

Full Case Report

Case 652

3IP -- 3 islands partnership, Islay, Jura and Colonsay (UK)

Delivering eServices to remote island communities.

Executive summary of the case:

Abstract

3 ISLANDS PARTNERSHIP(3IP)

Argyll and Bute Council is a Unitary Local Authority. Situated in the south west Highlands and Islands of Scotland, it covers the second largest geographical area of any Scottish local authority, stretching for over 100 miles from north to south and 90 miles from west to east. It boasts 26 inhabited islands and over 3,000 kilometres of coastline as well as six main centres of population, a good example of a polycentric spatial development pattern.

Although the administrative area of Argyll and Bute covers 690,900 hectares " almost a tenth of the total area of Scotland " it has a population of just 91,300 which is less than 2% of the population of Scotland. This gives Argyll and Bute an extremely low population density with a mere 13 persons per km².

The aim of 3IP is to enable people to access local, regional, national and international services without the need for extensive and expensive travel. It uses technology to overcome the disadvantages that remoteness, isolation and sparse populations can often bring. It is customer focussed and delivers a joined-up approach to public services, and indeed to private ventures such as the ability to demonstrate goods to a distant retail market.

Case description:

Background

The 3 Islands Project (3IP) was developed as an innovative approach, using an integrated combination of eTechnology, to improve public service access to the citizens living on the remote and peripheral islands of Islay, Jura and Colonsay. These 3 islands in the Argyll and Bute local authority area of the South West Highlands and Islands of Scotland have a total population of 3631 inhabitants. The islands lie approximately 20 miles from the mainland, where a peninsular, mountainous and sparsely populated landscape forms a further barrier to transportation. (see file1_map_of_Argyll_and_bute.pdf)

Ferry services are infrequent, with only 3 sailings per week to Colonsay in winter, and expensive in relation to the low incomes experienced on the islands. Jura experiences double insularity, with access to the mainland only via Islay. A round trip to the nearest population centre (Glasgow) from Colonsay, to seek specialist services takes 3 days in winter, adding significantly to cost and time. Depopulation, particularly amongst young people, is high, with 45% leaving the islands in search of employment. The consequent ageing of the population has a serious impact on economic sustainability.

As part of a strategic approach to improve the quality of life on the 26 inhabited islands of Argyll and Bute, the 3 Islands Partnership was developed to address public service delivery, because of the combination of remoteness and need. Consultation with the local communities, partner agencies including the Local Government, Health Board, Enterprise Company and Regional Government identified this need. Initial funding for the project was obtained from the regional government modernising government fund.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the case are to provide:

'A specifically tailored package of people, location and technology for each island, to overcome the social exclusion caused by geographical limitations on service delivery to Islay, Jura and Colonsay.'

The project seeks to deliver the broadest and most effective range of services to the island communities, at the most appropriate level, using ICT to remove the need to travel. These cover services delivered by the key public sector agencies:

- Argyll and Bute Council: for local tax, development, democratic services, registration, social services, housing, amenity and waste management, public protection, regulatory functions, etc.....
- Argyll and Clyde Health Board: for all health related specialist services.
- Argyll and Islands Enterprise: for business and employment related services.
- Argyll College/University of the Highlands and Islands: for higher and further education.

In addition the facilities offer free and open access to wider partnerships and opportunities, in Scotland, the UK and Europe.

In the short term, the project aims to:

- introduce the concept of ICT and make ICT accessible to all. Accessibility was low on these islands because of the lack of opportunity to access new technology and to raise skill levels;
- achieve an immediate improvement to the provision of Council and other partners' services;
- reduce the travel and time costs of individuals accessing these services and the employees of the public sector providing the services.

In the longer term the project will:

- contribute to stemming depopulation because islanders will be less likely to leave or will return after further education if work is available;
- increase community confidence through knowledge of, and communication with, those whom they can access for advice, information, and networking opportunities; thus demonstrating that an island community can make a difference;
- enable economic growth: for example a new IT business which opened on Islay only 18 months ago has already been able to extend its business by opening a shop in Ardrishaig mainland Argyll, by working with the council and providing support to the servicepoint staff.
- enable islanders to directly access their local, regional, national and European representatives through the video conferencing system.

