

Short Life Working Group – Argyll Islands Taskforce – Update on progress

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper provides an update on the activities of the Argyll Islands Taskforce since the 27 June 2014 Council meeting.
- 1.2 An update on the actions agreed at Council is included in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 The main activities of the Taskforce over the past twelve months have focused on collecting information about our island communities and keeping up to date with the work related to the Our Island Our Future campaign. The Taskforce has also met with both The Highland Council and North Ayrshire Council and has identified a number of priorities which are listed at paragraph 4.4. In order to progress these priorities, it is suggested that the Argyll Islands Taskforce in partnership with North Ayrshire and The Highland Councils seeks to work with both the Scottish and UK Government to enable them to contribute to the strategic discussions regarding island issues.
- 1.4 The Argyll Islands Taskforce has also developed a vision for the islands and is seeking Council approval of this vision.

Recommendations

- 1.5 That Council:
- (i) Notes the priorities for partnership working identified at para 4.4;
 - (ii) Agrees that the Argyll Islands Taskforce works in partnership with North Ayrshire Council and The Highland Council to progress the priorities noted at (i);
 - (iii) Agrees that the Argyll Islands Taskforce works with the Scottish Government and the UK Government to progress the priorities at a strategic level and requests inclusion within the Islands Working Group and other groups as appropriate;
 - (iv) Agrees the vision identified at para 4.7.

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 On the 23 January 2014 the Council agreed to the setting up of a short life working group to investigate the issues affecting our islands and to develop a vision statement as well as key actions necessary to address the issues. This was against a background of falling populations on many of our islands and an awareness that Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles Councils were promoting the Our Islands Our Future campaign. A list of actions to be undertaken by the Taskforce was agreed at the Council meeting of 27 June 2014. This paper provides an update on the activities of the Argyll Islands Taskforce since the June 2014 Council meeting.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Council:
- (i) Notes the priorities for partnership working identified at para 4.4;
 - (ii) Agrees that the Argyll Islands Taskforce works in partnership with North Ayrshire Council and The Highland Council to progress the priorities noted at (i);
 - (iii) Agrees that the Argyll Islands Taskforce works with the Scottish Government and the UK Government to progress the priorities at a strategic level and requests inclusion within the Islands Working Group and other groups as appropriate;
 - (iv) Agrees the vision identified at para 4.7.

4.0 DETAILS

- 4.1 At the Council meeting on 27 June 2014, twelve actions were identified for the Argyll Islands Taskforce to progress. Details of these and the progress made are included in Appendix 1. An additional item was added in August 2014 when issues were raised regarding the lack of GP cover on Mull, this is also included on the action list at Appendix 1. The Taskforce will continue to work on the remaining agreed actions.
- 4.2 The main activities of the Taskforce over the past twelve months have focused on collecting information about our island communities and keeping up to date with the work related to the Our Island Our Future campaign which has included the publication of the Scottish Governments Empowering Scotland's Island Communities (the Islands Prospectus, June 2014) and the UK Government and The Three Scottish Islands Councils: A Framework for the Islands (August 2014).

- 4.3 The Taskforce has also met with both The Highland Council (March 2015) and North Ayrshire Council (May 2015) and has agreed to work in partnership with both Councils to seek to address those issues which affect island and very isolated rural communities across the three local authority areas. As a group the three authorities have a total of 40 inhabited islands clustered around the west coast of Scotland as well as a number of very isolated rural communities which often experience the same difficulties and issues as island communities.
- 4.4 As a result of the discussions with North Ayrshire Council and The Highland Council the following priorities have been identified:
- To ensure that the future disbursement of powers and income, including income from The Crown Estate, to our island communities is equal to the three island communities.
 - To obtain Scottish Government capital investment in key island infrastructure such as ports, ferry terminals and vessels in order to facilitate the needs of RET and secure the future economic prosperity of our island and isolated rural communities.
 - To secure the integration of essential transport networks including ferries, buses, air and rail connections to minimise journey times to and from our island and isolated rural communities.
 - To lobby for parity for our island and isolated rural communities with regard to mail order delivery surcharges.
 - To lobby for maximum investment in our digital connectivity for our island and isolated rural communities, including superfast broadband, modern mobile phone signal and exploring the possibility of opening up public digital networks to the wider community.
 - To lobby for the removal of water and waste water constraints from our island and isolated rural communities to facilitate economic growth.
 - To lobby for innovative approaches to recruit and retain adequate GP coverage for our island and isolated rural communities.
 - To seek innovative and cost effective affordable housing for our island and isolated rural communities.
 - To address fuel poverty for our island and isolated communities.
 - To work with the three island authorities to identify common economic challenges across our islands and opportunities for joint working to address these.
- 4.5 Many of these issues are discussed within the Islands Prospectus and Framework for the Islands. Both the Scottish and UK Governments have set up working groups which include the three island councils of Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. These working groups have helped to inform the documents published to date and it is expected that the three island councils will continue to contribute including through the preparation of an Annual Statement of Collective Priorities which will assist the awareness and understanding of the UK Government in relation to their requirements.
- 4.6 It is therefore proposed that the Argyll Islands Taskforce, in partnership with North Ayrshire and The Highland Councils, seeks a much closer working relationship with both the Scottish and UK Governments so that representatives of the west of Scotland islands are able to contribute to the discussions at this strategic level.
- 4.7 Officers have already approached the Scottish Government regarding representation on the Island Areas Ministerial Working Group and have held discussions with Derek MacKay, Minister for Transport and Islands. Although formal inclusion within the Working Group appears unlikely it was indicated that regular meetings between the partnership councils and the Scottish Government would be acceptable. It is proposed

