

**OFFICER RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION FOR A PROPOSED BILL FOR
'SAFEGUARDING SCOTLAND'S REMOTE RURAL COMMUNITIES'**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the members of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee with the proposed officer response for the 'Safeguarding Scotland's Remote Rural Communities' consultation on a proposal for a Bill to enhance the consideration of remote rural mainland communities by public bodies in Scotland.
- 1.2 This consultation is being led by Gail Ross, MSP, Member of the Scottish Parliament for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross.
- 1.3 The detailed Argyll and Bute officer response to each of the consultation questions is outlined in **Appendix 1**.
- 1.4 The submission deadline is 31st January 2020. Therefore, this paper has been prepared for the EDI Committee on 5th March 2020 to enable members to homologate the submitted response.
- 1.5 The Argyll and Bute officer response will also contribute to the officer response to be submitted by the SLAED Rural Group (chaired by Argyll and Bute Council's Economic Growth Manager).
- 1.6 Members are asked to:
 - Note the content of this report.
 - Note the officer draft response to the recent consultation outlined in **Appendix 1**. As the deadline for submission to the Scottish Government was 31st January 2020, officers submitted a response aligned to the requested timetable. This response was considered and commentary provided for inclusion in the submission by members of the Strategic Management Team.
 - Agree to homologate the officer response. It is noted that responses received after the consultation has closed will not be included in any summary of responses that is prepared. However, officers suggest that any additional substantive comments from the EDI Committee Members could be fed back to officers for submission to Gail Ross, MSP in writing.

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the members of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure (EDI) Committee with the proposed officer response for the 'Safeguarding Scotland's Remote Rural Communities' consultation on a proposal for a Bill to enhance the consideration of remote rural mainland communities by public bodies in Scotland.

2.2 The detailed Argyll and Bute officer response to each of the consultation questions is outlined in **Appendix 1**.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the content of this report.
- Note the officer draft response to the recent consultation outlined in **Appendix 1**. As the deadline for submission to the Scottish Government was 31st January 2020, officers submitted a response aligned to the requested timetable. This response was considered and commentary provided for inclusion in the submission by members of the Strategic Management Team.
- Agree to homologate the officer response. It is noted that responses received after the consultation has closed will not be included in any summary of responses that is prepared. However, officers suggest that any additional substantive comments from the EDI Committee Members could be fed back to officers for submission to Gail Ross, MSP in writing.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 This consultation relates to a draft proposal lodged by Gail Ross, MSP, Member of the Scottish Parliament for Caithness, Sutherland and Ross as the first stage in the process of introducing a Members' Bill in the Scottish Parliament.

- 4.2 This exercise aims to “get the views of the whole of Scotland, to gauge whether depopulation in remote rural communities can be reversed and to encourage public bodies to take impacts on remote rural communities into account when making policy.” The consultation is laid out in sections seeking views under the following headings:
- Aim and approach of the proposed legislation;
 - Remote rural proofing;
 - Empowering remote rural communities;
 - National Remote Rural Plan;
 - Electoral Wards and Constituencies;
 - Financial implications;
 - Equalities; and
 - Sustainability.
- 4.3 The introduction of an Act to take into account remote rural mainland areas is intended to further complement other pieces of legislation such as the Islands Act, the Community Empowerment Act and the recent South of Scotland Agency Act.
- 4.4 The overall aim of the proposed Bill to promote remote rural mainland communities is welcome. Argyll and Bute has a unique geography compared with other parts of Scotland which is made up of many remote rural mainland peninsular areas which experience similar challenges as the area’s 23 inhabited islands, covered by the Islands Act. Therefore, Argyll and Bute Council officers would welcome the inclusion of remote rural issues within the Islands Act to address these similar challenges. This will avoid creating a cluttered legislative landscape for the Argyll and Bute area and unwieldy monitoring of a plethora of measures. That said, any additional requirements under the National Islands Plan need to come with sufficient additional resources rather than placing an extra financial burden on local authority budgets, which are already tight.
- 4.5 A list of ‘very remote rural’ communities, as defined by the Scottish Government’s 8-fold Urban-Rural Classification 2016, is outlined on page 16 of the consultation document. Due to its unique geography, Argyll and Bute should be included. Therefore care needs to be taken in the use of pre-defined definitions that are subjective in nature that are being used to identify remote rural/very remote rural communities, particularly with regard to the implications that such definitions might have for any future policy and how/where it is applied.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The draft officer response to the consultation questions in **Appendix 1** covers a number of issues as detailed in paragraph 4.2 above. In summary, the Scottish Government’s focus on mainstreaming remote rural policy is welcomed to help reverse population decline (particularly those of working age). Argyll and Bute Council officers have put forward a recommendation for the inclusion of remote

