

At a Special Meeting of the Council on 2nd April, called for by the Strategic Opposition Group, the leadership of the Council changed when on both the election of Provost and Leader of the Council the 18/18 deadlock was broken by cutting cards, where luck was with the opposition group. Full details of the makeup of the new Council will be decided at the Council meeting of 25th April.

The Special Council Meeting on the 15th April 2024, agreed to implement a Council Tax freeze for 2024/25 following additional funding received from the Scottish Government. The report made clear that £1.1M from UK consequential and £2.3M severe weather monies had been confirmed since the February budget, along with an anticipated extra £600k from a share of the island's cost of living fund. As a result of the extra monies which the previous administration were able to negotiate, services and jobs have been protected while allowing the Council Tax to be frozen, which is a win/win for the people of Argyll and Bute.

I met with the Visit Scotland Destination Development Director for Highlands & Islands to discuss concerns about their announcement that the Discovery Centre here on Bute would close. It was disappointing to hear that the board took this decision without any local consultation, pursuing a 'digital first' strategy, although this should probably be renamed a 'digital only' strategy, as all tourist information centres across Scotland are to close, creating the real risk of digital exclusion of some visitors.

Tourism is an important part of our economy, and this move undermines the work that is done by local providers to increase tourism and enhance the visitor experience. It is clear that a coordinated effort across Scotland will be needed to try to change this decision and to that end I am engaging with colleagues across the Council and the Scottish Parliament to call for an operating model that is more inclusive with both a digital and a face-to-face approach. I will of course also be supporting local efforts in relation to the Discovery Centre.

I attended the meeting of the Health and Social Care Partnership Integrated Joint Board as an observer; my request to speak at the meeting was denied as I do not serve on this board. Before the meeting I made representations to both the Chair and Officers in relation to plans to close Thompson Court Day Care facilities and I am pleased that at this meeting the immediate threat of closure was removed, with a full review of the delivery of this service to be undertaken and I will be closely following this process.

At the Environment Development and Infrastructure committee I raised concerns about road conditions here on Bute on behalf of Bute Wheelers, in relation to the cycling event later in the year. I was advised that in addition to the capital roads programme, additional works could be carried out through the revenue programme to address defects, but also that where there was accelerated deterioration identified on the network these could require some changes to the capital programme. I continue to liaise with the roads department in relation to specific issues to ensure that this event can go ahead safely.

The second batch of plugs has arrived for Bute and will be brought on at Ardenraig before being planted out. The Roads Department have been out checking culverts and clearing debris along the A844 following the stormy weather we have had recently. Unfortunately the poor weather has delayed lining works that were scheduled to be carried out.

With Cllr Kennedy-Boyle I had further meetings with Officers and Bute BID in relation to play facilities in the centre of town for which a small amount of money has been allocated. I also attended a meeting of the Dumbarton and Argyll & Bute Joint Valuation Board, and of the PPSL committee.