

A meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee will be held on Tuesday 17 September 2024 at 3pm.

Members may attend the meeting in person or via remote online access. Webex joining details will be sent to Members and Officers prior to the meeting. Members are requested to notify Committee Services by 12 noon on Monday 16 September 2024 how they intend to access the meeting.

In the event of connectivity issues, Members are asked to use the *join by phone* number in the Webex invitation and as noted above.

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LYNSEY BROWN
Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services

BUSINESS

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2. 2024/25 Policy & Resources Revenue Budget, 2023/24 Out-turn and General Fund Revenue Budget Update Report by Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development and Chief Executive	p
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ROUTINE DECISIONS AND ITEMS FOR NOTING		
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Enquiries to – **Colin MacDonald** – Tel 01475 712113

Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development and Chief Executive	Report No:	FIN/52/24/AP/AB
Contact Officer:	Alan Puckrin	Contact No:	01475 712090
Subject:	2024/25 Policy & Resources Revenue Budget, 2023/24 Out-turn and General Fund Revenue Budget Update		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the Policy & Resources Revenue Budget outturn for 2023/24 and the 2024/25 projected position. The report also highlights a projected overspend in the overall General Fund Revenue Budget and the impact this will have on the General Fund Reserve.

1.3 In 2023/24, excluding the carry forward of Earmarked Reserves, there was an underspend of £714,000 within the Policy and Resources Committee. This was a decrease in expenditure of £144,000 from the projected outturn reported to Committee in June 2024. This was largely due to a decrease in the anticipated draw on the Non Pay Inflation Contingency. More details are provided within section 3.

1.4 The revised 2024/25 Revenue Budget for the Policy and Resources Committee is £24,069,000, which excludes Earmarked Reserves. The latest projection is an overspend of £400,000 (1.66%), mainly due to unachieved turnover targets to date and a £250,000 shortfall within the Pay Inflation Contingency. More details are provided in section 3.6 and the appendices.

1.5 The latest projection for the General Fund Budget is an overspend of £1,192,000. Based on these figures the Council's unallocated Reserves are currently projected to be £0.778million less than the minimum recommended level of £4.0million. The August meeting of the Committee considered a report highlighting actions being progressed by the CMT to estimate the emerging recurring pressures and an update on progress appears later in this meeting's agenda.

1.6 This report also includes updates in respect of earmarked reserves spend and the Councils Common Good Revenue budget.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

2.1 Note the final outturn for the 2023/24 Policy and Resources Budget and note the current projected overspend for 2024/25 of £400,000.

- 2.2 Note the projected overspend of £1,192,000 for the General Fund and the projected reserve balance of £3.222 million.
- 2.3 Note that there is an update later in the agenda on progress in addressing the emerging budget pressures.
- 2.4 Approve the virement outlined in Section 3.10/ Appendix 5 and approves the use of the Capacity earmarked reserve to fund external assistance with the appointment of a new Chief Financial Officer.
- 2.5 Note the projected 2024/25 surplus of £4,300 for the Common Good Budget set out in Appendix 6.
- 2.6 Note the 2024/25 Workstream Savings achieved to date and updates from lead officers.

Alan Puckrin
Chief Financial Officer

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities & ODHR

Louise Long
Chief Executive

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the current position of the 2024/25 Revenue Budget as well as the 2023/24 final outturn and to highlight the main variances contributing to the £714,000 underspend for 2023/24 and the projected overspend of £1,920,000 for 2024/25.
- 3.2 The revised 2024/25 Revenue Budget for the Policy & Resources Committee is £24,069,000 excluding Earmarked Reserves. This is a decrease of £1,129,000 from the approved budget largely due to allocations from the pay inflation contingency. Appendix 1 gives more details of this budget movement.
- 3.3 2023/24 Outturn (£714,000 Underspend)

The final outturn for the Policy & Resources 2023/24 Revenue Budget, excluding Earmarked Reserves was an underspend of £714,000. This is a decrease in spend of £144,000 from the position reported to Committee in May 2024. The main reasons for the movement was a further underspend within the Non- Pay Inflation Contingency.

The outturn in specific service areas was as follows:

Service	Revised Budget 2023/24 £000	Outturn 2023/24 £000	Variance to Budget £000	P11 Projected Variance £000	Movement Since P11 £000
Finance	5,840	5,841	1	3	(2)
Legal	5,700	5,565	(135)	(119)	(16)
Organisational Development, Policy & Communications	2,378	2,430	52	34	18
Chief Executive	371	380	9	12	(3)
Miscellaneous	1,835	1,194	(641)	(500)	(141)
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	16,124	15,410	(714)	(570)	(144)

- 3.4 The main variances contributing to the net underspend were as follows -

- a. Non Pay Inflation Contingency underspend £620,000 - Within 2023/24 there was an underspend of £620,000 due to lower than anticipated calls on the contingency. This represents a decrease in anticipated costs of £132,000 since the previous 2023/24 report to Committee. As part of the 2024/25 budget process the Non Pay Inflationary budget was reduced by £500,000 to take into account the forecast reduction in inflation in the medium term.
- b. Computer Software/Hardware Maintenance underspend £70,000 - combined one-off underspend within ICT computer hardware and software budgets due to the timing of new corporate contracts. No change since reported at 2023/24 Committee.

- 3.5 2024/25 Projected Outturn - £400,000 overspend 1.66 %

The main projected variances contributing to the net overspend are listed below (within appendix 3) –

- (a) Overall committee Employee Costs are projected to overspend by £47,000 due to an under achievement of turnover savings to date.
- (b) The Revenues & Benefits section are reporting a £21,000 overspend within postages, this is due to a £12,000 one-off charge for re-billing of the 2024/25 Council Tax notices and additional postages charges relating to an increase in the volume of reminder notices. The total one-off charge for the re-billing of the 2024/25 Council Tax notices was £17,000 (£12,000 postages and £5,000 printing).

- (c) £22,000 underspend within legal expenses for the Revenues & Benefits section, based on historic budget.
- (d) Statutory Additions Income is projected to be £42,000 under-recovered in line with last year.
- (e) Projected over-recovery of £35,000 within Income for ICT service recharges for internal maintenance recharges for computer equipment purchased outside of the refresh programme.
- (f) External Licences are currently projecting at an under recovery of £53,000 for liquor and taxi operators. These projections are in line with previous outturns.
- (g) £250,000 overspend within the pay inflation contingency based on the latest offer to SJC employees for the 2024/25 pay award. This is outwith an additional £77 million funding from the Scottish Government.
- (h) Non-pay inflation is projected to be on budget in 2024/25 and officers will continue to review assumptions/projections in detail and an update Committee as appropriate.

3.6 General Fund Budget & Reserves Position

Appendix 7 shows that the General Fund is projecting a £1,192,000 overspend (excluding Health & Social Care) which represents 0.47% of the net Revenue Budget. All committees are reporting an overspend; Policy & Resources Committee £400,000, Environment & Regeneration of £268,000 and the Education & Communities £524,000.

The August meeting of the Committee considered a report highlighting actions being progressed by the CMT to estimate the emerging recurring pressures and an update on progress appears later in this meeting's agenda

Appendix 9 shows the latest position in respect of the General Fund Reserves and shows that the projected balance at 31 March, 2025 is £3.222 million which is £0.778 million below the minimum recommended balance of £4.0 million. A review of reserves prior to December was agreed as part of the June Finance Strategy update. This review will seek to address the projected shortfall in minimum reserves.

3.7 Earmarked Reserves

Appendix 4 gives an update on the operational Earmarked Reserves, i.e. excluding strategic funding models. Spend to 31 July 2024 on these operational Earmarked Reserves is £96,000 (1.16% of projected spend), the majority of the earmarked reserve budgets within the Policy & Resources reserves occur at the end of the year. Appendix 8 gives the overall earmarked reserve position which shows £590,000 (57.28%) slippage against phased budget largely within the HSCP.

3.8 Common Good Fund

The Common Good Budget is projecting a surplus of £4,300 in 2024/25 as shown in Appendix 6 which results in projected surplus fund balance at 31 March 2025 of £122,337.

3.9 Workstream Savings

As part of the 2024/26 Budget process, the Council approved workstream savings of £2.880 million over the 2 year budget. The Corporate Management Team increased the target by a further £0.055 million resulting in a final workstream target of £2.935 million, of which £1.320 million is due to be achieved in 2024/25.

It can be seen from appendix 10, £1.206 million has been achieved against a target of £1.32 million for 2024/25. A lead officer update has been included in the appendix. If all current workstream targets are achieved there will be a £300,000 over recovery in 2025/26.

3.10 Virements

Committee are asked to approve the virement of £7,100 from Revenue & Benefits Other Expenditure to employee costs to allow two recent regradings to be funded.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note that officers are currently reviewing the inflation projections and will provide an update to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 4.2 The Chief Financial Officer recently handed in notice of his intention to retire at the end of the current financial year. This post encompasses the role as the Council's Section 95 Officer and there is a need to conclude the recruitment prior to the end of 2024. It is understood that there are currently challenges in recruiting to senior specialist local authority posts such as this and therefore in line with recent Chief Officer appointments it is proposed to engage SOLACE to assist in the recruitment.
- 4.3 The cost of this is expected to be less than £10,000 and Committee approval is sought to fund this from the Capacity earmarked reserve.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)		X
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		X
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Earmarked Reserves	Capacity Reserve	2024/25	Up to £10k		Support for the recruitment of a new Chief Financial Officer

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
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Finance	Employee Costs	01/04/24	£7k	Other Expenditure	Virement for approved revaluated posts
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5.3 Legal/Risk

The Financial Regulations state the responsibility for ensuring Revenue Budgets are not exceeded lies with the Committee and budget holding Chief Officers. Updates on actions are being progressed to bring the Committee back within budget are reported elsewhere in the agenda.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no specific human resources implications arising from this report.

5.5 Strategic

There are no specific strategic implications arising from this report.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The paper has been jointly prepared by the Chief Financial Officer and the Corporate Director Education, Communities, and Organisational Development and the Chief Executive.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 There are no background papers for this report.

Policy & Resources Budget Movement - 2024/25

Service	Approved Budget 2024/25 £000	Inflation £000	Movements			Revised Budget 2024/25 £000
			Virement £000	Supplementary Budgets £000	Transferred to EMR £000	
Finance	5,634	14				5,648
Legal, Democratic Digital & Customer Services	5,279		114			5,393
Organisational Development, Policy & Communications	2,301		(47)			2,254
Chief Exec	336					336
Miscellaneous	11,648	(1,314)	104			10,438
Totals	25,198	(1,300)	171	0	0	24,069

Supplementary Budget Detail

	£000
<u>Inflation</u>	
Miscellaneous - Pay Inflation	(1,180)
Miscellaneous - Non Pay Inflation	(134)
Accountancy - Comp Soft Maint (CIVICA PAY)	6
R&B - Postages (Critiqom)	8
	<u>(1,300)</u>
<u>Virements</u>	
Legal - Information Governance Monies from Social Work	131
Legal - Members Superann reduction returned to Contingency Fund	(57)
ICT - NWOW Monies from Property Services	40
HR - Employee budget reduction from budget upload error returned to Contingency Fund	(47)
Miscellaneous - HR employee budget returned to Contingency Fund	47
Miscellaneous - Election Superann returned to Contingency Fund	57
	<u>171</u>
Total Inflation & Virements	<u>(1,129)</u>

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORTSUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

2023/24 Actual £000	SUBJECTIVE ANALYSIS	Approved Budget 2024/25 £000	Revised Budget 2024/25 £000	Projected Out-turn 2024/25 £000	Projected Over/(Under) Spend £000	Percentage Over/(Under)
10,153	Employee Costs	8,639	8,720	8,768	48	0.6%
739	Property Costs	744	744	744	0	-
895	Supplies & Services	915	923	948	25	2.7%
2	Transport & Plant	5	5	5	0	-
1,279	Administration Costs	1,331	1,339	1,244	(95)	(7.1%)
28,636	Payments to Other Bodies	38,954	37,728	37,991	263	0.7%
(28,404)	Income	(25,390)	(25,390)	(25,231)	159	(0.6%)
13,300	TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	25,198	24,069	24,469	400	1.7%
	Earmarked reserves			0	0	
13,300	Total Net Expenditure excluding Earmarked Reserves	25,198	24,069	24,469	400	

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEEREVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORTOBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

2023/24 Actual £000	OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS	Approved Budget 2024/25 £000	Revised Budget 2024/25 £000	Projected Out-turn 2024/25 £000	Projected Over/(Under) Spend £000	Percentage Over/(Under)
5,793	Finance	5,634	5,648	5,753	105	1.9%
5,571	Legal, Democratic Digital & Customer Services	5,279	5,393	5,363	(30)	(0.6%)
2,431	Organisational Development, Policy & Communications	2,301	2,254	2,313	59	2.6%
2,431	Total Net Expenditure Education, Communities & Organisational Development	13,214	13,295	13,429	134	1.0%
380	Chief Executive	336	336	352	16	4.8%
(875)	Miscellaneous	11,648	10,438	10,688	250	2.4%
1,936	TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	25,198	24,069	24,469	400	0
	Earmarked reserves		0	0		
1,936	Total Net Expenditure excluding Earmarked Reserves	25,198	24,069	24,469	400	

POLICY RESOURCES

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

MATERIAL VARIANCES (EXCLUDING EARMARKED RESERVES)

Appendix 3

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

MATERIAL VARIANCES

Outturn 2023/24 £000	Budget Heading	Budget 2024/25 £000	Proportion of Budget £000	Actual to 2024/25 £000	Projection 2024/25 £000	Over/(Under) Budget £000	Percentage Variance %
	<u>Finance Services</u>						
1,630	Accountancy - Employee Cost	1,462	465	440	1,503	41	2.8%
1,406	R&B - Employee Cost	1,225	390	390	1,242	17	1.4%
61	R&B - Postages	56	17	22	77	21	37.5%
4	R&B - Legal Expenses	26	9	1	4	(22)	(84.6%)
234	R&B - Legal Expenses SO (offset with Recoveries)	270	90	60	240	(30)	(11.1%)
(240)	R&B - Legal Recoveries (offset with Legal Expenses SO)	(268)	90	60	(238)	30	(11.2%)
(239)	R&B - Statutory Additions	(294)	(88)	(74)	(252)	42	(14.3%)
	<u>Organisational Development, Policy & Communications</u>						
2,023	ODHR - Employee Costs	1,886	559	544	1,916	30	1.6%
	<u>Legal, Democratic Digital & Customer Services</u>						
4739	Employee Costs	3,845	1,137	1,111	3,789	(56)	(1.5%)
(299)	ICT - Admin Costs - Telephone Recharges - offset in Income	333	111	125	301	(32)	(9.6%)
(60)	ICT - Income Costs - Telephone Recharges - offset in Admin	(333)	(111)	(123)	(301)	32	(9.6%)
(49)	ICT - Income - Recharges (5 Year Computer Refresh)	(26)	(9)	(159)	(61)	(35)	134.6%
(165)	Legal - Income Licenses - Stat Charges - Liquor	(122)	(41)	(10)	(92)	30	(24.6%)
(36)	Legal - Income - Licenses Taxi/Operator	(188)	(63)	(55)	(165)	23	(12.2%)
	<u>Miscellaneous Services</u>						
	Pay Inflation Contingency	8,038	0	0	8,288	250	3.1%
9,009	TOTAL MATERIAL VARIANCES	15,910	2,557	2,332	16,251	341	

EARMARKED RESERVES POSITION STATEMENT

COMMITTEE: Policy & Resources

C a t e g o r y	Project	Lead Officer/ Responsible Manager	Total Funding	Phased Budget 2024/25	2024/25 Spend	Projected Spend	Amount to be Earmarked for 2025/26 & Beyond	Lead Officer Update
			2024/25	2024/25	2024/25	2024/25		
			£000	£000	£000	£000		
B	Early Retiral/Voluntary Severance Reserve	Alan Puckrin	3,127	0	0	750	2,377	Projection for 24/25 is an intial estimate and linked to workstream savings and need for savings to offset emerging pressures
C	Equal Pay	Morna Rae	100	0	0	0	100	Balance for equal pay legal fees which is under review on an annual basis
C	Digital Strategy	Louise Long	1,149	53	49	349	800	2024/25 Committed project costs to date; purchases of Schools Cashless Catering System replacement 34K and CRM Replacement systems indicative timeline 16K, Revenue and Benefits Victoria Forms system (est cost 37K), Project Officer Post £52k (29/05/24 for 2 years), ICHRIS upgrade with temp Service Improvement Lead from 01/07/24, CLD Digital Outcome Solution £19k & Civica Pay Upgrade £66k.
C	Welfare Reform - Operational	Alan Puckrin	52	0	0	10	42	Employee Costs £10k in 24/25, £42k carried forward to future years.
C	Anti-Poverty Fund	Ruth Binks	2,248	18	18	624	1,624	Proposals to utilise £480k of the unallocated balance of £774k, appear elsewhere on the agenda. The phased budget, projected spend and future years projection assumes these recommendations will be agreed.
B	Loan Charge Funding Model	Alan Puckrin	3,821	0	0	687	3,134	Based on June Finance Strategy including a further £3.0million over 2024/27 to the EMR to deliver a recurring saving from 2025/26.
B	2023/26 Budget Funding Reserve	Alan Puckrin	9,000	0	0	2,628	6,372	Per approved 2024/26 Budget
C	ICT Technicians To Support Digital School Inclusion/Covid Recovery	Lynsey Brown	14	9	9	14	0	Ongoing Monthly Employee Costs. 1 x Service Desk Operator (until 01/09/24).
C	New Ways of Working	Stuart Jamieson	258	0	0	158	100	Work on-going on James Watt building for transfer of HSCP staff from Hector McNeil House.

EARMARKED RESERVES POSITION STATEMENT

COMMITTEE: Policy & Resources

C a t e g o r y	Project	Lead Officer/ Responsible Manager	Total	Phased Budget	2024/25	Projected	Amount to be	Lead Officer Update
			Funding	2024/25	Spend	Spend	Earmarked for	
			2024/25	2024/25	2024/25	2024/25	2025/26	
			£000	£000	£000	£000	& Beyond	
C	Project Resource	Louise Long	83	0	0	83	0	Budget set aside to aide the process of difficult to fill posts and certain council memberships/reviews. Projects approved todate; Co-operative Councils membership £5k. Unallocated balance as at P3 of £78k.
C	Covid Recovery - Marketing Post & Support for Discover Inverclyde	Morna Rae	44	8	8	44	0	Further development of the 'discover Inverclyde' website and social media as the single trusted source of events and activity for residents and visitors to Inverclyde, local marketing campaigns to support priorities above and local partners and venues, develop trusted and timely marketing data. £8k funds spent in 24/25 for associated prints. Development of facilities and resources to share Inverclyde's Historic Links to Slavery through the Watt Institute.
C	Scottish Welfare Fund	Alan Puckrin	129	0	0	0	129	Smoothing Reserve for Scottih Welfare Fund Grants. Expected to be carried forward to 25/26 based on current projections
C	Smoothing Reserve (Service Consession)	Alan Puckrin	490	0	0	201	289	Phasing over 2023/28, per Feb 2023 report.
B	Budget Delivery Reserve	Alan Puckrin	2,671	12	12	1,679	992	Allocated budgets to be vired to services: ASN transport (£800k), HR Review (£120k), 2024/25 Utility Costs (£1,000k), IL Smoothing Reserve (£200k), Winter Gritting (£150k), Finance Officer (£90k) & Workstream delivery costs (£660k).
C	Student Training Fees	Morna Rae	80	0	0	28	52	The funding is to support professional qualifications and the consequent retention and development of employees. Spend for 24/25 includes £12k for Finance, £2k Building Standards and £14k to be approved at CMT. Remainder £52k uncommitted.
C	IRI Smoothing Reserve	Alan Puckrin	646	0	0	356	290	Linked to June Finance Strategy. £7m contribution to reserves approved over 2023/27.
C	Empty Property Relief	Alan Puckrin	174	0	0	100	75	£94k for E&R Business Support, £5.5k cost EPR software for upcoming EPR changes. Remainder £75k balance to be carried forward to cover any retrospective applications for Empty Property Relief.
C	Elections 2024/27	Lynsey Brown	300	0	0	100	200	Budget approved at 2024/25 budget process for local election costs and funding shortfalls in national elections .
C	Allocation to sinking fund related for Asset Review	Alan Puckrin	3,750	0	0	0	3,750	Awaiting completion of Asset Plans and detail of Asset Workstream
C	Allocation towards Historic Child Abuse settlements	Alan Puckrin	500	0	0	500	0	Add to the Insurance Fund during 24/25. HSCP contribution of £500k due 2025/26.
Total Category B			18,619	12	12	5,744	12,875	
Total Category C to E			10,017	88	84	2,567	7,450	

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**VIREMENT REQUESTS**

Budget Heading		Increase Budget	(Decrease) Budget
Budget transfer to Accountancy & Exchequer Employee Cost		4,900	
Budget transfer to Revenue & Benefits Employee Cost		2,200	
Budget transfer from Revenue & Benefits Other Expenditure to finance employee costs			(7,100)
Total		7,100	(7,100)

Note**Reason for virement:**

Budget Transfer from R&B Other Expenditure to R&B Employee Cost and Accountancy Employee Cost for grade increase for 2 posts.

£7,100

COMMON GOOD FUND**REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2024/25****PERIOD 4 : 1st April 2024 to 31st July 2024**

	Final Outturn 2023/24	Approved Budget 2024/25	Budget to Date 2024/25	Actual to Date 2024/25	Projected Outturn 2024/25
	£	£	£	£	£
<u>PROPERTY COSTS</u>	47,219	65,200	23,000	9,130	65,200
Repairs & Maintenance	19,144	17,500	5,800	5,100	17,500
Rates 1	23,171	23,200	7,700	0	23,200
Property Insurance	4,034	8,000	4,000	4,030	8,000
Property Costs	870	16,500	5,500	0	16,500
<u>ADMINISTRATION COSTS</u>	6,200	7,700	500	0	7,700
Sundries	0	1,500	500	0	1,500
Commercial Rent Management Recharge	2,200	2,200	0	0	2,200
Recharge for Accountancy	4,000	4,000	0	0	4,000
<u>OTHER EXPENDITURE</u>	114,192	109,500	1,300	260	109,500
Christmas Lights Switch On	10,500	10,500	0	0	10,500
Christmas Decorations	38,885	44,000	0	0	44,000
Gourock Highland Games	29,400	29,400	0	0	29,400
Armistice Service	9,527	8,300	0	0	8,300
Comet Festival	13,300	13,300	0	0	13,300
Events	4,000	4,000	1,300	260	4,000
Bad Debt Provision	8,580	0	0	0	0
<u>INCOME</u>	(202,080)	(183,700)	(60,100)	(60,610)	(186,700)
Property Rental	(228,200)	(234,200)	(78,100)	(78,100)	(234,200)
Void Rents 2	33,164	54,000	18,000	17,490	54,000
Internal Resources Interest	(7,044)	(3,500)	0	0	(6,500)
<u>NET ANNUAL EXPENDITURE</u>	(34,469)	(1,300)	(35,300)	(51,220)	(4,300)
<u> earmarked funds</u>	0	0	0	0	0
<u>TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE</u>	(34,469)	(1,300)	(35,300)	(51,220)	(4,300)

Fund Balance as at 31st March 2024	£ 158,037
Projected Outturn 2024/25	4,300
Expenditure on Port Glasgow Burgh 250th Anniversary approved by Policy and Resources Committee on 13th August 2024	(40,000)
Projected Fund Balance as at 31st March 2025	122,337

Notes:**1 Rates (Empty Properties)**

Rates are currently being paid on empty properties, projection reflects current Rates levels however all historic Rates costs are being examined to ensure all appropriate empty property relief has been obtained. Any subsequent credit will be included in future report:

2 Current Empty Properties are:

	<u>Vacant since:</u>
12 Bay St	April 2015, currently being marketed
10 John Wood Street	August 2018
17 John Wood Street	June 2023

Policy & Resources CommitteeRevenue Budget Monitoring Report 2024/25

Committee	Approved Budget 2024/2025	Revised Budget 2024/2025	Projected Out-turn 2024/2025	Projected Over/(Under) Spend	Percentage Variance
	£,000's	£,000's	£,000's	£,000's	
Policy & Resources	25,198	24,156	24,556	400	1.66%
Environment & Regeneration	21,394	21,409	21,677	268	1.25%
Education & Communities	116,384	118,293	118,817	524	0.44%
Health & Social Care	73,714	73,896	74,112	216	0.29%
Committee Sub-Total	236,690	237,754	239,162	1,408	0.59%
Loan Charges	16,590	16,590	16,590	0	0.00%
Saving Approved yet to be Allocated (Note 1)	(100)	(100)	(100)	0	0.00%
Workstream Savings Approved (Note 2)	(364)	(419)	(419)	0	0.00%
Service Concession Flexibility	(1,650)	(1,650)	(1,650)	0	0.00%
Contribution from Other Funds (Note 3)	0	(87)	(87)	0	0.00%
Earmarked Reserves	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Total Expenditure	251,166	252,088	253,496	1,408	0.56%
Financed By:					
General Revenue Grant/Non Domestic Rates	(208,102)	(209,024)	(209,024)	0	0.00%
General Revenue Grant - Teachers Hold Back (Note 4)	(2,119)	(2,119)	(2,119)	0	0.00%
Contribution from General Reserves	(2,628)	(2,628)	(2,628)	0	100.00%
Council Tax	(38,317)	(38,317)	(38,317)	0	0.00%
Integration Joint Board - Contribution to Reserves	0	0	(216)	(216)	100.00%
Net Expenditure	0	0	1,192	1,192	

Note 1 - Approved savings yet to be allocated

Note 2 - Workstream Savings Approved yet to be vired

Note 3 - Contribution from Insurance Fund for redress scheme

Note 4 - General Revenue Grant - Teachers Hold Back funding to be received after criteria met

Earmarked Reserves Position Statement

Appendix 8

Summary

<u>Committee</u>	<u>Total Funding 2024/25</u>	<u>Phased Budget</u>	<u>Spend 2024/25</u>	<u>Variance Actual to Phased Budget</u>	<u>Projected Spend 2024/25</u>	<u>Earmarked 2025/26 & Beyond</u>	<u>2024/25 %age Spend Against Projected</u>	<u>2024/25 %age Over/(Under) Spend Against Phased Budget</u>
	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>		
Education & Communities	310	49	49	0	175	135	28.00%	0.00%
Health & Social Care	6,025	659	56	(603)	1,628	4,397	3.44%	(91.50%)
Regeneration & Environment	6,733	222	239	17	3,590	3,143	6.66%	7.66%
Policy & Resources	28,636	100	96	(4)	8,311	20,325	1.16%	(4.00%)
	41,704	1,030	440	(590)	13,704	28,000	3.21%	(57.28%)

Actual Spend v Phased Budget Behind Phasing = (£590k) (57.28%)

GENERAL FUND RESERVE POSITION
2024/25

	<u>£000</u>	<u>£000</u>
Projected Usable Balance 31/3/24		4414
<u>Available Funding:</u>		
Actuarial Pension Review (2024/26)	9000	
Additional IRI 2023/27	3500	
Reduced Use of Reserves Budget 2024/26	384	
IRI shortfall 2023/26 (£3.5m less £3.144m Actual 2023/24)	356	
Earmarked Reserve required for 2024/25	160	
	13400	13400
Projected Surplus/(Deficit) 2024/25	(1192)	(1192)
<u>Use of Balances Approved February 2024:</u>		
Additional IRI to Loans Charges	(3000)	
Increased support to the Revenue Budget over 2024/28	(6000)	
Increased support to the 2024/28 Capital Programme	(4400)	
	(13400)	(13400)
Projected Reserve Balance		3222

Minimum Reserve recommended is £4 million

Workstreams Saving Monitoring at 14 August 2024

Saving Title	CMT Lead Officer	Chief Officer Update	Approved Saving 2024/25 £000's	Achieved to Date 2024/25 £000's	Projected Saving 2024/25 £000's	Over achievement/ (Shortfall) 2024/25 £000's	Approved Saving 2025/26 £000's	Achieved to Date 2025/26 £000's	Projected Saving 2025/26 £000's	Total Projected Saving 2024/26 £000's	Over achievement/ (Shortfall) 2024/26 £000's	Est FTE Impact
Income Generation Original Target £700k	A Puckrin	5% increases in fees/charges for both 2024/25 and 2025/26 agreed as part of the 2024/26 Budget. Balance anticipated to come from Inchgreen JV no later than 2025/26	250	245	245	(5)	450	256	455	700	0	0.0
Procurement Original target £600k, now £805k Note 3	S Jamieson	£671k achieved in 2024/25 from the new Residual Waste contract with £80k achieved from the new SWAN contract. This has been phased 50% 24/25 and 50% 25/26 and requires £350k investment from the Budget Delivery emr. CMT have increased the target by £55k in order to help increase capacity within the Procurement Team. Proposal to increase target further developed as part of August 2024 savings exercise	710	711	711	1	95	40	94	805	0	(2.0)
Energy Original Target £500k , now £850k	A Puckrin	£800k reduction in gas/electricity budgets over 2023/26 approved as part of the 2024/26 Budgets. The 2025/26 position will continue to be monitored given the global issues that could impact. A £50k reduction in fuel costs was applied from 2024/25 based on 2023/24 out-turn. Latest projections for 2025/26 confirm target is achievable	250	250	250	0	600	600	600	850	0	0.0
Asset Management Original Target £400k Note 1	S Jamieson	The focus of officers has been on creating accommodation for the HSCP within the Municipal Buildings complex. The demolition of Hector McNeil house and accommodation within the GMB will result in a £100,000 saving. Proposals for consolidation of the wider estate will be presented to Members in October.	50	0	50	0	350	0	350	400	0	tbc
Management Restructure Ph3 Original Target £200k	L Long	Development of proposals to commence early autumn. Incorporated within August 2024 £1.0million savings target	0	0	0	0	200	0	200	200	0	3.0
Digital & Customer Services Original Target £100k	L Long	A number of projects delivering service improvements progressing . Updated via regular reports to Policy & Resources Committee. Incorporated within August 2024 £1.0 million savings target.	20	0	20	0	80	0	80	100	0	3.0
Community Learning & Development- Delivering Differently Review Original Target £180k	R Binks	Working Group set up now CLD inspection is concluded. Report due late 2024. Initial £40k anticipated to be delivered this year through vacancy management. Trawl being undertaken to inform redesign.	40	0	40	0	140	0	140	180	0	tbc
Over achievement Contingency Currently £300k	A Puckrin	This reflects the fact that targets exceed the overall allowance in the 2024/26 Budget. Any use of this will need approval by the Policy & Resources Committee.	0	0	0	0	(300)	0	(300)	(300)	0	0.0
Totals			1,320	1,206	1,316	(4)	1,615	896	1619	2935	0	4.0

Notes

- 1 - Asset Management Target is net of any reinvestment in either capital or recurring spend in remaining buildings.
- 2- CMT recommend the inclusion of a teachers workstream if reductions are permitted by the Scottish Government. The target would be based on a 29FTE reduction (3.8%) which would save approximately £1.80 million
- 3 - Procurement target increased by £55k as approved by CMT. New target of £805k consists of £670k for residual waste contract, £80k Swan and £55k Procurement.

Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Chief Financial Officer	Report No:	FIN/54/24/AP/MT
Contact Officer:	Matt Thomson	Contact No:	01475 712256
Subject:	Policy & Resources Capital Budget and Council 2024/28 Capital Programme		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide Committee with the latest position of the Policy & Resources Capital Programme and the 2024/28 Capital Programme as well as reflecting the impact of the 2024/25 Capital Grant settlement confirmed by the Scottish Government on 29 February.
- 1.3 The Policy & Resources Capital Programme has a capital budget over 2024/28 of £3.987m with total projected spend on budget. The Committee is projecting to spend £0.868m in 2024/25 which is the same as the approved budget.
- 1.4 The overall 2024/28 Capital Programme budget is £72.979m with projects totalling £76.232m. This represents a £3.253m (4.46%) over allocation. This is within the agreed 5% tolerance. In the current year net advancement of £1.180m, (6.37%) is being reported. The advancement has occurred in the programme within the individual Committees as follows; Environment & Regeneration (£0.327m advancement) and Education & Communities (£0.853m advancement). A further breakdown of this movement can be seen within the individual breakdown per Committee in paragraph 3.11. Expenditure at 31 July was £3.228m (16.38% of projected spend).
- 1.5 The Education & Communities Committee remitted a request for £22,000 funding from the Capital Programme Contingency as detailed in section 4 of the report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the current position of the 2024/28 Policy & Resources Capital Budget and the current position of the 2024/28 Capital Programme.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the Committee approve the remit from the Education & Communities Committee regarding a further allocation of £0.022m to the Parklea Branching Out project.

Alan Puckrin
Chief Financial Officer

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 On 29 February 2024 the Council approved the 2024/28 Capital Programme as part of the overall Budget approval factoring in additional funding to fund the shortfall in annual capital grant compared to the annual capital allocations. This report shows the current position of the approved Policy & Resources Capital Programme as well as the position of the overall 2024/28 Capital Programme.

2024/28 Policy & Resources Capital Position

3.2 The Policy & Resources capital budget is £3.987m. The current projection is £3.987m which means total projected spend is on budget.

3.3 The approved budget for 2024/25 is £0.868m and the Committee is projecting to spend £0.868m in 2024/25. The spend at 31 July is £0.198m (22.81%) of the approved budget.

3.4 PC Refresh Programme – The final phase of the project to replace existing primary classroom desktop PCs with portable trolleys containing laptops is now complete. 296 devices were delivered into classrooms and Education Services are reviewing future requirements for classroom-based computing. The 2024/25 Refresh programme has commenced with the majority of devices being replaced in the Corporate environment and involves replacing the first phase of laptops procured following the pandemic. 420 devices have been procured and the programme is well underway with planned completion by the end of the calendar year.

3.5 Server and Switch Replacement – A number of servers are being upgraded in response to security and performance requirements, in response, a range of network and server replacement programmes are being developed. Upgrade of the Telephony Voice/Quality Assurance system is scheduled for completion this Financial Year. A number of device replacements across the network estate to improve service and support the implementation of SWAN2 is now under way.

3.6 As part of the 2023/26 budget setting process £4m was added to a small existing contingency to meet potential cost increases, fund unforeseen projects and to protect core service delivery from unexpected fluctuations in costs. This budget will be allocated by this Committee following the receipt of relevant reports. To date £2.371m has been allocated by Committee leaving an unallocated balance of £1.729m.

Overall 2024/28 Capital Programme

3.7 The overall 2024/28 Capital Programme reflects the confirmed 2024/25 capital grant. The 2024/25 allocation is £6.022m, however this includes £0.052m allocation for Coastal Change Adaptions which is passported to the Property Assets budget and £0.188m for Play Parks strategy which is passported to the Environmental budget. Therefore, available core funding is £5.782m.

3.8 An over provision of projects against estimated resources of up to 5% is considered acceptable to allow for increased resources and/or cost reductions. Currently the Capital Programme is reporting a deficit of £3.253m which represents 4.46% of the 2024/28 estimated resources.

3.9 In terms of the overall Capital Programme, it can be seen from Appendix 2 that at 31 July 2024 expenditure in 2024/25 is currently 16.38% of projected spend. Phasing and projected spend has been reviewed by the budget holders and the relevant Director. The position in respect of each individual Committee is reported in Appendix 2 and in paragraph 3.11 of this report. Overall Committees are projecting to outturn on budget.

3.10 In the current year net advancement of £1.180m, (6.37%) is currently being reported. This is due to advancement within the Education and Communities Committee (£0.853m) and Environment & Regeneration Committee (£0.327m).

3.11 The position in respect of individual Committees for 2024/25 is as follows:

Policy & Resources

Expenditure as at 31 July 2024 is £0.198m against an approved budget of £0.890m. There is no net slippage within this committee to date.

Environment & Regeneration

Expenditure at 31 July 2024 is £2.182m against an approved budget of £12.800m. Net advancement of £0.327m (2.55%) and is mainly due to advancement in Clune Park Regeneration (£0.250m), Watt Institute LED Lighting (£0.034m), West Blackhall Street (£0.009m) and the Property General Provision (£0.025m) as well as other minor advancements across the committee.

Education & Communities

Expenditure at 31 July 2024 is £0.836m against an approved budget of £1.385m. Net advancement of £0.853m (61.59%) mainly due to advancement within Parklea Branching Out (£0.200m) and the Education Lifecycle Fund (£0.653m).

Health & Social Care

Expenditure at 31 July 2024 is £0.012m against an approved budget of £3.447m. There is no net slippage within this committee to date.

3.12 2024/25 continues to be another challenging year for delivery of the capital program, officers will endeavour to advance projects when possible, to keep slippage within the 10% threshold.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 The continued annual shortfall between the Councils core asset investment requirement and the level of Capital Grant continues to put pressure on the wider finances of the Council, however, the 2024/28 Capital Programme remains affordable based on current estimates.

4.2 Education and Communities Committee on the 3 September 2024 requested £0.022m funding from the Capital Programme Contingency to address the remaining shortfall in the Parklea Branching Out project. This report is prepared on the basis that this request is approved.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		X
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Communities Capital projects	Parklea Branching Out	2024/25	£22k	Capital Contingency	

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

The approved Governance documents set out the roles and responsibilities of Committees and officers in ensuring budgets are not overspent and the process to be followed in the event an overspend is unavoidable.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no HR matters arising from this report.

5.5 Strategic

The overall Capital programme contains many projects which contribute to the strategic priorities of the Council. As a result, timeous delivery of projects remains a focus for officers.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 This report has been prepared based on updates to the relevant Strategic Committees.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Education & Communities Committee (3 September 2024) – Agenda Item 5 (Parklea Branching Out Community Garden Hub – Funding Gap).

<https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/3676>

Project Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Est Total Cost	Actual to 31/3/24	Approved Budget 2024/25	Revised Est 2024/25	Actual to 31/07/2024	Est 2025/26	Est 2026/27	Est 2027/29	Future Years
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<u>Environment, Regeneration & Resources</u>									
<u>ICT</u>									
Storage/Backup Devices/Minor Works and Projects	8	0	0	8	1	0	0	0	0
Rolling Replacement of PC's	175	0	0	175	175	0	0	0	0
Meeting Room, Videoconferencing & Hybrid Working Equipment	2	0	48	2	0	0	0	0	0
Server & Switch Replacement Programme	26	0	0	26	22	0	0	0	0
Home Working Allocation	15	15	10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Annual Allocation	2,032	0	532	379	0	585	534	534	0
<u>ICT Total</u>	2,258	15	590	590	198	585	534	534	0
<u>Finance</u>									
Capital Programme Contingency	1,729	0	278	278	0	1,090	361	0	0
<u>Finance Total</u>	1,729	0	278	278	0	1,090	361	0	0
TOTAL	3,987	15	868	868	198	1,675	895	534	0

Capital Programme - 2024/25 - 2027/28

Available Resources

	A	B	C	D	E	G
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Government Capital Support	6,022	5,750	5,750	5,750	-	23,272
Capital Receipts (Note 1)	434	315	315	315	-	1,379
Capital Grants (Note 2)	3,801	-	-	-	-	3,801
Prudential Funded Projects (Note 3)	5,829	7,372	2,464	2,464	125	18,254
Balance B/F From 23/24	12,478	-	-	-	-	12,478
Capital Funded from Current Revenue	4,117	4,681	2,564	2,433	-	13,795
	<u>32,681</u>	<u>18,118</u>	<u>11,093</u>	<u>10,962</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>72,979</u>

Overall Position 2024/28

Available Resources (Appendix 2a, Column A-E)	<u>£000</u>
	72,979
Projection (Appendix 2b, Column B-F)	76,232
(Shortfall)/Under Utilisation of Resources	<u>(3,253)</u>
(Shortfall)/Under Utilisation of Resources %	<u>(4.46)%</u>

Note 1 (Capital Receipts)

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Sales	369	315	315	315	-	1,314
Contributions/Recoveries	65	-	-	-	-	65
	434	315	315	315	-	1,379

Note 2 (Capital Grants)

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future	Total
	£000	£000	£000			£000
Free School Meals	107	-	-			107
Watt Institute LED Lighting	41	-	-			41
Cycling, Walking & Safer Streets	345	-	-			345
Nature Restoration Fund	148	-	-			148
Peatland Action Trust	769	-	-			769
Sustrans	2,391	-	-			2,391
	3,801	-	-	-	-	3,801

Note 3 (Prudentially Funded Projects)

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Future	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Vehicle Replacement Programme	812	1,464	964	964	-	4,204
Borrowing in lieu of VRP Reduction	-	636	-			636
Asset Management Plan - Depots	64	274	-			338
Capital Works on Former Tied Houses	6	200	-	-	125	331
New Learning Disability Facility	3,447	3,298	-			6,745
Additional Prudential Borrowing to Fund Capital Programme	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500		6,000
	5,829	7,372	2,464	2,464	125	18,254

Appendix 2bCapital Programme - 2024/25 - 2027/28Agreed Projects

Committee	A Prior Years	B 2024/25	C 2025/26	D 2026/27	E 2027/28	F Future	G Total	H Approved Budget	I (Under)/ Over	J 2024/25 Spend To 31/07/2024
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Policy & Resources	15	868	1,675	895	534	-	3,987	3,987	-	198
Environment & Regeneration	8,714	13,127	19,454	7,656	7,590	125	56,666	56,666	-	2,182
School Estate	279	1,634	4,268	4,000	4,000	-	14,181	14,181	-	495
Education & Communities (Exc School Estate)	1,333	626	357	251	120	-	2,687	2,687	-	341
HSCP	655	3,447	5,605	-	-	-	9,707	9,707	-	12
Total	10,996	19,702	31,359	12,802	12,244	125	87,228	87,228	-	3,228

Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Chief Financial Officer	Report No:	FIN/53/24/AP
Contact Officer:	Alan Puckrin	Contact No:	01475 712090
Subject:	Finance Services Update		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with the annual debt recovery performance update and updates on various matters being progressed by the Revenues & Benefits service.

1.3 The report provides updates to Committee on the following:

- Debt Recovery Performance Report 2023/24
- Non-Domestic Rates – Empty Property Relief
- Transitions to Universal Credit
- Scottish Welfare Fund
- Discretionary Housing Payments & Policy
- Social Security Scotland

1.4 An amendment to the current DHP Policy is proposed and requires to be approved by Committee.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the annual debt recovery report, the current position of the NDR Empty Property Relief Budget, the feedback from service users and providers regarding the transition to Universal Credit, the next planned UC migration and the Social Security Scotland update.

2.2 It is recommended that the Committee approve the updated DHP Policy changes set out in appendix 3.

Alan Puckrin
Chief Financial Officer

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 Finance Services are responsible for a range of functions which are key to the overall finances and governance of the Council. This report provides an update of the main matters being progressed at this point in time, all of which relate to the Revenues & Benefits team.

3.2 Debt Recovery Annual Report- Year Ended 31 March 2024

There is a requirement within the Financial Regulations for the Committee to consider on an annual basis the performance of the Council in terms of Debt Recovery including the Council's debt recovery partner

3.3 Council tax collection in 2023/24 was 94.7% of Council tax billed which compares with 95.9% in 2022/23, which was assisted by £5m in covid and cost of living one-off grants. The Scottish average collection in 2023/24 was 95.5% with Inverclyde being placed 24 of the 32 councils. The effect of cost-of-living pressures and changes to Debt Recovery Regulations on Council tax collection affected performance. Collection of all Council tax billed since 1993 at 31st March 2024 was 97%, matching the position at the same point in 2023. The Council exceeds the budgeted collection rate for all years up to and including 2019/20.

3.4 Payment of Council tax by direct debit in 2023/24 was the highest level to date at 83.3% of in year receipts, an improvement of 0.2% on 2022/23. Direct debit continues to be promoted as the preferred payment method. Council Tax Online, launched in January 2020 allows Council tax payers to manage their account remotely. 2,619 Council tax payers have online accounts and of these 1,669 have opted for an e-bill

3.5 Council Tax debt recovered by the Council's debt recovery partner increased by 11% while Non-Domestic Rates debt recovery declined by 19%. Non-Domestic Rates legislation changed in recent years allowing debt to be recovered sooner after bills are issued allowing more debt to be passed to the Council's debt recovery partner for collection in year. In-year Non-Domestic Rates collection was 93.84%, 1.57% more than 2022/23.

3.6 Debt recovery continued to be more challenging with inflationary pressures and comparatively high interest rates affecting disposable income. The increase of the protected minimum balance in bank accounts from £566.51 to £1,000 also had an effect. Appendix 1 shows the level of debt collected against respective years; it also compares total collection with 2022/23 and 2021/22.

3.7 Services are in place to support those who ask for help by way of spreading payment over 12 months instead of 10; help to claim Council Tax Reduction; and referral to money and debt advice services. A sensitive approach continues to be followed by the Council's Sheriff Officer

3.8 The gross debt as at 31 March 2024 is £25.2 million as shown in Appendix 2. There is a bad debt provision of £21.9 million, leaving a net debt of £3.3 million.

3.9 Non-Domestic Rates Empty Property Relief

The Non-Domestic Rates Empty Property Relief (NDR EPR) budget is £500,000. Expenditure at the point of the report being prepared for the first of the three-year funding period from 2023/24, was £307,800, with relief being provided in respect of 277 accounts. It has been agreed that the unallocated balance is transferred to a smoothing earmarked reserve.

3.10 Expenditure in 2024/25 is currently £381,000 with relief being provided in respect of 120 accounts. The total includes the sum of £192,000 paid in respect of the premises formerly occupied by Amazon for the balance of 6 months at 100% relief until 1st August 2024 followed by

10% until the premises are occupied. Expenditure is expected to increase further as NDR ratepayers engage with the service to apply for the relief for the current year.

3.11 The amendments to the Non-Domestic Rates Empty Property Relief policy agreed in February 2024, to encourage owners to bring empty premises back into use take effect from 1st October 2024. The impact of the amendments equalising relief provided for industrial premises with non-industrial premises and tapering relief provided for listed buildings over a period of 24 months, will be included in future update reports.

3.12 **Universal Credit**

The Committee 4th June 2024 asked for further information on user experiences on the move to Universal Credit (UC). Services represented on the Financial Inclusion Partnership were approached and a small sample of clients of The Trust were surveyed which captured a range of views. A number of people have no issues with UC; others reflect on the move to UC being stressful but now find it now quite straightforward. Difficulties with budgeting were mentioned referring to the level of benefit being insufficient along with the need to use a Pantry for the first time and the preference for more frequent payments when multiple benefits were paid across the month. The way UC is structured was highlighted in one response with the respondent stating they were less likely to take up short term work to avoid payments being disrupted. Finally, some continue to require help from services to manage their online claim.

3.13 A common theme cited by service providers is the extent of specialist benefit face-to-face support required by those selected to migrate to UC. HSCP Advice Services, Financial Fitness and River Clyde Homes Financial Wellbeing Service ensure clients' current benefits are in order before migration to ensure people receive the correct level of transitional protection. They carry out follow up checks with their clients on their UC award and they verify that help with housing costs, Council tax reduction and discretionary housing payments have transitioned. The Central Library Service assists 30-60 customers each month set up email accounts and to access the UC portal to make a claim and many customers use libraries free Wi-fi to log in through mobile devices. Customers are referred to CLD classes for help building CVs and digital skills.

3.14 An important aspect of benefit advice services is their advocacy role, helping clients rectify problems with their claims. HSCP Advice Services identified inaccuracies with Kinship Carer UC awards resulting in Welfare Rights supporting these clients with their applications to make sure claims are assessed correctly. Services cross refer depending on clients' needs, with demand for specialist benefits services increasing. All services anticipate the need will increase further with the advancement of the ESA cohort into the programme.

3.15 DWP have started to issue migration notices to the final cohorts of legacy benefit claimants. The groups are a combination of tax credit only households, those on Income support and tax credits with housing benefit, housing benefit (HB) only customers, ESA (Employment Support Allowance) with child tax credits and the pension age tax credit cohort who have been identified to be moved to pension credit. State Pension age tax credit claimants in scope to move to UC will be issued a migration notice from September 2024. The DWP's planning assumptions are to begin notifying ESA claimants with or without HB, to move to UC from September 2024.

3.16 Enhanced support provided by DWP for more vulnerable customers is now at scale with outbound telephone calls and potentially home visits to those who do not respond to migration letters. Safeguarding teams support those customers at risk, with the advanced customer support senior leaders supporting the most complex cases, collaborating with multiagency partners.

3.17 The latest published estimated data from November 2023, shows there are 2,631 households still to migrate to UC and of these 1,622 households have incapacity related benefits and 563 are households with children.

3.18 Scottish Welfare Fund

Expenditure on the Scottish Welfare Fund in the 4 months to 31st July was £254,000, equalling the Scottish Government programme funding at that point. In addition to the Government funding, Anti-Poverty funding there are ear marked reserves totalling £220,000. An increase in applications is expected following the completion of a programme of SWF awareness refresher sessions with HSCP services and Financial Inclusion Partnership front-line practitioners. The objective of the sessions is to reach people who would not ordinarily apply to the fund, through the services they normally use. Expenditure will continue to be closely monitored and will be included in future update reports.

3.19 Discretionary Housing Payments

The legislative basis for the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme in Scotland changed as of 1 April 2024 and from that date the scheme is regulated by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. Following the Government's consultation on the Scottish statutory DHP guidance, working with COSLA and their advisors, the guidance was published online www.gov.scot/isbn/9781836010234. The changes extend DHP eligibility to more claimants and to a greater extent than the guidance it replaced. Officers' assessment is that the financial impact will be minimal

3.20 The main changes are as follows:

1. DHP can help with an unavoidable overlap in liability for rent, not met by Universal Credit or Housing Benefit legislation, when the applicant is treated as temporarily absent from their main home. Circumstances includes those who flee their home because they are a victim of domestic abuse; a couple, where one is a student having to reside elsewhere; a family housed by a housing authority in two separate dwellings. An individual moving home where housing costs were reasonably incurred and the need to move can be demonstrated.
 - a. Universal Credit (UC) claimants can receive help with housing costs in respect of one home at any time, unlike Housing Benefit (HB) claimants who can receive HB for up to 4 weeks for two dwellings when there is an unavoidable overlap. The new DHP guidance allows DHP to be paid to UC claimants in these circumstances. A common scenario is where a notice period is being served on the home they left to take up the tenancy of a home better suited to their needs. The new DHP criteria helps mitigate a restriction on UC claimants that does not apply to HB claimants.
2. A new award of DHP for those on UC and affected by the Benefit Cap. DHP can be paid to take account of any costs considered to be reasonably incurred in connection with housing to ensure the accommodation is habitable. Examples of costs reasonably incurred are service charges not met by the housing cost element of UC.
3. The guidance provides more detail about the recovery of overpaid DHP, emphasising it is for the local authority to decide on recovery.
4. DHP can be backdated for a period of twelve months or longer in exceptional circumstances. While this was not explicitly stated before this approach has been adopted.

The DHP policy is updated at appendix 3, to include the new category at (1a) above and to add examples of supporting evidence overlooked in previous policy reviews.

3.21 Social Security Scotland

Social Security Scotland's Carer Support Payment replaces the Department for Work and Pensions Carer's Allowance. It will be rolled out for new applicants and will be available across all council areas from 21 October 2024. The case transfer from Department for Work and

Pensions to Social Security Scotland commenced in February 2024. There are currently around 145,000 claimants in receipt of Attendance Allowance (AA) in Scotland who will be transferred to Pension Age Disability Payment (PADP). Applications will open for PADP in Inverclyde from April 2025, with cases being transferred from AA beginning in February 2025.

3.22 Following the UK Government announcement on the Winter Fuel Payment to older people, the launch of the Scottish Government’s new replacement benefit, Pension Age Winter Heating Payment (PAWHP) will be deferred from this winter to 2025/26.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 It is proposed that the Committee note the annual debt recovery report, the current position of the NDR Empty Property Relief Budget, the feedback from service users and providers regarding the transition to UC including the next planned migration and the Social Security Scotland update.

4.2 It is proposed that the Committee approve the updated DHP Policy changes set out in appendix 3.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	x	
Legal/Risk		x
Human Resources		x
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	x	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing		x
Environmental & Sustainability		x
Data Protection		x

5.2 Finance

The expected financial impact arising from the changes to the DHP policy are expected to be relatively minor and will be contained in the existing budgetary allowance.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are no legal/risk matters arising from this report

5.4 Human Resources

There are no HR matters arising from this report.

5.5 Strategic

Ensuring individuals are supported in receiving the benefits/financial support to which they are entitled assists the Council meet a number of its strategic priorities.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process and do not believe a separate EqIA is required for the relatively minor change to the DHP policy.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 The survey of UC recipients was carried out in consultation with partners in the Financial Inclusion Partnership.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

Appendix 1

Analysis of Debt Recovery Partner Performance 2023/24

Council Tax		Non Domestic Rates	
Financial Year	Payments Received £000's	Financial Year	Payments Received £000's
Pre 2000	5	Pre 2000	0
2000/01	4	2000/01	0
2001/02	5	2001/02	0
2002/03	5	2002/03	0
2003/04	8	2003/04	0
2004/05	9	2004/05	0
2005/06	15	2005/06	0
2006/07	14	2006/07	0
2007/08	12	2007/08	0
2008/09	12	2008/09	0
2009/10	17	2009/10	0
2010/11	18	2010/11	0
2011/12	18	2011/12	0
2012/13	21	2012/13	0
2013/14	24	2013/14	0
2014/15	31	2014/15	2
2015/16	33	2015/16	1
2016/17	42	2016/17	0
2017/18	57	2017/18	1
2018/19	72	2018/19	1
2019/20	112	2019/20	11
2020/21	153	2020/21	3
2021/22	206	2021/22	1
2022/23	439	2022/23	70
2023/24	1060	2023/24	341
Total	2392	Total	430

Comparison 2021/22, 2022/23 & 2023/24

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Difference: 2022/23 – 2023/24	
	£000's	£000's	£000's	£000's	%
Council Tax	2466	2161	2391	230	11%
Non Domestic Rates	268	531	430	-101	-19%
Total	2734	2692	2821	-129	-5%

Appendix 2

	Position 31/03/2024 £'000	Position 31/03/2023 £'000	Movement £'000
<u>Council Tax</u>			
Gross Debt	19,244	18,325	919
Less: Bad Debt Provision	<u>17,782</u>	<u>17,076</u>	<u>706</u>
Net Debt	<u>1,462</u>	<u>1,249</u>	<u>213</u>
<u>Sundry Debt</u>			
Gross Debt	2,343	1,732	611
Less: Bad Debt Provision	<u>638</u>	<u>604</u>	<u>34</u>
Net Debt	<u>1,705</u>	<u>1,128</u>	<u>577</u>
<u>Industrial & Commercial Rent</u>			
Gross Debt	52	105	(53)
Less: Bad Debt Provision	<u>115</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>35</u>
Net Debt	<u>(63)</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>(88)</u>
<u>Statutory Additions</u>			
Gross Debt	3,422	3,260	162
Less: Bad Debt Provision	<u>3,422</u>	<u>3,260</u>	<u>162</u>
Net Debt	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
<u>Long Term Debtors</u>			
Gross Debt	173	243	(70)
Less: Bad Debt Provision	<u>173</u>	<u>243</u>	<u>0</u>
Net Debt	<u>173</u>	<u>243</u>	<u>(70)</u>
<u>Overall Totals</u>			
Gross Debt	25,234	23,665	1,569
Less: Bad Debt Provision	<u>21,957</u>	<u>21,020</u>	<u>937</u>
Net Debt	<u>3,277</u>	<u>2,645</u>	<u>632</u>

DHP Policy – September 2024

Appendix 3

Category	Circumstances	Maximum Duration of Award/ Award to be reviewed	Amount of DHP (up to the stated % of the shortfall between HB and the rent charge – or otherwise stated)	Examples of Supporting Evidence	Changes from Previous Policy
1a.	Claimants affected by the Social Sector Size Criteria (Working Age Housing Benefit claimants living in Housing Association tenancies)	For the full financial year	100% of the SSSC reduction	HB, UC and Housing Association records	UC and Housing Association records added to examples of supporting evidence
1b.	Benefit Cap	Until end of financial year	100%	HB, UC and CTR records	UC records added to examples of supporting evidence
2a.	Claimants supported by the Homelessness Service in the Private Rented Sector	12 months	100%	Homelessness records	
2b.	Claimants supported by the Homelessness Service or from Temporary Accommodation into Social Sector housing	One- off payment	Up to the equivalent of 1 week's rent charge for the new tenancy	Housing Association notification Lease agreement	
2c.	Two Homes – unavoidable overlap in housing cost liability.	Up to 4 or 6 weeks, depending on circumstances.	The shortfall in total housing costs reasonably incurred	HB, UC and Housing Association records	New category
3a.	Financial Hardship – Less than £20 income over expenditure each week	Until end of financial year	75%	Claimant statement/HB Assessment/ UC records	UC records added to examples of supporting evidence
3b.	Financial Hardship – Less than £20 income over expenditure each week – aged less than 35years and housed private rented sector	Until end of financial year	100%	Claimant statement/HB Assessment/ UC records	UC records added to examples of supporting evidence
3c.	Financial Hardship – Less than £50 income over expenditure each week – housed in the private rented sector and in exceptional circumstances	Until end of financial year	100%	Claimant statement/HB Assessment/ UC records	UC records added to examples of supporting evidence

Notes

DHP is awarded in order of priority with applications meeting the criteria for Category 1 being the first priority to Category 3 being the lowest priority

Category 1

- Applicants in category 1 are not subject to a financial assessment
- Those affected by the Benefit Cap– the lower of either the capped amount or the applicant’s housing costs as permitted by regulations.
- Those on UC and affected by the Benefit Cap - in cases where the capped amount exceeds rent, other reasonable costs associated with housing can be included. For example, service charges, utilities up to the level of the capped amount or total housing costs (whichever is lower)

Category 2

- Applicants in category 2 are subject to a financial assessment. Applicants are approved where income is less than £20 more than essential expenditure. Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance and Scottish Disability Payments are disregarded as income although all other income is taken into consideration.
- Awards for claimants supported by the Homelessness Service in the Private Rented Sector are limited to the equivalent of the difference between the HB award and one rate above the LHA rate for the household’s requirements or the LHA 2 room rate, whichever is higher. Affordability of those supported by the Homelessness service or from temporary accommodation will be monitored closely subject to an upper annual budget of £10k.
- An unavoidable overlap in liability for rent due to an individual moving home, not met by Universal Credit or Housing Benefit legislation. Awards may be considered where the applicant can demonstrate a need to move and either the delay in moving is due to the applicant awaiting assistance with furnishing so that they could reasonably be expected to occupy the property and can demonstrate that they have taken reasonable steps to achieve this; or where the applicant has moved to the new home, but the overlap was unavoidable.

