
27th September 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 11th June to 14th September 2018, which period takes in the July recess. It also includes an update in relation to my Policy Lead portfolio, Economic Development.

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. OPENING OF HELMI PATISSERIE, BUTE – 17th June 2018

- 3.1** I visited Bute in May (covered in the Leader's Report for June) and had a look round the premises where the Helmi family were carrying out their last minute preparations to open a new patisserie. It was a real pleasure to attend the official opening on Sunday 17th June, just a few weeks later. With an amazing range of tempting treats on offer it was no surprise that the shelves were very quickly cleared by a steady stream of visitors and wellwishers.

The Helmi family came to the island through our refugee resettlement programme and their new patisserie is the second business established on Bute by Syrian refugees. A third business, the Rayan restaurant, has also opened up, and both residents and visitors alike are enjoying a taste of Syrian cuisine and the finest cakes and pastries.

It is fantastic to see our families settling so well into community life and offering another attraction to complement Bute's already well-established reputation for tasty local food.

4. COSO (CHIEF OFFICERS AND SENIOR OFFICERS), SAMS, 22nd June 2018

- 4.1** Our summer COSO event took place at the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) campus near Oban on 22nd June. It's always helpful to have an opportunity to meet with staff from across the whole Argyll and Bute area and from the whole spectrum of council services. This time was no exception, and I was glad to be able to have a further discussion with staff about our priorities (agreed last September) and how, working together, we are all helping to drive those forward and achieve the outcomes we all want to see for people across our area.

COSO sessions are always really positive and constructive – I remain in awe of those who take part in the Pecha Kucha sessions and who are able to give a succinct and useful summary of particular issues in such a short timeframe! It's fast becoming a feature of COSO sessions and it really is helpful in getting to grips with the kinds of issues and areas that our staff are dealing with. As Leader it's vital that I have that all-round view and perspective, and these sessions help to keep that up to date.

5. COSLA LEADERS, 29th June 2018

- 5.1** I attended the June Leaders session at COSLA with the Chief Executive. The following matters were discussed in private session:

- Local Democracy and Reform – Open Government Partnership, Local Governance Review and EU Charter
- Local government employees: payment for sleep-in duty
- Children's Services Funding and Distribution
- Spending Review
- Strategic Review of Improvement Service

All reports and associated briefings can be reviewed in the Leader's Report Pack.

6. DEPOPULATION IN WESTERN SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS - meeting with Leaders, 29th June 2018

- 6.1** Colleagues may recall from my last report in June that, following publication of NRS population statistics, I contacted the leaders of the other western authorities with a view to discussing together the apparent east-west split in

terms of population decline and growth. Following our first session, we agreed it would be helpful to continue to meet, with regular COSLA Leaders meetings offering a convenient opportunity.

Our second session took place on 29th June where we considered a report prepared by our Chief Executive and also an earlier Improvement Service study on Fragile Areas and Reversing Population. Leaders agreed to task their Chief Executives, or appropriate senior officers, to work together on a further paper which looks more closely at the challenges of our western areas and which we can use for further discussion and agreement on a way forward at our next meeting on 28th September. Our own Economic Development officers are playing a key role in shaping this report which, at time of writing, was being finalised in preparation for issue to the other council leaders.

7. STREET FOOD SUNDAY, Helensburgh & Lomond Civic Centre, 1st July 2018

- 7.1** The Helensburgh and Lomond Civic Centre has always been designed for community use as much as civic use, with a number of meeting rooms available for local people and a number of indoor and outdoor public spaces. It's also well established that, like other councils, we need to be able to take a more commercial approach, and the Civic Centre can play a significant part in this, with its custom-built marriage suite and offering a range of options for a wide variety of events.



Street Food Sunday is one of the first dedicated events offered by and at the Civic Centre – offering also an opportunity for local food businesses to showcase their products. It's safe to say that it was a roaring success! The event was a great example of how the council's investment in regeneration

in recent years, coupled with a fresh approach to how we do business, can help to create a real sense of place and bring a real vibrancy to community life. I'm looking forward to many more such events not only in Helensburgh but across Argyll and Bute where venues such as the Queen's Hall in Dunoon or the Rothesay Pavilion are being revitalised and brought back into a new lease of life.

