**Overall summary of business survey**

The survey responses indicated that the business landscape in Argyll and Bute presents both opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurs and established businesses alike. The region's unique market position, coupled with its potential for growth in the tourism sector, provides fertile ground for business development. However, businesses face numerous obstacles, including high costs, infrastructure and regulatory challenges, transportation hurdles, and staffing difficulties. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from stakeholders at all levels.

To support business growth and sustainability, stakeholders must focus on several key areas. Firstly, there's a need for infrastructure improvement, including better road connectivity, transportation infrastructure, and access to high-speed broadband. Additionally, streamlining regulatory processes and reducing bureaucratic barriers will facilitate business operations and encourage investment. Ensuring access to affordable housing for workers and entrepreneurs is crucial for attracting and retaining talent in the region.

Respondees suggested that stakeholders should prioritise support for local businesses, including financial assistance, grants, and relief measures. Promoting tourism, enhancing community engagement, and aligning education and training programs with the needs of the local economy are essential for fostering economic growth and development.

Transitioning to a net-zero economy requires concerted efforts from businesses and stakeholders alike. This includes investing in energy-efficient technologies, promoting sustainable practices, and advocating for supportive policies. Financial support, streamlined processes, and access to information and resources are essential to facilitate businesses' transition to net-zero.

Creating vibrant and successful places for doing business in Argyll and Bute requires investments in infrastructure, community enhancements, and supportive policies. Improving transport connectivity, promoting entrepreneurship, and engaging with local communities are key strategies for attracting ambitious and innovative businesses to the region.

Overall, addressing the diverse needs and challenges of businesses in Argyll and Bute requires a collaborative and multifaceted approach. By investing in infrastructure, supporting local businesses, and fostering innovation and sustainability, stakeholders can drive growth and prosperity across various sectors in the region.

There were 56 respondents to the survey. A summary of the responses to each question is below.

1. **Key points regarding opportunities for running businesses in Argyll and Bute:**

* **Unique Market Position**: Some businesses, being the only one of their kind within the local area, see opportunities in their uniqueness.
* **Tourism Sector Potential**: Increased tourist footfall is seen as an opportunity for many businesses. There's potential for growth within the tourism sector, although challenges like delays in licensing and high costs for small businesses exist. There's a perceived opportunity for significant growth in tourism, day visits, and activity tourism. Many see the opportunity to capitalise on staycation tourism due to tightening purse strings and the appeal of local scenery. International visitors post-pandemic represent a significant opportunity for recovery and sustainability.
* **Road Connectivity and Pro-Visitor Posture**: Improved road connectivity, a pro-visitor posture, and support for destination marketing are seen as crucial for attracting and retaining visitors.
* **Local Demand for Produce**: There's a local demand and desire for local produce, presenting opportunities for businesses.
* **Scenery, Community, and Local Engagement**: The area's beautiful scenery, friendly community, and opportunities for local engagement are highlighted as positives for businesses.

1. **Key points summarising the challenges faced by businesses in Argyll and Bute:**

* **High External Costs**: Businesses are struggling with the burden of external costs imposed on them.
* **Infrastructure and Regulatory Challenges**: Businesses face challenges from new legislation impacting tourism, holiday accommodations, and business rates, affecting profitability and sustainability. Issues such as private water supply testing, lack of networking opportunities, and slow planning permission processes hinder business operations.
* **Transportation Hurdles**: Transport, including product delivery and personal travel, poses a significant challenge to businesses, impacting both logistics and costs.
* **Staffing and Pricing Difficulties**: Difficulty in finding seasonal staff, coupled with high operational costs due to licensing requirements, affects competitiveness and profitability.
* **Housing and Infrastructure Shortages**: Lack of affordable housing for workers, inadequate public transportation, and poor road conditions impede business growth and operations.
* **Market Access and Promotion**: Businesses struggle with limited market access, insufficient advertising, and inadequate promotion of the region, impacting footfall and revenue.
* **Financial Constraints and Debt**: Rising costs, over-regulation, and lack of government support leave businesses in significant debt and uncertain about survival.
* **Isolation and Seasonality**: Challenges related to island living, extreme seasonality, and lack of year-round attractions impact business viability and sustainability.
* **Community Engagement and Support**: Businesses call for better community engagement, support from local councils, and understanding of rural and island contexts by decision-makers to address challenges effectively.

