

**ARGYLL AND BUTE COVID 19 RECOVERY
RESTART, RECOVER AND RENEW:
DELIVERING AND RESETTING OUR RECOVERY STRATEGY AND ACTION
PLAN**

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report, presents to Members, the progress report providing details of the work undertaken to recover from the Covid pandemic. The report, from the Recovery Working Group, outlines actions and achievements to date, and the medium to long-term priorities to support the area recovering from the impact of the pandemic, to the “new normal”.
- 1.2 This document provides an overview of progress with the Argyll and Bute Recovery Strategy and Action Plan, our achievements and our current priorities. This work focussing on **restart, recover and renew**, recognises the importance of restarting public services and adapting our continued response to tackling the impacts, both positive and negative, of the COVID pandemic to our local communities, our services, the economy and to public health.
- 1.3 There has been significant progress restarting services, embedding new practice and learning from the pandemic and in considering the critical areas affected by the Covid pandemic and associated restrictions. A partnership approach engaging with other agencies, including Highland and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and Third Sector Interphase, is critical in maintaining recovery to the “new normal” post Covid.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee consider this update report, along with the attached appendix.

**ARGYLL AND BUTE COVID 19 RECOVERY
RESTART, RECOVER AND RENEW:
DELIVERING AND RESETTING OUR RECOVERY STRATEGY AND ACTION
PLAN**

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In response to the Covid pandemic, the Council agreed a Recovery Strategy and Framework, to support the recovery to the “new norm”. This work is being coordinated through the well-established Recovery Working Group and the specific thematic working groups.
- 2.2 This attached document (**Appendix 1**) provides an overview of progress with the Argyll and Bute Recovery Strategy and Action Plan, our achievements and our current priorities. This work, focusing on **restart, recover and renew**, recognises the importance of restarting public services and adapting our continued response to tackling the impacts, both positive and negative, of the COVID pandemic to our local communities, our services, the economy and to public health.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee consider this update report, along with the attached appendix.

4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The attached report, “**RESTART, RECOVER AND RENEW**” details the achievements made in “recovery”; medium term priorities and the intention that the longer term issues are embedded within the strategic and corporate plans for key agencies and partners.
- 4.2 There are a number of medium term projects that target key areas for recovery over a 1-2 year delivery period. These address a range of issues including the challenging economic outlook of Argyll and Bute where the number of people claiming unemployment benefits, is higher than that pre-pandemic and optimising the opportunities through the Economic Strategy and other means, including the Council’s Staycation Programme. These critical issues include:-

1. Skills shortage in Argyll and Bute across a range of business sectors and occupations;
2. High unemployment focused on particular areas and under employment;
3. Medium to longer term recovery difficult to plan with annualised budgets;
4. Continuing population decline and aging population underpins all Covid impact and recovery efforts;
5. Targeting recovery activity at the sectors and demographics most affected by the Covid pandemic;
6. Vulnerability of community groups and organisations from the impact of Covid, including capacity, volunteers, financial impacts from changes to income generating activities;
7. Rising build costs and supply chain issues.

4.3 Economic and Social recovery, together with building back stronger communities and longer term outcomes. Recovery and renew requires to be an integral part of what the Council and our Community Planning Partners do, going forward. Recovery from this pandemic will need collaboration, networking and partnership between the Council and our many partners including the local community. The intention is to embed and mainstream Recovery into the strategic and service plans of the Council, Health and Social Care Partnership and other external partners. This requires agreement by the Council, the Community Planning Partnership and Local Resilience Partners

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 There has been significant progress restarting services, embedding new practice and learning from the pandemic and in considering the critical areas affected by the Covid pandemic and associated restrictions. A partnership approach engaging with other agencies, including Highland and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and Third Sector Interphase, is critical in maintaining recovery to the “new normal” post Covid.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Policy - Consistent with current corporate policies and Council’s civil contingencies remit.
- 6.2 Financial - Financial management embedded within strategy.
- 6.3 Legal - Statutory duty on Local Authority.
- 6.4 HR – None.
- 6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
 - 6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics: Recovery Strategy encompasses all areas and communities.
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty: Embedded within the recovery process.
 - 6.5.3 Islands: Embedded within the recovery process.
- 6.6 Climate Change - positive impact as a result of new ways of working, enhanced use of technology and reduced travel

- 6.7 Risk - Strategy minimises risks.
- 6.8 Customer Service - Embedded into Recovering Council activities.

Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

Date 12/01/2022

For further information contact:

Fergus Murray, Head of Development and Economic Growth
Fergus.Murray@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Alan Morrison, Regulatory Services and Building Standards Manager
Alan.Morrison@argyll-bute.gov.uk

Appendix 1:

ARGYLL AND BUTE COVID 19 RECOVERY
RESTART, RECOVER AND RENEW: DELIVERING AND RESETTING OUR
RECOVERY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

RESTART,
RECOVER
AND RENEW:

DELIVERING
AND
RESETTING
OUR COVID
RECOVERY
STRATEGY



ARGYLL AND BUTE COVID 19 RECOVERY RESTART, RECOVER AND RENEW: DELIVERING AND RESETTING OUR RECOVERY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Argyll and Bute Recovery Action Plan outlines the key themes and the actions to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and to shape the “new normal”.
- 1.2 The COVID pandemic is unique in civil contingency terms, as we have a long active incident phase rather than having to deal with a finite incident and then moving swiftly on to a recovery stage and then on to business as usual. Despite this complexity, considerable progress has been made in delivering our Recovery Plan and identified actions. Although, this has been negatively impacted by the second national lockdown on 26th December 2020 which lasted until 26th April 2021, together with a series of transitional stages to 9th August 2021 and “beyond level 0” for Scotland, and further omicron restrictions.
- 1.3 This document provides an overview of progress with the Argyll and Bute Recovery Strategy and Action Plan, our achievements and our current priorities. This work focusing on **restart, recover and renew**, recognises the importance of restarting public services and adapting our continued response to tackling the impacts, both positive and negative, of the COVID pandemic to our local communities, our services, the economy and to public health.
- 1.4 As the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic continues, full recovery is still a long-term objective in some areas of operation that will require greater collaboration, networking and partnership working. The Council have a role to coordinate recovery in civil contingency terms, with the ultimate aim to embed the recovery priorities into the Council/ HSCP/Community Planning Partnership and other agencies strategic and operating plans. The recovery process provides an opportunity to learn from the Covid pandemic and to embed good practice, which includes pro-actively engaging with communities and workforce, and adopting new working practices (i.e. working from home and making better use of digital infrastructure.)

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The impacts of the COVID pandemic continuing to be felt on a global scale with an estimated 300m people having tested positive for Covid 19. There are also significant national, regional and local impacts that need to be carefully considered as part of an overall response. Responding to the pandemic, the Council, working with our partners, developed and approved the Argyll and Bute Covid Recovery Strategy and Framework that outlines its process for recovery over the short, medium and longer term. In very

fluid and changing circumstances, the Overarching Recovery Working Group, together with its sub groups, has been instrumental in implementing and delivering this strategy together with its associated action plan.

- 2.2 This document details our achievements to date, medium priorities and proposes an approach to embed recovery and renew into the strategic and operating plans for the Council, partner agencies and community partners. The adequacy of the Recovery Strategy was also been considered.

