

REPORT BY POLICY LEAD COUNCILLOR FOR ISLAND AFFAIRS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an update to the work in relation to islands over the 2014 period.

2. UPDATE

Argyll Islands Taskforce

- 2.1 The short life working group – the Argyll Islands Taskforce – has met on four separate occasions to discuss the issues affecting the Argyll islands. These discussions have been centred around the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) and how we can assist our islands to ensure that over the next 10 years we deliver on the overall objective which is **“Argyll and Bute’s economic success is built on a growing population”**.
- 2.2 Work has been undertaken to analyse and better understand what is happening on each of our islands and to identify exactly what the key issues and challenges are going forward. Whilst Argyll and Bute’s island population fell by 5% over the period 2001 to 2011 the patterns of population change vary between and within islands. In regard to the variations in population trends, as a general rule, it is those islands with populations in the hundreds that have experienced the largest rates of population growth. An exception is Tiree, where the population has fallen by 15% over the period 2001 to 2011. While these islands show large population changes in percentage terms, the numbers of people involved may be small.

2.3 A number of overarching issues have been identified as being common to all our islands. These are as follows:

- Climate change impacts
- Digital connectivity (mobile phone and broadband)
- Economic Activities
- Governance Issues
- Healthcare provision
- Island Culture – language, history and natural resource
- Island specific skills and training
- Local responsibility for local resources
- Marketing and promotion – highlighting successes and opportunities
- Public services
- Secure and adequate electricity connections
- Transport connectivity (integration between ferry, bus train and plane). This also includes the issue of transport provision and timetabling on islands to allow access by those working out with normal work patterns
- Ferry services that are fit for purpose, support the needs of the islands and are reliable – mainland to island as well as island to island
- Transport infrastructure and costs of travel and fuel

These issues have been collated onto a matrix which will be used to focus the work of the Argyll Islands Taskforce.

SURF has agreed to undertake a study on Bute looking at how the public pound has been spent on the islands and what impact it has done. This work has the potential to influence where the Council and its community planning partners may decide to concentrate their efforts to be to stimulate the island economy. A presentation on their proposals will be presented to the next available Bute and Cowal business day. HIE are funding SURF with officer assistance from the Council.

2.4 Twelve actions for the Taskforce were agreed by Council on 26 June 2014 and an update on these is contained below:

Ref	Action	Time Frame	Comment
1	Undertake further analysis of the population census data to determine the demographics relating to each island	30/09/14	Work ongoing
2	Gather further information relating to those islands that were not directly part of the SOA consultation	Ongoing	Matrix of issues to be kept up to date.
3	Review the recently published Rural Scotland in Focus 2014 report and feed in any relevant information to the island analysis.	Next available committee	Report prepared to be reported to EDI Committee
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.	By next taskforce meeting	Draft vision being developed.
5	Give further consideration to the "island proofing" of the SOA and examine all new policies 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.	Next available Policy and Resources Committee	Report with template to be submitted to next Policy and Resources Committee.
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.	Following completion of item 8	

7	Maintain a watching brief in regard to the Three Islands Partnership. The Our Islands: Our Future	Ongoing	
8	Meet with Highland Council and North Ayrshire	Not later than 07/10/14, preferably before	Officers meeting has taken place, seeking agreement that members will attend the next taskforce.
9	Work with Scottish Islands Federation and other partners to ensure that we maximise the opportunities for the Argyll islands from projects such as the Smilegov project.	Ongoing	ABC are already part of Smilegov which has a focus on renewables, regular reports will be made on this project. Work will 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.	Ongoing	All officers advised.
11	Write to and meet with relevant Scottish and UK Minister(s) to lobby for the Argyll Islands.	Ongoing	Derek MacKay has already been contacted. Arranging a date with UK Scottish Minister.
12	Work with and support Argyll island communities in the development of their community development plans and in their delivery	Ongoing	Include work by HIE with Tiree and SURF work which will be reported back to BC committee.

2.5 At the last meeting of the taskforce, an additional issue with regards to out of hours working for GPs on Mull was also raised, the Taskforce lent its support to the Mull group which is seeking to remove the ability for doctors to opt out of providing an out of hours service. A briefing is also being sought from the NHS. Following consultation with the Leader of the Council a letter was sent to NHS Highland outlining the Council's concerns with this important matter for our islands communities.

2.6 The following are updates in relation to specific projects:

Iona pier slipway repairs

The Council had appointed a design consultant to prepare a scheme to implement slipway repairs on Iona. The most recent tendering exercise generated several expressions of interest but by the closing date the Council only received one compliant bid. This is currently being considered to ensure that best value is being achieved. If the tender is awarded then it is anticipated that works will commence this calendar year.

2.7 Procurement of PSO Air Services to Tiree, Coll and Colonsay

Argyll and Bute Council have initiated the process for procuring the subsidised Public Service Obligation (PSO) air services between Oban, Tiree, Coll and Colonsay. The existing services are operated by Hebridean Air Services and the current air services contract expires in May 2015. Argyll and Bute Council are currently undertaking a public consultation with residents on the islands to seek views on local air services so that we can work towards achieving services which meet the aspirations and requirements of island communities whilst being financially sustainable to operate. The deadline for returning the questionnaires is 12 September and copies of the questionnaire can also be downloaded from <http://obanandtheislesairports.com>. Argyll and Bute Council officers are also in consultation with Transport Scotland about undertaking a 'Re-assessment of PSO Adequacy' which requires to be approved by the European Commission prior to the publishing of the Invitation to Tender in the Official Journal of the European Union.

2.8 Digital Connectivity

Work has commenced on laying the subsea cables which will bring the fibre backbone to a number of Argyll's islands and allow them to receive next generation broadband. This work will be ongoing through 2014.

The Scottish Government Pilot seeking to provide mobile phone coverage to Coll was erected during August and is expected to go live during early September. The Council is supporting the project through a contribution to the maintenance costs for the first five years.

2.9 RET

The Scottish Government made an announcement that RET will be applied to all islands by October 2015. While this move is welcomed by the Council there still remains a considerable concern that some islands that have already had RET applied and others like Arran where it will shortly be introduced will have a competitive advantage in terms of ferry fares. This could have a detrimental impact on the fragile economy of Bute for example and as such the Council will continue to lobby the Scottish Government for the early introduction of RET to all islands as soon as possible rather than wait until October 2015.

2.10 Fisheries

Following an approach from the Scottish Government a place has been secured on the negotiating table for our island communities to be represented at talks for fishing quota in addition to representatives from the industry. This has been done in an effort to make clear the importance of the fishing industry to our small island communities economy and indeed social fabric. Account will also be taken of the needs of our remote peninsulas in Argyll and Bute.

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8 September 2014