1. **Key points regarding barriers to developing the workforce or own skills:**

* **Lack of European Workers**: Businesses face challenges due to the shortage of European workers, impacting staff supply and quality.
* **Location and Accessibility**: Businesses located in areas without convenient public transportation struggle to attract employees who can commute.
* **Cost of Training**: Affordability of training, especially when using private training agencies, presents a barrier to skill development.
* **Seasonal Employment and Retention**: Seasonal businesses struggle with regular staff turnover and the need for ongoing training and recruitment.
* **Support and Funding Accessibility**: Limited access to financial support, such as modern apprenticeships or grants, hampers workforce development efforts.
* **Housing Availability**: Lack of affordable housing in the local area makes it difficult to attract and retain employees.
* T**ime Constraints and Resource Allocation:** Time and financial constraints limit the ability to invest in training and development.
* **Lack of Networking and Mentorship Opportunities**: Absence of local networks and mentorship programs hinders skill development and business growth.

1. **Key points regarding improving people's skills to enter the workplace and achieve vocational and professional apprenticeships, higher paid employment, and/or self-employment opportunities**:

* **Increased Course Availability**: More courses need to be made available, particularly to address technological advancements impacting industries like hospitality.
* **Regular Workshops and Talks**: Regular workshops and informative talks can help individuals improve their skills and knowledge.
* **Financial Support for Training**: Financial assistance for businesses to support apprentices, along with funding for business startups, can improve skill development opportunities.
* **Encourage Vocational Training and Apprenticeships**: More vocational training opportunities, apprenticeships, and partnerships with businesses can help individuals gain practical skills.
* **Access to Affordable Housing**: Providing affordable housing or rental accommodation can attract and retain workers, particularly in rural areas.
* **Flexible Training Opportunities**: Flexible training options, such as online courses or evening and weekend classes, can accommodate individuals with existing work schedules.
* **Promotion of Entrepreneurship**: Encouraging entrepreneurship through mentorship programs and grants can foster self-employment opportunities.
* **Alignment with Local Economy**: Aligning education and training programs with the needs of the local economy, including small businesses and self-employment opportunities, can better prepare individuals for available jobs.
* **Government Support and Incentives**: Government incentive programs, grants for businesses, and eco-friendly grants can support businesses in improving their workforce and infrastructure.

1. **Key points regarding strengthening the Argyll and Bute economy post the COVID pandemic:**

* **Tourism Infrastructure Development**: Invest in tourism infrastructure and developing unique attractions.
* **Reduce Business Costs**: Address high business rates, reduce regulations, and provide support to small businesses to make it easier to operate.
* **Transport Connectivity**: Improve road infrastructure, ferry services, and public transport to enhance connectivity and accessibility for tourists and residents.
* **Support Local Businesses**: Offer incentives, grants, and relief measures for local businesses to encourage growth and sustainability.
* **Promote Investment**: Encourage investment in renewable energy, tourism, and other sectors to stimulate economic growth and create jobs.
* **Affordable Housing**: Address the shortage of affordable housing for residents and essential workers to attract and retain talent.
* **Streamlined Planning Process**: Simplify planning regulations and processes to make it easier and faster for businesses to establish or expand.
* **Focus on Basic Services**: Improve access to healthcare, dental services, and mental health support to enhance the wellbeing of residents and workers.
* **Collaboration and Engagement**: Foster collaboration between local government, businesses, community groups, and residents to develop and implement effective economic strategies.
* **Invest in Skills and Education**: Support skills development, vocational training, and education aligned with local economic needs to prepare residents for employment opportunities.

