
26th April 2018

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 November 2017 to 31st March 2018.

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. ARGYLL AND BUTE PARLIAMENTARY FORUM, 21st November 2017

- 3.1** Shortly after recess last year, we wrote to all MSPs who represent the Argyll and Bute area, whether as a constituency representative or as part of the regional lists. We had a very positive cross-party response and met with several MSPs in the Scottish Parliament on 21st November 2017.

Joining us were Rhoda Grant, Donald Cameron and John Finnie from the Highlands and Islands area, plus Ross Greer and Maurice Corry from West Scotland. Dumbarton constituency MSP Jackie Baillie was also present. Michael Russell and Maree Todd, who facilitated the event, were unable to attend due to urgent ministerial and parliamentary business. However we had an opportunity to catch up with Mr Russell by telephone early in December.

We had a very positive and constructive discussion and the session allowed us to highlight the council's priorities and introduce the Rural Growth Deal. Given the time of year, the budget outlook was a key feature of our

discussions also. Everyone agreed that engagement like this was very useful and, at the time of writing, final preparations are in hand for the second Parliamentary Forum on 18th April. We're very grateful to both Michael Russell and Jackie Baillie who are facilitating the latest meeting.

4. ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL EXCELLENCE AWARDS

- 4.1** It's always a pleasure to be involved in our annual Excellence and Recognition Awards. One of the priorities we agreed last September is ensuring that Argyll and Bute Council is an employer of choice. Taking steps to recognise the successes and achievements of our staff is a key part of delivering that priority.

As always the awards categories have customer service at their heart – entries must demonstrate that their efforts and innovations make a real difference to service delivery. Being part of the judging panel is always a difficult job but it's an important task and I'm always heartened and encouraged to see at each year's awards ceremony that high standards are not only maintained but enhanced and expanded. Well done to everyone involved – both the awards winners and those who put such a lot of work into arranging this annual event. The contribution you make to life in Argyll and Bute is very much appreciated.

5. MEETING WITH NHS HIGHLAND LEADERSHIP, 29th November 2017

- 5.1** It was helpful to meet with the Chair of NHS Highland, Dr David Alston, along with Robin Creelman, Chair of the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership Integrated Joint Board, on 29th November. Maintaining positive and productive working relationships is crucial at these times of challenge for all public sector agencies. This was a general introductory meeting but we're due to meet again as soon as possible following the recent Argyll and Bute HSCP budget meeting. As the partnership's parent bodies and in the face of considerable challenges for the HSCP we have much to discuss and I will update members in more detail when the meeting has taken place.

6. VISIT FROM COSLA LEADERSHIP, 30th November 2017

- 6.1** We were delighted to welcome a familiar face to the council chamber on 30th November in the form of Sally Loudon, our former Chief Executive and now holding the same role at COSLA. She joined Councillor Alison Evison, COSLA's President, for a presentation to all members at our council meeting.



Sally Loudon, Cllr Aileen Morton, Cllr Alison Evison, Cleland Sneddon

In our discussions ahead of the public session, Cllr Evison recognised the challenges we face in delivering services across such a diverse mix of communities. She said that Argyll and Bute is a 'unique example of how important local government is in Scotland today' and added that she'd very much enjoyed the BBC television series 'The Country Council' – "it's a real credit to you and a fantastic way of showcasing the huge difference that local government makes to people every single day".

Both Sally and Cllr Evison were clear about COSLA's wish to engage all of Scottish local government as a strong, collective voice, particularly ahead of the national Local Democracy Review which they outlined to members during their presentation.

7. ARGYLL AND BUTE COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP – FULL PARTNERSHIP, 5th December 2018

- 7.1** The Argyll and Bute CPP Full Partnership came together in Arrochar's Three Villages Hall on 5th December. As always this was a really positive day with a packed programme focusing on some of the key issues that we and our public and third sector colleagues are dealing with.



Addressing a packed Three Villages Hall for the CPP Full Partnership

This was my first Full Partnership as council Leader. We are really good at partnership working in Argyll and Bute and it's great to see that continue even in these challenging times.

I was delighted to welcome Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Employability and Training, as the keynote speaker for the day. His input was very much appreciated – especially given that many of the programme slots focused on young people, training and employment opportunities, and how we as community planning partners can work together to develop and encourage our young people into viable career paths full of potential.

