

30th November 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 16th September to 16th November 2017.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** Members are asked to consider 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. MEETING WITH ARGYLL AND BUTE'S MSYP

- 3.1** Argyll and Bute is represented on the Scottish Youth Parliament by Jamie Murray from Rothesay, who I met in Helensburgh on 19th September.

Elected to the SYP for a second term in March this year, Jamie is an enthusiastic and committed MSYP who is particularly keen to engage with the council on the key areas of interest we share in relation to young people. He is particularly interested in young people's mental health and in education, and in ensuring young people have a voice when it comes to the essential services that affect them. We enjoyed a very positive and friendly discussion

He is very interested in meeting with other members too and will be happy to hear from any colleagues who have an interest in exploring ways of working together in representing Argyll and Bute's young people.

4. ARGYLL AND BUTE CPP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

- 4.1** It was the turn of Helensburgh to host the Argyll and Bute CPP Management Committee meeting on 20th September. As always, this was a helpful opportunity to cement our already-strong partnership working and relationships.

Alongside area updates and reviewing local area community planning action plans, we had a productive discussion to shape and inform the final version of the latest CPP annual report, which examines case studies relating to each of the community planning outcomes.

Preparations are well in hand for the CPP Full Partnership, which takes place in Arrochar in December and at which Jamie Hepburn MSP, Minister for Employability and Training, will deliver the keynote address.

5. ARGYLL AND BUTE – DOORS OPEN DAY

- 5.1** Over the weekend of 22nd to 24th September, across Scotland, people had an opportunity to explore inside and outside some of the most interesting, unusual and attractive buildings in their community as part of the Doors Open Day programme. It was a real pleasure to launch the Argyll and Bute element in Helensburgh on Friday 22nd September.

We had 18 buildings across the area opening their doors to locals and visitors, including the iconic St Peter's Seminary in Cardross, Rothesay's Art Deco Pavilion, the newly restored Dunoon Burgh Hall and the romantic Dunans Castle in Glendaruel.

We are incredibly lucky in Argyll and Bute to have so many interesting buildings and places to see and explore – many of them set in stunning landscape. Many of them have a quite fascinating history and have involved several famous and notable architects in creating landmarks we live alongside every day. They make a rich contribution to community life and it is great to be able to open them up for everyone to enjoy.

6. EMPLOYEE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

- 6.1** The first EJCC meeting of the new council took place on 26th September. This was a very positive and constructive discussion, and it's clear that the good working relationships we have long enjoyed with our trades unions is set to continue. Working together is vital given the difficult times and challenges ahead and I'm glad that we have the opportunity to do so positively through the EJCC programme of meetings.

7. COSLA LEADERS

7.1 COSLA Leaders met in Edinburgh on Friday 29th September. Some items were discussed in private session, namely:

- Teachers Pay Negotiations
- Education Governance and Regional Collaboration
- Spending Review

The items take in public session were:

- COSLA response to the Fair Funding consultation
- Programme for Government – analysis by COSLA’s Policy Teams
- Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates
- Socio-Economic Duty
- Distribution Issues

Members will be aware that since that meeting took place, the Education Regional Collaboratives have moved forward apace with lead officers in place by end October.

The Scottish Government is expected to announce the local authority settlement around 13th or 14th December.

8. VISIT FROM AMBERG SULZBACH

8.1 2017 is the fiftieth anniversary of the twinning partnership between Argyll and Bute and the German region of Amberg Sulzbach. It was therefore great to welcome a delegation from Amberg Sulzbach to the chamber on Tuesday 3rd October to officially mark the occasion.

The key to the longevity of this relationship is its positive and friendly nature. It’s an important strategic partnership of mutual respect, sharing ideas and expertise, and making the most of the common ground we share. Our regions have very similar opportunities and challenges to deal with – and it’s helpful to explore those, as well as examine our differences, in order to learn how to make the most of the opportunities and new ways of tackling the challenges.

Twinning partnerships and their benefits are very much on the national agenda, given the potential that comes from matching areas with similar characteristics and facing comparable challenges. Amberg Sulzbach and Argyll and Bute offer an ideal example of ‘doing twinning really well’. The focus of this partnership remains very much as it started out 50 years ago -

on education, culture and opportunities for young people. We have also explored a range of significant issues which are important to our areas and their success, including population and economic growth, tourism and promoting our local offers of food, drink, outdoor and cultural heritage.

