

25 September 2014

LEADER'S REPORT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report outlines key activities undertaken within the role of Council Leader since 2nd June, through participation in meetings, as follow; A83 Rest and be Thankful Taskforce, Chief Officer – Senior Officer (COSO), Programme Board, Accounts Commission, Fraser Durie (Argyll College), COSLA Convention, Michael Russell MSP, HIEP Board, COSLA Leaders, ABRA, EJCC, and a visit from a delegation from Amberg Sulzbach. This Report also provides an update to Members in relation to Policy Lead activities on Strategic Finance, and Customer and Support Services including; Council Tax, Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, Local Support Services Framework Trial, Empty Homes Policy, Joint Working with Highland Council, IT Service Contract with ACHA, Information Management, Public Services Network, Customer Service Centre, Digital Agenda and Admin Review.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** It is recommended that the Council notes the report and also notes that additional documents are available in a Leaders Report Pack through the Leadership Support Officer.

3. Rest and be Thankful Taskforce, 10 June, Three Villages Hall, Arrochar

- 3.1** The full minute from the above meeting is available on-line at http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/documents/projects/A83/A83_Taskforce_meeting_7_Minutes.pdf as well as within the Leaders Report pack.

- 3.2** I have also summarised the main points from the meeting for you below.

The meeting was well represented with attendees including Keith Brown MSP – Minister for Transport and Veterans; Sean Clemie, Morag Mackay, Graham Edmond and David Hamilton, (Transport Scotland); Eddie Ross, John Wrigley and Gary Allan (BEAR Scotland), Mike Story – Chair of A83 Marketing Sub-Group, Gordon Ross – Western Ferries, Neil McRae – Hitrans, Councillor Duncan MacIntyre, Councillor Donald Kelly and Jim Smith (Argyll and Bute Council); Jane MacLeod and Alison Hay (Mid Argyll Chamber of Commerce), Ian Nicholson – Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, John Hair – Forestry Commission and Ian MacInnes – Lochgilphead

Community Council (part).

During the meeting, the Minister restated the Scottish Government's commitment to reducing the risk of landslides impacting upon the A83 and provided a breakdown of the investment that had been made in the route so far.

The meeting then progressed onto the works that had been completed so far including; debris fencing (the effectiveness of which will continue to be monitored), remote monitoring points, drainage repair works and slope maintenance. It was confirmed that where there was risk from landslide/slip in other areas, measures which had proved successful at the Rest and be Thankful could be employed where appropriate.

The 2014/15 programme was discussed including the investments planned for Loch Shira and Glenkinglas there was also an update on other planned works including; Strone Point realignment scheme design works, Dunderave phased works, a feasibility report which is currently being considered in relation to Balmore Road Tarbert, Tarbet Tea Rooms Corner resurfacing works to be carried out this year, the trunking of the A83 from Kennacraig to Campbeltown which includes initial works such as resurfacing, improved road markings and increased drainage.

There followed an up-date on the work of the Marketing sub-group in which Keith Brown highlighted that he was content that procedures which had been developed had now been implemented to ensure that a consistent message was being put out by stakeholders. Mike Storey, however, confirmed that he still had concerns about the way information was being interpreted by the media; the BBC in particular. Issues around communication and social media were discussed resulting in an agreement to continue pushing for improvements.

A discussion, question and answer item provided an opportunity for debate around important issues such as; resilience (which was agreed to have improved due to increased rail and ferry services around the area), the importance of prompt announcements when the road reopened, communication with the BBC, the announcement of the additional £6m for 2014/15, the search for a permanent solution to the A83 issues, slope planting, maintenance expenditure, condition monitoring and associated closures, signage and diversions, convoy systems, military road landowner agreement and potential bus facilities at Ardgarten and the Rest and be Thankful. It was suggested that the next meeting be held in December; date and time to be confirmed.

4 COSO, 13 June 2014

- 4.1 I was pleased to be able to attend the above meeting, which was held in Dunoon. The theme for the day was Leadership and while I gave a presentation on my experience of political Leadership to date, we were also

fortunate to have guest speakers such as Iain Jurgenson from Portavadie Marina speaking about Leadership in the Private Sector and Sir Peter Housden, Permanent Secretary, speaking about Leadership in the Public Sector. Carol Evans gave a general but memorable presentation on Effective Leadership and Jane Fowler led an HR perspective on Leadership for Healthy working Lives.

