



Argyll and Bute

ADAPT Report

includem 

Background

The following report details the work that the ADAPT Project conducted in Argyll and Bute. It covers the Argyll and Bute context, the timeline of events, an overview of the research, and a set of learning outcomes that the ADAPT Project will carry forward into future projects. While the work in Argyll and Bute did not result in the creation of a pilot intervention, the learning that can be taken from this work is extremely valuable for improving the ADAPT Project's processes, improving the development of pilot interventions, strengthening relationships with partner organisations, and sharing learning with other areas across Scotland.

The Argyll and Bute context

Child Poverty

Child poverty in Argyll and Bute currently stands at 21.7%, which is 1.1 percentage points higher than 2015. Like all social and economic statistics, the COVID-19 pandemic complicates things. Child poverty in Argyll and Bute increased 2.6 percentage points between 2015 and 2019 and then dropped to 18.9% in 2020.ⁱ Child poverty figures post-pandemic are back on an upwards trajectory. Only one area in Argyll and Bute is in the lowest SIMD decile (Oban South). However, there are several areas across the local authority area that are SIMD Q1.ⁱⁱ The SIMD relates to more than just income and reveals that over 40% of under 24-year-olds live in access deprived areas. For some areas, such as Oban, Lorn, and the Isles, that figure is over 50%. This relates to child poverty because limited transport options reduce the employment and education opportunities of parents and young people.

Education

Literacy and numeracy attainment figures show a varied performance in Argyll and Bute. In 2023, most students (94.5%) by the end of S6 had reached Level 4 in literacy, which is an improvement from the previous year but slightly below the national average. Level 5 literacy dropped slightly to 81.9%, and Level 6 literacy also declined to 52.4%, both trailing behind the national figures. In numeracy, 87.9% achieved Level 4, a decrease from 2022, and 69.0% reached Level 5, reflecting a national downward trend. Only 23.5% attained Level 6 in numeracy, again below the national average. Overall, the top and middle-performing students were close to or below national averages, while the lowest-performing students did better than the national average but still fell short of the national benchmarks.

Official figures show that attendance rates in Argyll and Bute are slightly higher than the national average. Attendance rates are in line with the national average until S5 and S6 when they drop below the national average. Pupil numbers vary massively across the region. For example, Tarbert Academy has 150 pupils, whereas Hermitage Academy has 1,282 pupils. Despite the attendance figures being good, professionals told the ADAPT team during our research conversations that school engagement is quite low. Something called

“lapping” was reported by multiple professionals. Lapping is where a young person is registered as attending school, but they do not attend classes. This means that the attendance figures might not reflect school engagement.

Free school meal registration offers a very accurate means of gauging how many students are living in poverty. Plotting this data against education metrics such as attainment, exclusion, and number of students with additional support needs shows the relationship between poverty and these metrics. The relationship between free school meals and a range of education metrics is the same in Argyll and Bute as it is for every other area in Scotland. That is to say, when the number of students living in poverty goes up, the number of students with additional support needs tends to go up, while attendance rates and attainment tend to go down. Where Argyll and Bute does buck the national trend is with exclusions. Almost every local authority area in Scotland saw a jump in exclusion numbers between 2021 and 2023. The reasons for these exclusions tend to relate to violence and abuse against staff and other pupils. In Argyll and Bute, exclusion numbers have been on a clear downward trend since 2008 and 2023 was no exception.

Depopulation

Argyll and Bute have been struggling with depopulation for nearly 200 years for a variety of different reasons. As industry developed, larger urban areas in Argyll and Bute became less dependent on smaller fishing and agricultural settlements. When these smaller settlements lost their service function, they could not replace it with sustainable employment. By the 1960s, the rural populations had dropped by 42%.ⁱⁱⁱ A growing tourist economy was massively impacted in the 1950s as Mediterranean holidays became more appealing to Scottish citizens. The drop in demand led to the disintegration of the once bustling transport links from Argyll and Bute to other markets, which stifled employment and business opportunities for residents.^{iv} Residents of Argyll and Bute, particularly in rural areas, moved away from the area in pursuit of more reliable employment and better links to the rest of the country. One in five people left Bute between 2001 and 2020.^v The population has been falling consistently for decades, and population projections show that this trend will continue well into the future.^{vi}

The impact of depopulation on the economy, culture, and an aging population are cause for concern on their own. In the context of young people, depopulation in Argyll and Bute means a significant labour shortage for support services, including teachers.^{vii} This also includes both public and third sector services. The research conducted by includem as part of the ADAPT project shows that Social Work and Police Scotland are impacted by this issue.

