

## SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ADDRESSING DEPOPULATION ACTION PLAN

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Scottish Government has published an Addressing Depopulation Action Plan (referred to as the Plan in this report) to address the challenges of depopulation in Scotland at both a local and national level. Following a period of consultation with key stakeholders the plan identifies 88 actions that recognises depopulation as a priority area of focus for the Scottish Government. This is something in itself has to be welcomed by the council given this is something council representatives over a number of years have lobbied for consistently. This report however looks at the content of the Plan, provides a high level overview and makes a number of observations that Members are asked to note and consider.
- 1.2 Our population levels and demography is important to Argyll and Bute as this heavily influences the funding we receive from both Governments and impacts on investment decisions from the private sector. The importance of demography is explained further in **Appendix 1** and it also contains a Map (Map 1) of current population trends which is taken from the Plan. In particular, it reveals the areas where population levels are in decline and this includes Argyll and Bute Council. In total 14 council areas are in a position where their population is now in decline (rising from 8) and as can be seen from the Map this is predominately in the west coast and peripheral rural areas. In areas where the population is rising this is due to greater in migration than out migration and predominately focussed in the central belt, cities, and urban areas.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council:-
- a) Consider the publication of the Scottish Government's Depopulation Action Plan and its contents;
  - b) Approve that the Council continues to engage with the Scottish Government to focus on delivering further investment in our communities facing depopulation with an increased focus on the key issues of affordable housing, digital and transport connectivity together with employment opportunity.

### **3.0 DETAIL**

#### 3.1 The Addre

- **The Plan** promises additional resources in the future however only £180k of new funding is linked to the plan and this is a competitive fund.
- 3.4 The Scottish Government consider the Plan to be the first phase of the necessary work to address depopulation. A Depopulation Delivery Group will take forward a second phase to oversee delivery of this Plan and set out its future work to be overseen by the Ministerial Population Taskforce. A Place based approach will be taken to deliver future interventions.
- 3.5 The publication of the Plan is welcomed by Argyll and Bute Council as we have consistently called for action to be taken at a national level to counter our population trends that have been ongoing over a number of decades. Our population is continuing to fall and this is largely due to an ageing demographic coupled with a decline of in migration particularly from people of working age. This trend of decline has now been extended to 14 councils (a rising trend from 8) in Scotland largely confined to Scotland's west coast and peripheral rural areas (See Map1). This situation is not unique to Scotland as western societies become more urban and gravitate to urban centres often exacerbated by changes in the national and global economies.
- 3.6 It also has to be acknowledged the work the council is doing to counter our population trends is referenced in the action plan in numerous locations. For example, Argyll and Bute Council has already secured part funding for our Settlement Officer post and the work done to date was reported to the Council's EDI March Committee. The council has also made a bid for an additional £60k of revenue funding referenced in the Plan but this is highly competitive with only 3 councils being able to access this funding and at the time of writing this report we have not been notified of being successful or not. In addition, there are a number of our local communities who have managed to reverse these trends through taking a bottom up approach working in collaboration with public bodies, including the council, and also the private sector. For example, the island communities of Jura and Gigha.
- 3.7 That said, there remains significant concerns that the Plan contains no significant increase in resources to counter the acute issues we are dealing with. In particular, the need to build new affordable homes, create employment opportunity and improve our transport and digital connectivity. There is a furth

arguing for additional resources to counter our negative population trends. Consequently, it remains important that the council continues to lobby for additional meaningful actions and the necessary resources to help with our population challenges. For example, to enable us to accelerate the actions identified with our declared Housing Emergency, create employment opportunities, or invest in our transport and digital networks to make Argyll and Bute an attractive place to stay or move to.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The Scottish Government has published its Addressing Depopulation Action Plan. The Plan contains 88 Actions linked to Scottish Government Policy interventions with regard to population and demography. This provides a useful summary of Government action together with an acknowledgement that local leadership that takes a place based approach can make the biggest impact on attracting and retaining people in our communities. Argyll and Bute Council is one of 14 LAs with a falling population and this is predominately the experience of West Coast and rural LAs over a sustained period of time. **Appendix 1** of this report explains the importance of demography and includes **Map1** that reveals where Scotland's population is rising and falling.
- 4.2 Whilst the publication of this plan is welcome, given the council has lobbied for national action for a considerable period of time, there remains a concern that there is still a need for greater focus on more radical actions, coupled with greater resources, to reverse these negative population trends. These actions need to focus on the issues that matter to our local communities, more affordable housing, better digital and transport connectivity together with additional employment opportunities. It is further acknowledged that other council's experiencing population gains are also lobbying Government for additional resources and consequently the council needs to continue its efforts to lobby Government over the vital importance of attracting and retaining economically active people to our area.

#### **5.0 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Policy - A key council priority is to grow our population and support the sustainable growth of our economy. The publication of the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan sets out a range of Government policy interventions that address this important issue.
- 5.2 Financial - None directly arising from this report however our population levels influence and inform Government funding mechanisms together with private sector investment decisions.
- 5.3 Legal – None.
- 5.4





decline largely through an excess of deaths over births and this is a common trend for predominately west coast and peripheral rural areas.

## **MAP 1**