Additional presentations included; a Corporate Update from Sally Loudon, Chief Executive, an introduction and observations from Pippa Milne, speaking as our new Executive Director for Development and Infrastructure, an explanation and briefing on the Referendum on Independence in relation to the Council's Roles and Responsibilities for Senior Officers by Charles Reppke, Head of Governance and Law and an overview of Committee Processes and Reports by Douglas Hendry, Executive Director of Customer Services.

Strong Leadership will be an extremely important issue as we tackle the challenges that we will be facing over the next few years it is an essential element of surviving change. It is important that Chief and Senior Officers continue to enhance skills to lead effective teams through the challenges that we face going forward.

5 Programme Board Meeting (Health and Social Care Integration), 16th June 2014

- 5.1** Chief Executive - Sally Loudon, Executive Director for Community Services – Cleland Sneddon and I met with the other members of the Programme Board for Integration in Oban. This was the second meeting of the board. Governance, was the first item on the agenda, although will not become the business of the empowered decision making body until the 1st April 2015 and it was acknowledged that until this date, decisions around Governance will be the focus for the Shadow Integration Board.

The meeting moved on to discuss the arrangements for the Shadow Integration Board. Details relating to Standing Orders were discussed and a document entitled Arrangements for the Shadow Integration Board was accepted as suitable for purpose.

In addition to the above, other issues which were discussed on the day included; Terms of Reference; Joint Project Team Workstreams terms of reference; Project Execution Plan Draft (PEP), Scope of Integration, The appointment of a Chief Officer, a Funding Paper (which was taken away by board members for consideration), a Trade Union/staff side update, the Risk Register, Issues Log, the Draft Communication, Engagement and Development Plan, a presentation designed to up-date staff on progress with integration, the schedule of meetings.

Through the discussion of Any other Competent Business, attendees considered a presentation by the Alison McCrossan from Scottish Health

Council in relation to COSMIC; its purpose, its process, its application and the role-out of its associated training. In addition, a letter from the Health and Social Care Directorate in relation to CEOs and Leaders was shared with the programme Board and its contents were noted.

Following the meeting, a time critical action log describing the tasks required for action by named individual board members was updated and circulated.

6 Visit by a delegation from Amberg Sulzbach, 17 June

- 6.1 I was absolutely delighted to again welcome our twinning partners from Amberg Sulzbach on their first visit since 2011. Of course, as a region, they had held their own elections and it was a different group of politicians and officers in attendance although there were a few of the visitors that had been here before.

Their visit to the Council marked just one appointment in their five day schedule of visits around the region which also included visits to Oban, Inveraray and Rothesay. The themes of their visit were wide ranging from business to public sector and education.

Of particular interest to me was the presentation that they made to us in the Council Chamber which explained the work that they had been doing as a region, to strengthen their local economy and the ways in which they had overcome some of their challenges to development through methodically and progressively working on and investing in infrastructure solutions. Further information will be shared on how this progress is being achieved.

7 Accounts Commission Meeting, 19 June

- 7.1 Chief Executive, Sally Loudon and I attended a meeting with the Accounts Commission in Edinburgh on the 19th June. Further information on the Audit Scotland/Accounts Commission and the Council's Updated Action Plan is contained within the Council papers.

8 Meeting with Fraser Durie, Argyll College, 25 June.

- 8.1 Chief Executive – Sally Loudon, Executive Director Community Services – Cleland Sneddon and I met with Fraser Durie, Principal of Argyll College in June. The partnership between the Council and the College is important to the delivery of the SOA and the associated outcomes.

The discussion was very positive and wide ranging on areas of mutual support and collaboration. The discussion covered areas such as the H&I Skills Plan focus on Argyll and Bute and the link to SOA; the recommendations of the Wood Commission on Youth Employment and the anticipated response from the Scottish Government; the joint use of property

estate between the college and the council; the Scottish Funding Council Resource Allocation to the college and projections for the future; the development of teacher and Gaelic teacher training opportunities in Argyll and Bute; the development of Health and Social Care Academic/ Career Pathways; the development of a suite of new courses and qualifications including those linked to our cultural heritage.

9 COSLA Convention, 27 June

9.1 I attended the above meeting which was held in Verity House, Edinburgh. All items on the agenda, apart from the minutes from previous Leaders' etc meetings were taken in public session. Where particular sections of reports are referenced, they are available for view within the Leaders Report Pack which is available from the Leadership Support Officer. I have provided an overview of the items discussed below:-

9.2 Item 1. Review of Constitution

The purpose of this report was to allow Convention delegates to receive the detailed work of the short life Task Group set up to review COSLA's Constitution which has been reported to Leaders and passed by them to the Convention for their decision regarding changes which should be made to COSLA's current Constitution.