rural issues within the Islands Act and associated National Islands Plan, without the requirement to develop a separate National Remote Rural Plan for Argyll and Bute. However, this must be accompanied by sufficient additional resources to meet such requirements.

- 5.2 Officers believe that remote rural mainland areas, although some are very ambitious, continue to face significant sustainability challenges due to Scottish Government budgetary restraints, greater urbanisation and growth focused on city regions. Remote rural areas require further support at all levels. With additional resource allocation and strong guidelines for collaborative working between the agencies, remote rural mainland areas have everything to gain.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

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|-------|----------------------|---|
| 6.1 | Policy | Adding in the remote rural focus to the existing National Islands Plan could assist with the delivery of the Argyll and Bute Local Outcome Improvement Plan, where the vision is that Argyll and Bute's economic success is built on a growing population. |
| 6.2 | Financial | Potential that further legislation to incur increased costs to local authorities to deliver. Thus any additional legislative requirements need to be sufficiently resourced. |
| 6.3 | Legal | All appropriate legal implications will be taken into consideration. |
| 6.4 | HR | None at present. |
| 6.5 | Fairer Scotland Duty | The Fairer Scotland Duty, Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010, came into force in April 2018. The duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland, such as Argyll and Bute Council, to pay due regard to (actively consider) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome, caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions and how this has been implemented. See response to Q12 and Q13. |
| 6.5.1 | Equalities | All activities will comply with all Equal Opportunities/Fairer Scotland Duty policies and obligations, see response to Q12 and Q13. |
| 6.5.2 | Socio-economic Duty | Any new legislation should focus on removing socio-economic disadvantage for residents across Argyll and Bute, see response to Q12 and Q13. |

- 6.5.3 Islands The recently published Islands Act and associated National Islands Plan, which aims to improve the quality of life for islanders and reduce population loss should be augmented to cover remote rural mainland areas. Remote rural mainland areas can experience similar challenges and issues as islands, thus it seems inappropriate for 'remote rural proofing' and 'island proofing' to be addressed through separate plans within Argyll and Bute.
- 6.6 Risk Argyll and Bute Council officers will continue to engage with the process to ensure that any legislation offers more opportunities and addresses many of the challenges for remote rural areas. To disengage with any of these consultations would be a significant risk for Argyll and Bute as specific issues for the area would not be put forward for consideration.
- 6.7 Customer Services None.

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth
Cllr Aileen Morton, Policy Lead Economic Growth
24th February 2020

For further information contact:
Ishabel Bremner, Economic Growth Manager, tel: 01546 604375

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Officer Response to Consultation Questions

ABOUT YOU

(Note: Information entered in this “About You” section may be published with your response (unless it is “not for publication”), except where indicated in **bold**.)

1. Are you responding as:

- an individual – in which case go to Q2A
- on behalf of an organisation? – in which case go to Q2B

2A. Which of the following best describes you? (If you are a professional or academic, but not in a subject relevant to the consultation, please choose “Member of the public”.)

- Politician (MSP/MP/peer/MEP/Councillor)
- Professional with experience in a relevant subject
- Academic with expertise in a relevant subject
- Member of the public

Optional: You may wish to explain briefly what expertise or experience you have that is relevant to the subject-matter of the consultation:

2B. Please select the category which best describes your organisation:

- Public sector body (Scottish/UK Government or agency, local authority, NDPB)
- Commercial organisation (company, business)
- Representative organisation (trade union, professional association)
- Third sector (charitable, campaigning, social enterprise, voluntary, non-profit)
- Other (e.g. clubs, local groups, groups of individuals, etc.)

Optional: You may wish to explain briefly what the organisation does, its experience and expertise in the subject-matter of the consultation, and how the view expressed in the response was arrived at (e.g. whether it is the view of particular office-holders or has been approved by the membership as a whole).