Category 3

- Applicants are approved where income is less than £20 more than essential expenditure. Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance and Scottish Disability Payments are disregarded as income although all other income is taken into consideration. This category will also be monitored closely and could be subject to review depending on the level of spend.
- In the private rented sector DHP is awarded based on the difference between HB or UC Housing costs and the LHA rate applicable to the household’s requirements or the 1 room rate for those aged under 35 years
- In the social sector DHP is awarded based on the difference between HB entitlement or UC Housing costs and the rent charge
- Private rented sector claimants subject to Local Housing Allowance restrictions who are in “exceptional circumstances”. Award DHP to meet the difference between HB or UC housing costs and one LHA rate above the rate applicable to the household’s requirements with a limit of the 2 room rate for those aged less than 35 years. Exceptional circumstances being situations that are particularly challenging and for an identifiable and specific reason, normally beyond the applicant’s control and more than the financial pressure experienced by most people who rely on welfare benefits. Exceptional circumstances may be when support is provided by Macmillan Cancer Support or similar organisation; those with terminal medical conditions; unexpected personal or family problems or illness.

Date: September 2024

Report To:	Policy and Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Corporate Director - Education, Communities and Organisational Development (OD)	Report No:	PR/29/24/RB/KB
Contact Officer:	Morna Rae	Contact No:	07385434459
Subject:	Corporate Policy and Performance Update: July-September 2024		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 This report provides the Committee with an update on Corporate Policy and Performance matters relating to:

- Programme for Government/Verity House Agreement;
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Excellence Awards 2024;
- Equalities, and
- Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the latest updates in relation to Corporate Policy and Performance and agrees to receive a further annual report on the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network in 2025.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director - Education, Communities and OD

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 A Corporate Policy and Performance update report is considered at every meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee; the last such report was submitted to the meeting of the Committee on 4 June 2024.

3.2 PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT/VERITY HOUSE AGREEMENT

3.3 In September 2023 the Policy and Resources Committee considered a report on the Verity House Agreement and the Scottish Government Programme for Government. It was proposed that future updates would be provided to Committee.

3.4 There is ongoing discussion at COSLA on dispute resolution in relation to the Verity House Agreement and updates will be brought to Committee when available.

3.5 A new Programme for Government was published on 4 September 2024 and is available via this link <https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2024-25-serving-scotland/> A report will be presented to the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee with more detail on the plans and their implications for Inverclyde Council.

3.6 COSLA EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024

3.7 National awards for local government include those co-ordinated by COSLA. Gaining external recognition for Council initiatives helps to increase the profile of the Local Authority, benchmark best practice and boost staff morale.

3.8 At the COSLA Excellence Awards 2024, the Council has been named as a finalist in the *Just transition to a net zero* economy category for our work on improving Inverclyde's environment through peatland restoration and tree planting. The restoration of the Coves Local Nature Reserve saw the enhancement of a beauty spot with the creation of new paths, improved access and habitats through the thinning of overgrown areas and the planting of over 10,000 natural species trees. Duchal Moor peatland restoration is a three-year project which has significant impacts in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, attenuating water flow thus helping to prevent flooding, and enhancing wildlife habitats which improves biodiversity. Finalists were invited to present to a judging panel on 15 August 2024. The winners will be announced on 19 September 2024 at COSLA's Annual Conference and Exhibition 2024.

3.9 EQUALITIES

3.10 Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

3.11 As Members will be aware, the following Policies were approved by the Committee at its meeting on 4 June 2024:

- Code of Conduct (Employees)
- Grievance, Dignity and Respect at Work Policy (Reviewed/Revised)
- Violence, Managing Aggression and Lone Working in the Workplace Policy (Reviewed/Revised)
- Whistleblowing (Confidential Reporting)
- Implementation of the Equally Safe at Work accreditation programme and associated Violence Against Women Policy and Sexual Harassment Policy, and Equality and Diversity Policy.

3.12 The EIAs relating to the above Polices have been published on the Council's website and are available to view here <https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/council-and-government/equality-impact-assessments/equality-impact-assessments-2024>.

3.13 CO-OPERATIVE COUNCILS' INNOVATION NETWORK

3.14 At the 20 September 2022 meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee it was agreed that the Council should apply to become a member of the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network (the Network), for an initial period of 3 years. This application was approved in October, and all councillors advised on 2 November. The Committee's approval of Network membership in September 2022 required officers to bring back annual reports highlighting the benefits which have arisen during the period of membership.

3.15 The Network, established in 2012, describes itself as "the fastest-growing network in local government", having over 100 councils, organisations and supporters from across the UK. The Network states that member councils are committed to reforming the way they work by building an equal partnership with local people based on the values and principles of the International Cooperative Alliance. In particular, the Network promotes the transformation of communities through community action, community engagement and civic empowerment.

3.16 More information on the Network can be found on its website: <https://www.councils.coop/about-us>

3.17 In addition, at its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council approved Cllr Cassidy's appointment to the Network's Executive Oversight Committee.

3.18 All members of the Co-operative Councils' Innovation Network benefit from the following:

- Access for Elected Members and officers to a wide network of local authorities who share a common purpose;
- Access to the Network's on-line resources, including case studies, <https://www.councils.coop/case-studies/>
- The potential to bid for funding to work on a case study, alone or in conjunction with other members;
- Access to conferences and training events to meet peers from other members;
- The ability to access a framework of specialist suppliers established by the Network for its members; and
- The opportunity to raise the Council's profile nationally across the UK.

3.19 The Council has taken advantage of these benefits in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Officer attendance at the virtual officers meeting;
- Cllr Cassidy's involvement in the Network's Executive Oversight Committee, and attendance at the Network's annual conference in 2023, there being no fee for this given the Council's membership;
- Sharing of local best practice through the inclusion of an Inverclyde Council case study in the national publication CCIN Case Studies Pack – 2024 <https://www.councils.coop/case-studies/download-2024-case-studies-pack/> This outlined the Inverclyde Culture Collective, which created a context for artists to experiment with alternate modes of sharing practice, developing partnerships and engaging with communities;
- Receiving information on initiatives underway in other local authorities. While we are yet to realise the full potential of this external learning officers will continue to look for opportunities, and
- A successful application by the Council to be a "Policy Prototype", receiving £2,000 funding from the Network, along with advice and experience from other areas. This has enabled development of graphically designed versions of the Council Plan and Partnership Plan, to make these documents more accessible and to stimulate engagement. Examples are

available at Appendix 1. These have been used at a variety of events including Clyde Conversations and employee workshops. The equipment purchased will also support future graphic design work within the Council.

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee notes the latest updates relating to the area of Corporate Policy and Performance and that the Committee will receive a further annual report on the Network in 2025.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk		X
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023/33/Council Plan 2023/28)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty and Children/Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		X
Environmental and Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

Annual membership of the CCIN within 2023/24 was £5,400 with further proposed spend of £6,000 until September 2025, allowing for a small inflationary increase. In September 2023, the Policy & Resources Committee agreed to meet the initial three-year cost through the Project Capacity Earmarked reserve

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Earmarked reserves	Projects – Officer Capacity	2023/25	£6k	EMR Budget	

Annually Recurring Costs/(Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

5.5 Strategic

This report supports the delivery of the following outcomes within the Council Plan 2023-2028:

- High quality and innovative services are provided giving value for money;
- Our employees are supported and developed.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 None.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

INVERCLYDE COUNCIL

our vision

committed

getting it right

nurturing

reliable

happening

positive

for everyone

dynamic

PLAN

getting it right

for everyone

dynamic

PLAN

getting it right

for everyone

dynamic

PLAN

getting it right

for everyone

dynamic

PLAN

THEME 3

PERFORMANCE

innovative

quality

value for money

supported

WE ARE HIRING

growing

thriving

sustainable

developed

robust housing

community

libraries

environmental

recycling

Healthcare

cafe

garden

ARCHITECT

Healthcare

Healthcare

Healthcare

THEME 2

PLACE

thriving

sustainable

developed

robust housing

community

libraries

environmental

recycling

Healthcare

Healthcare

THEME 1

PEOPLE

employed

healthy

supported

the best start for young people

reduced poverty

Safe

Safe

Safe

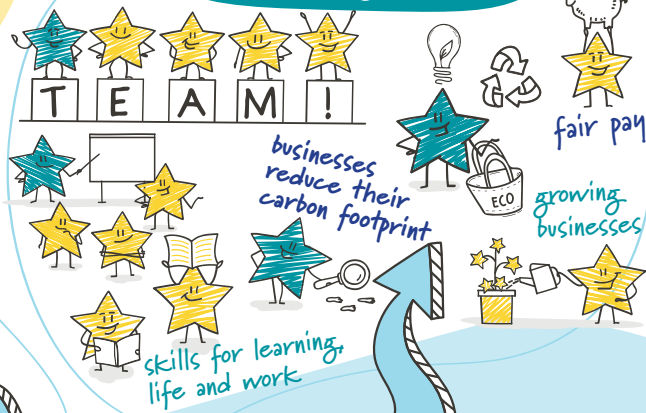
Safe

Meet the INVERSTARS

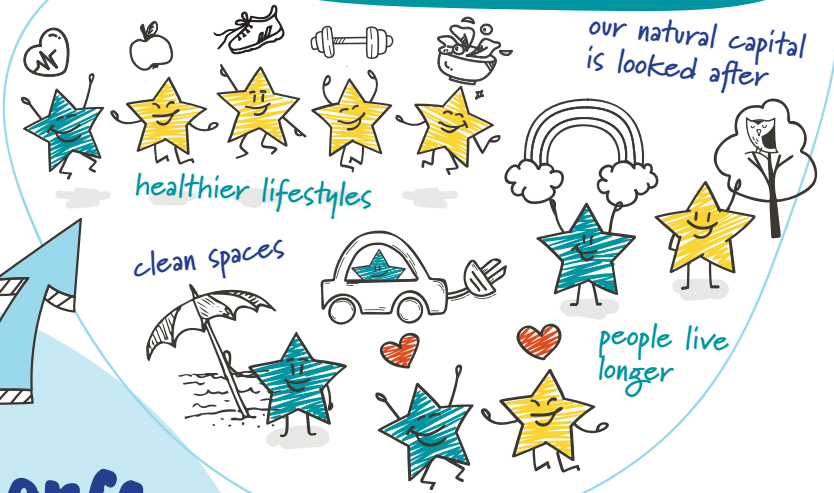
They will introduce you to the Alliance Partnership Plan.....



THEME 2 Working people



THEME 3 Healthy people and places

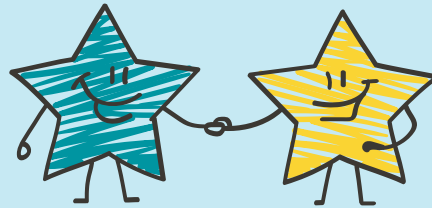


THEME 1 Empowered people



Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan 2023-33

getting it right for every child, citizen and community



THEME 4 A supportive place



THEME 5 A thriving place



Report To:	Policy and Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Corporate Director, Education, Communities and OD	Report No:	PR/31/24/RB/TM
Contact Officer:	Tony McEwan	Contact No:	01475 712828
Subject:	Update on Inverclyde Anti-Poverty Initiatives September 2024		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide Committee with proposals for the Anti-Poverty Initiatives funded by the Inverclyde Council Anti-Poverty recurring budget for the period to March 2027.
- 1.3 Inverclyde Council and the HSCP allocated a total budget of £1.08 million per year for financial year 2021/22 and 2022/23 to fund a range of time-limited local initiatives to mitigate poverty and deprivation. The recurring budget of £472,000 is now fully allocated whilst an earmarked reserve is used to fund pilots/time limited initiatives.
- 1.4 Projects funded through the anti-poverty fund are subject to monitoring and review by the anti-poverty project group. Continued review of the IRISE project in particular has concluded that although some aspects of the project have had positive impacts, the project has been unable to achieve its original outcomes. Given the significant funding allocated to this project, and the spending profile to date this report recommends the early termination of the project in its current format as of 31 December 2024, with the remaining funding being returned to the Anti-poverty ear-marked reserve.
- 1.5 The report recommends the Committee also notes the progress and information in relation to other Anti-Poverty Initiatives including the Scottish Government Grant to extend the Early Adopter Community for Affordable All Age Childcare, the Child Poverty Accelerator Funding and a bid to the Scottish government for pathfinder funding.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:
- Notes the content of this report;
 - Approves the proposals for both the Warm Hand of Friendship and Duke of Edinburgh until March 2027;
 - Agrees to the early termination of the IRISE project with remaining Council funding being returned to the Anti-Poverty ear-marked reserve; and
 - Notes the update on projects funded by the Scottish Government grants.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities and Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 In 2021 Inverclyde Council and HSCP agreed to create a £1.08 million budget to fund a range of local initiatives to mitigate the impact of poverty and deprivation levels that were reported in the Scottish Indices of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2020.
- 3.2 These initiatives are targeted towards communities and people most likely to be affected by deprivation, poverty, and inequalities, including males affected by drug and alcohol use, early intervention for families living in poverty and encouraging new businesses to start up in areas with the greatest deprivation levels.
- 3.3 The Full Council in December 2022 agreed a £600k saving from the Council's portion of the recurring anti-poverty budget of £830k, leaving £230k. It also agreed to add in existing Education funding for various education initiatives relating to anti-poverty, totalling £259k. Following reviews of the annual recurring funding as part of budget exercises, the total recurring anti-poverty budget available for 2024/25 is £472k.
- 3.4 In addition to the recurring budget there is an earmarked reserve made up of the carry forward from previous years' anti-poverty funding of £1,748,000 together with £500,000 additional funding from reserves, agreed by Members as part of the 2024/25 budget process to fund the continuation of current projects. There is currently £774,000 unallocated and is detailed in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.5 The Policy and Resources Committee has been keen that officers continue to review existing projects and also to bring forward new proposals for the unallocated anti-poverty budget. These proposals are detailed in section 4 below.

4.0 Anti-Poverty Project Proposals to March 2027

- 4.1 In June 2024, Committee approved the budgets and progress made against the current anti-poverty initiatives. The Anti-Poverty Implementation Group were tasked with providing Committee with a report recommending, the allocation of the remaining funding to establish to impact and improve outcomes for local communities facing the greatest inequalities until March 2027.
- 4.2 **Duke of Edinburgh Scheme £120,000 (in total)**

The young people in Inverclyde who participate in Duke of Edinburgh participants gain valuable skills including teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and perseverance. These skills are crucial for success in education and future employment. The Duke of Edinburgh programme can break the poverty cycle by offering participants opportunities for personal development, leadership skills, and qualifications. These skills can improve job prospects in the long run, helping young people out of poverty. DofE also provides opportunities, new experiences, like expeditions or volunteering, which may not be readily available due to financial limitations for many young people in Inverclyde. These experiences can broaden horizons for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds helping them to connect with peers from different backgrounds.

Funding from the Anti-Poverty budget would support a continued strategy to implement a targeted approach by identifying opportunities to increase engagement and participation for young female's and for young people living the areas with the highest deprivation and poverty or facing inequalities. This will prevent low-income families from being excluded on the grounds of cost.

4.3 Warm Hands of Friendship - Extend to March 2027 £120,000 per year for 3 years

Inverclyde Council has provided financial support for the Warm Hand of Friendship initiative for the past two winter periods successfully supporting 58 local community organisations to deliver essential community services during the winter period. These services ranged from safe warm spaces and clothing distribution to meals provision, and community activities. Over 9,000 individuals benefitted, from the Warm Hand of Friendship initiative, there was a focus on prioritising vulnerable groups including lone parent families, families with multiple children, and older adults. Data collection revealed that the initiative helped address the difficult choice between food and heating, fostered social connections, and even led to the formation of lasting friendships and establishing support networks within the community.

It is recommended that the Anti-Poverty Funding continues to support the development and implementation of this initiative across Inverclyde until March 2027.

4.4 IRISE

Progress in relation to this project is regularly reported to this Committee and while the work which takes place with the client group has had some positive impact, the project has been unable to achieve the aims first set out. Due to the very complex nature of the needs of the client group, this pilot has established that until the very basic needs of clients have been met for a sustained period of time, meaningful employment may be some years off, if indeed possible at all. While there have been some successes with offering advice and accessing housing and other benefits, the anti-poverty steering group feel that these services are already offered elsewhere. Given the significant resourcing of this project and its inability to achieve its original outcomes, it is recommended that due to limited impact the project comes to an end on 31 December 2024. Any unallocated Council funding will be returned to the Anti Poverty reserve.

4.5 Subject to the above being agreed then there will be £294,000 unallocated plus the unused balance for the IRISE project. Officers would recommend retaining a balance at this time which will allow funding for future initiatives over the remaining life of this Council.

5.0 Other Projects/Updates

5.1 Credit Union Movement – Update

The two credit unions have remained engaged with the Financial Inclusion partnership along with the Chief Executive Officer of Right Way Credit Union. Both Port Glasgow (1st July) and Tail o' the Bank (1st April) have now legally transferred to Right Way Credit Union. Both will operate with their own identity and from their own premises at least for the medium term. This move greatly strengthens the presence and resilience of Credit Unions within the Inverclyde area, with the safeguarding of savings and compliance and regulatory responsibilities now lying with RWCU. The Chief Executive of RWCU will continue to be part of the FIP and contribute to the updated FIP Strategy.

5.2 External Anti-Poverty Grants

In addition to the Inverclyde Council funded initiatives from the Anti-Poverty Funding, Inverclyde has also been successful in receiving additional Scottish Government grants to develop a whole systems approach to affordable childcare and supporting families who have high levels of anxiety and low mood and who has a child under the age of 5 years. This report provides progress on these externally funded initiatives and case studies are attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

5.3 Early Adopter Community for All Age Childcare £1,199,300 to from 1 Sept 2024 until 31 March 2026

On July 4th, 2024, Inverclyde Council secured additional funding to extend the program until March 2026. This grant will allow for significant expansion to serve three localities with the highest inequalities by March 2026. This includes two locations in Port Glasgow, as well as establishing services in Greenock East Central and Southwest Inverclyde. From January 2025, families will be expected to pay for the childcare service, however, information, advice and capacity will be given to families to help them to apply for relevant social security or tax relief childcare funding. The Early Adopter Community will work alongside childcare providers to ensure the cost of the provision is kept affordable and flexible to meet the needs of the parents.

Not only will the expansion service three localities it will also be scaled to support and deliver to families with children 0-5years with childcare support, integrating with existing early years services. and will include local playgroups, family groups, and toddlers to expand childcare options within the community.

Since its launch, the program has successfully served over 40 children from 33 families. Currently, it offers after-school childcare and holiday childcare services, primarily supporting lone-parent households, the project supports Breakfast Clubs for 5 days per week in the Port Glasgow primary schools, providing a subsidised costs to those who meet the criteria. Support is also offered to the Scottish Childminding Association (SCMA) to recruit and upskill local childminders and to pay the cost of the childcare provision for the families who meet the criteria.

Key to the success of the early adopter community is the whole family approach ensuring families receive the services they need at the earliest intervention, that the services are place based and person centred. This includes childcare providers, welfare and advice services, employability services, early years programs, colleges, and family support services. Additionally, a co-design approach will continue to be developed, involving children, families, and childcare providers. This collaborative effort aims to identify successful methods in building an accessible, affordable childcare system with broader family support.

5.4 Child Poverty Accelerator Funded (CPAF) Project (£83000 in total) November 2023 - March 2025

The Scottish Government's Child Poverty Accelerator Fund (CPAF) is supporting a collaborative project in Inverclyde aimed at developing a comprehensive theory of change for early intervention in tackling child poverty. This initiative leverages local and national expertise to engage families in a holistic support program. The project, led by Inverclyde Council in partnership with Inverclyde Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and delivered by a Home Start Inverclyde, adopts a person-centred, whole-systems approach.

Since its launch in November 2023, the Home Start intervention component has successfully engaged with 45 families. Notably, 58% of participating families have children under the age of one, highlighting the project's focus on early intervention. Additionally, 51% of families have at least one member with a disability, and 42% are lone-parent households, demonstrating the project's commitment to supporting vulnerable populations. The 45 families are participating in programmes designed to enhance self-esteem, confidence, and parenting skills facilitated by Home Start Inverclyde. Families are given to connect and build relationships with each other, fostering a supportive network and a comprehensive financial wellbeing assessment has been conducted to identify areas of need for income from social security and/or income from employment. The creation of this pathway passed on relationships between the parents and the collaborative services will empowering families towards greater financial security.

Initial findings from the Urban Foresight Evaluation highlight system-level change have fostered new, relationship-based pathways between Homestart Inverclyde and HSCP Welfare and Advice Services. This collaboration allows families to discuss financial concerns and access support to maximise their social security benefits. Additionally, they receive guidance on the impact of employment income on their overall financial well-being. Building on these successes, a further funding request was submitted during the recently closed Child Poverty Accelerator Fund Round 2. This underscores the commitment to continue learning from this innovative approach and ensure the sustainability of these valuable services.

5.5 Port Glasgow Pathfinder Project to March 2026

Inverclyde was successful in its bid to the Scottish Government to become a child poverty pathfinder, this is in line with other Early Adopter Communities in Scotland such as Dundee and Glasgow. The project will be delivered under the name “Fairer Futures Partnerships”. The Port Glasgow Pathfinder proposes a significant shift in public service delivery, moving towards a user-centric “no wrong door” approach. This ecosystem model will prioritise collaboration with service users to identify their needs and tailor support accordingly. This will involve piloting new service models, including streamlined initial contact with comprehensive assessments and “soft handovers” between services. Furthermore, co-locating relevant services will create a central hub fostering closer relationships between individuals, local services, and community organisations. This collaborative environment aims to empower people living in poverty by building trust, fostering self-reliance, and offering them greater choice and opportunity. The success of this pathfinder will inform the expansion of similar services to address deprivation and inequality throughout Inverclyde.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk		x
Human Resources	X	
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

6.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Anti-Poverty EMR		2024/25-2027/28	£480k		Based on proposals in 4.2 & 4.3 funded from unallocated balance
	I:Rise	2024/25	(£TBC)		Returned unallocated funding

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Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments

6.4 Human Resources

There are staffing implications in relation to any decision in respect of the IRISE project. The HSPC is working with HR in relation to this.

6.5 Strategic

Tackling the causes of poverty and deprivation to reduce inequalities in Inverclyde is a key priority for Inverclyde Council and HSCP. This report provides recommendations which are in line with this priority.

6.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

N/A

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

X

YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.

NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children’s rights.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 The CMT is supportive of the proposals in this report.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1 None.

Anti Poverty Earmarked Reserve

EMR Budget 2024/25 £1,748,000

Additional Funding from reserves (agreed 29 February 2024) £500,000

Available Funding 2024/25 **£2,248,000**Commitments:

	Budget Allocation	Projection 24/25	Spend to 31/08/24
Employment IRISE (agreed P&R 25 May 2021)	£641,000	£321,000	£28,652
Additional Food Insecurity Funding (agreed P&R 21 November 2023)	£37,000	£37,000	£7,500
Dedicated Team Leader Funding (agreed P&R 23 May 2023)	£13,000	£13,000	£4,546
Scottish Welfare Fund (agreed P&R 21 November 2023)	£125,000	£50,000	£0
3 Year Clothing Grant (agreed Full Council 29 February 2024)	£300,000	£0	£0
3 Year Clothing Grant Primary (agreed Full Council 29 February 2024)	£126,000	£0	£0
4 Year Free School Meals (agreed Full Council 29 February 2024)	£232,000	£43,000	£0

Total Commitments **£1,474,000** **£464,000** **£40,698****EMR Balance Unallocated****£774,000**Proposals per Section 4:

Duke of Edinburgh Proposal	£120,000	£40,000	£0
Warm Hands of Friendship Proposal	£360,000	£120,000	£0

Total Commitments including new proposals **£1,954,000** **£624,000** **£40,698****EMR Balance Unallocated****£294,000****£2,248,000**

Appendix 2 – Case Studies

Early Adopter Community for Affordable Childcare:

The Early Adopter Community for Affordable Childcare has proven to be a pivotal initiative in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by families in our community. By providing accessible and affordable childcare, this program has empowered parents to pursue education, employment, and improved financial stability.

To date, 33 families, comprising 43 children, have benefited from the program, receiving comprehensive support ranging from childcare provision to financial advice. The program has specifically targeted families experiencing significant barriers, with six families including a disabled adult or child, 25 lone-parent households, eight families with three or more children, and three kinship care families.

Family Category	No. of Families supported*
Families with a disabled adult or child	6
Families where the mother is aged under 25	-
Families with a lone parent	25
Families with a baby aged under 1	-
Families with three or more children	8
Families where English is a second language	-
Families of kinship care/care experience	<5

A dedicated project team has been instrumental in building trust and relationships with families, facilitating open conversations about financial circumstances and accessing support services. This engagement has evidenced and reporting a 100% increase in parents' ability to work or study due to the childcare provision. 88% of families have increased their working hours, and 44% have sought financial advice, highlighting the program's effectiveness in addressing economic inequalities.

