to prepare, even when so much of the local government landscape around us is shifting at pace.

In this Annual Report for Argyll and Bute Council, 2022/23, you will find more about these hallmarks of Argyll and Bute Council's approach, and how they are helping us to make the most of new opportunities

Cross-cutting Strategic Activities

Changing How We Work – Our Change Programme

‘Connect for Success’ is our change programme that’s all about us working easily and effectively together, and by doing so - making it easier for us to deliver what’s needed of us. Years of multi-million pound budget cuts have made it more and more difficult for councils to deliver services and support their communities. We are developing new ways of working together that make it easier to get things done. In brief, it means that we share knowledge, effort and resources to do the best job possible for and with our communities.

There are 7 principles to the Connect for Success Programme

1. One Council One Place Approach - working with other public sector agencies and our communities to get the

Rural Growth Deal

The Rural Growth Deal (RGD) will deliver £70m of investment across Argyll and Bute for projects that act as a driver for transformation and inclusive economic growth. Throughout 2022/23 we have been working to progress the outline business cases required for the signing of the Full Deal Agreement. To date 4 outline business cases have been submitted to Government with a further 7 nearing draft completion. We plan to submit all remaining business cases to Government in 2023 and we are working towards signing the Full Deal Agreement in this financial year. Following the deal signing we will enter year 1 of delivery.

Specific outline business cases are mentioned at appropriate points throughout this report.

The 4 outline business cases that have been submitted to government are:

Kintyre Seasports
Marine industry training centre – UHI Argyll college are leading on this business case
Clyde Engineering and Innovation Centre

Climate Change

The Council has a statutory duty to report on its emissions and climate action via the annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties (PBCCD) Report.

Regular update reports are presented to the Council's 6-weekly Climate Change Board which provides governance, oversight and discusses progress and action.

The PBCCD Report for the year 2022/23 confirms that the Council's total carbon emissions is 26,512 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO2e). This represents a reduction of 1,705 tCO2e on total emissions for the previous year. Reductions are confirmed across Scopes 1, 2 and 3 emission sources.

The following is an explanation of the Scopes

Scope 1 emission sources are direct emissions generated by an organisation itself. Examples include energy and fuel used in running boilers, and burning fuel in non-EV fleet vehicles.

Scope 2 emission sources are emissions that an organisation causes indirectly, and comes from where the energy it purchases and uses is produced.

Scope 3 emission sources includes emissions that are not produced by the organisation itself, but by those indirectly responsible up and down its value chain.

Projects delivered by the Council that have contributed to the reduction in emissions include:

LED Streetlight Replacement programme
Solar PV and LED lighting installations at Council assets
Installation of low carbon heating systems (e.g. air source heat pumps)

Additionally, the Council's Home Energy Efficiency Team provides grants to homeowners and private-rented tenants to improve home insulation. This is via the Scottish Government's Energy Efficient Scotland: Area Based Scheme.

The Council's annual Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Reports for previous years are available to the public via the Sustainable Scotland Network website https://sustainablescotlandnetwork.org/reports/argyll-and-bute-council

Best Value Improvement Action Plan 2020-2023

The Best Value Improvement Action Plan is now complete. Our Annual Audit Report from Audit Scotland in November 2022 concluded that the Council has an appropriate and effective best value framework in place and continues to make good progress addressing the recommendations in Best Value Assurance Report 2020.

The Improvement Action Plan was broken down into 5 themes:

Theme 1 - Develop the transformation agenda, supported by an affordable and achievable medium to longer term financial strategy.
Theme 2 - Improve performance management reporting to provide a balanced picture of long term trends in performance against targets.
Theme 3 - Increase the pace of transformational change to deliver the business outcomes.
Theme 4 - Assess the extent to which regeneration and economic development initiatives are delivering the vision and corporate outcomes.
Theme 5 - Work with communities and community groups to improve engagement.

Delivery of the 5 themes was through 36 actions. Full detail of the actions can be found on the council website Best Value Improvement Action Plan - Audit and Scrutiny Committee, 16/03/2023

Audit Recommendations

An essential element of the work undertaken by Internal Audit is to monitor and assess whether recommendations relating to its findings, and that of external audit, have been implemented by management of the Council. As part of the regular monitoring of progress, audit recommendations are reported quarterly to the Strategic Management Team and actions to complete them are recorded and allocated to the responsible officers. Supporting evidence is required from the responsible officer before being assessed by the auditor making the recommendation.

Significant Challenges

As well as our Strategic and Operational Risk Registers, we face some day-to-day that can impact on service delivery. Here we summarise these challenges.

