
26th September 2019

LEADER'S REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** This report gives colleagues an update on my activities as Leader of Argyll and Bute Council from 15th June to 6th September 2019. 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. JOINT LEADERSHIP MEETING, 19th June 2019

- 3.1** The third Joint Leadership session for 2019 took place on 19th June, bringing together senior leaders and officers from the council, NHS Highland and the Health and Social Care Partnership. This meeting brought an opportunity to meet with Iain Stewart, the new Chief Executive of NHS Highland, as well as Judy Orr, the Partnership's Interim Chief Financial Officer.

In particular focus at this session was the review of the Scheme of Integration. The council first agreed that it wished to review the Scheme of Integration in February 2018. However, there were delays in moving this forward. By law, schemes must be reviewed every five years and work is now focused on ensuring that this review can be concluded within the timescale set out by legislation. The quarterly Joint Leadership sessions

offer a useful opportunity to feed into that process at a high level, alongside the officer working group which is leading on the review itself.

Further Joint Leadership sessions are due to take place in October and November.

4. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN STRATEGIC GROUP, 20th June 2019

- 4.1** Considerable work has been and is still ongoing to embed and implement Equally Safe Quality Standards in Argyll and Bute. These standards aim to ensure that, wherever possible, action is taken to eradicate all forms of abuse against women and girls (VAW). This is a multi-agency approach with buy-in at senior level from community planning partners and third sector groups. It was helpful to be able to attend the Strategic Group meeting at Dumbarton Police Office on 20th June. Police Scotland L-Division are key partners in this initiative.

This group is a partnership between Argyll and Bute Council, West Dunbartonshire Council and Police Scotland (L Division) to support the delivery of future Equally Safe Delivery Plans. This meeting highlighted progress that is being made, with Argyll and Bute's Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference now fully up and running again. Work was also ongoing to gather statistics for the national bodies leading on this work.

There was agreement that the strategic group will meet again in October and then every 6 months from that point on, with a focus on where there can be learning from the differing approaches in each local authority area. The role of scrutiny and oversight is to be discussed further as this is also a responsibility of the Community Planning Partnerships.

I also had a meeting more recently with our HR & OD Manager to hear of the work ongoing within Local Authorities across Scotland to implement Equally Safe at Work plans. At the moment Argyll and Bute is a member of the shadow group and is following closely the work of the pilot local authorities. It is expected that by the end of this year the outcomes of the pilot work will be complete and there will then be an opportunity to consider next steps.

5. ARGYLL AND BUTE COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE, 26th June 2019

5.1 The CPP Management Committee met in the council chambers on 26th Jun and considered the following items:

- Child Poverty Action Plan
- Delivering the Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan
- CPP Annual Report 2019/20 and Annual Performance Information
- ABOIP Delivery Priorities for 2019/20
- Mid-Year Population Estimates
- National Community Planning Board Update
- Area Community Planning Groups update
- Adverse Childhood Experiences Presentation
- Update on Best Value Audit

Of particular interest was the presentation from the newly elected Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, Cameron Garrett and Yasmine Bowden, who will be playing an active part in the CPP in line with the council's agreed priority of increasing ways of engaging with local young people. I have also received recent correspondence from the Chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament and while it hasn't been possible to confirm a meeting date yet I am hopeful that will take place shortly.

Officers in Community Learning, Community Planning and Governance have also been working to ensure that appropriate arrangements are put in place to support young people to attend the local Area Community Planning Groups. In each administrative area this will take a slightly different form to suit local needs.

6. MEETING WITH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND, RURAL GROWTH DEAL – EDINBURGH, 27th June 2019

6.1 The Chief Executive and I met with then-Secretary of State for Scotland, David Mundell MP, in Edinburgh on 27th June as part of the political engagement around Argyll and Bute's Rural Growth Deal.



This was another positive discussion and an opportunity to highlight to the UK Government our progress since formal submission to both national governments last November.

With the appointment of Boris Johnson MP as Prime Minister just a few weeks after this meeting came a welcome announcement on growth deal funding for Scotland, with Argyll and Bute mentioned specifically by the Prime Minister during a visit to HM Naval Base Clyde.

