

**South Ayrshire Council**  
**Report by Chief Executive**  
**to South Ayrshire Council**  
**of 14 May 2026**

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**Subject: Delivering the Council's ambitions**

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**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to set out a strategy for increased delivery of the ambitions contained within the Council Plan and to seek approval to establish the Programme of Work, associated strategic boards and supporting reporting arrangements, along with next steps.

**2. Recommendation**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Council:**

- 2.1.1 Approve the strategy contained herein to increase delivery of the ambitions contained within the Council Plan;**
- 2.1.2 Approve the establishment of a Programme of Work and associated strategic boards;**
- 2.1.3 Approve the reporting arrangements for the Programme of Work;**
- 2.1.4 Upon approval, note that proposals to fully embed the Council's transformation approach '*Shaping Our Future Council*' within the new strategy and arrangements will be brought forward to Cabinet in October 2026; and**
- 2.1.5 Approve the next steps**

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The Council approved its Council Plan in 2023. The Plan sets out ambitions to reduce inequalities and a range of ambitions around three key priorities: Spaces and Places, Live, Work, Learn, and Civic and Community Pride.
- 3.2 It describes some cross-cutting themes, and how the Council Plan fits with the work of the Community Planning Partnership.
- 3.3 South Ayrshire faces some significant challenges, not least looming demographic issues which will have a significant impact on Council and partner services. By 2032, South Ayrshire is forecast to have a population decrease of 6.5%, one of only nine council areas in Scotland to decrease in population. By 2043, the working age population is forecast to decrease by 14%, with those of pensionable age increasing by 17% and over-75s increasing by 65%

- 3.4 Should there be no mitigating action, it is considered highly likely that these forecasts will put intolerable and likely unmanageable strain on Council and partner services, while embedding a declining economy.
- 3.5 It is highly unlikely that the financial position facing local government in Scotland will significantly improve in the medium term. Rising costs, pay awards, significant service pressures (particularly in adult health and social care) and a reducing working-age population all combine to present significant budgetary challenges.
- 3.6 The latest Medium-Term Financial Plan sets out that a cumulative budget gap of up to £28.6million can be expected to 2031.
- 3.7 It should be noted that, against that backdrop, the Council will continue to have revenue resources of around £400million at its disposal. It is essential that resources are utilised to not only continue to deliver the best possible services but that longer-term ambitions for the future of South Ayrshire are prioritised.
- 3.8 The Council Plan has ambition at its heart and the Council continues to deliver on that ambition, as detailed elsewhere on this agenda.
- 3.9 The Plan provides a robust basis from which to move forward. However, it is less clear how that ambition varies from day-to-day delivery of service and how achievement in terms of better outcomes is measured.
- 3.10 The Council's updated approach to transformation, '*Shaping Our Future Council*', refreshed in 2024, has achieved some success in terms of making improvements and efficiencies and realising cashable benefits which support the Council's ongoing financial sustainability. The agreed transformation priority areas are our assets; our workforce; our technology and our delivery model. It is essential that progress continues to be made in delivery of *Shaping Our Future Council*.
- 3.11 Therefore, an opportunity exists to accelerate the pace of change and refocus operational priorities while ensuring the whole resource of the Council is used to maximum effect with no consideration to existing organisational boundaries.
- 3.12 The challenges outlined above require a step change in delivering on ambition, collectively utilising the resources of the Council (regardless of service area) and working with partners to achieve better medium and long-term outcomes for the people of South Ayrshire while addressing the longer-term challenges.

#### **4. Detail**

- 4.1 While the Council Plan sets a high-level direction for the Council, it largely relies on service plans and performance reporting at a service level to measure success. While this is appropriate – and the delivery of Council services requires annual planning and reporting, some of it as part of national frameworks or by statute – it is considered necessary to reframe delivery of the Council's longer-term ambitions.
- 4.2 The most significant challenges facing the Council are medium and long-term in nature, and so delivery of ambition must reflect that position. In addition, none of these significant challenges can be met by services acting in isolation. They will require genuinely corporate and cross-cutting work to ensure a sustained focus and cohesive delivery.