1. Staff Recruitment

Challenge -

Assistance Programme, and the ways they can access it so that they can make contact. Additionally, alternative ways to offer support are being explored and outlined.

4. Unplanned Demands

Challenge – We have experienced several unplanned demands. These demands increase the pressure on delivery of the statutory or committed services, additional budgetary pressure and pressure on staff to deliver unplanned demands. The agility of our staff is the key to being able to deliver these unplanned demands.

Action - To help mitigate these additional pressures where possible we have revised our processes, systems and recruited additional staff.

5. Emergency Resilience and Planning

Challenge - We have a continuing duty to promote or enforce standards that preserve public health, public safety and protect the environment. The remit is wide-ranging, from a suspected or confirmed outbreak of a communicable disease or an animal health incident such as avian influenza or rabies.

Action - To ensure we continue to protect the public, environment and promote public safety we are reviewing our emergency plans and arrangements. This will ensure our level of preparedness for any emergency incident is suitable and robust.

6. Electric Grid Limitations

Challenge - Many areas within Argyll and Bute are off grid for gas, and the electrical grid has limitations in terms of capacity/constraints. These issues continue to impact on the Council (and the wider community) in terms of resilience and being able to deliver renewable solutions, Electric Vehicle charging, electrification of heat, etc.

Action - We are lobbying the regulator to highlight the impact of these constraints. We also lobby the Electrical Network Operators, emphasising the need for them to reinforce their infrastructure.

7. Cost of Living Impacts

Challenge - The Cost of Living Crisis impacts on individuals, businesses and our ability to deliver services across all service areas. Price increases and supply issues are continuing across all industry sectors. We have our ambitious 10 year Rural Growth Deal projects. The t AM6.7 budgets are fixed for the 10 year programme period with limited capacity to build cost escalation contingency into the projects. Other significant pressures are the cost of school catering and the impact on the building sector.

Action - We have already identified improving housing solutions for local people as a priority. There is a need for the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) to consider these recent issues in more detail and examine if they can be addressed by the Council, or our partners including the Scottish Government. The LHS is updated annually, and it is proposed that this is the appropriate vehicle to do this. To support this, officers have set up an internal Housing Group with relevant senior officers from across the Council's Services participating.

12. Changes to Managing Our Waste

Challenge - The Biodegradable Municipal Waste (BMW) ban is due for introduction in January 2026. This will affect the current waste collection and disposal methods. Ferry capacity to service the requirements of the BMW ban and other emerging changes need to be planned and managed. Other merging changes including Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), Circular Economy bill, carbon reduction initiatives, and market availability particularly for Energy from Waste (EfW) feedstock.

Action - Solutions identified through the Waste Strategy with ongoing discussions with Scottish Government and other appropriate bodies around derogations and implications of the changes of various legislation and regulations will bring to the rural geography of Argyll and Bute.

Complaints

In 2022/23 the number of stage 1 complaints fell to 467 from 499 in 21/22. Stage 2 complaints rose to 219 from 201 in 21/22.

Roads and Infrastructure Services continued to receive the majority of complaints in 2022/23 (stage 1 - 360) and (stage 2 - 122)

Performance within timescale has fallen in 2022/23 to 79% for stage 1 against 82% in 21/22 and 59% for stage 2 against 70% in 21/22. The Compliance and Regulatory team will continue to support services to try to improve this, through the provision of monthly reports which are sent to Executive Directors/Heads of Service and Service Complaints representatives.

All Council services follow the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's (SPSO) model complaint handling procedure (CHP). A requirement of this model procedure is that the Council report to the SPSO on a standard set of statutory performance indicators, and prepare an annual report for consideration by Members. You can view the Council's Complaints Annual Report 2022/23 through this web link. Microsoft Word - Annual Complaints Report 2022-23 V0.1 (argyll-bute.gov.uk)

Absence

The number of working days lost to sickness in the UK hit a record high in 2022 according to data published by the Office of National Statistics. The number of working days lost because of sickness increased beyond pre pandemic levels. The increase is a contrast from the low levels of absence at the peak of the pandemic when many workers were furloughed, working from home and social distancing led to a drop in minor illness but it also marks a reversal in the long term trend of declining sickness absence rates.

Absence data for 2022/23 saw increase for both Teachers and LGE. Teachers absence has increased by 0.60 of a day to 6.2 work days lost per FTE. LGE staff has increased by 0.90 work days lost per FTE to 14.3 days.