Housing

The housing situation in Argyll and Bute reflects the broader issue of low-use homes in the UK. Low-use homes are defined as long-term vacant or derelict dwellings, second homes, and those rented out for short periods. In Argyll and Bute, there are a total of 4,045 low-use homes, which is 8% of the total 48,388 homes. The average price of these low-use homes is £212,024, slightly higher than the average price of other homes in the region (£202,774). The presence of these low-use homes has led to a ‘hollowing out’ of areas in Argyll and Bute, which refers to a loss of community, people, and the labour force.^{viii}

Research from 2017 investigating the experience of young people on the Isle of Mull found that the housing market is characterised by a lack of choice and is influenced by several constraints. These constraints include financial limitations preventing progression within the housing market, restricted availability of certain housing tenures, and geographical restrictions that limit the ability to move to desired locations. These factors collectively contribute to the difficulty that young people face in accessing suitable housing options.^{ix} These housing issues are also contributing to the aforementioned depopulation issues as people from Argyll and Bute seek cheaper accommodation elsewhere, and people who might consider moving to Argyll and Bute being unable to access the market. In 2023, Live Argyll consulted young people living in Rothesay about what it was like to live on Bute. When asked about their worries, the top three factors were mental health, physical health, and being forced to move away from the island. This shows that housing worries are impacting young people years before they try to enter the housing market.

The housing issues facing Argyll and Bute are not new. A study from 1993 asked residents of Argyll and Bute about their housing experiences: “participants indicated that the problem of high-cost owner-occupation was compounded by a lack of choice from whom one could purchase new housing.”^x Argyll and Bute declared a housing emergency in June of 2023. This decision is partly attributable to the increasing demand for social rented properties among young people, with the waiting list nearing 2,000. It should be noted that approximately 125 young people on this list are homeless.^{xi}

Transport

Public transport in Argyll and Bute includes a variety of services such as rail, buses, and ferries. Rail service only cover the trainline between Helensburgh and Oban. Most areas are covered by bus services, but they are infrequent and sometimes do not run during school holidays. Ferry services operate to most main islands, but issues arise with limited journeys, a lack of service integration, and underutilisation. These limitations and the lack of flexibility lead to high car ownership.

While car ownership offers residents a more readily available mode of transport, the roads in Argyll and Bute are susceptible to closure from snow fall and landslips. When the roads are clear, the scale of the local authority still poses issues. In the context of children and young people, services and workers have to cover enormous areas. The long travel time negatively impacts both workers and young people by increasing the time it takes to respond to needs and through the increased travel costs.^{xii} With the exception of Helensburgh, the vast majority of young people from Argyll and Bute live in very remote

small towns or very remote rural areas. Transport is absolutely central to the lives of these young people.

Findings from ADAPT Research

As part of the ADAPT project we conduct research interviews with professionals from a range of organisations. In Argyll and Bute, we spoke to five organisations (9 professionals in total) about their experiences of youth justice and gaps in youth justice provisions. From analysing the interview data, we found 9 distinct themes and a total of 26 individual issues in the Argyll and Bute area. What follows is a summary of these findings.

Community support is crucial for young people. There is a need for community-based youth supports to prevent boredom, as noted by Argyll and Bute Social Work, Live Argyll, and Police Scotland. However, it was reported that effective community groups that used to exist have now been removed. Funding for third sector services and youth centres is being cut, which reduces the number of places and spaces that young people can occupy.

