

**THEME LEADER REPORT TO COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP ARGYLL
& THE ISLANDS LOCAL ECONOMIC FORUM**
7TH September 2005

This meeting included four key presentations.

Points of note included:

Status of the Campbeltown Contact Centre – lease now signed and 50 staff to be employed by the end of October. Tower construction capacity worldwide at Vestas is being reviewed and there is a need to ensure the Scottish facility is retained. There was a discussion on the anti-wind farm lobby, its effect on wind-farm production, and the need for a more pro-active, pro-wind farm lobby to be mobilised. The extended quay in Campbeltown, put in place to assist Vestas, was progressing well. The effect of the Scottish Executive targets on renewables was discussed. There have been a large number of responses to the latest consultation on the Argyll & Bute Council Local Plan. The NAC Local Plans are now in place. Where there are unresolved matters on the Argyll & Bute plan there are likely to be Planning Enquiries. There had been a meeting of CEO of LEC's covered by the National Parks and there was a recognised need to encourage businesses within the Park to be more active. Ken Abernethy was planning to contact Mike Cantley, Vice Chairman of VisitScotland to progress actions. It was agreed to obtain and circulate HIE & A&B Council's response to the consultation on Marine National Park. It was noted that no progress has been made on the transport strategy as the transport partnerships had not been finalised. It was noted that HIE was formulating some thinking and the new Scottish Transport Minister, Tavish Scott, had his own thoughts. The lack of progress was affecting island sustainability and economic development. It was noted that despite the lack of a current strategy, there was still progress on transport infrastructure.

- Linkspans at Oban and Dunoon
- Bruichladdich Pier
- Port Askaig Terminal
- Argyll Air Services linking Colonsay, Coll etc to Oban and Glasgow

There has been a change in attitude and perception despite the lack of a formal strategy following individual issue consultations. The tenders for Argyll Air Services were now in at £6m and are up for 49.9% ERDF intervention provided additional capital funding could be found from other partners.

Changes to the Scottish Ambulance Services provision were highlighted and it was agreed to invite them to a future LEF meeting. It was noted that there were 7 weeks left on the consultation on the future of the Argyll & Clyde Health Board. The new Mid Argyll Hospital is due to open in March 2006. The Mull Progressive Care Centre is going for approval to the various bodies.

The four presentations were:

(1) KEN MCTAGGART – ECONOMIC STRATEGY – MEASURING PROGRESS

The Aim of the economic strategy is achieved by 5 objectives with 17 Priorities. It is the intention to monitor progress against these 17 priorities. Constraints are variable quality of official statistics, non-contiguous boundaries of the official areas (police, health, council, LEC etc) sourced from different bodies, but while uniformity does not exist best estimates to monitor progress of the strategy will be used, i.e. the best we can get.

In some cases the factor to be measured may be change, for example, Broadband coverage may change to Broadband take-up. The baseline study needs to be flexible to assess progress. The fall in unemployment needs to be examined against population trends. It was noted that the provision of health facilities in rural areas had a significant economic effect. There was a debate on how East European labour was eliminating seasonal unemployment, how local colleges had a role on retaining young people to work seasonal in local areas, how to train locally, and Argyll College's role in this was recognised. Data will be collected from 04 (annual) and 05 (quarterly) and be reported annually using graphs and tables with a community to set the data in context. The first report will be made as at the end of December detailing coverage of each data set. Agreement from members/partners by mid October was sought on the measures to be used, and the first report available in February 06. There will also be a quarterly activity report which will be co-ordinated by Ken McTaggart, covering what is happening in each organisation, including major projects and significant barriers in order to give members an overview of what is happening.

There was a short discussion on how to imbed the economic strategy within member's economic activity. Reference to the strategy should be made in any papers requesting budgets or actions within the statutory bodies. There is also an issue on how to embrace the strategy within the different organisations at a day to day level.

(2) MIKE BRESLIN – ARGYLL COLLEGE – UPDATE ON THE NEW CONSTRUCTION TRAINING CENTRE (part of the CONSTRUCTION EXCELLANCE INITIATIVE)

The project will cost £992,000 to purchase land, build the centre and provide equipment and funding is largely in place from a number of sources with an application of £346,000 to ERDF. There is very little money left in the EDRF fund, but as there is much partnership working the application is seen as very strong. The professional contracting team will be encouraged to work "at risk" to get building control applications in place. Planning is in place.

(3) BILLY WALKER – JOBCENTREPLUS – PATHWAYS TO WORK

In 2003 there were seven pilot Pathways to Work aimed at these on Disability Benefits. Once a client has been on Incapacity Benefit for a year, they find it difficult to return to work even if they wish to. While there are 7,000 unemployed in the JCPlus area, there are 32,000 on Incapacity Benefit, so there is a lot of work to identify suitable clients and then help them back to work. (The JCPlus area covers Renfrew, Inverclyde and Argyll & Bute).

There are three identified barriers to their return to work:

- lack of confidence
- lack of skills
- lack of financial incentive.

There are a number of funds available to advisers to overcome these barriers. While these include financial incentives there is a Conditioned Management Programme to improve the health (not illness focused) of the client. This appears to be working well with mental health and addiction issues. This programme is working with a number of partners, NHS, employers, statutory partners, voluntary sectors, to address the economic constraint of a reducing workforce. There is an In Workforce Support mechanism to assist small businesses who are employing for the first time.

Performance so far is good, job entries have doubled compared to previous year, 8-10% off benefit flow found work and 20% of customers have taken up the “ Choices “ Option, 10% of 7,500 on programme are volunteers.

Changes to the Benefit Systems are resulting from the success of Pathways to Work but there needs to be:

- More Back to Work support from NHS
- Healthier workplaces

Incapacity Benefit recipients will in the future have:

- Work Focused Interview at week 8
- Back to Work Action Plan

(4) PATRICK FLYNN – COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND – LOCAL SOCIAL ECONOMY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

Patrick started by explaining as LSEP is nested in the LEF; he needed to get the groups agreement to use his draft action plan as a consultative document. While Argyll had a very strong volunteering tradition, there were very few social enterprises in the area. Papers and studies are being prepared on:

- Procurement
- Gross sector trading
- Healthcare sector

along with links to HIESEZ and similar groups. There will be successor funds to Futurebuilders but whether this is a grant or loan fund, is not yet decided. Patrick agreed to attend and update the next LEF meeting.

The next meeting will be held on 14 December 2005.