Two parents have returned to education, an ambition they attribute directly to the availability of affordable childcare. Additionally, the high prevalence of children with additional support needs among program participants has necessitated enhanced training for staff, demonstrating the program's adaptability to diverse family circumstances. 3 families advise that they face financial insecurity and have received guidance to maximise their income, 2 families have received redundancy and requested welfare advice and support, families have advised that they have benefited from advice because they have been off work due to mental health circumstances and their wages have been reduced. Families have also asked for housing allocation support and financial advice when English is a second language.

One parent stated “***I gave up a part-time job to finally follow my dreams of going back to education, I’ve always worked part-time around the children and when this opportunity presented, I knew it was time and applied for university and was accepted. This wouldn’t have been possible otherwise***”.

A key learning from the service delivery is to acknowledge the high number of children who have a diagnosis of having additional support needs (24%). The children attend mainstream school however, the staff providing the out of school children care have received enhanced training. One carer advised ***“The after-school care allows the children to learn in a way they didn’t get to as smaller children, they get to build meaningful trusting relationships with staff, and I cannot thank you enough for this, I don’t know what I would do without the support”***.

Overall, the Early Adopter Community for Affordable Childcare has demonstrated its efficacy in improving family well-being, increasing employment opportunities, and addressing financial challenges. By providing targeted support and building strong relationships with families, the program has emerged as a vital resource for the community.

Inverclyde Whole Family Wellbeing Model/ Inverclyde Child Poverty Accelerator Fund

Inverclyde Council and HSCP is implementing a Whole Family Wellbeing model through the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund (CPAF) project in partnership with Home Start Inverclyde. This initiative is grounded in the belief that by adopting a holistic, person-centred approach, we can empower parents experiencing poverty to make informed decisions and improve their circumstances.

The Home Start component of the project focuses on 45 families in Greenock East/Central, with a particular emphasis on parents with mental health concerns or anxiety and children under five years. This targeted approach involves one-to-one support and group activities to foster peer connections and resilience. By creating a safe and supportive environment, parents are encouraged to share experiences and learn from each other. Moreover, wellbeing discussions are integral to understanding and addressing the unique needs of these families. A significant proportion of these families include children under one year old and/or have a family member with a disability.

The CPAF funding has enabled Inverclyde Council to establish new pathways to support, strengthen relationships with families, and enhance the services provided by the Advice and Welfare team. This approach fosters trust and open dialogue, encouraging parents to discuss financial challenges and explore employment opportunities. By prioritising relationship building, we aim to create an environment where parents feel comfortable sharing sensitive information about debt and financial insecurity.

A notable success story involves a young couple supported by Home Start. Both of the individuals have care experience, they faced challenges in parenting and building trust with external agencies. The intensive support provided by a Home Start Family Support Worker was instrumental in rebuilding their confidence and accessing essential services. This holistic approach, encompassing emotional support, practical guidance, and financial advice, has empowered the couple to overcome adversity.

Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Director – Environment and Regeneration	Report No:	P+R/24/09/01/SJ
Contact Officer:	Stuart Jamieson	Contact No:	01475 712402
Subject:	Repopulation		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update in respect of the population size, initiatives and further proposals in respect of Repopulation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Committee are asked to:

- a) Note the statistics highlighted in the area of population;
- b) Note the activity of the Health and Social Care Partnership's New Scots Team in respect of their clients;
- c) Agree to the creation of a community settlement officer post, in part funded by the Scottish Government; and
- d) Agree that the remaining £21k from the ear marked reserve will be used for initiatives including place marketing, housing market growth, jobs and enabling infrastructure growth, and skills are undertaken within appropriate Inverclyde Alliance workstreams including the development of an economic growth plan.

Stuart Jamieson
Director – Environment and Regeneration

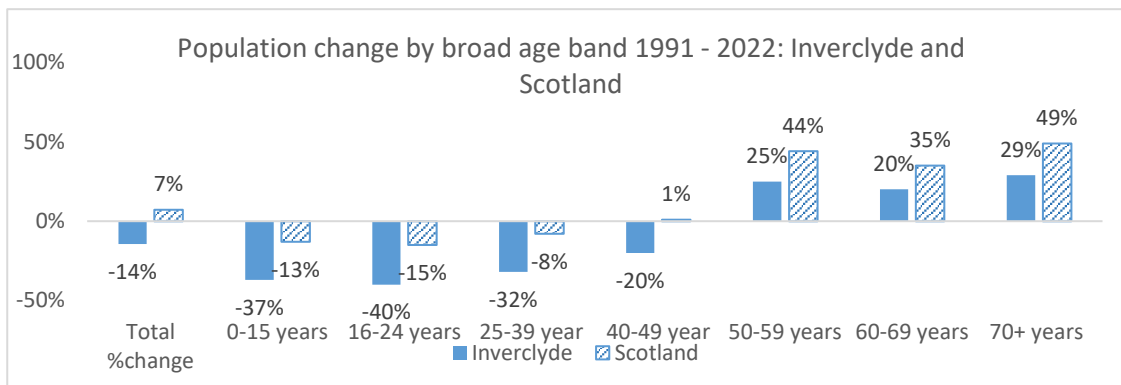
3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

3.1 Addressing depopulation in Inverclyde is one of the most significant challenges faced by Inverclyde Council and its Alliance Board partners.

Population

3.2 The Committee has received a number of reports in respect of the population statistics which have highlighted the reduction in the population within Inverclyde.

3.3 The table below highlights the change in population within Inverclyde



3.4 Between 1991 & 2022:

- the number of young people aged 24 years and younger has decreased by 38% (30,768 to 19,163).
- the number of people aged 60 years and over has increased by 25% (19,309 to 24,056).

3.5 Population change has been driven by a sharp decrease in the number of births in Inverclyde. Inverclyde births in 2022 were almost half the level of births in 1991:

Year	Number of births	% change from 1991 (births)	Number of Deaths	% change from 1991(deaths)	Natural change Births – deaths
1991	1,185	0	1,243	0	-58
2001	850	-28.27 %	1,109	-10.7%	-259
2011	814	-31.31 %	1,013	-18%	-199
2022	654	-44.81 %	1,134	-8.7%	-480

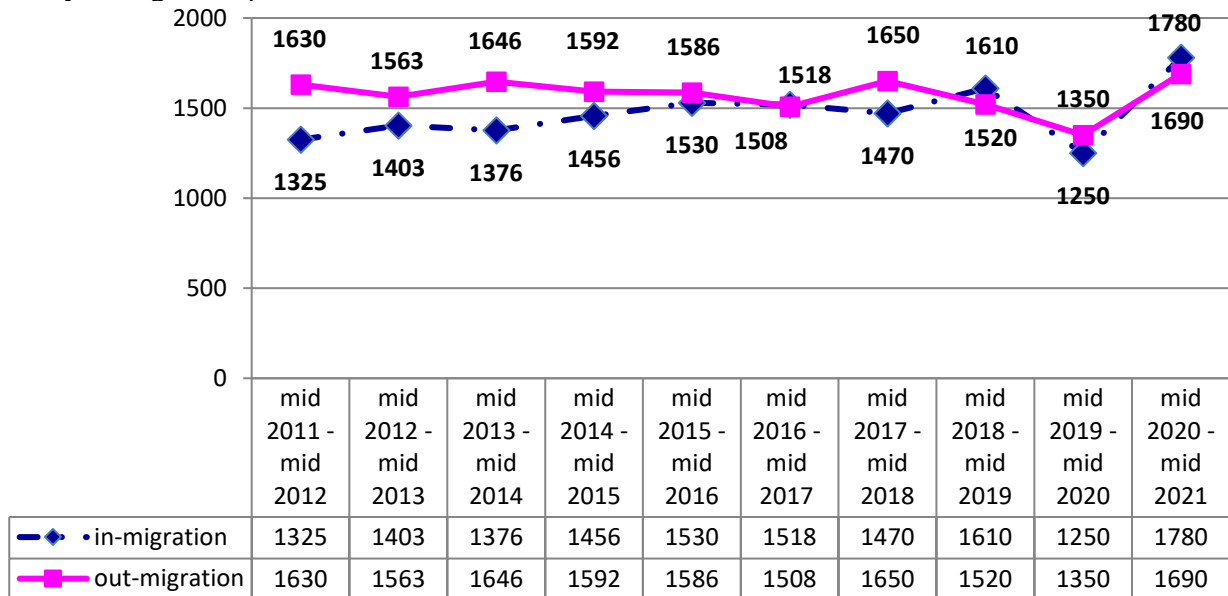
3.6 Over the 30-year period 1991 to 2022, births in Inverclyde were 23% lower than the number of deaths (35,167 deaths compared to 27,108 births), resulting in negative natural change of -8,059.

3.7 Census statistics on migration are expected in August 2024. In the meantime, the only other source of migration data is the NRS mid-year population estimates. Mid-year estimates will be re-based on Census 2022 data and therefore the information for 2011-2021 is subject to change.

- Between mid-2001 and mid-2011, it is estimated that net civilian migration in Inverclyde accounted for population change of -1.1%.
- Between mid-2011 and mid-2021, it is estimated that net civilian migration in Inverclyde accounted for population change of -1.2%.

Estimates in more recent years however show an increase in positive net migration level as shown below:

Inverclyde migration pattern mid 2011/12 to mid-2020/21



3.8 The Census highlighted that Inverclyde’s population had been underestimated repeatedly by NRS in the mid-year estimates, so the projection data is likely to be unreliable due to both its age and the fact it was based on an inaccurate baseline.

3.9 Population projections based on Census 2022 data will be published for Scotland in Oct/Nov 2024 and NRS has said that it aims to publish population projections at a Council level 5 months after the national publication. A report on the 2022 based projections will be prepared for CMT / P&R Committee once published.

People New to Scotland

3.10 Since 2015 through various resettlement schemes 205 families (874 individuals) have come to Inverclyde 155 families (613 individuals) and 24 individuals have settled in the area and 50 children have been born in Inverclyde . There are 248 Ukrainians currently living within Inverclyde in 92 family groups. Under the Home for Ukraine, 9 families are hosting Ukrainian families within Inverclyde.

3.11 The HSCP Integration Team provides intensive support to all those arriving via UK resettlement schemes. Financial support is provided by the government to procuring, furnishing and equipping tenancies prior to families arriving locally, an allocated worker provides food, clothing and assistance to access state benefits, banking facilities and GP registration immediately upon arrival. This is followed up with local orientation; attention to cultural and religious needs, education and ESOL provision registration, and any other person-centred supports required. Longer term practical and emotional support on managing life and a home in a new country, and to engage with DWP and employability services to obtain employment, is ongoing.

3.12 A good number of individuals and families are successfully integrated in the local community prior to their initial leave to remain period, leaving them well placed to apply for Indefinite Leave to Remain at the 5-year point.

3.13 Regular review allows early identification of any barriers to integration as they arise, prompting implementation of individualised support plans. In addition, contracts are in place with the local third sector to support community integration, and there are good connections with a wide variety of local organisations. ESOL classes are delivered by CLD partners, however capacity for these is limited and pilots on how this can be delivered in more accessible ways have commenced. This provision is funded directly from UK Government, calculated per capita of persons resettled, and paid over 3-5 years on a front-loaded basis.

- 3.14 The Repopulation Priority for the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) was chaired by the Chief Executive of River Clyde Homes.
- 3.15 The 10-year vision set out aspirations that:
- Inverclyde will be a more attractive place to live and work with excellent education provision, leisure facilities, transport links, good quality housing and employment opportunities.
 - A greater variety of opportunities that meet the needs and aspirations of our young people will be available so that they are encouraged to stay in the area after leaving school.
 - Inverclyde's local economy will have grown and be characterised by a diverse business base as a result of an increase in the number of local entrepreneurs and inward investment.
 - Communities in Inverclyde will have an enhanced sense of pride, identity and influence, resulting in improved quality of life and satisfaction with living in the area.
 - Inverclyde will have a stable population with a good balance of socio-economic groups.
- 3.16 Whilst the group has not met formally since the pandemic it is considered that the aspirations remain current and are very much in line with the evidence gathered as part of the Inverclyde Socio Economic Task Force that Inverclyde should focus on Business, business premises, skills and housing. The Regeneration and Planning Service are in the process of commissioning an Economic Growth Plan for Inverclyde. In the 2023-33 Inverclyde Alliance Partnership Plan repopulation continues to be a focus through our approach to "a Thriving Place" and the priority "Growth in our working age population by encouraging people to stay here, and attracting new people to settle here"
- 3.17 Officers have participated in a number of pan Scotland and regional discussions in respect of depopulation and repopulation, with the greatest concerns raised on depopulation identified in the West of Scotland and the islands whilst the concerns in repopulation focus on the East of the country. As part of the agenda the Scottish Government have offered local authorities part funding for the creation of a community settlement officer post, in the current financial year. The depopulation earmarked reserve has a balance of £95,000 which could be utilised in part to expand the duration and scope of the post to create a two-year post.
- 3.18 This will allow us to carry out research to explore local drivers of depopulation and to develop a greater understanding about the effects of current issues affecting the population in order to ensure the best possible impact of future interventions.
- 3.19 The primary objectives of the project will also provide tailored support to people who are currently living in or are moving to the area and will work with local agencies and other organisations on bespoke projects to tackle key challenges which are a barrier to population attraction or retention within the local area.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 It is proposed to create a new Community Settlement Officer post which will utilise in part the depopulation earmarked reserve matched to the Scottish Government Grant Funds to fund a 2-year post and to utilise the balance of funds to create specific projects.
- 4.2 It is further proposed that as part of appropriate workstreams within the Alliance structures that initiatives including place marketing, housing market growth, jobs and enabling infrastructure growth, and skills are undertaken including the development of an economic growth plan funded from the remaining balance in the earmarked reserve.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO	N/A
Financial	X		
Legal/Risk		X	
Human Resources	X		
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X		
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing		X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X	
Data Protection		X	

5.2 Finance

One off costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Depopulation		24-26	95		£104k estimated for 2 year post and £21k for initiatives.
SG Grant		24/25	(30)		

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
					None at this stage

5.3 Legal/Risk

None.

5.4 Human Resources

Creation of a community settlement officer post.

5.5 Strategic

This project accords with the Corporate Management Plan, by improving access for all.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqlA is required.
x	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqlA is required.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

Has there been active consideration of how this report’s recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report’s recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children’s rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
x	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

None.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services	Report No:	LS/064/24
Contact Officer:	Carol Craig-McDonald	Contact No:	01475 712725
Subject:	Complaint Handling Annual Report 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 This is an agreed routine annual monitoring report to provide the Policy & Resources Committee with details of the annual performance of all complaints received and handled by Inverclyde Council, Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP), and both Arms-Length Organisations (ALEOs), Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde, for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

1.3 The appended report (appendix 1) provides the annual complaint handling statistical information for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The report has been prepared by the Council's Information Governance Team and provides the following information:

- i. Performance Information.
- ii. Analysis of complaint activity; and an
- iii. Update on learning from complaints.

1.4 The SPSO has provided statistical information on the Council's complaint handling during the above period, which is included in section 4.10 of this report. There have been no cases involving the Council or the HSCP investigated by the SPSO in this reporting period.

1.5 The Council remains committed to investigating, learning from, and taking appropriate action where it is found that standards have fallen below the level expected or where it is recognised that services could be improved. The Council has over the course of the year taken action to centralise resources and expertise to handle complaints for the HSCP and the Council within Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services' Information Governance Team.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (1) notes the annual performance of Inverclyde Council's complaint handling procedure; and
- (2) approves the publication of the Annual Complaint Handling Report on the Council's website.

Lynsey Brown
Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Local Authority Complaint Handler Network (LACHN) is a national forum for local authority complaint handlers to meet quarterly to assist in the development of professional practice in relation to complaint handling. The Council's Complaints Officer alongside representatives represents Inverclyde Council at this forum from 32 Scottish Local Authorities. The Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO) attends these meetings to support the ongoing development of complaint handling within local authorities and to achieve consistency in approach.
- 3.2 There is a requirement for Councils to report complaint handling performance for ALEOs. Inverclyde Council have two ALEOs, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde, and they both require to report on complaints handled. Inverclyde Council is adhering to the reporting requirements for ALEOs set out by the SPSO.
- 3.3 The SPSO has confirmed that they will be moving to a quarterly submission of complaint handling statistical data from all Councils. This is intended to ease the collation of management information on an annual basis. Inverclyde Council has agreed to supply this statistical data each quarter, as it is currently prepared on a quarterly and annual basis. The draft report is issued to LACHN for discussion at the network meeting and any inconsistencies in data interpretation and analysis is resolved before the formal annual submission to the SPSO each year.
- 3.4 Inverclyde Council, the HSCP and both ALEOs implemented revised model complaint handling procedures on 1 April 2021.

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 Inverclyde Council, the HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde received and handled 288 complaints and closed 272 complaints within the relevant period.
- 4.2 Section 3 of the appended report provides a comparison of the complaint handling performance by the Council from 2019/20 to 2023/24. Members will note that, in comparison with volumes received during 2022/23, there has been a decrease in the overall number of complaints dealt with by Inverclyde Council. However, for the number of complaints dealt with by the HSCP, and Inverclyde Leisure, statistics show an increase in the complaints received. This is in line with a normal volume distribution post pandemic.
- 4.3 Section 3.6 to 3.7 of the appended report shows the breakdown of complaint volumes per service and the percentage of complaints per service area against the total number of complaints received for the reporting period. The numbers remain low within some services; however, they are proportionately higher in those services that have historically received higher complaint volumes based on the nature of work undertaken. Riverside Inverclyde was the only area which did not receive a complaint during the reporting period and some individual service areas within Inverclyde Council did not receive any complaints across the year which is in line with previous year trends.
- 4.4 Section 3.8 – 3.9 of the appended report shows the outcome of complaint investigations at each stage of the complaint handling procedure by area, the collective view of which is summarised below:
- 74 complaints were upheld across all complaint stages.
 - 54 complaints were partially upheld across all complaint stages.
 - 114 complaints were not upheld across all complaint stages: and
 - 30 complaints were resolved across all complaint stages.

- 4.5 Section 3.10 to 3.18 of the appended report details the Council's responses to complaints at each of the complaint stages and the average timescales for resolving complaints. The HSCP's performance has shown strain in timescale management due to the complexity of complaints being received at both complaint stage 1 and stage 2. This should remain an area of focus for the HSCP. When comparing in isolation the Council's complaint handling performance it is noted that the timescales taken to resolve complaints have increased at stage 1 and stage 2, which affects the average days reported. There is scope to improve timescale management in some complaints that exceed the expected timescales across all stages of the complaints. A further recommended action is for proactive actions to be taken on receipt of complaints to reduce the number of late responses or responses that are running very close to timescales to support remaining within the timescales expected for each stage of the complaint. Some responses are being issued but outside the normal expected procedure result in a number of complaints being escalated to stage 2 to remedy the complainant receiving their rights to review.
- 4.6 Stage one of the complaint handling procedure should be attempted where there are straightforward issues potentially easily resolved with little or no investigation. This should be completed within five working days. If the service user remains unhappy following the stage one complaint investigation, they can request that their complaint be escalated to stage two of the procedure. The performance of complaints handled at stage one of the complaint handling procedure has been summarised in the table below.

Stage 1 Complaints	Indicators 2023/24	Indicators 2022/23	Trend when comparing to 2022/22
No of complaints closed	189	187	An increase of 2 stage 1 complaints
% Of complaints closed on time within 5 days (including cases where a time extension was approved)	84.7	79.7%	An increase of 5% for on time responses
Average number of days taken to close complaints	4.3 days	4.4 days	A decrease by 0.1 on the average days,

Outcome of complaints	No of cases 2023/24	%	No of cases 2022/23	%	Trend when comparing to 2022/23
No of complaints upheld & as % of all stage 1 complaints	60 cases	31.7%	70 cases	37.4%	A decrease of 5.7%
No of complaints partially upheld & as % of all stage 1 complaints	29 cases	15.3%	28 cases	15%	An increase by 0.3%
No of complaints not upheld & as a % of all stage 1 complaints	72 cases	38%	65 cases	34.8%	An increase of 3.2%
No of complaints resolved & as a % of all stage 1 complaints	28 cases	14.8%	24 cases	12.8%	An increase of 2%

- 4.6 A stage two complaint is for complex complaints, or for serious issues where a thorough investigation will be undertaken. It should also be used for complaints that cannot be resolved at the stage one of the procedure. This typically requires a more thorough investigation to establish facts prior to

reaching conclusion and allows 20 days for the investigation to be completed. The performance of complaints handled at stage two of the complaint handling procedure has been summarised in the table below.

Stage 2 Complaints	Indicators 2023/24	Indicators 2022/23	Trend when comparing to 2022/23
No of complaints closed	74	76	An increase of 38 complaints
% Of complaints closed on time within 20 days & where we applied time extension	59.5%	67.1%	A decrease of 7.5%
Average number of days taken to close complaint	21.5 days	20.8 days	A 0.7 day increase in days to close complaint

Outcome of complaints	No of cases 2023/24	%	No of Cases 2022/23	%	Trend when comparing to 2022/23
No of complaints upheld & as % of all stage 2 complaints	11 cases	14.9%	17 cases	22.4%	A decrease of 7.5%
No of complaints partially upheld & as % of all stage 2 complaints	20 cases	27%	23 cases	30.3%	A decrease of 3.3%
No of complaints not upheld & as a % of all stage 2 complaints	41 cases	55.4%	36 cases	47%	An increase of 8.4%
No of complaints resolved & as a % of all stage 2 complaints	2 cases	2.7%	0 cases	0%	An increase by 2.7% as no complaints were

4.7 Escalated stage two complaints are ones where the service user remains dissatisfied with the way the Council dealt with their complaint at frontline resolution, the complainant can request a detailed investigation under stage two of our complaints handling procedure. This allows 20 days for completing the investigation. This must be undertaken before the complainant can take their complaint to the SPSO to review. The performance of complaints handled at escalated stage two of the complaint handling procedure has been summarised in the table below. It is noted that the HSCP have not seen any complaints escalate from stage 1 to stage 2 during the year.

Escalated Stage 2 Complaints	Indicators 2023/24	Indicators 2022/23	Trend when comparing to 2022/23
No of complaints closed	9	15	A reduction of 6 complaints
% Of complaints closed on time within 20 days & where we applied time extension	66.7%	80%	A 13.3% decrease in those complaints meeting timescale
Average number of days taken to close complaints	17.4 days	20.5 days	A decrease of 3.1 days

Escalated stage 2 outcomes	No of cases 2023/24	%	No of cases 2022/23	%	Trend when comparing to 2022/23
No of complaints upheld & as % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	3 cases	33.3%	1 case	6.7%	An increase by 26.6%
No of complaints partially upheld & as % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	5 cases	55.5%	6 cases	40%	A 10.5 increase
No of complaints not upheld & as % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	1 case	11.1%	8 cases	53.3%	A decrease of 42.2%
No of complaints resolved & as a % of all escalated stage 2 complaints	0 cases	0%	0 cases	0%	No change

- 4.8 Section 4 of the appended report provides further detail on the next steps that the Council requires to take in implementing the Customer Satisfaction Survey for complaint handling to meet the expectations set out by the SPSO. Implementation has been delayed and will be revisited in the coming year to develop the technical process for implementing the survey once the new complaint system is implemented. The HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde will also be required to develop their processes for implementation to meet this requirement. Engagement with the appropriate officers will be undertaken to support the delivery of this work.
- 4.9 Section 5 of the appended report provides an overview of service improvement recording which commenced in November 2016. This has been embedded within services and is reported quarterly to Directorate Management Teams. The HSCP requires to implement this process within their complaint handling process in the coming year. Training has been delivered to officers to highlight the importance of learnings being taken from complaints. The process to record and report service improvements quarterly as part of the management information provision the HSCP requires to be developed and delivered within the year. The Council publishes learnings taken from complaints on a quarterly basis, along with statistical information, in compliance with the SPSO's expected requirements of all Scottish local authorities. The Council has procured a new complaint handling relationship management system through the Digital Modernisation Project Board. This will replace the current system, Verint, which has come to its end of life, and this will be implemented during 2024/25. The Council has over the course of the year taken action to centralise resources and expertise to handle complaints for the HSCP and the Council within Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services' Information Governance Team.
- 4.10 Section 6 of the appended report provides detailed information on the complaints which were taken to the SPSO. The SPSO received 12 complaints for Inverclyde Council which is the same number of cases reviewed last year. Four complaints were dealt with under the advice stage and 8 complaints were dealt with at early resolution stage. No complaints were investigated. The SPSO recognised that the Council had demonstrated good complaint handling in 5 of the complaints they reviewed. The SPSO received 8 complaints for the HSCP which is an increase from the 1 received last year. One complaint was dealt with at early resolution stage, and seven complaints were reviewed, 5 complaints were recognised as examples of good complaint handling, 1 complaint was unable to be progress and 1 complaint was dealt with under discretion and an alternative action was proposed. No complaints were investigated in the period. This reflects an increase in the complaints received by the SPSO for the HSCP and the Council's performance showed no change in the numbers being received. It is also an indication of good complaint handling where a right of review was exercised, as the complainant remained dissatisfied with the Council's handling of their complaint.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman – Complaints Determined by Authority and Outcome
 (Tab 4 Joint Health & Social Care Cases Determined and tab 6 Local Authority)
<https://www.spsso.org.uk/statistics-2023-24>

- 4.11 The Council is responsible for ensuring the services provided by Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde meet the required standards and adhere to the complaint handling procedure. In doing this, the Council must establish mechanisms to identify and act on complaint handling performance issues found.
- 4.12 Inverclyde Leisure implemented their complaint handling procedure in March 2017 and have provided their management information for inclusion into the Council’s quarterly and annual reporting requirements to the SPSO.
- 4.13 Riverside Inverclyde implemented their complaint handling procedure from 1 April 2018 and provide quarterly statistical information for inclusion in the reporting for the Council. The volume of complaints from this ALEO continue to be extremely low with an entire year noted where no complaints were received.
- 4.14 Section 7 of the appended report explains that quarterly reports on progress throughout the year are submitted to the Directorate Management Teams for overall review and any actions on a service specific basis and to ensure awareness of the impact on staff resources. Some delays with presentation of these reports has been encountered due to business pressures within the Service.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal/Risk		X
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing		X
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

5.3 **Legal/Risk**

There are no legal or risk implications arising from this report.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

5.5 **Strategic**

This report will help deliver the outcomes in the Council Plan Theme 3 – Performance - high quality and innovative services are provided giving value for money.

6.0 **CONSULTATION**

6.1 The Corporate Management Team has been consulted on this report.

7.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1 None.

Inverclyde Council
Annual Complaints Report
1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Inverclyde Council, along with all other Scottish Local Authorities, follows a model complaint handling procedure (MCHP) which was created by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). This report demonstrates how Inverclyde Council has performed against the 8 key performance indicators that are set by the SPSO and provides an overview of improvements made to services along with positive feedback from service users.

2. THE COMPLAINT HANDLING PROCEDURE

- 2.1. Inverclyde Council co-ordinates the reporting of complaints to the SPSO and this includes the HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde. Each area is responsible for recording their own complaints and providing their management information to Inverclyde Council to enable the consolidated statistical report to be produced quarterly and annually.
- 2.2. The procedure provides a quick, simple, and streamlined process with a strong focus on local, early resolution. This enables issues or concerns to be dealt with as close as possible to the event which gave rise to the service user making the complaint. As far as possible, the complainant should be actively and positively engaged with the process from the outset.
- 2.3. Stage one of the complaint handling procedure should be attempted where there are straightforward issues which are potentially easily resolved with little or no investigation. This should be completed within 5 working days. If the service user remains unhappy following the stage one complaint investigation, they can request that their complaint be escalated to stage two of the procedure.
- 2.4. Stage two of the complaint handling procedure should be used for those matters which are complex, or for serious issues where a thorough investigation will be undertaken. It should also be used for complaints that cannot be resolved at stage one of the procedure. This typically requires a more thorough investigation in order to establish facts prior to reaching conclusion. The complaint points and resolution outcome sought is agreed with the complainant. This complaint should be completed within 20 working days. Should the service user remain unhappy with the investigation of the stage 2 complaint they can exercise their right of review and request the SPSO to look at the issues raised and determine whether they can investigate the matter further.
- 2.5. Escalated stage two of the complaint handling procedure can be used where the service user remains dissatisfied with the way the Council dealt with their complaint at frontline resolution. The complainant can request a detailed investigation under stage two of our complaints handling procedure. This must be undertaken before the complainant can take their complaint to the SPSO to review.
- 2.6. The SPSO reviews complaint outcomes that are referred to them by the service user and decide whether they should investigate the complaint.

3. SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT HANDLING PERFORMANCE BY INDICATORS

Indicator 1: the number of complaints received per 1,000 of the population.

- 3.1. To allow a fair comparison to be made across all 32 Scottish Local Authorities, this indicator looks at the figure of “Complaints per 1,000 of the population”. The total number of complaints received per 1,000 of the population in Inverclyde Council during the reporting period 1 April 2023 - 31 March 2024 was 3.8 complaints. This reflects a decrease of 0.2 when comparing the indicator to the same period last year. The population of Inverclyde Council is estimated to be at around 76,700 residents.
- 3.2. This means that there were 3.8 complaints per 1,000 of the population, or one resident in 250 made a complaint about services. A comparison of this indicator over the past 5 years is shown in the table below.

Table: Number of Complaints received per 1,000 of the population

Year	No of Complaints	Complaints Per 1,000 of the population
2023/24	288	3.8
2022/23	306	4.0
2021/22	317	4.1
2020/21	269	3.5
2019/20	389	5.0

Indicator 2 the number of complaints closed at each stage of the complaint handling procedure.

- 3.2 In the reporting period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024 Inverclyde Council, Inverclyde Leisure and the HSCP received and handled 288 complaints and closed 272 complaints. It should be noted that Riverside Inverclyde did not receive any complaints. The table below shows the percentage of complaints received at each stage of the complaint procedure.

Table: Percentage of complaints closed at each stage of the procedure

Area	Stage 1 % of all closed complaints	Stage 2 % of all closed complaints	Esc stage 2 % of all closed complaints
Inverclyde Council	72.5	23%	4.4%
HSCP	33.9%	66.1%	0%
Inverclyde Leisure	85.7%	14.3%	0%
Riverside Inverclyde	0%	0%	0%
Collective Performance	67.3	27.3%	5.4%

- 3.3. The tables below show the number of complaints received and closed in total, as well as at each stage of the complaint handling procedure for each area over the last 5 years for comparison purposes.

Table: Total number of complaints received by each area

Area	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Inverclyde Council	209	225	244	213	274
HSCP	61	70	61	39	73
Inverclyde Leisure	17	14	12	14	40
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0	0	0	2

Table: Total number of complaints received by each area at stage 1

Area	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Inverclyde Council	148	156	195	162	220
HSCP	23	19	20	25	39
Inverclyde Leisure	17	12	7	13	40
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0	0	0	2

Table: Total number of complaints received by each area at stage 2

Area	2023/24	2023/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Inverclyde Council	47	37	30	24	20
HSCP	30	37	38	10	27
Inverclyde Leisure	0	2	5	0	0
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0	0	0	0

Table: Total number of complaints received by each area at escalated stage 2

Area	2023/24	2023/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Inverclyde Council	9	15	20	12	21
HSCP	0	0	0	1	3
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0	0	1	0
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0	0	0	0

3.4. The table below shows the comparative performance across areas for timescale management across all complaint stages.

Area	Complaints Closed Stage 1	No of complaints meeting timescale	% meeting timescale at Stage 1	Complaints Closed Stage 2	No of complaints meeting timescale at stage 2	% meeting timescale at Stage 2	Complaints Closed Esc Stage 2	No of complaints meeting timescale at Esc stage 2	% meeting timescale at Esc Stage 2
Inverclyde Council	148	122	82.4%	47	35	74.5%	9	6	66.7%
HSCP	23	15	65.2%	30	11	35.7%	0	0	0%
Inverclyde Leisure	17	15	88.2%	0	0	0	0	0	0
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Inverclyde Council had a further 2 complaints at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure where a time extension was used this resulted in the complaints being responded to on-time when using this. The HSCP used a time extension for 8 complaints at stage 1 and for 3 complaints at Stage two.

3.5. The tables below provide a quarterly breakdown of complaints closed and the percentage of complaints received within Inverclyde Council, the HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure and Riverside Inverclyde for each quarter covering the reporting period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The volumes of complaints being received has returned to pre-pandemic norms when comparing to previous years.

Service Area	Qtr. 1 23/24	% complaints	Qtr. 2 23/24	% complaints	Qtr. 3 23/24	% complaints	Qtr. 4 23/24	% complaints	Total	%
Inverclyde Council	48	72%	51	66%	44	72%	66	71%	209	73%
HSCP	15	22.3%	19	25%	13	21%	25	27%	61	21%
Inverclyde Leisure	4	6%	7	9%	4	7%	2	2%	17	6%
Riverside Inverclyde	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	67	100%	77	100%	61	100	93	100%	287	100%

3.6 The tables below provide a monthly breakdown of complaints closed and the percentage of complaints received within each service each quarter covering the reporting period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. For Inverclyde Leisure, Riverside Inverclyde and HSCP the breakdown is only provided for the annualised volume.

Table: Breakdown of closed complaints by service areas each quarter Q3 & Q4

Service Area	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Qtr. 3 23/24	% complaints	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Qtr. 4 23/24	% complaints
Chief Exec Office	1	0	0	1	2.4%	0	0	1	1	1.5%
Education	1	3	4	8	20%	0	11	9	20	30%
Culture, Comm & Educ Resources	7	1	0	8	20%	0	1	2	3	4.5%
Org Dev, Policy & Comms	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0%
Finance	1	2	2	5	12.2%	2	3	6	11	16.6%
Legal, Democratic, Digital & Cust Svs	1	0	0	1	2.4%	0	4	1	5	7.5%
Physical Assets	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0%
Regeneration & Planning	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0	0	0	0%
Environmental Services	2	3	1	6	15%	5	2	4	11	16.6%
Public Protection	3	3	1	7	17%	3*	5*	1	9	13.6%
Roads	2	2	1	5	12.2%	1	3	3	7	10.6%

- In quarter 3 there were 2 invalid complaints, which are excluded from the table below, and 3 Services who did not receive any complaints, including Riverside Inverclyde.
- In Quarter 4, there were 2 invalid complaints which are excluded from the table below and 3 services did not receive any complaints and Riverside Inverclyde

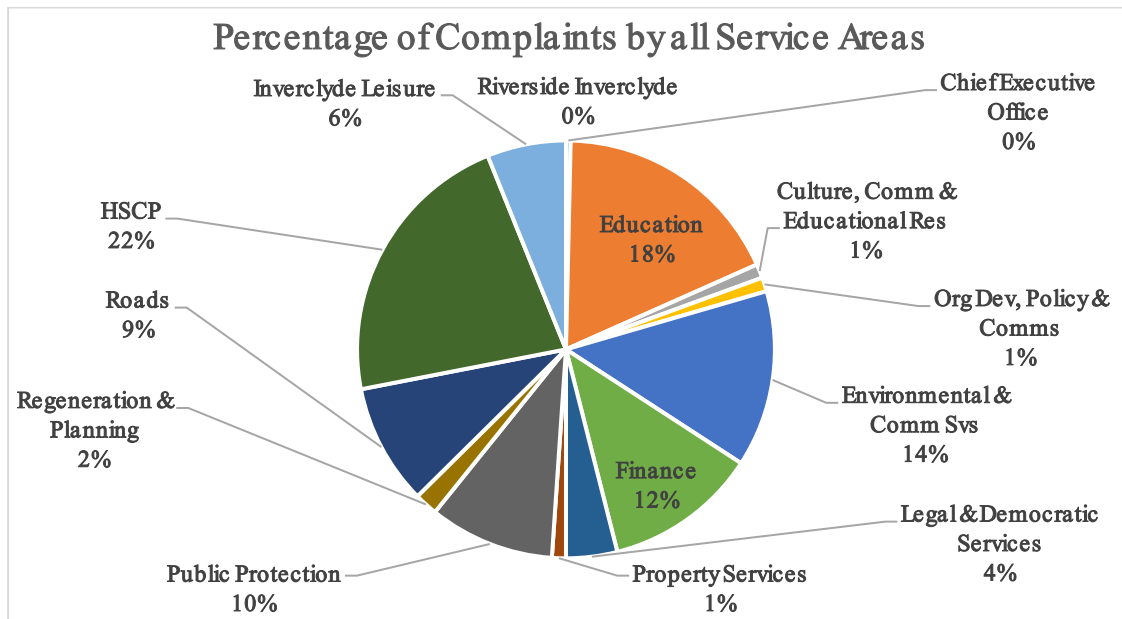
Table: Breakdown of closed complaints by service areas each quarter Q2 & Q1

Service Area	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Q2 23/24	% complaints	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Qtr. 1 23/24	% complaints
Chief Exec Office	0	0	0	0	-	0	0	0	0	-
Education	1	3	5	9	17.64%	2	9	2	13	28.2%
Culture, Communities & Educational Resources	0	0	0	0	-	3	0	0	3	6.5%
Org Dev, Policy & Comms	0	0	0	0	-	0	1	0	1	2.2%
Finance	1	1	4	6	11.8%	4	4	3	11	23.9%
Legal, Democratic, Digital & Cust Svs	1	1	1	3	5.9%	0	1	1	2	4.34%
Physical Assets	0	0	1	1	1.96%	0	1	0	1	2.2%
Regeneration & Planning	1	2	1	4	7.8%	0	1	0	1	2.2%
Environmental Services	6	2	6	14	27.5%	2	4	1	7	13.4%
Public Protection	1	2	2	5	9.8%	4	1	1	6	13.0%
Roads	2	6	3	11	21.6%	1	0	2	3	6.5%

- In quarter 1, all complaints have been closed for this period and one complaint was withdrawn. It should be noted that the Chief Executive Office received no complaints in the period 1 April – 30 June 2023.
- In quarter 2, 7 complaints remained in progress at the time of reporting statistics. The Chief Executive, Culture, Communities & Educational Resources & Organisational Development, Policy & Communications Service received no complaints in the quarter.

3.7 Outlined in the chart below is the percentage of complaints received by each service compared against the total number of complaints received for the reporting period. Riverside Inverclyde, Property Services and the Chief Executive's Office are the only areas that that did not receive any complaints in the reporting period.

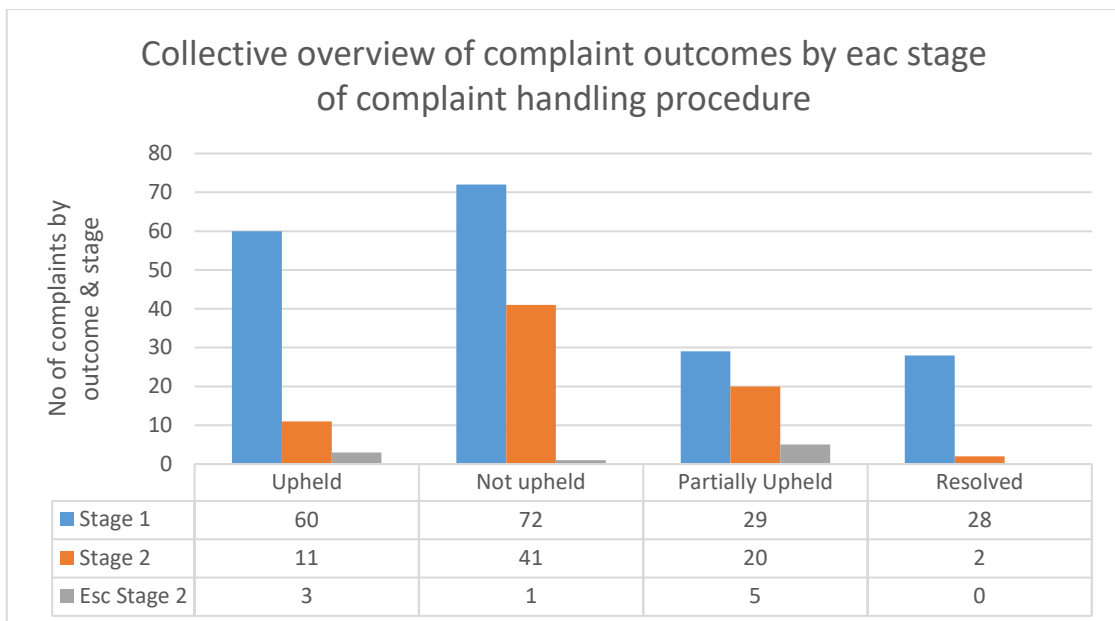
Chart: Annual complaint volumes received 2023/24



Indicator 3 Outcome of Complaint Investigation

3.8 The graph below outlines the outcomes of investigations of all complaints at each of the complaint stages. For every complaint the Council investigates, the service user will be contacted and an explanation of the outcome of the complaint investigation will be confirmed as being either upheld, not upheld, partially upheld, or resolved.

Chart: Complaint Investigation Outcome by each complaint stage all areas



3.9 In summary of all the complaints investigate the outcome reached at each stage are:

- 74 complaints were upheld across all complaint stages.
- 54 complaints were partially upheld across all complaint stages.
- 114 Completed were not upheld across all complaint stages.
- 30 complaints were resolved across all complaint stages.

Chart: Inverclyde Council only – outcome by each complaint stage

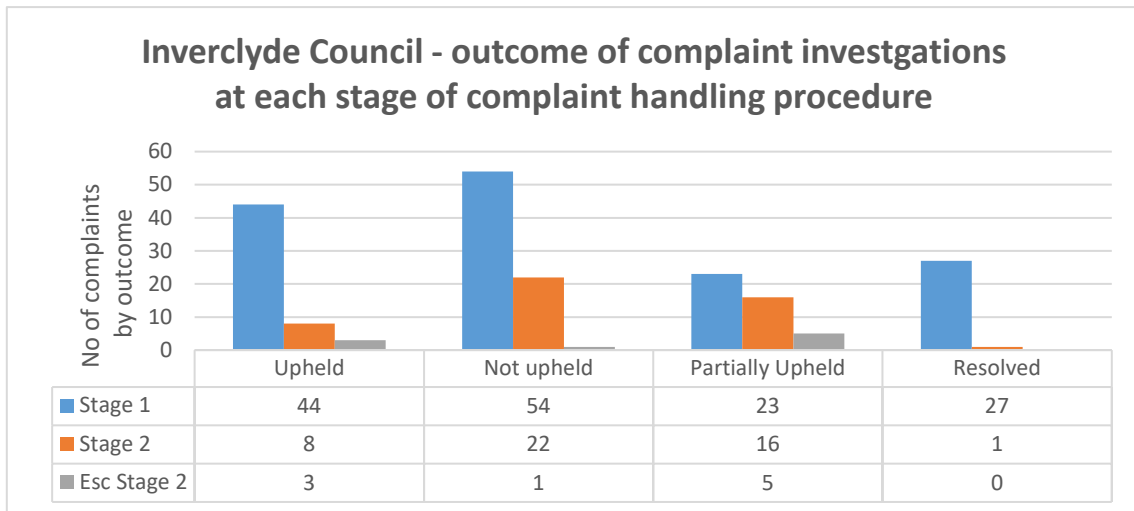


Chart: HSCP only – outcome of each complaint stage of the complaint handling procedure

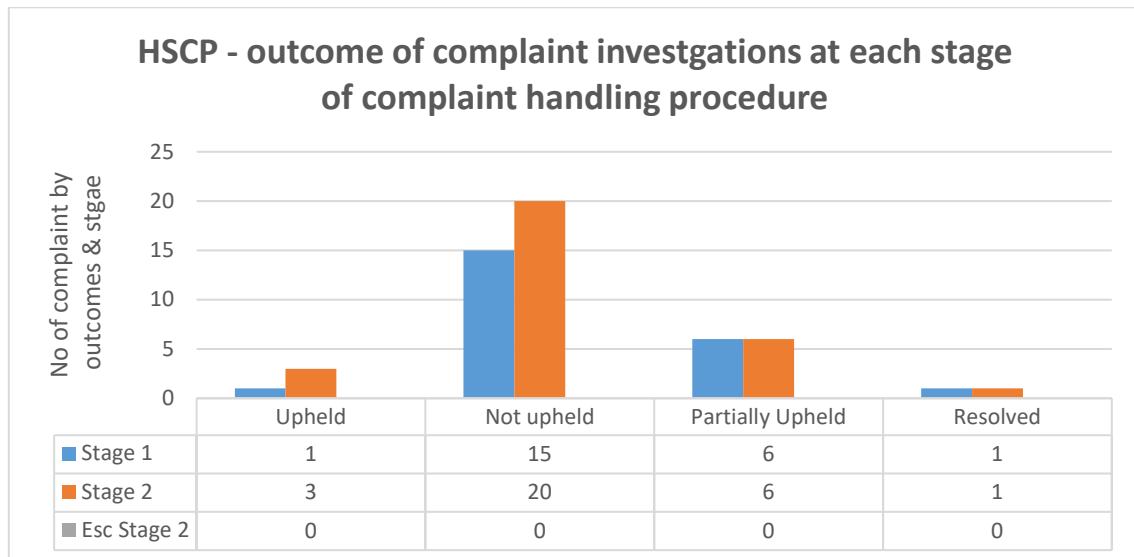
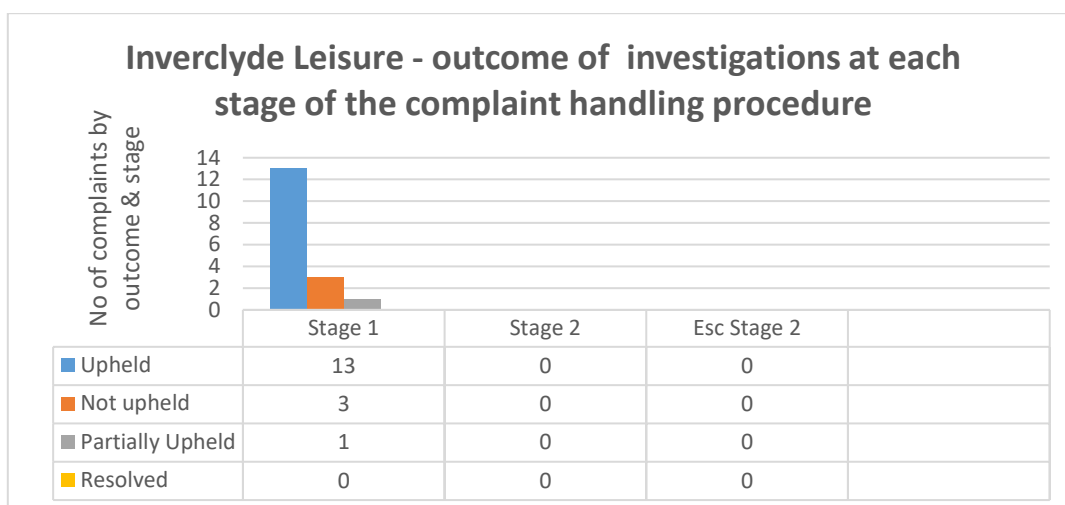


Chart: Inverclyde Leisure only – outcome of each complaint stage of the complaint handling procedure



Indicator 4 – average timescales for resolving complaints.

3.10 The table below outlines each areas performance on the average time taken to close complaints at each stage of the complaint handling procedure. The key performance indicators for complaints that are handled at stage 1 of the procedure should be closed by day 5 or sooner. Complaints handled at stage 2 or escalated stage 2 should be closed by day 20 or sooner. The only exception to this is where a time extension is used at any complaint stage which allows a further 5 days on top of the key performance indicator. The average time taken to close a complaint at each complaint stage has been:

Area	Stage 1 – Average time to close complaint	Stage 2 – Average time to close complaint	Escalated Stage 2 – Average time to close complaint
Inverclyde Council	4.6 days	15.6 days	17.4 days
HSCP	4.7 days	32.1 days	-
Inverclyde Leisure	1.7 days	-	-
Riverside Inverclyde	-	-	-
Collective	4.3 days	21.5 days	17.4 days

3.11 Inverclyde Council's collective performance measures on timescale management across all stages of the complaint procedure and covering the last 5 years for comparison purposes.

Table: Collective complaint handling – average timescale for resolving complaints

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Stage 1 Frontline Resolution					
No of complaints received	189	187	222	200	287
No of complaints – closed at stage 1 within 5 days	160	146	187	138	229
% Complaints meeting timescale (includes complaints that were time extended & completed on time)	84.7%	78.1%	84.3%	85.2%	83.6%
No of complaints closed at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed	69.5%	67.3%	70.5%	80%	80.2%
Ave working days taken stage 1 complaints	4.3 days	4.4 days	4.1 days	4.6 days	3.7 days
Stage 2 Investigation					
No of complaints received	74	76	73	35	47
No of complaints – closed at stage 2 within 20 days	48	51	46	19	34
% Complaints Meeting timescale (includes complaints that were time extended & completed on time)	59.5%	67.1%	63%	79.2%	76.7%
No of complaints closed at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed	27.2%	27.3%	23.2%	14%	13.1%
Ave working days taken stage 2 complaints	21.5 days	20.8 days	23.1 days	15.2 days	18 days
Escalated Stage 2 Investigation					
No of complaints received	9	15	25	15	24
No of complaints – closed at escalated stage 2 within 20 days	6	12	13	11	14
% Complaints Meeting timescale (includes complaints that were time extended & completed on time)	66.7%	80%	65%	91.7%	75%
No of complaints closed at escalated stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed	3.3%	5.4%	6.3%	6%	6.7%
Ave working days taken escalated stage 2 complaints	17.4 days	20.5 days	19.8 days	16.6 days	18.3 days

3.12 The key overarching action that is required is to reduce the time taken to investigate and close complaint handled at stage 2 of the complaint handling procedure as we have exceeded the 20-day timescale. The impact that one area's deteriorating performance has on the overall performance achieved is where the opportunity to improve exists.

3.13 The tables below outline the management of complaints within the prescribed timescale for each complaint stage and broken down by each area's complaint handling performance.

Table: Inverclyde Council performance – average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1	2023/24	2022/23	2021 /22	2020 /21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at stage 1 within 5 days	148	129	167	138	172
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	83.6%	83.6%	87.4%	85.2%	87%
Ave working days taken stage 1	4.6 days	4.0 days	3.6 days	4.6 days	3.9 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at stage 2 within 20 days	47	31	23	19	14
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	78.5%	83.8%	76.7%	79.2%	80%
Ave working days taken stage 2	15.6 days	13.9 days	17 days	15.2 days	16.1 days
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2 within 20 days	9	12	13	11	14
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	66.7%	80%	68.4%	91.7%	81.8%
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	17.4 days	20.5 days	20.8 days	16.6 days	15.7 days

Table: HSCP performance– average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at stage 1 within 5 days	23	7	15	14	39
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	100%	36.84%	75%	56%	72%
Ave working days taken stage 1	4.7 days	9.7 days	4.4 days	9.3 days	5.3 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021 /22	2020/21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at stage 2 within 20 days	30	20	20	6	27
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	46.7%	54.1%	52.6%	60%	74%
Ave working days taken stage 2	32.1 days	28.5 days	30.8 days	22.3 days	19.5 days
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021 /22	2020/21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2 within 20 days	0	0	0	1	3
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	0	0	-	0%	0%
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	0	-	-	27 days	31 days

Table: Inverclyde Leisure performance – average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020 /21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at stage 1 within 5 days	17	12	6	13	40
% Complaints Meeting timescale	100%	100%	85.7%	100%	100%
Ave working days taken stage 1	1.7 days	1 day	1 day	1 day	1 day
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020 /21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at stage 2 within 20 days	0	2	5	1	0
% Complaints Meeting timescale	0	100%	100%	100%	0
Ave working days taken stage 2	0	5 days	10 days	10 days	0
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020 /21	2019/20
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2 within 20 days	0	0	0	0	0
% Complaints Meeting timescale	0	0	0	0	0
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	0	0	0	0	0

Table: Riverside Inverclyde performance – average timescale for resolving complaints

Stage 1	2023/24	2022/23	2021 /22	2020/21	2019/ 20
No of complaints – closed at stage 1 within 5 days	0	0	0	0	2
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	0	0	0	N/A	2
Ave working days taken stage 1	0	0	0	N/A	2 days
Stage 2 Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021 /22	2020/21	2019/ 20
No of complaints – closed at stage 2 within 20 days	0	0	0	0	0
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	0	0	0	N/A	0
Ave working days taken stage 2	0	0	0	N/A	0
Stage 2 Escalated Investigation	2023/24	2022/23	2021 /22	2020/21	2019/ 20
No of complaints – closed at esc stage 2 within 20 days	0	0	0	0	0
% Complaints Meeting timescale inc those time extended	0	0	0	N/A	0
Ave working days taken esc stage 2	0	0	0	N/A	0

3.13 Services must maintain focus on ensuring complaints received are recorded and that officers follow the complaint handling procedure. Particular attention should be given to the timescales for resolving complaints at all stages of the complaint handling procedure. When comparing in isolation the Council's complaint handling performance it is noted that the timescales taken to resolve complaints have increased at all stages, which affects the average days reported.

3.14 The average days taken to resolve complaints in stage 2 complaints have increased in HSCP's complaint performance. Most of the delays have been during periods when HSCP services were under considerable pressure within particular service areas who are seeing the highest volume of complaints, this is coupled with increased Freedom of Information Requests and Subject Access Requests, which have increased considerably in response to the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry and the related Redress Scheme. Additionally, the complexity of some of the complaints has seen thorough and considerable investigations being undertaken. This will be an area for focus in the

coming year. Training has been rolled out across the HSCP on the importance of complaints, together with support from the management team and greater collaboration within service areas supporting the improvements required. The training programme seen many officers completing the SPSO training to support the ongoing improvement actions.

Indicator 5 - Performance against timescales for Stage 1 Complaints:

In the current year

3.15 The Council aims to close all stage 1 complaints within 5 working days. In 2023/24 the collective performance noted for stage 1 complaint was 187 complaints were closed, with 146 of these closed within timescale which equates to 78.1% response within timescale. 3 (1.6%) complaints were closed after an extension was agreed with the service user.

Table: Number of complaints closed within timescale and percentages stage 1

Reporting period	No of complaints closed	Within timescale	%	No with extension	%
2023/24	189	150	79.4%	10	5.3%
2022/23	187	146	78.1%	3	1.6%
2021/22	222	186	83.8%	7	3.2%
2020/21	200	169	84.5%	5	2.5%
2019/20	287	229	79.8%	27	9.4%

Indicator 5 – performance against timescales for Stage 2 Complaints

3.16 The Council aims to close all stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. In 2023/24, the Council closed 76 complaints, with 51 of these complaints being closed within timescale, which equates to 67.1% response within timescale.

Table: Number of complaints closed within timescale and percentages stage 2

Reporting period	No of complaints closed	Within timescale	%	No with extension	%
2023/24	74	44	59.5%	4	5.4%
2022/23	76	51	67.1%	0	0%
2021/22	73	46	63%	5	6.8%
2020/21	35	26	74.3%	3	8.6%
2019/20	47	34	72.3%	11	23.4%

Indicator 5 - performance against timescales escalated stage 2 complaints.

3.17 The Council aims to close all escalated stage 2 complaints within 20 working days. In 2023/24, the Council closed 15 complaints, with 12 of these complaints being closed within timescale which equates to 80% response within timescale.

Table: Number of complaints closed within timescale and percentages escalated stage 2

Reporting period	No of complaints closed	Within timescale	%	No with extension	%
2023/24	9	6	66.7%	0	0%
2022/23	15	12	80%	0	0%
2021/22	20	13	65%	2	10%
2020/21	15	12	80%	0	0%
2019/20	24	14	58.3%	6	25%

Table: Showing each areas performance against timescales at each stage of the complaint handling procedure.

