ARGYLL & BUTE COUNCIL

Housing Need & Demand Assessment Technical Supporting Paper 06

Core Output 1: Key Drivers of the Local Housing Market - Demographic Trends

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 To achieve “robust and credible” status, a Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) must satisfy the requirements of the Centre for Housing Market Analysis guidance (2020 and 2026). This should include detailed analysis of key housing market drivers such as household formation, population and migration trends; and should propose a set of future scenarios that will be used to run the online HNDA Tool. This will ultimately provide the calculation for new build requirements for additional affordable housing over a 5 and 10 year period.

1.2 This paper focuses on the past, current and future demographic trends for Argyll and Bute, and its constituent housing market areas; and proposes a set of variant scenarios for inputting to the HNDA Tool. The report has been prepared in accordance with Scottish Government guidance and data has been compiled from key sources including the National Records of Scotland’s mid-year estimates, sub-area population and household projections published in 2024, and other NRS reports, as well as the 2022 Census. Where appropriate, this report highlights comparisons between national and local trends, with particular attention being paid to Argyll and Bute’s nine functional Housing Market Areas (see HNDA Technical Supporting Paper 1).

1.3 The report comprises four key sections:

Section 1: Recent demographic trends and current household profiles (this includes population change due to natural change – births and deaths – and net migration; change by age and by ethnicity; and household change by size);
Section 2: Population and Household Projections (variant scenarios);
Section 3: Notes on special factors (Military population; Covid-19 and Brexit) and workforce housing research
Section 4: Conclusions and implications for the HNDA and LHS

1.4 The aim of this technical supporting paper is to provide a clear, evidence-based understanding of key demographic factors and how these influence the local housing market(s); the data and scenarios that will be used to run the CHMA’s HNDA Tool calculations; and the key findings that can be used to inform the Local Housing Strategy and the Local Development Plan(s).

1.5 The paper clearly outlines the methodology and all assumptions and judgements underpinning the variant scenarios; and notes any technical issues regarding data quality and analysis in a fully reasoned and transparent manner.

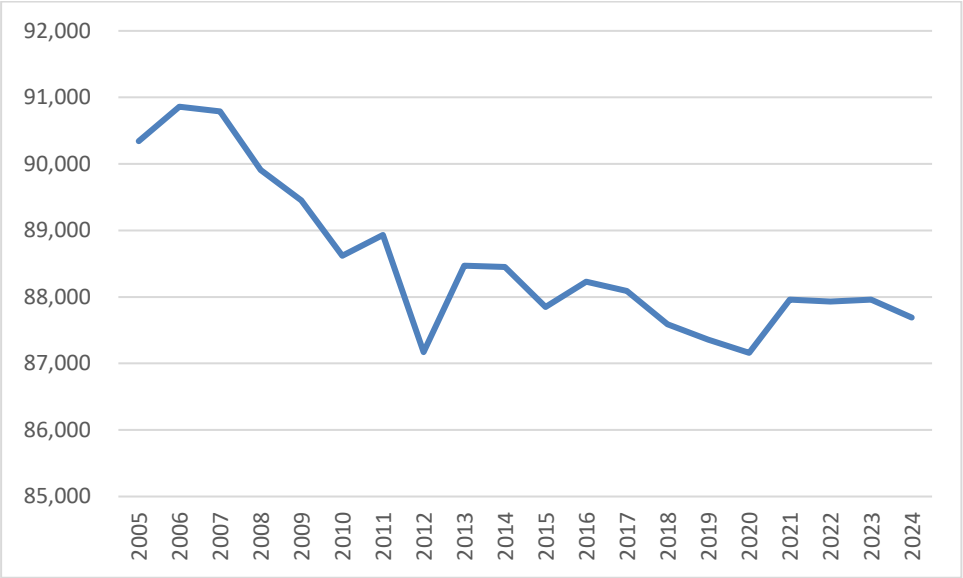
2.0 An overview of Demographic Trends in Argyll & Bute.

2.1 Population Trends

Between 2005 and 2024, there has been a steady decline in the population of Argyll and Bute. This is in contrast to the overall national trend which saw a steady increase over the same period. In 2024, the population of Argyll and Bute was estimated at 87,690. This is a decrease of 2.6% from 90,354 in 2005, compared to an increase of 8.5% for Scotland during that time.

However, this figure is a reduction on population loss from the 6.3% reduction reported between 2000 and 2020, in the previous HNDA. Data also suggests that the rate of population loss is reducing in the most recent years, with only a 0.3% reduction between 2021 and 2024.

Figure 2.1 - Population of Argyll and Bute, 2005 - 2024



Source: NRS Mid-Year Population Estimates (August 2025)

Figure 2.2 below shows the population of Argyll and Bute broken down across the nine Housing Market Areas in 2015 and 2024. Over this period of time, four of the nine HMAs showed a population decline. Helensburgh and Lomond, Islay Jura & Colonsay, Lorn and Mull and Iona HMAs showed an increase in population. This differs somewhat from the last HNDA analysis when all but one of the nine HMAs saw a decrease in population in a similar time period.

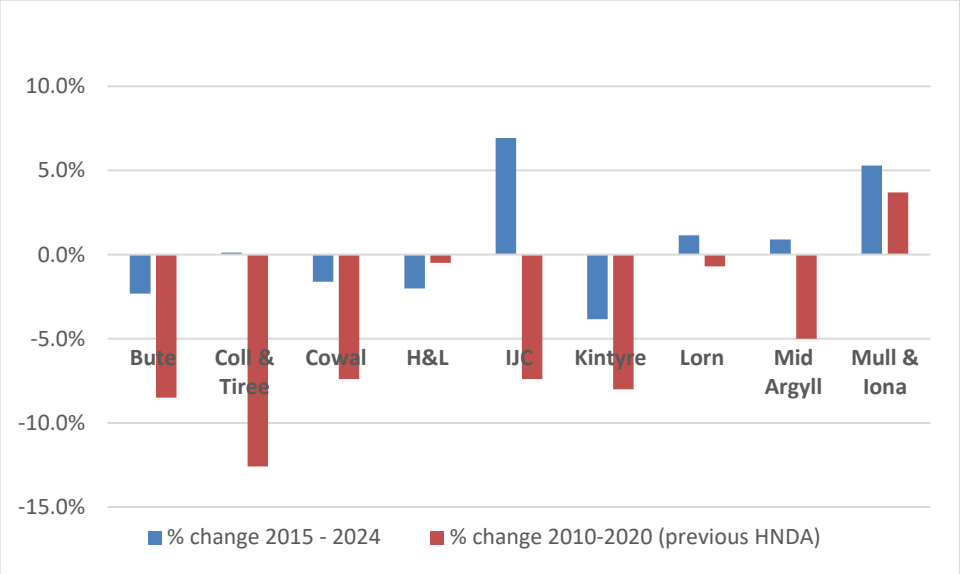
Figure 2.2: Population Trends by HMA, 2015-2024

HMA	Bute	Coll & Tiree	Cowal	H&L	IJC	Kintyre	Lorn	Mid Argyll	Mull & Iona
2015	6,143	847	14,386	26,091	3,388	7,662	16,224	9,320	3,069
2024	6,044	832	14,203	26,261	3,660	7,387	16,759	9,323	3,221
% change	-1.6%	-1.7%	-1.3%	0.7%	8.0%	-3.6%	3.3%	0%	5.0%
% change 2010-2020 (previous HNDA)	-8.5%	-12.6%	-7.4%	-0.5%	-7.4%	-8.0%	-0.7%	-5.0%	3.7%

Source: NRS re-based small area population estimates 2010 to 2022

The differing rates of population change in each HMA in this and the previous HNDA is illustrated in the table below. Caution should be taken in the figures for HMAs with small populations, such as Coll and Tiree, however there is an overall trend of population decline slowing or, in some cases, reversing.

Figure 2.3: **Comparative rates of population change 2010/20 and 2015/24**

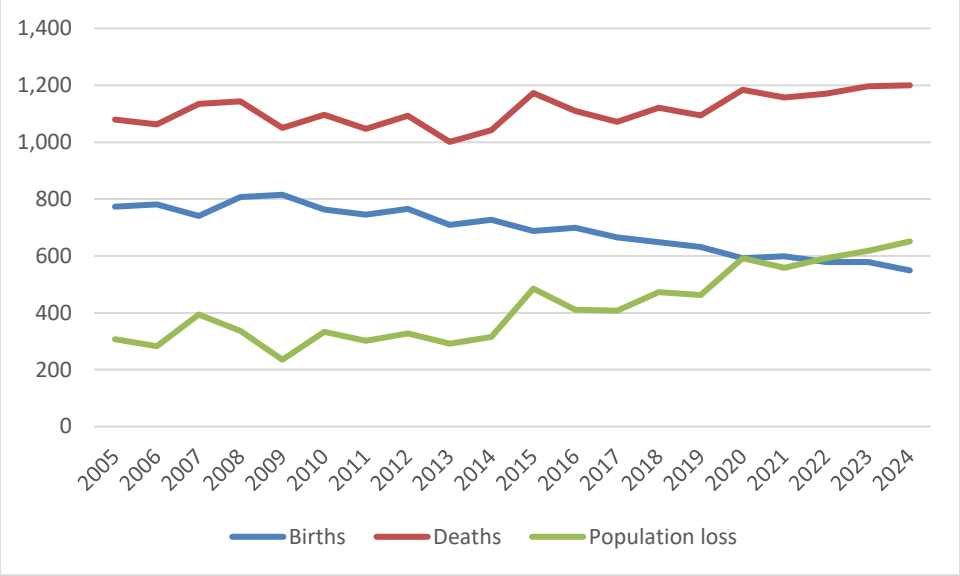


Source: NRS re-based small area population estimates 2010 to 2022

2.2 Components of Population Change

These changes in population are driven by two key components: natural change (the difference between the number of births and deaths) and the impact of net migration in or out of the area. Natural change accounts for a steady annual loss since 2005. The number of deaths recorded in 2024 was 651 higher than the number of recorded births as illustrated in Figure 2.4 below. The figure also illustrates how these figures combine to give a rising trend in net population loss by natural change.

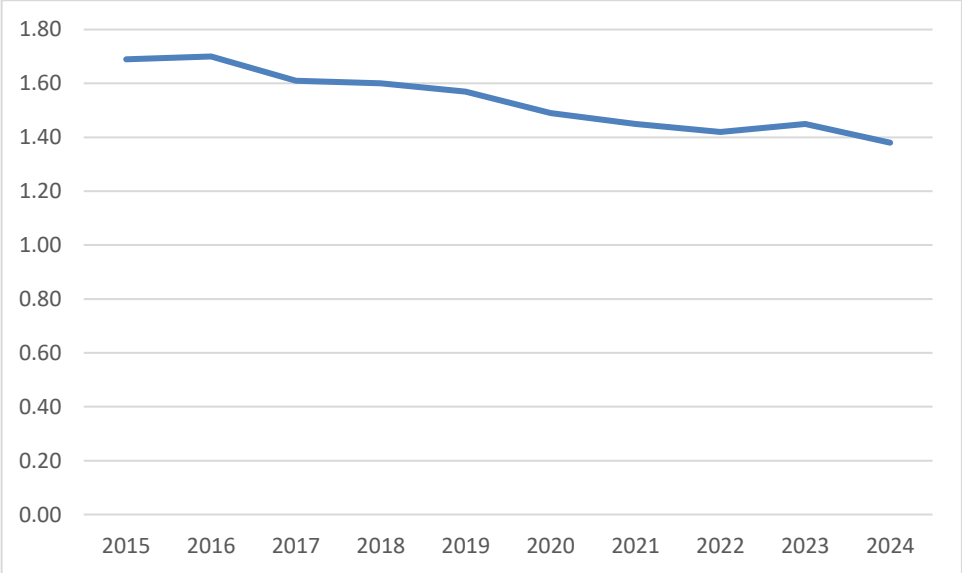
Figure 2.4: Birth and Death rates 2005 to 2024



Source: NRS Births/Deaths time series, August 2025.

Fertility rates in Argyll and Bute have consistently declined in recent years. The figure below shows the fertility rate consistent decline to a rate in 2024 of 1.38 (2.01 is the rate required to achieve natural population replacement). Contributing to the reduced number of births, it works with increasing deaths to create the decline in natural population change.