that a request is also made to the UK Government seeking representation on the Islands Working Group and input to the Annual Statement of Collective Priorities

- 4.8 Alongside the activities of the Argyll Islands Taskforce, the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) met on 1st June 2015 in Kirkwall. An identified priority for 2015 was to explore how COHI members want to engage with the Scottish Government around island issues, considering whether existing structures were sufficient and ensuring they communicated an island perspective effectively. This will affect the approach taken in relation to the Scottish Government and it may be appropriate for the Taskforce to liaise with the Scottish Government through the mechanism established by COHI in due course.
- 4.9 Convention members also agreed that delivering fast, reliable digital connectivity and tackling transport costs for remote and islands communities needed to be addressed. Action on both of these issues would help to address island concerns within Argyll.
- 4.10 In identifying the above priorities the Argyll Islands Taskforce remains mindful of the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) overall objective that “Argyll and Bute’s economic success is built on a growing population”. It is felt that improvements in these priority areas will help to make our islands more attractive places for people to live in and to operate businesses from and will therefore contribute to this overall objective. In order to express the Taskforce’s aspirations for the islands, a vision has been developed as follows:

It is recognised that our islands play a vital role in delivering economic growth across our area. We want to see our islands prosper and grow, providing education and employment for our young people, supporting and growing our businesses and communities and benefiting from the communication and transportation infrastructure and services necessary for them to be sustainable and prosper.

It is requested that the vision is agreed by Council.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Argyll Islands Taskforce, in partnership with other Councils, is now in a position to establish a working relationship with both the Scottish and UK Governments in order to contribute to the strategic discussions about the issues which affect our island communities. The Argyll Islands Taskforce is seeking confirmation from the Council that they can proceed with this work.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

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| 6.1 | Policy | The development of a vision statement and lobbying for positive policy and resource support for our islands fits with the objectives of the SOA, EDAP and Local Development Plan which seek to deliver sustainable island communities |
| 6.2 | Financial | None at this stage |
| 6.3 | Legal | None at this stage |
| 6.4 | HR | None at this stage. |
| 6.5 | Equalities | None at this stage |
| 6.6 | Risk | To do nothing may leave our island communities at a disadvantage as they would sit outwith the 3 islands initiative and potentially any benefit that comes from the Our Islands: Our Future campaign |
| 6.7 | Customer Service | None at this stage |

Pippa Milne, Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure
Policy Lead – Councillor Scoullar
16 June 2015

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APPENDIX 1 – ACTION TASK LIST

Argyll Islands Task Force
Action Sheet

Ref	Action	Lead Person	Time Frame	Additional Information
1	Undertake further analysis of the population census data to determine the demographics relating to each island and what impact that this is having on the islands in regard to their sustainability	Chris Carr	30/09/14	Population statistics report submitted 23/03/15. COMPLETE
2	Gather further information relating to those islands that were not directly part of the SOA consultation to help to fully understand all the issues affecting the future of the Argyll islands. Once these issues have been fully identified they will be used as a basis for discussions with the Scottish and UK governments.	Fergus Murray	Ongoing	Matrix of issues to be kept up to date, all members of taskforce to advice as issues change or new issues arise.
3	Review the recently published Rural Scotland in Focus 2014 report and feed in any relevant information to the island analysis.	Fergus Murray	Anticipated within 6 weeks	Report to 13/11/2014 - Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee (1) COMPLETE
4	Develop a position/vision statement for Argyll Islands which reflects the important role that our islands play in our economic future and in the delivery of the SOA objectives of economic success and population growth. The position/vision statement will be informed by the current analysis work and will be used to drive forward key actions and to lobby for the Argyll islands.	Audrey Martin	By next taskforce meeting	Draft vision discussed at meeting of 23/03/15, to be updated with member feedback. Vision agreed by Argyll Islands Taskforce – to be put before Council.
5	Give further consideration to the “island proofing” of the SOA and examine all new polices and legislation (EU, UK and Scottish Government) coming forward that have a relevance to and could have an impact on the Argyll islands. Consider the development of a template to inform the “island proofing” and use this in the development of all new council policy.	Audrey Martin	Awaiting Bill	Island proofing is being considered by both the Scottish Government and UK Government as part of their discussion with the Our Islands Our Future campaign, the Taskforce are seeking to engage with bodies. We will monitor both organisations in relation to relevant legislation.

