

LATEST UPDATE ON THE SETTLEMENT PROJECT SUPPORT OFFICER ACTIONS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide the Economic, Development and Infrastructure Committee with an update on the progress of the Settlement Project Support Officer actions. It follows on from the previous report submitted to the Economic, Development and Infrastructure Committee in December 2025 which addressed progress up to 11th November 2025.
- 1.2 The Settlement Project Support Officer works with, but is not limited to, the four Repopulation Zone communities in Argyll and Bute, which were agreed at the Policy and Resources Committee on the 14th October 2021. These are the Isles of Coll and Tiree, the Isle of Bute, the Kintyre and the Rosneath peninsulas. The Settlement Project Support Officer works with these communities to support population attraction and retention, and to gather local knowledge and insight on the opportunities and challenges individuals face when seeking to remain in or relocate to the Repopulation Zones in Argyll and Bute.
- 1.3 The post is part-funded by the Scottish Government for 12 months to the 31st March 2026 by the Addressing Depopulation Delivery Plan (ADAP)/Islands Fund. The Scottish Government is currently working to develop a second phase of this funding to begin in April 2026, for which a new application for part funding was submitted in November 2025.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee members are asked to:
 - a) Note that this report highlights the progress on actions to date.
 - b) Review the Settlement Project Support Officer actions and updates.
 - c) Agree that a further report will be provided to the Committee in December 2026.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 The release of Scotland's Census 2022 (Rounded Population Estimates) has provided more up-to-date information on Argyll and Bute's demographic challenges. Between 2011 and 2022, the population of Argyll and Bute decreased by **-2.4%**. (See Appendix 1).

- 3.2 As well as a declining population, the 2022 census findings further highlighted an ageing population. When compared to all other Scottish council areas, Argyll and Bute has the largest proportion of the population aged 65 and over, at **27.2%**. (See Appendix 1).
- 3.3 National Records of Scotland (NRS) Population Estimates for 2024 evidence that Argyll and Bute has the smallest population of young people between ages of 0-15 years (**13.89%**), and the second largest population of older people (**27.73%**). Demographic data continues to evidence Argyll and Bute's ageing and declining working-age population.
- 3.4 Sub-National Population Projections by the NRS are based on the NRS 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates. They project that between 2022 and 2032 Argyll and Bute's population will decline by **0.8%**. The data provided shows that this projection is due to 'natural change' outweighing 'net migration'. This is in comparison to the NRS Sub-National Population Projections published in 2020, which used NRS 2018 Mid-Year Population Estimates to project that by mid-2028, Argyll and Bute's population would decline by **5.9%**.
- 3.5 The difference between the latest and previous projections for Argyll and Bute is **10.3%**. The latest projections are 2022-based and have been compared with 2018-based projections to calculate this difference. Therefore, the 2022-based estimates project a reduced population decline compared to the 2018-based estimates by the year 2032.
- 3.6 It is important to note that population projections have limitations. Projections are based on a certain set of assumptions and are not forecasts. They can be influenced by social and economic factors. The reliability of projections decreases over time and projections tend to be less reliable in periods of change
- 3.7 The Argyll and Bute Settlement Project Support Officer works closely with the Settlement Officers in the Western Isles, Northwest Highland and Inverclyde, as well as colleagues from within Argyll and Bute Council, HIE, and the Scottish Government Population Team. This includes collaboration with the Private Sector Settlement Officer within Argyll and Bute Council's Housing team. These collaborations help to recognise the place-based barriers to population retention and attraction and support measures to address population decline as outlined in **Table 1**.
- 3.8 **Table 1** below outlines the actions undertaken by the Settlement Project Support Officer since the 17th November 2025. **Appendices 2 and 3** provide further detail on community engagement and Settlement Project enquiries, respectively.