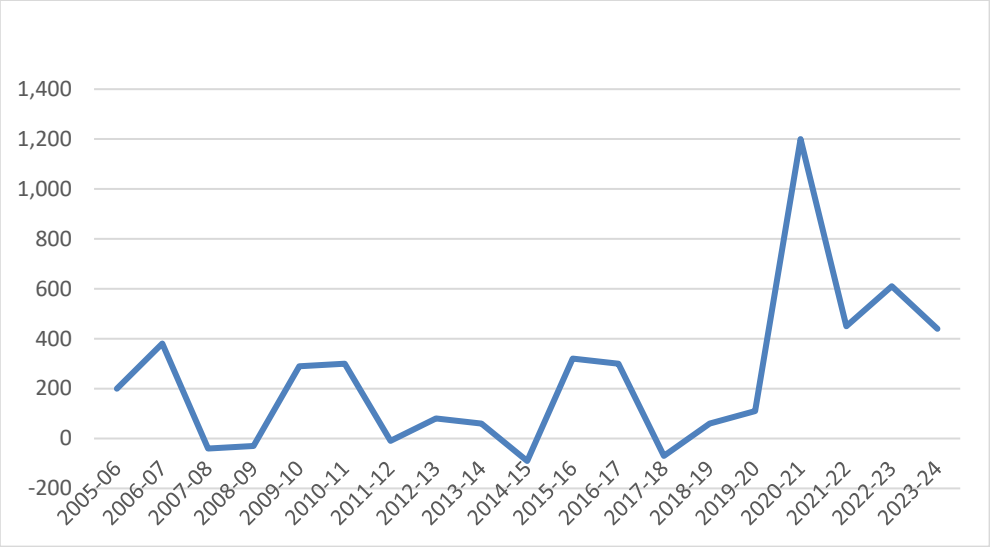
Figure 2.5: Fertility rates in Argyll & Bute, 2015 to 2024



Source: NRS births time series, August 2025

Figure 2.6 below shows the net migration for Argyll and Bute since 2005/6. The graph shows a wide fluctuation year on year, with significant spikes of in and out migration in particular years. However, since 2021, migration levels have still fluctuated but within a range higher than at any time since 2005.

Figure 2.6: Net Migration for Argyll & Bute, 2005 - 2024



Source: NRS Statistics, 2025

2.3 Population Change by Age

Figure 2.7 shows the population of Argyll and Bute by HMA in 2024 by age cohort. As a comparison, Figure 2.8 shows the percentage change in these figures since 2015.

Figure 2.7: Population by age cohort, 2024

Age Band	0 - 15	16 - 24	25 - 64	65 - 84	85+
Bute	12.9%	6.8%	46.1%	30.1%	4.1%
Coll and Tiree	14.9%	7.0%	49.4%	25.8%	2.9%
Cowal	12.8%	6.9%	47.9%	28.5%	4.0%
Helensburgh & Lomond	13.8%	10.7%	50.3%	22.2%	3.0%
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	14.0%	7.5%	50.9%	24.7%	3.0%
Kintyre	14.1%	7.4%	49.5%	25.4%	3.6%
Lorn	15.0%	8.0%	52.0%	22.0%	3.0%
Mid Argyll	13.9%	8.0%	50.9%	24.1%	3.0%
Mull & Iona	14.7%	6.4%	50.6%	25.6%	2.7%
Argyll and Bute	13.9%	8.4%	50.0%	24.5%	3.3%
Scotland	16.20%	10.70%	52.60%	18.10%	2.40%

Source: NRS Small Area Population Estimates, February 2026

These figures illustrate that, by the measure of the NRS 2024 mid-year estimates, the Argyll and Bute population profile shows markedly higher percentages of the population over 65 years than the Scottish average.

Figure 2.8: percentage change per age cohort, 2015 – 2024

% change 2015 - 2024	0 - 15	16 - 24	25 - 64	65 - 85	85+
Bute	3.7%	-21.2%	-6.7%	9.8%	9.2%
Coll & Tiree	-8.8%	9.4%	-9.3%	25.0%	-27.3%
Cowal	-5.5%	-20.5%	-3.1%	7.8%	21.1%
Helensburgh & Lomond	-5.7%	-10.1%	-2.3%	18.7%	14.0%
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	14.6%	-4.5%	7.7%	8.9%	13.4%
Kintyre	-2.3%	-26.0%	-3.7%	4.2%	2.7%
Lorn	5.3%	-22.0%	1.6%	17.2%	27.3%
Mid Argyll	-2.1%	2.2%	-4.9%	9.1%	34.0%
Mull & Iona	5.1%	15.7%	-4.1%	24.8%	8.9%
Argyll & Bute Total	-1.2%	-14.2%	-2.1%	12.9%	16.8%

Source: NRS Small Area Population Estimates (rebased) August 2025 and Feb 2026

While care should be taken interpreting data in small populations, both Mull & Iona, and Coll & Tiree HMAs show some reversal of trends in the previous HNDA in that there is a slight increase in the population in the 16-24 year cohort. Islay, Jura & Colonsay HMA shows an increase in both 25-64 and 0-15 age bands, the only HMA displaying such a trend. Lorn shows a slight increase in the 25 – 64 age band. All other HMAs show a reduction in working age population.

Increases in numbers are shown in the 65 – 85 years and 85+ year bands in all HMAs bar Coll & Tiree. Taken together, the figures are indicative of an ageing population profile.

2.4 Population by Ethnicity

Figure 2.9 shows the population of Argyll and Bute by country of birth at the 2001, 2011 and 2022 census. There was a 5.5% decrease in the proportion of people living in Argyll and Bute who were born in Scotland, a 2.5% increase of those born in England and a 3% increase in EU member countries. There was also a marginal increase in the proportion of people born outside Europe.

Figure 2.9: 2001/2011/2022 populations, Argyll & Bute, by country of birth (%)

Country of Birth	2001	2011	2022
Scotland	78.1%	76.1%	72.6%
England	17.0%	17.7%	19.5%
Northern Ireland	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
Wales	0.6%	0.6%	0.7%
Republic of Ireland	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
EU member	n/a	1.0%	3.0%
Other Europe	1.4%	1.0%	0.0%
Other countries	2.1%	2.5%	3.0%

Source: Census 2022

Figure 2.10 below shows the ethnicity profile of Argyll and Bute based on the 2022 census.

Figure 2.10: Population of Argyll & Bute by ethnicity

All People	85970
White: White Scottish	74.0%
White: Other White British	19.4%
White: White Irish	1.0%
White: Gypsy/ Traveller	0.1%
White: White Polish	0.8%
Other White	2.4%
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	0.8%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British: Total	0.9%
African: Total	0.2%
Caribbean or Black: Total	0.1%
Other ethnic groups: Total	0.4%

Source: 2022 Census returns

2.5 Household Trends

In 2024, there were an estimated 42,831 households in Argyll and Bute, an increase of 4.8% since 2014. This steady annual increase reflects the national trend in the last decade, albeit at a much slower rate (households in Scotland increased by 6.1% over the same period). However, the 4.8% increase over this 10 year period can be compared to a 2.8% increase over the 10 year reporting period (2008-2018) in the previous HNDA, suggesting that the rate of new household formation is accelerating. This is in contrast to the national trend, which shows an almost unchanged rate of increase (6.1% compared to 6% previously) in household numbers.

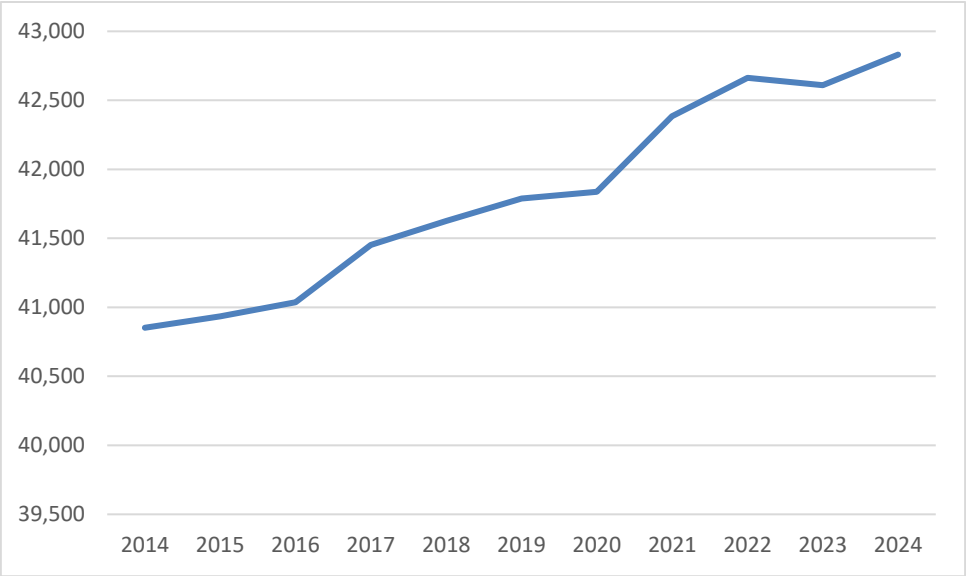
Figure 2.11: Changes in household numbers, 2014 to 2024

	2014	2024	% change
Household numbers Scotland	2,405,752	2,552,388	6.10%
Household numbers Argyll & Bute	40,852	42,831	4.80%

Source: NRS "Household and dwellings in Scotland, 2024"

The overall trend for Argyll and Bute is illustrated clearly in the following graph.

Figure 2.12: Household numbers, Argyll & Bute 2014 - 2024



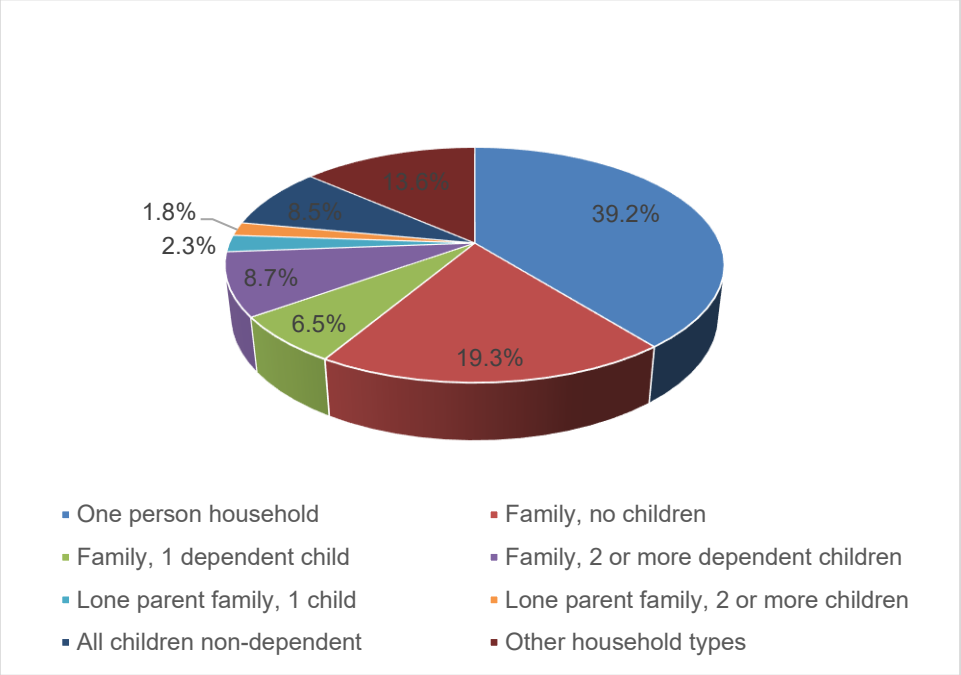
Source: NRS "Household and dwellings in Scotland, 2024"

This increase in the number of households at a time when the overall population is in steady decline can be accounted for by the continuing trend towards smaller households and in particular more single-person households.

2.6 Household Composition

Household composition data is available from National Census returns, and changes over a 10 year period can be seen by comparing the 2011 and 2022 census returns. The current household composition, as recorded in the 2022 census, is shown in the chart below.

Figure 2.13: Household profile in Argyll and Bute 2021



Source; Scotland Census 2022

There are some differences from the household composition data between 2011 and 2022. Most notably, there is an increase in the numbers and percentages of one-person households, and a decrease in households with dependent children.