Since then Alister Jack MP has taken on the Scottish Secretary role and portfolio. We made early contact with Mr Jack in order to build on the positive engagement to date with the UK Government and, in particular, in the context of Mr Johnson's announcement. We are awaiting a reply and would hope to be able to meet with Mr Jack soon to bring him up to date with our ambitions for Argyll and Bute and what our Growth Deal can achieve.

7. COSLA LEADERS, 28th June 2019

7.1 COSLA Leaders met in Edinburgh to consider the following matters:

- Scottish Welfare Fund Update
- Refugee Resettlement
- Spending Review
- Local Government Pension Scheme Structure Review
- Public Health Reform
- Children and Young People Mental Health Programme Board
- Interruption of European Social Fund Payments
- UK Exit from EU Update
- Learning Estate Strategy Investment Programme and Funding Model

- Alcohol and Drug Partnership Delivery Framework
- Gypsy/Travellers Action Plan Update
- Local Governance Review
- Water Billing and Collection
- Devolving Non Domestic Empty Property Relief
- Distribution

While these matters were considered in private, if any member wishes to see the reports or associated briefings, this can be requested through Leadership Support.

8. RECESS VISIT: LORN AND THE ISLES HOSPITAL, OBAN – 22nd July 2019

8.1 The council recess, as well as offering a break from normal business, also affords an opportunity for other activities which can make a positive and productive contribution to your councillor role. I took the opportunity to visit Lorn and the Isles Hospital in Oban during July – of particular interest as our area’s biggest and busiest hospital and given my role as an Integration Joint Board member.

I’m very grateful to the health and social care management who took the time to show me round the wards and different departments within the hospital, including the busy accident and emergency department and the new CT scanning facility. Staff at Lorn and the Isles, as with all our health and social care staff, work incredibly hard to deliver vital services and it was really helpful to see this first hand.

9. INTEGRATION JOINT BOARD DEVELOPMENT SESSION AND MEETING, 7th August 2019

9.1 One of the first items of major business after the July recess was the August Integration Joint Board development session and meeting where the following matters featured on the agenda:

- Culture Fit for Future Action Plan – delivered by Professor Boyd Robertson, Interim Chair of NHS Highland Board
- Joint Inspection of Services for Children and Young People in Need of Care and Protection in Argyll and Bute
- Finance matters – including budget monitoring, outlook and update on financial recovery plan
- Staff Governance
- Draft Annual Performance Report
- Review of the Scheme of Integration
- HSCP Co-location update

On the last point, Mid Argyll-based Health and Social Care Partnership staff have joined council colleagues in Kilmory, Lochgilphead. Co-location has involved much hard work and, inevitably, some disruption, and my thanks go to all the staff involved for ensuring that this went as smoothly as possible. The move is designed to support smooth integration and service delivery and it is positive and helpful for colleagues to be able to work more closely together given the challenges we all face.

Given the partnership's current financial position, and in the context of the council's own budget and the level of risk linked to the HSCP overspend, both myself and the Depute Leader, as IJB members alongside the Policy Lead for Health and Social Care, are maintaining a focus on the HSCP's financial planning. Both the Depute Leader and Policy Lead attend the now-monthly Quality and Finance Board meetings, I have had meetings with the HSCP's Chief Financial Officer and we all meet regularly in a variety of forums with senior leadership from the partnership as well as NHS Highland.

10. MEETING WITH CHAIR OF STRATHCLYDE PASSENGER TRANSPORT, 9th August 2019

10.1 I met with Councillor Dr Martin Barthos who, as well as sitting on Glasgow City Council, is the Chair of Strathclyde Passenger Transport and Valerie Davidson, Assistant Chief Executive at SPT. Martin has been meeting with all local authority leaders in the areas served by SPT to strengthen relationships and highlight some of SPT's areas of focus for the future. While much of the discussion was focused on local issues/priorities we did also discuss the National Transport Strategy, the draft of which had been released just shortly beforehand.

