

POLICY LEAD REPORT – ISLAND AFFAIRS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report provides an update to the main focus of work in relation to islands over the period April to October 2015.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that members note the content of the report

3. DETAIL

3.1 Argyll Islands Taskforce

3.1.1 At the Council meeting on 27 June 2014, twelve actions were identified for the Short Life Working Group Argyll Islands Taskforce to progress. An additional item was added in August 2014 when issues were raised regarding the lack of GP cover on Mull. The Taskforce continues to work on the agreed actions.

3.1.2 The main activities of the Taskforce over the past six months have focused on updating the information collected about our island communities and keeping up to date with the work related to the Our Island Our Future campaign.

3.1.3 The Taskforce has recently met with both The Highland Council (March 2015) and North Ayrshire Council (May 2015) and has agreed to work in partnership with both Councils to seek to address those issues which affect island and very isolated rural communities across the three local authority areas. As a group, the three authorities have a total of 40 inhabited islands clustered around the west coast of Scotland as well as a number of very isolated rural communities which often experience the same difficulties and issues as island communities.

3.1.4 As a result of the discussions with North Ayrshire Council and Highland Council the following priorities have been identified:-

- To ensure that the future disbursement of powers and income, including income from The Crown Estate, to our island communities is equal to the Three Island Communities.
- To obtain Scottish Government capital investment in key island infrastructure such as ports, ferry terminals and vessels in order to facilitate the needs of RET and secure

the future economic prosperity of our islands and isolated rural communities.

- To secure the integration of essential transport networks including ferries, buses, air and rail connections to minimise journey times to and from our island and isolated rural communities.
- To lobby for parity for our island and isolated rural communities with regard to mail order delivery surcharges.
- To lobby for maximum investment in our digital connectivity for our island and isolated rural communities, including superfast broadband, modern mobile phone signal and explore the possibility of opening up public digital networks to the wider community.
- To lobby for the removal of water and waste water constraints from our island and isolated rural communities to facilitate economic growth.
- To lobby for innovative approaches to recruit and retain adequate GP coverage for our island and isolated rural communities.
- To seek innovative and cost effective affordable housing for our island and isolated rural communities.
- To address fuel poverty for our island and isolated communities.
- To work with the three island authorities to identify common economic challenges across our islands and opportunities for joint working to address these.

3.1.5 Many of these issues are discussed within the Islands Prospectus and Framework for the Islands. Both the Scottish and UK Governments have set up working groups which include the three island councils of Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. These working groups have helped to inform the documents published to date and it is expected that the Three Island Councils will continue to contribute, including through the preparation of an Annual Statement of Collective Priorities, which will assist with awareness and understanding of the UK Government in relation to their requirements. It is therefore proposed that the Argyll Islands Taskforce, in partnership with North Ayrshire and The Highland Councils, seeks a much closer working relationship with both the Scottish and UK Governments, so that representatives of the West of Scotland islands are able to contribute to the discussions at this strategic level.

3.1.6 Officers have already approached the Scottish Government regarding representation on the Island Areas Ministerial Working Group and have held discussions with Derek MacKay, Minister for Transport and Islands. Although formal inclusion within the Working Group appears unlikely, it was indicated that regular meetings between the partnership councils and the Scottish Government would be acceptable. A request is also being made

to the UK Government seeking representation on the Islands Working Group and input to the Annual Statement of Collective Priorities

- 3.1.7** Alongside the activities of the Argyll Islands Taskforce, the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) met on 1st June 2015 in Kirkwall. An identified priority for 2015 was to explore how COHI members would like to engage with the Scottish Government around island issues, considering whether existing structures were sufficient and ensuring they communicated an island perspective effectively. This will affect the approach taken in relation to the Scottish Government and it may be appropriate for the Taskforce to liaise with the Scottish Government through the mechanism established by COHI in due course.
- 3.1.8** Convention members also agreed that delivering fast, reliable digital connectivity and tackling transport costs for remote and islands communities needed to be addressed. Action on both of these issues would help to address island concerns within Argyll.
- 3.1.9** In identifying the above priorities the Argyll Islands Taskforce remains mindful of the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) overall objective that “Argyll and Bute’s economic success is built on a growing population”. It is felt that improvements in these priority areas will help to make our islands more attractive places for people to live in and to operate businesses from and will therefore contribute to this overall objective.
- 3.1.10** In order to express the Taskforce’s aspirations for the islands, a vision has been developed and agreed by full Council as follows:-
- It is recognised that our islands play a vital role in delivering economic growth across our area. We want to see our islands prosper and grow, providing education and employment for our young people, supporting and growing our businesses and communities and benefiting from the communication and transportation infrastructure and services necessary for them to be sustainable and prosper.*
- 3.1.11** The Task force is currently considering the recently announced Scottish Government consultation on Provisions for a Future Islands Bill, deadline 23 December 2015. This consultation will seek the views of interested stakeholders on plans for more power and protection for Scotland's islands. These views will help shape the development of a future Islands Bill that will allow the islands to build a more prosperous and fairer future for their communities. A report will be prepared for consideration by members of the Policy and Resources Committee.