It was recommended that Convention:

- (i) Approve all of the specific changes, including all omissions and additions that are outlined in the Annex to this report (see Leaders Report Pack). In doing so, Convention should note that the provision regarding proportionality at paragraph 4.8(a) will not be enacted until 2017; and
- (ii) Consider the three general items referred to them by Leaders. In doing so, Convention must decide which additional alterations they wish to see to the Constitution to reflect:
 - a. Gender balance – three potential options are outlined in the main report but Convention delegates may choose another course of action.
 - b. Definition of political groups – a proposal for resolving this issue is outlined in paragraph 17(see Referenced Paragraphs below)
 - c. Clarity regarding how referrals of information between Convention and Leaders will be handled.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper

Outcome

There was a wide-ranging discussion with a number of points put across. On the basis of that discussion, the Convention agreed the recommendations of the paper and agreed that an assessment take place after one year of how

all the changes within the Constitution had settled in and during that time, COSLA would liaise with local authorities individually for their views.

Item 1 – Review of Constitution - Referenced paragraphs:-

4.8(a) - The membership of meetings of the Convention shall comprise:

representatives appointed by member councils whose number shall be in accordance with Appendix I (which assumes membership by all eligible councils) and on a basis which reflects the balance of political strength (including non-party political representation) within each member council;

17. Staffing and Property

17.1 The Association shall employ a suitable person to be the Chief Executive of the Association and such staff as may be reasonably required.

17.2 The Chief Executive shall be the Head of the Paid Service of the Association and shall also be responsible for the collection, custody and accounting for the expenditure of the Association's finances.

17.3 The Association may purchase, take on lease or otherwise obtain land and buildings for use as offices to provide accommodation for the business of the Association, and for the use of staff, and may sell, renounce or otherwise dispose of such land and buildings, all on such terms and in such manner as it considers suitable.

All feu writs, dispositions, leases, assignments or renunciations shall be granted by or taken in the name of the President, the Vice President and the Chief Executive of the Association and their respective successors in office for the time being, as trustees ex officio on behalf of the Association. Any such writs etc. shall be binding on the Association and on its individual constituent member councils jointly and severally, and any superior, grantor, landlord, disponent or assignee shall not require to enquire into the authority for such actions.

9.3 Item 2. ICT Collaboration Hub

The purpose of this paper was to provide an update on the progress of the Local Government ICT strategy which was previously approved by COSLA Leaders and in particular, to gain approval for a proposed Collaboration Hub which will be used to coordinate Local Government activity on ICT.

It was recommended that Convention:

- i. Note the progress on the Local Government ICT action plan;
- ii. Approve the arrangements for the establishment of the Collaborative

- Hub outlined in the paper; and
- iii. Approve the governance arrangements for the Collaborative Hub as outlined in the paper.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper

Outcome

The Convention agreed the recommendations of the paper.

9.4 Item 3. Underground Drilling Access

The purpose of this report was inform Convention of a consultation from the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) on Underground Drilling Access for the extraction of Unconventional Gas and Oil as well as Geothermal Energy and to seek approval of the parameters of a COSLA response.

Recommendations

Convention was invited to:-

- i. Discuss the implications for Scottish Local Government of the proposed simplification of the legislative framework for Underground Drilling Access;
- ii. Agree the main issues and parameters for a COSLA response outlined within the paper; and
- iii. Agree to mandate the President and Development, Economy and Sustainability Spokesperson to respond formally on behalf of Convention by 15 August 2014.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper

Outcome

During discussion, it was suggested that underground drilling or anything of this nature should be subject to scrutiny of planning committees at local authorities.

The Convention agreed the recommendations of the paper.

9.5 Item 4. Scottish Landfill Tax Consultation

The purpose of this report was to summarise the current Scottish Government consultation on the proposed regulations for the new Scottish Landfill Tax from April 2015 onwards, outline the main implications for Scottish councils and propose the parameters for a COSLA response.

Recommendations

Convention was invited to:

- i. Note the summary of the consultation on the new Scottish Landfill Tax system to be implemented from April 2015 onwards;
- ii. Agree the proposed key points to inform a final response;
- iii. Agree to mandate the Spokespersons for Development, Economy

- and Sustainability, and Resources and Capacity to sign off a final COSLA response;
- iv. Note that, in preparing the final consultation response, SOLACE, Waste Managers Network and Directors of Finance will be actively consulted for their views; and
 - v. Agree that the Spokespersons seek an early meeting with the Cabinet Secretaries for Finance and Sustainable Growth and Environment and Rural Affairs to discuss the proposed implementation of the Scottish Landfill Tax.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper.

