
16th April 2020

LEADERSHIP REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The Leader of the Council and Policy Lead Councillors provide a report outlining their strategic activities for consideration at each meeting of Argyll and Bute Council, except the budget meeting in February. The last Leader's Report and Policy Leads Report were considered at the council meeting on 28th November 2019, with the next reports due at the council meeting planned for 16th April 2020 and covering activity during that period.
- 1.2** The COVID-19 situation required significant change to council business, including its governance arrangements. At a special meeting of Argyll and Bute Council held remotely on 31st March 2020, the Business Continuity Committee was established to deal with business remotely in the meantime.
- 1.3** After consideration, it was agreed that to ensure all members are kept up to date with leadership activity, and to maintain openness and transparency, a high level Leadership update should be provided to the Business Continuity Committee's first meeting on 16th April, given that updates were originally planned for council on the same date. Given the need for the committee to prioritise decision-making at a time of considerable pressure and challenge, the report is more condensed than usual.
- 1.4** The report covers the period from 28th November 2019 to end March 2020 – the period after 20th March being concerned mainly with the response to COVID-19. More detail on this activity is reported elsewhere.
- 1.5** The report includes an outline of the council Leader's activity during the period, accompanied by high level updates for Policy Lead portfolios.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** Members are asked to consider the report.
- 2.2** Members are asked to note that any reports, briefings or copy correspondence referred to in the report can be requested as appropriate through Leadership Support staff, although it should be noted that some confidential reports provided by external organisations such as COSLA may be restricted.

3. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL – COUNCILLOR AILEEN MORTON

3.1 **Argyll and Bute Council Activities:**

COVID-19: All members will be aware that the Chief Executive has had to exercise emergency powers as national decisions to address the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in major changes to council services. While the initial aim was to maintain services as normally as possible for as long as possible due to both emerging new priorities and staff absence rates increasing (due to sickness and the need to self-isolate) there have been substantial alterations to some services. The Council's response to the pandemic and decisions made under emergency powers are reported separately on the agenda.

These are clearly very challenging times for all organisations but I'm sure all members will agree that council officers have done an exceptionally good job in addressing what has been a rapidly changing situation and ensuring an ongoing focus on the highest priority areas. Credit is also due to our communities who have absolutely risen to the challenge – their resilience, determination to take care of their neighbours and positive attitude in the face of previously-unimagined restrictions on day-to-day life is as we would all have expected but great to see nonetheless.

Chief Executive Recruitment: Following an extensive recruitment exercise in November, Pippa Milne, formerly Executive Director for Development and Infrastructure, was appointed to the role of Chief Executive. Pippa took up post formally from January this year.

The process for appointment of a replacement Executive Director had commenced but has been paused due to the COVID-19 situation.

Members may also be aware that our Chief Social Work Officer and Head of Children and Families, Alex Taylor, has indicated his intention to retire. However, with the current suspension of recruitment processes, he has committed to remaining in post a little longer to facilitate a smooth handover.

Argyll and Bute Council Excellence Awards: It is important to mark the achievements of hardworking council staff who deliver essential services in the face of very considerable challenge and despite significant reductions in funding. The annual Excellence Awards took place on 25th November 2019 with a high standard of entries once again. Congratulations go to all nominees and award winners, and thanks are due to all staff across all of the council's service areas for their hard work and dedication in times of change and challenge.

Customer Service Excellence: Our Building Standards team have once again secured the Customer Service Excellence standard following assessment in late November last year. They are one of a number of council departments who take pride in securing this standard each year and in building on their performance year after year. Their key goal is ensuring that this translates into direct service delivery for their customers. Thanks to all staff involved for their continued efforts.

Best Value 3 Engagement with Audit Scotland: Like many other colleagues I took part in interviews with Audit Scotland in January as part of the Best Value 3 Audit of Argyll and Bute Council. Officers remain in contact with Audit Scotland ahead of the Accounts Commission's consideration of the report.

Climate Change Environmental Action Group: Meetings took place on 16th January and 10th March, at which formal meeting we also held a session with a much wider group of officers to consider current operational activity and programmes. This session was also focused on how corporate indicators should be developed to evidence our progress as a council in delivering substantial reduction in CO2 emissions.

Waste Development Session, 27th January: Given the forthcoming requirements for councils to comply with the BMW ban, this was a useful opportunity to meet with officers and the Policy Lead for Amenity Services to consider in depth the challenges that Argyll and Bute Council faces in addressing both the end of our current waste PPP contract and the imminent changes to landfill tax. It is vital to maintain our progress on this and the matter will no doubt feature again at future development sessions or seminars for members.

3.2 Rural Growth Deal:

Officer engagement with officials from both the UK and Scottish Governments has continued. On 10th December the Rural Growth Deal Steering Group met in Inveraray – a meeting planned for the spring has had to be rescheduled with remote options being explored.

