

REPORT BY POLICY LEAD FOR ISLANDS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an update to the work in relation to islands over the September 2014 – March 2015 period.

2. UPDATE

Argyll Islands Taskforce

- 2.1 The short life working group – the Argyll Islands Taskforce –met on 23 March 2015 to discuss the issues affecting the Argyll islands.
- 2.2 Work has been undertaken to analyse and better understand what is happening on each of our islands and we received a report on island demographics at our meeting. The demographics show that our islands are complex and there is no single issue which results in either growth or decline of population however the Council are already working on numerous projects which seek to make improvements to our island communities.
- 2.3 Our meeting followed a successful meeting with member and officer representatives from Highland Council where we discussed opportunities for joint working to further the issues affecting our islands with the Scottish and UK Government. We are now looking to formalise this arrangement. We had hoped to have representation from North Ayrshire Council at this meeting but unfortunately they were unable to attend. Officers continue to work with officers from North Ayrshire 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	Report received. Complete
2	Gather further information relating to those islands that were not directly part of the SOA consultation	Ongoing	Matrix of issues to being 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 issued. 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.	By next taskforce meeting	Draft vision being developed.
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.	Next available Policy and Resources Committee	Under consideration
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	Meeting with Highland 23/03/15, N Ayrshire unable to attend. Joint working to be progressed.
9	Work with Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) 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 supporting SIF and have written to support their application for funding from the Scottish Government
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	Contacted Derek MacKay but unable to

			attend meeting due weather conditions cancelling ferries
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. SURF report now issued in draft

2.5

In addition,

- The issue of out of hours working for GPs on Mull was raised with the NHS;
- We have received a report indicating Cal Mac's plans to install Wi-Fi on their ferries and at their ferry terminals;
- We have received a report on the Local Energy Challenge Fund through which the ACCESS (Assisting Communities to Connect to Electric Sustainable Sources) project on Mull has been granted £1.5m to deliver equipment to enable matching of local electricity generation and local electricity demand;
- Bute has been visited by Danny Alexander who announced the award of £600,000 Coastal Communities Funding for the Pavilion project in Rothesay. (Tobermory Harbour Association also received approximately £200,000 to improve the harbour area);
- The Council has been working with dairy farmers in Bute together with the National Farmers Union Scotland and Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society in relation to falling milk prices.

2.6

The following are updates in relation to specific projects:

Iona pier slipway repairs

The Council had appointed a contractor to implement slipway repairs on Iona. It is anticipated that works will be completed in May.

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. A preferred bidder has been identified and negotiations on costs and service level are ongoing.

Digital Connectivity

The laying of the subsea cables which will bring the fibre backbone to a number of Argyll's islands was completed late 2014. It has been announced that the Balvicar, Rothesay and Craignure exchange areas should get coverage during 2015.

The Scottish Government Pilot seeking to provide mobile phone coverage to Coll went live in March 2015 and 4G mobile coverage is now available on the island. A number of island communities were successful through the Vodafone Rural Programme including Seil, Luing and Tiree.

Freight Ferry Fares

Following the announcement by the Scottish Government that RET will be applied to all islands by October 2015 a consultation on freight fares was launched. The Council responded to this consultation with the response informed by the members of the Taskforce.

Fisheries

For the first time, local authority representation has been secured on the Fisheries Management & Conservation Group (FMAC) which includes talks on fishing quotas. A representative from Shetland Council sits on the group and relevant local authorities, including Argyll and Bute Council, feed into the group through this point of contact.

Councillor Len Scoullar
9 April 2015