

John McLuckie 0:19

Hello and welcome to this episode of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Podcast. I'm John McLuckie, Partnerships Lead for Community Planning in Argyll and Bute and in this episode, we'll be talking about the role Scottish Fire and Rescue Service plays in community planning in Argyll and Bute. Joining me today is Kevin Rennie, Group Commander for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for Argyll and Bute and East and West Dunbartonshire. Kevin, welcome to the podcast.

Kevin Rennie 0:41

Hi there, good afternoon John, and thanks very much for the opportunity today.

John McLuckie 0:46

Thanks for joining me today. Can we start by asking you a bit about your role within Scottish Fire and Rescue Service?

Kevin Rennie 0:53



Hi there John. I'm currently a Group Commander within East and West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute. For me, as well as having an operational response role, I also have the references for training, operations and prevention within the area. We deputise as well for the Area Commander when required. I've got over 22 years' experience within Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and I've got experience of working within our local communities and also with our local communities, particularly in relation to fulfilling our local fire plans that we've got within our local authority areas. We've got priorities with them, such as domestic fire safety, unintentional harm, road safety. I'm relatively new to this area, just under a year within the area having previously worked within Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. However, I would say that this is probably one of the most scenic areas I've worked in and when I look at the location of some of our fire stations, I'm looking forward to getting out among some of our fire stations, particularly within the rural and remote areas.

I feel as if the CPP meetings are particularly important to myself, because they'll allow me to build up relationships, they'll allow me to make up key contacts and also allow

for greater sharing of information on issues that we feel are instances that will affect all members of the partnership, not just solely Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Again, I try to look at community plan in a simple way, how we can work together to improve communities, be that within housing, services, inequalities, reduction of risk and harm.

John McLuckie 2:11

Mm hmm, mm hmm, and you mentioned a bit about your previous experience in other areas. How did you come to be in your current role and how does that relate to community planning?

Kevin Rennie 2:21

It's more like a temporary promoted role I've got here within East and West Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute. Again, I have been involved in some of the community board meetings locally within different areas and now it's more involved in the Community Planning Partnership Management Committee meetings at Argyll and Bute, because I've took on a more senior level within the organisation just now.

John McLuckie 2:41

Great, great, in episode 1 of this podcast, we were delighted to welcome Joe McKay. I think Joe is still involved in Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in Argyll and Bute, and Joe certainly mentioned, particularly some of the more rural-based fire stations and enabling the community planning work to take place across the whole of Argyll and Bute, including these more difficult to get to places. Is that kind of part of your role as well within your new post?

Kevin Rennie 3:04

Aye, absolutely, and again for me, I think Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has played a key role within Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership over a number of years. Obviously, the previous Chair, he's really passionate about not only Scottish Fire and Rescue Service personnel and resources, but he's also really passionate about the

communities which we serve and the role that we play within it. Again, ranging from some of the most highly populated areas to some of the remote islands such as Coll and Tiree, and the part that we play in there and about the community resilience that we can help build up as well.

John McLuckie 3:29

Aye, absolutely. I think resilience is quite an important theme that runs through all the Community Planning Partnership's work. Is there anything you could say about how you think the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service involvement in Argyll and Bute communities has developed over recent years?

Kevin Rennie 3:44

I think when you look at a lot of the Community Planning Partnership, I think there's a greater understanding of the role that we all play within the Community Planning Partnership full agenda. Again, for us, we've got a key emphasis on prevention within the service and the role that it plays within communities. We've continually utilised a partnership approach, basically involving their key members.

I think it's also important to acknowledge the fact that within Argyll and Bute, we've got a substantial footprint for our personnel, for our services within our local communities and islands. Again, we've got a number of firefighters who live, travel, have their primary employment, as well as represent Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Many of them also have families within the local area as well.

I think that we are now embedded within the community basically as a trusted partner and we step up in times of need and we always love contributing to finding a shared solution. Again, you only need to look back at the examples of COVID, how we overcome some of the challenges that were faced locally. We also assisted delivering medication in some of the remote and rural locations. So, I think it has evolved over a number of years and I think it will continue to evolve as well.

John McLuckie 4:42

Just following on from that, you've given some examples of operations during COVID and supporting communities and that kind of thing. How do you think the work of

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service contributes to the community planning priorities and in the new Outcomes Improvement Plan? So that's transport infrastructure, housing and community well-being. Are there any examples that you can give of that?

Kevin Rennie 5:00

Aye John, I'm going to try to limit myself here for some of the talking I'm doing relating to examples, but again for me, when you look at the three main priorities that we've got within Argyll and Bute, I think there are a lot of strands underneath as well that actually feed into the three priorities that we've got. However, it feels as if collaborative working and innovative thinking is a key to be more effective within our communities, whether or not that's on some of our islands or highly populated areas. For us, some of the examples I look at is we now have fire stations, which also accommodate Scottish Ambulance Service, Police Scotland and Coastguard colleagues. Some of our stations have often been put into good community use, such as providing a space to facilitate parole board hearings, bringing hubs and facilities into communities.

