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**ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL**

### **3. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL COUNCILLOR AILEEN MORTON**

#### **3.1 Argyll and Bute Council Activities: COVID-19: All**

Customer Service Excellence: Our Building Standards team have once again secured the Customer Service Excellence standard following assessment in late November last year. They are one of a number of council departments who take pride in securing this standard each year and in building on their performance year after year. Their key goal is ensuring that this translates into direct service delivery for their customers. Thanks to all staff involved for their continued efforts.

Best Value 3 Engagement with Audit Scotland: Like many other colleagues I took part in interviews with Audit Scotland in January as part of the Best Value 3 Audit of Argyll and Bute Council. Officers remain in contact with Audit Scotland ahead of the Accounts Commission's consideration of the report.

Climate Change Environmental Action Group: Meetings took place on 16<sup>th</sup> January and 10<sup>th</sup> March, at which formal meeting we also held a session with a much wider group of officers to consider current operational activity and programmes. This session was also focused on how corporate indicators should be developed to evidence our progress as a council in delivering substantial reduction in CO2 emissions.

Waste Development Session, 27<sup>th</sup> January: Given the forthcoming requirements for councils to comply with the BMW ban, this was a useful opportunity to meet with officers and the Policy Lead for Amenity Services to consider in depth the challenges that Argyll and Bute Council faces in addressing both the end of our current waste PPP contract and the imminent changes to landfill tax. It is vital to maintain our progress on this and the matter will no doubt feature again at future development sessions or seminars for members.

### **3.2 Rural Growth Deal:**

Officer engagement with officials from both the UK and Scottish Governments has continued. On 10<sup>th</sup> December the Rural Growth Deal Steering Group met in Inveraray – a meeting planned for the spring has had to be rescheduled with remote options being explored.

I have written again to Alister Jack MP, Secretary of State for Scotland, seeking discussions with him in relation to our Deal. Members will recall that the previous Secretary of State met with the council on a number of occasions and we are keen to maintain momentum with the change in post. An encouraging sign was the mention in the UK Government's Budget announcement of the £25m allocation for Argyll and Bute – while this is confirming the announcement made by the Prime Minister on a visit to Faslane last year, rather than new or additional funding, it is welcome evidence of the UK Government's commitment.

In terms of Scottish Government engagement, the ambition remains to sign Heads of Terms later this year. We have already met with the lead Scottish minister, Michael Matheson, on a number of occasions; he has always taken a very positive approach and we will be back in touch with him in due course to arrange our next meeting as we progress to Heads of Terms.

HM Naval Base Clyde is a key partner for elements of the Deal proposals

Scottish communities, people and businesses, and the discussion focused on the merits of developing a collective Highlands and Islands regional response to this consultation.

Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> February: Much of the discussion focused on the agenda for the upcoming Convention of Highlands and Islands (which was subsequently cancelled just a few days beforehand). However, the group also discussed Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and whether this was really a suitable tool to use to measure deprivation in rural areas. Carroll Buxton, interim Chief Executive of Highlands and Islands Enterprise was in attendance and a follow up meeting/call has been arranged for me and the Council Chief Executive in April.

### **3.5 COSLA Meetings:**

#### COSLA Leaders:

Meeting 29<sup>th</sup> November: Agenda items for this session were:

- White Ribbon Pledge
- Spending Review
- Transient Visitor Levy
- Myjobscotland Governance proposals
- Fiscal Framework for Local Government
- Statutory Financial Redress Scheme for Historical Child Abuse – Consultation



Green Growth Accelerator  
Planning Performance and Fees Consultation  
Remote and Rural Members Bill

COSLA meetings are currently suspended.

**3.6 Ministerial Engagement:**

Conference Call with Derek Mackay – Economic Growth on the Clyde: Along with other council leaders from local authorities bordering the River Clyde, I took part in a conference call on 18<sup>th</sup> December with then-Finance Secretary Derek Mackay. The short call invited Leaders to consider options for the development and maximising benefit from spaces along the River Clyde. In the context of the current Covid-19 situation, we are awaiting clarity on how this proposal will proceed. With communities in Cowal, Bute, Helensburgh and Lomond all closely linked to the Clyde it will be important for Argyll and Bute to remain involved in any initiative that develops.