Table 1: Update on Settlement Actions since November 2025			
Initiative	Aim	Progress to date – 2nd February 2026	Partnership Working
Supporting relocation	Direct provision of resources and information to individuals and families who get in contact with the Settlement Project inbox, in alignment with the Economic Strategy Action Plan: 2025-2028 focus on increasing the economically active population.	Since June 2025, the SPSO has responded to 10 enquiries regarding the relocation of at least 22 individuals to Argyll and Bute (See Appendix 3). Since April 2023, this work has directly supported 31 relocation enquiries involving at least 61 individuals.	ABC Housing Team
Supporting Population Retention / Youth Engagement	Work to deliver sessions with young people focused on identifying career opportunities within Argyll and Bute, in alignment with the Economic Strategy Action Plan: 2025-2028 focus on population retention.	Project planning is underway.	ABC DYW Team Skills Development Scotland
Housing	Collaborate with Housing on a consultation to track housing journeys, decisions and future appetites to live and work in Argyll and Bute and to understand barriers to relocating and remaining in Argyll and Bute. Collaborate with others to address housing issues, as outlined in the Economic Strategy Action Plan 2025-2028.	The consultation is complete. Findings may inform future SPSO actions. Assisting fellow officers with the development of targeted housing interventions.	ABC Housing Team

Table 1: Update on Settlement Actions since November 2025 (continued)			
Initiative	Aim	Progress to date – 2nd February 2026	Partnership Working
Information gathering and sharing	<p>Complete site visits across Argyll and Bute, speaking to locals and community organisations and other relevant stakeholders to understand barriers.</p> <p>Consultation of all individuals previously in contact with the Settlement Project inbox to understand how the Settlement Project inbox assisted individuals in their move and whether they received the appropriate information.</p>	<p>The SPSO has completed 3 site visits to Bute, Tiree and the Kintyre Peninsula, with plans to visit Coll and Rosneath in early 2026. Site visits have involved engagement with local council officers, community organisations, businesses and members of the public. The SPSO is gathering an evidence bank of qualitative information regarding barriers to relocating to and remaining in Argyll and Bute (See Appendix 2).</p> <p>Complete. Learnings were used to inform the proposed updates to abplace2b.scot and continue to inform Settlement Project responses.</p>	<p>Tiree Community Development Trust Hynish Trust ABC Employability Team InspiraAlba Lochgilphead CARS Project Officer Business Gateway Officers</p>

Table 1: Update on Settlement Actions since November 2025 (continued)

Initiative	Aim	Progress to date – 2 nd February 2026	Partnership Working
<p>Information gathering and sharing</p>	<p>Contribution to councillor and officer understanding of population issues facing Argyll and Bute.</p> <p>Contribution to Scottish Government understanding of population issues facing Argyll and Bute.</p>	<p>The Settlement Project Support Officer (SPSO) has redesigned Monthly Economic Briefings to include a population focus and to promote increased engagement and has contributed to 6 briefings.</p> <p>Completion of an Interim Monitoring and Evaluation Report for the Scottish Governments ADAP team covering activities progressed thus far and challenges incurred.</p> <p>Engagement with local government and third sector colleagues focused on repopulation and presentation at the 'Depopulation Knowledge Exchange Event' in September 2025. Presenting on Argyll and Bute's unique demographic situation, activities progressed and activities planned.</p>	<p>The Scottish Government</p> <p>Community Support Officers (CSO) across Scotland</p> <p>The Scottish Government HIE</p> <p>Scottish Rural Action</p> <p>The James Hutton Institute</p>
<p>Childcare</p>	<p>Collaborate to understand the effects of childcare provision to relocating to or remaining in Repopulation Zones and to address this issue to support relocation.</p>	<p>Analysing secondary research on the economic consequences of childcare provision.</p>	<p>Tiree Community Development Trust</p> <p>CALA</p> <p>HIE</p> <p>Kilfinan Community Council</p> <p>Argyll and Bute</p>

			Employability Partnership
Repopulation Partnership	Investigate the possibility of setting up and leading a Repopulation Partnership group.	Discussions ongoing with Inverclyde Council regarding their establishment of a Repopulation Partnership.	Inverclyde Council Community Settlement Officer
Strategic Relocation Communications	Development and implementation of updated relocation marketing on abplace2b.scot, aligning with the Economic Strategy Action Plan: 2025-2028 focus on achieving population sustainability.	Work ongoing.	ABC Communications and Web teams