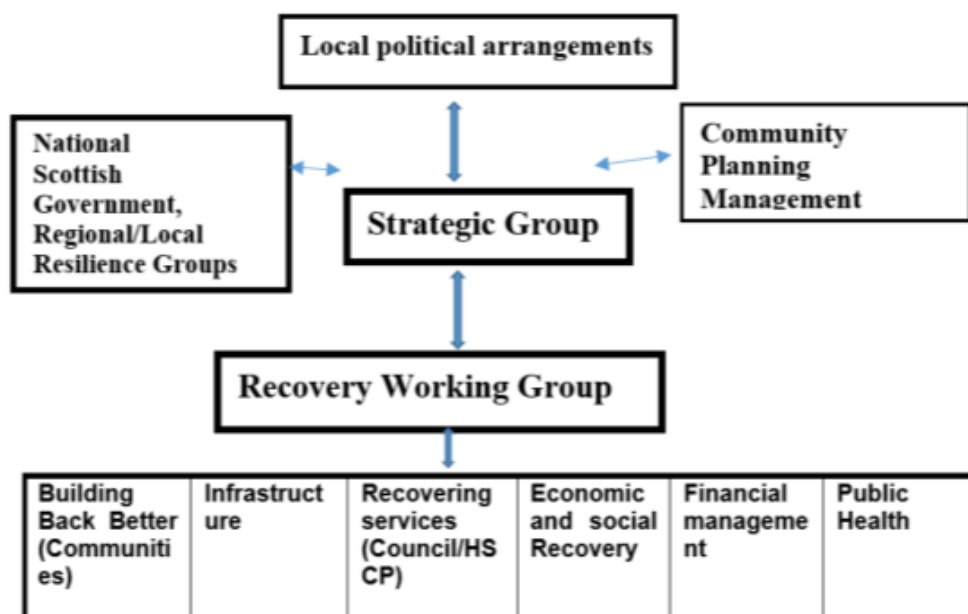
3. ARGYLL AND BUTE RECOVERY STRATEGY AND FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 Argyll and Bute's Recovery Strategy and Framework, approved by the Council's Business Continuity Committee on 25th June 2020, outlined the process being worked on with our partners including multiple public agencies, the third sector and local communities, to ensure a planned **"return to normality"** from the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Recovery Action Plan, agreed by the Council's Policy and Resources Committee on 10th December, outlined the specific actions and priorities for the thematic groups, as we considered the "new norm". The Strategy and Plan are available via [this link](#) ([Argyll and Bute Recovery Action Plan Appendix.pdf](#) (argyll-bute.gov.uk))

- 3.2 Our plans focused on renewal, our desire to transform service delivery to support the long-term future of the Council and other services, and its people, to take the lessons from the Covid pandemic to ensure our ongoing readiness and enhance our economic and community resilience. The plan recognised the importance of economic and social factors in driving recovery and building back stronger communities.

- 3.3 The Framework and objectives outlined in the Strategy were:-



Objectives:

- Reinstatement of normality in terms of Council and HSCP services, including a new approach to our buildings with a focus on hybrid working, a hub model and smarter use of buildings.
- Continued protection of public health, including the safe reopening of local businesses and activities following closure and subsequent restrictions
- Develop and deliver a proactive and integrated framework for the care of vulnerable people in our communities in terms of social care, medical treatment and supplies.
- Support and encourage Economic wellbeing and recovery to business and communities.
- Reinstate transport networks as soon as practicable.
- A proactive and integrated framework for communication (public information, employee information and media relationships)
- Deliver a proactive response to the impacts of Covid 19 on community organisations and volunteers.
- Maintenance of detailed and audited financial records for all activity, decisions and expenditure.
- The involvement, and co-operation, of the community and all relevant agencies.

- 3.4 The nature of the pandemic has complicated recovery to the “new normal” with the reinstatement of public health restrictions on a number of different occasions due to increasing Covid cases and emerging variants of the virus. However, Government strategies are now moving towards “living with the virus” following the successful national vaccination programme, providing the opportunity to consider the full impacts of the pandemic. In addition, the EU Exit continues to have an impact on the local economy in terms of the ongoing shortages in available workforce across a number of key sectors and occupations. Recovery is now an integral focus for the delivery of the Council’s Economic Strategy 2019-2023 and subsequent Economic Recovery Strategy including securing additional funding streams associated with the likes of the UK Levelling Up Agenda and the Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal into the medium to longer term. In addition, Argyll and Bute has had to contend with the ongoing issues around the A83 trunk road poor reliability and an ageing Cal Mac ferry fleet with its passenger and freight capacity constrained through Covid restrictions. All this activity, much of it out with the control of the Council, impacts on the “recovery process” and has been built into the Recovery Working Groups overview.

4 ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE: SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

- 4.1 The Overarching Recovery Working Group, established on 19th June 2020, continues to meet on a regular basis and report its work through regular Highlight Reports to the Council’s Strategic Management Team (and now Executive Leadership Team) with political scrutiny delivered through the Policy and Resources Committee, or full Council when considered

necessary.