Figure 2.14: Changes in Household Composition in Argyll and Bute

	2011 census	2022 census	Change	% change within category
One person household	14,273	16,443	2,170	15.2%
Family, all aged over 66	4,023	4,808	785	19.5%
Family, no children	7,745	8,093	348	4.5%
Family, 1 dependent child	2,698	2,468	-230	-8.5%
Family, 2 or more dependent children	3,877	3,433	-444	-11.5%
Family, children non-dependent	2,278	2,241	-37	-1.6%
Lone parent family, 1 child	1,315	968	-347	-26.4%
Lone parent family, 2 or more children	1,008	775	-233	-23.1%
Lone parent, children non-dependent	1,302	1,318	16	1.2%
Other household types	1,606	1,347	-259	-16.1%

Source: Scotland Census 2011 and 2022

Within the census data each category can be split further. The increase of 2,170 in the number of one-person households includes an increase of 1,146 (17.3%) in one person households aged 66 and over. There has been a 19.5% increase in one-family households over 66 years and a 4.5% increase

in families with no children, but a decrease in families with one, two or more children. Similarly, lone parent families have also decreased by 564 (or 15.6%) .

The NRS also provides an updated estimate for the number and percentage of households occupying dwellings in Scotland and local Council areas, as of September 2024 (published June 2025), and those in receipt of the single adult discount. As summarised in the following table, this indicates that over a third (35.3%) of occupied dwellings in Argyll and Bute comprised single adults compared to 38.5% in Scotland. For Argyll and Bute this is a rise of 3% from that reported in the previous HNDA. (*Note. however, that this is a proxy estimate only as the discount is available not only to adults living alone, but also to single adults with children or households which may contain other adults who are exempt from Council tax*.)

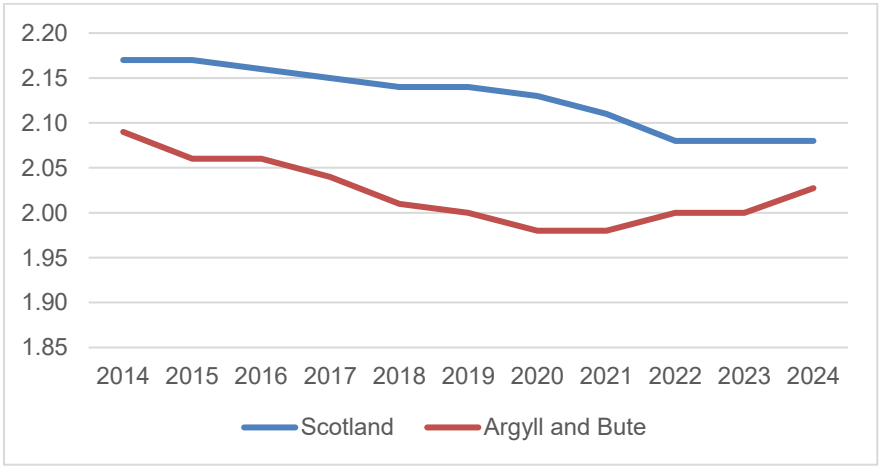
Figure 2.15: Occupied and vacant properties, Argyll and Bute September 2024

	Total number of dwellings	Occupied dwellings	Vacant dwellings	Dwellings with a single adult discount	Vacant dwellings %	Dwellings with a single adult discount %
Scotland	2,740,973	2,628,050	91,317	1,054,874	3.3	38.5
Argyll and Bute	49,697	43,889	2,847	17,543	5.7	35.3

Source: NRS Household and Dwellings in Scotland, 2024

The average household size for Argyll and Bute was estimated to be 2.03 persons in 2024, a decrease of 3.0% over the previous decade. The percentage decrease in the 10 year period in the previous HNDA was 6.3%. The average household size has also increased slightly between 2021 and 2024, in contrast to a national trend of continued decline. However, over the ten year period, the pattern is still one of overall decrease.

Figure 2.16: Trend in Average Household Size in Argyll and Bute, 2014 - 2024



Source: NRS Household and Dwellings in Scotland, 2024

Figure 2.17: Average Household Size, 2014 and 2024

AREA	2014	2024	Change (%)
Scotland	2.17	2.08	-4.2
Argyll and Bute	2.09	2.03	**-3.0**

Source: NRS Household and Dwellings in Scotland, 2024

2.7 Population by Gender

Considering the gender of the Argyll and Bute population, estimates derived from the NRS 2022-based projections indicate a fairly balanced 50/50 split between males and females, which remains consistent over time.

Figure 2.18: Argyll and Bute Population by Gender 2011-2030

	2011		2021		2031	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	43,830	49.3%	43811	49.8%	43,640	49.9%
Female	45,100	50.7%	44189	50.2%	43,741	50.1%
Total	88,930	100%	88,000	100%	87,381	100%

Source: NRS Rebased small area data and Population Projections, 2025

This projection is not yet available at HMA level, but similar trends are expected across the HMAs.

2.8 Island Populations

Of the nine Housing Market Areas in Argyll and Bute, four are island based. The importance of housing to island communities as a means to help support sustainability of the economy and population is recognised in the 2026 Islands Action Plan published by the Scottish Government which has population retention and attraction at its heart, and states the following aim; “To increase the availability of affordable, suitable homes on islands, supporting economic growth, year-round communities, essential services and long-term population sustainability” and “well-planned housing provision is a foundation for our objective to promote population retention and attraction on Scotland’s islands.”

The trends in islands demography can be shown both by analysing mid-year estimates over a time period, or by comparison of the 2011 and 2022 census returns, which can be broken down to datazone level and then collected into HMAs.

Mid-year estimates, looking at a 10 year period from 2015 to 2024, suggest that the demographic change in the island HMAs broadly follow the patterns for the local authority area as a whole, although with a lower level of percentage decline in the 16-24 age group, and a slightly higher loss of the working age 24 – 64 cohort.

Figure 2.19; changes in Island HMA age groups, 2015 to 2024

% change 2015 - 2024	0 - 15	16 - 24	25- 64	65 - 85	85+
Bute	3.7%	-21.2%	-6.7%	9.8%	9.2%
Coll & Tiree	-8.8%	9.4%	-9.3%	25.0%	-27.3%
IJC	14.6%	-4.5%	7.7%	8.9%	13.4%
Mull & Iona	5.1%	15.7%	-4.1%	24.8%	8.9%
Argyll & Bute average	-1.2%	-14.2%	-2.1%	12.9%	16.8%
Islands average	5.5%	-9.6%	-2.7%	11.8%	6.8%

Source: NRS Small Area Population Estimates (rebased) August 2025

Within the NRS small area population estimates an interesting variation can be seen between the Atlantic island HMAs of Coll & Tiree, Islay Jura & Colonsay and Mull & Iona, and the Clyde island of Bute. On Bute, there is a markedly increased loss of the working age cohorts of 16-24 years and 25-64 years than is shown in either the Atlantic Islands, Island HMAs as a whole or indeed Argyll & Bute as a whole. This perhaps reflects the influence of the Greater Glasgow conurbation on the Bute population where relatively easier access to the jobs and housing markets in that area exist. The Atlantic Islands show a loss of the working age populations that is less than the Council area as a whole, perhaps reflecting the lack of similar opportunities in these particular HMAs.

Figure 2.20: Change in age groups by island type HMA 2015 - 2024

Age band	0 - 15	16- 24	25- 64	65 - 85	85+
Bute	3.7%	-21.2%	-6.7%	9.8%	9.2%
Atlantic Islands	7.4%	3.9%	0.5%	16.9%	5.3%
All Islands	5.5%	-9.6%	-2.7%	11.8%	6.8%
Argyll & Bute	-1.2%	-14.2%	-2.1%	12.9%	16.8%

Source: NRS Small Area Population Estimates (rebased) August 2025

Census returns from the ten-year 2011 to 2022 periods again show a broadly similar pattern between island HMAs and the wider local authority area, albeit with increased levels of loss of the 16 to 24 year old cohort.

Figure 2.21: Changes in Island HMA age groups, 2011 - 2022

% change 2011- 2022	0 to 15	16 to 24	25 to 64	65 to 84	85+
Bute	-16.1%	-36.3%	-11.3%	16.8%	19.7%
Coll & Tiree	-0.7%	-26.9%	1.3%	22.2%	-18.2%
IJC	-8.7%	-19.4%	-2.7%	22.1%	7.1%
Mull & Iona	7.8%	-10.7%	2.9%	37.3%	-1.2%
Argyll & Bute average	-17.2%	-23.0%	-5.3%	21.2%	19.5%
Island average	-7.7%	-26.7%	-5.0%	22.2%	10.7%

Source: Scottish Census 2011 and 2022

Given the small population size of some of the island HMAs (Coll and Tiree in particular) caution should be used when interpreting their individual results. However, by the measure of 2011/22 Census returns, island HMAs show a higher than average (for the Council area) loss of population in the 16 to 24 age cohort, with this figure being notably high in the Bute HMA. For Bute HMA alone, this is also reflected in the figures from the mid-year population estimates.

3.0 Population and Household Projections (variant scenarios)

3.1 National Records of Scotland (NRS) publish regular population projections for Council areas, and the most recent report was the Population Projections for Scottish Areas (2022-based) issued in January 2025. In May 2026, NRS and Improvement Services also published draft population projections for areas smaller than individual Council areas, as defined by local authorities. Through an internal working group, the Council were able to feed back to the Improvement Service details of known growth and expansion plans and policies that would affect the demographics of specific HMAs. This allowed the Improvement Service to then further refine their HMA projections in line with the specific local knowledge of Council teams. These refined figures provide a baseline for principal HMA level projections in addition to the robust nationally produced principal projections.

3.2 Therefore, four key population forecasts, for Argyll & Bute as a whole or at HMA level have been produced:

- **A trend-based 'Main' or principal projection**: This projection extrapolates past trends into the future to show what the population will look like in future years should these trends continue. This uses data from 2022 and is based on the official modelling produced in January 2025 by the NRS and disaggregated to HMA level by the Improvement Service in June 2026.

- **A trend-based 'Low Migration' projection**: based on past trends and the alternative migration assumptions used by NRS/Improvement service in its 2022-based low migration variant population projections. This projection is available at Local Authority level only.

- **A trend-based 'High Migration' projection**: based on past trends and the alternative migration assumptions used by NRS/Improvement service in its 2022-based high migration variant population projections. This projection is available at Local Authority level only.

- **A workforce influenced projection** – a projection based on the Improvement Service disaggregated population data at HMA level,

triangulated with the robust assumptions from the Workforce Housing research.

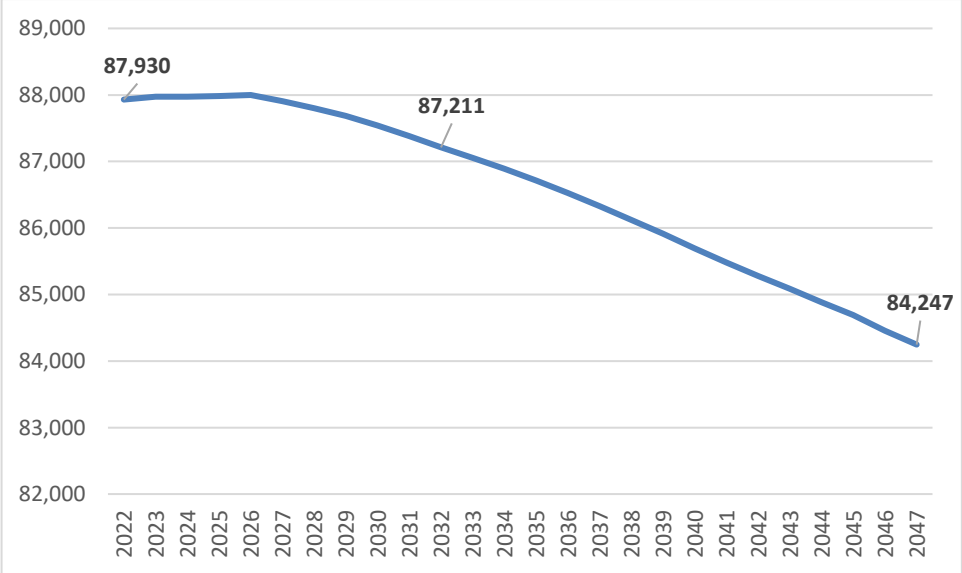
3.3 The two sets of areas for which projections / forecasts have been produced are:

- The local authority area of Argyll and Bute as a whole;
- The 9 Housing Market subareas, as defined in HNDA Technical Supporting Paper 1, i.e. Bute; Coll & Tiree; Cowal; Helensburgh & Lomond; Islay, Jura & Colonsay; Kintyre; Lorn; Mid Argyll; and Mull & Iona.

