

**MINUTES of MEETING of ARGYLL ISLANDS SOUNDING BOARD held BY MICROSOFT TEAMS
on WEDNESDAY, 31 MAY 2023**

Present: Councillor Liz McCabe (Chair)

Councillor Kieron Green
Councillor Andrew Kain
Councillor Jim Lynch

Councillor Dougie McFadzean
Councillor Peter Wallace

Attending: Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director
Audrey Martin, Projects and Regeneration Manager
Susie Sinclair, Directorate Support Officer
Christina Welch, Administration Officer
Lynsey Innis, Senior Committee Assistant
Cameron Anson, Repopulation and Island Communities Manager, Islands Team, Scottish Government
Francesco Sindico, Carbon Neutral Islands Lead, Islands Team, Scottish Government

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended a special welcome to the members of the Scottish Government Islands Team, who were also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of:

Councillor Robin Currie
Councillor Amanda Hampsey
Councillor Julie McKenzie

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest intimated.

3. MINUTES

The minute of the previous meeting of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board, held on 3 November 2022 was approved as a correct record.

4. NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN UPDATE

The Repopulation and Island Communities Manager gave a brief update on the National Islands Plan, which included information on the annual report which was published in March 2023 and the review of the Implementation Route Map which will be published later in the year. Mr Anson advised that all commitments contained within the plan had been taken forward with a number of them ongoing or spanning the term of the 5 year plan. He outlined the success of two projects in Argyll and Bute that recently secured funding through the Islands Funding Programme and the upcoming review of the Islands Plan, as required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Discussion was had in relation to the consultation on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMA's) and how it reconciled with the objectives of the National Islands Plan, with it being noted that the Scottish Government Island's Team need to ensure that they liaise with the HPMA Team to ensure that they are aware of Scottish Government policies which are already in place in relation to supporting communities.

5. ADDRESSING DEPOPULATION

The Repopulation and Islands Communities Manager advised of the statutory obligation contained within the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 to develop an action plan to address depopulation in rural and island communities across Scotland. He advised that the Scottish Government were in the process of preparing a Rural Repopulation Policy, which was due to be published before the end of the year. He outlined the collaborative working approach being taken to help understand the population challenges and to develop tangible plans to address these challenges, with the need to address key barriers such as housing, employment, transport and digital connectivity to ensure sustainability.

The Head of Development and Economic Growth outlined a number of case studies and successes that working in a collaborative way has had for the islands of Argyll and Bute. Mr Murray stressed the need to consider what other actions can be taken forward in the public sector to ensure sustainability.

Discussion was had in relation to strategic potential, which included renewable energy and investment opportunities, with it being noted, that in order to identify strengths and address depopulation in a sustainable way, both traditional and emerging sectors should be explored.

6. ISLAND TRANSPORT FORUM

The Repopulation and Island Communities Manager advised that as a result of heightened concern around transport issues on islands, a decision had been taken by the previous Minister for Transport and the Cabinet Secretary to re-establish the Island Transport Forum as part of the Islands Strategic Group. He advised that the Forum was chaired by Kevin Stewart, Minister for Transport and made up of the relevant transport leads from local authorities and Transport Scotland officials, and that their first meeting took place in March 2023 where they agreed the approach going forward in order to address strategic transport issues. Mr Anson further advised that the next meeting of the Forum was scheduled for mid-June with some of the key points for high level discussion including the role of aviation in supporting island communities, freight capacity issues, particularly in the Northern Isles and discussion on local authority roads featuring on the agenda.

The Head of Development and Economic Growth advised that he was glad to see the re-establishment of this Forum and suggested some other areas of focus for the Forum which included the fuels used and how they can play a part in the net zero journey.

7. ISLAY CARBON NEUTRAL ISLAND PROJECT AND RGD LOCAL ENERGY PROJECT

The Carbon Neutral Islands Lead provided a short update on the Carbon Neutral Island project on Islay. Mr Sindico advised that a steering group made up of key members of the Islay community had been set up and was working closely with Community Energy

Scotland and Islay Energy Trust. He advised of the completion of a carbon audit which involved all sectors relating to greenhouse gases and how this had helped to identify good practices and challenges in relation to the process. He further advised that the goal of the audit was to collate information on the current levels of greenhouse gases on the island and to inform the conversation about moving to carbon neutrality. It was noted that the outcome of the audit had aided the development of the Community Climate Change Action Plan, which is a document that has been written by the community for the community. Mr Sindico outlined the next phase of the project, which is to identify investment with a Climate Change Investment Strategy exercise and further activity to develop a Replicable Strategy. He advised that good practices and learning would be shared with other islands as they move towards net zero in a fair and just way.

The Projects and Regeneration Manager gave a brief update on how the use of renewable energy resources on Islay would help deliver more sustainable local energy systems through funding received from the Rural Growth Deal. Ms Martin advised that the focus of the project was to reduce the carbon footprint by focusing on households. She outlined the collaborative working approach which aimed to identify gaps in relation to funding, particularly in harder to heat properties, skills gaps and supply chain issues. She advised that the Council would look to work with Islay Energy Trust and the Steering Group to aid with the development of business cases for the project.

Discussion was had in relation to the cost implications of the net zero journey with the potential for private investment being outlined and the need to ensure that collaborative working was in place to avoid duplication of work.

8. FOCUS FOR FUTURE ARGYLL ISLANDS SOUNDING BOARD

Discussion was had on the focus for future meetings of the Argyll Islands Sounding Board with it being noted that Members were keen to become more involved with the setting of agendas by being involved in the process of selecting strategic topics for discussion. It was also agreed that visiting an island or holding one meeting a year on an island would be a valuable way of seeing first-hand the issues faced by islanders.

9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Having noted that there was no further business for discussion, the Chair, Councillor McCabe took the opportunity to thank the Scottish Government Islands Team for their attendance and the information provided.