Young people with nowhere else to go will hang out in public spaces which can cause tensions between young people and some older residents. Some older residents have a perception that young people congregating is antisocial behaviour. When these older residents call the police, the police have a duty to respond. From the perspective of these young people, the police are harassing them. Police Scotland acknowledge that the young people are rarely causing any issues, but they need to respond to any call that they receive.

Police Scotland also expressed a need for parental and family support. In Campbelltown, for example, there are sometimes only two officers on duty. If a young person requires Police attention, then both duty officers need to be present. Parents struggling to cope will sometimes refuse to take their child back which can increase the time that the officers spend with that young person, and by extension, how long the officers have to spend away from Campbelltown. Staff from Police Scotland also spoke about their experiences of parents calling the police for support with parenting. Parents who are struggling to cope and have nowhere else to turn to will call the police for help.

Across Argyll and Bute, the demand for resources often exceeds what is available. Several professionals said that Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) resources are limited, and the process is too slow to be effective. Mental health services are oversaturated as well. Several professionals reported that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are massively oversubscribed. Young people are facing a mental health crisis in Argyll and Bute, but there are no accessible services for them. Organisations reported that there are no reliable resources for 12-16yr olds. Youth centres, services, and supports are being cut, and this age group are being impacted the most. Police Scotland also reported that they are not equipped to deal with low-level crime and staffing issues are limiting the work that can be done. Staff from Police Scotland felt that Argyll and Bute is not an area that new police officers want to live, especially in the more remote areas, which exacerbates the difficulties they face with staffing.

Current legislation raised concerns among professionals in Argyll and Bute. Police Scotland staff from across Argyll and Bute reported that there is a lack of consequences and that the

impact of CSOs is minimal. There was also a feeling that there are small groups of young people that think they can come into conflict with the law without repercussions.

Education resources are another area of concern. It was reported that one high school in particular has issues with S1 and S2 students recording fights. It was also reported that this school's policy means that the police are called for minor incidents. Several professionals reported that there are school attendance and engagement issues, and that school nurses are picking up the slack in the absence of appropriate services for 12-16yr olds. It should be noted that we were unable to conduct research interviews with secondary schools before the work in Argyll and Bute was concluded.

Argyll and Bute social work praised the new Care and Justice Bill but also said that they anticipated that the new Bill would increase resource demand. Currently, there is a lack of skilled and appropriate court support. Young People leaving Polmont have zero support, which increases the risk of recidivism. In general, the availability of opportunity and support varies depending on the area. This postcode lottery of resources relates to housing, transport, education, employment, and services.

Offending behaviour among young people varies. There is an increase in sexualised crime such as inappropriate messaging, coercive behaviour, sexual assault, and allegations of rape. Professionals also reported fights, antisocial behaviour, posting videos of other young people onto social media, cannabis possession, and supermarkets being targeted for shoplifting and vandalism.

Timeline of activities

The ADAPT project began doing research in Argyll and Bute on 20th November 2023, with the identification of relevant contacts and organisations. Over the course of the next few days, 11 organisations across Argyll and Bute were contacted, including Argyll and Bute Social Work, Live Argyll, and Police Scotland.

Desk-based research on the Argyll and Bute area was conducted on 24th November 2023. Meetings with Live Argyll staff and Argyll and Bute Social Work staff were organised in the following week. However, contact with Argyll and Bute Social Work was lost and had to be chased up on 18th December 2023.

On 20th December 2023, a meeting with Live Argyll staff led to the identification of one particular high school as a potential area for a pilot. The Mid-Argyll, Kintyre, and the Islands Area Community Planning Group was contacted to arrange a meeting. Further meetings with Argyll and Bute Social Work and Police Scotland were held in early January 2024.

Initial contact was made with the aforementioned high school on 17th January 2024, with the aim of arranging a meeting with the Head or Depute Head. Meetings with Police Scotland were also held around this time.

On 20th January 2024, a conversation with Police Scotland was transcribed, analysed, and entered into thematic analysis. This revealed a clear potential for a detached youth work pilot in Campbeltown. Alongside this work, face-to-face meetings were held with Police

Scotland and the Depute Head of the high school. A meeting was arranged to discuss the potential pilot.