3.4 The projections will be utilised as the basis of disaggregated inputs for the HNDA Tool calculation. It is acknowledged that normally certain HMAs (Coll & Tiree in particular) would be considered too small statistically in terms of population size to generate absolutely valid projections. However, the validity of these areas as distinct Housing Market Areas has been established in earlier technical papers by analysing house sale containment and also addressing the geography of Argyll and Bute. Council staff are satisfied that this is a pragmatic "best fit" approach, to enable the HNDA calculation to be run at the level of the individual HMAs taking account of the real variations in these local areas and, in the policy based scenarios, allowing for the potential for economic growth or stabilisation. As with all estimates and projections, a degree of caution is therefore required, and it should be understood that all outputs are purely indicative.

3.5 The 'Main' or principal projection suggests that there is likely to be a continued decrease in the total population across Argyll and Bute.

Figure 3.1: Principal Population Projection, Argyll and Bute 2022 based-2047



Source: NRS Subnational Population Projections (2022-based)

Between 2022 and 2032, the population of Argyll and Bute is projected to decrease from 87,930 to 87,211. This is a decrease of 0.8%, which is contrary to a projected increase of 4.4% for Scotland over the same period. Over the planning period of the HNDA and next LHS (from 2027-2032), Argyll and Bute is projected to experience a 0.79% decline in the population, while Scotland is expected to see population growth of 1.11%.

When comparing the 2018-based and 2022-based projections for Argyll and Bute, there is a +10.3% difference, which is the highest percentage difference of any Local Authority in Scotland. This suggests that there is a significant deviation between the population projections produced in 2018 and 2022 for Argyll and Bute when updated to include the trends between 2019-2022, indicating that the population of Argyll and Bute has not behaved as expected in previous projections. This may be due at least in part to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on peoples housing and moving choices. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, when arriving at HMA level projections, the Improvement Service (IS) worked with Argyll and Bute Council to smooth out the anomalies that the pandemic years caused in trends.

Such an assumption would be supported by data from the HMA Refresh technical paper, which indicated a peak of house moves to Argyll and Bute during the pandemic years, and also the Housing Affordability technical paper which indicated a peak of house costs during that same period. It is felt therefore that the IS projections, smoothing out the COVID-19 spikes to avoid distorting future trends, are sound and valid.

Of Scotland's 32 Local Authority areas, Argyll and Bute is one of the Council areas projected to see a decrease in population between 2022-2032. Similarly to most Council areas in Scotland, population change as a result of natural change (i.e births minus deaths) in Argyll and Bute is projected to be negative.

Figure 3.2: NRS projected components, principal projection (2022-32)

Area Name	Estimated population: 2022	Births	Deaths	Natural Change	Net Migration: Within Scotland	Net Migration: Rest of UK	Net Migration: International	Net Migration (Total)	Other changes	Projected population 2032	Total Population Change	Total Population change (%)
Argyll and Bute	87,930	5,501	12,022	-6,521	-18	6,433	-487	5,928	-126	87,211	-719	-0.80%

Argyll and Bute is projected to see the largest population increase as a result of migration from the rest of the UK between 2022-2032 (+7.3%) and the highest decrease with regards to international migration (-0.55%). Argyll and Bute is also projected to face negative internal migration with more people leaving Argyll and Bute for other parts of Scotland than those arriving from other Local Authority areas in Scotland. Despite these anticipated trends, the

overall net migration for Argyll and Bute is projected to be positive between 2022-32 (+6.74%).

The average age of the population of Argyll and Bute is projected to increase as life expectancy continues to increase and people live longer.

Figure 3.3(1): Projected population change by age group, 2022-2047

Age group	2022	2032	A&B % change (2022-2032)	Scotland % change (2022-2032)	2047	Argyll & Bute % change (2022-2047)	Scotland % change (2022-2047)
All people	87,930	87,211	-0.80%	4.40%	84,247	-4.20%	6.00%
0 to 15	12,519	10,454	-16.50%	-8.50%	9,579	-23.50%	-9.00%
16 to 24	7,216	7,429	3.00%	6.00%	5,749	-20.30%	-9.00%
25 to 44	17,854	17,101	-4.20%	8.90%	15,722	-11.90%	7.00%
45 to 64	26,805	23,480	-12.40%	-5.90%	22,743	-15.20%	1.00%
65 to 74	12,750	15,147	18.80%	19.30%	12,020	-5.70%	1.00%
75 and over	10,786	13,600	26.10%	25.60%	18,434	70.90%	69.00%

Source: Sub-National Population Projections (2022-based)

Extracting the population change for the next Local Housing Strategy timeline of 2027-2032 gives the following figures.

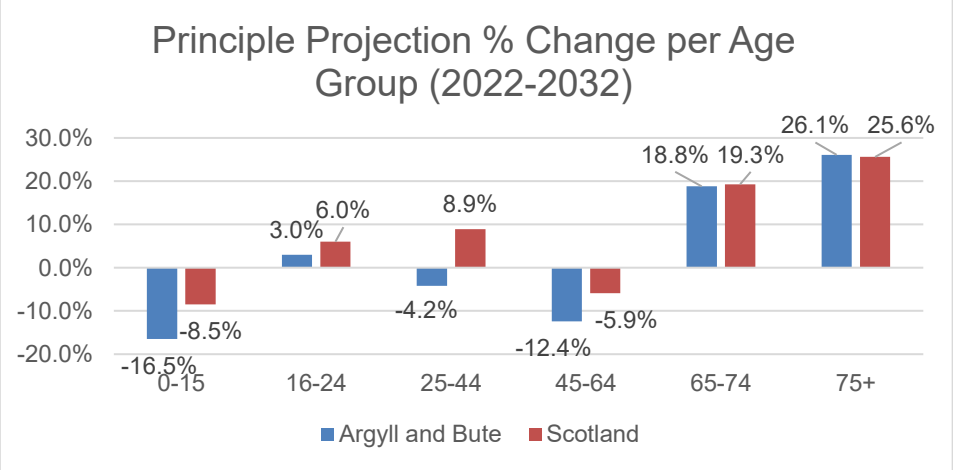
Figure 3.3(2): Projected population change by age group, 2027-2032

Age group	2027	2032	Argyll & Bute % change (2027-2032)	Scotland % change (2027-2032)	2047	Argyll & Bute % change (2027-2047)	Scotland % change (2027-2047)
All people	87,906	87,211	-0.8%	1.1%	84,247	-4.2%	2.9%
0 to 15	11,501	10,454	-9.1%	-4.7%	9,579	-16.7%	-5.2%
16 to 24	7,527	7,429	-1.3%	-0.4%	5,749	-23.6%	-14.6%
25 to 64	42,972	40,581	-5.6%	-0.8%	38,465	-10.5%	2.1%
65 to 84	22,746	24,769	8.9%	9.0%	24,030	5.6%	9.3%
85+	3,160	3,978	25.9%	22.8%	6,424	103.3%	95.1%

Source: Sub-National Population Projections (2022-based)

Looking at the 2027 and 2032 period that best matches the next Local Housing Strategy timelines, the 0 to 15 age group is projected to see the largest percentage decrease (-9.1%) and the 65 and over age groups projected to see the largest percentage increase (+34.8% combined). The 25 to 64 age group is projected to remain the largest in terms of total persons, however a decline of -5.6% in this working age cohort is far in excess of the Scottish projection of -0.8% for the same time period.

Figure 3.4: Principal Projection by Age Group Percentage Change (2022-2032)



Source: Sub-National Population Projections (2022-based)

3.6 NRS also produced a number of additional scenarios based on variant assumptions such as high, low and zero migration. The following table

summarises the population projections per variable for Argyll and Bute between 2022-32 and to 2047.

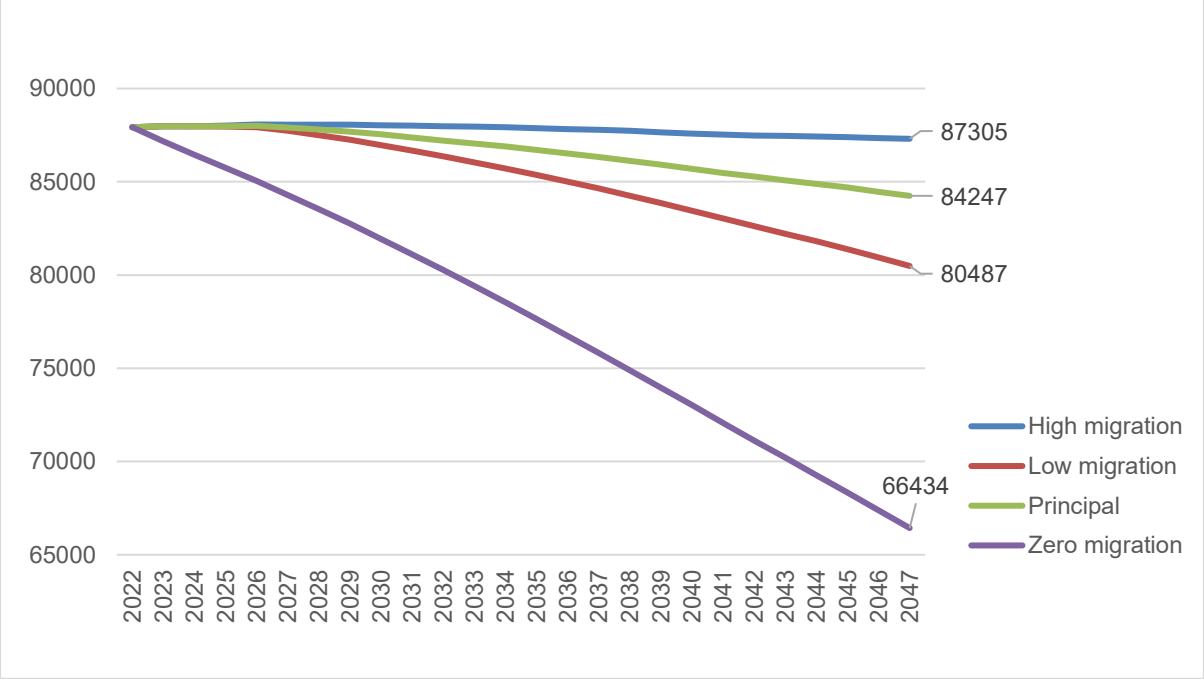
Figure 3.5: Variant Population Projections, Argyll and Bute, 2022-2047

Population Projection - Variants	2027	2032	% change (2027-2032)	2047	% change (2022-2047)
High migration	88,061	87,977	-0.10%	87,305	-0.86%
Low migration	87,730	86,363	-1.56%	80,487	-8.26%
Principal	87,906	87,211	-0.79%	84,247	-4.16%
Zero migration	84,295	80,265	-4.78%	66,434	-21.19%

Source: NRS Population Projections for Scottish Areas 2022-based

The variant projections are further illustrated in the following graph for the period from 2022 to 2047.

Figure 3.6: Variant Population Projections, Argyll and Bute 2022-2047



Source: NRS Population Projections for Scottish Areas 2022-based

The variants produce a significant range of outcomes: the High Migration projection results in a population estimate in 2032 which is 0.88% higher than the principal estimate, while the Low Migration projection is 0.97% lower than the principal projection. The special scenario for "zero out with Scotland migration" results in a substantial drop from the principal projection of -8%. (*N.B. The zero out with Scotland migration scenario assumes that there is no migration to or from Scotland, but internal migration within Scotland is still occurring. The Council has decided* ***not*** *to use this particular demographic*

assumption in running the HNDA Tool. Full details of the NRS methodology and assumptions are available at the following link: https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data.)

In 2026, the NRS collaborated with the National Improvement Service to create sub-council, small-area population projections for Local Authorities across Scotland, including bespoke HMA projections for Argyll and Bute. The initial data was adjusted after conversations with Council officers to reflect the anticipated influence of planned growth in specific areas.

The following table summarises the projected changes for each HMA, under the principal scenario, between 2022 and 2037.