We signed a charter to acknowledge the 50th anniversary and to affirm our continued partnership working – before breaking out into more focused sessions to take forward some of the key areas of interest.

8. 'THE COUNTRY COUNCIL' – BBC1 DOCUMENTARY SERIES

- 8.1** Over the past few months BBC film crews have been working with council staff and customers across the whole Argyll and Bute area, preparing and developing a three-part documentary series called 'The Country Council'. The first episode was broadcast on Thursday 19th October and attracted an audience share of over 20 per cent.

This was very much a first for Argyll and Bute Council – it was a bold step to take and it has paid off. Our staff, our services and our area have been showcased in a very positive light – examples such as staff working very long days in order to ensure customers on our islands could access services, supporting people in very complex and challenging personal circumstances, and going above and beyond to reach customers.

It was incredibly interesting to watch and to learn first-hand about the day to day activities of our front line staff – and reinforced for me that we have a council to be proud of, in its workforce, in the services we deliver and in the beautiful, diverse area we represent.

We are building on the opportunities that national TV attention like this offers and using this as another springboard to promote Argyll and Bute as a great place to live, work and visit – an area full of opportunities and one which has ambitions for a thriving and vibrant local economy.

10. COSLA LEADERS

- 10.1** Friday 27th October saw me returning to Edinburgh for the next COSLA Leaders meeting. Again most items were taken in private session, but reports and briefings are available to view in the Leader's Report Pack:

- Teachers' Pay Negotiations
- Spending Review
- Community Choices Budgeting Framework
- Brexit
- Welfare Reform
- Distribution Issues

11. CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

11.1 Each local authority of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) takes turns to host, and for the autumn 2017 session it was our turn to welcome fellow delegates – on this occasion to Oban.

The Corran Halls was the ideal setting to showcase some of our investment in Oban in recent times – looking over the new pontoons in Oban Bay and the town centre public space regeneration.

COHI offers an opportunity for leaders and officers from the Highlands and islands councils to come together, with Scottish Government ministers, to discuss the issues which have a very different impact and effect on our communities than on our urban counterparts.

With several ministers in attendance, including the Deputy First Minister, and a focused agenda, this was an intense but productive day where we discussed:

- 1 - Scotland's Place in Europe – protecting the interests of the Highlands and Islands (led by Michael Russell)
- 2 - What makes a thriving rural economy (led by Fergus Ewing)
- 3 - Highlands and Islands post 2020 (led by John Swinney)
- 4 - Digital and Rural Connectivity (led by Fergus Ewing)
- 5 - Health and Social Care Integration (led by Aileen Campbell)
- 6 - Education reform (led by John Swinney)

I have been in contact with all of the Ministers following COHI to build on our formal and informal discussions and to invite them back to Argyll and Bute in the future to explore any areas of interests and ways we can work together.



With Michael Russell, John Swinney and Fergus Ewing at COHI

At time of writing we have received the draft COHI outcomes – these may yet be refined or amended, but at this stage are:

Outcome 1 – Scotland's place in Europe

- COHI asks Scottish Government to continue to recognise the specific nature of the impact of Brexit on the Highlands and Islands (particularly in relation to loss of EU funding and impact, regulation and trade tariffs, and the importance of migration, including to support the future labour market and skills) and that these continue to be reflected in Scottish Government policy and negotiations, keeping COHI members involved in, and informed about, developments, including regional arrangements. COHI members agreed to do more - in a co-ordinated, structured way, with support from the Scottish Government - to raise local awareness and understanding and in parallel to lobby the UK Government.

Outcome 2 – Thriving rural economy

- COHI asks Scottish Government with partners to ensure the alignment of investment and strategic priorities across the public sector with the objective of creating a cohesive, shared, agenda that guarantees the development of a vibrant, diverse and thriving rural economy for all. Key elements of this include housing, digital and mobile infrastructure, and transport.

Outcome 3 – CoHI post -2020

- COHI members approved further work by the COHI Senior Officer Group as broadly outlined in the tabled Future of CoHI post-2020 paper. All COHI partners to be involved in all priorities, including the emerging marine proposition, given shared objectives.
- COHI agreed an annual summary report on implementation progress to more proactively shape the agenda of future meetings on growing vibrant communities across the Highlands and Islands through population growth, inclusive growth, and investment in communities and (particularly digital and transport) infrastructure.