Outcome

The convention:-

- i. accepted the Commission's work as the third stage of COSLA's strategy for developing further fiscal empowerment and changes to the resourcing of local government in Scotland; and
- ii. agreed to develop a Task Group to drive the work forward with Terms of Reference based on the final paragraph of the report.

9.6 Item 5, Community Justice Redesign

The purpose of this paper was to for the Convention members to discuss and agree the draft COSLA response to the Scottish Government consultation on the redesign of Community Justice in Scotland and to request that sign off of the final submission be delegated to the Spokesperson for Community Well-being.

Recommendations

Convention is asked to:

- i. Agree the content of the draft consultation response;
- ii. Agree that the final response is signed off by the Community Well-being Spokesperson, once the various local consultation events have taken place; and
- iii. Ensure that their own Councils are submitting a supporting response.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper

Outcome

It was highlighted that the workload and budget of Community Justice Services had increased significantly in recent years, which had put pressures on other budgets and this should be monitored closely going forward.

The Convention agreed the recommendations of the paper

9.7 Item 6. Fifth Reviews of Local Government Electoral Arrangements

The purpose of this report was to allow Convention to consider the nature of its response to the Local Boundary Commission's consultation on proposals

for councillor numbers.

It was recommended that:-

- i. The convention decide whether or not they accept the proposed link between deprivation and representation outlined in the Boundary Commission's documents. Our consultation response will then reflect Convention's judgement on this matter; and
- ii. Should Convention agree to accept the link between councillor numbers and deprivation, it should also consider whether that link should be reflected in the redistribution of councillor numbers outlined in the paper or whether we should demand an increase in the overall number of councillors in Scotland to reflect the importance of deprivation on effective representation.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position is that we would seek to rebut the proposals from the Commission

Outcome

There were a number of reservations and concerns expressed about the proposals put forward. In particular, there was unanimous agreement from those present that deprivation was not the only driver of councillor's workload and that a reduction in councillor numbers to benefit others was not acceptable.

The Convention:-

- i. agreed that they did not accept the proposed link between deprivation and representation outlined in the Boundary Commission's documents;
- ii. agreed that the Boundary Commission's work on councillors workload be accelerated at least as a basis for future discussions;
- iii. noted the concerns raised at the meeting and that they would be relayed to the Boundary Commission; and
- iv. agreed that the Boundary Commission be invited to a future meeting of Leaders or Convention.

9.8 Item 7. Fiscal Empowerment

The purpose of this report was to update Convention in regard to COSLA's campaign for fiscal autonomy for local government in the light of the Commission for Strengthening Local Democracy's final report.

It was recommended that Convention:

- i. Endorse the work of the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy with regard to fiscal empowerment for local government;
- ii. Accept the Commission's work as the third stage of COSLA's strategy for developing further fiscal empowerment and changes to the resourcing of local government in Scotland; and

- iii. Develops a Task Group to drive this work forward with Terms of Reference based on the final paragraph of the Fiscal Empowerment Report.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper, although the likelihood of a successful outcome was questioned.

Outcome

The Convention agreed to the recommendations of the paper

9.9 Item 8. COSLA's Audited Financial Statements for the Year ending 31 March 2014

The purpose of this report was to provide members with the audited financial statements for COSLA for the year ending 31st March 2014.

Recommendations

Convention was invited to adopt the audited financial statements appended to the report.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper to approve COSLA's accounts.

Outcome

The Convention agreed to adopt the audited financial statements as appended to the report.

9.10 Item 9. Recast budget for financial year 2014/15

The purpose of this report was to provide Convention with a revised budget for the current financial year (2014/15) and to seek approval for it.

Recommendations

Convention was invited to approve the budget which was a revised budget for the current financial year.

Background

Convention approved the current 2014/15 budget at their meeting on 22nd March 2013. At that time, Convention approved both the 2013/14 budget and the 2014/15 budget. Therefore, Convention did not have the opportunity to review the 2014/15 budget prior to the start of the financial year. In light of the notices provided by eight Councils of their intention to leave in April 2015, work has now commenced on preparing for the outcome of that. However, COSLA recognises that four of the notices have a condition attached which may mean that the notice to withdraw is not actioned in April 2015. Nevertheless, COSLA is preparing a number of scenarios for the future and these are part of the ongoing discussions with the Audit Group. The first step in the considerations is a review of the current year budget and Convention is now being asked to consider a revised budget.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper to approve the revised budget

Outcome

The Convention agreed to the recommendation of the paper.