In the following days, further research was conducted, and presentations were created for the Mid-Argyll, Kintyre, and the Islands Area Community Planning Group. Several organisations and individuals in these meetings expressed interest for the ADAPT project and expressed a range of concerns relating to youth justice provisions in Argyll and Bute. Meetings were arranged with the high school and the manager of a local youth service, who expressed enthusiasm about a high school-based pilot. Argyll and Bute Social Work was also contacted regarding the high school pilot.

On 30th January 2024, a conversation with SCRA for Oban/Lochgilphead identified opportunities around harmful sexual behaviour support, mental health support, and early intervention. In the following days, presentations were given at the Mid-Argyll, Kintyre, and the Islands Area Community Planning Group and the Bute and Cowal Area Community Planning Group. In early February 2024, a Power BI dashboard was created to combine national statistics with the data created by the ADAPT project. A meeting with Police Scotland and the Depute Head of the identified high school revealed that the main issues in the high school were fighting and social media filming. A core group of 10 young people was identified, along with a group of young people who hang out at the train station and have anti-social behaviour concerns.

On 7th February 2024, a meeting with senior staff at Argyll and Bute Council raised issues relating to the sustainability, staffing, and longevity of any pilot. The senior staff member made clear that they would not approve any short-term pilot (short-term being less than 12-months) because they only want to see long-term services. The nature of the ADAPT Project means that the pilot interventions only last for a maximum of 12-months. As a result of the senior staff member's concerns, the development of pilots in Argyll and Bute was put on hold.

Over the course of the next few weeks, several meetings were held, and emails were exchanged with the Argyll and Bute council senior staff member to resolve the issues with the ADAPT project. On 26th March 2024, a meeting with the senior staff member raised further concerns about any pilot intervention. Adding to the issue relating to the length of pilots, the senior staff member made clear that they would not approve any pilot that introduced new people into the area. The reasoning behind this was that depopulation and housing issues meant that it would be impossible to replace staff who were in Argyll and Bute on a temporary basis. Their concern was that young people might become reliant on the pilot service, and when it came to an end, a vacuum would be created that left young people without support. The senior staff member also expressed that more populated areas of Argyll and Bute, such as Oban and Campbelltown, do not need as much help as rural and island areas. However, the senior staff member did not rule out offering support to these areas, only that their preference would be to offer support to more rural and island locations.

This discussion led to the decision to scrap any pilots that introduced new staff to the area. Instead, the ADAPT team focussed on designing pilots that utilised current staffing levels, namely, peer support work. Such pilots would use includem staff to train young people from Argyll and Bute who have been in conflict with the law to support their peers. The

senior staff member advised includem that any pilot would need to go through their contact at the Third Sector Interface.

On 5th April 2024, the ADAPT team finalised their decision to go in a new direction for the pilots focussing on peer support. includem continued to contact the Third Sector Interface to arrange the next steps. After several attempts to contact the Third Sector Interface, included several emails sent directly to senior staff members, it was decided that the ADAPT project should conclude any further work in the Argyll and Bute area at the beginning of May 2024. As of the time of writing (15th October 2024) the ADAPT team have still had no response from the Third Sector Interface.

Learning

Despite being unable to develop a pilot intervention through to the delivery stage, there has been a significant amount of learning from our work in Argyll and Bute.