It wasn't all about the young people, though – we had a really interesting slot on intergenerational perspectives on Argyll and Bute, delivered in tandem by representatives from our Youth Forum and Gray Matters. This gave everyone a real opportunity to learn something about how others see us and our communities, no matter which generation we are.

8. SPECIAL COSLA LEADERS, 14th December 2018

- 8.1** For all Scottish councils December is inevitably dominated by one matter – the local government settlement announcement. This was therefore the focus for the special COSLA Leaders meeting held on 14th December. As well as a verbal update on the national picture, there was also a discussion on teachers' pay negotiations. Both items were taken in private session, which means I cannot report on them fully here, but colleagues will be aware that both matters shifted and evolved significantly over the course of December, January and February. Pay negotiations for all local government employees remain very much in focus at the time of writing.

9. HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS AIRPORTS LTD – 9th January 2018

- 9.1** Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL) made changes to its Air Traffic Management Strategy and, during January, its Chair and Chief Executive engaged with council Leaders to outline the strategy, the future of HIAL and to explore collective aspirations for aviation in the Highlands and Islands. We had a conference call with Lorna Jack, Chair and Inglis Lyon, CEX, on 9th January.

While the amended strategy itself is unlikely to have any significant impact on operations within Argyll and Bute, this was a useful opportunity to engage with HIAL and build relationships. We have clear ambitions for Oban airport which can play a significant role in air transport within the region and this provided a chance to highlight its strengths and the contribution it can make.

10. COSLA LEADERS, 26TH January 2018

- 10.1** Before reporting in detail on the COSLA Leaders meeting of 26th January, it's worth noting that a number of planned meetings in January had to be rescheduled due to severe weather, not only here in Argyll and Bute but elsewhere in the country.

January was also dominated by budget planning, building on the settlement news received in December and responding to a very rapidly changing situation.

When COSLA Leaders met late in January we discussed the following matters:

- Planning Bill – performance of Planning Authorities
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children – National Transfer Scheme
- Local Government Pay Claims 2018/19
- Distribution
- Business Gateway Governance Board
- National Care Home Contract
- Local Government Settlement 2018/19
- Education Bill Consultation Response
- Leaders Priorities Update

The full reports, along with the briefings provided by our officers, can be read in the Leader's Report Pack.

11. AB AWARDS – 31st January 2018, Helensburgh

- 11.1** 2018 is the Year of Young People in Scotland, and celebrating the success of our young people really was the ideal way to start that off, with the AB Awards in January. It's really important to mark the contribution that young people make to life in our communities. We really do have young people to be proud of in Argyll and Bute, and I was honoured and delighted to be asked to present one of the awards and to celebrate their hard work, commitment, achievements and success. Well done to all our young people who took part in this year's event.

12. MEETING WITH LORD IAN DUNCAN, 2nd February 2018

- 12.1** We have been working on a Rural Growth Deal for Argyll and Bute since 2016 and we have been clear that securing this in 2018 is an absolute priority for us. Our officers continue to engage with their civil servant counterparts at both the Scottish and UK governments and this has been backed up by political meetings too.

We were delighted to welcome Lord Ian Duncan of Springbank, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Scotland Office, to Oban on 2nd February to take forward the next steps in our discussions with the UK Government. This is the first opportunity we've had to meet with Lord Duncan since he took up post. He showed a keen interest in our ambitions and proposals to secure this potentially transformative outcome for our area, and we will be having further discussions with him later in the year as our plans progress and take shape. Momentum on this is very much stepping up apace and members will have the chance to hear more about the Rural Growth Deal at a special members seminar in May, with a report coming to Policy and Resources Committee later that month.



With Lord Ian Duncan and Depute Leader Gary Mulvaney in Oban

This meeting also offered an opportunity to show Lord Duncan the new pontoon facility installed in Oban bay, and it was also the first airing for the new Oban North Pier Building. This is a wonderful new facility which really complements the rest of the pier offer and cements Oban's place as one of the most important Scottish west coast sailing destinations.

13. ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL BUDGET – February 2018

- 13.1** The lead-up from the New Year to the council meeting on 22nd February was almost entirely focused on budget preparations.

This is hard work for everyone and this year that effort paid off with a unanimously agreed budget for the first time in a number of years. I am encouraged that, working together, we all managed to achieve this. This year's budget threatened to be very difficult, yet turned out to be perhaps not quite as bad as feared – but it was still a very, very challenging budget. We all know that there are, inevitably, greater challenges ahead.

