
29th September 2022

LEADER'S REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The Leader of the Council and Policy Lead Councillors routinely provide a report outlining their strategic activities for consideration at each meeting of Argyll and Bute Council, except for the annual budget meeting in February.
- 1.2** This report provides an update on the activities of the council Leader, Cllr Robin Currie, for the period 18th June to 15th September 2022.
- 1.3** This report also includes an update in respect of the Leader's Policy Lead portfolio of Economy and Rural Growth.

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 the Leadership Support Manager, although it should be noted that some confidential reports provided by external organisations such as COSLA may be restricted.

3. LEADER ACTIVITY 18th JUNE 2022 TO 15TH SEPTEMBER 2022**3.1 COSLA MEETINGS**

This period has required attendance at several COSLA Leaders and Special Leaders meetings - many of the latter convened at short notice and in response to the fast-moving and complex circumstances around national local government pay negotiations.

As is very often the case, the majority of matters are considered in private session. I have noted below the topics considered and would remind

members of the opportunity to make arrangements for access to any confidential papers as highlighted at para. 2.2.

Special Leaders, 4th July

This meeting was called to deal with the following items of urgent business:

- National Care Service Bill
- Asylum Dispersal and Consultation Response

Special Leaders, 5th August

The Depute Leader attended this session on my behalf. The following items were considered:

- Pay Claim
- Ukrainian Displaced Persons

Special Leaders, 12th August

An additional Leaders meeting was required one week later, again to consider the Local Government Pay Claim.

Leaders, 26th August

This normal scheduled meeting of Leaders considered the following:

- COSLA response to the National Care Service Bill Call for Views
- Learning Estate Investment Programme
- Local Government Finance
- Social Justice and Social Security Committee report on Low Income and Debt
- Flood Risk Management Affordability Review
- National Strategy for Economic Transformation
- Business Support Partnership Delivery Plan
- Climate Emergency
- Social Care Workforce
- Suicide Prevention
- Distribution

Special Leaders, 27th August

The Pay Claim situation was escalating to the extent that an additional Special Leaders meeting had to be called for Saturday 27th August at extremely short notice.

Special Leaders, 2nd September

The meeting of 26th August was not able to complete all business items and an additional session had to be called to cover the latest Pay Claim

position as well as the COSLA response on the NCS bill, Ukraine, and an additional item - Full Asylum Dispersal Plan for Scotland.

3.2 Housing Matters:

More new affordable homes for island communities

On 21st July, I was delighted to carry out the official opening of Otter Brae - a ten-home development in Craighouse, Isle of Jura, delivered in partnership with West Highland Housing Association, the Council, Ardfin Estate, the Scottish Government and contractors Macleod Construction.



This development comprises eight 2-bed and two 3-bed homes. Jura Community Council has worked closely with West Highland Housing Association on a local lettings plan - the result being that people who live and work, have the offer of work, or who have strong local connections on the island, are able to access homes they need and that they can afford.

Rhoda Grant MSP was also in attendance and this provided an opportunity to catch up with her about a range of issues that affect island life and the wider Argyll and Bute community, including the A83, ferry capacity and other transport matters.

ACHA engagement:

On 25th July I had an introductory call with Michelle Mundie, who has joined Argyll Community Housing Association as its new Chief Executive. Michelle brings considerable experience in both the housing sector and local government, including a spell at Glasgow City Council where she had responsibility for the city's Affordable Housing Supply Programme. I look forward to working with Michelle going forward.

Other housing matters:

During the period covered by this report, I have attended regular meetings and forums on housing including:

Argyll and Bute Strategic Housing Forum, 21st June:

As always, this forum - which brings together key stakeholders from external partners as well as across council services - yielded useful and constructive discussions. The following issues were considered:

- Housing Service Performance Report 2021/22 (key highlights are noted below)
- Scottish Government More Homes Division update
- Housing and Planning Update
- RSL Updates - Development Projects
- Community-led Housing Projects Update
- Housing and Economic Growth
- Energy Efficiency
- Wellbeing
- Care and Repair Update
- Veterans/Armed Forces Housing

Key highlights of note from the Performance Report include:

- 143 affordable home completions through the Strategic Housing Investment Programme in 2021/22
- 235 active empty homes cases open - with 38 empty properties brought back into use as affordable homes, over half of which had been empty for between two and ten years.
- 1,196 households in the Home Energy Efficiency Programme (HEEPS)
- £0.552m spend in Private Sector Housing Grants in 21/22

3.3 Campbeltown Working Group with Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, 4th August:

I joined officers and partners in attending the Campbeltown Working Group's most recent meeting, welcoming the attendance in person of Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise.

The Minister had an opportunity to visit sites around Kintyre including MACC, and he was clearly impressed with the potential that exists there as well as the work already done.

While it was helpful to hear about what has been done already, it is equally important to consider what needs to happen next - and now. As an example, connectivity was cited as one of the main challenges and barriers to growth. We need an urgent response to issues like this - and a response that consists of urgent action, given the scale of challenges like this. I intend to continue following up on this with the Minister.