I have written again to Alister Jack MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, seeking discussions with him in relation to our Deal. Members will recall that the previous Secretary of State met with the council on a number of occasions and we are keen to maintain momentum with the change in post. An encouraging sign was the mention in the UK Government's Budget announcement of the £25m allocation for Argyll and Bute – while this is confirming the announcement made by the Prime Minister on a visit to Faslane last year, rather than new or additional funding, it is welcome evidence of the UK Government's commitment.

In terms of Scottish Government engagement, the ambition remains to sign Heads of Terms later this year. We have already met with the lead Scottish minister, Michael Matheson, on a number of occasions; he has always taken a very positive approach and we will be back in touch with him in due course to arrange our next meeting as we progress to Heads of Terms.

HM Naval Base Clyde is a key partner for elements of the Deal proposals and it was therefore helpful to catch up with Commodore Donald Doull on 3rd December – an opportunity to keep him in touch with progress and in turn ensure that the Base's position can be fed back at meetings and through officers in the course of their liaison with government officials.

I have also written to Baroness Annabel Goldie, Minister of State for the Ministry of Defence, again seeking a discussion with her about our formal partnership with the MoD through the Strategic Development and Delivery Framework and of course any aspects relating to the Rural Growth Deal.

3.3 Integration Joint Board and Health and Social Care Partnership:

There have been three meetings of the Integration Joint Board during the period covered by this report – November, January and the budget meeting in March. The latter session was of course impacted by the restrictions on gatherings and social distancing guidelines and was conducted on a remote basis by teleconference – a challenge very adeptly managed by the Chair and notable given that it was possible to set a budget on that basis.

On January 23rd the first of this year's quarterly Joint Leadership meetings took place, bringing together political/board and official leaders from the council, NHS Highland and the Health and Social Care Partnership. Budget planning and the quinquennial review of the Scheme of Integration for Argyll and Bute were prominent on the agenda. A report on this is included on the agenda of this meeting, and following its approval by the NHS Highland Board late in March.

There have since been further changes at NHS Highland, with Professor Boyd Robertson assuming the position of Board Chair on a permanent basis, and Paul Hawkins' appointment as Chief Executive following Iain Stewart's move to NHS Orkney. The next session is planned for later in April; we aim to proceed with the meeting albeit on a remote basis and it is likely that the response to COVID-19 will feature heavily in our discussions.

3.4 Highlands and Islands Leaders Group meetings:

Meeting 28th November: Agenda items for this session included a discussion on the outcomes from the COHI session in October and a paper on the replacement of European Structural Funds in Scotland following the exit from the European Union. A Scottish Government consultation sought views on how any replacement funding could best meet the needs of

Scottish communities, people and businesses, and the discussion focused on the merits of developing a collective Highlands and Islands regional response to this consultation.

Meeting 27th February: Much of the discussion focused on the agenda for the upcoming Convention of Highlands and Islands (which was subsequently cancelled just a few days beforehand). However, the group also discussed Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and whether this was really a suitable tool to use to measure deprivation in rural areas. Carroll Buxton, interim Chief Executive of Highlands and Islands Enterprise was in attendance and a follow up meeting/call has been arranged for me and the Council Chief Executive in April.

3.5 COSLA Meetings:

COSLA Leaders:

Meeting 29th November: Agenda items for this session were:

- White Ribbon Pledge
- Spending Review
- Transient Visitor Levy
- Myjobscotland Governance proposals
- Fiscal Framework for Local Government
- Statutory Financial Redress Scheme for Historical Child Abuse – Consultation
- CYP Mental Health Community Support
- Additional Support for Learning - Additional Funding
- Suspension of European Social Fund Payments
- Review of Improvement Service and COSLA
- Humanitarian Protection
- Human Rights Leadership
- Trading Standards Service Workforce Initiative
- Distribution

Meeting 31st January: The following items featured on the agenda:

- Mainstream Participatory Budgeting in Scotland
- Spending Review Campaign
- COSLA Priorities Update
- UK Exit from the EU – Update
- Replacement of EU Funds – Scottish Government Consultation
- Scotland's Energy Efficiency Programme
- COSLA Representation on the Board of Public Health Scotland
- Best Value – Draft Revised Guidance
- Secure Care National Standards
- Fair Work in Social Care
- Suspension of European Social Fund Payments
- Tackling Intimidation and Abuse of Councillors

- Special Responsibility Allowances
- Health and Social Care: Improving Outcomes and Performance

Meeting 28th February: Agenda for this meeting was:

- COSLA Priorities – Mid-Term Review
- COSLA Lobbying on UK/EU Negotiations
- COSLA/Improvement Service – Partnership Agreement
- Transforming Business Support
- Data Sharing to Tackle Debt To and Fraud Against Councils
- Tackling Migrant Destitution
- Water Charges Consultation
- Bus Partnership Fund
- Fiscal Framework for Local Government
- Local Governance Review
- Spending Review
- Health and Social Care – Improving Outcomes and Performance
- National Care Home Contract
- Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan and Capital Funding
- Education Reform
- Distribution - Strategic Waste Fund Capital

COSLA Environment and Economy Board:

Meeting 6th December: Agenda items covered at this meeting were:

- Scottish Natural Heritage and Local Government - Presentation by SNH on strategic issues facing SNH and Local Authorities – report circulated
- European Social Funds Payments – report circulated
- Climate Change – report circulated
- Circular Economy Bill Consultation – report circulated
- Economic Outcomes and Regional Inclusive Growth Research Update – verbal update
- Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure - report circulated
- Bus Partnership Fund – report circulated
- Planning Fees – report circulated
- European Union – report circulated

Meeting 14th February: This session focused on:

- Presentation on R100
- Conference of the Parties (COP) (Verbal Update and discussion)
- Suspension of European Social Funds (Verbal Update)
- Public Health Reform
- National Transport Strategy
- Transforming the Business Support Environment
- 'Connecting people and places – a policy statement on Rangering in Scotland'

- Green Growth Accelerator
- Planning Performance and Fees Consultation
- Remote and Rural Members Bill

COSLA meetings are currently suspended.

3.6 Ministerial Engagement:

Conference Call with Derek Mackay – Economic Growth on the Clyde: Along with other council leaders from local authorities bordering the River Clyde, I took part in a conference call on 18th December with then-Finance Secretary Derek Mackay. The short call invited Leaders to consider options for the development and maximising benefit from spaces along the River Clyde. In the context of the current Covid-19 situation, we are awaiting clarity on how this proposal will proceed. With communities in Cowal, Bute, Helensburgh and Lomond all closely linked to the Clyde it will be important for Argyll and Bute to remain involved in any initiative that develops.

Internal Ferry Funding: Ministerial correspondence in December last year included a further representation to Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and Islands, in relation to funding of internal ferry services – the latest in a series of letters from myself and colleagues, and discussions about this issue. Representations were also made by a number of our constituency and list MSPs and, in a conference call with Mr Wheelhouse on 18th February, we received confirmation of additional funding to cover the four internal ferry services that the council operates – welcome resolution to a long-running issue and a much-needed boost in another challenging financial year. This award covers both the capital and revenue costs for the 2020/21 operation of these services. The council’s position remains, though, that these ferry services should be operated by Transport Scotland.

Meeting with Kate Forbes, Minister for Public Finance: I had written to Derek Mackay late in 2019 outlining the unique challenges that Argyll and Bute faces in terms of population growth and service delivery across our mix of remote, rural and island communities, pointing out that we have barriers to growth which can’t necessarily be addressed through the normal local government funding settlement nor through Growth Deals. Our query was passed to Kate Forbes who met with us at Kilmory on 17th January.

Our discussions were relatively positive but there remains more engagement to be done in order to secure any significant progress. A detailed briefing was developed for Ms Forbes and this can be provided to members should they wish. It is also important to acknowledge the support of Michael Russell MSP who has indicated he will do what he can to secure a follow-up discussion but progressing this has of course been impacted by the current situation.

Ms Forbes was keen that alongside any ministerial engagement we continue to add our voice to the collective position of COSLA and I formalised this in a letter to COSLA President, Alison Evison, on 3rd February.

Kintyre Economic Situation: Members will be aware of the various economic events which coincided in Kintyre towards the end of 2019, including the Campbeltown Creamery closure, CS Wind issues and other associated impacts on the local economy and employment levels. I remain in correspondence with Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy on this issue, including following up the Kintyre Economic Summit meetings held in November last year and on 2nd March this year.

This meeting was well attended by local businesses who highlighted some of the challenges facing them – including depopulation, the impact of changes to NDR and the resilience of the A83. HIE and Skills Development Scotland both gave brief updates on planned work locally and a further meeting towards the end of this year was agreed.

I also had a brief private meeting with the Cabinet Secretary following this where we discussed the Scottish Government's Population Taskforce, planning and housing work in Argyll and the importance of both transport and digital connectivity.

On the matter of the Population Taskforce, colleagues will recall previous updates on the work we have been leading with other west coast local authorities. Officer engagement at Chief Executive level is ongoing including exploration of potential for a pilot project to take place in Argyll and Bute.

Arrangements are in hand for a Parliamentary Forum session later this year (circumstances permitting) and the Kintyre economic position is a priority for discussion at that session, supported again by MSPs Michael Russell and Jackie Baillie.

Local Government Financial Settlement 2020/21: On 24th January I wrote to all Scottish political party leaders seeking their support and co-operation in securing a fair funding settlement for councils in this year's Scottish budget process.