Figure 3.7: Population Projections (principal Scenario) by HMA, 2022-2037

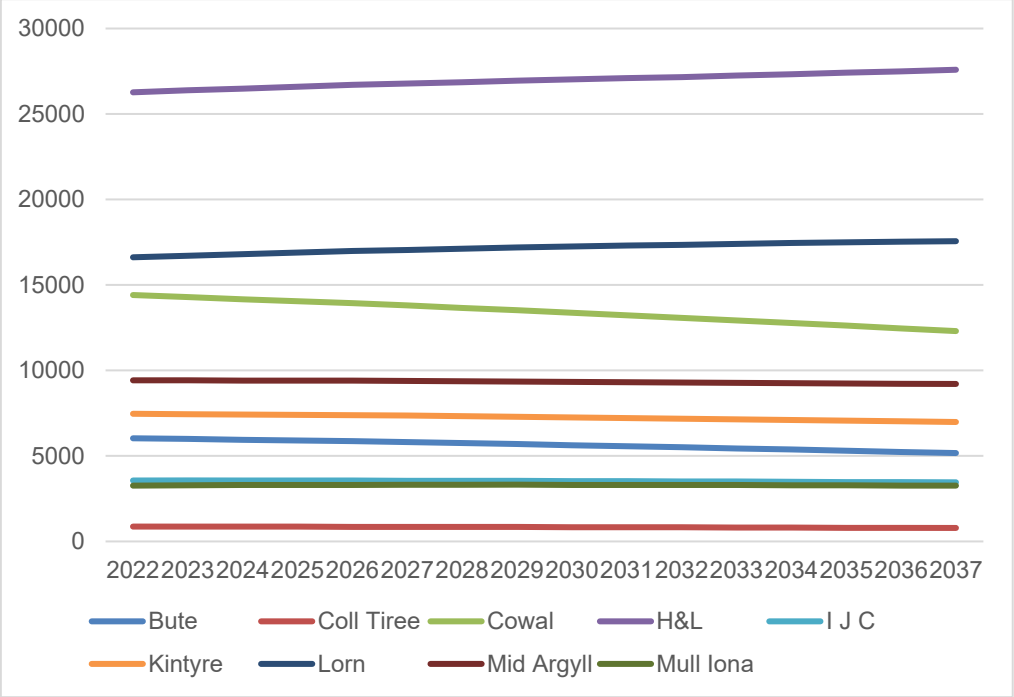
Year	Bute	Coll & Tiree	Cowal	H&L	I J C	Kintyre	Lorn	Mid Argyll	Mull & Iona
2022	6033	870	14411	26268	3568	7467	16619	9423	3271
2023	5994	869	14291	26383	3569	7448	16714	9420	3284
2024	5951	865	14168	26486	3567	7426	16802	9414	3293
2025	5906	862	14048	26595	3565	7405	16893	9408	3302
2026	5862	858	13929	26705	3563	7384	16983	9405	3310
2027	5807	853	13797	26782	3555	7356	17054	9390	3313
2028	5748	847	13660	26862	3546	7326	17124	9372	3313
2029	5691	841	13521	26942	3538	7294	17190	9355	3312
2030	5631	835	13376	27020	3528	7258	17250	9336	3309
2031	5568	829	13228	27092	3519	7222	17303	9315	3305
2032	5504	822	13077	27164	3509	7185	17354	9296	3300
2033	5439	815	12930	27247	3500	7148	17404	9279	3294
2034	5373	808	12778	27331	3490	7111	17451	9261	3288
2035	5305	802	12623	27415	3480	7071	17492	9244	3281
2036	5238	795	12463	27501	3469	7029	17529	9227	3273
2037	5170	788	12303	27588	3458	6986	17561	9211	3265
% change 2027 - 2032	**-5.2%**	**-3.6%**	**-5.2%**	**+1.4%**	**-1.3%**	**-2.3%**	**+1.8%**	**-1.0%**	**-0.4%**
% Change 2022-2037	**-14.3%**	**-9.4%**	**-14.6%**	**5.0%**	**-3.1%**	**-6.4%**	**5.7%**	**-2.2%**	**-0.2%**

Source: Improvement Services Small Area Population Projections, April 2026

In most HMAs, there is a projected decline in the population. The largest percentage decreases are in Cowal (-14.6%) and Bute (-14.3%). However, on the contrary, there is a projected population increase in Lorn (+5.7%) and Helensburgh and Lomond (+5%). This reflects the planned growth anticipated in these areas due to adopted policy. (*NB. The projections for Mull & Iona do appear anomalous, with basically no change over the period. However, this has been validated by the national Improvement Services who carried out the modelling with input from Council staff*).

The following graph illustrates population projections for the 9 sub-areas (the lowest statistically valid level of disaggregation for modelling purposes) based on the "main" or principal projection scenario for Argyll and Bute as a whole.

Figure 3.8: Variant Population Projections, Argyll and Bute 2022-2037



Source: Improvement Services Small Area Population Projections, April 2026

In terms of changing demographics by age band at HMA level, the following table summarises the estimated percentage changes between 2022 and 2037.

Figure 3.9(1): HMA Population Projections by Age Band, 2022-2037

2022-2037	0-15	16-24	25-64	65-84	85+
Argyll & Bute	-20%	-7%	-12%	+24%	74%
Bute	-45%	-23%	-29%	15%	39%
Coll & Tiree	-65%	-6%	-12%	28%	67%
Cowal	-36%	-25%	-25%	8%	51%
Helensburgh & Lomond	-17%	-13%	1%	26%	88%
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	-5%	-10%	-14%	12%	77%
Kintyre	-38%	-29%	-17%	31%	50%
Lorn	-8%	12%	-10%	43%	92%
Mid Argyll	-4%	20%	-19%	17%	94%
Mull & Iona	-20%	27%	-25%	45%	120%

Source: Improvement Services Small Area Population Projections, April 2026

Extracting the population change for the next Local Housing Strategy timeline of 2027-2032 gives the following figures.

Figure 3.9(2): HMA Population Projections by Age Band, 2027-2032

2022-2037	0-15	16-24	25-64	65-84	85+
Argyll & Bute	-9%	-1%	-6%	9%	26%
Bute	-20%	-3%	-13%	8%	13%
Coll & Tiree	-34%	-9%	-5%	9%	4%
Cowal	-16%	-3%	-11%	3%	18%
Helensburgh & Lomond	-8%	-8%	0%	9%	35%
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	-6%	3%	-5%	4%	25%
Kintyre	-16%	-8%	-8%	11%	20%
Lorn	-3%	9%	-6%	15%	24%
Mid Argyll	-4%	8%	-8%	7%	31%
Mull & Iona	-9%	13%	-12%	17%	36%

Source: Improvement Services Small Area Population Projections, April 2026

The table above indicates that while there will be a decline in the number of children aged under 16 in all areas, this varies considerably from only -3% in Lorn to -34% on Coll & Tiree and -20% in Bute. In addition, there are proportionate increases in the projected population of those aged 85+. This is projected to range from +4% on Coll % Tiree to as much as +36% on Mull & Iona.

It is proposed that the HNDA Tool should be run with the NRS official Principal, Low Migration and High Migration projections to provide a robust and credible range of estimates for the requirement for new build housing across Argyll and Bute over the LHS planning period and beyond. However, to take account of the Council's strategic objectives, an additional projection has been produced to reflect the influence of significant worker in-migration on local populations, and this will also be input to the HNDA Tool to provide alternative options when setting Housing Supply Targets. There are justifiable assumptions underpinning this projection, in terms of realistic economic aspirations and the potential impact of known or planned strategic interventions, however it is acknowledged that these may not satisfy the "robust and credible" criteria for the actual HNDA.

4.0 Household Projections

4.1 In December 2025, the NRS published household projections for every local authority in Scotland, based on the 2022 population estimates. The projections include a principal scenario and variants based on alternative assumptions about migration trends (high and low). Full details of the methodology and assumptions are outlined on the NRS website (See Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) - National Records of Scotland (NRS))

4.2 The principal and high migration projections for Argyll and Bute indicate a sustained increase in the number of households. Looking at principal projection data, over the five year period of the next Local Housing Strategy the number of households in Argyll and Bute is projected to increase by 1.3%

from 43,336 to 43,893; and over the decade from 2027 - 2037 the figure is projected to increase by 2.1% to 44,241.

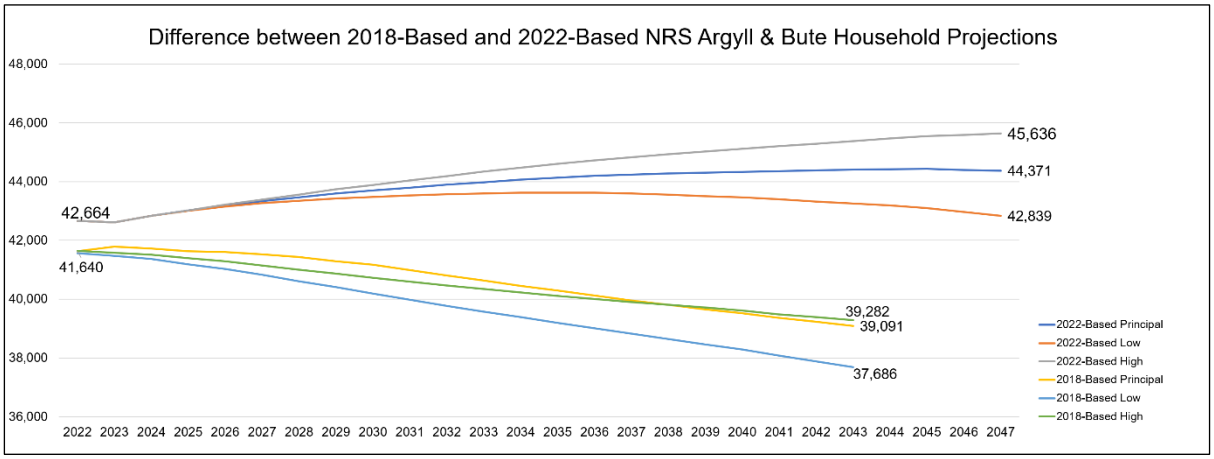
Figure 4.1: Household Projections 2027 – 2032 - 2047, Argyll & Bute

Projections	2027	2032	% change 2027-32	2037	% change 2027-37	2047	% change 2027-47
Principal	43,336	43,893	+1.3%	44,241	+2.1%	44,371	+2.4%
Low Migration	43,270	43,569	+0.7%	43,569	+0.7%	42,839	-1.0%
High Migration	43,387	44,193	+1.9%	44,833	+3.3%	45,636	+5.2%

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

4.3 The following graph illustrates the annual trend in households under all three official scenarios. Between 2027 and 2047, an increase in household numbers is forecast in both the principal projection (+2.4%) and the high migration based projection (+5.2%). The low migration based projection shows a decrease of 1.0% in predicted household numbers. These forecasts contradict the projections in the previous HNDA which was based on 2018 assumptions, which indicated a likely decline in household numbers across all three scenarios.

Figure 4.2: Household projections (2018 vs 2022 based) 2022 - 2047



Source: Arneil Johnston Housing and Depopulation Study 2026

4.4 Within the overall projections of household numbers in Argyll and Bute, there are variations between household types. Single person households and 2 adults with no children constitute the greatest proportion of households in Argyll and Bute, and both types are projected to increase marginally in number over the next five years. Single parent households, couples with children, and households with 3+ adults are all set to decline proportionately over the same period.

Figure 4.3: Household Type Principal Projection, Argyll & Bute 2027 - 47

Household Type	2027	% of total	2032	% of total	2047	% of total
1 person total	17,390	40.1%	18,005	41.0%	18,987	42.8%
1 adult, 1+ dependent child(ren)	1,564	3.6%	1,534	3.5%	1,442	3.2%
2 person all adult	15,163	35.0%	15,395	35.1%	15,349	34.6%
2+ adults, 1+ dependent child(ren)	6,276	14.5%	6,130	14.0%	5,859	13.2%
3+ person all adults	2,943	6.8%	2,830	6.4%	2,734	6.2%
All Households	43,336		43,894		44,371	

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

4.5 In terms of actual numbers, under the principal projection, single person households are projected to increase initially to 2032 by 3.5%, the increasing trend continuing to 2047 by which time a 9.2% increase is forecast. Two adult households will increase by 1.5% to 2032 and 1.2% by 2047. Single parent households are projected to decline by 6.5% by 2047; households with 3+ adults will decrease by 8.3%; and 2 adults with children will decrease by 6.6%.