Working Days Lost per Full Time Employee - By staff category and financial quarter												

Figure 1: Teacher, LGE and All Staff absence trends across each quarter since 20/21

The top three reasons for absence in 2022/23 have been:

Mental Health
Infections
Other musculoskeletal Infection.Td(
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Delivering On Our Outcomes - Corporate Outcome Indicators

2022/23 is the first year that the 47 Corporate Outcome Indicators have been used. Due to the nature of the change it is not possible to draw a direct comparison to previous years' performance however, where possible historic data is used to help identify the overall trend and progress on delivering our Corporate Outcomes.

Where appropriate a Target is used to track Performance and progress is identified using a Red or Green status indicator to track performance. Not all indicators have a Target, where this is the case the trend data is helpful for scrutiny.

For the majority of indicators the data is collected and presented annually, or even quarterly if this is possible and appropriate. However, in some cases the nature of the indicator means the collection of data results in a longer lag-time, or the data is collected biennially.

The following table illustrates how we have delivered on each of our Corporate Outcomes. This is followed by the detailed performance and supporting commentary for our Corporate Outcome Indicators.

How We Compare Nationally – Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF)

We view benchmarking as a crucial tool to help us improve as well as using

Delivering Our Outcomes - Key Successes by Corporate Outcome

Corporate Outcome: People live active, healthier and independent lives

Number of Indicators: 6

Number on Track: 4

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Maximise distribution of Scottish Welfare Fund	95.30%	96.70%	85.90%	120.70%	144.00%	G	The 2022/23 overspend has been covered by earmarked reserve from 2021/2022. This has ensured that the Council has been able to continue its support to its most vulnerable citizens in the year through the provision of Crisis Grant and Community Care Grant funds.
Percentage of clients satisfied that they are better able to deal with their financial problems	90.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	G	This voluntary survey is distributed with no obligation for a client to complete or respond. All clients who expressed an opinion agreed that they are better able to deal with their financial problems following our support. It is important to note that no negative comments or responses were received.
Maximise distribution of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) fund	96.00%	101.60%	99.90%	98.20%	79.00%	R	Actual expenditure at yearend was £807,000 meaning a funding underspend by £172,000 in 2022/23. Looking at the detail we received less

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Percentage of care services graded 'good' (4) or better in Care Inspectorate Inspections (HWBOI NI17)	75.20%	85.00%	87.10%	80.00%	79.50%	G	This indicator measures Adult Services rating only. The HSCP report for this measure is updated in line with Health And Care Experience Biannual schedule, however Care Inspectorate gradings are updated more frequently.

Using a holistic approach participants have access to accredited training, work placements paying the Real Living Wage, benefits, debt and fuel poverty advice, assistance with job applications, CV creation, interviews skills and techniques. Specific items can also be purchased to remove specific barriers, for example, a digital device to access online learning or a bicycle to help address poor transport links and allow travel to and from work.

Corporate]Outcome:

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual

Community Organisations Received Capacity Building Support

The Lochside Champions are a group that represent people with autism who attend the Lochside Resource Centre in Lochgilphead. The group were supported and attended the Mid-Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands Area Community Planning Group meeting. On behalf of the group they represent they raised a number of issues at that meeting including:

That the homes are lovely but often situated too far out of town causing feelings of isolation at times.
More work opportunities would be welcome.
The lack of transport choices in the area is constraining, this made it very hard to do things on a whim or last minute for example.

At the meeting the group was introduced to a key partner, the Third Sector Interface, who subsequently visited and talked to them about supported volunteering opportunities. Another partner, Fyne Homes, has subsequently visited the group to talk about housing and donated materials for their garden area. The group were put in touch with the strategic transport team within the Council. Work is ongoing with the group to strengthen their governance and ensure they can fundraise and lobby effectively.

Building Standards achieves maximum 6-year licence

Building Standards exceeded all targets for the 5 key national performance targets for 2022/23, attained one of the best customer satisfaction rates from the national Building Standards customer satisfaction survey run by the Scottish Government and achieved the maximum six year verification licence from the Scottish Government, which allows us to vett and verify building warrants. This brings benefits to the built environment and supporting our economy. During the period 2022/23 our work in supporting the economy resulted in a total 1,377 building warrants processed.

During the year there was an increase in the number of dangerous buildings complaints with occasions for emergency action to ensure that public safety was secured.

Short-term Lets

The Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Order 2022 required the design and development of a new Short-term Let Licensing scheme and policy. This is to ensure short-term lets are safe, address issues faced by neighbours, enable local authorities to know and understand what is happening in their area, and to handle complaints effectively. It also aims to balance the economic and tourism benefits from short-term lets with the needs and concerns of local communities across Argyll and Bute.