This year's budget process was of course an unusual one, with the UK Government setting its budget in March and the Scottish Government proceeding with a February timescale – local authorities having to adjust their own plans accordingly as they saw fit.

The changes to the process required significant work from officers and – despite some very tight and challenging timescales – we were able to set our budget and fulfil all legal obligations.

A83 Taskforce Meeting, 22nd January: This was attended by a number of elected members as well as community representatives. Updates on work done to date and planned works were provided by Transport Scotland and BEAR Scotland. We also had a brief update on progress with the Argyll and Bute Strategic Transport Projects Review process. Concerns were raised about delays to planned works and, as members will be aware, I've been in touch with the Cabinet Secretary since the most recent landslip at the Rest and Be Thankful pushing for a permanent solution to be identified that addresses these issues once and for all.

3.7 Other external activities:

Consultation on Replacement of European Structural Funds, 10th January: This session in Glasgow was facilitated by Prof John Bachtler (Strathclyde University) and Malcolm Leitch (SLAED) with representatives from the Scottish Government, local authorities, and third sector organisations amongst others. Attendees participated in group discussions of how best the replacement to existing structural funds could operate in Scotland in future considering both current best practice and opportunities to improve.

Music Education Partnership Group, 14th January: This was a positive meeting between myself, the Policy Lead for Education and two representatives of the MEPG (including the Chair, John Wallace). We discussed how national policy helps to shape our delivery of this service and they highlighted their work looking at areas such as digital delivery and the potential creation of a musical equivalent to Green Flag status for schools. The representatives will be back in touch with both me and the Policy Lead for Education to update us on their work to take forward their *We Make Music* programme.

4.0 POLICY LEAD UPDATES

4.1 POLICY LEAD FOR EDUCATION – CLLR YVONNE MCNEILLY:

COVID-19: During recent weeks, officers across the council have worked tirelessly following various announcements from the UK and Scottish Government regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Schools closed on Friday 20th March and teachers and staff across different services worked together to ensure that children can be taught at home by their parents. Ten school kitchens are open to ensure children who are entitled to free school meals can continue to receive them – this is an ever changing picture due to demand and staffing, and officers will continue to provide updates in the coming weeks.

A number of childcare facilities are open in Argyll and Bute for children of key workers. It is vital that we do everything we can to ensure that key workers can continue to do their job and we will continue to monitor all plans.

The council's website has helpful and useful information and can be accessed at <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/coronavirus-help-and-advice>

During a recent visit to Kintyre schools in February, along with the Executive Director with responsibility for Education, I was reminded that life can be made really simple. A pupil in primary 2 showed me his drawing of the "world's strongest man". I asked him what the man was called and he simply replied "*Strong, of course*". Life really can be put into perspective by our young people - Stay safe, wash your hands, social distance, and follow the guidance provided to you.

Every day I see how hard our staff work, and during these difficult weeks staff have never failed to take on a challenge - quickly and commendably putting in place a range of different measures. My sincere thanks go out to all staff who have worked so hard to take these actions in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our young people. I am comforted to see how much our young people mean to all of our staff and I am proud to be a part of their education journey.

School visits: As part of my scheduled programme of school visits around the area, I visited Dalintober Primary in February, along with the Executive Director and I can honestly say I was blown away by the great work that's going on there. From their British Sign Language Club and the vast amount of STEM challenges the children take part in, to their 'coach trip of Spain', their drama club and mindfulness lunch club, the school is truly thriving. The children all appeared motivated and eager to learn and it was clear they have a committed head teacher and staff group leading them forward. Dalintober is fantastic example of a school that is thriving and I look forward to seeing it continue to succeed.

Issues were brought to the attention of the council regarding the condition of the building. The safety and wellbeing of our young people is our top priority and we have spent around £50,000 carrying out ceiling remedial works and have arranged for 12 new windows to be installed. We have also programmed £20,000 for an internal upgrade in 2020/21 and are currently obtaining quotes to upgrade leadwork on the roof – work that was already scheduled to be carried out.

The Executive Director with responsibility for Education brought forward a report to the Community Service Committee in March. The survey was originally scheduled for next year, however, the report recommended

members agree to bring it forward to assure parents that the building is fit for purpose.

School inspections: Louise Connor, Head of Education – Learning and Teaching, delivered a presentation to the Community Services Committee in March and set out what inspections mean and how they work.

Education Scotland's role is provide assurance and public accountability; promote improvement; and inform the development of educational policy and practice.

The Chair of the Northern Alliance Convention of Convenors had written to HM Chief Inspection of Education outlining some queries. They were given assurance that HM Inspectors strive to take into consideration the unique context of each school and setting at the outset of any inspection activity. Inspectors will make comment about specific challenges a school has faced in the context section of the Summarised Inspection Findings. A recent training event for HM Inspectors provided an opportunity to emphasise the importance of capturing any challenges schools are facing, particularly related to staffing, as part of inspection activity. This is a subject that will remain on the agenda of the Northern Alliance Convention of Convenors Group.

