

**Argyll and Bute Business Group; An Evolution of the Argyll and Bute
Economic Forum**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This paper sets out a rationale for the development of a new business group to bring together leaders of all key sectors within the region to collaborate on inclusive growth. The new group will supersede the existing Argyll and Bute Economic Forum.
- 1.2 It is recommended that the Council notes the content of this paper and agrees to the principle of the establishment of the Argyll and Bute Business Group to improve engagement with businesses to promote inclusive economic growth.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This paper sets out a rationale for the development of a new business group to bring together leaders of all key sectors within the region to collaborate on inclusive growth

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council notes the content of this paper and agrees to the principle of the establishment of the Argyll and Bute Business Group to improve engagement with businesses to promote inclusive economic growth.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 Since the establishment of the Argyll and Bute Economic Forum in March 2015 and the publication of its findings in February 2016, the Forum has been a powerful influence in shaping the agenda for economic growth.
- 4.2 The key recommendations of the report are fully compatible with the key priorities of both the Community Planning Partnership and the Council. The update reports issued in January 2017 and April 2018 present a positive update on the key sectors the Forum explored; namely tourism, food and drink including aquaculture, education,

barriers and main towns.

4.3 In 2015 the Forum met as a full group 3 times and in the following two years met twice a year to monitor progress on the recommendations in the report. In 2018 the Forum will meet once. The Economic Forum has been successful in uniting some key sectors into a single voice and promoting a positive story around the current regional economy and more importantly its prospects. The Chair of the Forum and the Council Chief Executive have reviewed the role of the Economic Forum and what is needed from the private sector for the purpose of inclusive growth.

4.4 **Rural Growth Deal**

4.5 The Council has been developing a proposal to secure significant partnership funding from the UK and Scottish Governments for a 'Rural Growth Deal' in a similar fashion to the City Deals announced for parts of Scotland.

4.6 This work has involved detailed discussion with officers of both UK and Scottish Governments with support from the Scottish Futures Trust. Additionally, political meetings have been held at ministerial level with both Governments.

4.7 Civil servants are clear that in order to be successful in securing a growth deal, clear evidence must exist of private sector support for the Rural Growth Deal and engagement and consultation has been ongoing with individual sectors. What is required is clear support from leaders of all key sectors and this is considered further in this paper.

4.8 A distinctly separate and recently established group is the Industry and Regional Development Sounding Board which was created to ensure that Argyll and Bute's interests would be promoted during the UK negotiations to leave the European Union, as well as focusing on

advancing the further development of a Rural Growth Deal. Critically important to the Council is ensuring our strategic priorities for investment are aligned with the UK Government's Industrial Strategy as well as Scottish Government priorities.

4.9 Argyll and Bute Business Group

- 4.10 Despite the success of the Economic Forum in representing some key sectors, there is no single voice for the private sector in Argyll and Bute. The Council (and HIE) has good contacts and relations with specific sectors and a number of forums exist in relation to tourism, agriculture, aquaculture, renewable energy and others.
- 4.11 It is proposed to create a new Argyll and Bute Business Group to bring together leaders of all key sectors into a single group to ensure that clear messages from the private sector are developed and understood. Building on the benefits the Economic Forum has brought, it will be wholly private sector led and facilitated.
- 4.12 A key challenge is our geography and it is proposed that the format is a single annual meeting (mini conference) supported by year round thematic work managed digitally or through existing scheduled meetings. It is proposed that the new group will in time supersede the Economic Forum.
- 4.13 Successful engagement from the Argyll and Bute Business Group will also influence lobbying of elected representatives of UK and Scottish Government for improved outcomes for Argyll and Bute which may include strategic matters like the Rural Growth Deal. One to one communications between the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Ministers will continue along with the Argyll and Bute Scottish Parliamentary Forum of which the council has hosted two with plans for a third. This ensures Regional List MSPs as well as Constituency MSPs and MP are sighted on strategic priorities of the Council.

- 4.14 Subject to approval in principle from the Committee to create an Argyll and Bute Business Group, a further report will come back to committee with recommendations on membership.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The council has had good relations with the private sector through a range of representative bodies. The emergence of the Argyll and Bute Economic Forum proved powerful in developing consensus on growing economic growth and equally important promoting the region as a positive destination to visit and do business.
- 5.2 The proposition for a private sector led Argyll and Bute Business Group seeks to ensure that all key sectors are represented and fully engaged in a manner that supports strategic activity in relation to inclusive growth. Recommendations on organisations to invite to join will be reported to this committee for consideration.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy; None
- 6.2 Financial; Officer time to support Argyll and Bute Business Group.
- 6.3 Legal; None
- 6.4 HR; None
- 6.5 Equalities; None
- 6.6 Risk; None
- 6.7 Customer Service; None

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