

REPORT BY THE POLICY LEAD FOR ISLAND AFFAIRS

1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an update to the main focus of work in relation to islands over the period June 2016 - present.

2. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that members note the contents of this paper.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Islands Bill Up-date

3.1.1 The Future Policy Surrounding Scotland's Islands.

The future policy surrounding Scotland's islands continues to be widely discussed at both a Scottish and UK level. Since my last update a new Minister for Transport and the Islands, Humza Yousaf, has been appointed and he has confirmed again the Scottish Government's commitment to bring forward an Islands Bill. It was announced in August 2016 that the Bill would be brought forward within 12 months in the current parliamentary session. The Bill will be informed by the 2015 Consultation on Provisions for a Future Islands Bill, which Argyll and Bute Council responded to, as well as ongoing discussions with local authorities and local communities.

3.1.2 Strategic Islands Working Group

The new Minister has also reinstated an islands working group. The Strategic Islands Group comprises not just the three island only Councils but also includes Argyll and Bute, North Ayrshire and The Highland Councils. The first meeting of the Group took place in September 2016. The main focus of the Group will be to assist in shaping the future Islands Bill.

Argyll and Bute Council was asked to host the second meeting of this group, which took place in Rothesay on 19th December 2016. The Chief Executive and I were joined by the leaders and Chief Executives of Orkney and Shetland Islands, Western Isles and Highland councils, attending in person or by VC link, as well as Humza Yousaf and Scottish Government officials.

This was a very positive meeting which saw the relatively new group discussing a wide range of topics from an islands perspective, including:

- An update on renewables from the Minister for Business, Innovation and Energy
- The Scottish Energy Efficiency Scheme
- Planning Reform
- Social enterprise strategy

The agenda also included some time for discussion of the Islands Bill and the National Islands Plan. I was able to ask Mr Yousaf how he envisaged this new plan would relate to islands councils and councils with islands, and was glad to have his reassurance that Argyll and Bute Council, as a council with islands, will be fully involved in that conversation. While he was of the view that at this stage, it is a little early for fine detail, he did note the need for a strategy on depopulation, and that the National Islands Plan may provide a mechanism for this.

The next meeting of the Islands Strategic Group is yet to be arranged, and the minutes for the December meeting have not yet been made available to us, but I will be happy to share any more detail with members when these are provided.

3.1.3 Argyll Islands Taskforce and the Island Connections Event

The Argyll Islands Taskforce has continued to hold meetings with attendance from the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, Ambulance Service and Roads and Amenity Services. Support from Council services and partner organisations has enabled the group to understand how service provision on the islands is approached and raise issues and concerns.

The Argyll Islands Task Force was keen to hold an event which would bring together island communities to discuss significant issues which affect life on our islands and to identify good practice. The Island Connections event was held on 20 October 2016 at the Seil Island Community Hall. The event brought together approximately 70 delegates and speakers from community councils, development trusts, other community organisations, Argyll and Bute Council, The Scottish Government and Community Planning Partners.

Island Connections aimed to cover issues which had been highlighted as most significant by our island communities:-

- Health care for island communities
- Supporting economic growth
- Transport and island infrastructure
- Sustainable island homes
- Digital islands

Action is already underway to help to address many of the issues raised during Island Connections, for example the Joint Health and Social Care Partnership are already looking at more innovative ways to recruit GPs, affordable housing is planned for island communities and discussions are ongoing about the future of the Council operated ferry services. Island based community organisations are also playing an important part in helping to address the issues. There are however key messages that can be extracted from the discussions at Island Connections, especially that island communities may require bespoke solutions to service provision and that flexibility and innovation are important in island proofing our policies and programmes.

3.2 Other Island Updates

3.2.1 Rothesay Charrette

Following the Remaking Rothesay event which took place in February last year, the Bute Island Alliance is continuing to work on the actions arising.

3.2.2 Rothesay Townscape Heritage Bid

The second stage application is being prepared and is to be submitted in March 2017.

3.2.3 Tiree Charrette

Following their events which were held on two dates last year, one in February and one in March, the Tiree Community Development Trust are preparing a growth plan to guide their activities on the island with the aim of growing the population.

3.2.4 Digital Connectivity

The rollout of next generation broadband continues with a service already available in parts of Mull, Islay, Bute, Seil and Tiree. Further connections are expected on Coll, Islay, Mull, Jura and Bute during 2017. Community projects, Giga Plus Argyll and the Kyles of Bute, are proceeding with Giga Plus Argyll expecting to provide connections to the first premises during Spring 2017. In relation to mobile connectivity, Scottish Futures Trust are working with Tiree Community Development Trust seeking to erect a community mast which is expected to provide a Vodafone and O2 service to the island.

3.2.5 Consultation on treatment of non-mainland GB onshore wind projects

Finally, on 19 January 2017, the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee are due to consider the Council's response to the consultation on treatment of non-mainland GB onshore wind projects by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy which considers the issue of subsidies for non-mainland wind projects. This report has now been published and is available on the council's website.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Argyll and Bute Council is working positively with the Scottish Government and other partners to have our Island's special issues recognised and addressed. As you can see from the above this sustained dialogue has paid off and we are delighted to be working in collaboration with the other stakeholders as part of the Strategic Islands Group. I am confident that this work will stand us in good stead going forward.

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Policy Lead for: Island Affairs

Date: 16 January 2017