New operational arrangements to deliver the short-term let licensing regime were developed. This included the development of procedures, communication and engagement with the sector, an on-line information management system coupled with an online application process.

Welcoming Ukrainian Refugees

Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed to Argyll and Bute through the Scottish and UK Government's sponsorship in response to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the evacuation of the civilian population.

The council's resettlement team was scaled up and the multi-agency partnership established to coordinate support. Over 300 Ukrainians have chosen to resettle in Argyll and Bute and the Ukrainian population is dispersed across the whole authority. Ukrainian pupils are supported in school, with over 100 pupils attending 23 establishments. Ukrainian adults are supported to learn English and to move into work. A wide variety of activities and events have been arranged with services across the council providing support including Housing, Regulatory Services, Business Gateway, Employability, Welfare Rights, Revenue and Benefits, Community Development, Social Work, Public Health and Education.

Covid Recovery Strategy

To support the process of returning to normality in response to the Covid pandemic a Recovery Strategy was developed. This led to the publication of the Argyll and Bute Recovery document;

Corporate Outcome: Children and young people have the best possible start

Number of Indicators: 8

Number on Track: 7

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Provide quality meals within cost margins to all pupils	+/-5%	-0.0345	-0.069	-0.04	-2.56%	G	Catering continues to perform well, with the variance from food costs within the +/-5% target across the area. We continue to monitor areas/locations that fall outside of the target variance
Increase the percentage of our care experienced young people that have the recommended additional tracking and monitoring plans in place	100.00%		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	G	Virtual Head Teacher is now in post and continues to work on updated approaches to the monitoring, tracking and progress of this cohort. Targets for Attainment, Exclusion and Attendance updated and agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board.
Percentage of children living in poverty (After Housing Costs)	No Target	23.30%	18.90%	21.70%		**No Target**	Latest Data is 2021/22. Data is taken from the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF). Since 2018/19 the percentage of children living in poverty has improved against all local authorities. Latest data indicates a relative position of 11 out of all authorities (with lowest being best). Although we are advised to view the annual figures in the longer term, it does appear that Argyll and Bute's broad array of tackling child

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							poverty actions are having a positive impact and it is important that they are maintained and built upon.
Our percentage rate for attendance across all Argyll and Bute schools is comparable or better than the Scottish national average (Biennial data)	92.00%	93.50%	93.30%	93.30%	90.55%	R	This figure is taken from provisional Attendance, Absence and Exclusions (AAE) census data and is embargoed. We have used some basic reports from the AAE census but have no way of checking that this is correct at this time. We are waiting for data to be released for Director sign off and that will be actual data. Biennial 2020/21 Data
Support the increase in the uptake of available Grants, Allowance and Entitlements	2,573	3,103					

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For

Training sessions supported 143 practitioners engaging in dialogue around infant behaviour and how to apply nurture principles to their understanding of this. An increased number of settings reported feeling empowered by their growing knowledge around nurture to better understand and thus support dysregulated behaviour in children.

Bespoke training to support practitioners to increase their skill and confidence in delivering play and learning outdoors was delivered. This resulted in a better understanding of how specific outdoor environments can deliver learning for children, engages and extends children's thinking and supports their connection to the natural environment. The participants all reported that they felt more confident to assess risk, engage new skills and deliver learning outdoors.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is seeing increasing demands placed on schools in relation to youth voice. There are ongoing challenges in bringing all council departments up to speed in relation to UNCRC, and we have been working to develop a cross-council Youth Voice structure. The UNCRC working group is meeting regularly to address this and usin mpeed i1 (m.7 (R)-3k)-1.7pt(ng (tur2ek)-ewnhm

Award winning School Meals Service

We delivered over 1.2m School Meals and Early Years' meals

Corporate Outcome: Education, skills and training will maximise opportunities for all

Number of Indicators: 7

Number on Track: 6

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Maintain the percentage of all young people leaving school achieving a positive destination into further education, training or employment * ACADEMIC YEAR	95.00%						

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Increase the uptake of wider achievement opportunities which complement traditional SQA awards and offer alternative ways to develop learning, life and work skills	No Target				88.00%	**No Target**	Enhanced Wider Achievements Programmes across all Secondary Schools continue to be under development and are partially supported by UKSPF funding successfully obtained by the Education Service.
The percentage of Modern Apprentices that go on to a positive destination after completing the Argyll and Bute Council Modern Apprentice Programme	95.00%	97.40%	100.00%	96.10%	96.20%	**G**	The progress of Modern Apprentices onward to positive destinations remains high. We will be investigating expanding the reach of the Modern Apprentice programme through forthcoming workforce planning discussions.
The percentage of children that achieve their appropriate developmental milestones by Primary 1	70.00%	Not Collected (Covid)	75.00%	64.00%	63.00%	**R**	Moving forward, our Strategic Plan, Early Years 2023-24, highlights collaboration with Education Scotland's Curriculum Innovation Team. This will facilitate 'live' service design project across Early