9.11 Item 10. Subsidiarity and Proportionality – Influencing the EU Agenda

The purpose of this paper was for Convention members to agree, with any amendments, key messages for COSLA's and Scottish Local Government's involvement in the EU policy-making and pre-legislative consultation processes, in keeping with the subsidiarity principle.

Recommendations

The Convention was invited to:

1. Note the impact that EU policy and legislation has on Scottish Local Government competences and services;
2. Agree, with any amendments, a refresh to key political messages on how to strengthen the engagement with key partners on EU policy and legislation; and
3. Agree that COSLA's more detailed submission to the UK Balance of Competence review on Subsidiarity and Proportionality be based around the above-mentioned points, and submitted by the President.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper

Outcome

The Convention considered a report which sought agreement to key messages for COSLA's and Scottish Local Government's involvement in the EU policy-making and pre-legislative consultation processes, in keeping with the subsidiarity principle.

The Convention agreed to the recommendations of the paper.

9.12 Item 11. COSLA EU Committee of the Regions Nominations

The purpose of this paper was to agree arrangements for arriving at COSLA's nominations for the EU Committee of the Regions.

Recommendations

1. Convention was invited to:
 - i. Agree the nomination arrangements for the four Scottish CoR Members as follows:
 - two full places going to the Labour and SNP Political Groups and
 - two alternate places going to the Independent and Conservative Political Groups;
 - ii. Note the terms of office for CoR Members who will be nominated by and act on behalf of COSLA during the 2015-2020 period; and

- iii. Agree that the nominees' names be submitted by the President of COSLA as soon as possible.

Outcome

The Convention agreed the nomination arrangements for the four Scottish CoR Members as follows:

- two full places going to the Labour and SNP Political Groups and
- two alternate places going to the Independent and Conservative Political Groups;

Noted were:-

- the terms of office for CoR Members who would be nominated by and act on behalf of COSLA during the 2015-2020 period;
- the nominations put forward the Group Leaders at the meeting;
- and agreed that the nominees' names be submitted by the President of COSLA as soon as possible.

9.13 Item 12. Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill Task Group

The purpose of this report was to ask the Convention to establish a short term elected member Task Group that can react quickly to issues arising while the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill goes through the Scottish Parliamentary stages.

Recommendations

Convention was asked to;

- Agree to establish a short term Task Group, which can react quickly and timeously to issues arising from the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill going through the Scottish Parliament;
- Agree the remit and the political composition of this Group;
- Agree that Political Group Leaders be asked to consider their nominations for the Group; and
- Require the Task Group to report back to the Community Well-being Executive Group and Leaders, as required.

Argyll and Bute Council Position

Our position was to agree with the recommendations of the paper

Outcome

It was suggested that, as far as possible, members of the Community Well-being Executive Group be nominated to sit on the Task Group.

The Convention agreed the recommendations of the paper.

10 Meeting with Michael Russell MSP, 11th August.

- 10.1** I attended the above meeting with Sally Loudon, Chief Executive and Councillor Ellen Morton, Depute Leader, attended the meeting via Lync.

The agenda facilitated an exchange of information, ideas and opinions on the following items items; Castle Toward, Rockfield, Kilbowie, Mull roads,

Dervaig Public Toilets, Audit Scotland, Population Summit, specific unadopted roads, litter at roadsides, Bridge of Orchy – social care and school house, School Transport – Loch Awe /Dalmally, Ferries and Piers, CHORD Project – progress in Oban and Dunoon, Rothesay Window Policy, Rothesay Pier, Oban Airport, TIFF and Piers in Oban, The David Hayman Play, Gaelic Probationers, Health and Social Care Integration, School Meals and Finance.

The meeting provided a useful opportunity to explain the council's position on many of the above issues and to seek mutually agreeable solutions and Scottish Government support.

11 Meeting with HIE, 12th August

11.1 On 12th August, Chief Executive – Sally Loudon, Executive Director Development and Infrastructure Services – Pippa Milne and I met with HIE's; Chief Executive – Alex Paterson, Chairman - Professor Lorne Crerar and Area Manager (Argyll and the Islands) – Douglas Cowan.

The purpose of the meeting was to establish joint approach to priorities and issues of mutual interest; especially work aligned to the Single Outcome Agreement.

