

27th June 2024

LEADER'S REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Leader of the Council routinely provides a report outlining their strategic activities for consideration at each meeting of Argyll and Bute Council, except for the annual budget meeting in February.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the activities of the council Leader, Cllr Jim Lynch, for the period 5th April to 12th June 2024.

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 the Leadership Support Manager, although it should be noted that some confidential reports provided by external organisations such as COSLA may be restricted.

3. LEADER ACTIVITY 5th APRIL TO 14TH JUNE 2024:

- 3.1 **Tribute to Councillor Robin Currie:** In other circumstances, this first paragraph of my first Leader's Report to Council would have been thanking Robin and other colleagues across the chamber for their support and co-operation since becoming Leader. It is with real sadness that I find myself having to write a different kind of tribute, following the sudden and early passing of Councillor Robin Currie on 9th May 2024.

My working relationship with Robin from the start has always been positive, friendly and, I believe, ultimately of benefit to the council and to the communities we represent. There have been many tributes to Robin over the past few weeks and every single one of them has said how much

importance, how much value, he placed on those communities, and on doing the very best that he could, for them first and foremost.

Like so many fellow councillors and indeed council officers, Robin has been present throughout my entire council life so far. With almost 40 years of service, not just to local government but to the people he represented, it is very hard indeed to imagine this council without him.

It is fair to say that there is still a great deal of shock and sadness at the loss of Robin, which happened so very suddenly and unexpectedly. At his funeral service on his beloved Islay on 16th May, the high regard in which he was held by the island community was very much in evidence. At countless meetings both locally and nationally, people have made a point of paying their respects to Robin the man and to the work that he did.

With a wealth of experience and knowledge matched only by his passion and dedication to getting the best possible outcomes for local people, Robin leaves very big shoes to fill. We miss him, and we will miss him for some considerable time to come. We are so very grateful for all that he did for Argyll and Bute and for us as colleagues.

3.2 Senior Leadership Forum, 19th April: The Council brings together leaders and managers from across the organisation two or three times each year to go over key strategic challenges and opportunities, to focus on areas where it's possible to work more closely together and to look at ways of making service delivery as effective as possible. I welcomed the opportunity to join the group on 19th April in Kilmory.

Our teams are incredibly focused and dedicated to what they do, despite challenges which are outwith the council's control such as funding and, of course, our geography. I was impressed by the energy, questions and ideas that they bring to discussions, by their willingness to find solutions and by their enthusiasm to be innovative wherever possible.

The session gave me a chance to introduce the Administration Partnership's direction and ambitions – and I was really encouraged by the discussions I had with our teams both during the formal session and informally. I believe it's important to connect like this, where possible, with those who have responsibility for the frontline services which are so important to local people. It is invaluable feedback to have when we are considering the strategic direction and priorities for the council.

We will be doing more work on the priorities for the remainder of the council term and being able to attend this session was very helpful in that context. We will be reporting back to council on priorities at a future meeting.

3.3 Argyll and Bute Gaelic Gathering, 27th April: I was delighted to be able to join the Provost at the Gaelic Gathering in Oban on Saturday 27th April.

This year's Gathering was the fourth event, and the third one held in person. It is yet another tribute to the commitment of Robin Currie who was a very passionate supporter of the Gaelic language and culture and who was instrumental in driving forward our own Gaelic Gathering over the past few years. Alongside that sits the sheer determination of our local Gaelic community to come together, in a show of strength, to confirm that the language remains a very important part of local life, and one that they want to see growing and thriving.



With Provost Dougie Philand at the Gaelic Gathering, Corran Halls, Oban

A huge amount of work goes into organising an event like this and it's no surprise that this is another example of the positive partnership working for which Argyll and Bute is known. The event itself took a day – the work had been going on for months beforehand in order to ensure its success and its sustainability. Officers from the council have worked alongside partners at Bord na Gaidhlig, CHARTS, the Scottish Government and of course Argyll and Bute's Gaelic community to make the event happen.

With that in mind, the theme for this year of 'connections' was very fitting indeed and all of the workshop sessions and discussions, formal and informal, were focused on creating and building up those connections. They're a vital part of the drive to keep Gaelic alive and events like the Gathering help to nurture existing links and create new ones.