11. UK GOVERNMENT – LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS TELECONFERENCE ON EXIT FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION, 13th August 2019

11.1 The UK Government issued an invitation to local authority leaders in both Scotland and England to participate by teleconference in an information session relating to the UK's exit from the European Union. In attendance were Robert Jenrick MP, Secretary of State for Local Government, Luke Hall MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Local Government, and Catherine Frances, Director General for Local Government and Public Services from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

This was a short session in a rapidly moving situation and where clarity is still required on a number of points; however, it was helpful to note that proactive steps are being taken where possible to communicate with local authorities, alongside the work being done within each local authority by officers to prepare as much as possible for the impacts arising from exiting the EU.

12. MEETING WITH MICHAEL MATHESON, CABINET SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONNECTIVITY, 16th August 2019

- 12.1** The next session in our Rural Growth Deal political engagement programme was a meeting with Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, in Helensburgh on 16th August.



Mr Matheson is the Growth Deal ministerial lead within the Scottish Government and, while we have met on a number of occasions before, this meeting provided an opportunity to bring him up to date with our progress so far as well as detail on our Deal's key themes.

This was a really positive meeting and we were encouraged to hear Mr Matheson's acknowledgement that there should be a push to ensure that an agreement is in place by the end of this year. We did also discuss the wider needs of Argyll and Bute, not all of which can be met by the Rural Growth Deal. Mr Matheson advised that the Infrastructure Commission

should be publishing their report by the end of this year with an Investment Plan to be published next year.

13. MEMBERS SEMINAR, 19th August 2019

13.1 The latest session in the Members Seminar programme took place on Monday 19th August. The agenda featured a number of significant issues including an update on our preparation for the Best Value 3 audit, updates on economic growth and customer engagement activity, an overview of capital monitoring processes and a presentation on the recent Accounts Commission report 'Local Government in Scotland – successes and challenges'.

This report is particularly relevant as we draw closer to setting our budget for the next year – it highlights the challenges faced by all Scottish councils in adapting to the changing needs of the communities they serve, and the ways that local authorities, including Argyll and Bute, are responding not only to those shifting needs but to increased demand in the context of significantly reduced funding.

The seminar closed with the showing of four short films produced by the council's Refugee Resettlement Group. The films illustrated how the council's Employability Strategy has played a part in supporting refugee families to find work and do business within their local community, as well as offering an opportunity for us to hear about the experiences of our families as they adjusted to life in Argyll and Bute.

Over 80% of the adult refugees who came to live in Argyll and Bute have now started their own business, obtained employment, started studying at college or university or are doing voluntary work in the community.

It was particularly positive to have this feature on the seminar programme given the news earlier in the month that the council's work in supporting refugees into employment has been shortlisted for a 2019 COSLA Excellence Award.

The 'Supporting our Refugees into Work' programme is one of three finalists in the 'Tackling Inequalities and improving Health' category for the awards which highlight and celebrate the very best in Scottish local government activity and practice.

Being nominated for a national excellence award is testament to the determination of the refugees to build new lives here and the hard work and commitment of council officers to ensure they are supported to do just that – all of this backed up by the overwhelmingly positive support of the local community who have welcomed the refugee families to Bute.

14. NATIONAL ISLANDS STRATEGIC GROUP AND ISLANDS TRANSPORT FORUM, EDINBURGH – 21st August 2019

14.1 I joined other island authority representatives to meet with Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands in Edinburgh at two strategic islands-focused meetings on the same day – the Strategic Group and the Transport Forum.

The Islands Strategic Group meeting took up the morning and focused on the following:

- Update on the National Islands Plan Consultation Process
- Presentation on Island Communities Impact Assessments
- The Additional Powers Request (Scotland) Regulations 2019

The National Islands Plan is due to be laid before Parliament on 4th October.

The Islands Transport Forum in the afternoon featured the following agenda items:

- National Transport Strategy discussion
- Presentation on Ferries Plan
- EU Exit issues, with Q&A session

15. IMPROVEMENT SERVICE WEBINAR – FAIRER SCOTLAND DUTY, 27th August 2019

15.1 I took part in an Improvement Service webinar on 27th August focusing on the Fairer Scotland duty which came into force in April last year.

