

DELIVERING ON THE SOA - COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the proposal and process for consulting the public in the decision making process for approval by the Policy and Resource Committee. It is proposed that the council seeks the views of our communities, employees, partners and service users on planning for the future - developing the economy, growing the population, working together in and for Argyll and Bute, alongside delivering services now and in the future.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The recommendations in relation to communication and involvement are set out in the covering report as part of a consolidated set of recommendations.

3 DETAIL**3.1 Background**

- 3.1.1 Argyll and Bute Council's budget for 2014/15 and 2015/16 was set in February 2014, providing a period of stability and time to plan for delivering the Single Outcome Agreement and delivering services from 2016 onwards. This will require careful planning and difficult decision-making in light of the significant financial challenges expected from 2016.
- 3.1.2 The Argyll and Bute Economic Summit reinforced the need to achieve the Single Outcome Agreement objective of developing our economy through a growing population. The message is clear that this depends on everyone in Argyll and Bute backing Argyll and Bute. Everyone has a key part to play in securing a prosperous future for our area.
- 3.1.3 The views of our communities will therefore be welcome and valued in supporting the council in reaching the decisions that best serve the immediate and long term interests of Argyll and Bute.
- 3.1.4 The consultation process would be used as an opportunity to provide members of the public with further information on the challenges the council is working to meet for the short and longer term benefit of Argyll and Bute; and it will give citizens different ways in which to contribute to decisions that will influence service delivery and

prosperity in Argyll and Bute.

3.2 Consultation and engagement proposals

- 3.2.1 The consultation, entitled 'Planning for Our Future', would seek views on attracting people and businesses to Argyll and Bute, developing the economy, funding growth alongside service delivery, ways of working together in backing Argyll and Bute, and how they prioritise council services. The consultation and engagement process would be much wider than simply considering how the Council balances its budget or reduces expenditure to fit within funding.
- 3.2.2 Balancing the budget is a key task for the Council but the most significant risk on the strategic risk register relates to population and economic decline and the overall objective of the SOA is "Argyll and Bute's economic success is built on a growing population". The papers under consideration today also set out proposals to secure economic growth through investing for economic growth, developing a strategic infrastructure plan and investing for income. All three of these proposals have a key role in planning for our future and communications strategies will be developed for each and integrated with the proposals set out in this paper.

3.3 Service choices consultation

- 3.3.1 This consultation would run in three stages. Whilst primarily concerned with the service choices proposals it would be developed in the context of the overall set of proposals that also focus on economic growth through investing for economic growth, strategic infrastructure plan and investing for income.
- 3.3.2 The first phase would take place between January and February 2015 and would seek views on high level priorities. Views provided at this stage by the public would help to inform members in developing proposals for action in progressing the immediate and longer term future of Argyll and Bute.
- 3.3.3 The second phase would seek views on detailed savings proposals. The indicative timescale for this second phase is November and December 2015.
- 3.3.4 The third stage of consultation stage would relate to statutory or non statutory consultation relevant to implementation of specific savings options. This may commence from November 2015 or from April 2016 depending on the specific savings proposals and the consultation requirements.
- 3.3.5 In addition to public and service user consultation there would be an opportunity for employee engagement during the development of detailed savings proposals.

3.4 **Investing for economic growth**

3.4.1 There will be a need for communications and engagement throughout the proposals for investing for economic growth whether this is part of setting the agenda, securing commitment, policy and strategy into action, resourcing or development and delivery of the Argyll and Bute Investment Plan. A separate communications and engagement plan will be developed alongside the Project Initiation Document for the proposals on investing for economic growth.

3.5 **Strategic infrastructure Plan**

3.5.1 The separate report on developing the Strategic Infrastructure Plan sets out a 5 stage approach that covers understanding the current situation; defining strategic economic goals for a positive economy; using the key economic goals to identify priority infrastructure projects; funding options and finalising the Strategic Infrastructure Plan. Throughout this process there will be a need for communications and engagement. A Project Initiation Document will be prepared for this and this will include a separate communications and engagement plan.

