
28th September 2017

LEADER'S REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report gives colleagues an update on my activities as Leader of Argyll and Bute Council from 24th June to 15th September 2017.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the report,
- 2.2 Members are asked to note that the full Leader's Report Pack is available in the Leader's office. This includes COSLA and other papers and briefings as referenced in the report. Any items discussed in public can be provided to members electronically; the papers for items taken in private session can be reviewed in the Leader's office.

3. ARGYLL AND BUTE COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, 28th June 2017

- 3.1 It is often said that Argyll and Bute has a really strong record in partnership working – and we do. The Argyll and Bute CPP Management Committee and Full Partnership is one of the best examples of this in practice, bringing as it does all of the key partners and stakeholders together to discuss how we can continue to work together to secure the best outcomes for all of our communities.

While this meeting saw the committee putting in place many of its management and housekeeping arrangements for the new council, there was as normal a very strong 'business as usual' focus, looking at strategic plans including locality plans for each of our four administrative areas and more. We also had a presentation from Neil Ritch, Deputy Director at the Big Lottery.

A welcome development in the committee's practice is the opportunity for a focus session on one particular area at each meeting – this one being the turn of Bute and Cowal. We all inevitably know our own local areas very well, but having this opportunity to take a closer look at another area is really useful in terms of considering the wider strategic needs of Argyll and Bute as a whole, and how to shape and integrate priorities which meet those and take account of local characteristics.

The full Community Planning Partnership meeting is scheduled for late this year and I have every faith that this too will highlight even more growth and success in working together in the best interests of Argyll and Bute.

4. CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE, 28th June 2017

- 4.1** Governance and Law went through its annual assessment for the Customer Service Excellence standard award in June this year and, during his visit to Kilmory, I had an opportunity to meet with external assessor Willie Wilson.

Willie spoke to a range of different service customers and the staff who serve them during the assessment process, and it was helpful to be able to contribute to that from a councillor's perspective. How we communicate and deal with our customers – inside and outside the council – is a real priority for me, and one I know many colleagues share. Customer service is a crucial part of everyone's role at Argyll and Bute Council – in all departments, in all jobs, and whether you are an elected member or an officer.

A number of council departments already have or are aiming for the Customer Service Excellence Award, ensuring that standards here are indeed excellent and constantly striving for improvement. This is encouraging, especially given that we consistently achieve high standards in the awards themselves and demonstrate progress and improvement year on year.

Having met Willie I know that the assessment process is thorough and comprehensive, so those teams who, like Governance and Law, have come through the process with flying colours, are to be congratulated – and thanked for their contribution to the council's business and service delivery.

5. COSLA CONVENTION, 30th June 2017

- 5.1** The first COSLA Convention of the new council term took place on Friday 30th June 2017. Inevitably this meeting was about putting in place new arrangements and making new appointments, including the COSLA President, Vice President and Spokesperson positions. All papers are available for members to view on the COSLA website or in the Leader's Report Pack.

COSLA has undergone review and change over the past year, with new boards established to commence sessions after the May elections. You will hear more about these in due course from the Policy Lead councillors who represent Argyll and Bute on each of the boards.

6. COSLA SPECIAL LEADERS, 30th June 2017

- 6.1** A special COSLA Leaders meeting was convened to coincide with Convention. All items of business were taken in private session, which means I cannot report on them in full here, and agenda items are listed below. Reports, where provided, are available in the Leader's Office.

- Enterprise and Skills Review
- Local Government Pay Negotiations 2017/18
- Education Governance

7. GP OUT OF HOURS SERVICES, VALE OF LEVEN HOSPITAL

- 7.1** Members will recall that when council met on 20th April, there was unanimous agreement to a motion on GP out of hours services at the Vale of Leven Hospital. The service has been unavailable to patients on several occasions, forcing redirection to hospitals in Paisley or Glasgow. The Chief Executive corresponded on the matter with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and others as requested by council.

The issue has persisted since then and I attended a public meeting in Helensburgh on 3rd July where hundreds of people gathered to voice their concerns about the impact of changes to the GP out of hours services. Following that meeting I have written to the relevant health board chairs and also to Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, making clear the views of our communities that they need local access to GP out of hours services at the Vale. While I have received an initial response from the Health Secretary, I have sought further clarification and specific reassurance about services in the area, and will be happy to share this with colleagues when it arrives.