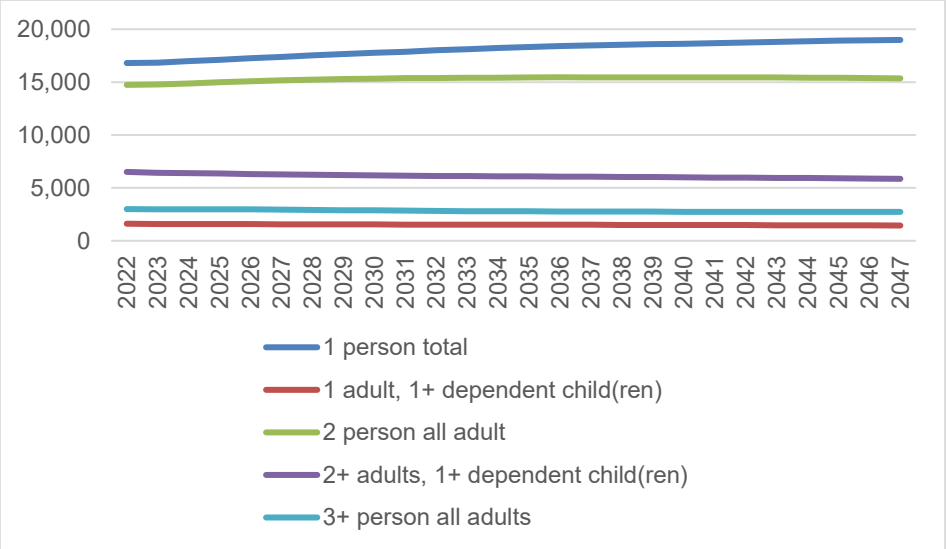
Figure 4.4: Household Type, Principal Projection, Argyll & Bute, 2027-47

Household Type	2027	2032	2047	% change 2027-32	% change 2027 - 47
1 person total	17,390	18,005	18,987	3.5%	9.2%
1 adult, 1+ dependent child(ren)	1,564	1,534	1,442	-1.9%	-7.8%
2 person all adult	15,163	15,395	15,349	1.5%	1.2%
2+ adults, 1+ dependent child(ren)	6,276	6,130	5,859	-2.3%	-6.6%
3+ person all adults	2,943	2,830	2,734	-3.8%	-7.1%
All Households	43,336	43,894	44,371	1.3%	2.4%

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

The following graph also illustrates these annual trends by household type under the official NRS principal projection.

Figure 4.5: Household type projections, principal scenario, 2026 - 2047



Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

4.6 Alternative NRS Household Projections

As noted above, the NRS have also developed alternative household projections for Argyll and Bute as a whole, based on variant migration assumptions. The following tables and graphs illustrate these alternatives.

Figure 4.6: Household Type Low Migration Projection, Argyll & Bute

Household Type	2027	% of total	2032	% of total	2047	% of total
1 person total	**17,368**	40.1%	**17,896**	41.1%	**18,576**	43.4%
1 adult, 1+ dependent child(ren)	**1,560**	3.6%	**1,506**	3.5%	**1,348**	3.1%
2 person all adult	**15,143**	35.0%	**15,313**	35.1%	**14,910**	34.8%
2+ adults, 1+ dependent child(ren)	**6,261**	14.5%	**6,040**	13.9%	**5,369**	12.5%
3+ person all adults	**2,939**	6.8%	**2,814**	6.5%	**2,637**	6.2%
All Households	**43,271**		**43,569**		**42,840**	

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

Under the low migration scenario, single person households are projected to increase initially to 2032 by 3.0%, the increasing trend continuing to 2047 by which time a 7.0% increase is forecast. Two adult households will increase by 1.1% to 2032 but decrease by 1.5% by 2047. Single parent households are projected to decline by 13.6% by 2047; households with 3+ adults will decrease by 10.3%; and 2 adults with children will decrease by 14.2%.

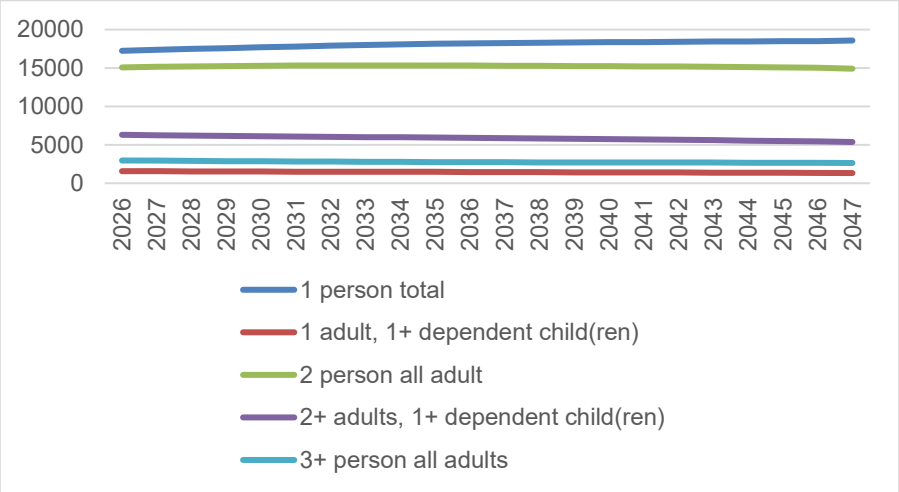
Figure 4.7: Household change, Low Migration Projection, Argyll & Bute, 2021-2031

Household Type	2027	2032	2047	% change 2027 - 32	% change 2026 - 47
1 person total	17,368	17,896	18,576	3.0%	7.0%
1 adult, 1+ dependent child(ren)	1,560	1,506	1,348	-3.5%	-13.6%
2 person all adult	15,143	15,313	14,910	1.1%	-1.5%
2+ adults, 1+ dependent child(ren)	6,261	6,040	5,369	-3.5%	-14.2%
3+ person all adults	2,939	2,814	2,637	-4.3%	-10.3%
All Households	43,271	43,569	42,840	0.7%	-1.0%

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

The following graph also illustrates these annual trends by household type under the official NRS *low migration* projection.

Figure 4.8: Household type projection (low migration), 2026 to 2047



Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

The third, more optimistic scenario for *high migration* is set out below.

Figure 4.9: Household Type High Migration Projection, Argyll & Bute

Household Type	2027	% of total	2032	% of total	2047	% of total
1 person total	17,405	40.1%	18,106	41.0%	19,386	42.5%
1 adult, 1+ dependent child(ren)	1,569	3.6%	1,558	3.5%	1,540	3.4%
2 person all adult	15,174	35.0%	15,478	35.0%	15,677	34.4%
2+ adults, 1+ dependent child(ren)	6,291	14.5%	6,205	14.0%	6,230	13.7%
3+ person all adults	2,946	6.8%	2,846	6.4%	2,803	6.1%
All Households	**43,385**		**44,193**		**45,636**	

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

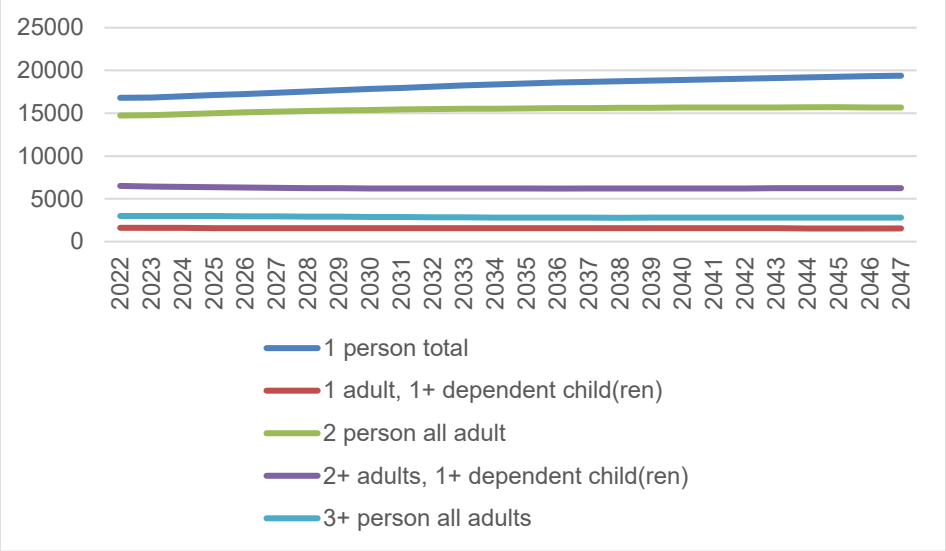
Figure 4.10: Household change, High Migration Projection, Argyll & Bute, 2021-31

Household Type	2027	2032	2047	% change 2026 - 31	% change 2026 - 47
1 person total	17,405	18,106	19,386	4.0%	11.4%
1 adult, 1+ dependent child(ren)	1,569	1,558	1,540	-0.7%	-1.8%
2 person all adult	15,174	15,478	15,677	2.0%	3.3%
2+ adults, 1+ dependent child(ren)	6,291	6,205	6,230	-1.4%	-1.0%
3+ person all adults	2,946	2,846	2,803	-3.4%	-4.9%
All Households	43,385	44,193	45,636	1.9%	5.2%

Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

The following graph also illustrates these annual trends by household type under the official NRS *high migration* projection.

Figure 4.11: Household type projection (high migration), 2026 - 2047



Source: Household Projections for Scotland (2022-based) Detailed Scottish Area Tables, NRS, 2025

4.7 HMA-Level Household Projections

At the time of writing there are no published household projections that are disaggregated down to housing market area levels. However, given that it is known that the trend for Argyll and Bute as a whole is towards increasing household numbers, existing data has been analysed to help provide an indicative projection of HMA household numbers. These projections are heavily caveated as estimates only, as opposed to official NRS projections.

Several sources of data are used to allow an estimate of HMA level household projections. Firstly, Scottish Government data for household numbers across the years 2022, 2023 and 2024 were analysed. This data can be disaggregated to datazone level, allowing household numbers to be calculated for individual HMAs. This gives relative proportions of HMA household levels within Argyll and Bute, which was then checked against Council Tax data to ensure that figures were consistent when different data sources were triangulated. Pulling this data together allows a relative percentage of households per HMA to be calculated as shown in the table below. The triangulation between different data sources (Scottish Government and Council Tax) allows confidence in the robustness of the data.

Figure 4.12: Comparative split of household numbers per HMA

HMA	2022	2023	2024	3-year average
Bute	8.1%	8.0%	8.0%	8.1%
Coll & Tiree	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%
Cowal	18.4%	18.3%	17.3%	18.0%
Helensburgh & Lomond	25.8%	26.1%	27.0%	26.3%
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%
Kintyre	9.0%	8.9%	8.8%	8.9%
Lorn	18.5%	18.7%	18.8%	18.7%
Mid Argyll	11.1%	11.0%	10.9%	11.0%
Mull & Iona	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%	3.8%

Source: Council analysis of SG and NRS data

The relative split of households per HMA can then be applied to the official NRS household projections for the whole Council area to allow this to be broken down to HMA level. The NRS figures, based on 2022 data, is presented in three scenarios, a principal projection, a low migration projection and a high migration projection. Thus using the methodology above we can also extrapolate household numbers per HMA for each of these projections.

The principal population projection is based on the best known and anticipated trends in the Scottish population, which has been disaggregated to household levels using the in-house methodology outlined above and presented over a period consistent with the next LHS timelines (2032).

During this timescale, the principal projection suggests a 1.3% increase in household numbers in Argyll and Bute. Should such an increase materialise, the breakdown of household per HMA is indicated in Figure 4.13 below.

Figure 4.13: Projected households per HMA, principal scenario

Household Type	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
All households A&B	**43,336**	**43,469**	**43,598**	**43,702**	**43,796**	**43,893**
Bute	3,500	3,510	3,521	3,529	3,537	3,545
Coll & Tiree	462	463	465	466	467	468
Cowal	7,805	7,829	7,852	7,871	7,888	7,906
Helensburgh & Lomond	11,382	11,417	11,451	11,479	11,503	11,529
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	1,833	1,839	1,844	1,849	1,853	1,857
Kintyre	3,858	3,870	3,882	3,891	3,899	3,908
Lorn	8,083	8,108	8,132	8,151	8,169	8,187
Mid Argyll	4,769	4,784	4,798	4,809	4,820	4,831
Mull & Iona	1,643	1,648	1,653	1,657	1,660	1,664

Source: Council analysis of SG and NRS data

If analysed across a longer 10 year period between 2026 and 2035, a 2.2% increase across all HMAs is identified.

Two alternative projections are also available, a low migration projection and a high migration projection.

The low migration projection suggests a 0.7% increase in household numbers across the 2027/28 to 2031/32 timeframe. Should such an increase materialise, the breakdown of household per HMA is indicated in Figure 4.14 below.

Figure 4.14: Projected households per HMA, low migration scenario

Household Type	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
All households	**43,270**	**43,354**	**43,434**	**43,485**	**43,529**	**43,569**
Bute	3,494	3,501	3,508	3,512	3,515	3,518
Coll & Tiree	461	462	463	464	464	465
Cowal	7,793	7,809	7,823	7,832	7,840	7,847
Helensburgh & Lomond	11,365	11,387	11,408	11,422	11,433	11,444
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	1,830	1,834	1,837	1,839	1,841	1,843
Kintyre	3,852	3,860	3,867	3,872	3,876	3,879
Lorn	8,071	8,086	8,101	8,111	8,119	8,126
Mid Argyll	4,762	4,771	4,780	4,786	4,790	4,795
Mull & Iona	1,641	1,644	1,647	1,649	1,650	1,652

Source: Council analysis of SG and NRS data

When extended to a ten year period (2025 – 2035), a 1.1% increase in household numbers is indicated.