- 4.2 Whilst progress has been hindered by the cyclical nature of the pandemic including the introduction of new variants that have given rise to increasing numbers of cases and further Covid restrictions, good progress has been made in recovery. It is important to recognise these achievements, as the priority, quite rightly, has focused on the incidence rate of Covid 19 rather than recovery. The key achievements of the Overarching Group, chaired by the Head of Development and Economic Growth, and also the thematic sub groups are listed below:-

(i) Overarching group.

Purpose: The Group has an overview of the recovery process and responsibility to deliver the Recovery Strategy, consider and identify specific issues and develop a range of specific actions to aid restart, recovery or renew.

Achievements:

- Recovery Strategy and Framework has been revised and no changes are proposed;
- Recovery Working Group and Framework is established with excellent engagement from key partners and agencies;
- Agreed Terms of Reference for the Recovery Working Group and the Thematic Groups;
- Governance arrangements have been agreed at strategic, political and partnership level;
- Reporting mechanism in place with regular Highlight Reports;
- Ensuring our Recovery Strategy is consistent with Scottish Government's Route Map and Regional Recovery Strategies;
- Established effective links with Greater Glasgow and Clyde Regional Resilience Partnership; Argyll and Bute Strategic Partnership Group and the Greater Glasgow and Clyde Recovery Groups ensuring a coordinated approach and sharing best practice;
- Effective communications Strategy implemented;
- Identified gaps in resource and achieved funding for delivery.

(ii) Recovering Council

Purpose: To create COVID safe and improved workplace and services for now and in the future, that benefits our staff and customers.

Achievements

- Majority of Council services have been reinstated, subject to Covid restrictions;

- Opportunity to take advantage of increased home working and flexibility of location that improves our prospect (across all partners) of attracting new people to work in Argyll and Bute;
- Council priorities have agreed Recovering Council priorities focusing on Modernising Workspaces, Digital first, minimising the need to travel and ongoing engagement with staff/unions.

(iii) Economic and social recovery

Purpose: Supporting the economic and social recovery of Argyll and Bute, sustaining jobs and communities.

Achievements

- Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy 2019-2023 agreed and in place;
- Substantial business support assistance provided through business support grants etc. For example, since March 2020, Argyll and Bute Council staff have collectively administered 20 types of grant funding, distributing over £86m across 11,637 awards. This figure does not include the ongoing business support and grant awards under existing programmes such as the Argyll and Bute Business Gateway Local Growth Accelerator Programme;
- Business supported to be COVID compliant through enforcement strategy adopted by Council;
- Town Centre Recovery funding secured and a programme of capital and revenue funding being implemented;
- Staycation Project funding, action plan approved and delivered with funding allocated of £800K;
- Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal Heads of Terms signed;
- Argyll Economic Resilience Forum established with industry representatives;
- Managing concurrent risks by integrating the economic risks associated with EU Exit into the COVID Economic and Social Recovery Group;
- £2m of Community Renewal Funding secured from UK Government.

(iv) Community strengthening: building back better

Purpose: Building on community resilience evidenced through the pandemic and developing the best ways in which to respond, engage and work in partnership with our community organisations for the future.

Achievements

- Active engagement with community organisations to establish key areas of concern and action plan taken forward to address these including:-

- Signposting to services for the vulnerable to receive appropriate support;
- Provision of food to the most vulnerable meets their nutritional needs;
- Development and delivery of a partnership project to tackle financial hardship for people in communities (Flexible Food Fund);
- Resilience Plan advice and guidance updated for community organisations;
- Funding of partnership work to prevent financial impact of fraud and telephone frauds;
- Launch of Micro-Grants fund to support community organisations in particular village halls following impacts of Covid;
- Flexible and proactive approach to managing customer and service user needs through the Customer Contact Centre (CSC). The CSC continues to carry out proactive call out functions for Scottish Government, and was extremely agile in absorbing new requirements – this has been built into business as usual through learning from the pandemic.

(v) Transportation and Infrastructure

Purpose: Reinstating services post pandemic and meeting emerging challenges relating to connectivity.

Achievements

- Maintaining the delivery of essential council services such as waste disposal;
- Transport services have been largely reinstated, working with reduced capacity due to Covid public health measures;
- Actively engaged in conversations regarding A83 and ferry capacity.