This was a helpful session given the duty that we have as elected members to ensure that our decision-making processes are informed by consideration of socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities. As well as learning more about the specifics of the role of councillors in relation to the Duty, the session included examples in practice and gave an opportunity for questions and informal discussion.

This was the latest in a series of webinars offered by the Improvement Service on a range of topics relevant to the work of elected members. With the pressure on diaries, this – along with their programme of free training events hosted by councils – offers an effective way of keeping up with personal and professional development. The IS also has a considerable online resource for elected members and it is worth checking their website periodically for the latest webinar sessions which are simple and easy to join in.

16. COSLA LEADERS, 30th August 2019

16.1 COSLA endeavours to meet in other local authority areas where possible on a number of occasions over the course of the year. The August Leaders session was hosted by Glasgow City Council on 30th August.

Agenda items were all held in private session and included:

- Local Governance Review
- Spending Review Update
- Interruption of European Social Fund Payments
- UK Exit from EU update
- Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding post 2021
- Learning Estate Strategy – Programme Governance
- Programme for Government Commitment to Counselling in Schools
- Child Protection Register Information Sharing with Police Scotland
- Planning (Scotland) Act 2019
- Business Support Environment
- Devolving NDR Empty Property Relief
- COSLA Priorities Update

As normal, reports and associated officer briefings can be viewed by arrangement with Leadership Support.

17. ARGYLL AND BUTE PARLIAMENTARY FORUM, 4th September 2019

17.1 The latest Parliamentary Forum was held in Edinburgh on 4th September, with the support of our constituency MSPs Michael Russell and Jackie Baillie.

As well as Michael and Jackie, we were joined by regional MSPs Donald Cameron, David Stewart, Rhoda Grant and Maurice Corry.

The forum meetings provide an opportunity to bring together as many as possible of the parliamentarians representing all corners of Argyll and Bute at local and national level. At this session we focused on the following:

- Rural Growth Deal – update for parliamentarians following formal submission and political engagement nationally
- Budget 2020/21
- West coast depopulation – update on work with other local authorities and ways of contributing to the Scottish Government Taskforce on Population
- Health and social care integration update

- Community engagement matters

Our parliamentarians also make it clear at these sessions that they will do what they can to support us on a range of key issues, for example the Rural Growth Deal. Positive and constructive discussion has been a feature at each forum meeting to date and we are working with Michael and Jackie's teams to arrange the next meeting late 2019 or early 2020.

18. POLICY LEAD FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE, June to September 2019

- 18.1** Isle of Bute BID: A seedcorn grant of £30k has been awarded and work is ongoing with Visit Bute to progress a Business Improvement District (BID) for the Isle of Bute.

A co-ordinator role has been advertised to progress to ballot stage, aiming for March next year. The steering group has a chair and treasurer in place and will be appointing a secretary.

Officers will work with the group to develop an initial proposal which will form the basis of the business plan, in turn becoming part of the proposal to the local business community.

National Transport Strategy 2: Colleagues will recall the members' seminar in June where Transport Scotland and consultants Jacobs provided a presentation on NTS2. Feedback from the session was provided to Transport Scotland. The Scottish Government released its draft NTS2 at the end of July and this is currently out for consultation, concluding on 23rd October. Officers from our Strategic Transportation team will lead on a response, working also with colleagues in Roads, Public Transport, Planning, Piers and Harbours.

Cycleways, Helensburgh and Lomond: Sustrans have provisionally awarded funding for 2019/20 to continue design development for Phase 2 of the Helensburgh and Lomond route, linking Cardross and Dumbarton. A further funding application to Sustrans is being prepared for design work on the alternative Phase 1 route, as instructed by the Helensburgh & Lomond Area Committee on 20th June. Sustrans reopened for further funding applications on 25th July. An update report is due to come to the Helensburgh and Lomond Area Committee in September.

Rosneath Shared Use Cycleway - Sustrans have provisionally awarded funding for 2019/20 to continue design development of the route linking Rosneath town centre to the Castle Caravan Park junction.