- 4.3 To achieve this strategic focus, it is proposed that a thematic Programme of Work is established, sharply focused on delivery of medium and long-term ambition. It is important to distinguish this Programme from the business-as-usual service delivery undertaken by the Council; these activities will continue to be delivered by services and reported to Council within the current arrangements.
- 4.4 It will allow for appropriate flexibility in the delivery of complex and interconnected projects and plans critical to achieving the Council's ambitions.
- 4.5 This should not be seen as another layer of complexity. Rather, it should allow necessary corporate focus and member oversight of strategic ambition and delivery, bringing clarity to the achievement of the Council's ambitions. In implementing this strategy, it should be recognised that choices will have to be made about the direction of resource (both in terms of time and budget) to ensure the best possible chance of success.

4.6 **Key strategic principles of the Programme of Work**

The challenges outlined are well understood. There are three key strategic themes which require to be developed further and which represent the best opportunity to ensure a thriving South Ayrshire in the future. These are designed to stabilise the working-age population base, make people and communities more prosperous and reduce avoidable demand on Council and partner services through prevention and sustainability.

4.7 *The economy*

We will ensure that our Programme of Work activity is focussed on inclusive growth of the economy. It is a basic fact that a wealthier population leads to better health outcomes, better places and better prospects for people.

Delivering increased inclusive growth requires achieving maximum benefit from Council capital expenditure, increased partnership with other councils and governments to achieve the greatest possible benefit from investment and understanding the needs of a future economy and the opportunities within that landscape. In achieving this, we recognise that the rural economy requires particular interventions and supports.

Closer partnership with employers and exploiting opportunities for inward investment are also critical to success, as will ensuring a working-age population is able to access these opportunities and therefore stay in South Ayrshire to contribute to the economy. Increased housebuilding, both socially rented and private, has a critical role to play in supporting construction jobs, increasing the council tax base and increasing local spend.

In developing this strategic theme we understand that our economy is inextricably linked with the economy of Ayrshire as a whole. Increasingly, both UK and Scottish Governments consider economic investment and development as regional. Against that backdrop, the continued development of regional economic policies and strategies is recognised as essential to growth in South Ayrshire.

4.8 *Pathways to sustainable employment*

Closely interlinked with the economy theme is a need to ensure pathways to sustainable employment is available to the people of South Ayrshire.

While this means understanding the future economy, it also means ensuring that barriers to entry, such as poverty and inequality, for employability are identified and removed. Ensuring curricular pathways in schools will be critical, as will maximising available support for people furthest from the jobs market.

Working with partners in the further and higher education sectors, governments, other public sector partners and businesses in a systematic and coherent way will be a key feature of delivering under this strategic theme.

#### 4.9 *Infrastructure, places and people*

Places within South Ayrshire are all different, with different needs, challenges and opportunities. A clear, purposeful and coherent vision for places requires to respond to these factors. South Ayrshire Council should be a leader of place, inspiring long-term change through its policies and strategies and working closely with diverse communities to implement changes which achieve better outcomes.

The Council has a key role to play in direct delivery, for example through capital expenditure. It is essential that the capital programme remains focussed on strategic outcomes and, to this end, will be subject to comprehensive review to ensure that focus. This review will be clearly linked to our asset management plan and will result in a capital programme which will be smaller in scale, more deliverable, and more targeted at strategic outcomes.

It must be recognised, and fully embedded across the organisation, that the Council also has a significant role to play through delivery of the Ayrshire Growth Deal, Regional Economic Strategy and other initiatives delivered in partnership with others.

A strategic focus on communities and people who need the most support is essential to community resilience. We require to fully understand and plan how Council, partner and voluntary services can play a role which supports and provides opportunities for the most vulnerable people while making best use of our collective assets.

#### 4.10 **Developing the Programme of Work**

To meet the challenges and strategic themes outlined above, five thematic Programme of Work boards will be established at officer level:

- Thriving Places
- Brighter Futures
- Resilient People
- Sustainable Futures
- Future Council

These boards will be comprised of, and chaired by, chief officers. Relevant subject matter experts (for example in finance, legal, procurement and communications) will attend the boards as required.

#### 4.11 *Thriving Places*

Thriving Places is about ensuring that the places of South Ayrshire are well connected, well designed and support a growing economy. It will accelerate the coherent use of spaces and facilities in South Ayrshire's towns.