The outcomes from the meeting included:-

- agreement that HIE and Argyll and Bute Council would work more closely together and that HIE would commit to more regular meetings
- that the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) would provide a focus for outcomes
- that opportunities for alignment of work would be sought and further discussion would follow on how this would be implemented
- agreement to look at priorities collectively
- agreement that the two organisations would seek opportunities to align investment for maximum impact; capital projects, renewables, digital, marine science, Clyde crossing etc
- agreement that the Single Outcome Agreement was a working document forming a basis for development work as a partnership but that the Economic Summit and Economic Forum should be used to “harness possibilities”
- that Local Action Plans would provide a focus for looking at each area together
- that HIE would provide support on project and plan maximisation
- that other partners, particularly SE and SDS would be “brought to the table” where joint input would bring benefits.

12 Meeting with Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael MP, Secretary of State for Scotland. 18 August

12.1 Chief Executive – Sally Loudon, Executive Director, Customer Services –

Douglas Hendry, Executive Director, Economic Development and Infrastructure – Pippa Milne and I met with Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael MP, Secretary of State for Scotland on the 18th August.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss matters which are of significant importance to Argyll and Bute and relevant to the MP in his capacity of Secretary of State for Scotland.

The key issues which were discussed on the day included;

1. **Defence** – we discussed the UK Government position regarding Faslane and the potential implications for Argyll and Bute in relation to potential personnel changes.
2. **National Grid** – we discussed the aspirations of Island Communities in relation to energy generating renewables projects and the support mechanisms available to us from the UK Government as well as how we can input to policy regarding connectivity
3. **Crown Estate** - we discussed current proposals which may have impacts on the operation of Coastal Communities Fund, the possibilities for increased levels of funding and the need for local authorities to have more control over resources.
4. **Port Security** – we discussed the demand from Department of Transport that Oban should become a Port Authority, and the concerns of the Council and key stakeholders in relation to the properly funded management of such a burden.
5. **Population and Economic Issues** – we up-dated the Secretary of State on the work being carried out in preparation for the forthcoming summit and discussed whether any assistance could be made available to us
6. **Island Issues** – we discussed the work of the Council’s Short Life Working Group, the meetings with Derek MacKay and the assurances of the extension of benefits arising from the Ministerial Task Group for Islands to Argyll and Bute. In addition we spoke about the commitments contained in the UK Governments Framework for the Islands to our council’s islands.

13 HIEP Board Meeting, 25 August

- 13.1 I attended the above meeting via VC from Kilmory. The meeting focused on three main topics; national and regional funding priorities, draft programme documents for submission to the European Commission and the delivery and governance structures for the European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds which has been the subject of development work over recent months. Meeting delegates were updated on HIEP’s involvement with:-

1. The submission of the UK Partnership Agreement (UKPA) to the European Commission. This document outlines the strategic focus taken by the UK Government and the devolved administrations and indicates the thematic focus for investment of ESI funds. HIEP and individual partners had provided comment to several iterations of the Scottish chapter of the UKPA to ensure that it reflects the challenges and opportunities of the Highlands and Islands Transition region.
2. The submission of three Scottish Operational Programmes – ERDF, ESF and EAFRD (Rural Development). These documents detail the proposed investments by each of the funds and include detail on the particular issues and proposed investments in the Highlands and Islands Transition region. HIEP partners have provided input to strengthen the analysis of need, proposed investment priorities and financial allocations for the Highlands and Islands transition region. The EMFF fisheries programme will be submitted as a UK programme.
3. Further development of strategic interventions, including identification of specific project activities, expected outcomes, consideration of cost models and potential delivery arrangements. For some strategic interventions HIEP partners are lead bodies – for example HIE leading on Business Competitiveness and Innovation; Local Authorities leading on Employability and the Business Gateway element of the Business Competitiveness and Innovation SI. In others, HIEP partners are likely to be delivery bodies – for example UHI delivering on Workforce Development. In all cases the HIEP priority is to influence where necessary to ensure that proposed activities clearly address the challenges and opportunities present in the region
4. Outlining of programme governance arrangements, including the Highlands and Islands Territorial Committee – HIEP are working to ensure that there is representation on the HITC to influence the programme and that it is not restricted to having a reporting function.

There was an explanation of the further work that would be required in each of these areas, particularly in 3 and 4 above, as we move towards programme commencement. We were advised that the timeline for completion of negotiations, approval of programme documents and commencement of programmes had slipped as a result of later than anticipated submission of the Partnership Agreement and Operational Programmes with the programmes anticipated to begin in January 2015 at the earliest. Also that there would be further negotiations between the European Commission and UK / Scottish Governments on establishing administration and governance arrangements.