We touched briefly at the meeting on the interventions made in Dundee when the Michelin plant closed down, and arguably the extent of the economic challenges that have beset Kintyre in recent years have the same level of impact and require the same level of intervention and support.

I had an opportunity for a short private discussion with Mr McKee prior to the meeting and it was good to hear that he had travelled to Campbeltown by road, rather than flying in from Glasgow. This would have given him an opportunity to see at first hand the practicalities of travelling to and from Kintyre and throughout rural Argyll, illustrating perhaps some of the challenges involved in service delivery in Argyll's rural and island communities. He would also, of course, have used the A83 at a busy period and I hope that he takes the opportunity to relay his experiences to ministerial colleagues at the Scottish Government while deliberations - and work, and traffic lights - are ongoing in relation to the longstanding landslide damage and establishing a permanent solution.

3.4 Rothesay Pavilion Lobbying Group:

We have had two meetings of the Rothesay Pavilion Lobbying Group in the period covered by this report - including a visit to the Pavilion itself on 10th August - and a further meeting on 13th September. This provided an opportunity for group members to see both the Pavilion's current position and hear about its potential from Rothesay Pavilion Charity representatives, who were also in attendance.



Officers have been liaising with the Charity on a fundraising plan and, as part of that activity, I have written to Scottish ministers seeking a discussion about the Pavilion, given its importance not only to Bute but in terms of national architectural significance.

My office is also liaising with Jenni Minto MSP's team to arrange an initial discussion about this matter. In the meantime, liaison with the Charity on this crucial plan will continue and I will report back on any responses from ministers.

3.5 A83 Rest and Be Thankful

Members will recall that in my last report I advised that I had written to Jenny Gilruth MSP, Minister for Transport, in relation to the urgency for action on a permanent solution at the rest.

We subsequently heard that Ms Gilruth would be visiting Oban on 18th August and would be available to meet with myself and officers.

The Harbour Building in Oban, with its overview of the busy bay and pontoon facility, was the ideal location for a meeting to focus largely on transport-related issues.



The Minister had asked to discuss the Bus Partnership Fund project and we were able to provide her with an update on this. I also raised the matter of ferry capacity particularly on our island routes. Ms Gilruth indicated that the Project Neptune report was due to be published soon and, indeed, at the time of writing it has now been made available online. I will want to take time to carefully consider the report and it goes without saying that, given the importance of reliable ferry services and adequate capacity on these lifeline routes, we will continue to lobby on this as a matter of priority.

It was reassuring to hear the Minister say that resolving the Rest was a key priority for her. Since that meeting of course we have had a further announcement about a £25m investment in progressing design and development work, with medium term proposals due by the end of the year and a decision on the preferred long term route option by spring next year.

Elsewhere on this agenda is a motion which I hope will secure backing across the chamber, given our historic unity on this matter of urgent importance for Argyll and Bute and its future success.

I had also noted in my last report that I was in contact with the RABT Campaign Group about inviting them to a seminar for all councillors. Our original date of 8th September was rescheduled to 22nd September and the seminar will have taken place before the council meeting.

3.6 HRH The Princess Royal - Visit to Loch Fyne, 6th September:

I was delighted to be invited by Tarbert Harbour Authority for a visit from Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal on 6th September. The Princess was in the area to visit both sides of Loch Fyne. She had first visited the Kyles of Bute, where she went to Tighnabruaich Sailing School and Kyles Camans, who manufacture traditional shinty sticks.

She then crossed the loch - by air - to visit the Harbour Authority and view the new shoreside facilities it has put in place.

Her final engagement in Tarbert was to visit the Argyll South Branch of the Pony Club.

It certainly seems to be the case that Her Royal Highness enjoys her visits to Argyll and has a real affection for the area. As has happened before, she spent a lot of time talking to local people and those involved with each of the organisations that she visited, clearly very much to their delight.



Photo by Kevin McGlynn

Reviewing photos and memories of the day are of course particularly poignant given the very sad events just a few days later, when Her Majesty The Queen passed away. It is my intention to write a letter of

condolence to the Princess, expressing sadness and sympathy at the very sad loss she experienced so soon after the visit.

3.7 Economy and Rural Growth Policy Lead Update:

Levelling Up Fund: Members have been provided with a range of information on the Levelling Up Fund bids that officers have worked hard on, and I was delighted to be informed that two bids were submitted in August for consideration.

- The Regeneration Bid up to £20m – Argyll and Bute Western Seaboard Marine Gateways Initiative – Rothesay and Dunoon.
- The Transport Bid up to £50m – Connected Argyll and Bute – Whisky Islands; and North Lorn Economic Growth Zone.