8. RECESS – AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING, July 2017

- 8.1** I hope that colleagues had a restful and relaxing recess. While it offers a chance for a well-earned break, it also provides opportunities to be a little more proactive outside of the usual meetings cycle – to build relationships, to reach out and to engage with other agencies and issues.

During this time I had an opportunity to meet with the newly appointed board members for the Argyll and Bute Leisure Trust. By the time this report is published, plans for the launch of the new trust-driven service Live Argyll will be well underway. However it was very helpful to meet with the new board members at an early stage. The knowledge, skills and experience they each bring are considerable and are matched only by their enthusiasm. Along with our elected member representatives on the Board, they will make a formidable team and I am confident they will ensure that the Trust works well and delivers the leisure services our communities expect and enjoy.

I have also been in contact with a number of partner organisations and agencies to introduce the new council and build on the excellent relationships that are already in place.

I have been in touch with Humza Yousaf, Minister for Transport and Islands, expressing our willingness to work in partnership on some of the key strategic transport and connectivity issues that impact all of Argyll and Bute and which can contribute to our economic growth. These include the lifeline A82 and A83 routes, ferry links, rail connections and fixed links. Our correspondence on this continues and I hope to have an opportunity soon, perhaps at the Convention of the Highlands and Islands in Oban in October, to discuss all of this and more with him in person.

I am also actively pursuing a meeting with Professor Lorne Crerar, Chair of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, who we already work with closely and productively. In light of the Enterprise and Skills Review I am keen to meet with him to ensure we can work together to maintain and strengthen Argyll and Bute's representation nationally in this key area. There has also been significant activity across Argyll and Bute in terms of economic development and the time is right to showcase that to as many people as possible.

The Depute Leader and I are also looking to meet with Michael Russell MSP soon and our offices remain in regular contact on key issues as and when required and also to secure a date for discussions in person - amid considerable mutual diary pressures given our respective remits.

Early in July I met with Jackie Baillie MSP in Helensburgh, where we had an opportunity to discuss a range of issues, both strategic and local. Jackie is particularly keen to keep up to date with progress on our Rural Growth

Deal and we will continue to engage with her, as with our other elected representatives, on this. Their support will be very significant as we move this forward.

The Crown Estates Scotland Board launched their Scottish engagement programme in Helensburgh on 18th July. As well as an opportunity to meet members of the newly-formed board, this also offered a chance to discuss Crown Estate projects and assets within Argyll and Bute, including Rhu Marina, many hundreds of kilometres of foreshore and seabed leases to tenants. These encompass everything from fish farming and offshore renewable energy to commercial moorings and wild salmon fishing. Choosing Argyll and Bute to launch a national conversation is very welcome and is a great springboard to build an even stronger partnership with the new Crown Estate Scotland organisation.

8. MONEY SKILLS ADVICE LAUNCH, 18th August 2017

- 8.1** I was delighted to attend the launch of Money Skills Advice in Helensburgh on 18th August. This is another example of partnership in action in Argyll and Bute, this time providing financial inclusion services to the people who most need assistance and advice. It sees a number of key service providers working together across the whole area to make sure that people get the right help to suit their needs. Crucially, it makes the most of grassroots connections to reach as many people as possible – linking with addiction projects, carers' centres, food banks, young family groups and many more.

Money Skills Argyll has become a reality through collaboration with Big Lottery Fund (who awarded a £3.77m contract for the next three years for provision of this service) and the European Social Fund, as well as Argyll and Bute Citizens Advice, Bute Advice Centre, ACHA, ALIEnergy, HELP Project, CarrGom, Fyne Homes, Kintyre Youth Enquiry Service, West Highland and Dunbritton housing associations, and of course our own Adult Learning and Literacy Service. It's a great mix of skills, insight and experience and, most of all, commitment to making it work.

9. HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP, 21st August 2017

- 9.1** Along with officers from our European team I attended this meeting by VC. Ensuring that the views and interests of the Highlands and Islands area, including Argyll and Bute, are taken on board during the Brexit process is understandably the main focus of the partnership at the moment, and we agreed to write to the Secretary of State for Scotland to press this case. Our letter pointed out the benefits that years of European Union membership have brought to the region, and urged a discussion with the Secretary of

State in view of the significant potential impact on the area. I'll be happy to share any response in future updates.

