

The Council faced a gap of £40m this year in the revenue and capital budgets, which put at risk the services and maintenance that we all rely on. The decision to increase Council Tax by 10% was one that I was reluctant to take, but despite identifying £4M of savings and looking for other ways to raise income, a multi-million pound budget gap remained. The alternative put forward included measures such as transferring £3.1M of the Health and Social Care Partnership pension gain to the Capital Plan, increasing fees and charges by 8% and depleting funds for future projects. The Council Tax Freeze proposed by the Scottish Government was not fully funded, with the CoSLA budget reality analysis showing a £62.7M cut to Councils. The Council continues to support the CoSLA campaign for fair funding for local authorities in Scotland.

Since then, on Friday 8th March the Council Leader and Depute Leader met with Deputy First Minister Shona Robison and while it is somewhat disappointing that engaging with the Council seems to have been an afterthought for the Scottish Government, I welcome the ongoing discussions to try to address the issues that we face here in Argyll & Bute. Our goal remains to protect the vital services and jobs on which we all rely and I support any constructive dialogue with the Scottish Government that furthers that objective.

I attended the Townscape Heritage Event which highlighted the beneficial impact this funding has had on the built fabric of our town and community. The funding from key partners, National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic Environment Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise has allowed the Council to support businesses and owners to reinvigorate buildings on Victoria Street, Montague Street, Argyle Street and the Discovery Centre, building on the successful delivery of the first THI programme.

Thanks to members of the community council for raising the issues of Ardenraig Gardens and Castle Street, Port Bannatyne at public questions at the Area Committee meeting, highlighting the concerns of the community. With Cllr Kennedy-Boyle, I also met with the new BID manager and council officers to discuss a number of issues affecting the town.

The Fyne Homes Management Committee heard a report about the challenges faced with abandoned tenancies and the poor state of repair that some properties are left in and the additional time and money required for these properties to be reallocated. This is particularly frustrating given the Housing Emergency that the area is currently facing, where these properties are much needed to provide new homes.

The capital footway works on Marine road are now complete and preparation works are about to begin for surfacing work on a 300mtr section of the A844 between Ballianlay Farm and Etrick Bay.

I attended the CalMac Community Board Drop In event at the Glenburn Hotel and heard from members of the Community Board and from our own community about the shared experiences being faced across the network, particularly in relation to the new ticketing system and capacity.

At the Argyll & Islands Sounding Board we heard feedback from the Scottish Government's Islands Team on the National Islands Plan with a desire for a more localised approach with more connectivity. It was noted that there had been high expectations with the initial plan but with too many priorities and not enough money the outcome had been disappointing, with members requesting a plan for action, not just a plan.

There are public engagement events planned for w/c 18th March on the A83 Rest and Be Thankful to provide the opportunity to see and comment on the design for the long-term solution to that key route. Unfortunately there are no events planned on the island, however a virtual exhibition is

available at [www.pinpointcloud.co.uk/A83restandbethankful](http://www.pinpointcloud.co.uk/A83restandbethankful) with a deadline for response by 10th May 2024.

Councillor Peter Wallace  
Isle of Bute Ward  
Argyll and Bute Council