

ARG representatives: Vicki Yuill (Arran CVS); Sheila Gilmore (Visit Arran); Greg Hamill (Arran Medical Group); Jude King (Eco Savvy), Ruth Betley (Arran Medical Group)

Note-taking – Joao Goncalves (Arran CVS)

There were representatives of the following groups/organisations present:

ArCaS; Pirnmill Village Association; Lochranza Centre; Mary Davies Trust (x2); Arran Foodbank; COAST; Befriending, Keep Arran Talking and Lunch Club (same person representing them all, except KAT which had one more rep on the call); Arran Community Council (x2); U3A and Arran Sound (same person representing both)

Vicki did the housekeeping and then gave the floor to Sheila, who then went through a presentation to talk about who the Arran Recovery Group are, what they are trying to achieve and how they used the survey to understand the needs and priorities of the community:

The survey showed that the community of Arran pulled together very strongly during the pandemic. 77% of respondents felt that the information they received was good. Support was varied but sometimes confusing to access.

There is concern about mental health due to covid-19. In terms of physical health, people actually made more of an effort to go out for walks and do exercise, which normally they might not have been able to do due to lack of time.

There was a great degree of optimism on Arran's environment. The community are very much supporters of keeping Arran clean.

People were very worried about Arran's economy post-COVID.

People were mostly concerned about issues around health & safety, job security and transport in general.

900 responses, 35,000+ quantitative, 1,400+ qualitative responses

Health was the key priority. The fear of uncertainty was felt in equal measures by residents who were suffering financially and those suffering physically.

Community sessions, such as this one, will contribute to putting together a recovery plan for the island. The health of the community will be at the forefront.

Buses are currently running with 17 passengers

Refuse collection – yes, this is being collected. The only refuse that wasn't being collected was commercial because everything was closed, but they are now collecting it again. The only thing that isn't sorted is clothing banks, the council has got a huge backlog of clothing banks to clear

Physical distancing – very difficult to manage, we have asked people very clearly to stick to socially distance but it is very difficult to manage, we can have all the signage we want but we can't guarantee people will adhere to guidelines

Business signage – posters have gone up everywhere, you will see in some businesses etc. Please get in touch if you want a poster and we will be able to provide.

Greg then took over to discuss recovery from the perspective of the Arran Medical Group

Things have gone pretty well on Arran, the last case was in the middle of April. The early cases that we had we were able to identify them quite quickly, trace them and isolate them. Various factors can explain this: island community, ferry lockdown, luck! However, there is still a long way to go.

Worth reflecting on what health and social care is. We are Scotland in miniature, and the health and social care is like that too, we are a smaller version of North Ayrshire is dealing with, which makes this a small but complex place to manage. We had to focus on keeping our essential services going while dealing with the pandemic – keeping Montrose open, continuing palliative care, sending people to the mainland, etc..

Now we are opening the island, and what does that mean? We want to do the best to support the island and the economy, so we need to get on with our own test and trace programme on the island. A lot of effort going into getting the testing centre up and running. We have our own contact tracers on the island on call, every day of the week in case cases are identified.

How can we keep the coronavirus at bay, whilst opening up? The next couple of months will be particularly crucial for Arran. Great that the incidence is so low in the rest of the country, risk is very low for us on Arran, but there is always the potential for outbreaks and we have to be ready for that. Don't think there is much room to start many more services on the island until risks are further lessened.

We are going to rely on the test and trace to avoid another lockdown of the island, but cannot be discounted. There isn't a particular number that would mean we would get lockdown, there's more to it (e.g. whether there are outbreaks happening concurrently around the island). 90% of GP consultations are now over the phone, but they are still getting the same contact hours as before COVID-19. Some of that won't ever change back because it has now been seen that some of those things can be done indefinitely over the phone. There is still a lot of uncertainty ahead of us and we much to figure out around staffing levels etc, so we are not sure when we will be able to open some of the GP surgeries. Lochranza will not be opening in the near future as cleansing and infection control are problematic. Lochranza is managed single handed and there is no-one to clean door handles and surfaces. Will be reviewed Aug/Sept.

Temperature checks – there are pros and cons, but quite a lot of cons. A lot of people who have COVID don't have symptoms, and up to 50% of cases are spread by symptomless people. People can also take paracetamol/ibuprofen to do away with the fever. So, don't want to be doing that and provide false reassurance – it wouldn't pick up the majority of people with coronavirus.

Respite – it is still judged to be too high risk to bring people back to Montrose house

Vicki then addressed questions about reviving lunch clubs, redundancies at Ranger's centre, continuation of community hubs, food delivery and cost of healthy food

ACVS produced a recovery pack so that groups can do scenario planning. We are looking into safer ways for people to meet outdoors, such as shelters. We have indication from NAC that public buildings will not be opening up to groups at least until the end of the year, so any in-door spaces will not be from the council.