10. MEETING WITH AUDIT SCOTLAND, 23rd August 2017

10.1 Making sure Argyll and Bute Council is the best council it can be is a goal we all share. We are all keen to drive forward improvement and that is why I was happy to meet with Audit Scotland in August. This meeting was to discuss progress from our most recent Best Value audit, specifically focusing on relationships, innovation and engaging with communities. This was a constructive discussion and I am confident and positive that our council is moving firmly in the right direction. The Annual Audit Report is due to come to council in November.

11. HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS LEADERS GROUP, 24th August 2017

11.1 This group met for the first time after the May elections on 24th August, on the eve of COSLA Leaders in Edinburgh. With a few changes in the leadership of the member authorities, this was a good opportunity to meet together and continue the work of the group in sharing common issues and providing a voice for the Highlands and Islands region. We focused on the Enterprise and Skills Review and also agreed to explore a further discussion on tourism at our next meeting on 28th September.

12. COSLA LEADERS, 25th August 2017

12.1 COSLA Leaders met on 25th August to discuss the following:

- Education Governance and Regional Collaboration
- Exceptions to two child limit for Child Tax Credit
- Brexit
- Review of Local Governance and Strengthening Democracy
- Grenfell Tower Tragedy
- Communications Strategy
- Employers Organisation Groups
- Trading Standards Scotland Board- Membership
- Scottish Government Programme for Government 2017/18
- Paisley City of Culture 2021

All briefings and associated reports are available in the Leader's Report pack.

13. MEETING ARGYLL AND BUTE'S HEAD TEACHERS, INVERARAY, 5th September 2017

13.1 I had an opportunity to meet with many of Argyll and Bute's Head Teachers in Inveraray on 5th September. Since the election in May we have been clear that education is one of our top priorities so, as we focus on taking every step to secure positive outcomes for our young people, it's always helpful to meet those who are delivering on the front line. Our Head Teachers are committed and enthusiastic and having a chance to meet with them certainly increases my confidence in our education service. During the meeting we had an interesting session on the new Scottish National Standardised Assessments delivered by a colleague from the Scottish Government. It is useful to have opportunities like this to learn more about the new developments to be delivered by front line staff in one of our key services.

14. INDUSTRY AND REGIONAL SOUNDING BOARD, 6th September 2017

14.1 When the council met in June it agreed to establish the Industry and Regional Sounding Board. This group will explore Argyll and Bute's future engagement with the European Union, ensure that our interests are taken into account during the Brexit process, and lobby for suitable regional support measures to be put in place.

The board's inaugural meeting took place on 6th September and a number of issues were discussed, including identifying a clear Argyll and Bute/Brexit message; potential routes for lobbying and representing the peripheral/rural position; and examining feedback and views from local industry representatives about the potential impact on recruitment and other matters.

While the Sounding Board has no executive powers it will report to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, and will meet quarterly or in response to particular developments.

15. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

15.1 Rural Growth Deal

Following advice from both the Scottish and UK Governments that it would be vital to demonstrate public and private sector support for the SIP / Rural Growth Deal proposals, the Council have undertaken a stakeholder consultation exercise and a report has been prepared on the findings, which were very supportive. This report will be used as evidence of public and private sector support for the SIP / Rural Growth Deal. Officers met with representatives from the Scottish Office, Scottish Government, Scottish Futures Trust and Transport Scotland on 23rd August 2017. The meeting was very positive and minutes and an action plan from the meeting are currently being drafted. It was agreed that officers would work with the Scottish Government to undertake an Inclusive Growth Diagnostic assessment to inform the Rural Growth Deal as it is taken forward.

I have also written to Lord Ian Duncan, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, seeking to meet with him and build on the discussions we've had previously with the Scottish Government, David Mundell and Lord Duncan's predecessor, Lord Dunlop. We are hopeful of securing an early meeting date.

15.2 Lorn Arc

We are continuing to progress the Lorn Arc projects and also to explore other potential projects which could deliver the greatest economic and social benefits for the Lorn Arc area. This exploratory work will be undertaken in addition to the ongoing development of our Rural Growth Deal as there are a number of other projects being explored currently as part of that process, which could potentially impact on the existing Lorn Arc programme. Along with Oban, Lorn and the Isles colleagues, I attended a briefing meeting with the project manager on 9th August and this was a helpful opportunity for everyone to find out more and ask questions; it was also helpful for me to have a chance to engage with local members on key strategic projects in their own area.

15.3 Economic Development Action Plans

At a meeting with the Executive Director and Head of Service on 2nd August it was agreed that more consideration should be given to the EDAPs (strategic and area-based) throughout 2017/18. A short summary proposal on the future direction of the EDAPs should be discussed with all Area Committee chairs, who are due to meet shortly. Updated reports will then be brought to all Area Committees at the end of the year.