(vi) Financial management

Purpose: Ensuring sound financial management.

Achievements

- Sound financial management arrangements are in place for Council.

(vii) Public Health

Purpose: ensuring that Appropriate arrangements are in place to manage the incidence and minimise the risks to public health.

Achievements

- Enforcement of COVID standards in place through Council Regulatory Services and Police. An indication of this, 4655

enforcement interactions have been carried out by the Council, business compliance levels have been generally high with only 19 warning notices and 4 Prohibition Notice's served. A Memorandum of Understanding remains in place with Police Scotland to coordinate enforcement, and the Council's Environmental Health Team continue to actively respond to business referrals from NHS Highland Test and Protect, and in outbreak management;

- Design and delivery of the vaccination programme and booster programme across Argyll and Bute;
- Asymptotic testing arrangements in place, supported by PCR testing facilities operated by Scottish Ambulance Service at designated locations, including some fire stations.

(viii) HSCP Recovery

Purpose: Remain on an emergency footing to respond to Covid 19 pandemic demands. Remobilise the Health and Care Service as per SGHD road map and targets, 70-80% of 2019/20 activity and reduce waiting times. Review and implement its new 3 year HSCP Strategic plan 2022-2025 and respond to the implementation of the National Care Service.

Achievements

- The HSCP has focused on the areas agreed as priorities with the Scottish Government and applying a Clinical Prioritisation framework within a Covid 19 compromised physical operating environment as below:
 - Priority level 1a Emergency and 1b Urgent – operation needed within 24 hours
 - Priority level 2 Surgery/Treatment – scheduled within 4 weeks
 - Priority level 3 Surgery/Treatment – scheduled within 12 weeks
 - Priority level 4 Surgery/Treatment – may be safely scheduled after 12 weeks.
- *NHSGG&C & the HSCP/NHS Highland are therefore prioritising P1 & P2 patients, this will continue until March 2022*
- The HSCP has also applied this target level of remobilisation and prioritisation within social care services.
- At the same time, the HSCP has delivered an unprecedented vaccination programme for Covid 19 and an expanded winter flu vaccination programme, covering 95% of the “targeted population” in the former and making good progress in the flu and Covid 19 booster programme.

Our health and care sector is under extreme stress at present due to NHSGG&C, and NHS Highland are having to prioritise P1 & P2 patients. The combination of the backlog of treatment/care resulting in an increase in demand due to the legacy and impact of Covid 19 and the imminence of

winter. The key issues the HSCP is looking to address:

- Inability to recruit staff across care sector (statutory & independent) due to Brexit loss of care workforce and competition with other sectors. Oban, Islay, Campbeltown;
- Social Work staff recruitment to vacancies is proving difficult i.e. Helensburgh and Cowal and Oban;
- Vacancies in key health professional groups due to retirement etc. Occupational Therapists, physiotherapy, radiography etc.
- Availability and affordability of housing for new staff continues to compromise recruitment;
- Increase in Delayed Discharges in hospitals due to lack of capacity in care sector etc;
- Care home resilience minimising the impact of Covid19 outbreaks in community to maintain ability to open;
- Treatment waiting times are increasing for non P1 and P2 patients;
- Strengthening and supporting our health and well-being support and services to health and care staff

5 MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES

- 5.1 There are a number of medium term projects to target key areas for recovery over a 1-2 year delivery period. These address a range of issues including the challenging economic outlook of Argyll and Bute, where the number of people claiming unemployment benefits is higher than that pre-pandemic levels, and optimising opportunities through various means, including the Staycations program.

The critical issues being addressed are:

1. Skills shortage across Argyll and Bute across a range of business sectors and occupations;
2. High unemployment focused on particular areas and under employment;
3. Medium to longer term recovery difficult to plan with annualised budgets;
4. Continuing population decline and aging population underpins all Covid impact and recovery efforts;
5. Targeting recovery activity at the sectors and demographics most affected by the Covid pandemic;
6. Vulnerability of community groups and organisations from the impact of Covid, incl. capacity, volunteers, financial impacts from changes to income generating activities;
7. Rising build costs and supply chain issues.