The high migration projection suggests a 1.9% increase in the 2027 to 2032 timeframe. Should such an increase materialise, the breakdown of household per HMA is indicated in Figure 4.15 below.

Figure 4.15: Projected households per HMA, high migration scenario

Household Type	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
All households	**43,387**	**43,560**	**43,736**	**43,888**	**44,040**	**44,193**
Bute	3,504	3,518	3,532	3,544	3,556	3,569
Coll & Tiree	463	464	466	468	470	471
Cowal	7,814	7,846	7,877	7,905	7,932	7,960
Helensburgh & Lomond	11,396	11,441	11,488	11,527	11,567	11,608
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	1,835	1,843	1,850	1,856	1,863	1,869
Kintyre	3,863	3,878	3,894	3,907	3,921	3,935
Lorn	8,092	8,125	8,158	8,186	8,214	8,243
Mid Argyll	4,775	4,794	4,813	4,830	4,847	4,864
Mull & Iona	1,645	1,652	1,658	1,664	1,670	1,676

Source: Council analysis of SG and NRS data

When extended to a ten year period (2025 – 2035), a 3.2% increase in household numbers is indicated.

The official 'main, high and low migration' projections assume that past trends, both in terms of location and demographics, will continue into the future.

Figure 4.16; summary of estimated 2035 Household projections per Housing Market Area

HMA	Principal	Low Migration	High Migration
Bute	3,564	3,523	3,602
Coll & Tiree	471	465	476
Cowal	7,950	7,858	8,034
Helensburgh & Lomond	11,593	11,459	11,716
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	1,867	1,845	1,887
Kintyre	3,930	3,884	3,971
Lorn	8,233	8,138	8,320
Mid Argyll	4,858	4,801	4,909
Mull & Iona	1,673	1,654	1,691
Argyll and Bute	44,139	43,629	44,607

Source: Council analysis of SG and NRS data

4.8 Later notes in this paper reference the anticipated growth of certain sectors of the economy in Argyll and Bute that will either necessitate incoming workers or will produce additional employment opportunities for existing residents. These sectors include energy, MOD expansion at Faslane, tourism opportunities and a range of identified Regional Transformational Opportunities (RTOs). The demographic effect of these will be to either affect local populations in the short term through an influx of temporary workers or provide a range of employment opportunities for local people that will help to address and alter the pattern of depopulation that Argyll and Bute, in common with other rural areas, faces.

Depopulation Research carried out by Arneill Johnston in 2025/26 on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council sought to identify, collate and model the effects of these various sector changes to provide an anticipated model of the effect, in terms of jobs, in the nine Housing Market Areas in Argyll and Bute. The modelling takes account of the proposed timescales for the various workstreams, recognises that a degree of displacement of other jobs will take place, that certain sectors may expand then contract and that various housing tenures will be sought. It is therefore considered to be a very robust set of data. Taken together with the population and household projections available from both NRS and the Improvement Service, this allows a growth scenario to be projected.

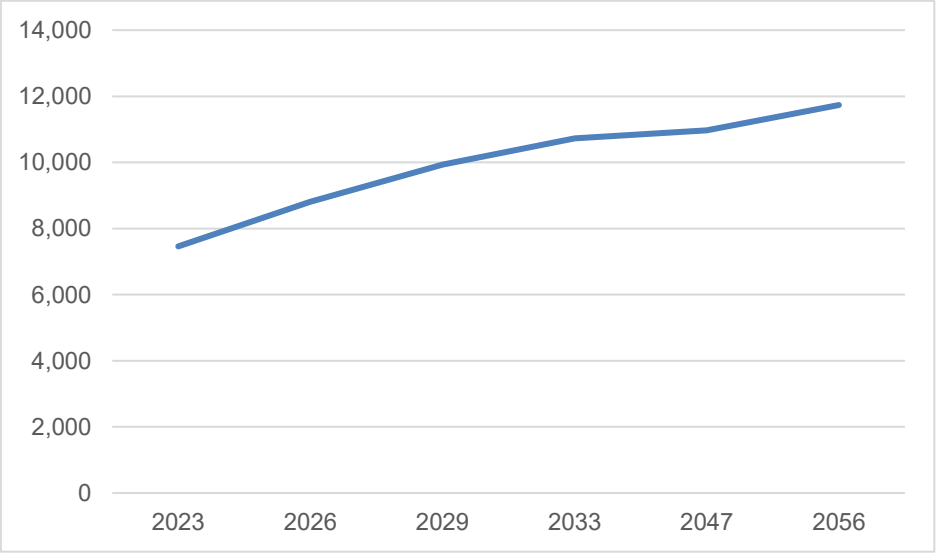
5.0 NOTE ON APPROACH TO INSTITUTIONS/MoD BASE

5.1 The NRS report "Population Projections for Scottish Areas, 2022-based" published in September 2025, contains the following methodological statement regarding "special populations"-

Members of HM Armed Forces and the prison population are considered to be special populations. The age and sex structure of these populations remains fairly consistent over time and is atypical of the underlying population of an area. In order to project the special populations, estimates from five years prior to the base year are averaged. The resulting distributions are removed at the start and added on at the end of each year in the projection.

5.2 However, the assumption of a steady-state, self-contained population at the Faslane naval base in Argyll and Bute is not currently accurate, as the MoD have implemented plans to develop HMNB Clyde as the single base for submariners across the UK. It would be reasonable to assume that over time, there will be a further growth in the local population as families and dependents of serving or retiring military personnel eventually start to relocate too and settle permanently in the area. Projecting these ancillary population trends are problematic in the short-term, however the MoD has provided baseline data on projections for increased active service personnel over the next decade. The basic projections are summarised below and include military personnel, trainees, contractors and civil servants increasing from a 2023 estimate of 7,460 to a projected peak in 2056 of 11,735. Planning approval for single person accommodation for 639 people has been obtained, however accommodation for families is likely to have an effect in the surrounding areas.

Figure 5.1: Number of employees at HMNB Clyde 2023 - 2056



Source: Approved extract of Establishment Management Plan

5.3 While these forecasts are subject to further amendment, the available data is at least indicative of the potential scale of the proposed changes over the next

decade or so. The anticipated growth at and around the Base will be considered out with the HNDA, when setting Local Housing Supply Targets.

6.0 NOTE ON LARGE SCALE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS AND PROJECTED GROWTH AREAS

6.1 There are a significant number of large-scale infrastructure projects, and identified Regional Transformational Opportunities (RTOs), underway or planned within Argyll and Bute. Many of these, particularly in the energy sector, will bring additional but temporary populations into Argyll and Bute. The energy infrastructure upgrading being carried out by SSEN for example, will bring significant numbers of workers into specific parts of Argyll and Bute.

There will also be areas of proposed economic growth through direct Council policy decisions, for example in the Helensburgh and Lomond and Lorn Growth Areas. Measures taken to provide economic opportunities in these areas are intended in part to help address issues of depopulation by providing reasons to stay within the community, particularly for working age populations. These scenarios were therefore included in dialogue with the Improvement Service when producing population estimates at Housing Market Area level. This helped ensure that the modelling of population growth in Argyll and Bute reflected proposed policy interventions and represented the best estimates of how the demography of Argyll and Bute will look in the immediate future.

6.2 A Workforce Housing Survey undertaken on behalf of Argyll and Bute Council by consultants Arneill Johnston sought to quantify the influence these projects may have in local communities, in terms of temporary populations and subsequent pressures on the housing system.

7. WORKING AGE DEPOPULATION RESEARCH 2025

In support of the HNDA process, in 2025 survey research was undertaken which aimed to deepen understanding of depopulation in Argyll & Bute, and in particular the decline in younger and working-age households. One element of the research explored the key housing-related push and pull factors influencing people's decisions to stay or leave and assessed the future intentions of younger working-age households who live in Argyll & Bute, have lived there previously, or are considering moving to the area. It focused on households aged 16-44 who are economically active or have the potential to be economically active who live in Argyll and Bute, who have lived in Argyll and Bute, or wish to move to Argyll and Bute

Overall, 521 household responses were achieved. Most respondents were current residents living in Argyll & Bute (429), followed by previous residents that wanted to move back (47), those that did not want to move back (24), and those who have never stayed in Argyll & Bute (21). All respondents were from economically/ potentially economic households and aged 16-44.
The survey targeted four key groups, including people who had left Argyll and Bute but wished to return, and those who currently lived in Argyll and Bute,

and those who had aspirations to move to the area. Of those currently living in Argyll and Bute, a combined 72% stated that they were likely to move out of Argyll and Bute within the next one to six years, with 27% of those citing finding suitable jobs as a reason for leaving. Similarly, for those who have left but are keen to return, 41% cited finding suitable jobs as a reason for leaving.

A common factor for people who want to move from Argyll & Bute was to pursue education or training. Key factors that would support remaining in, or moving back to Argyll & Bute include;

- A good supply of homes to buy.
- Improved access to services, public transport and amenities.
- Low-cost home ownership options.

These results illustrate some of the systemic issues behind demographic changes in Argyll and Bute, while showing the importance of housing choices and integrated service provision.

8. IMPLICATIONS OF THE WORKFORCE HOUSING SURVEY and STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS

Medium to large scale projects requiring significant worker numbers, and areas of planned Economic Growth as part of Council policy, have the ability to affect population and household numbers in specific areas of Argyll and Bute. It is important to try to assess the influence of these individually and combined in terms of demographics and, consequently, housing need.

Projected household numbers under the Principal NRS projection are given in Figure 8.1 below.

Figure 8.1: Household projections per HMA, NRS Principal projection

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Bute	3488	3500	3510	3521	3529	3537	3545	3552	3559	3564
Coll Tiree	461	462	463	465	466	467	468	469	470	471
Cowal	7779	7805	7829	7852	7871	7888	7906	7921	7937	7950
Helensburgh & Lomond	11344	11382	11417	11451	11479	11503	11529	11552	11574	11593
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	1827	1833	1839	1844	1849	1853	1857	1860	1864	1867
Kintyre	3845	3858	3870	3882	3891	3899	3908	3916	3923	3930
Lorn	8056	8083	8108	8132	8151	8169	8187	8203	8219	8233
Mid Argyll	4753	4769	4784	4798	4809	4820	4831	4840	4850	4858
Mull Iona	1638	1643	1648	1653	1657	1660	1664	1667	1671	1673
Argyll & Bute	**43191**	**43336**	**43469**	**43598**	**43702**	**43796**	**43893**	**43981**	**44066**	**44139**

Source: NRS projections/Council in-house analysis

8.1 The workforce survey was based developed with key partners and complemented by additional data from the MOD, energy sector organisations,

and RTO projects to establish an initial benchmark of the number of jobs necessary to support the proposed projects in these sectors. Overall 114 employers responded to the survey, representing 2,828 employees (8% of total workforce). 74% of responses highlighted the lack of affordable accommodation as a barrier to filling posts and retaining staff.

The initial jobs estimate was then extrapolated to account for not just the direct jobs created, but also the indirect and secondary jobs that may be necessary, using Scottish Government approved industry multipliers. Adjustments to direct job numbers account for job displacement (using a 4% factor derived from a World Energy Employment Report) and to indirect job numbers (using a 10% ration based on known worker numbers in Argyll and Bute who live out with the Local Authority area) were applied. Information was also accessed on the location and timescale of proposed projects, allowing the data to then be assigned to specific Housing Market Areas over a specific 10 year time period.

The analysis also breaks down the housing need based on known costs, industry standard salaries and appropriate tenures. This combination of source data and rigorous cleansing, at a level using Scottish Government and ONS supported filtering, has produced a dataset that is considered to be robust and comprehensive.

Having the breakdown of new jobs over time and for specific Housing Market Areas allows the calculation of how the population in each area could be affected. Six Housing Market Areas are forecast to show population increases due to incoming workers. Full details and outputs from Depopulation Research is available in supporting report which will be published with the HNDA Final Report.

While not every job will serve to attract people to Argyll and Bute, the creation of jobs will serve to help retain population and slow population decline. As mentioned previously, the Young People's survey undertaken as part of the HNDA process specifically targeted working age people to gauge their thoughts on living, and remaining or returning, in Argyll and Bute. Of current residents, 72% were likely to move from the area within the next 6 years, with 27% of these doing so for employment opportunities. People who had left but were keen to move back also cited employment opportunities as a reason for moving.

