
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

6 October 2020

Cabinet

Title: Islands Renewal Best Practice Pilot

Purpose: To seek Cabinet approval of an Islands Recovery and Renewal pilot project developed in partnership with the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Recommendation: That Cabinet:

- a) Agrees that the Council participates in a pilot project focused on the recovery and renewal of islands aligned to the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the National Islands Plan; and
- b) Agrees to receive Annual Reports on the progress and outputs of the pilot.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval of the Council's participation in a pilot project to support an inclusive and green economic recovery and renewal of North Ayrshire's island communities in line with their unique needs. The pilot project is aligned to the delivery of the National Islands Plan and Community Wealth Building (CWB), developed in partnership with the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), which will provide national and international learning. The pilot project will include the creation of a new Senior Manager (Islands) post and will trial new ways of local government, community planning partners, national government and government agencies working on the islands in partnership with island communities and businesses to support the implementation of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the National Islands Plan.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 introduces measures to underpin the objective of ensuring that there is a sustained focus across Government and the public sector to meet the needs of island communities now and in the future. The Act also gives effect to a range of policy changes to improve outcomes for our island communities. This includes placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to publish a National Islands Plan and a duty to have regard to island communities in exercising their functions – in essence, this means island 'proofing' what and how we do things. The Act recognises that island communities often face different issues and challenges compared to the mainland and

the Council and other partners must consider this when assessing strategies and programmes. Following the introduction of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, a section on this has been added to the Council's Equality and Children's Rights Impact Assessment.

- 2.2 The National Islands Plan published in December 2019 provides a framework and 13 strategic objectives for action in order to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Council's response to the proposed National Islands Plan in 2019 noted that a whole systems approach should be applied to ensure the overall ambitions of the Plan are realised given the complex nature of island challenges.
- 2.3 Whilst North Ayrshire's key islands of Arran and Cumbrae are much cherished for their beauty and uniqueness, natural assets and are home to passionate and resilient communities, they also must manage the challenges of geographical remoteness, poor connectivity and other demographic challenges. Together with the allocation of a specific support role for islands through an Islands Cabinet portfolio holder, our island communities are also supported as part of our wider 'Locality Planning Partnership' model. Cumbrae is supported as part of the North Coast and Cumbraes' Locality Planning Partnership and Arran is supported through the Arran Locality Planning Partnership. This model continues to exhibit its effectiveness and will be complemented by the proposed creation of an Islands Manager as part of the proposed pilot.
- 2.4 The Covid-19 public health crisis however has highlighted the vulnerabilities of the island's economies and, in particular, their dependency on ferry transportation and the tourism sector. The islands have faced a disproportionate impact due to their reliance on reduced ferry capacity for the transportation of goods, services and visitors, and accessing essential services. During the crisis the island communities worked together with council officers and resilience groups to support recovery and renewal and identify targeted support measures ensuring a very effective response.
- 2.5 Our Local Economic Recovery and Renewal Approach, agreed by Cabinet in September 2020, recognises that our islands' communities of Arran and Cumbrae need specific support to recover from the economic and social impact of Covid-19. Central to our approach to supporting our islands will be Community Wealth Building and a place-based approach to ensure a more inclusive economy going forward, aligned to the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and National Islands Plan, as well as tackling climate change in line with the Council's net zero carbon target of 2030.
- 2.6 In developing our understanding of the unique nature of the challenges being faced by our islands as a result of Covid-19, we are aware that national interventions and investment will be fundamental to recovery and renewal of our island economies. In partnership with stakeholders on the islands, in July the Council put forward four areas of support requested from the Scottish Government to support our islands to recover:
 - That CalMac explore creative solutions to implement an increase in ferry capacity, whilst aligning with necessary public health measures, to ensure an economic recovery for the islands in a safe and sustainable way;
 - Ticketing systems for ferry journeys should prioritise journeys that will contribute to the economic and social recovery of the islands;
 - Financial interventions to support island businesses; and
 - The creation of a bespoke Island Fund aligned to Community Wealth Building.