5.2 These medium term priorities or projects include:

Project	Outcome	Milestones	Timescales
Modernising our Workspaces	Rationalisation of Council offices, new service delivery models, new ways of working for our people	Design of new "Council hubs"	2023 (timetable to be agreed by Council)
Vaccination roll out	Protecting public health and reducing demand on health services from Covid	Meeting national vaccination priorities at local level	Ongoing
Staycation	Enhancing visitor numbers to Argyll and Bute, whilst minimising impact to communities/protecting our environment	Visitor numbers will be reflected in the ongoing STEAM reports.	Annual data.
Economic Recovery Strategy	Delivering our economic and social recovery plan	Resilient businesses and local communities, with a focus on growth potential and opportunities.	Into 2022/23 and beyond.
Building stronger communities and	Develop and deliver action plan from community listening events.	Recruit Building Back Better (Communities) Worker post to engage and work with communities. Undertake extensive area-wide engagement to identify needs Develop plan linked to Community Strategy and identify any necessary funding Deliver the plan	Advertised January 2022 2022 By 2024
Community Wealth Building	Established as a crosscutting theme with CPP.	Community Wealth Building is a thematic area which is being considered by HIE, TSI and Council on behalf of the CPP's	2023

		Management Committee. Through this, it has been suggested that it is a strategic theme to be considered within the revision of the LOIP due from March 2023.	
HSCP	HSCP is updating its 3 year Strategic plan to reflect impact of the pandemic and its plans to remobilise service to 2019/20 levels. This includes continuing to redesign services to focus on prevention, re-enablement, maintaining independence of people in their community as well as rapid diagnosis and treatment. Together with enhancing children's services and delivering the "promise".	Facilitating this also requires continuing and accelerating the digital modernisation of health and care services, reducing the burden of work on staff by enhancing mobility and productivity and sharing health and care data/information	2021-24

- 5.3 These projects are critical in Covid recovery and require appropriate resourcing. The Recovery Working Group will monitor progress and report through existing governance arrangements.

6. LONGER TERM SOLUTIONS

- 6.1 Economic and Social recovery, together with building back stronger communities are long-term outcomes. Recovery and renew requires to be an integral part of what the Council and our community planning partners do, going forward. Recovery from this pandemic will need collaboration, networking and partnership between the Council and our many partners including the local community. The intention is to embed and mainstream Recovery into the strategic and service plans of the Council, Health and Social Care Partnership and other external partners. This requires agreement by the Council, the Community Planning Partnership and Local Resilience Partners

7 REVIEWING THE STRATEGY

- 7.1 A review of the Recovery Strategy confirmed that no changes are required to the framework or objectives. The role of the Community Planning Partnership has been included.
- 7.2 Progress in delivering actions identified in the Recovery Action Plan has been delayed due to the implementation of further lockdown restrictions and resourcing capacity. To aid the recovery and support the longer-term themes of economic and social recovery and building back stronger communities, Argyll and Bute Council are funding two temporary Project Officers to accelerate work in these critical areas and work with partners and communities in delivering this Plan.

8 CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The Argyll and Bute Recovery Strategy and associated Action Plan focuses on renewal, a desire to transform service delivery to support the long-term future of Argyll and Bute and its people, to take the lessons from the Covid pandemic to ensure our ongoing readiness and enhance our economic and community resilience. The plan will identify what transformational and organisational change is required to deliver a long-term vision for Argyll and Bute post Covid. It recognises the importance of economic factors in driving our recovery. A thriving local economy will underpin renewal, providing opportunities for local people although population decline will continue to be a major factor in our capacity for recovery and renewal.
- 8.2 There has been significant progress restarting services, embedding new practice and learning from the pandemic and in considering the critical areas affected by the Covid pandemic and associated restrictions. A partnership approach engaging with other agencies, including Highland and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise and Third Sector Interphase, is critical in maintaining recovery to the “new normal” post Covid.

References:

Argyll and Bute Covid Recovery Strategy and Framework ([Argyll and Bute Recovery Action Plan Appendix.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#))
Argyll and Bute Economic Strategy 2019-2023 ([Economic Strategy \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#))