	Stage 1 no of closed complaints	No of Stage 1 complaints within timescale	% Include time ext. complaints	No of complaints with time ext.	%
Inverclyde Council	148	122	82.4%	2	1.4%
HSCP	23	15	65.2%	8	35.8%
Inverclyde Leisure	17	15	88.2%	0	0%

	Stage 2 no of closed complaints	No stage 2 complaints within timescale	% Include time ext. complaints	No of Complaint with time ext.	%
Inverclyde Council	47	35	74.5%	2	4.3%
HSCP	30	11	36.7%	3	10%
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0	0%	0	0%

	Esc Stage 2 no of closed complaints	No of esc stage 2 complaints within timescale	% Include time ext. complaints	No of complains with time ext.	%
Inverclyde Council	9	6	66.7%	0	0%
HSCP	0	0	0%	0	0%
Inverclyde Leisure	0	0	0%	0	0%

Indicator 6 - Extensions to Complaint Timescales

3.18 The complaint handling procedure allows officers to seek an extension to the timescales permitted for stage one and stage two complaint investigations. The maximum period permitted to extend the timescale of a complaint is 5 days for both complaint stages. This indicator reports the number and percentage of complaints at each stage of the procedure, which were closed after an extension to the 5 days, or 20-day timescale was authorised.

Complaint stage	No of extensions agreed	% as a total of all complaints
Stage 1 complaints	10 extensions were agreed	5.3% of total complaints
Stage 2 complaints	4 extensions were agreed	5.4% of total complaints
Escalated stage 2 complaints	0 extensions were agreed	0% of total complaints

4 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

4.1 The SPSO has recommended that all Local Authorities should be completing customer satisfaction surveys with service users regularly to gain true insight on how well they are handling complaints. This standardised approach has been delayed this year to allow the development of a straight through process within the complaint handling system to support capturing this feedback in an efficient manner. The Council is developing the process to enable a customer satisfaction survey to be automatically issued once a complaint is closed. The survey will seek feedback using a standard set of questions that have been agreed for use by the SPSO as part of the collection of feedback to assist with suggestions and opportunities for improvement. The HSCP, Inverclyde Leisure, Riverside Inverclyde are also required to implement the survey being issued to complainants. The implementation will be planned for once the new complaint handling system is implemented and the process embedded.

5 LEARNING FROM COMPLAINTS

5.1 The Council is committed to reflecting on occasions when it does not get it right in order to highlight opportunities for improvement. As such, where a complaint has been upheld or partially upheld, the service determines what actions are required to support improvement and prevent a repeat of circumstances that led to the complaint.

5.2 Service improvement recording commenced in November 2016 for Inverclyde Council only. Service improvement tracking requires to be developed for the HSCP as this is not currently in place, although work is underway to implement this once the new complaint handling system is implemented across the Council and the HSCP which enables tracking of this information in a centralised way.

5.3 The Council shares the outcomes of complaint investigations and a selection of actions taken as a result of complaints on a quarterly basis with the Corporate Management Team. The learnings are published on the Council's website each quarter along with the quarterly statistics although there has been some noted delays in this being actioned timely due to pressure within the wider team.

6 SCOTTISH PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN (SPSO) – RIGHT OF REVIEW

6.1 Following a stage two investigation and written response, if a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint investigation, they have a right of review through the SPSO. The table below outlines the number complaints received at the SPSO for Inverclyde Council and HSCP.

Table: Complaints received by the SPSO for a review

Year	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Inverclyde Council	12	10	12	7	15	15
HSCP	7	1	4	3	11	6

6.2 The SPSO reviewed 12 complaints for Inverclyde Council of which 4 complaints were reviewed at the advice stage and these complaints was not taken forward. Eight complaints were reviewed at the early resolution stage of the procedure. The outcome of these reviews were as follows:

- 5 complaints were recognised as examples of good complaint handling;
- 1 complaints were reviewed and insufficient benefit would be gained from further investigation of the complaint;
- 2 complaints were where there existed a right of appeal to court/tribunal/ or Scottish Ministers.

6.3 The SPSO reviewed 8 HSCP complaints of which 1 was conducted at early resolution stage and not taken forward. Seven complaints were reviewed at early resolution stage of their procedre. The outcome of these reviews were as follows:

- 5 complaints were recognised as examples of good complaint handling,
- 1 complaint was unable to be proceed.
- 1 complaint was under discretion and an alternative action was proposed.

6.4 . The table below outlines the SPSO's published statistics for Inverclyde Council. This reflects a redudcation of 2 complaints being reviewed by the SPSO when comparing the data to the same period last year.

Table: SPSO breakdown by reviews by stage and outcomes for Inverclyde Council

Stage	Outcome Group	Inverclyde Council
Advice	A&G - Complaint submissions - mature	0
	A&G - Complaint submissions - premature	2
	A&G - Enquiries	2
	Organisation not in jurisdiction	0
	Total	4
Early Resolution	Cause and impact test not met (s 5 (3))	0
	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	1
	Discretion – Alternative action proposed	0
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available	0
	Discretion – Good complaint handling	5
	Discretion – Referred back	0
	Discretion – Resolved - both parties satisfied with proposed outcome	0
	Member of the public test not met (s 5 (6))	0
	No response to contact	0
	Organisation not in jurisdiction	0
	Premature	0
	Right of appeal to court/tribunal/Scottish ministers (s 7 (8))	2
	Subject matter not in jurisdiction	0
	Time limit (s 10)	0
	Unable to proceed	0
Total	8	
Investigation	Fully upheld	0
	Not duly made or withdrawn	0
	Not upheld	0
	Resolved	0
	Some upheld	0
	Total	0
Total		12

6.5 The SPSO reviewed one complaint for the HSCP and no complaints were investigated. One complaint was taken through an alternative proposed action. Overall this reflects an decrease of 3 complaints when comparing data to the same period last year. The table below outlines the SPSO’s published statistics for the HSCP.

Table: SPSO breakdown by reviews by stage and outcomes for HSCP

Stage	Outcome Group	HSCP
Advice	A&G - Complaint submissions - mature	1
	A&G - Complaint submissions - premature	0
	A&G - Enquiries	0
	Total	1
Early Resolution	Discretion – Insufficient benefit would be achieved by investigation	0
	Discretion – alternative action proposed	1
	Discretion – Alternative route used or available	0
	Discretion - Good complaint handling	5
	Discretion – referred back to the area	0

	Discretion - Resolved - both parties satisfied with proposed outcome	0
	Premature	0
	Subject matter not in jurisdiction	0
	Time limit (s 10)	0
	Unable to proceed	1
	Total	7
Investigation	Fully upheld	0
	Not duly made or withdrawn	0
	Not upheld	0
	Resolved	0
	Some upheld	0
	Total	0
		8

7 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

7.1 The Council reports and publishes its complaint statistics in line with performance indicators published by the SPSO. Some aspects of the indicators are currently being developed and will be included in the core performance indicators applicable to all sectors (similar to those released in the draft MCHP).

8 POSITIVE COMMENTS

8.1 Throughout the year the Council receives positive comments and compliments from service users across all services. These recognise where employees have gone above and beyond the normal standard of service delivery and these compliments are shared with the service teams concerned.

9 TRAINING

9.1 Complaint handling training forms part of the induction process for all new staff joining the Council. Line managers identify which new staff require training, which involves completion of the complaint handling procedure e-learning module followed by attendance at a digital or face-to-face training course on the more practical aspects of dealing with complaints using the complaint handling procedure. Each year, the Education Service provides an induction training programme to all relevant staff who will be required to deal with complaints which also includes the use of the complaint handling system training.

9.2 Refresher training is provided on a regular basis on request from service areas and where it is deemed necessary. This includes the use of the complaint handling system. All training is tracked using personal individual development plans. A total of 154 hours training has been delivered during the course of 2023/24 for the Council.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1** The Council is committed to investigating, learning from and taking action as a result of individual complaints where it is found that standards have fallen below the level expected and where services could be improved. By listening to the views of service users who make a complaint, the Council can improve its services.
- 10.2** In the coming year, the key action for services to focus on is to reduce the time taken to respond to complaints at each stage of the complaint handling process. This is particularly relevant when the Council is seeing an increase in the complexity of complaints received by it. Balancing the need to deal with complex complaints timeously alongside all other priorities and challenges facing the Council will be essential whilst also managing the resources required to support this.
- 10.3** The Council will also be preparing for the implementation of the Child Friendly Complaint procedure, which will be included within the Model Complaint Handling Procedure. The principles of the Child Friendly Complaint Procedure will underpin how to handle and investigate complaints involving children in a way that respects their rights under the The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024. A pilot involving local authorities who agreed to test the process and guidance materials is underway. Feedback arising from the pilot will be factored into the materials in preparation for the wider roll out which will be implemented in 2024. Training will be undertaken in preparation for this change. The Council will also be preparing for the new complaint handling system which will be introduced in late 2024.

Report To:	Policy & Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services	Report No:	LS/054/24
Contact Officer:	Carol Craig-McDonald	Contact No:	01475 712725
Subject:	Freedom of Information Annual Report 2023		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 This is an agreed routine annual monitoring report to provide the Policy & Resources Committee with details of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Council during the period 1 January – 31 December 2023.

1.3 The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) came into effect on 1 January 2005. Under FOISA, a person who requests information from a Scottish public authority which holds it is entitled to be given it by the authority, subject to certain conditions and exemptions which are set out in the FOISA. The Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (the EIRs) also came into force on 1 January 2005 and give the public rights of access to environmental information held by Scottish public authorities.

1.4 The Council has adopted the Model Publication Scheme 2016 which was produced and approved by the Scottish Information Commissioner on 29 March 2016. The Model Publication Scheme (MPS) and the Council's Guide to information available through the MPS are on the Council's website at <http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/>.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- (1) Notes the information provided in relation to FOI requests received by the Council during 2023.
- (2) Approves the publication of the annual performance report on the Council's website.

Lynsey Brown
Head of Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 FOISA provides a right of access to recorded information held by Scottish public authorities subject to certain conditions and exemptions which are set out in the FOISA.
- 3.2 The Council has adopted the Model Publication Scheme 2016 which was produced and approved by the Scottish Information Commissioner on 29 March 2016. The Model Publication Scheme (MPS) and the Council's Guide to information available through the MPS are on the Council's website at <http://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/>. The Council's Guide provides information on: -
- what information is available (and what is not available) in relation to each class;
 - charges that may be applied;
 - how to find the information easily;
 - contact details for enquiries and help with accessing the information; and
 - how to request information held by the Council that has not been published.
- 3.3 An applicant for information has the right to ask the Council to review its action and/or decisions if they are dissatisfied with the way in which the Council has dealt with the request for information. If still dissatisfied with the review decision, or if the review decision has not been received within 20 working days, an applicant may appeal to the Scottish Information Commissioner.
- 3.4 The Scottish Information Commissioner has since April 2013 asked all Scottish public authorities to provide statistics on FOI requests and requests under the EIRs, the number of Subject Access Requests received, details of reviews dealt with, and exemptions/exceptions applied on a quarterly basis. These statistics are available on the Scottish Information Commissioner's website at <http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/>.
- 3.5 Although the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC) has no locus in relation to Subject Access Requests (SARs), this information is collected to see how the number of FOI and EIR requests authorities receive compares to the number of SARs received.

4.0 PROPOSAL

- 4.1 During 2023, a total of 1151 requests under FOI, 99 under the EIRs and 132 SARs were received. The annual report on performance during 2023 is appended to this report.
- 4.2 Section 2 of the appended report provides a comparison with the number of FOI and EIR requests received by the Council from 2016 to 2023. Members will note that, in comparison with volumes received during 2022, that there has been an 8.2% increase in the overall number of FOI/EIR requests dealt with by the Council. The volume of requests being received has normalised post the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4.3 Section 2 of the appended report details in full the source of applicants who submitted requests over the course of the year. The top three sources of requestors who submit FOI requests are recorded as Individuals at 36.6%, Parliamentary Assistants at 15% and Media and Newspaper Sources at 12.3%. Additionally, there were 11.62% of requests associated under the category of 'Others' however this cannot be quantified from the source of where these requests came from.
- 4.4 The Council's responses to FOI and EIRs for on time, late and failed to respond rates, as well as percentages of key performance indicators which is used by the SIC when comparing performance of other Scottish local authorities, is detailed in section 4 of the appended report. The Council responded to 94% of information requests on time and had a failure rate of 6% for responding late or failing to respond to information requests during 2023. This reflects a 3% improvement on both the on-time

and failure response rate which is reflective of the increased monitoring, and work by service areas, which has been undertaken throughout 2023. The Council is continuing to work on sustaining the time taken to respond to requests, following the intervention that was opened by the SIC in 2022, and reported to Committee with the 2021 Annual Report on 15 November 2022. The intervention was closed by the SIC on 18 May 2023.

- 4.5 FOI/EIR requests are dealt with within existing staff resources and are recorded and co-ordinated centrally by Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services. In addition, Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Services deal with any requests which are specific to the service and all of the corporate requests, the preparation and submission of quarterly statistical returns to the SIC and quarterly monitoring reports to the Corporate Management Team (CMT). This is supported by staff within the directorates who deal with service specific requests.
- 4.6 Quarterly reports on progress throughout the year are submitted to the CMT for overall review and any actions on a service specific basis and to ensure awareness of the impact on staff resources.
- 4.7 The information management system Workpro has been in use throughout 2023 for the processing of FOI requests. Benefit from the system has been realised in terms of how we are responding to and managing the FOI requests across all services and in particular timescale management using the reports within the suite. Further training was delivered to support the ongoing development of knowledge across all officers who deal with FOI requests.
- 4.8 Monitoring of performance continues to be undertaken using the Day 15 FOI work progress report which was implemented in January 2022. The Information Governance Team continues to issue this report on a weekly basis to the Extended Corporate Management Team (ECMT). The report highlights those cases that may require assistance from and escalation to managers to expedite prompt responses to requests. This is particularly important when a response has not yet been issued and the statutory response deadline is approaching. The implementation of this process is continuing to have a positive effect – in that improved response times generally and for more complicated requests have been noted. Monitoring will continue to maintain oversight on performance.
- 4.9 The FOI workflow summary continues to be used by services, the purpose of which is to improve officer understanding of the FOI process, to act as a reminder on the process that should be followed and to remind officers of the escalation points to assist with sustaining focus on the response timescales being met and the quality of responses being improved. These stringent measures remain in place within services to ensure the appropriate timely actions are taken by services when responding to requests. These measures sit alongside the above-mentioned Day 15 report that is issued weekly to senior managers to highlight cases that may require assistance from managers in order to expedite a prompt response to requests. The CMT, along with the Information Governance Team, continue to support the focus on key actions that are required each week, which has assisted in improving performance in subsequent quarterly performance statistics to date.
- 4.10 As reported to Committee last year, the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC) opened a Level 1 Intervention in respect of the Council's failure to comply with FOISA. Specifically, this action was taken by SIC as a result of concerns with the elevated levels of both late responses and requests where the Council failed to respond. The Council responded to the Level 1 Intervention providing supporting information and details of actions that were being taken to address non-compliance with the statutory timescales. Ongoing monitoring continued throughout 2023 to support the improvements sought by the SIC and the Council. The table below highlights the quarterly trends for the Council's FOI response failure rate. The SIC wrote to the Council on 18 May 2023 to close the Level 1 Intervention noting significant improvements made in response times. The Information Governance Team will continue to work with services to ensure that these improvements are sustained.

Period	FOI/EIRs responded to within Statutory Timescale	% On time	FOI/EIRs responded to out with Statutory Timescale	Requests not responded to	% of failed to respond within statutory timescale rate
Jan - Mar 2021	152	82.6%	32	0	17.4%
Apr - Jun 2021	155	68.9%	70	0	31.1%
Jul - Sept 2021	180	79.6%	43	3	20.4%
Oct - Dec 2021	269	85.4%	43	3	14.6%
Jan - Mar 2022	324	90%	33	3	10%
Apr - Jun 2022	344	91%	29	2	9%
July - Sept 2022	280	89.2%	32	2	10.8%
Oct - Dec 2022	395	94.7%	22	0	5.3%
Jan - Mar 2023	367	91.6%	28	6	8.4%
Apr - Jun 2023	348	92.3%	21	7	7.7%
July - Sept 2023	346	95.3%	17	0	4.7%
Oct - Dec 2023	407	96.67%	14	0	3.32%

4.11 An internal audit of the FOI process was undertaken between August and October 2022 in accordance with the 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan. The audit identified 6 green issues which if implemented by management would enhance the control environment. The overall control environment opinion for this audit review was Satisfactory. The Legal, Democratic, Digital & Customer Service are implementing the agreed actions in the action plan, which it is hoped will further improve the Council's performance. Update on progress reflected in the undernoted table

Audit Finding	Update on agreed action	Status
Business continuity arrangements involving the Workpro FOI/EIR case system	Training delivered to key officers to strengthen coverage across the key processes.	Completed
Managing quality assurance arrangements for FOI and EIR requests	Sample checks were carried out to ensure appropriate use of exemptions, appropriate use of information not held exemption, reasons for late responses and to review quality of responses. Training and guidance shared with FOI designated officers on areas that required focus.	Completed
Supporting people to easily locate the Council's published information	Finalise the completion of the council's publication scheme. Proactive publication to be promoted to all service areas to support the location of information sought without requirement to submit formal request	Due by 31/12/2024
Allocating FOI and EIR requests to services for processing	Services without a central mailbox for requests were consulted to see if they would introduce a centralised mailbox approach for receipt of requests to support coverage of key processes. This was introduced by 5 additional Service Area. The remaining Services has stated their preference to retain their current arrangements	Completed

Lack of enforced password change and regular review of access rights to Workpro.	Workpro users will be reminded of the need to occasionally change their passwords which will comply with the ICT recommended practices	Completed
Adequacy of the procedures for managing FOI and EIRs requests	All FOI Guidance ad Workpro Guidance for officers to be reviewed and updated thereafter to ICON.	Drafting of the procedures has been commenced. To be finalised by 31/12/24.

4.12 As noted by Committee in May 2023, information on the time spent and estimated costs of dealing with FOI and EIR requests across the Council is no longer collated or reported annually to Committee. Officers considered that there is no tangible benefit from the collection of this information, and no statutory requirement for local authorities to report on it.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO	N/A
Financial	x		
Legal/Risk	x		
Human Resources		x	
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	x		
Equalities & Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing			x
Environmental & Sustainability			x
Data Protection			x

5.2 Finance

All costs associated with dealing with FOI and EIR requests, reviews, and appeals and SARs are contained within existing budgets.

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 makes a limited provision for refusing requests which incur an excessive cost, and partially for recharging those that would cost the authority more than £100 to process. The Environmental Information Regulations allows for full recharge of the cost of dealing with requests.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

5.3 Legal/Risk

The Council is legally bound to comply with FOISA and the EIRs. The Scottish Information Commissioner has powers of enforcement which can be used where a public authority is consistently failing to comply with the legislation.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no human resource implications directly arising from this report

5.5 Strategic

This report helps deliver Council Plan Theme 3 Outcome: Performance – high quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
x	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function, or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision: -

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children’s rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
x	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy, or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 None.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

Inverclyde Council

Freedom of Information

Report on information requests received from

1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023

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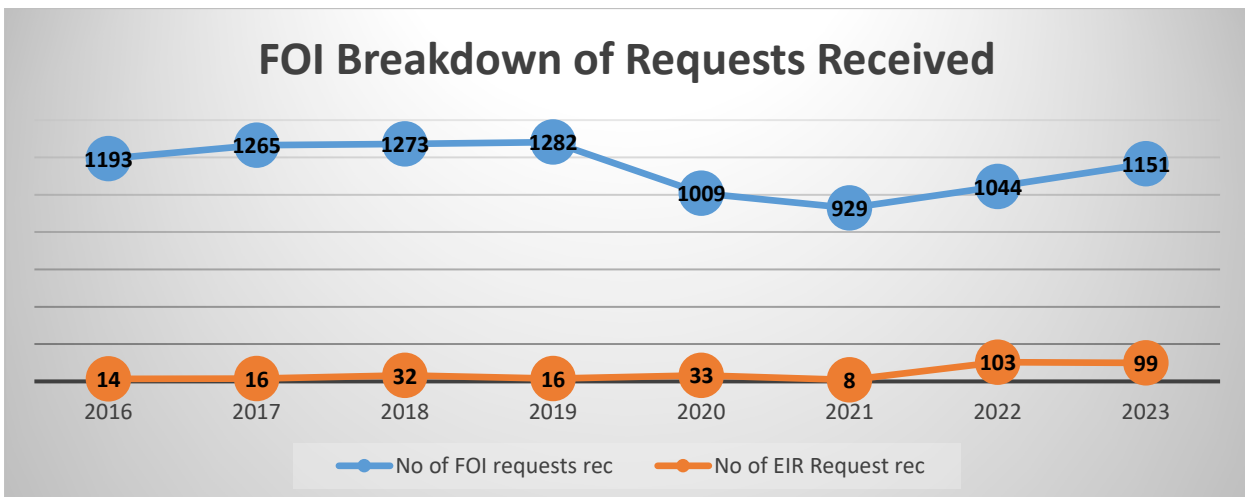
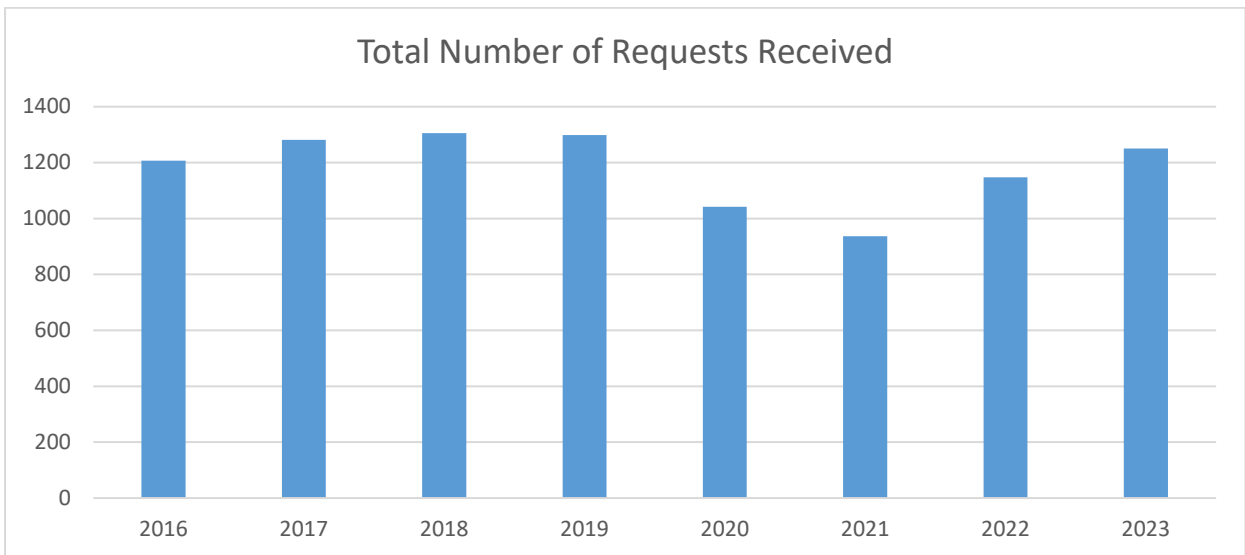
1. Introduction

This report outlines the volume of information requests received during the period 1 January to 31 December 2023 and provides a performance review across the Council's processing of these requests. It also considers the use of exemptions, fees, reviews, and appeals.

The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) and the associated Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs) provide a statutory right to access information that is held by Scottish Public Authorities. FOISA encourages openness and accountability and helps to build trust between the Council and the public it serves.

2. Volume of requests received

Inverclyde Council (including the HSCP) received 1250 requests for information in 2023 compared to 1147 received in the previous year. This figure represents an 8.2% increase in the number of information requests received during 2023. This total comprised of 1151 requests under FOISA (1044 in 2022) and 99 under the EIRs (103 in 2022). This is an increased number of EIRs which is largely down to more accurate categorisation of these requests. The Council also received 132 Data Subject Access Request (SARs) which is a 50% increase when comparing to last year's SARs of 88 requests.



3. The Nature of requests

The requests for information have been received from a variety of sources as noted in the table below. The top three sources of requests have been received from individuals – 36.6%, parliamentary assistants - 14.02% and media and newspaper sources – 12.3%. Additionally, there were 11.6% of requests associated under the category of Others however this cannot be quantified from the source of where these requests came from. The information was not recorded in 40 requests which we received and responded to.

Source of request	% of requests 2023	% Of requests 2022	% Of requests - 2021
Individual	36.6%	37.80%	42.9%
Commercial Firm	8.3%	9.41%	18.3%
Media / Newspaper	12.3%	15.07%	15.7%
Parliamentary Assistant	15%	14.02%	9.28%
Charity / Third Sector	2.7%	3.31%	4.2%
Legal Firm	1.3%	2.44%	2.5%
Other	11.6%	14.20%	1.3%
Students	0.6%	0.44%	1.28%
Trade Union	0.88%	0.44%	1.17%
Researchers	5.36%	1.48%	1.06%
Client	0.88%	0.52%	0.4%
Employee	0.0007%	0.44%	0.3%
Political Party MSP	0.96%	0.44%	0.1%

4. Performance

The table below compares the Council's responses to FOIs and EIRs for on time, late and failure to respond rates as well as percentages of key performance indicators which are used by the Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC) when comparing performance with other Scottish local authorities. The statistics reflect what was reported to the SIC at the time of submitting the Council's statistical return. The Council responded to 94% of information requests on time and had a failure rate of 5% for responding late or failing to respond to information requests during 2023. A decrease is evident in the number of FOIs/EIRs failure rate when comparing the key performance indicators in 2022 to the previous year. The Council ended the year with 8 requests, which were not responded to, and 56 requests which were responded to late. Those FOIs which were not responded to now have FOIs been, which reflects the position as noted as part of the quarterly provision of the Council's statistical updates to the SIC.

No of requests received	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No of FOIs rec in calendar year	1193	1265	1273	1282	1009	929	1044	1151
No of EIRs rec in calendar year	14	16	32	16	33	8	103	99
Total requests rec in the year	1207	1281	1305	1298	1042	937	1147	1250

On time Response Performance numbers and %	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No of responses issued within timescales during the year	1010	1063	1042	1144	820	748	1049	1174
Percentage of requests answered within timescale	86%	92%	84%	91%	80%	80%	91%	94%

FOI not responded to failure rate numbers & %	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No of request where we failed to respond during the year	0	0	0	0	15	4	7	8
No of responses issued late during the year	151	95	197	119	187	188	116	56
Failure rate for responses issued during the year%	14%	8%	16%	9%	20%	20%	9%	5%

During 2023, there was a continued increased focus on the Council's performance when responding to FOIs, as it recognised the number of responses being issued late was too high in previous years. The Council continued to apply more stringent measures within services to ensure the appropriate timely actions are taken when responding to requests. These measures sit alongside a Day 15 report that is issued weekly to senior managers to highlight cases that may require assistance from managers to expedite a prompt response to requests. The Corporate Management Team, along with the Information Governance Team, supports the focus on key actions required each week and this has assisted with the improved performance seen in the 2023 statistics, which show the best performance for a number of years.

In February 2022, a Level 1 Intervention was opened by SIC with the Council in connection with its 2021 submitted statistics. This action was taken by SIC because of concerns with the Council's recording for both late responses and requests where the Council failed to respond. The aim of the intervention was to support the Council to improve its performance with regard to providing timely responses to information requests.

An action plan was put in place and the SIC continued to monitor the Council's FOI statistics until they were satisfied with the Council's performance. The SIC closed the Level 1 Intervention on 18 May 2023 due to the continued and sustained improvement in the Council's response times to Freedom of Information Requests.