6	Write to the Leader of the Three Islands Council, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland and invite them to a future meeting of the Group.	Fergus Murray	Following completion of item 8	To be progressed shortly.
7	Maintain a watching brief in regard to the Three Islands Partnership. The Our Islands: Our Future campaign has the potential to change the powers and responsibilities for those islands within the Shetland, Orkneys and Western Isles. It would therefore be appropriate for the Council To maintain a watching brief on the initiative.	Audrey Martin	Ongoing	Report tabled on Empowering Scotland's Island Communities – a Scottish Government response to the Our Islands Our Future campaign and ministerial working groups at meeting in August 2014. The Taskforce is seeking to engage with the Scottish and UK government in these discussions.
8	Meet with Highland Council and North Ayrshire to ascertain if there is an appetite to work collaboratively on areas of common interest. Some of the issues affecting the three island councils will also apply to islands within Argyll and Bute but there may also be other issues that are applicable to our islands. Now that we have commenced work to identify the specific issues relating to our islands it would be helpful to also meet with neighbouring authorities which also have islands to see if there are any shared areas of interest.	Fergus Murray	Not later than 07/10/14, preferably before	Meetings with North Ayrshire and The Highland Councils have taken place COMPLETE.
9	Work with Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) and other partners involved with our islands to ensure that we maximise the opportunities for the Argyll islands from projects such as the Smilegov project The objective of the Smilegov project is to effectively strengthen capacity to support development and implementation of high quality island sustainable action plans and bankable energy projects. www.sustainableislands.eu	Audrey Martin	Ongoing	ABC are already part of Smilegov which has a focus on renewables. COMPLETE SIF to be invited to make a presentation at Council. At the request of the SIF, Councillor Scoullar has written to support their request for funding from the Scottish Government. Work may also be required with HITrans, SPT, CALMAC and CMAL.
10	Maintain a watching brief in regard to new legislation and policy and future EU funding that may have an impact on Argyll islands and make representation on any issues.	Fergus Murray	Ongoing	EDST continue to consider the island perspective.

11	Write to and meet with relevant Scottish and UK Minister(s) to lobby for the Argyll Islands. It is imperative that the specific issues affecting our islands and their resulting needs and actions are raised with the Scottish and UK Government and the necessary support and commitment secured. One of the issues of particular concern at the moment relates to the inequitable phased introduction of RET which is assisting some islands but impacting on others not yet included.	Councillor Scoular	Ongoing	<p>Letter sent to Derek MacKay as the new minister for Transport and Islands updating him on the Argyll Islands Taskforce and inviting him to a meeting. Meeting with Leader and Chief Exec which has taken place.</p> <p>Council representatives have met with the UK Scottish Minister - Need to create links with new Scottish Minister following election.</p> <p>Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) will be rolled out to all of the remaining ferry routes in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services network in October 2015.</p>
12	Work with and support Argyll island communities in the development of their community development plans and in their delivery	Audrey Martin with the support of CPP and HIE	Ongoing	<p>Argyll and Bute Council staff continues to work with the Tiree community.</p> <p>SURF have carried out assessment work on Bute, draft report now prepared, which will be reported back to BC committee.</p> <p>The Community Development Team continue to assist communities, Community Action Planning Training is being delivered in July.</p>
13	Issue arisen regarding out of hours doctor cover on Mull	Councillor Devon, Councillor Scoullar and Fergus Murray	Ongoing	<p>This was a new issue raised in August 2014.</p> <p>Letter sent to NHS Highland, August 2014.</p> <p>Interim solution agreed, with support from locums and existing GPs there will be two cover arrangements (Tobermory/ Salen and Bunessan). Long-term a single cover arrangement for all three practices supported by the appointment of salaried GPs is planned. Options appraisal exercise also being undertaken regarding ambulance service.</p>