Digital: 92% of premises in Argyll and Bute are now connected to the fibre network, with 82.8% accessing speeds of greater than 30mbps. Officers are engaging on a weekly basis with BDUK in preparation for a bid to the £200m Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme (RGCP). These meetings are progressing well and the first stage of the business case is now complete.

The RGCP is a £200m fund to support the government's aim of an 'outside in' approach to digital connectivity – connecting up first those places with poor or no coverage.

People and businesses across Argyll and Bute have been clear for some time that good digital connectivity is a priority – the increasing uptake of fibre availability demonstrates the local appetite for effective, speedy connection which will support working and doing business with and from Argyll and Bute.

The council has also been liaising with Digital Scotland and Openreach, among others when appropriate, on the Rest of Scotland Superfast Broadband programme. This includes some areas in Argyll and Bute, the rest being managed by Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

The Rest of Scotland (RofS) programme element is drawing to a close and has been very successful. Eight exchange areas in the Argyll and Bute RofS element have had work undertaken with over 6,100 premises connected to the new hybrid fibre network. Average take-up across Helensburgh and Lomond is a fantastic 65.14% - the greatest take-up across the RoS intervention area (which has an average of 55.7%) and an indicator of the appetite across Argyll and Bute for access to modern digital infrastructure.

Digital Boost Programme: This levers in additional funding from Digital Scotland to support small businesses to develop their digital skills. 17 workshops have been arranged and a further three still to be scheduled, with five clients approved for one to one support. Two Argyll and Bute based clients (one in Helensburgh, one in Dunoon) were joined by Business Gateway staff to meet with Kate Forbes MSP, Minister for Public Finance and Digital Economy, in August.

Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator: Grants and specialist advice for small businesses is provided through European Regional Development Funding (ERDF). In the first phase, 2015 to 18, the total grant received was £195,672. Phase 2, 2019 to 22, is now live with grant applications registered, in process and some initial approvals agreed already.

CARS Activity: A proposal for Helensburgh town centre conservation area is due to come to council following the PPSL meeting on 18th September. If council agrees to designate the conservation area, this will allow consideration of a deferred application to Historic Environment Scotland, all criteria having been met.

Dunoon CARS is on track with works on two shopfronts about to commence on site. A substantial training programme is being developed in partnership with HES, Argyll College UHI, Skills Development Scotland, Dunoon Grammar School, Dunoon Burgh Hall Trust and local contractors.

In Campbeltown five priority buildings have been completed and two are at the snagging stage. One additional £300k building project started in August using surplus funds, housing grant and owner contributions.

Business visits – Mid Argyll, 13th August: Accompanied by Pippa Milne, Executive Director, I had an opportunity to visit some local businesses in the Mid Argyll area on 13th August.

First stop was a visit to the MACPool in Lochgilphead to hear about their redevelopment proposals and projects.

We then visited Precision Photofabrication Developments – a family run business established over 30 years ago and which manufactures precision elements including architectural, model rail, sculpture, military models, jewellery, TV and film props and prototyping. Their market ranges from global high profile companies to individual hobbyists and they export their specialist products worldwide from Lochgilphead.

Finally, I had an opportunity for an 'on the street overview' of the Lochgilphead CARS proposals. It was helpful to see where the CARS funding is going to make a difference in the town centre, particularly in conjunction with the Front Green project.

COSLA Environment and Economy Board, 6th September: I attended the COSLA Environment and Economy Board in Edinburgh on 6th September where the following agenda items were considered:

- Presentation – local government's role in supporting fishing communities
- Climate Change Bill and policy update, and discussion paper on future economic policy
- Regional approaches to maximising inclusive economic growth – local authority perspective
- Transport Bill
- Waste Management

- Programme for Government – verbal update
- Interruption of European Social Fund Payments
- UK Exit from the EU – verbal update
- Planning (Scotland) Act and Planning Fees Consultation

Reports and briefings can be arranged through Leadership Support.

19. CONCLUSION

19.1 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.

Councillor Aileen Morton

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

6th September 2019

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