

Since the turn of the year, my focus has very much been on constituency work as there have been no strategic committees sitting during January.

Subjects that have been explored include Council Budget, Rothesay Pavilion, Broadband Connectivity on Bute, Library Services, Provision of Amenity in relation to Ardenraig Garden and Rothesay Esplanade and a number of individual issues.

During February I will be attending Policy & Resources on 15th February, full Argyll and Bute Council meeting on 22nd February, there is also a special meeting planned on the same day about Rothesay Pavilion.

The budget process has been made more difficult as a result of Westminster budget announced on 27th December 2023. This of course has the domino effect on Scottish Government, which operates within a legal framework that requires it to deliver a balanced budget annually, and then to local authorities. Not only was the timing unhelpful the continuation of an austerity agenda and reductions in capital budget has meant it there is a very difficult landscape for local authorities. At this time Tory/LibDem and Independents (TALIG) Administration are working through a number of options for presentation. The Opposition Group will seek to work constructively on this process, but inevitably there will be areas where we would seek to do things differently. This process is ongoing, the public papers should be published on 15th February however there may be items which are not presented until 22nd February full Council meeting.

Rothesay Pavilion – it will be extremely challenging to get this project over the line, however this major asset, which has international interest, must work for this community. We are currently benefiting from the construction work that has continued over the winter with contractors taking up beds, spending money locally and moving the project closer to completing phase 1. There are have great efforts by the Charity to raise the funds to complete the project and have Rothesay Pavilion open for business in the summer of 2026. I fully support the project, and I guess the question is this – if this project does not progress to completion what ideas do TALIG have for the economic regeneration of Bute?

With regards to Broadband on Bute we are experiencing issues, and Openreach have recently confirmed that whilst Rothesay Exchange is in the plan for upgrade there are no confirmed date for delivery. This could also impact on decision making for those considering moving to our area. I think this is significant and I will be following up through within the committee environments that I attend however I think there is an urgent need for Argyll & Bute Council to understand the potential impacts for service delivery and, although non-statutory, economic development activity.

An interesting question has arisen about the service provision of libraries. Argyll & Bute Council transferred management of libraries to Live Argyll in the last Council term. A constituent raised the issue of provision of local newspapers which was a library service pre-COVID19. This service is no longer provided on Bute, and the response received indicated that that decision would only be revisited if demand was established. I raise here for feedback and support from Bute Community Council to reinstate this service.

I have been following up on implementation of the policy to reinstate nursery services at Ardenraig Gardens and have included Cllrs McCabe and Wallace in correspondence. I asked for an update on the procurement of plants and the growing plans to service the region following the restoration of

nursery services at Ardenraig Gardens. I expressed my hope that this would be a good news story for Bute and the wider region this year.

The response I received on 25th January is below:

“We are currently going through a procurement process for the plugs and expect this to conclude in the next couple of weeks. The plants will be brought on at Ardenraig Gardens for planting out on Bute in early summer.”

On 7th February I raised further questions “I note that the notice for procurement was published on Public Contracts Scotland on 22nd January 2024 and the deadline for quotes being 5th February 2024. Hopefully there have been successful bids.

An update would be appreciated and an outline of any contingency plans in event of market failure. Thank you.” I have not yet received a response.