- 2.7 To support this work, we have commissioned and published research from the Fraser of Allander Institute on the disproportionate economic impact of Covid-19 on the Arran economy. This work has also provided an outline socio-economic baseline for Arran that can be updated and monitored moving forward to inform an evidence-based approach to policy development. The full report is available at: www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/Documents/EconomyCommunities/Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Arran-economy.pdf
- 2.8 With the recent introduction of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and National Islands Plan, there is an opportunity to test new ways of working across local government, Scottish Government, community planning partners, HIE, island communities and businesses to deliver the ambitious objectives outlined in the Act and Plan, as well as share this learning with other island areas.
- 2.9 The need for a new approach and a test of concept pilot is driven by the following strategic frameworks:
- Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the National Islands Plan
 - North Ayrshire Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy
 - Place-making and Covid-19 inclusive and green economic recovery and renewal
 - Community Planning and the locality approaches embedded in North Ayrshire including Locality Planning Partnerships

Project Scope and Aims

- 2.10 As part of this pilot a new post of Senior Manager (Islands) will be created to contribute to the ongoing development and delivery of islands policy, working across the public sector with island communities, businesses and with a range of external stakeholders to tackle long-standing place-based issues relating to island communities including economic activity and resilience, demographics, health and wellbeing, education and skills, housing, transport, digital connectivity, fuel poverty, human rights, and climate change and biodiversity. This would allow for local input to the National Islands Plan delivery, progress of which we would expect the post holder to monitor. This would support the development, support and monitoring of an 'Islands Plan' on both Arran and Cumbrae developed within a locality planning context.
- 2.11 A key action within the National Islands Plan is to 'explore ways to strengthen the voice of island communities whilst capturing the differences between islands in local and national decision-making' and the post will provide a vehicle to ensuring the understanding and representation of the unique needs of islands' communities in local and national policy development and will encourage strategic island planning at all levels.
- 2.12 The post will achieve this by focusing on the following areas:
- 10-year visionary plans are in various stages of development on the islands and the additional resource will support increased collaboration and co-production across partners, island communities and businesses in the delivery of those plans and ensure alignment across the 13 strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan. This will also allow island specific outcomes, baselines and measurements to be developed and aligned to the Scottish Government measurement of the strategic outcomes of the National Islands Plan including as part of the National Performance Framework;

- Support the recovery and renewal of the islands from the social and economic impact of Covid-19, to maximise the support available for island communities, including targeting partner resources to address recovery priorities particularly in business resilience, to identify wider island specific recovery needs, and ensure that this is strategically applied to address recovery and renewal priorities;
- Contribute to closer and more coordinated working between the island communities, community planning partners, national and local government and agencies to ensure stronger place-based partnership working and a whole systems approach to improve island wellbeing, including in areas such as housing and transportation;
- Strengthen the island voice and influence national and local government working on the islands and influence services to better meet the unique needs of islands;
As part of the above aim, inform the development of the Scottish Rural Network at a local level, working with other partners such as Scottish Rural Action who are already developing networks to influence policy at local and national level. This will have a focus on young people and young islanders' networks, including Arran High School, Arran Youth Foundations and within the nationally recognised North Ayrshire Youth Participation and Citizenship Strategy;
- Work across the Council and support the elected member who is the Islands Cabinet Portfolio lead, ensuring policy development is 'island proofed';
- Support the role of island communities and businesses and ensure a participatory approach to meet their ambitions, building on the priorities identified as part of the National Islands Plan and locality planning partnership developments undertaken on Arran and Cumbrae; and
- Collaborate with national and international partners as appropriate to ensure a model of best practice and develop a model to inform National Islands Plan delivery on other islands that are not Unitary.

2.13 The Senior Manager (Islands) will be employed and recruited by North Ayrshire Council in line with the Council's HR policies and procedures. The officer post will be supported by a small project budget to support the delivery of the above aims. The officer would work with Scottish Government Rural and Islands Team one day per week which would allow the post holder to gain an in depth understanding of islands policy on a larger scale, whilst supporting the Rural and Islands team as a 'local liaison' for the National Islands Plan and the Scottish Rural Network.

2.14 The Scottish Government's 2020-21 Programme for Government announced a £2 million Green Recovery Programme for islands, opening in October 2020, to help deliver on low-carbon related commitments in the National Islands Plan and further work will be undertaken to scope how this can support the delivery of the pilot and benefit island communities and businesses.