Climate Change: A number of Argyll and Bute schools are involved in the ECO School programme, working on ten topics (Biodiversity, Energy, Food and the Environment, Global Citizenship, Health and Wellbeing, Litter, School Grounds, Transport, Waste Minimisation and Water).

Climate Change is incorporated within the school curriculum and sustainability is one of the permeating themes of Curriculum for Excellence. We have 35 schools who are involved in attaining ECO Schools Green Flags.

Further details can be found on the website

<https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/sustainable-development-education/eco-schools/>

Children's Mental Health: In addition to ongoing curricular and extra-curricular activities throughout the year, Campbeltown Grammar and Dalintober Primary joined forces and held a "Find Your Brave" week in February.

Senior pupils encouraged young students to take part in conversation topics during lunch hours, to demonstrate that "it's good to talk". From being creative and clearing your mind, pupils decorated food and stones to clear their minds.

During these difficult and unprecedented times, it is vital that our young people are aware of the advice and support there is for them. Lots of useful information for mental health for young people can be found on <https://www.seemescotland.org/>

4.2 POLICY LEAD FOR CORPORATE SERVICES – CLLR RORY COLVILLE

Corporate Communication: Communications staff have completed ‘train the trainer’ sessions in Plain English – this will help them share their own skills with others across the council as well as directly supporting the council’s priorities. It may also lead to income generation opportunities for the council as the team are now able to deliver Plain English training to external organisations who may wish to improve customer service, cut down on calls or get their message across more effectively.

Use of and public contribution to our social media sites continue to grow with, for example, almost 14,000 images posted on Instagram all using #abplace2b, promoting the area and provided overwhelmingly by the public.

HR and Organisational Development

Secondment Policy: The HROD team have developed a draft secondment policy which sets out proposals for secondments in line with our talent management aspirations. The council has used secondments in practice for a number of year but this policy (and associated guidance) consolidates our approach to secondments within and out with the organisation.

Wellbeing: The wellbeing team are now in place and are currently working on revisions to attendance procedures which are being developed in consultation with the trades unions and other relevant stakeholders and also our addictions policy as well as guidance on menopause. The team are also reviewing all absence cases with a view to contacting managers with targeted support.

Resourcelink: The council’s current contract for Resourcelink (HR and Payroll system) will come to an end in September 2021. The HR and OD team are working with IT and colleagues in finance to develop options in relation to procurement and replacement of the system, including options for a joint system between HR and Finance.

Customer Service Centre (CSC) and Registration: All main Service Plan targets met with exceptional performance in:

- Low phone call abandon rate in contact centre 2.6% vs target of 6.5% due to continuing shift of enquiries to automated and self-service channels.
- Tell Us Once death notification service had a 99% uptake, best ever and 110 users in February.

- Voice Automated Payment Service had a 45% increase on previous February with 385 payments worth £55k taken in February.
- Nearly 500 additional customers signed up to the MyAccount personalised web service, which now has 8335 subscribers.
- Independently evaluated SOCITM Website Accessibility score rose to “Great” status in last report.

ACCESSIBILITY SCORE



COMPLIANCE



- The Keep in the Loop Service had its busiest ever month promoting five corporate consultations and helped HSCP get 554 responses to its budget survey.
- The annual council tax bills and benefit uprating letters have now all been issued and the usual surge in enquiries have been readily managed using mediated and automated systems.
- All statutory Registration returns have been issued to National Records of Scotland Examiner from all Registration Districts well ahead of national deadline.

ICT: ICT are represented on the joint COVID 19 Tactical Group, with the current focus on enabling VPN access for key staff.

IT Management have agreed a temporary halt to non-essential development work under present circumstances. The objective now is to maintain access to the network and key applications - non-essential updates could put services at risk.

We are at an early stage of engagement with Microsoft and partners along with the Scottish Digital Office around the scoping of a project to manage the move to Office 365 during 20/21. Based on experiences of other authorities, this project is likely to continue for 18 months.

The replacement of three major business applications combined with a migration to Office365 and Skype for Education across all schools presents an exceptional challenge for the council’s ICT resource as we will face one of our busiest periods ever and managing resources will be key.

Legal and Regulatory Support

Civil Contingencies: The team are playing a very significant role in the council's overall Covid-19 response.

Governance: The normal cycle of committee meetings continued up until 19th March. Since then, some meetings have continued on a virtual/remote basis, including the first virtual council meeting on 31st March held to agree enhanced governance provisions in light of Covid-19.

Staff have been working hard to make the most of technology to support these new arrangements and also to maintain support for elected members. The team are also managing the dedicated Covid-19 members' inbox for handling member queries, alongside the Casebook system for 'business as usual' member casework.