1. Support for young people in conflict or in potential conflict with the law

- **Community Support:** Community-based support is vital to keep young people engaged and prevent boredom. However, many effective community groups that used to exist have been disbanded. Funding for third sector services and youth centres is being reduced, leading to a decrease in the number of places where young people can spend their time meaningfully.
- **Interaction with Law Enforcement:** Young people often gather in public spaces, which can lead to misunderstandings with older residents who may perceive this as antisocial behaviour. This often results in calls to the police, who are obliged to respond, even though the young people are rarely causing any real issues.
- **Parental and Family Support:** There is a significant need for support for parents and families. Parents who are struggling to cope sometimes resort to calling the police for help. This puts additional pressure on police resources.
- **Availability of Resources:** The demand for resources across Argyll and Bute often exceeds what is available. Resources for Early and Effective Intervention (EEI) are limited, and the process is often too slow to be effective. Mental health services are also oversaturated, with CAMHS being massively oversubscribed. There is a particular lack of reliable resources for 12-16-year-olds.
- **Legislation:** Current legislation has raised concerns among Police Scotland staff. There is a perception that there is a lack of consequences for young people who come into conflict with the law, which can lead to a feeling of impunity among a small group of young people.
- **Educational Resources:** There are issues with school attendance and engagement. School nurses are often left to pick up the slack in the absence of appropriate services for 12-16-year-olds. There are reports of an increase in school fights and students posting videos of these fights on social media.
- **Care and Justice Bill:** The new Care and Justice Bill has been praised, but there are concerns that it will increase the demand for resources.
- **Offending Behaviour:** Offending behaviour among young people varies, with an increase in sexualised crime, antisocial behaviour, and vandalism. This includes inappropriate messaging, coercive behaviour, sexual assault, allegations of rape,

fights, posting videos of other young people onto social media, cannabis possession, and supermarkets being targeted for shoplifting and vandalism.

In general, the availability of opportunity and support varies depending on the area, leading to a postcode lottery of resources related to housing, transport, education, employment, and services.

2. Priorities for Local Authorities and Local Contexts

Strategic Alignment: Understanding and aligning with local authority strategic visions is crucial. Our experience highlighted the need to improve our scoping process to anticipate these needs.

Local Context: Factors like depopulation, transport, and housing in Argyll and Bute significantly influence pilot design. Future projects must consider both frontline staff experiences and broader strategic perspectives.

Communication Delays: Bureaucratic challenges and communication delays with organisations like the Third Sector Interface and Social Work must be anticipated and mitigated in future projects.

Flexibility in Approach: The ability to adapt in response to feedback is essential. We will continue to maintain flexibility while acknowledging the limits of our influence over longstanding socioeconomic issues.

3. Communication

Earlier engagement with senior council staff would have streamlined our efforts and focused our research. Misunderstandings about our approach led to the perception that we attempted to bypass proper procedures. Moving forward, we have contacted key leaders across Scotland to ensure our intentions are clear, respectful of local hierarchies, and aligned with existing strategic visions.

Conclusion

The ADAPT project aims to improve the lives of children and young people in conflict with the law. Our work in Argyll and Bute produced valuable outputs in three areas: understanding local provisions, collaborating with public and third sector organisations, and refining our internal processes for service design.

We learned that, like in other parts of Scotland, Argyll and Bute faces reduced funding for public and third sector services, resulting in fewer safe spaces and support for young people. However, Argyll and Bute's unique mix of urban, rural, and island populations adds specific challenges, including depopulation, housing shortages, and transport issues. These factors create gaps in service provision, shaped by local politics, economics, and culture. An intervention effective in one area may not be suitable in another, and in Argyll and Bute, even a fully funded 12-month intervention might not lead to a sustainable service if it relies on external staff.

Our experiences emphasised the need to align with stakeholders' strategic visions from the start. While delivery staff may identify service gaps, senior staff have broader perspectives on resource allocation. Early understanding of these preferences would have streamlined our efforts and respected local authority hierarchies. We have since engaged with senior staff across Scotland to ensure our research and interventions align with their strategic goals.

To improve future project implementation, we propose several strategies: engaging a broader range of stakeholders in the planning phase, expanding our scoping process to include various local factors, and establishing structured communication lines with regular check-ins. Maintaining flexibility in our approach and developing a standardised follow-up protocol will further enhance project effectiveness.

We will share our learnings internally to refine our processes and externally to help other organisations working in Argyll and Bute or similar rural areas. By understanding local preferences and the long history of socioeconomic challenges, we hope other organisations can efficiently implement services that support young people in conflict with the law.

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