

PROPOSED ARGYLL AND BUTE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC FORUM

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Despite many positive developments in recent years the economic and demographic challenges facing Argyll and Bute are increasingly daunting. No single organisation or sector is able to rise to this challenge on its own. Consequently, a partnership approach between key representatives of the public, private and the voluntary sector is urgently required to help deliver sustainable economic growth throughout Argyll and Bute.

1.2 This report therefore proposes the creation of a new Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum (ABSEF) to take forward this partnership approach. The primary remit of ABSEF will be to develop and influence the creation of new sustainable economic opportunities for the benefit of the whole of Argyll and Bute and its people. ABSEF will meet a minimum of 4 times per year and have the ability to commission sub groups and other works to take forward specific actions to assist in the growth of the Argyll and Bute economy. ABSEF will also oversee the holding of an economic seminar and showcase at its annual AGM that will involve a wider audience of key stakeholders to help measure performance and ensure ABSEF is responding appropriately to current and future issues.

RECOMMENDATION

That this report is noted and that the Committee agree to establish an Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum (ABSEF).

That the Executive Director, Development and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Depute Leader and Policy Lead for Economic Growth, be given delegated authority to approach suitable individuals and invite them to serve on the forum.

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1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is a discussion paper on the merits of establishing an Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum (ABSEF) to help drive forward long term sustainable economic growth in Argyll and Bute through a partnership approach with the public, private and the voluntary sectors.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That this report is noted and that the Committee agree to establish an Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum (ABSEF).
- 2.2 That the Executive Director, Development and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, Depute Leader and Policy Lead for Economic Growth, be given delegated authority to approach suitable individuals and invite them to serve on the forum.

3. DETAILS

- 3.1 **Proposed establishment of Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum (ABSEF)**
- 3.2 Given the challenging economic situation facing the Argyll and Bute economy that has been directly linked to a falling population in parts of Argyll and Bute there is a now a compelling need for the private, public sectors and voluntary sectors to work in partnership to ensure that economic opportunities are both realised and consolidated, barriers to sustainable economic growth are overcome and the needs of a remote rural economy is not forgotten at a

national level. It is proposed that the Forum be chaired by one of the private sector representatives on the Board.

- 3.3 Successful Scottish Cities such as Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh have formed public/private sector partnerships for a number of years now which have helped them address the current economic challenges and prioritise investment to where it is needed most. Partnerships have also been formed in predominantly rural authorities such as the Highland and Islands where they are dealing with a rapidly expanding population and economic activity. This partnership approach has been praised by the Scottish Government as the best way to help deliver economic growth where public resources and private capital are increasingly finite in an increasingly competitive environment.
- 3.4 The membership of ABSEF would consist of senior decision makers from the private, public and voluntary sectors who are keen to have a better understanding of the key challenges facing the Argyll and Bute economy and act on them by removing barriers to sustainable growth, promoting the strengths of the local economy and realising its full potential through a partnership approach. As Argyll and Bute's economy looks to increasingly capitalise on its key economic assets there is also a need for the Scottish Government to invest in essential infrastructure (roads, ports, broadband, affordable housing) to help improve our competitiveness at a national level.
- 3.5 ABSEF would be different to existing council partnership arrangements in that it should be led primarily by business interests, the wealth creators – to ensure that their views are heard alongside those of the public and voluntary sectors.
- 3.6 It is hoped that working together in this way a greater mutual understanding between the three sectors will be forged, allowing more innovative and creative solutions to take place at a local level and to also allow for the creation of a louder Argyll and Bute voice to take our case to Government.

Argyll and Bute Sustainable Economic Forum (ABSEF)

The creation of a dynamic and pro active private, public and voluntary sector partnership which is committed to developing and influencing new sustainable economic opportunities for the benefit of Argyll and Bute and its people.

Through effective partnership working at a strategic level and through engagement with the Scottish Government, the wider business community and key agencies ABSEF seeks to inform policy, achieve consensus on key economic issues, remove potential barriers, identify solutions and realise new and available opportunities in order to deliver sustainable economic growth. ABSEF will report directly to the Community Planning Partnership Management team.