The team are also providing support to various groups established to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and are developing processes to manage Local Review Bodies, hearings, and other civic government requirements going forward.

Community Governance: Community council interim by-elections have had to be postponed. Processing for the final community council grant payments is in hand to meet year end deadlines.

Health and Safety/Governance and Risk/Trading Standards/Welfare Rights/Legal Services: The vast majority of staff are home-working as a result of the Covid-19 situation and are continuing to provide a full service in relation to all aspects of business. Health and Safety in particular have had a role in relation to risk assessments in relation to the council's overall response to Covid-19.

Four Trading Standards staff have joined 20 Environmental Health colleagues in gaining authorisation to enforce the provisions of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 in relation to businesses opening in defiance of national restrictions.

Procurement and Contract Management Team: The audit of School Procurement is near completion with the PCMT providing support to the audit team when they have been looking at how schools carry out their purchasing activity and if there is any scope for improving the methodology and ultimately delivering best value.

The procurement team have arranged service specification training for Roads and Amenity colleagues to support their procurement training requirements. Further training will be given to HSCP colleagues who are the named persons responsible for the management of the various SLAs they have in place within NHS Glasgow etc.

Along with colleagues from ICT, the team have developed a SharePoint site to enable all services to update and maintain their own information on the number and detail of the Service Level Agreement/Grants/Agency and Off Payroll Worker agreements that they have. This is in relation to two recent audits that have taken place and ensures a corporate approach is being taken to manage these to ensure best value is being delivered

4.3 POLICY LEAD FOR PLANNING AND REGULATORY SERVICES – CLLR DAVID KINNIBURGH

Reform of Planning Legislation: Since my last report the Scottish Government have implemented parts of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and officers held a training session prior to the December meeting of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee to advise members of the main changes that have come into effect which are:

- S23 of the Act: Requirement to notify Councillors/MSP/MPs of Major applications came into effect on 1st March 2020
- S25 of the Act: “Agent of Change” principle came into effect for all applications received on or after 20th December 2019.
- S27 of the Act: Amendment to requirements to refer determination of national/major applications which are significantly contrary to the development plan to Full Council came into effect for determinations from 1st March 2020.
- S30 of the Act: Requirement to include a statement on a decision notice confirming whether the development is viewed to be consistent with the development plan came into effect on 1st March 2020.
- S42 of the Act: Maximum level of fines for failure to comply with various notices increased from level 3 to level 5 on the standard scale, and from £20k to £50k with regard to notices served from 20th December 2019.

Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2)

Following the approval of the proposed LDP2 becoming the settled view of the council the next stage which was an 8 week public consultation period was carried out from the 14th November 2019 to the 24th January 2020.

The consultation received in excess of 800 responses and approx. 1300 separate objection issues from the responses have been identified so far which officers are now analysing and preparing responses to.

Part of the process in the preparation of LDP2 is to update annually the Development Plan Scheme (DPS) which is the timetable for preparing the replacement LDP2 and is a requirement of the Planning Etc. (Scotland) Act 2006.

The latest update to the DPS was approved by the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee on the 18th March 2020 and it shows a timetable that anticipates delivery of LDP2 by the third quarter of the financial year 2021/22.

Details of the proposed LDP2 and the updated DPS can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/ldp2>

Conservation Area Appraisals: At the March meeting of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing (PPSL) Committee members agreed to the draft Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Strategies for Helensburgh Town Centre and Tarbert Conservation Area being put out to an eight-week public consultation which will include publicity, communication with the relevant Community Councils and a public meeting event in each location however because of the ongoing situation and restrictions with coronavirus (COVID-19) the consultation will not take place until appropriate.

In relation to Conservation Areas the Lochgilphead Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan was also approved by the PPSL Committee after being updated to take account of comments received during a consultation carried out between 1st May 2019 and 13th June 2019 and this document will now be used as technical guidance to preserve and enhance the conservation area.

Planning Performance Framework (PPF) 2018/19: In February positive feedback was received from the Scottish Government in relation to our 8th PPF Report covering the period April 2018 to March 2019. As always the PPF seeks to focus on the Council being 'open for business' and the positive economic contribution that Planning Services have made to Argyll and Bute. Of the 13 performance measures relevant to the report 10 were green, 3 were amber and there were no red markers.

Building Standards: Martin Matheson left his post of Building Standards Manager on 31st March and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Martin for all the work he has carried out on behalf of the council over the years he has been in post.

Building Standards will now be managed by Alan Morrison as part of Regulatory Services and one of the existing Team Leaders, Alex Linden, will become the Principal Team Leader for the service.

Although commercialisation work has slowed down over recent months Building Standards continue to process applications for Falkirk and East Lothian Council's and in view of this it is hoped that the service will be able to return a balanced budget for the end of the financial year.