The Argyll and Bute Council area is divided up into four Administrative Areas, which are frequently used for service planning within the area. These are:



- Bute and Cowal (red area)
- Helensburgh and Lomond (yellow area)
- Mid-Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands (green area), and
- Oban, Lorn and the Isles (blue area).

The Helensburgh and Lomond administrative area is closer to the central belt of Scotland by road. However, the other administrative areas face largely similar challenges: peninsular communities, limited public transport, a road network where 50% of the carriageway is C class or unclassified, and lower than average mobile and broadband coverage. Most importantly, Argyll and Bute is set to lose 10% of its population by 2041 (up to 8,600 people) if remedial action is not taken. To put this into context this accounts for the entire resident population of Oban.

Argyll and Bute Council is working, with our partner organisations, to deliver this vision for our area: ***our economic success is built on a growing population.*** Which is set out in the [Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan](#).

The Plan sets out six outcomes that help us achieve our vision:

- [Outcome 1 - The economy is diverse and thriving](#)
- [Outcome 2 - We have infrastructure that supports sustainable growth](#)
- [Outcome 3 - Education, skills and training](#)
- [Outcome 4 - Children and young people have the best possible start](#)
- [Outcome 5 - People live active, healthier and more independent lives](#)
- [Outcome 6 - People live in safer and stronger communities](#)

In recognition of the challenges and opportunities for Argyll and Bute, the council has revised its Economic Strategy and notably has secured £50m for the area's Rural Growth Deal which will support investment and economic growth for 10 to 15 years, once up and running.

This consultation response has been drafted by senior officers of the council with the responsibility for Economic Growth with input from other departments as appropriate.

3. Please choose one of the following:

- I am content for this response to be published and attributed to me or my organisation
- I would like this response to be published anonymously
- I would like this response to be considered, but not published (“not for publication”)

If you have requested anonymity or asked for your response not to be published, please give a reason. **(Note: your reason will not be published).**

4. Please provide your name or the name of your organisation. **(Note: The name will not be published if you have asked for the response to be anonymous or “not for publication”).**

Name: [Argyll and Bute Council](#)

Please provide a way in which we can contact you if there are queries regarding your response. Email is preferred but you can also provide a postal address or phone number. **(Note: We will not publish these contact details).**

Contact details: ishabel.bremner@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Ishabel Bremner
Economic Growth Manager
Argyll and Bute Council
Whitegates Office
Whitegates Road
Lochgilphead
PA31 8SY

5. Data protection declaration

- I confirm that I have read and understood the privacy notice attached to this consultation which explains how my personal data will be used.

YOUR VIEWS ON THE PROPOSAL

Note: All answers to the questions in this section may be published (unless your response is “not for publication”).

AIM AND APPROACH

1. Which of the following best expresses your view of legislating to enhance the consideration given to remote rural mainland communities by public bodies in Scotland?

- Fully supportive
- Partially supportive
- Neutral (neither support nor oppose)
- Partially opposed
- Fully opposed
- Unsure

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Officers are fully supportive of the proposed legislation where remote rural mainland issues are being recognised, considered and mainstreamed. If legislation is to be introduced that binds the council to certain activities, promotes or rejects others, then reassurance needs to accompany the publishing of the Bill that these activities will not be to the detriment of normal council business. In particular, the introduction of such legislation should come with sufficient additional resources so as not to place an extra financial burden on local authority budgets, which are already tight.

Argyll and Bute has a unique geography, compared with other parts of Scotland, which is made up of many remote rural mainland peninsular areas which experience similar challenges as the area's 23 inhabited islands, covered by the Islands Act. Therefore, rather than just complementing existing legislation such as the Islands Act, Argyll and Bute Council officers would welcome the inclusion of remote rural issues within the Islands Act and associated National Islands Plan to address these similar issues. The National Islands Plan sets out 13 objectives and over 100 measures to achieve this, which in turn needs to contribute to the National Performance Framework. To augment the National Islands Plan with additional remote rural requirements/measures needs reassurance of extra funding to support improvement across challenging areas.

Circa 43% of the population within the Argyll and Bute Council area lives in areas identified as being 'remote rural' (Scottish Government 6-fold Urban-Rural Classification 2016) and approximately 17% live on islands (2011 Census). In turn, 'rural' areas account for over 90% of Argyll and Bute's total land area. Therefore the council has extensive experience of delivering high quality services to remote rural communities.