1. **Key points regarding the services and facilities required to support business growth:**

* **Financial Support**: Provide grants, funding, and access to capital to support business growth and investment.
* **Infrastructure Improvement**: Address issues such as road quality, transportation infrastructure, and availability of fuel stations/electric chargers to facilitate business operations.
* **Networking Opportunities**: Create platforms for networking, collaboration, and knowledge sharing among businesses to foster growth and innovation.
* **Training and Development**: Offer training programs, workshops, and grants for skills development to enhance workforce capabilities and entrepreneurship.
* **Business Hubs**: Establish business hubs or co-working spaces where entrepreneurs and small business owners can access resources, support, and networking opportunities.
* **Affordable Housing**: Address the shortage of affordable housing for workers and entrepreneurs to attract and retain talent in the area.
* **Tourism Support**: Provide support and incentives for tourism-related businesses, including quality assurance schemes and marketing assistance.
* **Regulatory Simplification**: Streamline planning regulations, reduce red tape, and simplify application processes to make it easier for businesses to operate and expand.
* **Community Enhancements**: Invest in public amenities such as toilets, bins, parking facilities, and recreational options to improve the local environment and attract visitors.
* **Business Resilience Focus**: Shift focus from growth to resilience, emphasizing support for businesses to withstand challenges and maintain stability in uncertain economic times.

1. **Key points regarding the required investment across Argyll and Bute for various sectors and areas of activity:**Overall, the investment needs vary across different sectors and areas of activity, but common themes include infrastructure improvement, financial support for businesses, tourism promotion, and community enhancements

* **Infrastructure Improvement**: Prioritize investment in better road infrastructure and reliable ferry services to facilitate transportation and connectivity.
* **Financial Support for SMEs**: Provide more financial relief and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to help them thrive and compete with global brands.
* **Tourism Promotion**: Invest in promoting Argyll and Bute nationally and locally as a destination for tourists, emphasizing its natural beauty and unique attractions.
* **Training and Development Funding**: Allocate funding for research and development (R&D) and provide grants for training and diversification to support local businesses.
* **Housing Affordability**: Address the shortage of affordable housing to attract and retain employees, especially young professionals, in the area.
* **Marketing and Advertisement**: Invest in collective advertising and marketing efforts to promote local businesses and attract more visitors.
* **Community Enhancements**: Allocate funds for community enhancements such as water treatment plants, shoreline cleaning, rubbish bins, and community centres to improve the quality of life for residents and tourists.
* **Business Support Services**: Provide support services for businesses, including assistance with licensing, networking opportunities, and access to funding and grants.
* **Environmental Sustainability**: Invest in environmental initiatives to address climate change impacts and ensure the long-term viability of businesses in the area.
* **Utilization of Existing Assets**: Make use of existing assets such as unused council buildings for business purposes to support entrepreneurship and economic growth.

1. **Key points regarding the investment required to create vibrant, attractive, and successful places for doing business in Argyll and Bute:**Overall, the investment needs include a combination of physical infrastructure improvements, community enhancements, financial support for businesses, and collaborative efforts to create vibrant and attractive places for doing business in Argyll and Bute.

* **Infrastructure Improvement**: Invest in better transport links, parking solutions, and road upgrades to enhance accessibility and convenience for businesses and customers.
* **Business Parks and Workshops**: Develop business parks with affordable workshops to encourage investment in tooling and equipment for startups and small businesses.
* **Revitalization of Town Centres**: Focus on the renovation of dilapidated buildings and storefronts in town centres to create new business hubs and attract entrepreneurs.
* **Community Enhancement**: Invest in community enhancements such as public spaces, outdoor hubs, and sports facilities to foster a sense of place and attract both locals and tourists.
* **Support for Small Businesses**: Provide financial support, grants, and loans to small businesses, including tax relief and incentives for new startups.
* **Tourism Promotion**: Promote Argyll and Bute as a tourist destination through advertising, events, and investment in attractions to drive footfall and support local businesses.
* **Collaborative Approaches**: Foster partnerships between local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations to ensure a coordinated effort in creating vibrant and attractive places for doing business.
* **Environmental Improvement**: Focus on green initiatives such as planting grass and greenery, cleaning streets, and enhancing public spaces to improve the aesthetics and appeal of the area.
* **Affordable Housing and Living Costs**: Address housing affordability issues and provide support for locals through initiatives such as affordable housing, free parking, and tax relief.
* **Support for Niche Sectors**: Invest in niche sectors such as offshore wind, community land, and distilleries by providing resources and skills development support.