4.4 **POLICY LEAD FOR HOUSING, ROADS AND AMENITY SERVICES – CLLR ROBIN CURRIE:**

COSLA Community Wellbeing Board:

I have attended two COSLA Community Wellbeing Board meetings since My last update to members. Anyone wishing to see any specific report or briefing can do so through Leadership Support staff.

24th January 2020 – agenda items:

- Gypsy Traveller Action Plan – funding principles and accommodation need
- Human Trafficking and Exploitation Strategy consultation response
- Scottish Welfare Fund
- Information gathering for Scottish Disability Assistance
- Disabled Parents Employability Support Fund
- Consultation on Housing 2040

6th March 2020 – agenda items:

- Scottish Police Authority Corporate Plan
- New Adult Learning Strategy
- Homelessness Best Practice
- New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy
- Money Advice Levy Fund

Roads, Amenity and Infrastructure Services:

Since my last update in November last year, I have attended my first meetings of HITRANS and the Northern Roads Collaboration.

Members will be aware that in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic the department is focused on delivering key front line services including changes to waste collection services and, in other areas, prioritising urgent repairs, for example to the roads network or street lighting infrastructure. The team continue to work through possibilities for service delivery specification, testing these against the resources available across the council area.

Housing:

In December I spent some time on the housing development site at Dunbeg and was in total awe at the sheer size of the project and how well managed it all is.

While attending the Rural Housing conference in Dunkeld at end of February I was delighted to be told that the Scottish Government had awarded £750k towards building 4 houses at Ulva Ferry, which is very welcome news indeed and congratulations to all involved in this project.

Homeless Service: A virtual service is in place. All staff are working from home and numbers are posted for applicants to contact.

We are in daily touch with the HSCP Bronze Command Group to provide assistance where required from the Housing Service. Additional room capacity has been sourced from local hotels to provide on-going accommodation for new homeless applicants as the situation develops. RSL's have stopped letting due to limited contractor availability therefore it is likely that there will be no moves for those applicants who are currently in temporary accommodation, and sourcing accommodation will be critical.

Accommodation providers have been provided with National Guidance on social distancing, cleaning etc.

We are meeting with colleagues from across a number of services to discuss our responses to Domestic Violence during this time.

As required, the Regulator has been updated on our change of service. Additionally, we are in touch with other Housing Services in Scotland to share information and advice as the situation develops.

Housing Support – we are keeping in touch with all our accommodated service users and working pro-actively with our support providers to ensure that vulnerable households continue to receive the support they need and are not isolated.

Adaptations Grants: Care and Repair are limiting contact with clients and works have stopped as contractors have shut down. Liaison is on-going with Care and Repair to determine operational requirements for priority hospital discharge cases, this links to the Bronze Command Group and their requirements for hospital beds.

Private Sector Grants: As contractors have shut down, this work will be on hold for the foreseeable future.

HEEPS:ABS: As a result of the current COVID-19 Restrictions, the Scottish Government has suspended the HEEPS: ABS programme. Argyll and Bute Council's appointed scheme contractor, BCA Insulation, put measures in place to bring works to a close ensuring that customers' homes were left in a safe state. Efforts have been made to contact households to advise them of the suspension of the scheme.

At the time of suspension, there were 968 referrals to the scheme. 315 householders had received grant approval and 112 households had works completed on their household.

Scottish Government Officers are holding a Webinar on 30th March 2020 to update officers on the way forward for the scheme. Guidance and grant awards for the 2020/21 programme have not yet been announced.

ACHA warmer homes project: Argyll Community Housing Association are working with SSE Energy Solutions to deliver a programme of external wall insulation to mixed tenure blocks. In order to support private owners and tenants, ACHA approached Housing Services to access HEEPS: ABS funding. Housing Services liaised with Officers at the Scottish Government and successfully secured an additional funding award of £1,009,125.00 for the 2019/20 HEEPS: ABS programme. This award will support the installation of external wall insulation to mixed tenure blocks in the Oban area with 135 private owners/tenants/landlords benefiting from this funding. This brings the total HEEPS: ABS award to Argyll and Bute Council in 2019/20 to £2,980,215.77. ACHA's programme is currently also suspended due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Gaelic

Bòrd na Gàidhlig have been in contact about the 1500 anniversary of Colum Cille (St Columba). They are planning a series of activities from December 2020-December 2021 and are keen to involve Argyll and Bute Council in this, given the importance of Argyll to the life of Colum Cille. This will include opportunities for businesses and other organisations in the area being able to use BnG branding materials to promote their activities and how they link to Colum Cille.

Recruitment to the Gaelic Development Officer 2 year post, funded by GLAIF (Gaelic Language Implementation Fund) has been paused due to Covid-19, but will be pursued once the situation recovers.