2. What do you think would be the main practical advantages and disadvantages of the proposed Bill?

Advantages

The focus on remote rural mainland areas provides an opportunity to have a positive impact on national policy delivery for many parts of Scotland, including Argyll and Bute. Argyll and Bute's remote rural communities, face transport, digital and infrastructure challenges – similar to those of the island communities.

To take advantage of this opportunity, a standard approach should be put in place so that public bodies across Scotland are required to consider all aspects of remote rural communities in decision making.

Officers have consistently argued for the decentralisation of public sector jobs (Government, enterprise agencies, Skills Development Scotland, etc.). Where these jobs are located should be better embedded into such legislation, to enable greater flexibility to help support rural economies in this way, rather than a Glasgow/Edinburgh focus.

Consideration should be given to the delivery principles of the current LEADER and European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) programmes, where the focus is on bottom-up, community-led, local economic development. In particular, focus should be on how a separate Bill and associated National Remote Rural Plan, or an augmentation to the National Islands Plan, could strengthen the debate for the repatriation of funding from the UK Government to Scotland and in turn to the Scottish Rural Development Programme where a similar programme such as LEADER could be delivered across remote rural Scotland post EU Exit.

Disadvantages

A list of 'very remote rural' communities, as defined by the Scottish Government's 8-fold Urban-Rural Classification 2016, is outlined on page 16 of the consultation document. Due to the unique geography of Argyll and Bute, which includes 23 inhabited island, Argyll and Bute should be included. Therefore care needs to be taken in the use of pre-defined definitions that are subjective in nature that are being used to identify remote rural/very remote rural communities, particularly with regard to the implications that such definitions might have for any future policy and how/where it is applied. If the population of Dunoon or Oban grows to 10,000, then these towns would become urban areas according to the Scottish Government's Urban-Rural Classification (see: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/understanding-scottish-rural-economy/> research paper undertaken by Rural & Environment Science & Analytical Services, Scottish Government). This would then affect the classification of surrounding rural areas, changing remote rural areas to accessible rural areas, etc. However, this would not mean that those areas suddenly have better access to services.

Currently Helensburgh is classed as an urban area; this means that its hinterland is an accessible rural area. However, Helensburgh does lack in

service provision, for example, residents still have to go into the Central Belt to access many health services.

Furthermore, the Scottish Government's Rural-Urban Classification covers islands. As a result, the islands are remote rural areas. Therefore it could become complicated if the legislation relies on the Urban-Rural Classification to identify areas it covers.

REMOTE RURAL PROOFING

3. Which of the following best expresses your view of placing the concept of Remote Rural Proofing into legislation?

- Fully supportive
- Partially supportive
- Neutral (neither support nor oppose)
- Partially opposed
- Fully opposed
- Unsure

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Once embedded into legislation, providing that resource comes with extra legislative powers, it will be easier to retain a level playing field across Scotland's remote rural areas. There is currently a perception that council areas to the far west are treated less favourably than those to the south and the east.

4. Which of the following best expresses your view of giving Scottish Ministers power to issue statutory guidance to other relevant public bodies related to Remote Rural Proofing which they would be required to adhere to in exercising their functions and duties?

- Fully supportive
- Partially supportive
- Neutral (neither support nor oppose)
- Partially opposed
- Fully opposed
- Unsure

Mirroring the response to Q3, once embedded into legislation, providing that resource comes with extra legislative powers, it will be easier to retain a level playing field across Scotland's remote rural areas.

However, care must be taken to recognise the unique challenges and opportunities for each of the remote rural areas. A top down approach may not be fully cognisant of the local geographies etc. Council officers have experience of this in the delivery of employability programmes which are target driven but do not in general take into account geography, transport or training capacity of the remote rural areas.

5. If Scottish Ministers had such a power, which public bodies should it apply to, and in relation to which of their functions and duties?

It should apply to all public bodies with a responsibility for delivery of services in rural and remote rural areas or across the whole of Scotland to allow for a holistic approach, where all agencies are committed or encouraged to work more closely together to enable more added value to be delivered at the local level. To fulfil the opportunities that could be afforded by this legislation cannot be a tick box exercise.