1. **Key points regarding specific actions businesses could take to help Argyll and Bute transition to net-zero:**

* **Energy Efficiency**: Invest in energy-efficient technologies such as solar panels, heat pumps, and thermodynamic panels to reduce carbon emissions and reliance on fossil fuels.
* **Transportation**: Transition to electric vehicles (EVs) for business operations and consider installing EV chargers to support the adoption of electric vehicles in the community.
* **Waste Management**: Improve recycling practices within the business, including proper disposal of commercial waste and incentivizing businesses that carry out waste management properly.
* **Renewable Energy**: Embrace renewable energy sources such as hydroelectric, solar, and wind power to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and lower carbon emissions.
* **Support Sustainable Practices**: Partner with suppliers who prioritize sustainability and fair trade practices, and consider incorporating eco-friendly alternatives into business operations.
* **Building Efficiency**: Improve insulation in commercial buildings to reduce energy consumption and invest in carbon-neutral heating systems to minimize environmental impact.
* **Promote Carbon Offsetting**: Explore options for carbon offsetting initiatives to mitigate the carbon footprint of business operations, such as investing in reforestation projects or renewable energy credits.
* **Advocate for Policy Changes**: Advocate for government incentives and policies that support businesses in transitioning to net-zero, such as grants for renewable energy installations and tax incentives for sustainable practices.
* **Encourage Sustainable Transport**: Support initiatives for sustainable transportation options, such as electric boats for Loch Fyne or promoting car-sharing platforms to reduce carbon emissions from commuting.
* **Community Engagement**: Engage with the local community to raise awareness about the importance of transitioning to net-zero and encourage collective action towards sustainability goals.

1. **Key points regarding what would help businesses take action towards transitioning to net-zero:**

* **Financial Support**: Many businesses expressed a need for grant funding or financial assistance to invest in sustainable practices, such as installing renewable energy systems, purchasing electric vehicles, or implementing energy-efficient technologies.
* **Grants for Specific Initiatives**: Businesses highlighted the importance of grants tailored to specific initiatives, such as installing EV chargers, starting up cloth nappy schemes, or improving waste management infrastructure.
* **Streamlined Processes**: Simplifying and expediting planning and permit processes would facilitate businesses' efforts to implement sustainable measures, such as insulation upgrades or renewable energy installations.
* **Access to Information and Resources**: Businesses indicated a need for better access to information and resources, including online resources, guidance on available grants, and assistance in navigating sustainable practices.
* **Supportive Policies**: Some businesses called for supportive policies that incentivize sustainable practices and provide financial benefits for adopting green technologies.
* **Affordable Options**: Access to affordable alternatives, such as green energy sources or eco-friendly packaging, would enable businesses to make environmentally friendly choices without incurring significant costs.
* **Partnerships and Collaboration**: Collaboration with universities, government agencies, or other organizations could provide businesses with expertise, resources, and support in developing and implementing sustainable solutions.
* **Infrastructure Improvements**: Investments in infrastructure, such as better car charging infrastructure or access to affordable land for sustainable projects, would create opportunities for businesses to transition to net-zero.
* **Awareness and Education**: Businesses expressed a need for increased awareness and education on sustainable practices, including training for staff, access to case studies, and information on the environmental impact of purchasing decisions.

1. **Key factors needed to drive growth and sustainability across various sectors in Argyll and Bute**:

Overall, a combination of supportive policies, infrastructure investments, access to funding, and community engagement is needed to drive growth and sustainability in Argyll and Bute across various sectors.

* **Hospitality and Tourism**: Affordable external costs, a steady flow of workers, and a balanced supply of products are essential. Moreover, addressing seasonality and implementing supportive policies regarding short-term lets and tourist taxes.
* **Networking**: Collaboration and sharing of ideas and practices across businesses in all sectors.
* Energy and Manufacturing: Investment in property to accommodate advanced manufacturing equipment.
* **Retail**: Access to more footfall, better parking, leisure options, and clean streets are necessary for growth. Additionally, support for local businesses to compete with national chains would contribute to sustainability.
* **Event Industry**: More funding to support event organizers would stimulate the local economy and boost morale.
* **Education and Skills Development**: Aligning education with local job opportunities and lobbying for skills frameworks that meet the needs of the rural economy.
* **Transport and Infrastructure**: Improved transport links, including extended season ferries, would support various sectors, particularly tourism and hospitality.
* **Wellbeing Sector**: More opportunities to deliver services to local providers such as schools, social services, and the NHS.
* **Access to Funding and Support**: Financial assistance, access to grants, and support for new businesses.
* **Regulatory Environment**: Addressing bureaucratic barriers, such as red tape in the fishing industry and regulations on self-catering accommodations.
* **Community Engagement**: Building trust within the community, understanding local needs, and promoting local products and services.