Specific Proposals and Next Steps

2.15 For each island there will be a specific portfolio of work and projects that the officer will progress with groups and partners. Plans will be developed through a Community Wealth Building lens and will take account of and contribute to the ongoing work of locality partnerships in the North Coast and Cumbraes' and on Arran. Across both islands the work to develop and finalise 10-year plans will be central to informing specific

development needs and priorities for the pilot. In addition, support for recovery will continue to be dynamic depending on the public health priorities and restrictions and also any further government support that becomes available.

- 2.16 For Arran, work will take place to finalise a 10 year plan for the island and progress Community Wealth Building proposals for further exploration identified at a workshop in June 2020 which cover the five pillars of Community Wealth Building (Procurement, Fair Employment, Land and Assets, Financial Power, and Plural Ownership) as well as a sixth pillar of the Environment.
- 2.17 For Cumbrae, work will take place with local groups and representatives to create a new 10-year plan for the island building on an initial meeting with group representatives in August 2020.
- 2.18 The National Islands Plan highlights the need for strong socio-economic baseline to ensure an evidence-based approach to policy development and the officer will work closely with the Economic Policy team to develop baselines for each island, building on the work already undertaken with the Fraser of Allander Institute.
- 2.19 The proposed intended outcomes and 'tests of change' for the pilot are:
- Promoting the voice of island communities and ensuring the 'island proofing' of policies, strategies and investment;
 - Harnessing island resources through playing a part in a joined up and whole system approach including to tackle climate change; and
 - Ensure enhanced wellbeing of island communities through Community Wealth Building approach and series of related projects and developments.
- 2.20 Discussions will continue to progress with Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise on how all the key strands of activity set out in this report will inform a programme of work and priorities that will be taken forward as part of the pilot. Subject to Cabinet approval and Scottish Government and HIE approval procedures, the pilot will commence late 2020 for a three-year period.

3. Proposals

3.1 That Cabinet:

- a) Agrees that the Council participates in a pilot project focused on the recovery and renewal of islands aligned to the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 and the National Islands Plan; and
- b) Agrees to receive Annual Reports on the progress and outputs of the pilot.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

- 4.1 The total cost of the project is £250,000 which will be co-funded by the Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and North Ayrshire Council. A small project budget is part of this total to cover costs associated with events, communications, consultancy support and other project related expenses. The

Council's contribution of £130,000 will be incorporated in the Council's recovery and renewal planning through 2020/21.

Human Resources

- 4.2 Role profile, job evaluation and recruitment will take place in line with the Council's HR policies and procedures.

Legal

- 4.3 The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 gives effect to a range of policy changes to improve outcomes for our island communities. This pilot will support the delivery of the ambitions set out within the Act.

Equality/Socio-economic

- 4.4 The project will have a specific focus on ensuring the enhanced wellbeing of island communities through Community Wealth Building approach. Socio-economic baselines will be developed for each island. The project will promote the voice of island communities and ensuring the 'island proofing' of policies, strategies and investment.

Environmental and Sustainability

- 4.5 The project will support the ambitions of the Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change strategy through an island perspective in line with the National Islands Plan and activity to take steps to achieve the Council's 2030 net zero carbon target.

Key Priorities

- 4.6 The report covers information relevant to the following priorities:
- North Ayrshire has an inclusive, growing and enterprising economy;
 - North Ayrshire's residents and communities enjoy good life-long health and well-being;
 - North Ayrshire has active and strong communities;
 - North Ayrshire's children and young people experience the best start in life;
 - North Ayrshire is well-connected with effective infrastructure;
 - North Ayrshire has homes that meet our residents' needs;
 - North Ayrshire is a sustainable environment; and
 - North Ayrshire is a vibrant, welcoming and attractive environment.

Community Wealth Building

- 4.7 All plans will be developed through a Community Wealth Building lens in partnership with island communities and businesses.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The proposals have been co-produced by the Council, Scottish Government and HIE. Consultation has taken place with local stakeholders, community representatives and businesses on each island including the Arran Locality Partnership, the Arran Recovery Group and Cumbrae representatives. Consultation has taken place with the Cabinet Member for the Islands.

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For further information please contact **Caitriona McAuley, Head of Service (Economic Development and Regeneration)**, on **07720237111**.

Background Papers

None.