
24th June 2021

REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The Leader of the Council and Policy Lead Councillors provide a report outlining their strategic activities for consideration at each meeting of Argyll

Report and Policy Leads Report were considered at the council meeting on 15th April 2021. This report covers the period from that date until 11th June 2021.

1.2

period, and includes updates in relation to his Policy Lead portfolio.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1** Members are asked to consider the report.

- 2.2** Members are asked to note that any reports, briefings or copy correspondence referred to in the report can be requested as appropriate through Leadership Support staff, although it should be noted that some confidential reports provided by external organisations such as COSLA may be restricted.

3. COSLA LEADERS MEETINGS

- 3.1** COSLA board meetings are operating according to their normal schedule but continue to take place virtually, via Teams. Below are the agenda items for the COSLA Leaders meetings I have attended during this period. Details of the COSLA strategic board meetings are noted elsewhere in this report.

COSLA Special Leaders, 16th April 2021

Distribution of Additional Funding for Self Isolating Support Grants
Tackling Poverty Further Consideration of Pandemic Payments
National Care Home Contract
Covid-19 Strategic Framework Local Authority Engagement

COSLA Leaders, 30th April 2021

UK Government Levelling Up Fund
Learning Estate Investment Programme
Edinburgh Declaration on Biodiversity
Heat and Energy Policy
New Plan for Immigration
Hong Kong British National (Overseas) Visa
Local Government Finance
Covid-19 Business Grants and Support Update
Local Employability Services Policy Direction and Resourcing
Update
Scottish Welfare Fund
Revised Participatory Budgeting in Scotland
Enhanced Summer Programme 2021
Expansion of Universal Free School Meals
Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act
Joint Investigative Interviewing of Children in Scotland

COSLA Leaders, 28th May 2021

EU Settlement Scheme
Local Government Finance
Pay Negotiations
Early Learning and Childcare funding from 2022/23
Strategic Commissioning and Grant Aided Schools
Joint Policy/Funding Scottish Healthy Milk Snack Scheme
Independent Review of Adult Social Care
Financial Support for Adult Social Care
Teachers £400 Assessment Paper
Relocation of Afghan Nationals to the UK
Local Government Approach to UK Immigration Policy
Implications of Emerging Policy for Local Government
School Clothing Grant

- 3.2 Meeting with HSCP/NHS Leadership:** I was delighted to welcome Boyd Robertson, Chair of the NHS Highland Board, Pam Dudek, NHS Highland Chief Executive, and Fiona Davies, the interim Chief Officer of the Health and Social Care Partnership, to Islay in May. The team, along with Pippa Milne, our own Chief Executive, were visiting local health facilities to find out more about the implementation of vaccination, testing and other

Covid-19 related issues in an island setting. This meant an ideal opportunity to meet Pam and Fiona for the first time and to catch up with Boyd in person rather than on island services first hand in these unusual circumstances and look forward to further engagement with Fiona through the IJB.

3.3 Housing: Key housing highlights for the period include:

Private Sector Housing Grants - £0.421m paid out in 20/21, comprising £0.332m for disabled adaptations and £89k for common repairs.

Homelessness applications are down by 5% (20 applications) to 416 between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021. There are fluctuations up and down across local areas. 35 households made applications due to domestic abuse.

The Strategic Housing Investment Programme has delivered 48 new homes up to March 2021, despite challenges, restrictions and slippage during the Covid-19 pandemic.

£2.207m has been paid out through the Strategic Housing Fund for development work in 2020/21.

29 empty homes have been brought back in to use, the majority as private rented or owner occupied accommodation, and providing permanent housing for 24 households.

Alongside my regular meetings with the service I have attended the Strategic Housing Forum on 1st June, where the agenda included the following key issues alongside partner/RSL updates:

- Community led housing projects
- Bute Strategic Housing Review
- Energy efficiency and fuel poverty
- Veterans housing
- Local Housing Strategy

I also joined the Chief Executive to meet with Ailsa Raeburn, Chair of Community Land Scotland, on 21st May. Many CLS members operate in areas of high tourist demand meaning that local housing stock is often used as second or holiday homes. Permanent loss of affordable housing has an impact on the ability of young people in particular to stay or return to their home communities. While community led projects can augment levels to some degree, these are not possible in all areas. A Scottish Government Working Group has been established to look at effective use of land and property resources as well as the emerging short term lets legislation (which will also impact on local authorities who will be responsible for administering licensing schemes).

This is an important issue for us and it was helpful to have a discussion with Ailsa who will be part of that national working group and is keen to understand the Argyll and Bute position in more detail.

3.4 Gaelic:

Swinney, Depute First Minister, has convened a number of discussions in relation to Gaelic development and engagement.

Our Education service is working with Highland Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), which is the lead authority, in progressing this work. I was invited to an update discussion session on 6th

excellent

On 24th May I met with representatives from Drax who operate the Cruachan hydro power station. Decarbonisation is a key focus for them and it was interesting to hav

After a quick stop at Bute Gin to catch up on their progress, it was on to Bute Island Foods for a tour of their new distribution centre and office, supported by council investment. The company has recently been bought over and this will allow them to expand and reach new global markets their vegan cheese products are already exported all over the world. They are aiming to employ 250 people they already have 180 staff, a healthy increase from the 27 employed in 2017. Despite the takeover, the current

employ a number of young people and are coping with international high demand for their quality products.

- 3.7 Other COSLA activities:** I sit on two COSLA strategic boards Community Wellbeing and Environment and Economy. Agenda topics for the meetings which have taken place during this period are omy.

UK Government Consultation and Funding
EU Funding Consolidation Update

Two have taken place over
this period the Argyll, Lochaber, Skye and Small Isles on 1

provided to EDI if more detail is required, and I retain a key interest in the progression of this given its importance to our communities and their recovery from the pandemic.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1** This report highlights the activities of the Leader of Argyll and Bute Council for the period from April to June 2021

**Councillor Robin Currie
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council**

11th June 2021

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