3.2 Further Updates

The following are updates in relation to other projects that relate to our islands but are in no way an exhaustive list:

3.2.1 Iona pier slipway repairs

These works were undertaken by George Leslie Ltd and were completed in June 2015 at a cost of £1.1m

3.2.2 Oban and the Isles Airports

3.2.2.1 The current operator is Hebridean Air Services who were awarded the current three year PSO contract in May 2015. The passengers carried on the Isles Air Services operated out of Oban Airport continue to grow. This is despite difficult market conditions given the current economic climate.

3.2.2.2 In 2014 passengers carried on Oban and the Isles Air Services rose to just over 3500. In total 3,516 passengers were carried during 2014 compared to 3,334 during 2013. This equates to a 5.5% annual increase.

3.2.2.3 The highest figure for passengers carried per month was recorded this year in March and passenger figures in July for the seven month period of 2015 show an increase of 8.7% compared with the same 7 month period last year.

3.2.2.4 Fly Scenic Scotland also continue to grow their scenic flying tours business out of Oban airport.

3.2.3 Fionnphort Village to Community Hall Link - £100k Project

This project is a partnership between Argyll and Bute Council and The Mull and Iona Community Trust to deliver an off-road path linking the village of Fionnphort on Mull with their local village hall (Creich Hall). The project is well supported and the Community Trust have developed a detailed business plan. Funding this financial year will be spent on taking forward detailed design and land negotiation.

3.2.4 South Islay Distilleries Path - £55k Project

This project involved surfacing a recently constructed off-road shared use path, linking the villages of Port Ellen and Ardbeg on the island of Islay and the three distilleries sited at Laphroaig, Lagavulin and Ardbeg. The path is approximately 5km in length and 2.5m wide, and was previously constructed with a type 1 granular sub base surface. In order to comply with grant funding regulations the path required to have a sealed surface and the preferred/cost effective method of achieving this was a double skin slurry seal. This process used locally sourced aggregate from Dunlosit quarry, mixed on site with a bitumen aggregate and

spread by hand, creating a durable sealed surface suitable for multi user purposes. Works were completed by COLAS in September 2015.

3.2.5 Milk Prices

We continue to work with NFUS, SAOS and Bute and Kintyre farmers to provide support as necessary.

3.2.6 SURF and the Alliance for Action, Bute.

The Alliance has held a number of meetings to develop the vision and priorities going forward. A part time officer is to be appointed to work with the Alliance. Funding has been secured to take forward a charrette for Rothesay.

3.2.7 Tiree Charrette Funding

We have been working with Tiree development Trust to assist in their submission to Scottish Government for charrette funding. As part of the Scottish Government Charrette Mainstreaming Programme, a fund of £300,000 is available in 2015-16 to support the delivery of community design charrettes across Scotland. The fund aims to support communities to input directly into the design and development of plans for the future of their areas.

3.2.8 Communications Infrastructure

3.2.8.1 Vodafone Open Sure

Vodafone has announced that seven communities in Argyll are included in a programme to receive their Open Sure Signal product. Open Sure Signal boxes connect to the internet (minimum 4mbps required) and provide a 3G mobile coverage for Vodafone users within approximately 500m radius (reducing where trees, buildings etc. block the signal). Four of these proposed locations are on islands.

3.2.8.2 Coll Mobile Mast

In March 2015, a new mobile mast funded by the Scottish Government went live on the Island of Coll. The Scottish Government led the development stages of the project and provided the capital for the mast, with Vodafone providing the equipment. Development Coll own the mast and will pay for its on-going maintenance. The new mast provides 4G, 3G and 2G coverage with improvements in signal being reported not only on Coll but also on parts of Tiree and Mull. We are working with Scottish Futures Trust to confirm whether there is potential for any similar pilots elsewhere in Argyll.

3.2.8.3 Contractor Appointed for the Giga Plus Argyll Project

During 2015, CBS announced that a contractor has been appointed for the Giga Plus Argyll project which is seeking

to provide superfast broadband to all premises on Colonsay, Iona, Lismore, Luing and parts of Mull, Jura, Islay and the Craginish Peninsula; approximately 1,400 properties. The project will receive £988,000 funding from CBS to assist with capital costs. It is expected that coverage will be rolled out to premises within the Giga Plus project area from 2016.

3.2.8.4 Next Generation Broadband

The rollout of the H&I Next Generation Broadband programme has reached the Rothesay Exchange area, This connection has been delivered earlier than the 2016 date estimated in the initial rollout plans.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Our Council continues to work in partnership with the Scottish Government, other island councils, stakeholders and our island communities to continue to deliver the Single Outcome Agreement, EDAP and Local Development Plan outcomes, which seek to deliver sustainable island communities.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – None
- 5.2 Financial – None
- 5.3 Legal – None
- 5.4 HR – None
- 5.5 Equalities – None
- 5.6 Risk – None
- 5.7 Customer Service – None

**Councillor Len Scoullar, Policy Lead for Island Affairs.
November 2015**