8. MEETING – RURAL EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH, 31st July 2018

- 8.1** Our Rural Growth Deal consultation ran until 9th August and, during the consultation period, I was approached by a number of local people and businesses who wanted to share their views, opportunities and challenges in connection with our Deal aspirations. These meeting arrangements are ongoing but I was able to meet with representatives from Rural Employment Research late in July.

They are carrying out a research study into the barriers that people with mental health difficulties face in rural areas in particular when seeking to find, or come back to, regular employment. Given that this issue also features in the council's priorities, this was a very interesting and useful discussion, and I look forward to hearing more from the team as their research progresses.

9. BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE TASTER SESSION, 19th August 2018

- 9.1** An opportunity arose locally to take part in a taster session for British Sign Language on 19th August. Organisers had put in a lot of effort to raise awareness of BSL and to encourage people to come along and try this for themselves. Opportunities to find out more about the ways that people deal with challenges such as hearing difficulties are always helpful and useful. I would encourage you to go along and give it a try if you get an opportunity to do so in your own local area.

10. INTRODUCTORY CALL WITH PAUL WHEELHOUSE, MINISTER FOR ENERGY, CONNECTIVITY AND THE ISLANDS – 28th August 2018

- 10.1** Following the Scottish cabinet reshuffle earlier this summer, Paul Wheelhouse took on the energy, connectivity and islands ministerial portfolio. His office got in touch to offer an introductory telephone call on 28th August, for which I was joined by Pippa Milne, Executive Director for Development and Infrastructure.

Mr Wheelhouse made it very clear that he's keen to work in partnership with local government and his 'open door' policy and positive approach are

extremely welcome. With changes not only in personnel but in policy portfolios, it was helpful to hear from him about the scope of his new role and the ways in which we can work together to secure good outcomes for all.

As well as interests in digital connectivity and, of course, islands issue, Mr Wheelhouse will have ministerial responsibility for ferry services generally.

We had an opportunity to outline to him the Argyll and Bute perspective in relation to the Islands Bill and tell him about some of our activity in relation to broadband and islands service delivery.

The call was also an ideal time to introduce our Rural Growth Deal – while the Scottish Government ministerial lead for this is Michael Matheson, Mr Wheelhouse works closely with him, and his interest in engaging where possible is much appreciated.

Given the challenges that all levels of government currently face, positive relationships are crucial – ultimately, for the best outcomes for the communities we are all elected to represent. Mr Wheelhouse's positive approach is very much in line with the good working relationships the council has enjoyed with other ministers in its relatively short lifespan, and it was encouraging to hear him pay tribute to the council's 'good stewardship' of Argyll and Bute, with its opportunities and challenges.

11. MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND, 28th August 2018

- 11.1** David Mundell MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, visited Argyll and Bute on 28th August and came to Kilmory to discuss our Rural Growth Deal progress.



With David Mundell at Kilmory

Once again this was a very positive meeting, where we had the chance to convince Mr Mundell that Argyll and Bute is the natural choice for a growth deal, full of opportunities for economic success and prosperity. We were encouraged to hear from Mr Mundell that the UK Government is looking forward to receiving our proposals and seeing them go through the process over the coming months. He spoke very positively about our progress so far.

Mr Mundell hosted a dinner in Inveraray later that evening for a number of business representatives from across Argyll and Bute, who had the opportunity to speak with him about exiting the EU and the impact on Argyll and Bute.

12. JOINT LEADERSHIP MEETING – NHS HIGHLAND, ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL, ARGYLL AND BUTE HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP, 3rd September 2018

- 12.1** As we drive forward improvement in integrating health and social care services, it's important to work together in partnership in order to secure the best possible outcomes. That is why I implemented a series of quarterly meetings bringing together the leadership of the three organisations involved in health and social care integration – the council, NHS Highland and the partnership itself.

The second session took place on 3rd September, giving the organisations' political leadership and senior management a way of focusing on the issues which are crucial to integration's success – including finance, reviewing the scheme of integration and the HSCP's Visible Change Improvement Plan progress.