3.6 **Investing for income**

3.6.1 From a communications perspective investing for income may be viewed as an unusual course of action for a Council. The separate report sets out the case for investing for income and the issues members should consider as part of that. As further details on the approach to investing for income are developed a separate communications and engagement plan will be prepared.

3.7 **Financial outlook**

3.7.1 It is important the public are presented with information to keep them informed about how the Council manages its finances and the financial outlook it is facing. Information on significant changes to the financial outlook will be made available to the public and the public will also be provided with information in relation to the budget, annual accounts and ongoing financial position based on finance reports to members. This information will all be based on information made available to members as part of reports to Policy and Resources Committee or Council.

3.8 **Communications and engagement methods**

3.8.1 It has to be recognised that members of the public are increasingly called upon to give their views through consultation on a wide range of topics. To encourage participation in this consultation, opportunities will be provided to give views in a range of ways.

3.8.2 The consultation would be made available through tried and tested

methods. It would be available on the council's on-line channels (website and social media), through a questionnaire to our Citizens' Panel, and we would work with other organisations who play a key part in our communities in promoting it and making it available more widely, for example voluntary organisations through our Third Sector Partnership as well as through local media. It would also be circulated to our community planning partners, and promoted within the council to our employees.

- 3.8.3 On-line channels would include an on-line survey to support people in identifying their priorities. Resources would be put in place to reach people who do not have ready access to the internet but who would like the opportunity to take part.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 In meeting the challenges of decreasing funding while also investing for the future of Argyll and Bute, the council would benefit from the views of the communities in reaching the decisions that work best for Argyll and Bute in both the short and longer term. A three-stage consultation exercise would be used as an opportunity to provide communities with further information on the challenges the council is taking action to meet. It would also provide an opportunity to involve citizens' feedback at different stages in the council's process for planning for the future; and to discuss with them their involvement in backing a prosperous future for Argyll and Bute.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – None directly from this paper
- 5.2 Financial – None directly from this paper
- 5.3 Legal – None directly from this paper
- 5.4 HR – Consultation and engagement with employees will be carried out in line with agreed procedures
- 5.5 Equalities – Consultation and engagement aligns with our duties under the Equality Act 2010
- 5.6 Risk – Significant decisions need to be backed up by a process which demonstrates in-depth consideration by elected members and incorporates public feedback
- 5.7 Customer Service – customer service will benefit from customer in-put

For further information please contact Sally Loudon, Chief Executive 01546-604263

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10 December 2014

Appendix 1: Communication and Involvement Overview – Service Choices

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Below is a summary of the steps to be taken to involve citizens in working with Argyll and Bute Council in reaching the decisions that best serve the immediate and long term interests of Argyll and Bute.

Aim	Draw on the views of our citizens in making decisions for the short and long term future of Argyll and Bute in a period of challenge and competing priorities.
Key contributors	Communities, employees, members of the public, service users, community planning partners
How we will involve people	<p>A three stage consultation process that invites views at different times, in a range of ways, in the decision making process.</p> <p>Phase 1: views invited on high level priorities Phase 2: views invited on members' proposals for actions to be taken Phase 3: views on implementing decisions</p>
When	<p>Indicative times are:</p> <p>Phase 1: January to February 2015 Phase 2: November to December 2015 Phase 3: From November 2015 or April 2016</p>
Key points for people to know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argyll and Bute's economic success is built on a growing population • The council is using a period of financial stability to plan ahead for and invest in the future • We have an economy of opportunities to harness for a prosperous future • We have significant priorities to balance – developing growth and prosperity alongside delivering services now and in the future • Careful choices must be made – we need to invest and we need to save • Times are changing – Argyll and Bute needs to respond to this and grow • We need to be ambitious for our area while planning and prioritising resources effectively • Working together – sharing knowledge, skills, practice, experience – is crucial • Everyone (citizens, employees, elected members, partners, media) has a part to play in backing the future of Argyll and Bute • Get involved, have your say in planning for our future