Outcome 4 – Digital / Rural

- COHI members agreed that a detailed update on the points raised by members around digital connectivity will be provided by Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise by the end of 2017.
- On the issue of fixed wireless broadband provision, members agreed that HIE and Scottish Government officials should meet with local authorities by the end of 2017 to explore the possibility of interim solutions, providing better connectivity now while R100 is deployed, can be progressed.

Outcome 5 - Health

- CoHI asks Scottish Government and partners to work together to consolidate the stories of success and to articulate the impact of service change; to ensure that we are effectively communicating programmes of change to build confidence across our communities about the value of that change; and to coproduce with communities to build new models of delivery.
- CoHI asks Scottish Government to continue to support ongoing change and innovation in the governance of health and social care; and to hear back from partnerships about how those models are developing
- CoHI asks Scottish Government to consider remote and rural issues in respect of workforce strategies and planning

Outcome 6 - Education

- Scottish Government will work with COHI partners to bring further focus to the impact of rural deprivation on educational attainment and consider what further support can be put in place.

12. ROTHESAY – PAVILION AND ISLANDS STRATEGIC GROUP

- 12.1** Tuesday 31st October saw me joining the Chief Executive and Depute Leader in Rothesay, where Keith Brown, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, confirmed the award of £10.6m European Regional Development Funding for the restoration of Rothesay Pavilion. This funding will be used to create affordable space for small businesses to operate and grow, and will help to bring new jobs to the island.



It also offered an opportunity for the Argyll Islands Strategic Group meeting to coincide with Mr Brown's visit and in the hope that his schedule would permit a contribution to the agenda. Unfortunately Mr Brown had to leave for another engagement, but the group has also extended an invitation to Humza Yousaf, Minister for Transport and Islands, and we hope that he will be able to come along to a future meeting.

13. COSO

- 13.1** Chief and senior officers from across the council – both geographically and in departmental terms – gathered in Helensburgh on Friday 10th November for the first COSO session since the local government elections in May.

It is really helpful to have an opportunity to meet with such a broad range of council staff in this setting – which has a new, thematic format and is very much focused on driving forward the council's transformation agenda.

For me, it was a chance to personally introduce the council's priorities – agreed at the council meeting in September – to a significant body of staff for the first time. I was really encouraged by the positive questions and contributions made by officers and hope to hear from any others who may not have been able to attend COSO but who may have ideas about how we can all work together to deliver for Argyll and Bute – please do get in touch.

14. SCOTLAND'S SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY – MEETING

- 14.1** When the Scottish Government first announced its plans for a national social security agency, Argyll and Bute was undoubtedly the first council to express an interest in getting involved. Since then, the government's plans for the agency have developed and moved on. However, given our clear ambitions to grow our economy and our population, and to bring more jobs to the area, we have continued to make it clear we are keen to play a part in this.

While the agency is to be located in Dundee and Glasgow there are elements of local service delivery where councils can get involved. This would see staff based and working in Argyll and Bute.

Officials tasked with setting up the agency have been liaising with Scottish councils over the past few months. They have already had preliminary discussions with our officers and on Wednesday 15th November came to Kilmory for a follow-up meeting.



I was delighted to join senior officers from Economic Development, HR and Customer Services to meet with Ally McPhail, Brian Goodfellow and Miriam Craven from the Scottish Government. We had very positive discussions and it was interesting to get a high level overview from them about how the agency will work and how councils can get involved.

They were keen to learn from us about how we deal with remote working – something in which we’re well versed – and it was clear that we are able to make a real contribution to those discussions.

Our officers spoke with them in more depth about our systems, about co-location potential within Argyll and Bute, about our experiences of recruiting and retaining staff, training and generally working to deliver crucial services in a mix of remote, rural and island communities.

We continue to emphasise that availability of good quality jobs is crucial to Argyll and Bute’s success and we will continue to work for any possible involvement in the set-up, operation and service delivery of the new agency.

15. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

15.1 COSLA Environment and Economy Board: The second meeting of the COSLA Environment and Economy Board was held in Edinburgh on 23rd October.

