

## **Argyll and Bute Council, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019 – Leader’s Report, Appendix 1**

### **PRIORITIES FOR THE LIFE OF THE COUNCIL Update to Argyll and Bute Council, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

#### **Introduction**

Following the local government elections in May 2017, the Administration of Argyll and Bute Council embarked on a process to develop a set of priorities for the life of the council. These priorities were agreed by Argyll and Bute Council in September that year.

Following members’ endorsement, officers developed the council’s Corporate Plan 2018 to 2022, ensuring that it was closely aligned to the priorities alongside both corporate values and the CPP overarching vision of growing the local economy and population. The Corporate Plan was agreed at the council’s budget meeting in February 2018.

Good progress has been made on delivering these priorities since their agreement in 2017. As the national picture shifts, so timescales for further work are highlighted – for example, lobbying for funding to support waste management measures in line with national targets, or using political influence to increase pressure on industry in improving packaging to support environmental issues. Any scope for new activity is closely monitored with opportunities identified and action taken wherever possible.

#### **Priorities Progress**

##### **Making the most of our assets to build the local economy**

The right infrastructure is a crucial part of a successful local economy. Our communities, their people and their businesses need to be connected to each other and to markets elsewhere. That’s why the Administration took the decision to confirm additional capital investment of over £10m in 2018/19 and 2019/20 in our first – and unanimously agreed – budget in the life of this council. Most recently at this year’s budget we agreed a further £0.5m for winter maintenance (recurring), to keep Argyll and Bute’s roads network safe and open for business for everyone and to address one of the Council’s highest risk areas.

We are serious about making sure that Argyll and Bute thrives. The investment in our roads is just one of a series of investment decisions put in place to give communities across the area the best possible chances for success. These include a range of significant capital regeneration projects in most major towns, ongoing commitment to the Lochgilphead and Tarbert Regeneration Fund, CARS schemes in several of our towns, and other more specific local funding boosts like an investment of £100k in Bute Islands Foods to support a growing sector with massive potential for the economy.

We are exploring other sectors which promise to make a major contribution to Argyll and Bute's successful economic growth, including food and drink, sustainable seaweed production, and of course the film industry. Targeting screen industries to highlight Argyll and Bute's many opportunities and advantages has been particularly successful and is an area where we can build up further growth.

There are other ways to maximise our assets to secure economic growth. Alongside the investments we have made, we are taking as many opportunities as we can to influence and lobby for the best possible outcomes for Argyll and Bute. Transport connectivity is as crucial as an effective roads network and we have lobbied vociferously in this regard. This ranges from calling for a dedicated transport working group which focuses on Argyll and Bute's unique needs in a holistic way, to lobbying for equity in terms of our internal ferry services – lifelines which we believe should be provided by national and not local government.

We have brought together leaders of other local authorities in Scotland who face the same kind of depopulation challenges that we do – working with COSLA and securing ministerial meetings to ensure that an apparent west coast depopulation trend is taken seriously with the right kind and level of action to match.

And we continue to press ahead with our determination to secure a Rural Growth Deal for Argyll and Bute – securing cross party support from national politicians and making the final submission to both governments at the end of last year.

### **Education meets the needs of all our young people and their families**

As well as outperforming national attainment averages on all qualification outcomes, we have seen 100% National 3 and 4 passes with Highers and Advanced Highers pass rates up in the past year. There are new or substantially refurbished schools in place or in development across the area in Oban, Campbeltown and Dunoon. These brand new learning spaces – making the most of indoor and outdoor resources – will support our young people not only to maintain but to build on the significantly improved attainment results seen in our schools in the past year.

The Our Children, Their Mental Health guidance has been developed to ensure that our Education Service and other key partners are able to effectively address the mental health and wellbeing needs of all our children and young people. This is about taking direct action to improve outcomes for the young people who most need support.

We have ensured that the strategies and plans we have in place in relation to our young people are refreshed and up to date, and reflecting the outcomes we want for their success. This includes a revised Parental Engagement Strategy, agreed in June last year and developed in partnership with parents, teachers and other partners, and aiming to enhance and further development opportunities for parents to engage and get involved in all of our schools.

The rollout of 1,140 hours early learning and childcare is progressing well across Argyll and Bute with investment in new and improved facilities both inside and outside to maximise play and learning opportunities from the earliest possible point for young children in our communities.

We are constantly seeking best practice as a corporate parent – always with a view to supported looked-after children and others in most need. A new Corporate Parenting Plan was approved in spring 2018 and activity will be monitored and reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Work continues to ensure that Argyll and Bute's young people have opportunities to remain in the area after finishing their education. The council is contributing to this through its Modern Apprenticeship Programme with further opportunities arising this year, including with our Early Learning and Childcare team.

The progress made in this area is illustrated through the update on the Education Service inspection reported in December last year, with improvements achieved and no further visits are planned in relation to this inspection.

### **Supporting individual and community wellbeing**

Key to good wellbeing for people in Argyll and Bute are effective and well integrated health and social care services. That is why we are being very proactive about working constructively and positively with Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership. We see this as vital in addressing the challenges associated with integration in an area like Argyll and Bute and in the context of significantly reduced resources. And it requires serious commitment from both parent bodies – ourselves and NHS Highland – as well as the partnership itself.