The Thriving Places strategic board will oversee capital investment, business support and inward investment, and the Ayrshire Growth Deal.

It will also drive the development of comprehensive Town Visions and support development of housing opportunities in the private and social rented sectors.

*Links to Council Plan priorities: all priorities.*

#### 4.12 *Brighter Futures*

The Brighter Futures strategic board will ensure that early years and school education provides the best possible opportunities for young people in South Ayrshire. It will also focus on adult learning and employability pathways, working with others to ensure a skills mix which gives the best possible opportunity for the people of South Ayrshire to access the jobs of the future.

Volunteering already plays a critical part in services to people in South Ayrshire, and the Brighter Futures strategic board will ensure that support and opportunity for the voluntary sector is available and coherent.

It will also support entrepreneurship across South Ayrshire, working with businesses and business groups to support business creation

*Links to Council Plan priorities:* Live, Work, Learn

#### 4.13 *Resilient People*

The Resilient People strategic board is aimed at ensuring that people and communities have the supports in place to thrive. It will ensure that whole family support is targeted at those who need it most and with a focus on coordinating Council and other services in a way which works for people.

It will develop ways in which community planning, partnership and capacity can be maximised and focus on early intervention and prevention to provide better outcomes for people and efficient use of Council resources.

By necessity, successful delivery will require extensive and embedded partnerships with NHS Ayrshire and Arran, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue and others.

*Links to Council Plan priorities:* Live, Work, Learn

#### 4.14 *Sustainable Futures*

The Council has bold ambitions around its climate obligations and sustainability. The Sustainable Futures strategic board will oversee development and delivery of work to manage carbon and climate adaptation

It will examine opportunities for energy efficiency and generation, maximising potential in this area for renewable energy and income generation. Recognising that active travel is an essential part of decarbonisation and promotes healthy lifestyles while being a significant part of national policy, the Sustainable Futures strategic board will identify and promote active travel networks, working with government and other agencies.

*Links to Council Plan priorities:* all priorities.

#### 4.15 *Future Council*

The Future Council strategic board is an enabler of the overall Programme of Work. It will identify and oversee interdependencies between the other strategic boards' activity, ensuring that barriers are broken down where necessary. It will, by necessity, link directly to the work within the Council's existing Transformation Programme. The Transformation Board will continue to provide delegated decision-making on investment for transformation projects via the Transformation Fund.

The Scottish Government set out its Public Service Reform strategy in 2025. Among its aims for change, the strategy sets out that simplification, local integration, removal of duplication and shared services are central to the future of public services in Scotland.

Public service reform will gather pace across Scotland in the coming months and years, and the Future Council strategic board will consider national developments as well as driving forward work with the other Ayrshire councils and NHS Ayrshire and Arran on the necessary development of joint working, removal of duplication and shared services.

Future Council will be responsible for achieving the commitments set out in the Council's Workforce Plan and will have responsibility for the overall direction of the Programme of Work, performance, assurance, risk and communication.

*Links to Council Plan priorities:* all priorities.

#### **4.16 Developing the Programme**

As part of the next steps outlined in table 1 below, rapid analysis of all activity not classed as business-as-usual will be prioritised into the Programme of Work. A series of workshops will then take place based on the key strategic themes of the Programme to identify opportunities which can be taken forward.

A set of prioritisation criteria will be developed to ensure that projects contained within the programme align with the Council plan and the LOIP. This will include reducing inequalities, positive financial impact and an assessment of deliverability.

Only projects with a clear benefit profile and robust resourcing assumptions will enter the Programme. To avoid duplication and manage ability to resource projects, new projects will only enter the Programme as part of the annual review. Exceptionally, projects may enter the Programme mid-cycle where required by statute, urgent local priority or time-limited funding availability. Any such exceptions will require approval through the Corporate Management Team to protect overall capacity.

Aligning the focus of the Council's transformation activity to its strategic priorities and wider Programme of Work will ensure change resource and activity is targeted to support the overall ambitions of the Council. It is also anticipated that leadership and ownership of transformational change projects will be enhanced and strengthened as a result of stronger cross-Council working arrangements.