Agenda items included:

- Enterprise and Skills review – regional partnerships
- Planning Bill

- UK's exit from the European Union
- Electric Vehicles – a report from COSLA and Transport Scotland
- Circular Economy
- Unconventional Oil and Gas

Representatives from Transport Scotland joined the meeting for the discussion on electric vehicles, which was wide-ranging and highlighted the current infrastructure limitations in rural areas.

The meeting also included a presentation by the Director of Regional Economic Growth on the Glasgow City Region Deal. This covered the structure of the deal, progress that has been made so far, planned infrastructure investment and the need to consider inclusive economic growth.

15.2 Rural Growth Deal: Council officers continue to liaise with the Scottish Futures Trust and I am due to join them at a further meeting scheduled with Scottish and UK Government representatives on 22nd November 2017. The Strategic Transportation and Infrastructure Manager presented a paper to SMT on 31st October setting out the proposed interim governance arrangements required to progress the deal to a Heads of Terms agreement with the Scottish and UK Governments.

15.3 Oban as a University Town (OaUT): This is progressing with an overall steering group now in place and four work groups dealing with academic offer, infrastructure, commercial engagement and communication.

A five year plan is due to be published in the next month and an awareness raising event for this initiative is planned for January 2018. The workgroups are preparing higher level strategic goals that they can take forward. It should be noted that Oban has in excess of 800 students split between a number of providers such as SAMS/UHI, Argyll College/UHI, Ballet West and NHS.

To assist communication a new leaflet is being prepared which includes case studies of successful students – and, on that note, it's great to hear that in the last academic year four SAMS students gained first class degrees.

15.4 Digital Connectivity, Broadband: At the end of September, 83.3% of premises in Argyll and Bute are now connected to the fibre network – and 72.8% of these can access speeds in excess of 24Mbps. This means that 9.1% are connected but unable to get superfast speeds – while 16.7% are still on standard ADSL.

Work continues to progress on the Rest of Scotland Programme intervention area.

Mobile: Planning Officers had major concerns over the siting of a mast at the end of Kilmartin Glen right on the edge of the national scenic area. They had asked for a slight move in its location but this could not be accommodated and was rejected by EE. After the Digital Liaison Officer's intervention this has been escalated and is being looked at again to see if there is any chance of finding an alternative location. Mast planning applications continue to be progressed and Phase 2 of the Emergency Service Network is about to enter pre application consultations, in an attempt to streamline the process.

A full update will come to members at the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee meeting in December.

15.5 Argyll Enterprise Week: I was happy to attend the launch event for Argyll Enterprise Week in Kilmory on Monday 6th November. The chamber was buzzing with 'stalls' for the first focused session of the week-long event – this one looking at funding opportunities for community and third sector groups. With sessions on a variety of topics ranging from funding to making the most of social media and digital marketing, taking place in several locations across the area, it's fair to say that once again Argyll Enterprise Week was a definite success, attracting a lot of positive comment from those who attended.

15.6 Visitor attractions in Argyll: Along with HIE officers, I met with Dr Sharon Webb and Gordon Gray-Stephens of Kilmartin House Museum on 6th November where they provided an update on their plans for the museum. A further report is due to come to Policy and Resources Committee in December.

On 11th November I attended the official launch of the Scottish Submarine Centre in Helensburgh, where the Lord Lieutenant marked the occasion by unveiling a plaque. The Submarine Centre will be fully open to the public next month.

