

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

Report on Committee visit to Cumbrae, North Ayrshire, November 2023

Background

1. The Scottish Government has consulted on proposals for a Community Wealth Building bill, and this visit to Cumbrae in North Ayrshire provided Committee members with the opportunity to visit examples of community wealth building in practice.
2. Community Wealth building (CWB) is an internationally recognised approach designed to address economic challenges and transform local and regional economies through a partnership between sectors. It aims to see wealth being generated, circulated and retained locally within communities.
3. During session 6 the Committee is visiting a number of local authorities to learn first hand about the issues they face, in order to take them into account throughout its work. On their visit to Cumbrae, members took the opportunity to have a wider conversation with North Ayrshire Council leaders and senior officials about the issues faced in North Ayrshire.
4. This brief report notes the key issues that were discussed during the Committee's visit.

Community Wealth Building ('CWB')

5. North Ayrshire Council see CWB as a practical approach which supports local business, particularly in the absence of inward investment. Local spend has increased to 26%, from 19% in 2020. After undertaking a CWB 'diagnostic' to identify existing practice and where opportunities lay, the council developed Scotland's first CWB Strategy and Action Plan in 2020. This has 55 actions and takes a locality-based approach, with CWB staff in place to support its delivery.
6. The buy-in and investment in CWB by the council's leadership has been key to its success, with the council now leading the way in Scotland in taking a CWB approach. CWB unifies 'anchor' organisations with communities and wider partners, and provides a shared language. Ideally it is a shared responsibility and helps to tackle inequalities, but at present the local authority is the main driver behind it. An 'Anchor Charter' was established in 2020 to help drive that collaboration.

7. The wider Ayrshire area (North, East and South Ayrshire councils) is working together to support CWB, and are joint members of a CWB Commission which includes 6 other anchor organisations including NHS, Police Scotland, Scottish Fire & Rescue, Scottish Enterprise, North Ayrshire's TSI, and a Further Education College. The three local authorities have undertaken a joint exercise to map their procurement, to help identify opportunities to support more local procurement. An Ayrshire Growth Deal involves the three authorities, and a new Regional Economic Strategy was launched in 2023, which has CWB embedded within it.
8. North Ayrshire Council supports the proposal for a CWB Bill, with it providing an opportunity to increase both the buy-in and the flexibility of wider partners who are sometimes currently restricted in their actions (for example in procurement).
9. 'Community' is critical to CWB, and the council's investment in community engagement has been highlighted by Audit Scotland. Its Connected Communities team helps build capacity, and it proactively asks communities what benefits they want to see, ensuring CWB is not just 'done to' a community. It also supports community asset transfers of facilities into community ownership, both practically and through providing funding if needed. A Community Investment Fund is available in its 6 locality areas, providing a place-based approach to tackle inequalities.

Examples of Community Wealth Building on Cumbrae

10. Committee members were able to visit three different local projects which each represent aspects of CWB in practice.
11. Millport Town Hall is being restored to provide a community venue, with its ownership being transferred to the community through a community asset transfer, supported by the local authority. This significant building project is being managed by local volunteers who have successfully gained funding from almost 50 different grants, including Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Funding and NAC Community Investment Funding. The building will provide facilities including a performance venue and an accessible meeting space together with revenue from self-catering holiday accommodation.
12. Isle of Cumbrae distillers is a locally owned business committed to sustainability and local training and employment opportunities. Their products have won a number of awards. An all-female owned business, they are actively creating employment and training opportunities for island residents, including people with disabilities. They are a Living Wage employer and a Young Person's Guarantee Employer, and proactively support other local businesses and the Millport Town Hall project.
13. Jack's Alt Stays was established last year to provide self-catering cabins and help build the local tourist economy. Another locally-owned business it is

environmentally conscious, receiving funding to instal solar panels, and proactively works with other local businesses to source local produce and sign-post local services and attractions.

Other issues discussed

14. A 10-year Cumbrae Island Plan is in place, co-designed with the community. Flood prevention works are underway, and a Marine Tourism project has been developed. A new marina will be partly run by the community, and the island will provide a site for research into international marine science and environmental issues.
15. Wider work by the council to provide sustainability include the creation of 2 photovoltaic solar farms, owned and built by the council, from which it projects there will be a significant net financial return over 20 years.
16. Council leaders highlighted to Members the importance of public services being designed around local need, as with the Single Island Authority model. Local flexibility is key to local authorities meeting those needs. The spending of any revenue raised from a Visitor Levy for example should not be restricted.

Committee Clerks

November 2023