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
The percentage pass rate for the National 5 qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average * ACADEMIC YEAR	No Target	91.60%	87.50%	79.70%	77.39%	**No Target**	For session 2022-2023, the post-appeal National 5 pass rate in Argyll and Bute at grades A-C is 77.39%. The national post-appeal data will not be made available until December 2023. Argyll and Bute's pre-appeal pass rate for National 5 was 76.93%. The national pre-appeal A-C pass rate for National 5 is 78.80%.
The percentage pass rate for the National Higher qualification is comparable or better than the Scottish national average * ACADEMIC YEARBC00D641 0			[redacted]	[redacted]	n tpa	[redacted]	

Corporate Outcome: Our economy is diverse and thriving

Number of Indicators: 12

Number on Track: 10

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Maintain the per the							

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
The percentage of homeless applicants who required temporary accommodation this period	No Target	44.00%	45.00%	40.00%	34.00%	**No Target**	The percentage reduction has to be considered in

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
							successful completion of the Motor Caravan Overnight Parking scheme.
The total visitor spend in Argyll and Bute (Jan-Dec, STEAM, Direct visitor spend - £/M	No Target	£364M	£125M				

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
Unemployment rate - Claimant Count as a %age of working age population	No Target	2.70%	5.80%	4.00%	2.80%	**No**	

Economic Growth

The positive experience for visitors has been assisted by the actions delivered through the Staycation agenda, which included employing a temporary post to take forward specific actions on the ground, such as successful completion of the Motorcaravan Overnight Parking scheme. Details on the Staycation agenda can be found in this report Staycation Update Paper

With reference to the Scottish Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) the number of visitor trips and visitor spend increased in Argyll and Bute.
Visitor trips increased from 1.5m (Jan – Dec 2021) to 2.5m (Jan- Dec 2022). This is an increase of 67%
Visitor spend increased from £262.5m (Jan – Dec 2021) to £407.5m (Jan- Dec 2022). This is an increase of 55%.

Supporting the Economic Recovery and Our Communities

The Procurement, Commercial and Contract Management Team (PCCMT) provided a strong lead to ensure we continued the percentage of Council spend that is under a contract or service level agreement, while also maintaining the percentage of all Small Medium Enterprises (SME) that win council contracts. We also worked to improve the delivery of contract management on all high risk contracts.

2022/23 centage of C- m.

[redacted]

No. of tenders receiving local bids	**No. won by local bidders**	**Percentage success rate of local bids won to local bids submitted**
34	29	85.3%

The [redacted] ed in 2022/23, and the overall percentage with our local suppliers was 37.3% - see detail below:

	Total Spend	**Local Spend**	**Local Spend Percentage**
2022/23 –			

Business Start-Ups and Support – Two Case Studies

The number of business gateway start-ups has dropped slightly over the financial year, but is it hoped this will improve during 2023/24 as the Argyll and Bute Business Gateway Team recently launched a start-up grant funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

During 2022/23 we worked hard to ensure that the financial help available to businesses was correctly awarded and quickly paid out. In total we awarded nearly £18 million of Non-Domestic Rates reliefs to support local businesses.

The following are two case studies illustrating how Business Gateway has supported these businesses to grow.

Aosdàna

Based on the Isle of Iona, Aosdàna designs and manufactures contemporary jewellery with a Celtic influence.

Business owner, Mhairi Killin, founded Aosdàna in 2003. Having operated successfully for almost two decades, most of Aosdàna's sales were generated from its gallery on the island, where some of the jewellery ranges are also designed and made. However, like many other small businesses, pandemic closures and subsequent travel restrictions meant the main source of income for Mhairi dwindled.

During this time, however, Mhairi, together with award-winning jewellery designer Maeve Gillies, won an Innovate UK award to develop a range of jewellery based on the heritage of original Iona silversmiths, the Ritchies.

Mhairi approached Business Gateway for support and guidance on how to reach a wider audience and generate global sales for the new range, the Kist o' Ritchies. She received 1:1 support from a dedicated business adviser, as well as advice on funding, a strategic review of her business, and signposting to a wider network.

"Support from Business Gateway has been so beneficial. Not only has their assistance helped me re-evaluate my business strategy, but it has also

Argyll Yacht Rigger

A Scottish yacht servicing business in Argyll & Bute is thriving after its owner received specialist start-up advice and grant funding from Business Gateway.