#### **4.17 Accountability and governance**

The Corporate Management Team (CMT) will serve as the sponsoring body for the delivery of the Programme of Work. CMT will also have decision-making authority where there is the potential of conflict of ownership of projects between boards, or where a way forward for interdependent projects cannot be agreed at board level.

Specific significant Programme items will be reported to Cabinet as required and in accordance with the delivery plan. Overall Programme progress reports will be submitted to Council annually, with quarterly programme update briefings delivered to members and a mid-year highlight report to Cabinet.

Programme risk and assurance arrangements and monitoring of risk will be reported to the Audit and Governance Panel, with frequency to be determined once risk monitoring and management arrangements are finalised, with an appropriate approach to managing risk appetite, how risks are aggregated and assurance of benefits.

Boards will be responsible for managing risks and controls, with corporate assurance controls (finance, legal, HR and communication) built into the framework.

Each board will have a Terms of Reference which, as a minimum, will detail purpose, scope, membership, quorum and meeting frequency. Terms of Reference will include decision rights and delegated authority, including escalation routes for interdependent work and any conflicts of ownership, with unresolved issues escalated to CMT.

Appendix 1 shows the structure of the Programme and related governance arrangements.

#### 4.18 Measuring success

The Programme of Work is designed to deliver long-term ambition. While the Council utilises a range of performance indicators – a mix of statutory, internal and Local Government Benchmarking Framework measures – it is essential that measurement of success reflects the long-term ambitions.

To this end, a suitable suite of indicators – all externally measured – will be developed as part of the performance framework for the Programme. These will be based around better outcomes linked to the strategic themes and the Council Plan themes.

These indicators must be publicly reported by the partner or external body, with a defined publication timetable and methodology.

At a programme level, the following outcomes are appropriate and measurable through a range of external indicators:

PO1	Inclusive economic growth strengthens local prosperity	Thriving Places
PO2	More people access sustainable employment pathways	Thriving Places, Brighter Futures
PO3	Children and young people have better life chances through attainment, skills and destinations	Brighter Futures, Resilient People
PO4	Health and wellbeing improve with fewer avoidable interventions and a reduction the dependency ratio for older people	Resilient People
PO5	Communities are more resilient, safe and connected	Resilient People, Thriving Places
PO6	Towns and neighbourhoods are more vibrant and attract investment, supporting jobs and enterprise	Thriving Places, Sustainable Futures
PO7	Net zero progress accelerates and climate resilience increases	Sustainable Futures
PO8	Capital and assets are optimised for strategic, long-term outcomes	Thriving Places
PO9	Public service reform delivers efficiency and better user experience	Future Council
PO10	Workforce and organisational capability support sustainable delivery	Future Council

The indicators will be submitted for approval as part of the next steps. A clear benefits realisation methodology will be developed to ensure outcomes remain the overriding focus of the Programme. Each board will be accountable for project-level outcomes.

Business as usual and service performance will continue to be scrutinised by the Service and Partnerships Performance Panel.

#### 4.19 Review of existing strategies

The Council, like all local authorities, has a number of key policies and strategies. Some of these are required by law, but most are decided on by the Council, with a complicated combination of strategies running over multiple years.

This picture can be confused, with older strategies overlapping with more recent ones and performance against these strategies not necessarily as focused as it could be. Therefore, a strategy review will be undertaken, with a refreshed strategic framework presented to the Council in due course. This framework will clearly define the strategies seen as essential to success, with unambiguous timelines for update and performance reporting. The review will also consider amalgamation of existing strategies where appropriate, and the cessation of some strategies where these are outdated, superseded or ineffective

#### **4.20 Review of capital**

Audit Scotland, in its Best Value assessment of the Council's asset management arrangements, recommended that there should be closer strategic alignment of capital plans to asset management and better analysis of how capital investment aligns with the Council Plan.

Clear benefit and alignment with the Council Plan and the strategic intent of the Programme of Work are essential to delivery of the Council's ambitions. A review of the council's capital programme and alignment with asset management plans will be led by the Depute Chief Executive and be presented for approval by Council in January 2027.

The capital review will be aligned to *PO8 - capital and assets are optimised for strategic long-term outcomes*, and approved by CMT before submission to Council for approval.