5. Exemptions

Most requests which have been responded to have resulted in full disclosure of all the requested information in 1013 (81%) of information requests. However, for some requests some information is exempt from disclosure in terms of FOISA or the EIRs. In such instances, FOI or EIR exemptions and exceptions are applied. The table below provides further information as to the use of these exemptions and exceptions. Partial disclosures, where some but not all information was released, accounts for 63 (5%) of information requests. The Council relied on exemptions or exceptions for all requested information in 121 (9.68%) of information requests received, although this is largely attributable to information sought not being held by the Council or being otherwise accessible through other sources such as already being published on the Council's website or on the Scottish Government website as part of statutory duties to report data.

Section	Exemption / Exception Cited	No of times cited
Section (12)	Excessive cost of compliance	1
Section (17) Regulation 10(4)a	Information not held	71
Section (25) Regulation 6(1)b	Information otherwise accessible	12
Section (26)	Statutory Prohibition	0
Section (27)	Future Publication	1
Section (30)	Substantial prejudice	2
Section (33), Regulation 10(5)e	Commercial interests and the economy	3
Section (34)	Investigations	0
Section 35 Regulation 10(5)b	Law Enforcement	0
Section (36) Regulation 10(5)d	Confidentiality	5
Section (39)	Health and Safety	0
Section (38) Regulation 11	Personal Information	9
Regulation 10(5)f	Interests of the supplier of information	0
Regulation 10 (4)c	Request formulated in too general a manner	0

6. Fees

FOISA makes limited provision for refusing requests, which incur an excessive cost and for partially recharging those that would cost the authority more than £100.00 to process. The EIRs allow for the full recharge of the cost of dealing with requests. The table below sets out the number of requests where fees notices were issued. If the applicant does not pay the fees notices within a certain period of time, the request will not be progressed. The Council tends to release the information in most cases without a fee. In relation to EIRs, services are encouraged to charge for information particularly when a significant amount of information is required. The Council has a charging schedule on the Council's website to assist officers with this.

Quarterly Period	No of Requests where fees notices issued	No of requests fee notice not paid	No of Requests where fees notice paid
Jan to Mar 2023	0	0	0
Apr to Jun 2023	0	0	0
Jul to Sept 2023	0	0	0
Oct to Dec 2023	0	0	0

7. Time and Cost Involved in Responding to FOIs

All costs associated with dealing with FOI/EIR requests, reviews, and appeals and Data Subject Access Requests are contained within existing budgets. The Policy and Resources Committee agreed to the cessation of collation of the time and grade information that was being collated for FOIs that were dealt with by the Council. This was communicated to FOI designated officers to alleviate the pressures that collating this information was putting on Service.

8. Reviews and Appeals

Of the 1250 information requests received in 2023, applicants formally asked the Council to review its decisions on 14 FOIs and 20 EIR requests. The table below outlines the outcome of the reviews. Applicants submitted appeals to the SIC in 14 cases (1 FOI, 13 EIRs). The SIC published a decision notice in connection with 4 requests following the Council's original failure to respond to these requests. Substantive review responses were provided and as a result, 3 further appeals have been submitted following the issue of the substantive response. 13 appeals are currently ongoing. There is a substantial increase in the number of appeals being submitted to the SIC, the majority of which are from one applicant.

Type of review	Number of reviews
No of requests for internal reviews	14 FOIs & 20 EIRs
Outcome of internal reviews:	
- upheld the Council's decision	14
- partially upheld the Council's decision	10
- did not uphold the Council's decision	10
- internal review submitted outside of timescale	0
Appeals to Scottish Information Commissioner (SIC)	
- Awaiting request for submissions from SIC	0
- Notification of application and the Council has supplied submissions as requested	13
Outcome of SIC Appeal:	
-upheld the Council's decision	0
-did not uphold the Council's decision	4*
-withdrawn by applicant	0

*Decision notices issued on the basis of the Council's failure to respond to the original FOI/EIR requests with a requirement to issue a substantive response.

9. Conclusion

The Council's performance during 2023 improved steadily each quarter. This follows the close monitoring process that was implemented in early 2022 to support the improvements required

in statutory response timescales. During the year, training has been delivered to support FOI designated officers and those officers involved in responding to requests to refresh knowledge and support confidence in the application of exemptions and exceptions. The 2023 statistics demonstrate that the actions put in place to improve performance have been successful. This work will continue to ensure that these improvements are sustained.

Ongoing work on policy, procedures and training will continue in order to support continuous improvement of the Council's performance in meeting its statutory obligations.

Report To:	Policy and Resources Committee	Date:	17 September 2024
Report By:	Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications	Report No:	PR/30/24/RB/MR
Contact Officer:	Morna Rae	Contact No:	01475 711160
Subject:	OD, Policy and Communications Policy Updates		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the following updated policies:

- Overpayment of Wages and Deductions from Salaries,
- Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation, and
- Supporting Employee Attendance.

1.3 As part of the wider work in developing a policy framework a number of policies were identified for review and update. This work has been undertaken on a phased basis, alongside trade union consultation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee is recommended to approve the policies.

Morna Rae
Head of Organisational Development, Policy and Communications

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 The *Review of Council Policy Framework* report to the 26 March 2024 Policy and Resources Committee included a review schedule for Organisational Development, Policy and Communications policies. Seven policies were agreed by the June 2024 Policy and Resources Committee. A further three policies are now available for Committee review (Overpayment of Wages and Deductions from Salaries, Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation, and Supporting Employee Attendance). The original timetable included the update to the Discipline Policy for the September Committee meeting. However due to long term sickness absence within the service this has not progressed at the anticipated rate. This will now be included in the next round of policy updates to Committee.
- 3.2 The three policies are provided in Appendices 2, 3 and 4. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the key changes. It should be noted that procedure documents are also available for employee use in relation to recruitment, selection, redeployment, relocation and supporting employee attendance.

Overpayment of Wages and Deductions From Salaries

- 3.3 The following changes have been made to the existing policy:
- Use of new policy template with related additional information added,
 - Reference to the claw back of annual leave entitlement,
 - Addition of definition of overpayment,
 - Addition of use of a template letter,
 - Addition of responsibilities on different groups in line with requirements of new policy template and
 - Additional information on the criteria and process for reductions in the amount of overpayment recovery.

Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation

- 3.4 Updates from the previous policy include:
- Combination of three separate policies into one,
 - Use of new policy template with related additional information added,
 - Removal of operational sections from policy to procedures document,
 - On right to return to substantive post an addition that in exceptional circumstances the right of return would be to a suitable alternative on the same grade, with this included in the new contract,
 - More detail on relationships that should not be involved in the recruitment process,
 - Highlights the need for managers to check the redeployment register for possible matches,
 - Additional detail added on vacancy management and shortlisting,
 - Change from having an appropriate panel composition in relation to the gender of the candidates to having diversity in all panels,
 - Reference to relevant LNCT agreements,
 - Updates to safer recruitment checks, including PVG changes and references, and
 - On the relocation allowance addition of enquiries as to whether the allowances may be payable should be raised with the Head of OD, HR, Policy & Communications prior to actual expenditure being incurred.

Supporting Employee Attendance

- 3.5 The following changes have been made to the existing policy:

- Use of new policy template with related additional information added,
- Deletion of if a disciplinary hearing results in a formal warning this may be considered abuse of the scheme and the Occupational Sick Pay element of the last incident of absence which led to the hearing may be recovered from an employee's next pay normally up to a maximum of 5 days, and
- More emphasis on responsibilities of managers and employees.

3.6 Following Committee approval there will be promotion of the policies to employees. They will also form part of the website hosted information on corporate policies as well as being available on the intranet.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 It is proposed that Committee approve the following updated policies:

- Overpayment of Wages and Deductions from Salaries,
- Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation, and
- Supporting Employee Attendance.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

There are risks in the failure to have updated and relevant policies.

5.4 Human Resources

There are no Human Resources implications in terms of posts.

5.5 Strategic

This report supports the delivery of the following outcomes within the Council Plan 2023-2028:

- High quality and innovative services are provided giving value for money
- Our employees are supported and developed

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required and will be made available on the Council website: https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/council-and-government/equality-impact-assessments
	NO – will be completed as required for specific topics.

Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty.

Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
--	---

X

NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children’s rights

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 There has been engagement with trade union colleagues and Workforce Development Group.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None.

Appendix 1

Overview of Policy Updates		
Policy On The Recovery Of The Overpayment Of Wages And Deductions From Salaries		
PAGE	TITLE	PROPOSED CHANGE
Throughout		Use of new policy template
4	Policy Content	Addition of definition of overpayment
4	Policy Content	Reference to the claw back of annual leave entitlement
5	Policy Content	In addition to employee being advised of the overpayment they will also be told of the reason for this arising.
5	Policy Content	Addition of use of a template letter
6	Policy Content	Additional information on the criteria and process for reductions in the amount of overpayment recovery.
6	Roles and Responsibilities	Addition of responsibilities on different groups in line with requirements of new policy template. Highlighted importance of services following processes promptly to minimise risk of overpayments.
Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation Policy		
PAGE	TITLE	PROPOSED CHANGE
Throughout		Use of new policy template
Throughout		Combination of three separate policies into one
Throughout		Removal of operational sections from policy to procedures document
6	Application and Scope – Right to Return to Substantive Post	Addition - in exceptional circumstances the right of return would be to a suitable alternative on the same grade, with this included in the new contract.
7	Recruitment Process	More detail on relationships that should not be involved in the recruitment process
7	Recruitment Process	Emphasises the need for managers to check the redeployment register for possible matches
7	Recruitment Process	Additional detail added on vacancy management and shortlisting
7	Recruitment Process	Change from having an appropriate panel composition in relation to the gender of the candidates to having diversity in all panels
8	Safer Recruitment Checks	Updates to safer recruitment checks, including PVG changes, registration and references
9	Teacher Specific Recruitment Information	Reference to relevant LNCT agreements

14	Relocation Allowance	Addition - Enquiries as to whether the allowances may be payable should be raised with the Head of OD, HR, Policy & Communications prior to actual expenditure being incurred.
Supporting Employee Attendance Policy		
PAGE	TITLE	PROPOSED CHANGE
Throughout		Use of new policy template
8	Disciplinary Action	Deletion of <i>if a disciplinary hearing results in a formal warning this may be considered abuse of the scheme and the Occupational Sick Pay element of the last incident of absence which led to the hearing may be recovered from an employee's next pay normally up to a maximum of 5 days.</i>
9	Roles and Responsibilities	More emphasis on responsibilities of managers and employees

POLICY ON THE RECOVERY OF THE OVERPAYMENT OF WAGES AND DEDUCTIONS FROM SALARIES

Version No 3

Produced by:

Inverclyde Council
Municipal Buildings
GREENOCK
PA15 1LX

2024

Inverclyde Council is an Equal Opportunities employer

This document can be made available in other languages, large print, and audio format upon request.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document Responsibility		
Policy Title	Corporate Group	Service
		OD & HR and Communications

Change History		
Version	Date	Comments
1	January 2004	
2	April 2016	Minor changes in the wording to reflect updated individual contracts of employment
3	July 2024	Addition of definition of overpayment. Transfer to new policy template. Addition of criteria for reduction in overpayment recovery amount.

Distribution
Corporate Directors, Heads of Service, Trade Unions, ICON

Policy Review		
Updating Frequency	Next Review Date	Responsible Officer
5 years	2029	Service Manager (HR Support + Payroll)

Policy Review and Approval			
Name	Action	Date	Communication
Policy and Resources Committee	Approved	17/09/2024	Website, ICON, Trade Unions, ECMT

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this policy is to set out the steps which the Council will take to recover the overpayment of wages when they occur. It also outlines the other circumstances in which deductions can be made from salaries.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Inverclyde Council aims to ensure that all salary payments are paid accurately and timeously. However, it is recognized that occasionally overpayment may occur, for example, due to administrative errors or errors in claims to allowances and expenses.

1.3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This policy supports delivery on the Council Plan 2023/28 in relation to the following outcome – “high quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money.”

1.4 LINKS TO LEGISLATION

This policy complies with employment legislation, including the Employment Rights Act 1996.

1.5 AIM

This policy aims to provide a fair and consistent approach to the recovery of overpayment and deductions from wages.

1.6 LINKS TO CORPORATE GROUPS

This policy links to the Trade Union Liaison Group.

2 SCOPE

This applies to all current and former employees of Inverclyde Council.

3 POLICY CONTENT

3.1 The Council will seek to recover all overpayments of wages in accordance with legal requirements.

3.2 All contracts of employment issued by the Council will contain reference to the policy on the recovery of overpayment of salaries or wages.

3.3 An overpayment is monies paid to an employee over and above their entitlement in terms of their conditions of employment relating to salaries/wages or related expenses/allowances including leave.

3.4 The Employment Rights Act 1996 provides that protection from deduction of wages does not apply to an overpayment of wages or employment related expenses. Under the Act,

Inverclyde Council is entitled to recover any sums due because of an overpayment in salary or any other allowances or payments including leave.

3.5 In addition, deductions can be made:

- As a result of disciplinary proceedings provided for in legislation (for example, policy disciplinary proceedings);
- As a consequence of the worker taking part in a strike or other industrial action;
- To satisfy a court order ordering the employer to make debt payments from an employee's wages to a third party;
- As a result of a court ordering an employee to make a payment to their employer – the employee must have agreed in writing that the employer can make the deduction;
- Where the worker has given his or her prior written agreement to the deduction or
- Required or authorised by legislation.

3.6 Where a deduction is made under an arrangement agreed to by the worker in writing, for the employer to pay a third party amounts notified by that third party, the deduction is lawful if the employer deducts the amount that has been notified.

3.7 Where a deduction is made because of a statutory requirement on the employer to deduct and pay over specified amounts to a statutory authority (for example, PAYE income tax payments to the Inland Revenue), the deduction is lawful provided that the Council deducts the amount specified by the authority. Any questions as to whether or not the authority has correctly calculated the amount due should be followed up by the employee with the authority itself.

3.8 The Written Statement of Terms and Conditions of Employment for Inverclyde Council employees allow for overpayment of wages to be deducted from employee's salaries on a contractual basis. Deductions made by Inverclyde Council enforcing this contractual entitlement do not constitute an unlawful deduction from wages.

3.9 Where an overpayment of wages has been made, the following arrangements will apply:-

- Using a template letter the employee will be advised in writing of the overpayment, the reason for it arising and that the amount will be recovered in the following way:-
 - i. Where the overpayment has been made in one pay and discovered before the next salary or wage payment, the overpayment of any salary, wage or allowance made in error to an employee will be deducted in full from the next available salary or wage payment
 - ii. Where the overpayment has been paid over more than one payment period, then the overpayment will be repaid over the same period of time by equal instalments commencing with the next available salary or wage payment.
 - iii. It is the employee's responsibility to notify their supervisor or Payroll Services immediately if they suspect that an overpayment or underpayment has occurred.
 - iv. In the event of any overpayments, advances or loans made to the employee being due to the Council on the termination of their employment, the whole sum owed will be deducted from their final pay. If their final salary payment is insufficient to allow for the whole of any such deduction, they will be required to repay the outstanding

amount due to the Council within one month of the date of the termination of their employment.

- where having been notified of the proposed repayment arrangements the employee submits that they may cause them hardship then payment terms can be reviewed by the Payroll and HR Support Team Leader. If required a meeting will be arranged at which the matter can be discussed and options explored. The employee may be represented by a trade union representative at this meeting which will also be attended by a representative of Human Resources, Organisational Development and Payroll.
- In accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations, it is the responsibility of all Chief Officers to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all monies due, which would include overpayments of salary, are collected. The Council will seek to recover overpayments in full. The only situation in which there may be a reduction in the amount recovered is when it amounts to exceptional circumstances, taking into account how the overpayment arose and the employee's circumstances. Any agreement to a reduction in the overall amount repaid requires sign off by the relevant Director, Head of Organisational Development, Policy and Communications and the Chief Financial Officer.

3.10 Where agreement cannot be reached under the arrangements detailed then the employee may submit a grievance under the Council's Grievance Procedure or, in appropriate circumstances, lodge a claim with the Employment Tribunal.

4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

4.2 DIRECTORS

Directors are responsible for setting the strategic direction of their Service consistent with the principles of best value.

4.3 HEADS OF SERVICE

Heads of Service should promote a culture whereby accurate information is recorded in relation to employee wage and allowance entitlement.

4.4. SERVICE MANAGERS

Service Managers should ensure employee awareness of key policies.

4.5 EMPLOYEES

Employees are expected to:

- promptly and accurately complete forms and processes relating to payments to employees;

- accurately complete forms relating to their wages, allowances and deductions in a timely manner;
- ensure they understand their salary entitlement;
- check their payslip every pay period to ensure that it appears accurate; and matches the payment received;
- raise pay anomalies with their manager and Payroll
- remain aware of their position and obligations under this policy for the resolution of overpayments

5 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 TRAINING

Specific training on the content of this policy is not planned. However it will be incorporated into wider training on Human Resources policies as appropriate.

5.2 COMMUNICATION OF THE POLICY

The policy will be available on ICON, the intranet, as well as publically via the Council website.

6 RISK

6.1 LEGISLATIVE RISK

This policy takes into account the requirements of the Employment Rights Act 1996, and the circumstances in which deductions from salaries are legitimate.

6.2 WIDER RISKS

Without this policy there is a risk that overpayments are not identified and recovered, and therefore Best Value is not secured and there is a reputational and financial detriment to the Council.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This policy was updated in consultation with the Trade Union Liaison Group.

7.2 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This policy was assessed in relation to the Council's equality duties. All employees are entitled to use, access and be subjected to the policy and there is no evidence to indicate that this policy could affect employees differently or less favourably, on the grounds of their Protected Characteristics.

RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, REDEPLOYMENT AND RELOCATION (RSRR) POLICY

Version No 1

Produced by:

Inverclyde Council
Municipal Buildings
GREENOCK
PA15 1LX

2024

Inverclyde Council is an Equal Opportunities employer

This document can be made available in other languages, large print, and audio format upon request.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document Responsibility		
Policy Title	Corporate Group	Service
		OD & HR and Communications

Change History		
Version	Date	Comments
1	August 2024	Combination of existing policies into one document. General updates. Updated template used.

Distribution
Corporate Directors, Heads of Service, Trade Unions, ICON

Policy Review		
Updating Frequency	Next Review Date	Responsible Officer
5 years	2029	Service Manager

Policy Review and Approval			
Name	Action	Date	Communication
Policy and Resources Committee	Approved	17/09/2024	Website, ICON, Trade Unions, ECMT

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy outlines Inverclyde Council's procedures for recruitment, selection, redeployment, and relocation, ensuring alignment with best practices and legislative requirements. It aims to provide a fair, transparent, and inclusive framework to support the recruitment and retention of a diverse and talented workforce

1.2 BACKGROUND

The combined policy integrates recruitment, selection, redeployment, and relocation procedures to streamline processes and enhance operational efficiency. It reflects best practices from other councils and adheres to guidelines from the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

The Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation (RSRR) Policy is designed to ensure the Council attracts, selects, and retains the best candidates in a fair, transparent, and consistent manner, in line with best practices and legislative requirements. This policy aims to remove potential barriers to accessing services and support that may exist for some people, particularly where they may have a history of having experienced trauma

This policy sits alongside the Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation Procedures which provides detail of the how employees should implement processes in line with the policy.

1.3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Aligning with the Council's vision and values, this policy supports strategic objectives related to workforce management and organisational development. It supports the Council Plan 2023/28 outcomes of:

- More people will be in employment, with fair pay and conditions
- High quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money, and
- Our employees are supported and developed

1.4 LINKS TO LEGISLATION

This policy considers relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010, Employment Rights Act, and the Working Time Regulations, to ensure comprehensive compliance. It promotes fair talent management through adherence to the ACAS Code of Practice, ensuring that all recruitment, selection, redeployment, and relocation activities are conducted fairly and transparently.

Inverclyde Council is an equal opportunities employer. The Council is committed to promoting equality and diversity throughout the recruitment and selection process. All activities will comply with the Equality Act 2010, ensuring no candidate is discriminated against based on protected characteristics. This policy should be considered in conjunction with Inverclyde Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.

The Council recognises its social, moral and statutory duty to employ people with disabilities and will do all that is practicable to meet this responsibility. As a Disability

Confident Employer, the Council guarantees interviews for disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria for a role, ensuring fair opportunities for candidates with disabilities.

The Council supports the Armed Forces Covenant and ensures fair treatment of current and former members of the armed forces and their families during the recruitment process. Council managers will give positive consideration to shortlisting veterans for posts where they meet the essential criteria of the post. In addition the Council will publicise through recruitment materials its support for reservists, highlighting that applications from reservists are particularly welcome.

1.5 AIM

The aim is to establish a fair, transparent, and inclusive policy framework that supports the recruitment, retention, redeployment, and relocation of a diverse and talented workforce

1.6 LINKS TO CORPORATE GROUPS

This policy is linked to the work of the Corporate Management Team and the Corporate Quality Improvement Group, ensuring alignment with broader organisational policies and objectives

2 SCOPE

This policy applies to all recruitment, selection, redeployment, and relocation activities within Inverclyde Council. However, it is acknowledged that the terms and conditions specific to the teaching profession may necessitate amendments to address these differences appropriately.

3 POLICY CONTENT

3.1 Recruitment and Selection

3.1.1. Application and Scope

This policy applies equally to all employees and applicants for posts, whether permanent, fixed term, or temporary, irrespective of grade, or profession. While the principles of this policy apply to the recruitment and selection of the Chief Executive and Chief Officers there are differences in procedures, outlined in the appendix to the procedures document.

The policy also applies to the recruitment to supply teaching or casual/sessional work registers. A separate protocol is available which covers the circumstances for engagement of casual/sessional workers.

All existing Council employees, modern apprentices, supply and casual (sessional) workers are entitled to apply for internal vacancies. This includes agency workers who have been on the same assignment for a period of more than 12 weeks.

Organisational Development, Human Resources & Communications reserve the right to withhold or withdraw any vacancy for redeployment, at any stage of the recruitment and selection process including up to where an appointment has been recommended, as per the Council's Redeployment Policy.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, existing employees who are employed by the Council on a permanent basis and who are appointed to a temporary or fixed term post within the Council should always be given the right of return to their substantive post. However, this right of return is not an automatic entitlement and employees must always discuss this with their current line manager before accepting a move to another post. In exceptional circumstances where a manager believes they are unable to give an employee the right of return to their original post, approval must be sought from the Head of Organisational Development, Human Resources & Communications. The right of return would be to a suitable alternative on the same grade, with this included in the new contract. This must be discussed by the manager with their employee before accepting a move to another position.

Training is essential for all managers prior to participating in recruitment panels – at any stage, with specific training for panel chairs. This ensures adherence to fair and consistent recruitment practices and aligns with best practice across other organisations.

3.1.2. Jointly Funded Posts

There may at times be posts which are jointly funded by a partnership organisation. For this reason, the recruitment & selection process may differ slightly for this type of vacancy in relation to both new and backfilled posts.

The ownership of the recruitment & selection process for this type of post may rest with either of the parties jointly responsible for the post. Applicants will therefore be subject to the recruitment & selection policy & procedures of the organisation responsible for filling the vacancy.

3.1.3. Recruitment Process

Anyone involved in the recruitment process who has a personal relationship with a candidate, or may be able to exercise favouritism, should remove themselves from the process. Where there is any doubt, they should take no part in the shortlisting and interview process. For example where:

- they are in a close personal relationship with a candidate e.g., husband/wife/spouse, civil partnership, co-habitant.
- they are a relative of a candidate e.g.- daughter/son, sibling, parent, aunt/uncle, cousin etc. including in-laws and step relatives.
- they are a close friend of a candidate. e.g. - someone known personally and on a social basis outside of work.
- they are living in the same household as a candidate. e.g. - lodger, step-sibling etc.
- they have previously had a personal relationship with a candidate e.g. – ex-wife/husband/partner etc.

This list is not exhaustive. Where there is a potential perception of a conflict of interest discretion should be used and advice sought from HR.

Where practicable, anyone directly involved in the appointment process who is also listed as a referee for any candidate they must either decline from acting as a referee or take no further part in the interview process.

Recruiting managers are expected to check the central redeployment register to identify any potential matches to their vacancy prior to commencing with the recruitment process.

The vacancy management processes should be followed in order to receive the correct approvals before a post is advertised. Advertising will then be coordinated by HR.

Shortlisting for interview will be based on the essential and desirable criteria for the post as set out in the person specification ensuring that the process is free from discrimination. Candidates who have indicated on their application that they have a disability or are a veteran, and who meet the essential criteria for the post, will be shortlisted for interview in line with our Disability Confident Initiative and Armed Forces Covenant.

3.1.4. Interview Panels

In respect of the Council's Equality & Diversity Policy, every effort should be made to have interview panels are balanced with at least one male and one female member where possible.

In appointment panels, for which recruitment is delegated to officers, it is the role of the Chairperson to ensure that appointments are run in accordance with the recruitment procedure and all attempts are made to achieve a gender balance on interview panels.

Where the Recruitment Panel consists of a panel of Elected Members and/or parent councils, such appointment panels should strive for gender balance and both male and female recruiters should be on each Panel or where that is not practicable, an HR representative/other officer of appropriate gender should be in attendance to advise the Panel.

There may be occasions where an Elected Member panel composition is fixed based on the principle of political balance and a gender mix may not be possible.

All interviews must be conducted in a fair and consistent manner and must be structured and systematic. The interview process and format is outlined in the Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation Procedures

3.1.5. Canvassing of Elected Members or Employees

The canvassing of Elected Members or employees of the Council, directly or indirectly, in connection with any appointment being made by the Council, shall disqualify the candidate.

3.1.6. Positive Action

The Council follows the principles of 'positive action' as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. This can be applied during the recruitment and selection process when a tie breaker situation arises between two (or more) candidates of equal merit. Positive action allows an employer to make an appointment based on a particular protected characteristic possessed by a candidate.

This process must only be used in consultation with the Head of Organisational Development, Human Resources & Communications.

3.1.7. Politically Restricted Posts

Some posts in the Council are politically restricted by virtue of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 and the Local Government Officers (Political Restrictions) Regulations 1990.

Where a political restriction applies this means that the applicant will not be permitted to be involved in, or may be restricted, in political interests or associations. If the post being applied for is politically restricted this will be shown on the job advert. If you are unsure whether this applies to you or a post you wish to apply for, please contact Organisational Development, Human Resources & Communications.

3.1.8. Safer Recruitment Checks

The Council will carry out employment checks to determine the suitability of candidates for a post, for example:

- Confirmation of Right to Work in the UK.
- PVG Enhanced/Standard/Basic or post April 2026 Level 1 and Level 2 Disclosures.
- Criminal Conviction Declaration, if the post is not regulated work with a vulnerable group.
- SSSC, GTCS registration
- Pre-Employment Health Checks.
- References - two written references (one for internal candidates if moving from one Service area to another) will be requested and one should be from the current line manager. Internal candidates with an internal referee will only need a verbal reference. Teachers require one reference from their previous head teacher. It must be completed on the relevant head teacher report form which is sent to the successful candidate by HR Support. Teachers that are returning to teaching after some time will require two references as per their work history.
- Confirmation of qualifications required to meet the essential criteria on the person specification - relevant qualifications will be viewed at interview.

Inverclyde Council is committed to ensure information gathered is used fairly. All safer recruitment checks must be satisfied otherwise an offer of employment may be withdrawn.

Recruiting managers should follow the steps in the Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation Procedures to:

1. notify candidates whether they have been unsuccessful or are the preferred candidate,
2. provide feedback,
3. provide information to HR on the interview outcome, and
4. liaise with the preferred candidate and HR to confirm their start date.

All safer recruitment checks must be satisfied otherwise an offer of employment may be withdrawn.

Although safe recruitment checks will be carried out prior to appointment there may be exceptional occasions where an offer of employment is offered subject to satisfactory checks in agreement with HR.

Upon starting employment, the employee will undertake the corporate induction in addition to service or role specific induction.

3.1.9 Reengagement

The Council will not normally re-engage an employee who has benefited from an early departure package in a similar role or as a consultant within 12 months of leaving. It is acknowledged, however, that employees may apply for other advertised vacancies during this time. This does not apply in respect of sessional/supply work.