That said, we have, with our budget, managed to secure investment in the areas which matter most to our communities, like roads; protect jobs as much as possible; and, while we could not avoid taking savings, we have looked for ways to mitigate impact as much as possible.

Following our budget decision to invest almost £15m in roads over the next two years, I have written to Humza Yousaf in relation to finding solutions to other key transport issues which affect Argyll and Bute – our significant investment will have a considerable impact but there are other matters to be addressed in keeping Argyll and Bute connected, viable and thriving. These include the need for investment in the lifeline A83, A82 and A85 trunk routes, rail and ferry services. Investment in our transport systems is vital to stimulate further growth in Argyll and Bute especially given our contribution to the national tourism and high value food and drink export economy. I am pressing for a meeting with Mr Yousaf in the very near future to discuss these issues.

14. COSLA LEADERS, 23rd February 2018

- 14.1** It doesn't take long to get back to business after the budget and this year has been no exception with a COSLA Leaders meeting the very next day.

The agenda items are noted below and, as usual, all reports and related briefings can be viewed in the Leader's Report Pack:

- Local Taxation
- Electoral Reform
- Planning Update

- COSLA Communications Strategy Update
- Equal Pay
- National Care Home Contract
- Local Government Settlement 18/19
- National Performance Framework

15. CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS, 12th March 2018

15.1 It was the turn of North Ayrshire Council to host the Spring COHI, with this session taking place in Millport, Isle of Cumbrae.

This also afforded an opportunity for a brief, informal meeting of the Islands Strategic Group members with Humza Yousaf, given the forthcoming discussions on the Islands (Scotland) Bill.

The draft outcomes for COHI have just been provided to us and, while these are still at a draft stage, they are noted below for your interest:

Outcome 1 – Housing

CoHI members agreed that each Local Authority would ensure mid-market rent opportunities are highlighted in Strategic Housing Investment Plans submitted to Scottish Government to further develop opportunities for key worker accommodation across the CoHI area.

CoHI members also agreed there is a need for there to be a real understanding between Scottish Government and local authorities to allow a cohesive approach to planning to be developed in relation to the steps necessary to accelerate investment.

Community Planning Partnerships should identify exact local need and potential models with SG. Local Authorities will also consider available Public sector owned land and the use of CPO powers and other potential planning issues to secure land for housing and develop new housing pilots.

Outcome 2 – Digital

CoHI members welcomed the ambition, nature and scale of the Scottish Government's R100 and 4G Infill Programmes and the achievements secured in part by CoHI joint working. Members reaffirmed the rationale for continuous improvement through further, faster, integrated and innovative national and local developments and that progress would be best served by further collaborative working - including HIE participation in the rollout of R100 - and regular review in this forum with a focus on the issue of future proofing.

Bi-lateral meetings between Scottish Government and each local authority will be arranged to address identified and differentiated local challenges. SG to explore potential of leveraging the Scottish Wide Area Network (SWAN) infrastructure

serving schools and other public buildings. UK Government Ministers and the CEO of Ofcom will be invited to attend the next CoHI meeting to seek to further enhance joint working. This would provide an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of continuing and proportionate investment by UK Government in addition to the funding provided by Scottish Government to R100. In advance of that next meeting, local authority Leaders and Ministers will urgently prepare and send a letter to the UK Government to make a persuasive case on funding.

Outcome 3 – GFG Alliance Lochaber

CoHI members asked for an exploration into areas of engagement which can be made between CoHI and the Lochaber Delivery Group (for example regarding Oban airport) to learn lessons from the GFG Alliance experience in Fort William and to maximise the strategic economic opportunities within the wider Highlands and Islands.

Members recognised the value and impact of those co-ordinated actions and endorsed the ambition of applying that model in a proactive way to other strategic opportunities in the Highlands & Islands. Members agreed to reflect on what those opportunities might be, for discussion at the next CoHI. HIE will provide a paper setting out some suggestions for discussion built around assets and opportunities.

Outcome 4 – Air traffic control

CoHI members welcomed the HIAL presentation and highlighted the importance of responding to real or perceived concerns about the centralisation, safety and resilience of the ATC modernisation proposal scheduled for implementation in 2028. HIAL provided reassurance that a new system could only be introduced with the agreement of the CAA who would require certain levels of resilience to be built in. HIAL would continue to keep local authorities informed as the modernisation programme progresses and made clear that it would be business as usual in the meantime.

16. NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING CONFERENCE, 16th March 2018

- 16.1** Volunteering in Scotland is generally on the decline – but Argyll and Bute is bucking that trend, with volunteers on the increase across the area. That's why we were the natural choice to host a national conference on volunteering in partnership with the Improvement Service.

Turning Volunteer Participation Upside Down took place in Helensburgh's Victoria Halls on 16th March and was a great opportunity to come together and explore the value of volunteering, how it can make a difference and how we can increase participation in the future for everyone's benefit.

We will be hearing more about this in the future and the Chief Executive, who is leading on this, will bring a report to council in due course.

17. COSLA CONVENTION AND SPECIAL LEADERS, 23rd March 2018

17.1 Renfrewshire Council were the hosts for COSLA Convention and a special COSLA Leaders Meeting on 23rd March.

After hearing a little about some of Renfrewshire Council's current activities, including its community engagement efforts, we enjoyed a presentation about the Scottish Youth Parliament and ways that young people can, do and want to participate in local democracy – very apt for the Year of Young People.

I had an opportunity to ask a members' question during Convention, relating to the differing terms and conditions applying to NHS and council staff within Health and Social Care Partnerships.

Other agenda items were:

- COSLA Progress Update and reports from Presidential Team and spokespeople
- COSLA Budget 2018/19
- Councillors Code of Conduct
- Right to Local Self Government – Members Bill

The Special Leaders agenda items were Pay Claims 2018/19 and Early Learning and Childcare Consultation, both taken in private session.

18. INDUSTRY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT SOUNDING BOARD, 26th March

18.1 The Industry and Regional Development Sounding Board met for the second time on 26th March 2018. We were delighted to welcome industry representatives from a range of sectors significant to Argyll and Bute, including forestry, farming, fisheries and tourism. Also joining us was Michael Russell MSP, Minister for Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe, and it was really helpful to hear from him about the current position on Brexit negotiations and the potential outcomes. While this is a developing situation, it was useful to come together like this, particularly with industry reps, in order that we can work together to make the most of any opportunities that arise through Brexit as well as dealing with challenges like population levels and recruitment, among others.

19. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

19.1 Enterprise and Skills Support for Argyll and Bute: One of the priorities we agreed as a council was to lobby for Argyll and Bute to be served by a single enterprise agency, with HIE taking on responsibility for the whole of the area. Colleagues will recall from a previous Leader's Report that I wrote

to Keith Brown, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work about this and therefore, with his agreement, we arranged an initial meeting with Scottish Enterprise in January.

SE currently provide enterprise and skills support to the Helensburgh and Lomond area and, while there is still a significant degree of discussion and negotiation to do in order to fully deliver on this particular priority, this initial meeting was positive and productive. Our officers continue to liaise with colleagues in both SE and HIE and the matter also features on the agenda for the second Parliamentary Forum, mentioned earlier in this report. Work is ongoing and discussions on this continue at all relevant levels.

- 19.2 COSLA Environment and Economy Board:** The COSLA EE Board was due to meet on 2nd March but this was postponed due to a further spell severe weather impacting on travel arrangements. Some agenda items required immediate feedback by email. This included the Proposed Restricted Roads (20mph Limit) (Scotland) Bill – a 20mph limit for built-up areas.

While we agree in principle that a shift from 30mph to 20mph will improve environment, road safety and health, there are a number of other issues to address when considering this from Argyll and Bute's perspective. These include the definition of a 'built-up' area – some villages on A and B class roads could be considered through routes and therefore outwith scope of the proposal. A lead-in period would be required and, where effective enforcement would require police input, alternatives should be explored.

There will also be costs involved in providing additional signage and, potentially, other traffic management measures to ensure compliance, and we would want to see extra resources allocated to councils to cover this.

We also fed back to COSLA our agreement with its position on Crown Estate pilots and bill, Fairer Scotland Duty draft interim guidance, Business Gateway Data Sharing and the Islands Bill. These papers and associated briefings can be viewed in the Leader's Report pack.

- 19.3 Rural Growth Deal:** We indicated in the priorities agreed by council that securing Argyll and Bute's Rural Growth Deal in 2018 is an absolute priority. Work on this continues to progress apace.