We also had an opportunity to meet with Joanna MacDonald, the interim Chief Officer for the HSCP and who, following a rigorous recruitment process, has now been appointed to the position on a permanent basis. I am looking forward to working with Joanna and to continue building on the progress we've already made through these joint leadership meetings, which will now also involve the chief financial officers from each organisation. Our next meeting is scheduled for November

13. MEETING WITH SCOTTISH CANALS, 3rd September 2018

- 13.1** Catherine Topley, the interim Chief Executive of Scottish Canals, visited Kilmory on 3rd September while at the organisation's Ardrishaig base on business.

Catherine is in post while recruitment is ongoing for a permanent Chief Executive. It was helpful to catch up with her and to hear that Scottish Canals is keen to maintain the positive working relationship we have, and to explore ways we can work together to make the most of the opportunities linked to the Crinan Canal and the key end points of Ardrishaig and Crinan. We also discussed areas where Scottish Canals can help promote Argyll and Bute through its own activities at its sites across Scotland.

We agreed that a further meeting in the next few months would be very beneficial and hope also to meet with their board chair at that time.

14. ARGYLL AND BUTE PARLIAMENTARY FORUM, SESSION THREE – 12th September 2018

14.1 Along with Pippa Milne, Executive Director and Fergus Murray, Head of Economic Development, I attended the third Argyll and Bute Parliamentary Forum in the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh on the morning of 12th September.

Once again this was facilitated by our constituency MSPs, Michael Russell and Jackie Baillie, who were also in attendance along with Highlands and Islands list MSPs Donald Cameron and David Stewart, and Maurice Corry for the West Scotland constituency.

This third session was to focus on the Rural Growth Deal ahead of consideration by council in October. As we have stepped up activity on the Deal throughout the year, engagement with a wide range of stakeholders has been vital. In earlier sessions with our parliamentarians we – and they – were clear that they wanted to be involved and to offer any support possible. The September forum session was an opportunity to do that.

Following a short presentation on the Deal themes by Fergus, we were able to answer the parliamentarians' questions and we are particularly encouraged by their positive reaction to our progress so far and their willingness to offer support in any way that they can.

They have told us that what we are doing is absolutely the right thing to do for Argyll and Bute, and that we are going about it in the right way; they were equally encouraged to hear that 97% of those who responded to our recent public consultation overwhelmingly back our Deal. It's clear that they too share our view that our area is the natural choice for a Rural Growth Deal.

With everyone pulling together like this, our agreed priority of securing a Rural Growth Deal for Argyll and Bute stands every chance of becoming

reality. We will continue to work with our MSPs over the next few weeks as the final touches are made to our Deal proposals ahead of consideration by council.

Following the session with our local parliamentarians, and the meeting with David Mundell outlined earlier, the next stage is a further discussion with the Scottish Government. Following the cabinet reshuffle earlier this summer, the minister who will lead on Argyll and Bute's Rural Growth Deal is Michael Matheson. At the time of writing, I am due to meet with him in Edinburgh on 20th September, and will be glad to give members a verbal update on that discussion.

15. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

15.1 The Council as an Economic Driver: As we finalise the shape of our Rural Growth Deal, a point that's come up frequently is the importance of using all the opportunities that we can as a council and as an economic driver.

As an employer we employ a considerable number of people with over 91% of our employees coming from Argyll – this is very high in terms of other councils and where their employees come from. There is scope to do more through targeting areas of deprivation to attract staff and looking at alternative ways to join the council such as apprentices and graduate apprentices.

As a certified living wage employer we also have a role, along with community planning partners, to raise awareness of this and expand, where possible, to partners and the private sector – it is recognised as playing a key part in raising pay levels and tackling our low wage economy.

Through procurement we can look to improve our share of expenditure in the local economy. We can demonstrate an improving share of our expenditure to local firms – most recent figures showing a 7% increase which is good news.

Our corporate approach to assets is recognised as good practice, and we do need to build on this and make the most of it as a means of boosting our economy and generating additional income.

Other work is ongoing to review levers the council can use as economic growth incentives – for example fees, regulations, council tax and more. This work will also complement the evidence base required to support our Rural Growth Deal proposals.