Following redundancy during the Covid-19 pandemic, experienced rigger Ian Burton launched Argyll Yacht Rigger, in June 2020. The Tarbert-based business provides a full range of services for pleasure and commercial yacht owners in the region, from complete re-rigs to installing new masthead electronics and winter maintenance.

Seeking to capitalise on this niche area of business, Ian approached Business Gateway in 2020 for advice on setting up his own business. As well providing start up guidance, his local adviser facilitated specialist support which included employment advice and expert help on business growth and resilience. This support was crucial as Ian looked to build the business during the pandemic.

Business Gateway also signposted grant funding, helping Ian access financial support to expand. This included support from the Local Growth Accelerator Programme, funded by Argyll and Bute Council and the European Regional Development Fund (2014-20) Structural Funds Programme. With a referral made from Business Gateway, Ian was also awarded funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The grants enabled Ian to purchase higher

Generating Income for the Council

We have generated over £560,000 by selling off surplus property assets and generated annual income of £31,750. This is part of our strategy to divest surplus property assets and generate income from our estate.

Notable sales include:

- The former Innellan Primary School
- The conclusion of the Castle Toward sale
- The marketing of the Helensburgh Waterfront commercial site, which attracted 9 international, national and local bids for the site with a

with festival-based and themed events and high-

West Coast Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) Logistics and Training Hub

This project will be supported with investment of up to £4m from the UK Government subject to the approval of a full business case.

This project will invest in new business park infrastructure at Oban Airport. Recent trials using drone's to provide essential services to some of the most fragile rural and island communities have been successful. The investment will enable it to become a leading innovative research and development centre for UAV technologies.

The centre will deliver Scotland's first specialised drone training and research centre. Providing enhanced Research & Development capabilities, space for UAV pilot training, laboratories, and lecture suites. The UAV Hub will also provide state of the art hangars with maintenance facilities for UAVs and general aviation aircraft. Oban Airports' position on the West Coast of Scotland will also provide enhanced capability to trial Beyond Visual Line of Site (BVLOS) flights in controlled airspace. This will support the safe integration of UAV's and general aviation traffic across the UK, future-proofing our airspace for all users.

Corporate Outcome: We have an infrastructure that supports sustainable growth

Number of Indicators: 5

Number on Track: 5

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
The percentage of waste that is recycled, composted or recovered	45.00%	43.80%	49.30%	48.30%	52.00%	G	There was an overall improvement in recycling performance in 2022 which was mainly due to an increase in green garden waste and wood waste tonnages sent by Renewi from the PPP area for onward composting and recycling. There was also an improvement in recovery performance in 2022 mainly due to a trial carried out by Renewi in the PPP area whereby Renewi sent circa 1,500 tonnes of general mixed residual waste (mainly from their Dalinlongart waste facility near Dunoon) to an Energy from Waste (EfW) plant in the central belt
The number of tonnes of waste sent to landfill (Biodegradable)	21,500	18,577	18,435				

Corporate

First photo shows the reservoir which will be dry the majority of the time, only holding water during a flood event.

Second photo shows

Piers and Harbours

Marine Infrastructure and Ferry Services

The restructure of our larger harbour infrastructure and reviewed legislation have led to an additional number of Piers and Harbours. Argyll and Bute Council is the Statutory Harbour Authority at 7 locations and a marine asset owner at a further 29 marine facilities located throughout the Council area. All remedial actions required to close out audit findings have been completed, with the ongoing audit regime visiting Rothesay later this year.

Ferry Services

All our ferry routes operated according to timetable with additional sailings put on to cope with increased demand. We are reviewing the previous works and studies carried out around the ferry services we provide and the infrastructure they need now and for the future.

The replacement of the Jura ferry remains the priority and work is underway towards the installation of appropriate passenger access at Feolin on Jura. We have undertaken a topography study at Feolin with a view to tendering a design build for the passenger only access for those periods when the vehicular vessel is not available. This will make a very significant improvement to the connectivity issues when there is a breakdown on the Eilean Dhiura and will likely be in the form of a gangway and pontoon near the existing slipway.

Tobermory Wall and Rails

The council secured funding in the region of £450k to make improvements to the front rails at Tobermory Main Street and help alleviate some of the flooding issues associated with Tobermory. A new higher wall was installed to which the upgraded rails were attached to, as well as a flood barrier/gate and flat valves. As part of this project the council will also be making road surfacing improvements to the area of car parking adjacent to the wall.