When I look at maybe like the transport and infrastructure, we've set up a series of road safety hubs, a collaborative approach basically between Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, some of our partner agencies and the Institute of Advanced Motorists to enhance driving skills, reduce road collisions, provide advice to drivers of all ages and experience, not just young drivers, but all ages and experience.

Again, these inputs are in Oban, Dunoon, Campbeltown. We also look at delivering some of these on our partner agency organisation sites as well, such as the joint campus at Lochgilphead, so we've utilised other areas as well to deliver these. I've got things like the Good Egg Initiative, which is another road safety programme, which focuses on child car seat safety as well, young driver education and wider community safety.

When I look at the next priority of housing, again for us, probably one of the biggest things we've ever done was introduce home fire safety visits. We've been completing these for a number of years, and when you look at statistics over the last ten years, we've actually completed over half a million home fire safety visits throughout Scotland nationally, which again, it shows when you consider the population of Scotland, the number of households that we've actually been in with fire safety advice and information.

We've got a fire safety team as well. Again they provide guidance, advice, information, and carry out audits within non-domestic premises within Argyll and Bute, ensuring

basically services such as schools, care services, hospitals, comply with fire legislation as well. They're also involved in the licensing of short-term let premises.

When I look at maybe a couple of examples in relation to wellbeing, again there's a lot of information I've got for wellbeing. Probably some of the key examples here is through like the MCR pathways mentors, as part of our responsibility for corporate parenting. We've got a number of personnel within the area that basically support the wellbeing of care experienced young persons within the community, mentoring, developing, offering advice and support, and being there just as a further person for them to go to for some advice, information that they require. We've also got dedicated youth volunteer schemes, these are delivered at our local stations, they aim to develop our youth to be learning practical skills in a supportive environment, skills such as CPR, communication skills, team building. Helensburgh, Tobermory and Campbeltown are just a couple of stations with examples in the areas that we've got YVS schemes in. CPR awareness inputs as well, again, it's a fantastic life skill to be learnt, not only for the young, but anybody within the community, again, allowing anybody within the community to deal with a cardiac emergency. I think it's second to none. We've also got things like the Partnership Approach to Water Safety, the PAWS initiative. That basically originated within the Argyll and Bute area, it's now a multi-agency approach to improving water safety, not only within our community, but throughout Scotland as well now. So that's good practise that's come out this area that's actually been took Scotland-wide. Many of our local stations as well, I don't if you're aware, but they also have beehives situated within many of the grounds.

John McLuckie 8:12

I have, I have seen some photos, yeah, yeah.

Kevin Rennie 8:57

They're not only there just to produce honey that we'll then utilise for charitable donations and funding for firefighters charity and for the local community, but they're also to encourage some of the local school children in, to become involved and visit these stations, understand about nature, about the local environment and how even the simplest actions can contribute to their future.

A few years back as well, we introduced one of the roles of a Local Area Liaison Officer

as well within the service. Again, they'll sit at roughly Watch Commander level in here and their role is to work closer and in partnership with Local Authority partners, but most importantly community groups.

Again, these officers sit in various working groups, sharing key information with partners, whilst leading in the development of initiatives to enhance safety, wellbeing, and targeting inequalities. So, they'll sit on the PAWS water safety groups and they'll sit on the likes of the MARAC (*note: Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference*) groups as well, just sharing that key information. They're also the lead and the key focal points for what we introduced as Community Action Teams. Again, that's a mixture of both uniform and non-uniform colleagues, and their role is to work within the community to deliver initiatives such as home safety, road safety, water safety, school education, all trying to foster a collaborative approach to addressing key issues within the community.

There's a lot of stuff that we do within the fire and rescue service that I don't think a lot of people know about out there in the wider community.

John McLuckie 9:27

Really interesting and so many of these aspects tie into the three priorities as you mentioned there. I mean there's a lot in there about community assets, services, facilities and activities. You talked about the home safety visits regarding housing, road safety in terms of transport infrastructure and I think there's a lot more.

One other area that the Community Planning Partnership looks at as well is around climate change, and you mentioned there are some environmental tie-ins with that, like the beekeeping, for example.

Something that's come up, and I think your colleagues who attend the Area Community Planning Groups have probably talked about this as well and they've been giving updates at these groups, and that's around the area of wildfires, and I know that's been increasing over the past years. Is there anything you can say in terms of the work you do in wildfire and wildfire prevention?

Kevin Rennie 10:16

Aye, I think for us, and you can probably see throughout Scotland, throughout the UK, there's been a massive increase in the number and effect of wildfires that we've seen over a number of years. I think for us locally, particularly within East and West

Dunbartonshire and Argyll and Bute, there's been a massive financial investment put on the wildfire equipment, wildfire training and wildfire resources that we're going to have available for us locally.