#### **4.21 Structure of Council services**

The Programme of Work will be genuinely cross-cutting; no single service will be responsible for its delivery. Equally important is the continued delivery of Council services as business-as-usual.

To better facilitate and support the Programme of Work and better alignment to the key strategic themes, an opportunity exists to examine the structure of Council services. This will include the overall management of the Programme and outcomes to ensure success, and identification of where there is an opportunity to accelerate delivery of projects already agreed.

With respect to day-to-day-delivery of services, the new structure must also empower chief officers to efficiently discharge the Council's services.

The Chief Executive will present a proposed structure to meet these requirements as part of the next steps of implementing the Programme of Work approach.

#### **4.22 Management of the Programme**

The Assistant Director (Transformation) will establish suitable programme management arrangements. Any programme management resource requirements will be met within existing budgets or through the proposed restructure of services.

Programme management includes portfolio planning, reporting, benefits realisation, risk and issue management, and dependency management across boards.

#### **4.23 Development of next Council Plan**

The current Council Plan expires in 2028. The development of a Council Plan is by necessity complex and requires extensive internal engagement as well as with community planning partners, the community and voluntary sector and with communities themselves. As such, development of the new plan will begin in late 2026 with approval from Council achieved by early 2028.

By necessity, the Programme of Work will require to align with emerging priorities during the development of the Council Plan and with continued development of the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan. However, because the pressures facing the Council impact on partners and communities, an opportunity exists to examine the possibility of a single Community Plan which incorporates both the Council Plan and a refreshed LOIP. Officers will consider this possibility in more depth and report to Council in due course.

#### 4.24 Next steps

Table 1 sets out the next steps in developing and delivering the Programme of Work.

**Table 1**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Finalised by</b>	<b>Approval</b>
Establishment of boards - chair, vice chair and members appointed - Terms of Reference agreed	July 2026	Chief Executive
Restructure of Council Services	September 2026	Cabinet
Review of existing strategies	September 2026	Cabinet
Detailed Programme of Work and performance framework	October 2026	Council
Risk and assurance framework for Programme of Work	November 2026	Audit and Governance Panel
Review of capital	January 2027	Council

## 5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

## 6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## 7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 There are no direct HR implications arising from this report.

## 8. Risk

### 8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations. The contents of this report enable the Council to support all Council Plan priorities.

### 8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 If the Council rejects the recommendations its ability to maximise benefit from its Council Plan priorities will be compromised, potentially leading to poorer outcomes for people and communities.

**9. Integrated Impact Assessment (incorporating Equalities)**

9.1 The proposals in this report do not require to be assessed through an Integrated Impact Assessment, since they reflect the priorities of the Council Plan which have undergone such assessment. Individual projects in the Programme of Work will be subject to suitable assessment.

**10. Sustainable Development Implications**

10.1 This report does not require a strategic environmental assessment. Individual projects in the Programme of Work will be subject to such assessment as necessary.

**11. Options Appraisal**

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

**12. Link to Council Plan**

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to all Council Plan priorities.

**13. Link to Shaping Our Future Council** Yes  No

13.1 The implementation of the recommendations in this report will support delivery of Shaping Our Future Council.

**14. Results of Consultation**

14.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report

14.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Brian Connolly, Policy Lead for Economy and Strategy, and the contents reflect feedback provided.

## 15. Next Steps for Decision Tracking Purposes

- 15.1 If the recommendations above are approved by Members, the Chief Executive will ensure that all necessary steps are taken to ensure full implementation of the decision within the following timescales, with the completion status reported to the Cabinet in the 'Council and Cabinet Decision Log' at each of its meetings until such time as the decision is fully implemented:

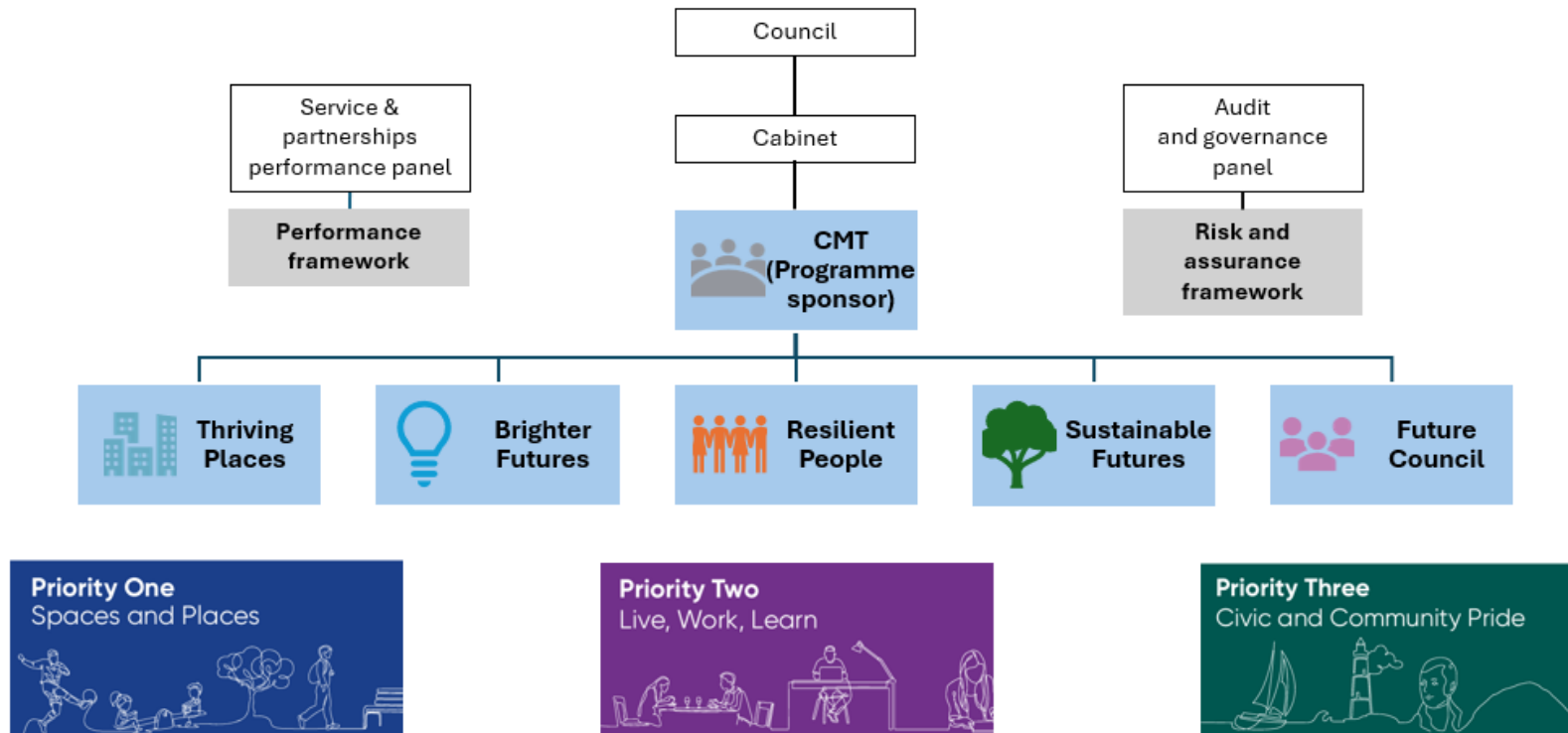
<b><i>Implementation</i></b>	<b><i>Due date</i></b>	<b><i>Managed by</i></b>
Restructure of Council services	September 2026	Chief Executive
Review of existing strategies	September 2026	Assistant Director (Corporate Policy, Strategy and Performance)
Detailed Programme of Work and performance framework	October 2026	Chief Executive
Risk and assurance framework for Programme of Work	November 2026	Chief Executive
Review of capital	January 2027	Depute Chief Executive

### Background Papers

**Person to Contact**      **Stephen Penman, Chief Executive**  
**County Buildings, Willington Square, Ayr, KA7 1DR**  
**Phone 01292 436 990**  
**E-mail [Stephen.Penman@south-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:Stephen.Penman@south-ayrshire.gov.uk)**

**Date: May 2026**

# Appendix 1



**Key:**