EMPOWERING REMOTE RURAL COMMUNITIES

6. Do you agree that councils that serve remote rural areas currently have sufficient powers to deliver positive outcomes for their communities?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

Please give reasons for your response (and suggest any additional powers that you think these councils should have).

As noted under the council's response to the initial Local Governance Review/Democracy Matters consultation, 14th December 2018, it remains unknown at this stage what the proposed Local Democracy Bill will contain. However it is anticipated that it will have the potential to have a) a long term impact on how decisions are made affecting our communities in Argyll and Bute and b) generate organisational or structural change or introduce the transfer of powers between or from spheres of government and communities. The Scottish Government intends to continue the 'Democracy Matters' conversations during 2020. Therefore, in short, any proposed legislation for remote rural communities should be implemented complete with appropriate powers.

Officers believe that in order to continue to deliver a sustainable service to remote and rural communities going forward there are current opportunities for the council to exercise its powers to raise tax locally, such as the Transient Visitor Levy, if it so wishes with due consideration to the needs and challenges faced by remote communities.

REMOTE RURAL PLAN

7. Which of the following best expresses your view of requiring the Scottish Government to prepare a 'National Remote Rural Plan'?

- Fully supportive
 Partially supportive
 Neutral (neither support nor oppose)

- Partially opposed
- Fully opposed
- Unsure

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Officers are fully supportive of the overarching principle of providing legislation that ensures the Scottish Government gives due recognition to remote rural mainland areas. However, Argyll and Bute Council officers would welcome the inclusion of remote rural issues within the Islands Act and associated National Islands Plan that will address similar challenges and issues, accompanied by sufficient additional resources to meet such requirements.

8. How often should the plan be reviewed?

- Every 10 years
- Every 5 years
- Every 3 years
- Every year
- Other frequency (please specify)
- No need for regular reviews
- Don't know

Five year plans allow for outcomes to begin to be realised at the local level. As noted under the response to Q1, if there is to be a National Remote Rural Plan for discrete parts of Scotland, it should be reviewed and updated in parallel with the National Islands Plan, rather than it working to a separate timescale.

ELECTORAL WARDS AND CONSTITUENCIES

9. The Boundary Commission is normally required to ensure that all constituencies and wards contain similar populations, even if that results in rural constituencies and wards being much larger than urban ones. At present, the only exceptions are for a few island areas (e.g. Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles must remain separate constituencies, despite their relatively small populations). Do you believe further exceptions should be made for mainland remote rural areas?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please explain the reasons for your response.

In principle, remote rural areas face similar challenges and issues as island communities. However, due cognisance should be given to the ongoing review of electoral ward and constituency boundaries within Argyll and Bute (and other areas). see: <https://www.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk/2019-reviews-electoral-arrangements>

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10. Taking account of both costs and potential savings, what financial impact would you expect the proposed Bill to have on:

(a) Government and the public sector

- Significant increase in cost
- Some increase in cost
- Broadly cost-neutral
- Some reduction in cost
- Significant reduction in cost
- Unsure

(b) Businesses

- Significant increase in cost
- Some increase in cost
- Broadly cost-neutral
- Some reduction in cost
- Significant reduction in cost
- Unsure

(c) Individuals

- Significant increase in cost
- Some increase in cost
- Broadly cost-neutral
- Some reduction in cost
- Significant reduction in cost
- Unsure

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Public sector: the delivery of the National Islands Plan is the responsibility of local authorities, where an integral part of the delivery is the need to undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment, in order to “island proof” legislation, policy, strategies and services where those are considered likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities. Given that remote rural areas within Argyll and Bute face similar challenges to island communities it is anticipated that capturing a remote rural element within the National Islands Plan, as suggested for Argyll and Bute, will have a significant impact on already tight resources.

The public sector is, and will remain, a key employer in remote rural mainland areas where there is often a shortage of alternative high value employment in the private sector. Continued reductions in public sector / local authority budgets could have a huge impact on remote rural communities that rely heavily on the public sector for employment.

Other public bodies not geographically linked might face higher costs to adapt. Service delivery costs are generally higher in remote rural areas; the Bill may provide the platform for remote rural mainland areas to argue for

more resources.