Internal Ferry Funding: Ministerial correspondence in December last year included a further representation to Paul Wheelhouse, Minister for Energy, Connectivity and Islands, in relation to funding of internal ferry services – the latest in a series of letters from myself and colleagues, and discussions about this issue. Representations were also made by a number of our constituency and list MSPs and, in a conference call with Mr Wheelhouse on 18<sup>th</sup> February, we received confirmation of additional funding to cover the four internal ferry services that the council operates – welcome resolution to a long-running issue and a much-needed boost in another challenging financial year. This award covers both the capital and revenue costs for the 2020/21 operation of these services. The council's position remains, though, that these ferry services should be operated by Transport Scotland.

Meeting with Kate Forbes, Minister for Public Finance: I had written to Derek Mackay late in 2019 outlining the unique challenges that Argyll and Bute faces in terms of population growth and service delivery across our mix of remote, rural and island communities, pointing out that we have barriers to growth which can't necessarily be addressed through the normal local government funding settlement nor through Growth Deals. Our query was passed to Kate Forbes who met with us at Kilmory on 17<sup>th</sup>

Ms Forbes was keen that alongside any ministerial engagement we continue to add our voice to the collective position of COSLA and I formalised this in a letter to COSLA President, Alison Evison, on 3



The changes to the process required significant work from officers and – despite some very tight and challenging timescales – we were able to set our budget and fulfil all legal obligations.

A83 Taskforce Meeting, 22<sup>nd</sup> January: This was attended by a number of elected members as well as community representatives. Updates on work done to date and planned works were provided by Transport Scotland and BEAR Scotland. We also had a brief update on progress with the Argyll and Bute Strategic Transport Projects Review process. Concerns were raised about delays to planned works and, as members will be aware, I've been in touch with the Cabinet Secretary since the most recent landslip at the Rest and Be Thankful pushing for a permanent solution to be identified that addresses these issues once and for all.

### **3.7 Other external activities:**

Consultation on Replacement of European Structural Funds, 10<sup>th</sup> January: This session in Glasgow was facilitated by Prof John Bachtler (Strathclyde University) and Malcolm Leitch (SLAED) with representatives from the Scottish Government, local authorities, and third sector organisations amongst others. Attendees participated in group discussions of how best the replacement to existing structural funds could operate in Scotland in future considering both current best practice and opportunities to improve.

Music Education Partnership Group, 14<sup>th</sup> January: This was a positive meeting between myself, the Policy Lead for Education and two representatives of the MEPG (including the Chair, John Wallace). We discussed how national policy helps to shape our delivery of this service and they highlighted their work looking at areas such as digital delivery and the potential creation of a musical equivalent to Green Flag status for schools. The representatives will

A number of childcare facilities are open in Argyll and Bute for children of key workers. It is vital that we do everything we can to ensure that key workers can continue to do their job and we will continue to monitor all plans.

The council's website has helpful and useful information and can be accessed at <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/coronavirus-help-and-advice>

During a recent visit to Kintyre schools in February, along with the Executive Director with responsibility for Education, I was reminded that life can be made really simple. A pupil in primary 2 showed me his drawing of the "world's strongest man". I asked him what the man was called and he simply replied "*Strong, of course*". Life really can be put into perspective by our young people - Stay safe, wash your hands, social distance, and follow the guidance provided to you.

Every day I see how hard our staff work, and during these difficult weeks staff have never failed to take on a challenge - quickly and commendably putting in place a range of different measures. My sincere thanks go out to all staff who have worked so hard to take these actions in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our young people. I am comforted to see how much our young people mean to all of our staff and I am proud to be a part of their education journey.

School visits: As part of my scheduled programme of school visits around the area, I visited Dalintober Primary in February, along with the Executive Director and I can honestly say I was blown away by the great work that's going on there. From their British Sign Language Club and the vast amount of STEM challenges the children take part in, to their 'coach trip of Spain', their drama club and mindfulness lunch club, the school is truly thriving. The children all appeared motivated and eager to learn and it was clear they

members agree to bring it forward to assure parents that the building is fit for purpose.

School inspections: Louise Connor, Head of Education – Learning and Teaching, delivered a presentation to the Community Services Committee in March and set out what inspections mean and how they work.

Education Scotland's role is provide assurance and public accountability; promote improvement; and inform the development of educational policy and practice.

