

7/10/10

**Report on the February 2007 Meeting of the Argyll & Islands
Local Economic Forum to the Argyll & Bute Community
Planning Partnership.**

A report on the Bute and Cowal CPP Seminar was given. It was explained how the new format for community consultation pilot was arrived at with an annual conference (in December) with a feed back meeting in September. It was agreed that the AL LEF would encourage attendance at both meetings.

Dr Ken McTaggart provided an update on some of the economic development measures that are to reflect economic progress. There are now three years of data on New Business Starts. There was a large decline in the summer and autumn of 2006, representing about 10% fall on annual basis. This differed from the usual profile and may reflect almost full employment however this is not confirmed by the unemployment figures where the summer low in 2006 was higher than in 2005. There is a similar pattern in long term unemployed to the rest of Scotland even though some LEF areas differ. In a debate on reasons why business starts appears to decline there was also a strong view that red- tape discourages personal risk and that there needs to be greater priority placed on this area by the Government.

Broadband coverage is almost 100%, take up has been high, but has not yet eliminated dial up: ISDN usage has fallen slightly. Population in the A&BC area, (about 90,000) which differs from the LEF area (about 70,00) shows a gradual decline and is about 3% lower over 15 years, despite a general rise in rural Scotland. It was noted that population growth drives economic activity; however detailed figures based on age distribution are not available for the census years. If inward migration to

Argyll by retirees is disproportionate, it is of concern despite the additional spending brought in.

There has been a reduction in waste going to landfill, recycling has increased while composting remains fairly constant. There are a number of social enterprises involved in recycling and there is a role from partners to support these groups.

Michael Breslin, Director of Argyll College UHI, provided a report on their activities. The college was celebrating 10 years and has thirteen learning centres. At set up the numbers involved in Argyll in further education was 18% below the Scottish average, but is now 9% above. He explained how the college was funded and the severe effect of both not meeting budget or exceeding budget which, in effect, could be disastrous. Over the 10 years, turnover has increased from £30,000 to £1.6m and now employs 300 (42 fte) who are almost all part time. In the current year about £2.0m will be invested in property.

It was noted that the Scottish Funding Council has a freeze against any further growth, and that other Scottish Executive capital funding is not available. The landmass/population of Western Isles, Shetland and Orkney are similar to Argyll, however each gets £600k over this year and next for capital development for their colleges while Argyll gets nothing.

Jane Fowler, Argyll & Bute Council, explained that the Council had put their regional transport strategy on their website and all were encouraged to look and respond in view of the importance transport issues have for the economic development of Argyll.