
OUR ISLANDS: OUR FUTURE

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council at their meeting on 27 June 2013 discussed the Our Islands: Our future campaign being led by the Shetland, Orkney and Western Isles Councils to obtain greater extension of powers devolved to Scotland's islands. The Council agreed a motion *"that the Council enters into dialogue with the 3 islands Councils to put the case that the islands of Argyll and Bute should be part of this campaign so that all of Scotland's islands are part of this initiative and that the Council is represented and takes part in the islands conference in Orkney in September."*
- 1.2 At the 29 August 2013 meeting, the Executive Director of Customer Services provided an update in relation to the positive response from the island councils and also notification of the establishment of an Island Areas Ministerial Working Group.
- 1.3 Elected Members of the Council attended the Our Islands: Our Future conference held on the 19/20 September 2013 and from this it was concluded that direct involvement in this particular campaign would not be the most appropriate route for Argyll and Bute.
- 1.4 Whilst direct involvement in the Our Islands: Our Future campaign may not be considered appropriate, it is considered that there is a need to take forward its own island initiative which it is proposed could also include other Scottish island Councils. There is a risk that inequalities could arise between Scottish islands if the latter is not pursued.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Members agree to the following:
- That the Council keeps a watching brief in regard to the *3 islands Councils* initiative;
 - That Members agree to the Council developing its own islands initiative including a position statement for our islands which outlines the key areas for support, including any increased resources and powers from the Scottish Government and UK Government;
 - That Members agree that the Council works with other Scottish Islands Councils to determine if there are common issues and areas of interest that can be developed in partnership;

- That Members agree to the Council setting up a short life working group consisting of up to 9 Members to investigate and to take forward the actions above and to meet with the Scottish and UK Government to present its own case in regard to our islands and their needs and to seek support and commitment; and
- If minded to approve the above recommendations, the Council nominates appropriate elected members to sit on the short life working group to progress the actions.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The Our Islands: Our Future Conference was held in Orkney on 19/20 September 2013. It was attended by the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure Services and Councillors McCuish and Currie.
- 3.2 A conference report is being prepared and is likely to be publically available in late January 2014.
- 3.3 The three councils have issued a position statement which identifies opportunities in relation to the development and extension of the powers which could involve:
- Resource-based – including control of the sea bed; development of Fishery Management Plans and Schemes of Assistance; The effective development of the world class renewable energy resources around the islands;
 - Location-based – including support to agriculture; sustainable transport: effective transport links to maximise Island resources; mainland/ island ferry services and inter-islands ferry services being commissioned, funded, operated and controlled from the islands to meet island needs;
 - Governance-based – including potential changes to fiscal arrangements to allow the islands to benefit more directly from the exploitation of local resources; recognition of the status of islands in the new Scottish Constitutional Settlement (regardless of the result of the referendum) and within the European Union Governance Framework; public sector reform with continued development of the integrated public authority concept; clarification of the role of HIE and any adjustment required to promote greater integration; possibility of extension of the principle of promotion of local legislation to other island areas, or in support of specific developments.
 - Culture based – including continued support for the Outer Hebrides as the heartland of the Gaelic language and for the promotion of the Orcadian and Shetlandic dialects and recognition of the Nordic aspect of the culture of the Northern Isles; further promotion of the disproportionately strong contribution of Scotland's islands to the culture, language, history and natural resource of Scotland.
- 3.4 The first meeting of the Islands Area Ministerial Working Group took place on 29 August 2013. Further meetings took place on 29 October

2013 and 21 November 2013. The Group will meet six times in total, and is working towards developing a prospectus outlining opportunities for island communities in the context of the referendum.

- 3.5 The Scottish Government has committed to bring forward a bill for an Islands Act following the independence referendum.
- 3.6 The councils have also met with the UK government on 14/15 October 2013 and again on 29 November 2013. The three Islands Councils and the Secretary of State for Scotland have agreed to work towards a Concordat to take forward the Our Islands Our Future initiative. Discussions are covering issues such as the development and management of island resources including renewable energy, oil and gas, fisheries and the Crown Estate. It was also confirmed that the Scotland Office would host a dedicated islands' desk.
- 3.7 As a result of attending the conference, it is considered that direct involvement in the Our Islands campaign is unlikely to be appropriate for Argyll and Bute Council however it is noted that any changes as a result of the campaign may create inequalities between the three councils' islands and other Scottish islands outwith the campaign. For this reason it is considered that the Council should develop its own initiative in close consultation with our island communities. In addition the Council would look to meet with other Scottish island councils to identify common areas of interest which can then be taken to Scottish and UK Governments for their consideration and support.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 Some of the issues affecting the three councils will also apply to islands within Argyll and Bute but there may also be other issues that are applicable to our islands and it would be advantageous to identify the specific issues relating to our islands (in conjunction with neighbouring authorities which also have islands where appropriate). Once these issues have been identified they could be used as a basis for discussions with the Scottish and UK governments.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy The development of a position statement and associated 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.
- 5.2 Financial None at this stage
- 5.3 Legal None at this stage

- 5.4 HR A staff resource will be required to support the short life working group in identifying the issues and taking forward the actions.
- 5.5 Equalities None at this stage
- 5.6 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
- 5.7 Customer Service None at this stage

Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure Services

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