So, there has been that investment made for us within Argyll and Bute and also East and West Dunbartonshire, just to make sure that we are prepared and on the foot front basically for our wildfires, because over the next few weeks we will be coming into what's normally traditional wildfire season as we move forward.

John McLuckie 10:48

Really interesting and something that definitely will be in our local Area Community Planning Groups. It's formed discussion before and I'm sure it will continue to, but I appreciate that update on how you're tackling that area.

I think as well, are you able to give a bit more information, for example, on how people can find out more about how you work in the community? I'm thinking things like how could people find out about things like MCR pathways or PAWS or the advanced driving programmes that are put on.

Kevin Rennie 11:16

Again, for us, we've got a lot of information available on our website, but I would urge people in the first instance to contact their local stations, and they'll put them out to speak to probably the right people at the right place to talk about them. We've got people basically set up within the local area who take on the responsibility for certain key tasks. We've actually set them up into separate reference holders for maybe road safety, for home safety, for non-domestic fire safety, so just to make sure they get put onto the right individuals. But for us, if we're at any of the Community Planning Partnership meetings, if we're having any station open days, we're always more than willing to talk to anybody about fire, fire safety, how to reduce the risk of harm. Again, I think a lot of us could talk all day about it and we enjoy talking all day about it as well.

McLuckie, John 11:54

Thanks very much. And I guess, just looking ahead a little bit, how do you think the role

that Scottish Fire and Rescue Service plays in community planning will develop into the future? What do you think that will look like?

Kevin Rennie 12:05

I think even for myself, I've seen probably the role of community planning evolve over the last few years. I think it's important to continue and highlight the role of collective decision making and how important it can be to everyone out there. I think amongst us all community planning partners, there's a realisation that joint working practises actually work.

Again for us, I've tried to use it. Quite an easy example, we utilise it for operational response, for multi-agency response, it works and resolves instances. I think when you transfer that to the community, you actually see how well it works within the community, utilising other partners, other agencies that bring their skills, their skill sets to the table basically and how effective it actually can be.

I think there's also a greater understanding of the role that different organisations play within the Community Planning Partnership. I think we've got the involvement at a lot of the local meetings and again for me new coming into the area, a lot of the Community Planning Partnership board meetings allow me the opportunity to join the dots, make the connections, basically with some of our partners as well, and who I can actually tie into and who I actually need to go to for certain things and for certain information.

Also, I think there's a change in requirement, what's actually required for us within our communities, again you're talking about wildfires there, but I think we're going to see further changes in society and also current challenges and also future challenges.

The wildfire investment is one probably that we've addressed there and for us, I think we've also seen a 2.4 million pound investment for lightweight vehicles as well, for our islands and some of our remote stations as well. So again, it's up to us then to look at what is the challenges we're going to face in future planning for somewhere down the line.

As an organisation as well, I think as a service, we've just put out our three-year strategy there for 2025 to 28 over the next three years, and within it, again, we've got five strategic objectives, but one's about safer communities through prevention, and I think for me, that highlights the fact that there's a further emphasis on all of our personnel to make sure there's a commitment to community planning partnership working, not just nationally, but particularly within some of our local areas as well, just to make sure we've got that joined up approach locally.

John McLuckie 13:55

Aye, aye, absolutely, and I think as well, you mentioned the word prevention there quite a lot. Prevention comes up in a lot of our other partners' work and the work that they do and how they collaborate with others within the community planning settings.

Kevin Rennie 14:09

The Community Empowerment Act obviously placed a statute of requirement on the public sector organisations. However, within Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, we've seen the benefits of the joined up approach to prevention. Again for us, this has resulted in significantly reducing the number of house fire-related incidents across Scotland. I don't know if you're aware, but we're now probably sitting at house fire incidents now at a record low for us, from the inception of Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

But through joint working and working with the Community Planning Partnership, we want to keep them at that record low level as well. Again for me, I feel fortunate that I've been able to represent the Fire and Rescue Service at local meetings, not just local community board meetings. However, I've also attended the Community Planning Partnership Management Committee meeting held at Arrochar at the end of December there. Again, that allowed me to start putting faces to names as well that I've actually seen on some of your information.

John, can I just use this last point as an opportunity to inform your listeners that Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is currently recruiting within Argyll and Bute, within our on-call and volunteer stations. If anyone is listening that requires any more information, please contact your local fire station or log into our website at firescotland.gov.uk.

McLuckie, John 15:12

Really interesting and a lot of good pointers there for folk that want to find out more information, but also I guess for other community planning partners to know a bit more about the extensive range of work that Scottish Fire and Rescue Service does, and how that all feeds into community planning.

Kevin, thanks very much for joining me for this episode of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Podcast. Thank you.

Kevin Rennie 15:32

John, thanks for your time this afternoon, thanks.