If a lack of suitable employment opportunities is taken as a driver for depopulation, then any increase in well paid employment can help to reverse this decline. The Workforce Housing Survey identified the main upcoming employment opportunities and correlates these jobs to standard salaries in their given employment sector. Most of the jobs indicated through the Workforce Housing Survey, in particular with the Regional Transformational Opportunities and energy infrastructure upgrades, are well paid with above average salaries.

Taken together the direct and indirect jobs associated with these infrastructure and industry projects therefore have the potential to retain people in their communities and increase the populations of individual HMAs by the numbers and percentages indicated in the tables below. The figures include an adjustment by a factor of 0.7 to account for those jobs likely to be filled either remotely or from workers travelling in.

Figure 8.2: Direct, induced and indirect jobs per HMA

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Cowal	7	7	7	7	7	3	3	3	3	3
Helensburgh & Lomond	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
Kintyre	61	61	61	61	61	31	31	31	31	31
Lorn	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
Mid Argyll	26	26	26	26	26	15	15	15	15	15

Source: Arneil Johnston Housing and Depopulation Study 2026

8.2 In addition to the Workforce Housing estimates, it is also important to factor in the effect of the proposed Strategic Development Frameworks the Council are developing in the Helensburgh & Lomond and Oban/Lorn areas, which have been identified as key areas for sustainable growth in the Councils Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2). The frameworks will act to identify, and co-ordinate actions required to deliver strategic growth and guide sustainable development over the next 20 to 40 years. The SDFs consider not just housing but the associated infrastructure needed to support this housing.

Projections for Helensburgh area have been made based on the Housing Land Audit and average completions over the last five years (91 pa) to calculate average demand. As a strategic growth area and based on increasing population and household projections, the HNDA Working Group have agreed a prudent annual growth of **0.5%** for the Helensburgh & Lomond HMA taking effect from 2031, and having influence over the HNDA period 2031-2046.

The Oban SDF (OSDF) will guide how the area evolves over the next 20 to 40 years and examine how best to support a growing population while safeguarding the natural environment. Similar to HSDF as a strategic growth area, it is anticipated that the population and household numbers will continue to increase in Lorn, and the HNDA Working Group have agreed a prudent annual growth of **0.5%** for the Lorn HMA taking effect from 2031, and having influence over the HNDA period 2031-2046.

To properly assess the likely impact of this on housing need however, analysis of the effect on household numbers is required and the impact of this projected growth on household numbers is indicated in the table below.

Figure 8.3: additional households based on agreed 0.5% Strategic Growth from 2031

	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040
Helensburgh & Lomond	57	57	57	57	57	58	58	58	58	58
Lorn	40	40	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	41

Source: Council HNDA Working Group

8.3 The combined effect of the Strategic Growth Areas and the Workforce Housing needs on projected household numbers is shown in the table below. This data incorporates the agreed 0.5% growth from 2031 in the Helensburgh & Lomond and Oban areas of strategic growth, and the Workforce Housing need numbers adjusted by the 0.7 factor to account for remote workers and those commuting into Argyll and Bute for their daily work.

Figure 8.4: Household number per HMA inc. Workforce Housing and SDF needs

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Bute	3,488	3,500	3,510	3,521	3,529	3,537	3,545	3,552	3,559	3,564
Coll Tiree	461	462	463	465	466	467	468	469	470	471
Cowal	7,786	7,812	7,836	7,859	7,878	7,891	7,908	7,924	7,940	7,953
Helensburgh & Lomond	11,389	11,426	11,461	11,495	11,522	11,605	11,631	11,654	11,676	11,695
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	1,836	1,842	1,848	1,853	1,858	1,862	1,866	1,870	1,873	1,876
Kintyre	3,907	3,920	3,932	3,943	3,952	3,930	3,939	3,947	3,954	3,961
Lorn	8,091	8,118	8,143	8,167	8,186	8,245	8,263	8,279	8,295	8,309
Mid Argyll	4,779	4,795	4,810	4,824	4,835	4,834	4,845	4,855	4,864	4,872
Mull Iona	1,638	1,643	1,648	1,653	1,657	1,660	1,664	1,667	1,671	1,673
Argyll & Bute	43,373	43,518	43,652	43,780	43,884	44,032	44,129	44,217	44,302	44,375

Source: NRS/Council projections and Arneil Johnston Housing and Depopulation Study 2026

The table below shows the same data but presented as percentage changes in households.

Figure 8.5: Workforce Housing and Strategic Growth Frameworks as % of projected HMA households

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Bute	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Coll Tiree	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Cowal	0.09%	0.09%	0.09%	0.08%	0.08%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%	0.04%
Helensburgh & Lomond	0.39%	0.39%	0.38%	0.38%	0.38%	0.89%	0.88%	0.88%	0.88%	0.88%
Islay, Jura & Colonsay	0.51%	0.51%	0.51%	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%	0.50%
Kintyre	1.60%	1.59%	1.59%	1.58%	1.58%	0.79%	0.79%	0.79%	0.79%	0.78%
Lorn	0.43%	0.43%	0.44%	0.44%	0.43%	0.93%	0.93%	0.93%	0.93%	0.92%
Mid Argyll	0.55%	0.54%	0.54%	0.54%	0.54%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
Mull Iona	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Argyll & Bute	**0.42%**	**0.42%**	**0.42%**	**0.42%**	**0.42%**	**0.54%**	**0.54%**	**0.54%**	**0.53%**	**0.53%**

Source: NRS/Council projections and Arneil Johnston Housing and Depopulation Study 2026

As stated elsewhere in the paper, areas with smaller populations can often show skewed statistics and this should be borne in mind. However, the percentage increases are not insignificant when taken at a population level. Therefore, it is considered that this represents an additional scenario that can be presented when carrying out the final HNDA analysis.

9.0 NOTE ON IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

9.1 The impacts that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns are referenced in other technical papers focussing on HMA profiles and housing market affordability in Argyll and Bute. There is however also a demonstrable impact on demography, due firstly to the increased number of house sales in 2020 and 2021 which drove up average and median prices, pressurising the housing market to the detriment of local populations, and secondly (but associated) by increasing the number of house sales to buyers from out with Argyll and Bute, affecting population trends by creating a spike in inward migration numbers.

9.2 In producing the indicated population forecasts at HMA level earlier in this paper, housing staff worked with the Improvement Service to identify those areas where COVID related spikes in figures were affecting potential trends. In particular, the HMAs with smaller population numbers were more liable to disproportionate forecasts if the jump in migration numbers in 2020 and 2021 were taken as indicative of a trend. This data was therefore adjusted to take account of area specific knowledge and known policy decisions to reduce these spikes and establish what is regarded as a more realistic population forecast.

9.3 Similarly, and as referred to in the previous section of this paper, the initial population forecast for the Helensburgh and Lomond HMA prepared by the Improvement Service did not reflect either the likely influence to the proposed increase in MOD staff and personnel associated with the expansion of HMNB Clyde, or the identification of the area through Council and partner policy decisions as one of two growth areas in Argyll and Bute. Again, adjustment of the forecast was undertaken which reflect both the naval base expansion and the likely effect of policy decisions in the area.

10.0 NOTE ON IMPACT OF "BREXIT" ON DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

At the time of the previous HNDA, there remained some uncertainty of the effect of Brexit on the influence of migration on the demographic profile of the Argyll and Bute population. Given the timing of Brexit closely followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine War, a cost-of-living crisis and other global factors, there is still a degree of uncertainty about migration patterns to the UK and Scotland.

While leaving the European Union made it more difficult for EU nationals to move to the UK, the policy adopted made it easier for non-EU nationals to make that move. In a briefing paper to the European Commission in June 2025 by the European Parliamentary Research Services (EPRS), it was noted

that the number of non-EU migrants had increased and further noted that the typical age profile of these migrants was older than EU nationals who might move to the UK under the old system. This could have the effect of exacerbating the existing ageing population trend.
(The Brexit paradox: How leaving the EU led to more migration. Stephen Blaakman, June 2025.)

From a Scottish perspective, the Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends 2024 (Scotland's Population 2024 - The Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends) notes that the population of Scotland is forecast to continue to increase over the forthcoming years, to reach 5.8 million by 2047. However, as deaths will continue to outstrip births, this trend of population increase is expected to be driven entirely by migration. Contrary to the findings of the EPRS paper cited in the preceding paragraph, the Registrar General notes that the age profile of incoming migrants is generally younger than the resident population, offsetting the ageing trend very slightly.

11.0 Conclusion and Key issues for the HNDA and LHS

11.1 NRS mid-year population estimates suggest that the observed decline in population in the last 20 years is slowing down, with a distinct levelling out being seen in figures from 2020 to 2024.

11.2 The Argyll and Bute HNDA will utilise demographic projections derived from the National Records of Scotland 2022-based projections (published in 2024) as the baseline "robust and credible" scenarios. Each selected scenario (principal, low migration and high migration) indicates an overall decline in the total population. However, projections show an increase in the number of households, driven by changes in household profile. Between 2026 and 2031, for example the principal projection estimates a population **decrease** of 0.7%, while during the same time period the number of households is forecast to **increase** by 1.4%.

11.3 There are however significant variations across the HMAs. Cleansed and adjusted NRS data supplied by the Improvement Service suggests that in most areas the rate of population decline will vary over the 2022-2037 period, from -14% in both Bute and Cowal, to +5% in Helensburgh and Lomond and +5.7% in Lorn. The Mull & Iona HMA appears to be stable over the same period with no significant change.

11.4 While a projected decline in the population would suggest a crude reduction in the level of housing need, the increase in household numbers both current and projected, will be the justification for public sector investment and other resources in order to sustain a strategic, affordable housing development programme in the future, with a view to stimulating sustainable growth.

11.5 The population profile, as expected, will continue to age, with projections indicating that the Argyll and Bute population will have a percentage of the

population over 65 years of age (and therefore typically not in the labour market), of 27.8%, compared to the Scottish average of 20.5%. While there will be a requirement, therefore, for additional purpose-built, accessible housing to meet the particular needs of an ageing population, the main strategic implications are likely to focus on improving existing stock and for the repair and maintenance of properties, particularly in the private sector, as well as the provision of care and support services required to enable this.

11.6 The working age cohort of 25-64 years will remain the largest age group within the population; however, it will reduce by -5.6% between 2027 and 2032. This compares to a much more modest decline of -0.8% in Scotland as a whole, illustrating the challenge of retaining working age population in remote or rural areas. The emerging worker age cohort of 16-24 years also shows a projected decline, this being especially notable in the Bute HMA with a project -21% decline. This is much more marked than other island HMAs, perhaps illustrating the influence of the Greater Glasgow conurbation on workforce choices.

11.7 The continued and forecast decline in younger persons and particularly those of working age, who contribute to the funding of service provision as well as to staffing relevant workforces and also to the overall health of a balanced housing system and to the sustainability of local communities, will also present real challenges. Limited housing options for working aged people was recognised as a major driver behind the declared Housing Emergency in 2023 and forms part of the justification for the strategic aims of providing more homes and housing choices for people in Argyll and Bute.

11.8 Single person households are currently the largest category of households within Argyll and Bute and are set to remain so in the foreseeable future, with couples (2 adults only) making up the next main category of households, and these too are likely to increase over time. Therefore, there will be a requirement for a range of flexible options available to accommodate smaller household units, primarily one and two bedroom properties; whilst still seeking to attract and retain larger, family households.

11.9 The ethnic minority component of the local population remains statistically and numerically very small, as far as available data can evidence; and the historical trends for these groups generally do not indicate any significant implications for the HNDA or LHS but will of course continue to be monitored on a case by case basis.

LHS & Development Plan	Key Issues Identified in the HNDA
Demographic Trends affecting the housing market	• Population decline appears to be slowing and has reversed since 2020. This is reflected in eight of the nine HMAs. Average household size is decreasing and there is an increased percentage of one person households in the most recent census data. Consequently, household numbers are increasing, and at a faster rate than the national average. This trend is forecast to continue to 2047. • The Argyll and Bute population shows a greater than average percentage of older age cohorts. The key working age cohorts are showing a decline at a rate in excess of the Scottish average. • Large scale infrastructure works, projected areas of growth, forecast industry expansions and the investment by the MOD in RN Clyde Naval Base combine to increase the populations in specific Housing Market Areas by varying amounts and over varying timescales. This has been modelled down to HMA level.