14 Meeting with CalMac, 2nd September

14.1 Councillor Ellen Morton, Councillor Duncan MacIntyre, Chief Executive – Sally

Loudon, Executive Director, Development and Infrastructure Services – Pippa Milne and I attended a meeting with Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd's CEO - Martin Dorchester and Marketing Manager - Cathy Craig.

Issues of mutual concern, including those relating to the Single Outcome Agreement were discussed at this meeting including; employment and training, supporting the local supply chain, CalMac's routes and network as an enabling factor for people and businesses (including infrastructure investment and future service planning), working with partners to promote CalMac destinations (and therefore tourism) and improving partnership working to assist with the population growing aspect of the SOA.

The proposal to improve collaboration between the two organisations and the wider partnership was welcomed and it was agreed that a more structured approach would facilitate more effective progress towards mutual objectives.

15 ABRA, 6 September

15.1 I chaired the meeting of the Argyll and Bute Renewable Alliance, which took place on 4th September in Inveraray. The meeting focused on the opportunities associated with planned improvements to the grid network and we heard specifically about the work that SSE have been undertaking through their "Open 4 Business" Portal which seeks to engage small and medium sized enterprises in their supply chain. A local event will be taking place to promote these opportunities to a wide range of our businesses.

With these opportunities comes the need for an appropriately skilled workforce and we also heard from the Energy Skills Partnership, National Academy for Skills and Argyll College on how we can ensure appropriate training is in place. Further analysis work will be undertaken with a view to developing a skills plan to cover the renewables industry.

ABRA is now in its third year and we took the opportunity to review how best to move it forward, we will be refreshing the Renewable Energy Action Plan and will continue to use ABRA as a mechanism for its delivery.

16 EJCC, 5 September

16.1 At the EJCC on 5 September I was pleased to be able to reassure the trades unions that we continue on a course of financial stability as set out in our budget strategy. They were also presented with the recent paper considered by the Policy and Resources Committee on the use of the general fund reserve. I outlined the discussions that are taking place on how we can maximise the benefit to the council and to services from this reserve to support our Single Outcome Agreement objectives of growth and

development.

The EJCC was also advised of the joint working that is underway between officers and trade union colleagues from both the Council and the NHS to support the transition arrangements for Health and Social Care Integration.

The next meeting of the EJCC will be in February to consider the budget, but I have offered to meet on a more informal basis with TU colleagues before then.

17 Strategic Finance

17.1 Detailed financial monitoring reports covering Revenue Budget 2014-15, Budget Savings, 2015-16 Budget, Financial Risks, Reserves And Balances, Capital Plan and Treasury Management were submitted to Policy and Resources Committee on 21st August. These set out a comprehensive picture of the Council's financial position.

18 Up-dates for Members in relation to Council Tax, Scottish Welfare Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, Local Support Services Framework Trial, Empty Homes Policy, Joint Working with Highland Council, IT Service Contract with ACHA, Information Management, Public Services Network, Customer Service Centre, Digital Agenda and Admin Review.

18.1 Local Tax Collections

Collections of Council Tax to the end of August stand at 47.66%, which is 0.27% down on last year at this time. At the end of July, the collection figure was down 0.20%, so there has been some deterioration here. Sheriff Officer collections are down by c £174k, which equates to 0.30% on collections. This is because the first summary warrant was issued three weeks behind schedule this year, due to a delay in awarding the new Sheriff Officer contract. In-month Sheriff Officer collections were down by £7k, but it is expected that this will start to improve shortly. A progress review meeting with the new Sheriff Officers, in relation to the above, is planned.

In contrast, collections are going well on the 2013/14 year, where 96.92% have been collected, which is 0.14% up on last year at this time. This is better than at the end of last month, when the figure was 0.12% up. It is possible that Sheriff Officer collections are being allocated slightly differently than in the past and this is affecting the collections.

Collections of non-domestic rates are 61.61% at end of August, which is 0.05% up on this time last year.

18.2 Scottish Welfare Fund

In August, £59,422 was spent from the Scottish Welfare Fund, compared to

the monthly profile of £36,796. The increase in spend is, in part, due to adjustments relating to the previous financial year where there were some difficulties with invoices from the main supplier, which have now been resolved. This is the first month this year that spend has been higher than the profile. Cumulatively, £131,720 has been spent for this year's applications compared to £155,320 profiled spend (85% of profiled spend). Low priority items are also currently being funded and have been since June. 16 community care grants currently await processing and a further 42 were part paid at the end of August.