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Data published by the Scottish Census 2022 has provided further insight into the demographic challenges facing Argyll and Bute, specifically an ageing and declining population. Moreover, compared to all other Scottish council areas, Argyll and Bute has the largest proportion of the population aged 65 and over (**27.2%**). Census findings show that between 2011 and 2022, Argyll and Bute’s population decreased by **2.4%**. The percentage difference between 2018-based and 2022-based projections for Argyll and Bute’s population in 2032 is **10.3%**, meaning the 2022-based estimates project a reduced population decline compared to the 2018-based estimates by the year 2032.
- 4.2 To help mitigate the projected decline in population by 2032, **Table 1** provides an update on the progress of the Settlement Project Support Officer Actions. A further update report will be provided to the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in December 2026.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – The overarching vision of Argyll and Bute Council’s current Economic Strategy, 2024-2034 is that Argyll and Bute’s economic success is based on a growing population.
- 5.2 Financial – A bid for £22,500 was submitted to the Scottish Government in early November 2025 for continued part funding for the SPSO role in 2026/27.
- 5.3 Legal - All appropriate legal implications will be taken into consideration.

- 5.4 HR – Funding from the Scottish Government has allowed the Settlement Project Support Officer post to be extended to the end of May 2026. An application for further funding from the Scottish Government was submitted in November 2025.
- 5.5 Customer Service – None.
- 5.6 Risk – None.
- 5.7 Climate Change – None.
- 5.8 Fairer Scotland Duty - The Fairer Scotland Duty, Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010, came into force in April 2018. The duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland, such as Argyll and Bute Council, to pay due regard to (actively consider) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome, caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions and how this has been implemented.
- 5.9 Equalities (protected characteristics) - All activities will comply with all Equal Opportunities/Fairer Scotland Duty policies and obligations.
- 5.10 Consumer Duty - None.
- 5.11 Island Communities - The activities of the Settlement Project Support Officer cover three islands; Tiree, Coll and Bute.
- 5.12 Children’s Rights and Wellbeing – None.

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

Councillor Jim Lynch, Policy Lead for Economic Development, Housing, Islands and Communities

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APPENDICES

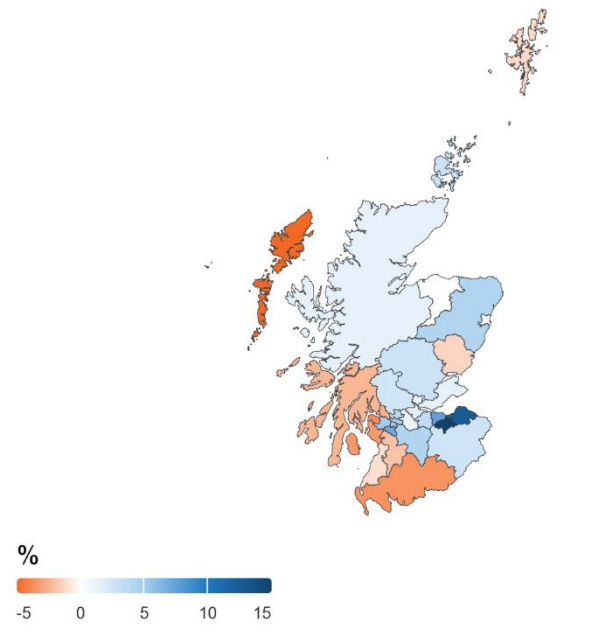
Appendix 1 - Scotland’s Census 2022- Rounded Population Estimates