Design details were discussed with stakeholders to accommodate the wishes of the pier users such as realigning the flood barrier to reduce impact to the pier stones. From this design the council obtained a listed building consent and secured a local contractor through the tendering process. The council has been physically supervising the site on a weekly basis and continue to maintain contact with the affected stakeholders as such. This has enabled revising construction sequences to address summer tourist season for directly affected businesses.

The majority of the works programme is targeted to be complete by December 2023 with the flood barrier construction across Fisherman’s Pier to be completed in January/February 2024.

Oban Harbour Revision Order
Informal discussion have been ongoing to finalise the Oban Harbour draft Harbour Revision Order (HRO). The draft HRO has unde

Land Based Developments

Road Reconstruction

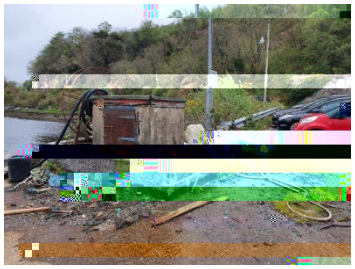
During this financial year we carried out a programme of road improvements. The Council invested nearly £10m with additional funding from the Timber Transport Fund in the region of £1m. This allowed us to complete over 80 individual road reconstruction schemes which will improve the overall road network, contributing to keeping Argyll and Bute open for business. As a result of this ongoing prudent investment and proportionate and appropriate engineering choices, the overall road condition continues to improve, and we recorded the most improved road condition in over 15 years.

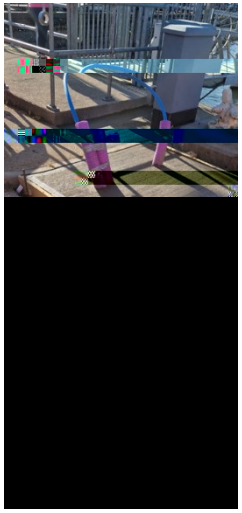
Tobermory Cemetery Expansion

There was limited burial capacity in Mull. To resolve this an £820K extension to the existing Tobermory site was constructed. This has increased the number of lairs by 192, with each lair being 3 deep.

Protecting the Drinking Water Supply

In line with The Water Supply (Water Fittings) (Scotland) Byelaws 2014, Scottish Water require a number of piers under Argyll and Bute Council ownership to be upgraded. This is to ensure private and local public water supplies are protected from any backflow contamination and that harbours / terminals / pontoons etc. are adequately protected.





We are currently working on four sites - Oban, Campbeltown, West Loch near Tarbert and Carradale that require upgrade works. A Contractor has been appointed and work has commenced at three of the four sites. All four sites are expected to be completed late in 2023.

Deliver the ICT and Digital Strategy Action Plan - Our aims

Our networks and systems are secure, accessible and current
ICT provides value, and enables and empowers both customers and staff to make tasks easier
Our people have the knowledge and capabilities to use ICT effectively

We continue to network and engage with Scottish Local Government Digital Office, Society For Innovation Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM) and Scottish Government Digital Team. This engagement helps ensure that we achieve best practice, share our ICT and digital experience and expertise, and achieve the highest levels of value for money we can through active procurement and contract management.

The 2021-24 ICT and Digital Strategy Action Plan has approximately 100 actions. The majority of actions are progressing satisfactorily and to target. Along with highlights noted below from the 2021-24 ICT and Digital Strategy Action Plan we have managed to maintain the average time to resolve ICT incidents**.** We have operated well within our service level targets with service levels at or above previous levels and our response times were as good as previous years**.**

Microsoft365 (MS365)

We led on the national project for MS365, working with the NHS and Di i. (3)-4.t(of v)3.7 (al)-1.1 (ue for)0.6 (mW)1. l.4pw2u.6 (H)14 (er)0.6 dece, s

New Ways of Working with ICT and Data

As well as the day to day challenges of managing a high profile IT network we have implemented a raft of improvements to support working efficiencies. These include a new self-service facility with our ICT Service Desk system and working with finance colleagues to introduce the new Oracle Cloud financial management system

We are currently developing and implementing a new Data Strategy. A key aim of this strategy is to evaluate, design and implement a new Data Platform. Not only will the Data Platform enable us to measure and report on performance, importantly we will be able to combine data sets and make better use of our data to help improve decision making at all management levels, thereby ensuring that evidence based decisions are made.

Capital Investment and Central Repairs Delivered

We have successfully delivered a programme of capital investment totalling £7.5M. Included within the wide variety of investment projects were 50 projects relating to energy efficiency, reducing fossil fuel consumption and renewable energy generation. This included solar panels, air source heat pumps and new automated control systems in our buildings, mainly in our schools.