18.3 Discretionary Housing Payments

£393,632 has now been either paid out or committed, compared to the Department of Work and Pensions allocation of £409,580 – 96%. The Scottish Government allocation has not yet been tapped into. All the registered social landlords have been contacted and given new simple forms to ensure that their tenants affected by under-occupancy apply for this. A meeting was held with representatives from all 4 main Registered Social Landlords and they are happy with the process. All cases previously refused have now been granted and others who have not yet applied will receive communications in this regard.

18.4 Local Support Services Framework Trial

The UK Government has been working with local authorities and other organisations to form a comprehensive view of the type of services that may be required, as Universal Credit is rolled out. The UK Government views partnership working as essential to the success of this roll-out and is looking to local authorities, as key partners, to help to provide targeted local support. This Local Support Services Framework, produced collaboratively with local authorities, sets out the principles for that support. It covers the type of support that DWP would be willing to fund, how current partnerships work and how a partnership approach might work in the future, as well as outlining areas that require further development such as the funding model.

Insight from staff and organisations that support claimants with additional needs is being gathered and Argyll and Bute Council is one of the two Scottish Local Authorities which are engaged in a trial which commenced on Monday 1 September. The trial is now being branded “Universal Support – Delivered Locally” and will cover 3 elements; triage, digital skills support and personal budgeting support. Dundee City Council is the other Local Authority taking part in the trial.

18.5 Empty Homes Policy

Argyll and Bute Council's joint working with Community Services on empty homes, has been short-listed for a national IRRV award in innovation. This will be judged in early October. As at end of August, our council had billed an additional £648,043 in double Council Tax charge. In the first 3 months of this year, 469 homes were brought back into use. Information has been received from over 600 empty home owners about their properties.

18.6 Joint working with Highland Council

The pilot to roll out Lync to 500 Highland Council users is now gathering pace. Initial roll out has covered IT users and will now be extended to all 500 Dingwall users by the end of this month.

18.7 IT Service Contract with ACHA

Argyll and Bute Council currently provide IT services, under contract, to ACHA. This contract expires in November 2015. ACHA have already started their re-procurement process and have issued the pre-qualification questionnaire. The Council has to respond to this by end of September.

18.8 Information Management

An Information Management strategy and high level action plan has been drafted and is being reviewed at present. Following review by DMT and SMT, this will be brought forward to the Policy & Resources Committee for approval. Work has commenced on an Outline Business Case to support additional investment in this area. Progress in the area of Records Management is important to us, as a Council, and is subject to audit.

18.7 Public Services Network

The aim of the Public Services Network (PSN) is to substantially reduce the cost of communication across public services and enable new, joined-up and shared public services for the benefit of citizens. As such, it is required to meet stringent criteria and it is therefore accredited. As our council's current accreditation runs out in January, a "health check" has been commissioned to be carried out within the required 6 months of the expiry date. It is extremely important to retain this accreditation.

18.10 Customer Service Centre

Our council's Customer Service Centre launched a "Community Lets" service, following the earlier "go live" for Decriminalised Parking Enforcement. The next new area is Co-mingled Waste. Our customer service staff are starting to work on a new Customer Services Strategy. This will come to the Policy & Resources Committee in due course for approval. Customer Services has been researching alternative Customer Relationship Management (CRM) suppliers and are now likely to go out to tender as a step change in the market and in market leaders seems to be taking place. There may be an opportunity here to work with Highland Council as they are similarly minded and potentially other councils also.

18.11 Digital Agenda

Socitm is the professional body for people involved in the leadership and management of IT and digitally enabled services delivered for public benefit.

Their purpose is to; help maximise the effectiveness of IT and digital in delivering services for public benefit, to help members to develop professionally and to deliver their outcomes, to help public service organisations and citizens get maximum value from IT and digital services.

As a Local Authority using IT for public benefit, Argyll and Bute Council is

gearing up for the next Socitm “Better Connected” assessment at the end of October. This process has started with the improvement of school websites and other IT services will be subject to a process of evaluation and improvement.

18.12 Admin Review

The centralised main handling project is now live for parts of Customer Services in Lochgilphead area, with the remaining parts of Customer Services to go live later this month. The education sourcing team pilot is now covering all schools. Further business process re-engineering is being planned within Development and Infrastructure to iron out some difficulties in the purchasing process. This is now scheduled for end of November.