BnG have extended the deadline for applications to this year's GLAIF funding due to Covid-19.

I am hearing that growing numbers of staff are learning Gaelic by using the free Duolingo app, which is very positive.

4.5 POLICY LEAD FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE – CLLR KIERON GREEN

Local Meetings: Since my last report in November I have attended a number of meetings of the IJB and associated committees and groups.

The IJB has met on 27th November, 29th January and 25th March. Several key agenda items have been the NHS Highland Sturrock Report and associated follow up actions including a review within Argyll and Bute, a redesign of dementia services, and consideration and approval of a balanced HSCP budget for 2020/21. Through development sessions

including additional dates on 6th December and 26th February there has been increased IJB awareness around Risks, Strategic Commissioning and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

Ongoing monitoring of the 2019/20 budget and scrutiny around feasibility of new savings has been considered by the Finance and Policy Committee on 21st November, 12th December, 24th January, 6th March and 27th March.

The Clinical and Care Governance Committee met on 14th November, 30th January and 26th March with members also participating in a regional engagement workshop covering the West of Scotland on 23rd January.

Audit and Risk Committee on 18th February considered internal and external audit activity as well as the aspects relating to health and social care within the Audit Scotland overview report on Local Government Finances.

The Strategic Planning Group has been involved in the drafting of Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Strategic Commissioning Plan on 10th January and 6th February.

Responding to specific matters relating to mental health and learning disabilities in the Cowal area I met with officers on 6th January – this was followed by a meeting between officers and local elected members on 14th January where a wider range of health and social care issues were discussed.

On 29th November I participated in a reflective learning workshop in Lochgilphead that the Lomond and Argyll Advocacy Service had arranged. This included participation by HSCP officers as well as the MS Centre and TSI.

Following on from the report into experiences of Mental Health services in Argyll and Bute last year there was another session to discuss this in Oban on 28th February which I attended.

Being aware of the significant interest in services for people with Autism locally I was present at the Autism Steering Group on 9th March. Further detail on this is included later in my report.

National Meetings: I was at the COSLA Children and Young People Board meetings on 15th November and 21st February, which included items on expansion to 1140 hours of childcare, school food regulations and diet, and the independent review into Additional Support for Learning. Similarly I attended the COSLA Health and Social Care Board meeting on 7th February where progress with integration, performance and accountability of

integrated services and improving lives of Gypsy Travellers were amongst topics covered.

I was at the second Health and Social Care Conference on 4th December. Highlights for me were sessions covering collaborative and compassionate leadership, and a human rights approach to providing care.

As Vice-Chair of the national IJB Chairs and Vice-Chairs executive I have had meetings with Scottish Government officials on 4th November and 14th January as well as attending the Ministerial Strategic Group for Health and Social Care on 22nd January. The executive continues to provide a link from the wider network of IJBs to COSLA and the Scottish Government.

Autism Services Update: Recruitment continues for a Service Improvement Officer for Learning Disability and the Service Manager for Learning Disability and Autism. These posts will enable us to focus specifically in the areas of Autism and Learning Disability and will provide stability in terms of leadership, management and development to services across Argyll and Bute.

The Autism Steering Group has recommenced and the first meeting was held on Monday 10th February. Councillors Philand and Horn are amongst the members of the group, along with multi-agency representatives all of whom are relevant to developing Autism services. Areas the group will be actioning are:

- Refreshing the current Autism Strategy that had not been implemented.
- Evidencing that the HSCP are working towards and achieving A Healthy Life, Choice and Control, Independence and Active Citizenship as set out in “The Scottish Strategy for Autism” outcomes and priorities 2018 – 2021.
- Implementation of pathways across services, including robust guidelines for transitions. This will be supported by Children’s Services and will be in line with GIRFEC principles.
- Development of a clear diagnostic pathway for people with Autism. This includes post diagnostic pathways and access to appropriate healthcare and autism friendly environments.
- Education, training and the development of autism friendly space and care.

COVID-19: Following COVID-19 being confirmed in Scotland officers have been working to prepare HSCP services locally to care for affected patients. This has included considerable work in reducing delayed discharges from hospitals, and being actively involved in planning across NHS Highland and Scotland. The IJB has also reacted by moving to virtual meetings and giving additional delegated powers to the Chief Officer to deal with developments.

The pressures arising from COVID-19 are likely to cause changes to timescales of other HSCP activity due to the need for officer resources to

be prioritised. However for now the focus has to be on caring for people locally and I wish to thank all staff within the HSCP – from those on the front line to senior managers, as well as unpaid carers and our colleagues working in third and independent sector care providers for their tireless efforts at this difficult time.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1** This report highlights the activities of the Leader and Policy Lead Councillors of Argyll and Bute Council for the period from November 2019 to March 2020.

**Councillor Aileen Morton
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council**

7th April 2020

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