3.7 Remit of the Forum

3.8 To better align the activities of the public sector to work in partnership with the private and voluntary sectors to help deliver sustainable economic growth throughout Argyll and Bute.

- to focus on job creation that will help raise the region's relatively low average earnings in the private sector.
- to support the development of an entrepreneur culture through Argyll and Bute.
- focus on the long term, strategic development of the Argyll and Bute economy
- act as the economic consultative group on all relevant local economic issues and planning issues for Argyll and Bute by raising awareness and understanding of issues affecting the local economy.
- contribute to local and national policy development and influence business plans of all agencies providing support for the local economy
- facilitate better communication, consultation and liaison amongst local businesses, the voluntary sector and agencies providing support for the local economy.
- work with the Scottish Government, organisations, agencies and partnerships with an interest in the economic development of Argyll and Bute.
- to help maximise the impacts of the UHI and attract national and international research funding into the area.
- to ensure that the workforce, sector by sector, has the skills to enable the region and its businesses to capitalise on existing and emerging opportunities.
- co-ordinate the delivery of key projects and initiatives through member organisations and others as appropriate.
- provide support to existing local business and promote inward investment activity in Argyll and Bute.

3.9 The suggested priorities of the forum are identified below but this together with the remit should be formed by an inaugural workshop to determine key forum priorities, potential sub groups and actions.

1. To better understand what private businesses require to grow
2. Make best use of our existing economic assets and opportunities
3. Improve decision making process and policies in relation to the economy.
4. Assist in the delivery of the Single Outcome Agreement and Local Development Plan.
5. Deliver Argyll and Bute's Strategic and Area based Economic Development Action Plans.
6. Improve our town centres.
7. To help market and promote Argyll and Bute.
8. Attract economically active families and develop sufficient skilled people to meet the current and future needs of our local industries.
9. Maximise investment in our strategic transport network

3.10 The role of ABSEF therefore is to provide leadership at a strategic level – to work in partnership – to shape, facilitate, engage, influence government thinking, advise and help deliver on our corporate commitments and manage progress against the priority actions and outcomes with a focus on our economy and achieving sustainable growth. The work of the ABSEF will help to develop and improve local priorities identified through the local Economic Development Action Plans which will be refreshed to take account of the outputs of the forum. ABSEF once formed will sign a partnership charter agreement that will set out partner behaviours and expectations of members.

Potential membership of ABSEF Board

- Senior Business representative
 - Senior Tourism representative
 - Senior Academic representative
 - Senior Council representative
 - Senior Enterprise Agency representative
 - Senior Connectivity representative
 - Senior Voluntary sector representative
- 3.11 Board would meet on a quarterly basis with the power to establish sub groups to take forward actions and reporting to the Board when required. For example the sub group could be formed to examine how better we can attract inward investment and business growth in Argyll and Bute. The work of these sub groups will be facilitated by a number of key officers from the council and other partner representatives according to their specific skills and interests.
- 3.12 One Board meeting each year will consist of the Board's AGM with associated economic summit and showcase with an invited audience drawn from the private sector and key economic partners including Argyll and Bute Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Visit Scotland, AITC, Food from Argyll, Scottish Natural Heritage, Mid Argyll and Helensburgh Chamber of Commerce, Oban Bids, Dunoon Bids, MACC, Kintyre Forum, Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, Scottish Enterprise, Cal Mac, CMal, SCDI, Institute of Directors, CBI Scotland, JobCentre Plus, Highland Employers Coalition, the Federation of Small Businesses, STUC, UHI, Argyll College, North HITRANS, SPT, ABRA, Strategic Housing and Communities Forum, Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. The event will also be attended by Economic Development and Strategic Transport staff, COG and all Elected Members

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Given the challenging economic and demographic situation we face there is a need to work in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors to

help drive forward sustainable economic development in Argyll and Bute. ABSEF has the potential to do this in Argyll and Bute building on the successes and lessons learned of other authorities in order to improve our economic effectiveness and to also ensure our specific needs are recognised at a national level.

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