15.4 Digital Connectivity

On 2nd August I was happy to join the Digital Scotland team in Rhu as they launched a new high speed fibre broadband cabinet in the village. The new cabinet means that over 800 homes and businesses in Rhu are now able to access fibre broadband through the Digital Scotland rollout. Better, faster communication means businesses are best placed to grow and create more jobs, and local people can enjoy faster internet use at home.

Broadband availability across Argyll and Bute currently stands at 82.5% with 72.1% of premises being able to access Superfast broadband. A full update on digital connectivity is due to come to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in November.

15.5 Tarbert and Lochgilphead Regeneration Fund

The MAKI Area Committee met on 6th September and agreed a paper asking for confirmation of the projects which should proceed to Outline Business Case. The report recommended that the three highest scoring projects are progressed (one in each of the Tarbert, Lochgilphead and Ardrishaig communities) with full funding made available. A further three projects are included (the next highest scoring in each community) although it is proposed that restricted budgets and scopes are put in place for two of these projects in order to enable delivery within the budget of the fund. The MAKI committee decision will be referred to Policy and Resources Committee on 19th October for confirmation.

15.6 Hermitage Park regeneration

I visited the park in my Policy Lead capacity on 29th August. Great progress has been made and a new pedestrian crossing is being installed to help manage access to the park and the nearby Victoria Halls. Work is ongoing to regenerate the park for future generations to enjoy – a key focus at the moment is work on the war memorial ahead of this year's Remembrance Day parade.

15.7 COSLA ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY BOARD, 4th September 2017

The first meetings of the new COSLA boards are taking place throughout September and I attended the Environment and Economy Board on Monday 4th. This board replaces the previous Development, Economy and Sustainability Group and has a similar focus.

All the new boards are opening with an introduction to the COSLA Plan for 2017-22 but we did have an opportunity to discuss a number of items of business, each of significant importance to Argyll and Bute:

- Enterprise and Skills Review
- Climate Change

- Crown Estate
- Islands Bill
- Socio-Economic Duty
- National Transport Strategy Event

15.8 Place-based Visits: Mull, 12TH-13TH September 2017

Along with the Executive Director for Development and Infrastructure, I travelled to Mull to visit a number of local businesses and organisations on the island. This was a really useful trip which helped to provide a greater insight into the challenges and opportunities our island communities have. A common theme at each local company I visited was the pressure of finding accommodation on Mull – especially private rentals - and the impact on staff recruitment and retention.

One of the organisations we visited was the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust who are now taking forward a new Whale Trail Project. Funded by the Coastal Communities Fund this project aims to identify 25 land-based sites across the west coast which would be suitable for developing sustainable tourism opportunities. We also visited a number of different food producers - Isle of Mull Cheese, the Island Bakery and Isle of Mull Scallops. It was particularly interesting to see the level of diversification activity taking place at Sgriob-ruadh Farm, the home of Isle of Mull Cheese.

15.9 Amberg Sulzbach Delegation

In October we will welcome a delegation from Amberg Sulzbach, on a return visit to Argyll and Bute to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our twinning arrangement. This agreement was first ratified by the then- Argyll County Council and adopted by the new unitary authority in 1996. The visitors from Amberg Sulzbach will be visiting various parts of the area and focusing on local food in particular. This will be a great opportunity for the Council and local businesses to get involved in discussions and idea-sharing sessions with the visitors, whose region shares similar characteristics to Argyll and Bute.

16. CONCLUSION

- 16.1** This report highlights my recent activities as Leader of Argyll and Bute Council, together with a brief update on my Policy Lead portfolio.

I hope that this update is helpful for members and will be happy to provide more information wherever possible.

The full Leader's report pack can be viewed in the Leader's office at any time.

17. IMPLICATIONS

- 17.1** Policy - None
- 17.2** Financial – None
- 17.3** Legal – None
- 17.4** HR – None
- 17.5** Equalities – None
- 17.6** Risk – None
- 17.7** Customer Service – None

**Councillor Aileen Morton
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council
Policy Lead for Economic Development
11th September 2017**

For further information or to access the Leader's Report Pack please contact Aileen McNicol, Leadership Support and Member Services Manager, telephone 01546 604014 or email aileen.mcnicol@argyll-bute.gov.uk