Further detail on each of the bid and the Levelling Up Fund can be found in officer's report to Council in June [UK LEVELLING UP FUND UPDATE AND BID SUBMISSION June22.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

I feel the two submissions made are strong and stand a good chance of success, but it must be noted that this is a competitive process and I look forward to hearing the outcome of the UK Government's decision.

I am due to meet with Lord Offord, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, in the near future (our original meeting due on 13th September was cancelled following the sad passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II). I will be taking the opportunity to promote Argyll and Bute's bid at our rescheduled discussion.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF): Argyll and Bute's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan was put before members in August at the Policy and Resources Committee. The UKSPF is a successor to the previous EU structural funds, it is viewed as a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda. The overarching aim of the UKSPF is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK. The Plan will be delivered over a period of three years, and officers have prepared this plan in conjunction with colleagues and local partners/stakeholders, as well as with endorsement and support from our MP. Further information on the Investment Plan can be found [ARGYLL AND BUTE UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND INVESTMENT PLAN.pdf \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](#)

Love Local Gift Card: The Argyll and Bute Love Local Gift Card formally launched in October 2021 and there are currently 110 businesses registered to accept the gift card as payment for goods and services throughout Argyll and Bute, with more businesses in the process of registering to join the scheme. This is a great tool for Argyll and Bute and boosts spend and

support to local businesses. I know Members will agree that we should encourage more businesses to take up this great opportunity

[Argyll and Bute Scotland Loves Local Gift Card \(argyll-bute.gov.uk\)](https://argyll-bute.gov.uk/argyll-bute-scotland-loves-local-gift-card)

Rural Growth Deal: The Rural Growth Deal (RGD) Programme Management Office (PMO) continue to work with the Scottish and UK Governments and key stakeholders to progress the signing of the Full Deal Agreement which represents the next key milestone of the RGD process. We have the consultancy Stantec to support the preparation of Treasury 5 business cases which are required by central government in order to sign the Full Deal Agreement. It is anticipated that the majority business cases will be submitted to government for initial feedback towards the end of 2022 / early 2023 and a draft programme of works has been prepared by Stantec.

The RGD PMO are also in the process of drafting the various documents which will form the Full Deal Agreement including an Implementation Plan, Governance Plan, Communication Plan and Full Deal Agreement document. The RGD PMO have also been supporting colleagues to progress a number of grant funding bids in support of several projects within the RGD programme including bids to the UK Government's Community Renewal and Levelling Up Funds and the Scottish Governments Clyde Mission Fund. The Council will continue to work with potential funding partners to identify synergies between the Rural Growth Deal and other national funding programmes which is particularly important given current inflationary budget pressures.

Officers also continue to work with the National PMO network to identify best practise with regard to the delivery of city region and growth deal programmes including maximising the potential of deals to support inclusive economic growth, act as a catalyst for business growth and support the transition towards net zero.

Heritage and Place Programme: It was agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee on 16th June that an expression of interest (EOI) be made to Historic Environment Scotland based on which of the two suggested conservation towns, Tarbert and Tobermory, were considered to best fit with the criteria and therefore hopefully stand the best opportunity of success, bearing in mind that this will be a highly competitive process. Following assessment of both bids by officers, I am delighted that Tarbert has been put forward under the Expression of Interest for this funding. Officers will continue to look at what funding options are available to improve Council assets and assets throughout Argyll and Bute.

3.8 Gaelic Policy Lead Update:

Highlights from the council's Gaelic language activity include:

- Successful Argyll Gaelic Gathering 2022 held online with 55 participants. Actions from the Gathering have been compiled and have been shared with other stakeholders.
- Furan Gaelic Centre continues to support a wide range of Gaelic activity, both face to face and online. This includes working with Alzheimer's Scotland, Coraidh is Cabadaich air an Lèanag at Dunollie House and Gaelic Bookbug sessions for children and their families.
- There has been a 50% increase in unique traffic to the council's Gaelic webpages over the period June 2021-June 2022 compared with the previous two years.
- Comunn na Gàidhlig Officers continue to be active on Islay, Jura and Mull engaging young people in Gaelic Medium Education with in and out of school activities.
- The Royal National Mod will be taking place in Oban in 2024. A working group is being set up by Economic Development.
- Gaelic Culture Officer has been employed by CHARTS (Culture Heritage and Arts, Argyll and the Isles) for 12 months with funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
- A further round of Strategic Events and Festivals (SEF) funded via the council in 2022/23 was offered to address challenges of fragility and to acknowledge the period of recovery required for this sector. Those that provided support to Gaelic culture for round 4.2 include: Tìree Music Festival, Argyllshire Gathering and Tarbert Music Festival.
- Gaelic Development Worker consulting with community around Gaelic Community Hubs which was an action identified via the Argyll Gaelic Gathering. 40 people have shown interest and two workshops have created a collection of ideas and actions that participants will look to take forward.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1** This report highlights the activities of the Leader of Argyll and Bute Council for the period from 18th June to 15th September 2022.

Councillor Robin Currie
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council

15th September 2022

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