More widely in the public sector the decision to re-engage officers immediately after they take redundancy or early retirement has been subject to criticism by Audit Scotland and managers need to be aware of this and the public perception of the use of public funds in making decisions on re-employment.

3.1.10 Complaints

The Council will endeavor to respond to any concerns the employee or applicant has concerning any aspect of the recruitment and selection process. This is outlined in the Recruitment, Selection, Redeployment and Relocation Procedure.

3.1.11 Teacher Specific Recruitment Information

Inverclyde Council acknowledges the unique procedures and job specifications applicable to the recruitment and selection of teaching staff. These processes are guided by the Local Negotiating Committee for Teachers (LNCT) agreements, which provide specific frameworks for appointments and job descriptions within the teaching profession.

The following LNCT agreements should be referenced for detailed guidance on recruitment and job specifications for teaching staff:

- LNCT 04-2023: Employment of Teachers on Temporary Contracts
- LNCT 05-2024: Appointment of Teachers on Permanent Contracts
- LNCT 10-2024: Temporary Promoted Posts in Schools
- LNCT 11: Job Description – PT Primary
- LNCT 12: Job Description – PT Secondary
- LNCT 13: Job Description – DHT Primary

These documents outline the agreed procedures for appointments, job specifications, and other relevant aspects of teaching positions. They are essential for ensuring compliance with the specific requirements of the teaching sector.

To access these documents please visit the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teacher (SNCT) website at <https://www.snct.org.uk/lnctAgreements.php>. Select "Inverclyde" in the filter and then for the relevant LNCT numbers listed above.

3.2 Redeployment

3.2.1 Reasons for Redeployment

Redeployment within the Council may be necessary as a result of one of the following:

- a. Capability
 - a. Medical grounds
 - b. Performance Issues

- c. Where redeployment is the outcome of a formal action.
- b. Redundancy
- c. Efficiency of the Service (where there is no redundancy situation but there would be efficiency improvements resulting from the retirement).
- d. Displacement due to budget savings, restructures, job redesign
- e. Some Other Substantial Reason (SOSR)
 - i. For example it is recognised that personal relationships with colleagues can deteriorate or that circumstances outwith the work environment can adversely affect an employee's ability to function in the job.
 - ii. To be included on the Redeployment Register for SOSR a report into the circumstances would be required, e.g. a recommendation through the Council's Dignity & Respect at Work Processes. This would also need to be approved by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications and the relevant Head of Service.

3.2.2 Staff covered by arrangements

This covers all permanent employees of the Council and temporary employees as detailed below.

For temporary employees (as defined in the Temporary Employee Protocol), whose employment is due to be terminated, redeployment to a suitable alternative position or vacancy will be sought in accordance with the undernoted arrangements. Temporary teachers will be dealt with in terms of the relevant Local Negotiating Committee Teachers (LNCT) and Scottish Negotiating Committee Teachers (SNCT) provisions. There can be no guarantee that a suitable alternative position will be found and, if not, this will result in the termination of employment in the normal manner, and with notice in accordance with contractual entitlement.

Where the employee has up to 2 years service the Redeployment Register will be checked, at employee or manager's request for up to a 6 week period, to be agreed between Head of Service and HR, but ending no later than the contractual notice end date. Management must advise the employee, in accordance with the Temporary Employee Protocol, that the end of a fixed term /temporary appointment is being considered and the reasons for this. The employee must be invited to a meeting with management to discuss the circumstances, to establish whether the contract might be extended or whether there is any alternative work the employee could do. If no suitable alternative vacancy found then the employee's dismissal shall take effect – if suitable redeployment found and agreed to by the employee then existing contract will be terminated by mutual consent, in writing, and subsequent offer of employment in new role offered at rate for the post (no salary protection consideration).

Where an employee has more than 2 years service the Redeployment Register will be checked at employee or manager's request for up to a 12 week period, to be agreed between Head of Service and HR, but ending no later than the contractual notice end date. Management must advise the employee, in accordance with the Temporary Employee Protocol, that the end of a fixed term /temporary appointment is being considered and the reasons for this. The employee must be invited to a meeting with management to discuss the circumstances, to establish whether the contract might be extended or whether there is any alternative work the employee could do. If no suitable alternative vacancy found then the employee's dismissal shall take effect and the contract terminated with redundancy payment, in redundancy situation – if suitable redeployment found and agreed to by the employee then existing contract will be terminated by mutual consent, in writing, and subsequent offer of employment in new role offered at rate for the post (no salary protection consideration).

Notwithstanding the above, the Council may exercise discretion in exceptional circumstances (Head of OD, Policy & Communications in consultation with Chief Financial Officer & relevant Head of Service) e.g where any employee with over 2 year's temporary service is to be displaced and face a "redundancy" situation and where an alternative post is sourced but at a substantially reduced grade. In such cases employees may be eligible for salary protection up to a maximum of 1 year.

Teachers will only be covered where the following are not applicable: LNCT 15- 'Future Provision - School Accommodation Staffing Policy', 'Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006' and 'Parental Involvement in Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher Appointments (Scotland) Regulations 2007'.

The Scottish Teachers' Superannuation Scheme (SPPA) circular 09/2012 referring to redeployment on the grounds of ill health for Teachers may apply.

Redeployment is a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act 2010. If there are no reasonable adjustments that would enable a disabled employee to do their current job, employers must look for suitable alternative vacancies to which the employee can be transferred.

3.2.3. Terms of Redeployment

Redeployment will be looked for with reference to the following terms and conditions, subject to provisions in respect of Temporary Employees:

- a) Consideration will only be given to an employee whose circumstances are as detailed above.
- b) Organisational Development, Policy & Communications will keep a central Redeployment Register. Consideration will be given to temporarily placing individuals in temporary posts in the interest of utilising an employee's skills, improving the skills base of an employee, and as a consequence positively affecting absence levels. Employees receiving retraining of some description not with their own service will, however, continue to be paid by their own service.

- c) Where an employee is included in the Redeployment Register on health grounds a search for a suitable alternative role will commence within their current service, then directorate.
- d) A suitable alternative post has to be a substantive, temporary or fixed term vacancy - established post i.e. a post is not created to accommodate an individual.
- e) Pregnant Employees who have commenced their maternity/family leave; or Shared Parental Leave/Adoption Leave who are selected for redundancy, special provisions apply to them. They must be given first refusal on any available suitable alternative.
- f) A suitable alternative employment opportunity may be at a lower, or similar salary level. Where an employee can demonstrate to management that they meet all essential criteria of a vacant higher salaried post then this may be considered. The job description and person specification for the vacancy will be the factors which determine if there is the possibility of a match. The associated remuneration package is not a determining factor, although any salary differential would have to be "reasonable" as determined by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications.
- g) Offers of redeployment will be made at the salary rate attached to the post. Protection in terms of conditions of service and 1 year's salary protection will apply where redeployment occurs due to reasons of restructure, redundancy or for health reasons when recommended, by the Councils Occupational Health Adviser, as essential.
- h) The redeployment will be subject to consultation with the relevant Head of Service. Should a vacancy be considered appropriate then the employee to be redeployed may be considered without recourse to the advertising process or on a restricted basis (i.e. when limiting leeting to a retriected pool and not advertising competitively, with other employees on the Redeployment Register) and slotted in where they meet the essential criteria for the post. Individuals alternatively may be interviewed as part of the normal recruitment and selection process, depending on the circumstances of the post and subject to agreement by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications and relevant Head of Service.
- i) The authorised signatory of a 'Request to Advertise' form should consider all requests to advertise a post as potential redeployment opportunities, and, therefore, ensure that the central Redeployment Register is considered prior to the authorisation to advertise a vacancy. A suitable candidate for the vacancy found on the Redeployment Register may circumvent the traditional recruitment and selection process at any stage prior to having made an offer of employment to a candidate.
- j) In determining the suitability of any offer of alternative employment, cognisance will be taken by HR and the appointing Head of Service of the following factors: pay; status; location; working environment; hours of work; job description; person specification.
- k) Any offer of alternative employment will be subject to the Council's safer recruitment practices.
- l) The redeployment will be subject to a four week trial period during which time the employee and the new service will be able to assess the suitability of the transferee.

In the event of either party considering the alternative as unsuitable the reason offered should be captured in writing and reported to the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications. Where the reason is agreed by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications as a justifiable one, the employee will return to the Redeployment Register and remain attached to their substantive service.

- m) An employee who rejects the offer of redeployment, which is considered a reasonable match by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications, without good reason may result in their dismissal taking effect subsequent to the employee having, in the view of the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications, unreasonably refused the offer of a suitable alternative post. Employees will be given 2 working days to consider an offer. The Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications has discretion to extend the two day period for acceptance in appropriate cases.
- n) When determining whether a suitable offer of redeployment has been made, a variety of factors require to be considered including rate of pay, duties of the job, location, any family friendly issues. The deciding factor will be where an employee has no justifiable reason for refusing a job that the employer deems a suitable alternative offer of employment.
- o) Where possible, the period on the Redeployment Register will be determined at the outset. This will be for up to 6 months (inclusive of notice period). This timescale may be extended in exceptional circumstances for an additional 6 months (for example, due to serious health issues) by the Head of Organisational Development, Policy & Communications and relevant Head of Service. In determining the period for redeployment, consideration will be given to a number of factors, eg. the remaining sickness allowance of an employee, the expiry date of the existing contract of employment, how long a service can maintain an employee on redeployment who may be on restricted duties or work placement.
- p) Where staff are displaced as a result of a service review /budget saving the custom & practice for employees is a maximum of 12 weeks and will be agreed by Head of Service and HR, in consultation with Trade Union. Budgetary and financial constraints will also be a key determining factor when deciding on the period for redeployment. For example, when the Council carries out its annual budget review, or where redundancies are necessary, redeployment periods will be determined based on the financial circumstances of the Council at that time.
- q) Financial liability will remain with employing service up until the beginning of the trial after which it is the new service. If the trial does not work out liability returns to the employing service. On occasions the new service can agree to contribute towards the salary protection costs.
- r) If no suitable alternative employment is found, then the employee's dismissal will take effect and the contract of employment will be terminated at the end of the redeployment and notice period.
- s) Restructure - In circumstances in which post(s) have been removed from the organisational structure as a result of organisational change the employee(s) in the

post(s) find themselves in a displacement situation. Where more than one employee is affected by an organisational change and all options under the voluntary redeployment and voluntary severance routes are entirely exhausted, the Council will identify which employee is displaced by applying the Displacement Selection Criteria Matrix. Details are contained in the Voluntary Severance Policy, and the employee will be placed on the Redeployment Register.

- t) The Council will attempt to avoid compulsory redundancy where practicable but where an employee(s) are displaced from their job(s), have gone through the redeployment process without success and do not wish to opt for voluntary severance, then a report will be prepared for the Policy and Resources Committee to advise of the position and to seek authority to make a displaced employee or employees compulsory redundant. Any severance payment made will be the same that is offered under voluntary severance. All appropriate notice periods will apply.
- u) Retraining will be available within reasonable boundaries, that is to say with reference to previous experience, qualifications already gained, time and cost constraints. This process should be considered immediately and is the responsibility of senior management within the transferee service to instigate.

3.2.4 Other Conditions

Where an employee, has been redeployed because of a service restructure/ redundancy situation the following additional conditions will apply:

- (i) Where the alteration results in a move to a post which has earnings lower than the employee's previous salary then a Certificate of Material Change will be issued. This certificate has the effect of protecting pension rights for a period of ten years, by recognising the employee's most advantageous salary arrangements over the prescribed period.
- (ii) Where the alteration results in a move to a post which has earnings lower than the employee's previous salary then pay protection on a cash conserved basis will apply for up to one year.

The Certificate of Material Change detailed in paragraph above will also be applicable to employees who have been redeployed due to the ill health criteria, as outlined by Strathclyde Pension Fund Scheme and whose earnings are now lower than their previous salary.

3.2.5 Right of Appeal

Where a dismissal is due to the expiry or termination of a temporary/fixed term contract, then the right of appeal is one internal stage and to a Corporate Director (or nominated senior officer not previously involved). For all other dismissals, the right of appeal will be to the Human Resources Appeal Board or HR Appeals Panel (Officers), for absence related dismissals.

An employee who is of the opinion that their circumstances have been considered unfavourably can raise a grievance using the Council's Grievance Procedure, subject to the terms of that procedure.

3.3 Relocation

3.1.1 General Conditions

The Council wishes to encourage its employees to live within the Inverclyde area to promote population and economic growth. Relocation expenses will therefore only be applicable where an employee moves into the Inverclyde area.

It is expected that the move will take place within 1 year of taking up employment.

In considering claims, the following criteria will be applied:

- Considering an employee's normal means of travel, whether it is considered unreasonable or impractical for the employee to commute from their present home to their new place of employment.
- Any expenses must have been necessarily and actually incurred and will be to a maximum level as specified in the procedures
- Expenses will be recovered on a proportionate basis from the employee should they fail to complete 2 years service from the date of the move. A declaration to this effect will require to be signed by participants. Any repayment due must be made **before the employee leaves the service of the Council.**

Enquiries as to whether the allowances may be payable should be raised with the Head of Organisational Development, Human Resources, Policy and Communications (OD, HR, Policy & Communications) prior to actual expenditure being incurred.

4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

4.2 DIRECTORS

Directors are responsible for setting the strategic direction of their Service consistent with the principles of the policy.

4.3 HEADS OF SERVICE

Heads of Service should promote a culture whereby accurate information is recorded in relation to recruitment, selection, redeployment and relocation, procedures are followed and appropriate supports put in place.

4.4. SERVICE MANAGERS

Service Managers should ensure employee awareness of key policies.

4.5 EMPLOYEES

Officers are expected to:

- accurately complete forms and processes relating to recruitment, selection, redeployment and relocation in a timely manner and
- ensure they understand their role in the policy implementation.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 TRAINING

Training on the content of this policy is provided to employees.

5.2 COMMUNICATION OF THE POLICY

The policy will be available on ICON, the intranet, as well as publically via the Council website.

6 RISK

6.1 LEGISLATIVE RISK

This policy takes into account the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, Employment Rights Act, and the Working Time Regulations.

6.2 WIDER RISKS

Without this policy there is a risk that fair and transparent processes are not followed with consequential reputational and financial detriment to the Council. These policies also aim to secure the best candidates for roles and so minimise workforce capacity risks.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This policy was updated in consultation with the Trade Union Liaison Group.

7.2 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This policy was assessed in relation to the Council's equality duties. All employees are entitled to use, access and be subjected to the policy and there is no evidence to indicate that this policy could affect employees differently or less favourably, on the grounds of their Protected Characteristics.

SUPPORTING EMPLOYEE ATTENDANCE POLICY

Version No 6

Produced by:

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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document Responsibility		
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Supporting Employee Attendance		OD & HR and Communications

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2	Nov 2011	Updated to reflect Policy and Strategy outcomes on 15 th November 2011
3	April 2014	Updated to reflect change in absence measures to days lost per employee
4	March 2017	Updated to reflect Policy & Resources outcomes on 20 th June 2017
5	October 2017	Updated to include changes to Displacement Selection Criteria Matrix
6	July 2024	New policy template. Additional information on employee and manager responsibilities.

Distribution
Corporate Directors, Heads of Service, Trade Unions, ECMT

Policy Review		
Updating Frequency	Next Review Date	Responsible Officer
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Policy Review and Approval			
Name	Action	Date	Communication
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that all absences from work are appropriately managed and those who are absent are supported accordingly. It also promotes and encourages employee wellbeing at work.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The Council believes that employees are its most valuable resource and recognises the important contribution made by regular attendance at work in maintaining high levels of service delivery.

Sickness absence is one of the Council's Statutory and Key Performance Indicators. Information in this area is recorded and provided to the Local Government Benchmarking Framework.

Application of this policy and associated procedures ensures a fair, consistent and compassionate approach to supporting employee attendance, whilst ensuring compliance with all associated legislation.

1.3 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This policy supports delivery on the Council Plan 2023/28 in relation to the following outcomes – "high quality and innovative services are provided, giving value for money" and "employees are supported and developed".

1.4 LINKS TO LEGISLATION

Under this policy, the Council will ensure that everyone receives equal consideration and that the needs of all are taken into account as per The Equality Act 2010, irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on someone's ability to carry out normal daily activities. The definition includes people with hidden disabilities (such as diabetes, epilepsy, and mental health issues). In accordance with the Act, the Council will consider and make reasonable adjustments to enable a person with a disability to work or continue to work.

This policy also takes into account the requirements of the Employment Rights Act (1996), Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) and The Employment Rights Act (1996).

1.5 AIM

The aims of this policy are:

- To ensure that all services are delivered efficiently and effectively. As an employer, Inverclyde Council has a duty to respond to actual and potential problems arising from absence levels particularly in relation to service delivery and staff wellbeing

- To ensure that Inverclyde Council recognises its responsibility for the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees and, in conjunction with other policies of the Council, aims to place emphasis on the comprehensive range of services and agencies established to provide assistance to employees
- To ensure that all employees are treated fairly and consistently, and are encouraged to seek help with any problems they might have which are resulting in non-attendance at work
- To ensure that managers are aware of their responsibilities under this policy and associated procedures
- To ensure that employees are aware of the terms of this policy and associated procedures and of their responsibilities to comply with them.

1.6 LINKS TO CORPORATE GROUPS

This policy links to the Trade Union Liaison Group.

2 SCOPE

This policy and associated procedures are applicable to all Council employees. That is, to those employed under the:

- Scottish Joint Council for Local Government Employees;
- Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT);
- Scheme for Salaries and Conditions of Service laid down by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Chief Officials of Local Authorities (Scotland).

3 POLICY CONTENT

3.1 PRINCIPLES

The following principles should be followed

- Managers will adopt a supportive and consistent approach to supporting employee attendance, taking into account individual circumstances
- Attendance issues will be dealt with promptly, confidentially, consistently and effectively, demonstrating clear outcomes at all stages
- All appropriate efforts will be made to support and assist an employee absent due to sickness and steps will be taken to help facilitate their return to work at the earliest opportunity
- Each employee will understand that regular attendance at work is of vital importance and that supporting employee attendance procedures must be adhered to

- Employees may seek advice/support from a trade union representative at any stage of the Supporting Employee Attendance procedure, and may be accompanied by a colleague or trade union representative at absence review and capability meetings
- Advice and guidance will be provided by the Council's Occupational Health provider where deemed appropriate.

3.2 NON-MEDICAL ABSENCE

The Council supports special leave, paid or unpaid, for necessary absences not caused by or categorised as sickness. Matters such as single day family or home emergencies, time off for close friend or relative funerals may be awarded on a compassionate basis and need not be recorded as sickness absence. Conditions surrounding these matters can be found in the supporting procedures, Family Friendly policy and the Conditions of Service document.

Short term periods of authorised leave may also be granted to care for ill relatives to allow employees to adjust to their personal circumstances and make other arrangements. Conditions surrounding these matters can be found in the supporting procedures document.

3.3 CATEGORISATION OF ABSENCE

Short Term Absence

Short term absence is defined as a period of absence lasting less than 4 weeks. It can take the form of minor one-off absences or minor absences that occur more frequently. The focus for managing short term absence is on reducing the number of incidences.

Long Term Absence

Long Term absence is defined as a period of absence lasting longer than 4 weeks. The focus for managing long term absence is on reducing the length of the absence period and supporting employee wellbeing.

Guidelines for managing both long and short term absence in practice are outlined in the Supporting Employee Attendance Procedures.

3.4 ATTENDANCE TARGETS AND TRIGGER POINTS

Attendance Targets

The Council has an average non-attendance target, adjusted periodically, which all employees are expected to satisfy and to be aware of. This target is clearly communicated at all times. It is available on ICON, through managers, and at Return to Work meetings. Details of Return to Work meetings can be found under section 5 of the Supporting Employee Attendance Procedures.

As at August 2024 the attendance target level is 9 days Full Time Equivalent (FTE) – pro rata for part time staff. That is any absence level around or above this figure must be fully reviewed and any underlying matters addressed. 9 days FTE is the maximum trigger for managers, all attendance issues should be addressed prior to reaching 9 days.

Trigger Points for Managers

Trigger points are a method of ensuring that absences are fully supported and reviewed. This is both to ensure effective management of attendance, and to ensure the Council fulfils its Health & Safety obligations as a reasonable employer

There are 5 distinct categories of trigger points listed below. These are designed to allow early intervention and support and to minimise the duration of any absence where possible and within reason;

- Mental Ill Health
- Musculoskeletal
- 4 separate episodes of absence or more in a 12 month period
- 6 days of absence or more in a 12 month period
- 4 weeks of absence or more

Trigger points are designed as a tool to raise managers' awareness, ensure discussion and early intervention with employees in relation to potential absence concerns which may require support and in some cases further action. The 6 day target is an indicator that an employee's absence is approaching the Council's overall 9 day target and may require further support/action and not necessarily that an Occupational Health referral is required or a letter of concern issued. Further guidance is provided within the Supporting Employee Attendance Procedures document.

3.5 FIT NOTES AND REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The Council will consider advice given by an employee's GP on the 'Statement of Fitness to Work'. Should the GP advise that an employee 'may be fit for work' all reasonable adjustments will be explored in conjunction with advice from Occupational Health.

3.6 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH APPOINTMENTS AND REVIEWS

It is a condition of employment that an employee may be required, where it is considered necessary or advisable, to attend an appointment with the Council's Occupational Health Advisor.

Employees are expected to comply with this condition of employment particularly when they are being paid occupational sickness allowance.

The Council will ensure consideration of all information presented to them and professional judgement, service needs and risk assessment will be applied when making any decisions in relation to information presented in medical reports.

3.7 ABSENCE REVIEW AND RETURN TO WORK MEETINGS

Supervisors/managers should meet with employees who are absent from work regularly to gather facts and discuss their absence from work. Employees are obliged to attend return to work and absence review meetings in accordance with the Supporting Employee Attendance procedures and relevant conditions of service.

3.8 TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

Dismissal on the grounds of incapability through ill-health may be considered where all other reasonable options, including support mechanisms, reasonable job adjustments, redeployment, retraining and, where appropriate, ill-health retirement have been exhausted. The Council may consider terminating employment on the grounds of the employee being unfit to perform the duties of the post due to ill-health or absence. Further guidance is provided within the Supporting Employee Attendance Procedures. Any appeal against dismissal on the grounds of incapability through ill-health will be heard by a Human Resources Appeal Panel (Officers).

3.9 CONFIDENTIALITY

All matters relating to employee attendance at work are confidential. The Council will ensure confidentiality of information through all relevant parties.

3.10 CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

The requirement for all employees to maintain a satisfactory level of attendance is included in an employee's Contract of Employment and Conditions of Service.

3.11 REDUNDANCY

When the Displacement Selection Criteria Matrix is being applied in relation to the *Voluntary Severance Policy* the last 3 years absence history will be taken into consideration.

3.12 ACCESS TO OCCUPATIONAL SICK PAY

Details of Sick Pay schemes are available within the relevant Conditions of Service. These can be accessed on ICON or on request from Organisational Development and Human Resources. To receive Occupational Sick Pay employees are required to follow certain notification and certification procedures as detailed within each respective Conditions of Service and in accordance with the Supporting Employee Attendance Procedures. These requirements are clearly defined and managers and employees are equally responsible for ensuring that they are adhered to.

Failure to comply with reporting procedures for sickness absences will normally exclude an employee from accessing occupational sick pay, and the absence from work may be deemed as unauthorised therefore warranting consideration under the Disciplinary Procedures.

3.13 DISCIPLINARY ACTION

In accordance with section 10.2.2 of the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service (*the 'Red Book'*) sick pay may be suspended if an employee abuses the sickness scheme. Should disciplinary action ultimately lead to termination of employment on the grounds of a poor attendance record, appeal hearings will be heard by a Human Resources Appeal Panel (Officers).

3.14 ACCIDENTS AND CRIMES OF VIOLENCE AT WORK

Details of all accidents and incidents of violence at work must be entered in the Accident Book and an Internal Accident/Incident Report Form completed (available on ICON). Please refer to the Council's Violence and Lone Working Policy. When confirmed as an incident under this policy the absence will not be reckoned against the Council's absence target. This

also applies to teachers and the recording of absence due to workplace violence (SNCT 6.20 - 6.25).

3.15 CONTACT WITH INFECTIOUS DISEASE

Any employee who in accordance with the National Insurance Acts is prevented from attending their place of employment because of contact with notifiable infectious diseases shall advise his or her supervisor immediately and shall be entitled to full pay during the absence, subject to the deduction from that full pay of any benefit payable under the National Insurance Acts. A period of absence on this account will be classed as medical suspension, shall not be reckoned against the employee's entitlement to sickness allowance nor will it be recognised against the Council's absence target.

3.16 PREGNANCY RELATED ILLNESS

If an illness is connected with pregnancy then the period of maternity leave will automatically begin if the illness commences or continues into the four week period before the expected week of confinement. Please refer to the Council's Family Friendly Policy for further details. Where the absence is unconnected to the pregnancy absence management procedures will apply.

4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Chief Executive has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.

4.2 DIRECTORS

Directors are responsible for setting the strategic direction of their Service consistent with the principles of the policy.

4.3 HEADS OF SERVICE

Heads of Service should promote a culture whereby accurate information is recorded in relation to employee attendance, procedures are followed and appropriate supports put in place.

4.4. SERVICE MANAGERS

Service Managers should ensure employee awareness of key policies.

4.5 OFFICERS

The manager should:

- Support the health, safety, and wellbeing of employees, recognising their duty of care
- Take action to identify and reduce, where possible, underlying causes of sickness absence with a view to preventing ill health

- Ensure appropriate early intervention where ill health arises to prevent the escalation of healthcare needs e.g. temporary reasonable adjustments to hours, workload, referral to physiotherapy/counselling.
- Seek, consider, and implement Occupational Health advice where appropriate to support employee attendance
- Update and record absences in a timely manner across relevant systems.

Employees are required to familiarise themselves with the terms of the policy and procedures during the course of their employment and to ensure that they comply with them.

The employee should:

- Recognise personal responsibility to take reasonable care of their own health and wellbeing
- They must also make sure they are fit to work without detriment to themselves or others e.g. taking appropriate action where they have an infectious disease
- Actively participate in the process to avoid delays
- Communicate at the earliest opportunity any underlying health issues or other contributing factors which may impact their attendance at work

All supervisors/managers are responsible for applying the policy and procedures ensuring consistency and fairness.

Trade Union representatives will work together with managers and employees to promote a positive work environment to ensure the policy and procedures support a culture of high levels of attendance at work.

Organisational Development and Human Resources will provide advice to support managers and employees in the application of this policy and associated procedures.

5 IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 TRAINING

Appropriate training will be provided for managers in the effective implementation and operation of the Supporting Employee Attendance Policy and Procedure to ensure consistency and full understanding. Elements of this training are mandatory for supervisors/managers please refer to the Council's training matrix for further information.

5.2 COMMUNICATION OF THE POLICY

The policy will be available on ICON, the intranet, as well as publically via the Council website.

6 RISK

6.1 LEGISLATIVE RISK

Managing sickness absence is a part of the employer's general duty to secure the health, safety and welfare of their employees (Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)).

The Employment Rights Act (1996) requires that terms and conditions such as sickness, notification of sick pay and rules relating to statutory sick pay must either be set out in a single document such as a “written contract of employment” or “statement of the main terms and conditions of employment” or in another readily accessible document (such as a sickness absence agreement) that is referred to in the above.

Sickness absence policies must be compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

6.2 WIDER RISKS

Without this policy there is a risks of high levels of absence from sickness. High levels of sickness absence are costly and disruptive and can lead to reduced service provision, additional pressure being placed on work colleagues leading to higher levels of stress and low morale, loss of continuity for Service users, additional salary costs necessary to cover absences and reputational damage for the Council.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This policy was updated in consultation with the Trade Union Liaison Group.

7.2 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

This policy was assessed in relation to the Council’s equality duties. All employees are entitled to use, access and be subjected to the policy and there is no evidence to indicate that this policy could affect employees differently or less favourably, on the grounds of their Protected Characteristics.