The Chair of the Northern Alliance Convention of Convenors had written to

During these difficult and unprecedented times, it is vital that our young people are aware of the advice and support there is for them. Lots of useful information for mental health for young people can be found on <https://www.seemescotland.org/>

- 4.2 POLICY LEAD FOR CORPORATE SERVICES    CLLR RORY COLVILLE**  
Corporate Communication: Communications staff have completed ‘train the trainer’ sessions in Plain English – this will help them share their own skills with others across the council as well as directly supporting the council’s priorities. It may also lead to income generation opportunities for the council

Voice Automated Payment Service had a 45% increase on previous February with 385 payments worth £55k taken in February.

Nearly 500 additional customers signed up to the MyAccount personalised web service, which now has 8335 subscribers.

Independently evaluated SOCITM Website Accessibility score rose to "Great" status in last report.

The Keep in the Loop Service had its busiest ever month promoting five corporate consultations and helped HSCP get 554 responses to its budget survey.

The annual council tax bills and benefit uprating letters have now all been

### Legal and Regulatory Support

*Civil Contingencies:* The team are playing a very significant role in the council's overall Covid-19 response.

*Governance:* The normal cycle of committee meetings continued up until 19<sup>th</sup> March. Since then, some meetings have continued on a virtual/remote basis, including the first virtual council meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March held to agree enhanced governance provisions in light of Covid-19.

Staff have been working hard to make the most of technology to support these new arrangements and also to maintain support for elected members. The team are also managing the dedicated Covid-19 members' inbox for handling member queries, alongside the Casebook system for 'business as usual' member casework.

The team are also providing support to various groups established to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic and are developing processes to manage Local Review Bodies, hearings, and other civic government requirements going forward.

*Community Governance:* Community council interim by-elections have had to be postponed. Processing for the final community council grant payments is in hand to meet year end deadlines.

*Health and Safety/Governance and Risk/Trading Standards/Welfare Rights/Legal Services:* The vast majority of staff are home-working as a result of the Covid-19 situation and are continuing to provide a full service in relation to all aspects of business. Health and Safety in particular have had a role in relation to risk assessments in relation to the council's overall response to Covid-19.

Four Trading Standards staff have joined 20 Environmental Health colleagues in gaining authorisation to enforce the provisions of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 in relation to businesses opening in defiance of national restrictions.



The latest update to the DPS was approved by the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee on the 18th March 2020 and it shows a timetable that anticipates delivery of LDP2 by the third quarter of the financial year 2021/22.

Details of the proposed LDP2 and the updated DPS can be viewed at the following link: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/ldp2>

Conservation Area Appraisals: At the March meeting of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing (PPSL) Committee members agreed to the draft Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Strategies for





*Homeless Service:* A virtual service is in place. All staff are working from home and numbers are posted for applicants to contact.

We are in daily touch with the HSCP Bronze Command Group to provide



including additional dates on 6<sup>th</sup> December and 26<sup>th</sup> February there has been increased IJB awareness around Risks, Strategic Commissioning and Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

Ongoing monitoring of the 2019/20 budget and scrutiny around feasibility of new savings has been considered by the Finance and Policy Committee on 21<sup>st</sup> November, 12<sup>th</sup> December, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 6<sup>th</sup> March and 27<sup>th</sup> March.

The Clinical and Care Governance Committee met on 14<sup>th</sup> November, 30<sup>th</sup> January and 26<sup>th</sup> March with members also participating in a regional engagement workshop covering the West of Scotland on 23<sup>rd</sup> January.

Audit and Risk Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> February considered internal and external audit activity as well as the aspects relating to health and social care within the Audit Scotland overview report on Local Government Finances.

integrated services and improving lives of Gypsy Travellers were amongst topics covered.

I was at the second Health and Social Care Conference on 4<sup>th</sup> December. Highlights for me were sessions covering collaborative and compassionate leadership, and a human rights approach to providing care.

As Vice-Chair of the national IJB Chairs and Vice-Chairs executive I have had meetings with Scottish Government officials on 4<sup>th</sup> November and 14<sup>th</sup> January as well as attending the Ministerial Strategic Group for Health and Social Care on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. The executive continues to provide a link from the wider network of IJBs to COSLA and the Scottish Government.

Autism Services Update: Recruitment continues for a Service Improvement Officer for Learning Disability and the Service Manager for Learning Disability and Autism. These posts will enable us to focus specifically in the areas of Autism and Learning Disability and will provide stability in terms of leadership, management and development to services across Argyll and Bute.

The Autism Steering Group has recommenced and the first meeting was held on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> Febru

be prioritised. However for now the focus has to be on caring for people locally and I wish to thank all staff within the HSCP – from those on the front