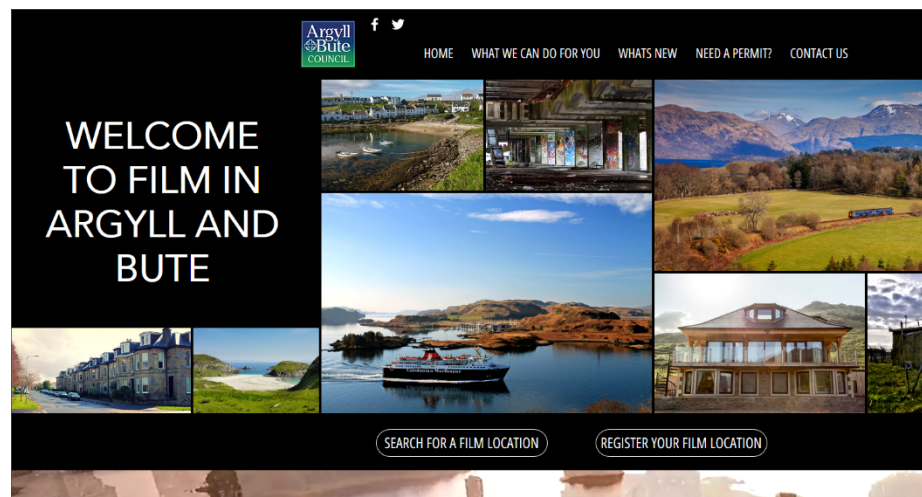
15.7 Food From Argyll – Good Food Show: The council, along with partners from Food from Argyll, other local food and drink producers and the Argyll and Isles Tourism Co-operative, were represented at the BBC Good Food Show in Glasgow in October. Argyll and Bute has a fantastic local produce offer which deserves to be highlighted and promoted – and it's a key part of our overall drive to promote the area as a great place to live, work and visit. Understandably the Food from Argyll stall was a major attraction at the show and this was a great opportunity to let a wider audience savour the fabulous flavour of Argyll and Bute.

15.8 Driving CARS forward: Our Conservation Area Regeneration Schemes in Dunoon and Inveraray have hit major milestones in the past few months.

The Dunoon CARS scheme, worth over £1.25m, launched in September and focuses on the regeneration of historic buildings in the town centre – also complementing the prior investment and current regeneration works being carried out in the town.

Meanwhile the Inveraray scheme has seen the scaffolding coming down from the last of the Royal Burgh’s picturesque and characteristic white buildings. The building restoration phase of Inveraray CARS is now complete but the £2m overall scheme continues until March next year, with the focus now shifting to supporting community engagement initiatives.

15.9 Filming in Argyll and Bute: Here in Argyll and Bute we’re well aware of the outstanding beauty the area has to offer – and we are always delighted to show it off to a wider audience. We have an abundance of amazing places and spaces to share and that’s why we have created a dedicated, one-stop-shop website for companies looking for the ideal film location. The new website has been created entirely in-house, it looks fantastic and is another channel for promoting the attractions of Argyll and Bute. It takes film companies through the whole process from permit to playing on the big screen, with a stop-off at a locations database and library first, and it also offers the facility for anyone wishing to register their property for film makers to use.



www.filminargyll.co.uk

Argyll and Bute has been the site of a number of international blockbusters and popular TV shows over the years and we hope to welcome many more to our shores. This is another affirmation of our clear message that we are well and truly open for business.

15.10 European activity: I attended the West of Scotland European Forum in Glasgow on 20th September and also (by VC) the scheduled Highlands and Islands European Partnership meetings in October and November.

In common with the discussions at COHI, mentioned elsewhere in this report, post Brexit regional development policy and funding continue to be of significant importance at these meetings, with discussions around lobbying activity to ensure availability of equivalent funding in the future.

16. CORRESPONDENCE AND FUTURE MEETINGS - SUMMARY

16.1 Along with the Depute Leader, I am due to meet with both Michael Russell MSP and Brendan O'Hara MP before the end of the year.

At the time of writing we have confirmed arrangements for the first Argyll and Bute Parliamentary Forum, inviting all the constituency and list MSPs who represent the entire Argyll and Bute local authority area. While parliamentary business is inevitably a priority, we have been encouraged to receive confirmation that seven MSPs are due to attend. We hope to discuss the Rural Growth Deal, the recently agreed council priorities and the importance of connectivity – but we are also keen to hear from the MSPs too and to explore effective ways that we can all work together in the future. I will bring an update on this session in my next Leader's Report.

A meeting with Lord Ian Duncan of Springbank, also in connection with the Rural Growth Deal, has been confirmed for 2nd February 2018 and is likely to take place in Oban.

As indicated by the Policy Lead for Education, I have invited John Swinney to participate in the official opening of Kirn Primary School and am awaiting a response.

Correspondence with Keith Brown on enterprise and skills support within Argyll and Bute continues and it is likely that we will meet soon with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to discuss this further. Mr Brown has asked both agencies to progress this and will be kept updated on developments.

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
16th November 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