In addition to very active representation on the Integrated Joint Board, we have put in place a series of joint leadership meetings at the most senior level in all three organisations – both political and operational. This strengthens partnership working and offers us a way to work together through those very considerable challenges and support the partnership's drive for improvement.

We have backed this up with our budget decisions in both 2018/19 and 19/20 – taking a measured and sensible approach which supports the partnership in its own longer-term financial planning while also protecting vital services for vulnerable people with an appropriate level of investment.

We've also seen other more targeted pieces of work to support wellbeing of people facing particular challenges – like agreeing a Joint Local British Sign Language Plan for Argyll and Bute last year.

Leisure services can make a significant contribution to health and wellbeing – so we see support of Live Argyll, the leisure and library trust, as crucial. All members will be aware of some of the substantial steps the trust has taken to drive up use of facilities, it's great to see the opportunities being seized as the trust finds its feet.

### **Strengthening and empowering communities**

There are many ways for people to have the greater involvement that they'd like to have in decision-making – for example our participatory budgeting projects, including the Supporting Communities Fund, where we have also taken steps to help build the capacity of local groups to participate.

We are enabling communities to develop their sense of place and make the most of their own unique attributes and characteristics, with Making Places/Charrette projects delivered or in the process of being delivered for some of our main towns including Rothesay, Dunoon, Lochgilphead/Ardrihaig and Helensburgh. These projects help create a vision for the future land use of these communities. . To support communities develop their own plans, the Council has developed a Community Led Action Planning Toolkit and carried out training for communities to help them plan and deliver improvements in their areas.

Establishing a Member-Officer Working Group on Communications early in the life of the council has helped to set the tone for improved communications at all levels as well as increasing transparency.

The past two years in particular have seen us involved in very positive and significant partnership working with local communities – including working with the Rotary club to deliver internet safety and CPR training in our primary schools and delivering the national WW1 commemorative event in partnership with island volunteers in the centenary year of the end of the First World War.

We have hosted a national volunteering conference in partnership with the Improvement Service and have taken steps to embed a positive approach to this through an action research project with our senior leaders and managers.

Positive outcomes have been achieved in terms of participation and asset transfer requests from local communities and groups – with a wide variety of different requests being progressed across the whole area.

### **Homes for all – tackling poverty and building opportunity**

Argyll and Bute has a good track record in delivering affordable homes, working in partnership with others – but we want to ensure we maintain and build on our progress. The framework we need to deliver is in place – including a Strategic Housing Investment Plan programmed to deliver 500 units by 2021 and the Local Development Plan 2 which identifies a generous housing land supply.

We are also focused on support for those in urgent need – with our Anti-Poverty Strategy and Action Plan and Rapid Rehousing Delivery Plan to support those affected by homelessness both agreed for implementation in the last year.

### **Greener, cleaner communities**

As identified in the budget motion, this is a key area of focus for us in the coming year with our Draft Waste Strategy going out to consultation and the very considerable implications of national targets and changes on Argyll and Bute.

With the impending landfill ban and new deposit return scheme this is a complex and very significant piece of work on which we are considering a lobbying position in relation to funding, given the scale of the likely impact on an area like Argyll and Bute.

### **Employer of choice**

Our flexible, knowledgeable and experienced workforce is one of our biggest and best assets. We are proactive about making sure they know that – and about doing everything we can to make sure that vital local government jobs are protected as much as they possibly can be.

There are several initiatives in place to support all of this – including a robust People Strategy, innovative approaches to recruitment promotion, and a new Strategic Workforce Plan.

With a strong link to education and opportunities for our young people, we are also continuing to make great progress with the Growing Our Own programme and Modern Apprenticeships. 44 apprenticeships have been delivered in-house so far with a successful bid to deliver 36 Foundation Apprenticeships in Social Services/Children and Young People in 2019/20.

Protecting jobs is always a priority, backed up by the organisation's excellent track record in redeployment and avoiding compulsory redundancies wherever possible. It goes without saying that, while there remain very significant financial challenges ahead, this is a default approach for us and one we will always strive to maintain. An aspect of this particular priority is making the best use of technology to increase efficiency and reduce time and costs – supported by our budget investment of almost £0.8m in last year's budget to support crucial IT infrastructure.

### **Managing our finances**

Two years into the life of this council, we've delivered two balanced budgets (including one unanimously agreed) which minimise the impact on jobs and make the best use of all resources to meet the very considerable funding shortfalls we've experienced. We've found ways to make investments in Argyll and Bute's future despite very challenging circumstances; we've supported the services that matter most to local people after listening to their views shared in our budget consultations; and we're taking steps to manage the financial risks the Council is currently exposed to. As noted above, we're taking steps to support the Health and Social Care Partnership with its longer term financial planning. And, with a Best Value audit on the horizon, we're confident that significant improvements will be highly visible, clearly evidenced and recognised.

### **Next steps**

We have clear areas of focus for the year ahead – particularly in light of the Scottish Government's indication that a three-year settlement may be confirmed this year, and the impact this will have on our activities and our planning.