3.4 UK Islands Forum, 7th and 8th May: I joined local authority leaders and chief executives from island authorities across the UK in Anglesey for the latest meeting of the UK Islands Forum in early May.

The forum brings together councils with representatives from all national governments to focus on the particular challenges experienced by island communities and to ensure that island needs are reflected in policy-making.

The theme for this session was housing, obviously of keen interest for us. The increased attention to this at a national level must be maintained and, crucially, must turn into action. That too will be in sharp focus for us as we develop and drive forward our own priorities, building on the work already done, taking clear action and doing so at the pace demanded of this critical situation.

Argyll and Bute Council was due to host the next meeting of the Forum. With the calling of the UK General Election, the next steps are unconfirmed at this point. We will be seeking clarity following the election and, should the Forum continue, we will be happy to host as scheduled, this being a good practical opportunity to highlight some of the issues our island communities face as well as the contributions they make at a national level.

3.5 COSLA Meetings: I have attended two COSLA Leaders meetings during the period covered in this report. Agenda items are taken in private session, so I can share only the topics themselves, but will do my best to answer questions as far as possible or have a confidential discussion.

A number of key issues are recurring and/or the subject of continuing correspondence amongst Leaders, including the widely publicised public sector pay matter and teacher numbers/funding.

COSLA Leaders 26th April:

- Teacher Numbers (continuing)
- Education Assurance Arrangements
- Childrens Services Social Care £12 per hour Uplift 2024/25
- Scottish Government/Local Government Joint Digital Strategy
- Publication of Local Government Workforce Report
- Persistent Organic Pollutants
- Pay Negotiations (continuing)
- Local Government Finance
- Verity House Agreement Dispute Resolution Procedure

COSLA Leaders 31st May:

- Historical Child Abuse Redress Scheme
- Verity House Agreement and Dispute Resolution Procedure
- Pay Negotiations (continuing)
- National Care Service
- Teacher Numbers Funding (continuing)
- Asylum Dispersal
- Local Government Finance
- Minimum Service Levels
- Distribution
- Draft Equally Safe Delivery Plan 2024 to 2026

3.7 Next Steps: The initial period since coming into post, and as the Administration Partnership settles in, has been taken up with initial introductory meetings and engagement with a range of council officers and external partners.

There are numerous key issues which are, of course, very familiar to members and which will be in immediate focus moving forward. I have mentioned the housing emergency earlier in this report and, along with colleagues, will be looking closely at this to identify actions we can take now and swiftly in this regard. I am very clear about the crucial need for pace on this – our main challenges like population and economic growth

are inextricably linked to housing and we must and will move forward quickly on this.

I have had the first of a series of meetings with Jenni Minto MSP and will be working with Jenni and any other parliamentarians who can help us get results for Argyll and Bute. We have had offers of other ministerial meetings and will be pursuing others, particularly following the election.

I will be making contact in very early course indeed with the new UK Government to ascertain its intentions and next steps with the £20m Levelling Up Partnership funding confirmed for Argyll and Bute last year. This funding can make a real difference and we will want to ensure that it progresses as planned, as quickly as possible.

We were due to sign the Rural Growth Deal on 7th June but, with the calling of the General Election, this will be rescheduled. Officers continue to liaise with civil servants and, again, I look forward to engaging with both governments so that we can press ahead with this crucial Deal, meet this milestone and maintain progress and pace.

I have mentioned in this report a number of times the fact that we will be developing priorities for the rest of this council term. This work has started and is developing; I will be glad to share more detail as soon as practical and to answer any questions. I have also said on a number of occasions that action is critical and that will be a key element of those final priorities. I know that everyone in the chamber is ambitious for Argyll and Bute and we all have a part to play in delivering on those ambitions. We are in a time of real change, not just at council level but nationally too. This inevitably has an impact on some of the actions we would like to take and leaves some matters out of our control – for a while. That too will change and, as it does, we will maintain the momentum, we will work with whatever opportunities should arise, and we will act.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1** This report highlights the activities of the Leader of Argyll and Bute Council for the period 5th April to 12th June 2024.

**Councillor Jim Lynch
Leader, Argyll and Bute Council**

12th June 2024

For further information or to access the Leader's Report Pack please contact Aileen McNicol, Leadership Support and Member Services Manager, telephone 01546 604014 or email aileen.mcnicol@argyll-bute.gov.uk