1. **Key points regarding actions needed by stakeholders to make Argyll and Bute a natural choice for ambitious, emerging, and innovative new businesses:**

* **Infrastructure Improvement**: Address road issues, enhance the ferry network, and invest in fast broadband and transport connectivity. This involves actions by both the Scottish government and local authorities.
* **Affordable Accommodation**: Provide affordable housing solutions for workers and businesses, ensuring that accommodation costs are not prohibitive.
* **Support for Entrepreneurs**: Make it easier to access start-up grants and reduce bureaucratic barriers to setting up businesses.
* **Transport Connectivity**: Improve transport infrastructure to facilitate movement between urban areas and within the region. This includes faster train services, reliable ferries, and efficient logistics access.
* **Regulatory Environment**: Simplify planning approvals and provide forward-thinking planning departments that can react quickly to business needs.
* **Community Engagement**: Engage with local communities and businesses to understand their needs and priorities, ensuring that decisions are inclusive and representative of the entire region.
* **Financial Incentives**: Offer financial incentives such as reduced business rates, start-up grants, and energy incentives for sustainable practices like solar and heat pump installation.
* **Promotion of Success Stories**: Share success stories of businesses thriving in Argyll and Bute to inspire confidence and attract new ventures.
* **Support for Local Producers**: Work with local producers to create a 'Made in Argyll' quality assurance badge for food, drink, and craft products, promoting local goods.
* **Recognition of Unique Selling Points:** Highlight the region's natural beauty, lifestyle, and opportunities to attract talent and investment.
* **Engagement with Younger Generation**: Encourage the involvement of younger elected members and support initiatives that focus on skills development and entrepreneurship among youth.
* **Economic Stewardship:** Embrace the concept of the wellbeing economy and adopt policies that balance economic growth with social and environmental considerations.

1. **Key points from the ‘any other information’ responses**:

* **High Operating Costs**: Businesses are struggling due to rising costs of operation. There's a need for policy changes to alleviate this burden and make it more viable for businesses to operate.
* **Government Policies**: The impact of government policies, both at the national and local levels, is significant. Businesses feel that some policies are not well thought out and negatively affect them. There's a call for better consultation and consideration of local issues when formulating policies.
* **Infrastructure**: Improvements in infrastructure, including transport connectivity, broadband access, and maintenance of roads, are crucial for business growth. Delays in infrastructure projects can hamper economic development.
* **Regulatory Environment**: Businesses seek a reduction in red tape and more efficient processes for obtaining permits and approvals. Streamlining regulatory procedures can facilitate business operations and encourage investment.
* **Community Engagement**: There's a desire for better engagement between local authorities and businesses, with a focus on practical advice and solutions. Businesses want their concerns to be heard and addressed effectively.
* **Support for Tourism**: Tourism is a vital economic driver, and businesses in the sector emphasize the importance of policies that support rather than hinder tourism growth. The implementation of tourism taxes should be carefully considered to avoid negative impacts on businesses.
* **Council Accountability**: There are calls for greater accountability and effectiveness from local councils. Businesses expect their elected representatives to be proactive and responsive to their needs.
* **Incentives and Support**: Providing incentives for business development, such as grants, reduced taxes, and support for renewable energy projects, can stimulate economic growth and job creation.
* **Community Development**: Revitalizing town centres, addressing derelict properties, and investing in infrastructure projects can enhance the attractiveness of the region for businesses and residents alike.
* **Education and Skills**: Collaboration with national skills bodies is seen as essential to ensure that education and training programs align with the needs of the local economy.

Summary created from verbatim business survey responses using AI.