On 22nd November 2017 I was able to attend, as an observer, a meeting between our officers and civil servants where they discussed how to shape and refine our deal in line with the policy direction of both the Scottish and UK Governments. It was useful and helpful to be able to observe this session.

The Depute Leader and I met with our own officers again in March to have an update on progress and to confirm the timeline for progressing the deal that we want to see for Argyll and Bute.

Officers are currently finalising draft details for the proposed growth deal vision and themes, projects that will be included in our deal, a communication plan and other associated information for proposed sign off at the P&R Committee meeting in May. In advance of this, there is a members seminar on 14th May to update all councillors on progress and allow them to provide comment.

Next steps are, as mentioned earlier in the report, to arrange further meetings with representatives from the Scottish/UK Governments and Transport Scotland with a view to submitting a draft deal to both governments in time for this to be considered in their 2018 budgets (October/November 2018).

Argyll and Bute's Rural Growth Deal will also feature at the parliamentary forum on 18th April.

19.4 Building Standards Workshop: Our Building Standards service held a stakeholders' workshop on 22nd November in Helensburgh. This was a really useful session – as well as hearing more about the service and its activities, it was also very encouraging to hear positive comments from local businesses who have had help and guidance from Building Standards. This is another example of how all council services can and do make a positive contribution to a thriving, successful Argyll and Bute economy.

The day also offered an opportunity to congratulate Building Standards on retaining their Customer Service Excellence accreditation – they are one of several council services who have achieved this and it's no surprise that they have continued to build on their standards and drive forward excellence and improvement.

19.5 Islands Transport Forum: This meeting, originally due to take place in January, was rescheduled for 28th March 2018 as a result of severe weather. Along with Jim Smith, our Head of Roads and Amenity Services, I attended the forum by conference call. Agenda items were:

- National Transport Strategy review – update
- Brexit issues
- HITRANS report on Mobility as a Service – Island Project Opportunities
- Paper from HITRANS on Low Carbon Transport and Travel ERDF
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar report on Audit Scotland – Transport Scotland's Ferry Services

- Report from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar on HIAL Air Traffic Management 2030 Strategy

The previous day, 27th March, saw the Argyll Islands Strategic Group meeting in Kilmory and I know the Policy Lead for Communities, Housing, Gaelic and Islands will be covering this in his update. At the AISG we discussed a number of similar issues including the Audit Scotland ferries report, the latest position on the Islands (Scotland) Bill and an update report on the fuel poverty consultation. It was helpful to have had these discussions from an Argyll and Bute perspective ahead of feeding into the national forum discussions.

19.6 Oban as a University Town (OaUT): The Oban As A University Town launch event took place on 1st March 2018. This was a very successful evening despite the weather and it is hoped that momentum on this important project gains traction. It was with real regret that, due to weather conditions, I was unable to attend at short notice. Sincere thanks go to Elaine Robertson, OLI Area Chair, who represented the council officially on the day. Elaine is a real ambassador for Oban and is very passionate about seeing success for OaUT.

19.7 Digital Connectivity: This remains a key priority for us and I will be discussing digital connectivity with Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, on 18th April after the parliamentary forum. Our officers are finalising a briefing note in preparation for this meeting and I will be happy to provide that for members if they wish.

Broadband: The most recent update shows that by early March, 88.5% of premises in Argyll and Bute are connected to the fibre network, with just over 80% able to access speeds higher than 24Mbps. Only 11.5% of premises remain with standard ADSL service.

The R100 procurement process has commenced – this is a crucial project for Argyll and Bute. At the time of writing commercial confidentiality means that available detail is limited, and the procurement process is not expected to be complete until the end of the year, so it is likely to be 2019 before any substantial updates are available.

Mobile: Site upgrade work continues across Argyll and Bute and consequently coverage has improved in several communities.

Work on the EE and Emergency Services Network (ESN) continues to progress. There are also Home Office plans for a network of masts to supplement the ESN. Seventeen of these are in Argyll and Bute – to include seven new masts and the remainder site-sharing or using existing Airwave masts.

20. CONCLUSION

20.1 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.

21. IMPLICATIONS

21.1 Policy - None

21.2 Financial – None

21.3 Legal – None

21.4 HR – None

21.5 Equalities – None

21.6 Risk – None

21.7 Customer Service – None

Councillor Aileen Morton

Leader, Argyll and Bute Council and Policy Lead for Economic Development

10th April 2018

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