As well as delivering the additional investment projects the emergency, planned and statutory maintenance programmes were successfully delivered, resulting in improved customer satisfaction. Additionally a separate large-scale project reviewed the water, waste water and drainage charges for the Council. The results of this project has delivered one-off refunds in the region of £500,000 and year-on-year savings of more than £100,000 per annum.

Helensburgh Waterfront Development- i n l c e s f a

Our Workspace – Reducing Costs and Increasing Efficiencies

Corporate Outcome: Getting It Right

Number of Indicators: 5

Number on Track: 4

Corporate Outcome Indicator	Target	Actual For 2019/20	

Target	Actual For 2019/20	Actual For 2020/21	Actual For 2021/22	Actual For 2022/23	Status	Commentary
						and averaged 96% customer satisfaction - The Registration Service had 333 respondents to its service satisfaction survey with a 98.7% satisfaction rating - There were 975 users of the Customer Service Points who completed a survey and 95.8% of them were satisfied, with a very small number of comments about walk in opening hours. - The corporate website had an 86% overall satisfaction rating with the transactional forms element being higher at 92% and the new marriage website at 96.4% of satisfied visitors. Naturally all returns were analysed to determine if any improvements were needed, but comments were overwhelmingly positive and where staff were named the feedback was passed on to the m(ne)]TJemsCprha (i)-1 (m)3.4 (i)-1R(ne)]T3.4 (i)-ol 0 Td[ov

Increasing the Use of our Website and Self-Service Tools

The target to increase the percentage of all Self-Service or automated contacts through the Contact Centre and online channels was 70%.

The actual percentage achieved was 75%, this is up from 73% in 2021/22. The total number of interactions increased to 598,000, up from 563,000 in 2021/22.

Table showing the volume of all transactions by financial quarter during 2022/23

Many of the automated and self-service interactions were driven by the high usage of the corporate website, which for the first time had over 4 million page views in a year and over 35,000 online forms were submitted.

During the year the Web Team were very focused on the building of the new corporate website ready for launching in 2023/24. Even so, there was a raft of new features and services that encouraged the continued shift to digital, including:

The roll out of the online webchat bot ‘Abbot’ and Smart Assistant to all web pages which was used 5,733 times.
The launch of the new Google smart speak1 (aunc)-1.7 (lh-1.7 (e4ah)theonl)-1 (i)gift tccd( )Tteon-nu9 -1.814 Tptal, including:

We continued the focus on making the online resources as accessible as possible. The website averaged a score of 98 out of 100 on the independent Silktide index. This index is the global accessibility league table of all public websites. To further support access to our online resources by our customers that have visual and language related issues we invested in upgraded “Reachdeck”, which is supported browsing technology.

Our voice automated services also continue to be very popular with 46,000 switchboard and payment transactions totalling £1.5M were made using the service.

Overall the shift from expensive mediated activities to low cost digital channels in 2022/23 resulted in £940,000 worth of efficiencies, continuing to build on the efficiencies of the previous years:

Table showing the volume of transactions that have shifted to digital and

All returns were analysed to determine if improvements could be made, but comments were overwhelmingly positive and where staff were named the feedback was passed on to them.

We are continually working to improve our customer service. Both Building Standards and Legal and Regulatory Services not only achieved reaccreditation but increased the number of Compliance Plus elements awarded.

Other ways that we are improving our customer service experience is the digital “User forum” for Building Standards customers to highlight issues with the service, changes to the Technical Standards, how this impacts on the customer and an opportunity to discuss their issues.

Supporting our Community Councils

We oversaw the successful delivery of Community Council Elections in October 2022. A review of the Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils was also undertaken and agreed at the end of September 2022. A total of 54 of a possible 56 Community Councils are now formed and the team attended all 54 inaugural meetings to formally set up the Community Councils.

We continue to develop social media to help communities get the support they need, for council and communities to work together through engagement exercises, and promoting council and area challenges and opportunities. Our combined corporate social media channels grew by 10% last year. Our use of social media successfully signposted 80,000 people to the information they could access quickly and easily on the council’s website.

Local Government Elections and Supporting New Elected Councillors

We delivered the Local Government Elections in May 2022 and the subsequent induction process for our 36 Elected Members. These elections resulted in a turnover of more than 50% of Members. This posed a significant challenge to ensure that all Members are prepared and able to carry out their roles. Along with delivering the Local Government Election in May a review of Political Management Arrangements was concluded in advance of the new Council being elected. Post-election activities include relevant training for those appointed to the Regulatory Cohort, the Audit and Scrutiny Clcrt7