Regarding the rangers centre, the consultation period ends on the 31st of July. ACVS have written a letter of support for local services, as have many other groups and organisations. Unfortunately, there are lots of groups and orgs struggling and jobs will be lost.

Arran Outdoor Centre is acting as a child care hub and this will continue for the time being, to be assessed when the new term starts. Volunteers are also still available to do food and prescription drops etc., will continue to support at least until the start of the school term, so please get in touch with the hub if necessary. Local authority will keep supporting individuals at risk.

Woodside Farm CIC are selling locally produced food on a “pay what you can afford” basis, including giving free food away for those who can’t afford it, and they may be able to deliver too. The Arran Community Land Initiative are also providing social services with food packs free of charge.

The floor was then opened to questions from the rest of the attendees.

Question 1 – Arran Foodbank rep – 300% increased usage of food bank. Few people have taken up delivery service. Can be accessed 24/7. Had referrals from social services. Wanted to know whether individuals would be able to access food from the Land Initiative too, or whether that is just for social services.

Vicki & Joao – it would be a matter of getting in touch with them. They have indicated that they have provided food to individuals who have identified themselves to them as being in need, so this would probably be ok.

Question 2 – Befriending rep – spoken to people that would like to attend activities but can’t afford taxis and the mybus service hours have become a lot more restricted, so how can they attend events?

Vicki – yes, transport is an overarching issues on the island as it stands.

Sheila – a very valid point, will need to take back to the recovery group and see what we can do. Those services need to continue without a doubt. People are looking for environmentally better, safer transport, and mybus is really important for that.

Befriending rep – people told her they would rather not go to something than not feel in control. They wouldn’t want to risk ‘not getting a lift’ home.

Sheila – absolutely understand, and the last thing you want to do if you have low self-esteem is to ask people for help

Question 3 – Mary Davies Trust rep 1 – Arran Ear has been running from the beginning, but surprisingly received few phone calls. Don’t know whether people did not feel the need to use the service, or whether they know about it. Perhaps people will get more anxious as they open up? We are not sure whether we should keep the service open.

Sheila – maybe people do not feel confident to make that phone call

Vicki – we have also let community groups and organisations know about mental health improvement training and we have had little uptake to date

U3A rep – Because of U3A age group, we put a helpline up straight away and we got a lot of phone calls. It doesn’t happen as much, but goes in waves – something scary might happen and you get a lot of calls, and then fewer etc. We also have a chat line and that has been working well. Because we started early and because they feel part of a club (over a 100 members), they felt comfortable to use the service and to pull people they knew into it. Perhaps they don’t want to impose on other services? But there are definitely people who need to talk

Greg – What happens through the next 6 weeks or so will let us know the direction of travel, and if things further open up then perhaps that would be the moment when you re-evaluate if services can be closed.

Sheila – many people are emotionally and physically drained, so perhaps that's why people have not come forward for the mental health improvement training

Question 4 – U3A rep – question to Greg. Do you know how many tests you are getting through?

Greg – not many, some days might be 2 or 3, and we have capacity to go up to 20 per day. Guidelines change on a daily basis.

Question 5 – Arran Community Council rep – In Sheila's presentation, the priorities of the Arran Recovery Group were named as community, environment and economy. Are these criteria in order of preference?

Sheila – Community will always come first, but the environment is part of the community.

Arran Community Council rep – Surely, for the sake of the island, the economy must come before the environment at least in the short term?

Sheila – the reason why environment is second is because we are stewards of the island, and it is part and parcel of the community. People are here because of the environment. We're not saying economy is not important.

Arran Community Council rep – But why would the economy come after the environment?

Jude – it's all about balancing out, it's not there to disadvantage the economic recovery in any way. There are lots of green opportunities that will be good for us economically, in the longer term.

The Arran Community Council rep communicated disagreement with environment being a goal for recovery, and dissatisfaction at the answers provided.

Side note from Mary Davies Trust rep 2 – I would just like to pay tribute to the medical staff of the island we are so lucky to have such a motivated and coordinated approach to this. It has made things possible at the start of this that we wouldn't think possible. There is lots going behind the scenes that we do not know about and I think it is terrific to know that so much is being to care for us.

Greg – thank you very much for saying this. We're not special in any way, we are just trying to do our jobs in the best way we can. I will pass on the feedback to the staff.

Sheila – we have run out of time, thank you very much for coming on the call. Please don't feel like this is the end of it, it is an ongoing process, please make sure to provide feedback continuously. I will send out the presentation