Appendix 2: Barriers to Settlement from Community Engagement Visits thus far

Appendix 3: SPSO Relocation Enquiries

Appendix 1: Scotland's Census 2022- Rounded Population Estimates

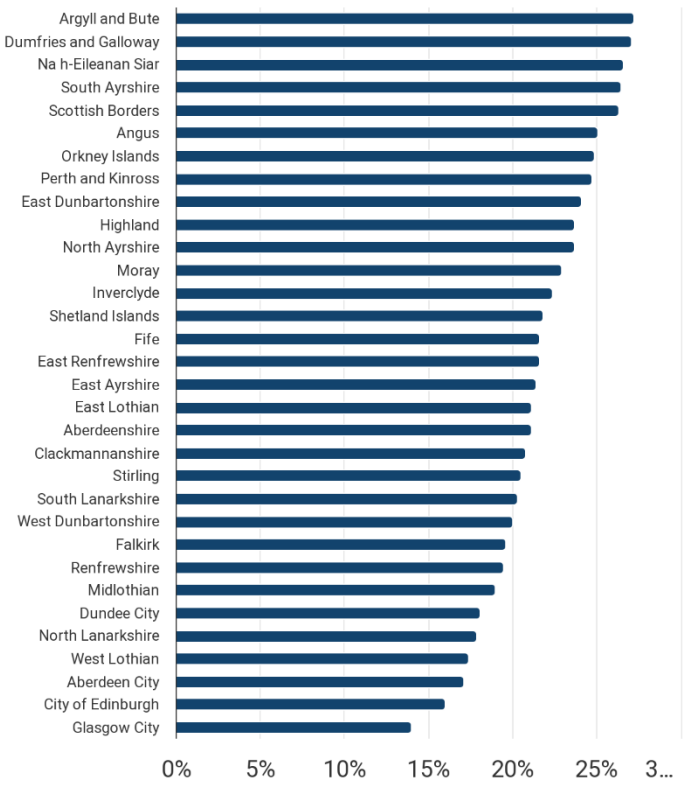
Population change, 2011 - 2022, council areas in Scotland



Population change, 2011 to 2022, council areas in Scotland.

Source: Scotland's Census 2022

The 65 and over age group as a proportion of the population, 2022, council areas in Scotland



The 65 and over age group as a proportion of the population, 2022, council areas in Scotland.

Source: Scotland's Census 2022

Appendix 2: Barriers to Settlement from Community Engagement Visits thus far

Table 2: Barriers to Settlement from Community Engagement Visits thus far				
Tiree	Coll	Bute	Kintyre	Rosneath
<p>The availability and affordability of housing. No pre-3 childcare. 46% of housing is not occupied all year round (Tiree Community Development Trust) Ferry booking system for residents impacts retention. Employment opportunities are underpinned by housing availability. Further education requires relocation. No vet service. Demand on community to participate resulting in volunteer burnout. Cost of living.</p>		<p>The affordability and availability of housing. Lack of permanent contracts, seasonality of employment/ high underemployment. Restricted elderly/ adapted housing. Need for family homes. The reliability of the ferry is impacting the retention of businesses and residents. Limited on-island support for businesses. Business premises for SMEs. Limited access to on-island training/ education/ skills development.</p>	<p>Limited affordable housing is a significant challenge for recruiting essential workers- HSCP/ Education. High proportion of Short Term Lets/ vacant homes. Significant number of individuals relocating during retirement, driving up property prices. Limited rental market. Unreliable flight, the ferry is a relief vessel that operates seasonally- Reduces tourism and subsequent economic impact on businesses. Lack of public transport provision allowing individuals to attend employment. Limited employment opportunities/ loss of industry. Lack of permanent contracts and seasonality of employment. Limited subject choice in schools. Lack of youth opportunities from age 14+. Limited wraparound childcare.</p>	

Appendix 3: SPSO Relocation Enquiries

Table 3: SPSO Relocation Enquiries			
Enquiry	Reason for Enquiry	Location	Economically Active
1.	Information on housing, broadband provision, moving companies, ferries, general information	Rothesay	Yes
2.	General information	Argyll and Bute	Yes
3.	Information on ferries	Bute	Unknown
4.	Information on housing, ferries, moving companies and storage facilities, and employment.	Bute	Yes
5.	Information on housing	Lochgilphead	Yes
6.	Information on housing, communities and employment	Argyll and Bute	Yes
7.	Information on housing, communities and employment	Argyll and Bute	Yes
8.	Information on housing	Dunoon	Yes
9.	Information on council tax	Helensburgh	Unknown
10.	Information on housing, schools, and local services	Dunoon	Yes