The Scottish Government should look at ways that jobs / agencies could be decentralised and relocated in remote rural areas to reduce property costs and give a much needed jobs boost to remote rural areas.

Businesses: existing budget pressures causing a reduction in service provision are likely to have a disproportionate effect on island communities, who are already less able to access (face-to-face) adviser or workshop Business Gateway support due to geographical challenges. The same is true for service provision in remote rural mainland areas, where the higher cost of delivery coupled with reduced budgets will marginalise some communities due to less support being available.

Argyll and Bute's business profile is largely SMEs, with the majority of these being micro businesses, which do not hit the Government's growth agenda for support but play a vital role in sustaining vibrant local communities. The ongoing challenges for remote rural SMEs are issues such as poor mobile/digital coverage, higher distribution/delivery costs, less choice of utility suppliers which can drive up the operating costs.

This Bill could present a real opportunity to seek more resources for businesses in island/remote rural areas and in particular to support fragile island and remote rural communities with self-employment. Approximately 12.3% of the working age population in Argyll and Bute are self-employed, compared with 8.2% for Scotland.

Individuals: if the plan brings an additional financial burden to the council then this will need to be passed on to residents/visitors.

11. Are there ways in which the Bill could achieve its aim more cost-effectively (e.g. by reducing costs or increasing savings)?

Turning the above question around, it is vital that rural/remote rural areas are awarded more funding per head of population than urban areas as using a standard method of basing investment per capita puts remote rural areas at a huge disadvantage as these areas are often characterised by large geographic areas with low and dispersed populations.

Activity should be focused on growth sectors in rural/remote rural areas e.g. tourism, marine industries and food and drink production, with greater use of digital technologies to increase efficiencies and reduce costs. These industries are major employers with significant potential for growth and high value career opportunities. Modern apprenticeships and training should be tailored to employment gaps in these sectors, schools should be encouraged to promote parity of esteem between vocational learning and further education at universities. The Scottish Government should be encouraged to reflect this when assessing attainment. Remote rural areas are subject to an ageing and depleting population and have the need to in-migrate young people. Therefore the academic offer in rural/remote rural areas needs to be expanded and linked to economic opportunities.

Schools and further education should be encouraged to work closely with the business sector and vice versa. Understanding the businesses already in the area and relative succession planning requirements would assist with matching skills/courses to the employment opportunity. Better links would also support opportunities for mentoring.

The provision for quality and affordable co-working space has the potential to tackle inequalities (aligned to Q12) by providing opportunity for businesses to grow, peer-to-peer learning whilst also combating social isolation and promoting inclusion.

EQUALITIES

12. What overall impact is the proposed Bill likely to have on equality, taking account of the following protected characteristics (under the Equality Act 2010): age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation?

- Positive
- Slightly positive
- Neutral (neither positive nor negative)
- Slightly negative
- Negative
- Unsure

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Officers do not foresee this as an issue as Argyll and Bute Council has an equalities agenda built into its constitution and ensures that this is also reflected in the procurement process. In short, delivery of service interventions should have no adverse impact on key equality groups if the provision complies with all Equal Opportunities policies and obligations.

This consultation does not mention the Fairer Scotland Duty, which is about reducing socio-economic inequalities. It is anticipated that a Remote Rural Bill and associated National Remote Rural Plan is more likely to address issues of socio-economic disadvantage rather than the protected characteristics within the Equality Act, 2010. That said, depending on what is included in the proposed Plan, if it leads to improved access to health services, it might have positive impacts on the protected characteristics of age, disability and possibly gender re-assignment.

13. In what ways could any negative impact of the Bill on equality be minimised or avoided?

By ensuring that good lines of communication exist between those administering the Bill and the agencies on the ground who have to deliver on it. It is likely that, as with the Islands Plan, this Bill will create additional measures that must be implemented then this must come with additional resource.

SUSTAINABILITY

14. Do you consider that the proposed bill can be delivered sustainably, i.e. without having likely future disproportionate economic, social and/or environmental impacts?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please explain the reasons for your response.

Officers believe that remote rural mainland areas, although some are very ambitious, continue to face significant sustainability challenges due to Scottish Government budgetary restraints, greater urbanisation and growth focused on city regions. Remote rural areas require further support at all levels. With additional resource allocation and strong guidelines for collaborative working between the agencies, remote rural mainland areas have everything to gain.