- 15.2 Rural Resettlement Fund:** The Policy and Resources Committee agreed to discontinue this fund at its May meeting. The final amount awarded by the fund, through New Resident/Personal Relocation Grants (£357k) and Self Employment Grants (£30k) is 3387,986. Overall the fund has resulted in almost 200 new residents coming to join us in Argyll and Bute – 138 adults and 55 children, 196 in total. £112,013 of the original budget for the fund is to be used to support our Rural Growth Deal.
- 15.3 Business Gateway:** The Local Growth Accelerator Programme update for July to September – the target spend is £372k and the first claim of £65k has been prepared. Five new clients have been registered, taking the programme total to 102. Three growth grant applications have been approved – the programme total is 39 applications either completed or in progress. A total financial commitment of £156,222 (42% of the total programme) has been made to date. Two key sector grant applications have also been approved and five further specialist advice sessions agreed.
- 15.4 Fair Start Scotland Contract:** This has been promoted on the council's website and social media channels to highlight the service, aimed at supporting people back into employment, and increasing interest and referrals. Eighteen people have accessed the service so far, including five in the past month.
- 15.5 Digital:** At 31st August, 91% of premises are now connected to the fibre network. The Scottish Government's 4G infill programme, led by the Scottish Futures Trust, has awarded a design-and-build contract to Telecoms Consultants WHP. Three sites are located in Argyll and Bute, one of which is within the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park planning authority area. SFT have identified another eleven locations across Argyll and Bute, with consultation due to commence in the next couple of months.
- Ofcom have been invited to attend the December meeting of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee, coinciding with the publication of their annual Connected Nations report.
- 15.6 Film in Argyll and Bute:** The area's profile as an attractive, supportive and very much open-for-business filming location continues to grow. The past month alone has seen a further eleven enquiries, with three location reccees for high profile feature films. Forty four productions have been filmed across the area including tourism and private sector promotion work, and a BBC documentary about families living on Mull.

As well as stimulating the local economy, our profile as a quality film destination helps us achieve another of our priorities which is to promote Argyll and Bute to as wide an audience as possible as a great place to live, work, visit, do business, invest and learn – a simple, but highly effective and absolutely crucial message which underpins our economic and population growth activity.

15.7 COSLA ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY BOARD, 15th June 2018: I attended this quarterly meeting in Edinburgh on 15th June and the following matters were discussed in public session:

Proposed Restricted Roads (20mph) (Scotland) Bill: Mark Ruskell MSP, who is proposing this Bill, was in attendance and outlined his views on the benefits of introducing a 20mph speed limit in particular areas across the country. While the board broadly supported the aspirations, there were concerns about its implementation, its financing and the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be effective. A further report on this matter was due to come to the next COSLA EE meeting on 14th September, this to include an outline of costs for the proposal.

Regional Economic Partnerships: The board discussed how these might be developed in future and tasked officers from SOLACE, COSLA and SLAED (on which the council is represented) to bring forward more detailed proposals.

The following matters were discussed in private session, which means I cannot report on them fully here, but I will be happy to discuss informally with any member who is interested in more detail:

- Biodegradable landfill ban
- Planning Bill
- National Transport Strategy
- Broadband – oral update
- Consultation on new south of Scotland enterprise agency
- Local Governance Review
- Fisheries policy post-EU exit

15.8 Historic Environment Scotland Seminar: The council was asked to host this year's Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) Officers Seminar on behalf of Historic Environment Scotland. This took place on 12th September in Rothesay. It was an excellent opportunity to showcase the town, the island, and all the HES and council investment that has and is continuing to be made in Rothesay and its built heritage.

This was also an opportunity to highlight the other CARS schemes being delivered across Argyll and Bute, including Campbeltown, Dunoon and the recently completed scheme in Inveraray.

The conference was attended by CARS officers from across Scotland who are delivering schemes in other towns. In the evening, there was a civic reception, hosted by the Provost, to show thanks to HES for all the CARS funding support provided to Argyll and Bute since the inception of this particular funding stream in 2007 – Campbeltown was one of the first towns in Scotland to benefit from this.

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 and Policy Lead for Economic Development

14th September 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