Proposals

The most appropriate level of service delivery was assessed in consultation with the communities and partners. This identified 4 types of delivery:

1. For services delivered from the islands:-
 - To ensure that in as many cases as possible, services can be delivered by staff that are based on the island.
 - To ensure that the level of support, training and external expertise available to island-based staff is sufficient to enable them to deliver the range of services required.
2. For services delivered from the mainland:-
 - To enable more frequent customer contact where required
 - To enable more timely customer contact where required
 - To increase the effectiveness of time spent on the islands
 - To expand the range of options available to customers for accessing mainland services.
3. For services delivered by organisations outside Argyll and Bute:-
 - To ensure that the widest possible range of expertise, knowledge and support is readily available to island residents and businesses.
4. For all services:-

- To ensure that any demand for service is quickly and effectively directed to appropriately skilled staff in the appropriate organisation, whether based locally or on the mainland.

Following extensive consultation with the three communities, with current and potential services providers and with organisations that have tested innovative approaches to overcoming remoteness, a multi-agency centre has been provided on each of the three islands, each with capacity to deliver services from partners and others in person with ICT support and through videoconferencing links to mainland service providers.

- **Objectives - Key Factor: Public eServices public-civil society partnerships**

3IP promotes and support local community based economic development.

Resources

The project has been developed using the combined skills of Argyll and Bute Council staff involved in service provision and ICT, community representatives and partners organisations. Knowledge from other public sector ICT projects has been investigated and adapted to this particular remote island community. The starting point for the project was to achieve interoperability between organisations, and that has remained a key objective throughout.

A. BUILDINGS

On Islay, the largest of the islands, the existing Council office was extended to provide a large reception area, a meeting room and three offices. On Jura, the former schoolhouse was adapted to provide a first time office facility on the island. The building contains one meeting room and three offices. One of the rooms has been adapted to provide a computer training facility.

On Colonsay the decision was made, after local consultation, to build an extension to the village hall. This allows very large meetings to take place in the hall itself as well as smaller ones in the extension which consists of two offices. The hall has been connected to the video conferencing network. Prior to this provision the people of Colonsay complained about the lack of library facilities which consisted of a box of books delivered to the school twice a year. The purpose built extension to the village hall was therefore built to contain a permanent library with computer access to the main catalogue at library headquarters.

In Lochgilhead, the local enterprise company Argyll and the Islands Enterprise has their Headquarters, as does the Council. A small self contained video suite for up to 10 persons has been developed here specifically to encourage local businesses to link in to the mainland; it will also be used in partnership with training development.

In Helensburgh, which is a small town with a population of 14,000, and only 30 minutes from the central belt of Scotland, the existing video conferencing facilities have been enhanced so that links with central belt companies, groups and voluntary organisations can take place. There is access from here to the video bridges owned by the council so that any of the venues can link with up to 16 other centres throughout the world.

B. TECHNOLOGY

On Islay there are three video conferencing systems:

- System 1 is a small single user system that allows confidential video conferences to be held, for example a medical consultation.

- System 2 is a slightly larger system that can be used for small video conferences with a local audience of between three and five people.

- System 3 is capable of bridging four remote locations and can be used for small self contained video conferences between Islay and the other three island sites or elsewhere and can hold 20/30 people.

Four staff are available to assist users on Islay. In addition there are three PC"s which are attached to

Argyll and Bute Council's network which allows access to internet and e-mail. There is one colour and one monochrome printer, one scanner and a CD writer and a 3D visualiser for use with the video conferencing equipment. The provision of this technology means that people can use the servicepoint to access the internet, send and check their e-mail, print letters, scan photos and run CD's. To enable islanders to discuss planning applications, building warrants or business opportunities, there are digital cameras and digital camcorders which are available for use by members of the public; and also faxing and photocopying facilities at each servicepoint. The use of a laptop computer and powerpoint projector is also available at each of the servicepoints as well as a slide and overhead projector.

Jura has one video conferencing system similar to system 3 on Islay capable of holding small video meetings. The servicepoint also has three PC's and similar facilities (printer, scanner) to those in Islay plus faxing and photocopying facilities . There is one member of staff provided by the local Jura Development Trust.

Colonsay, the smallest of the three islands lies to the west of Jura and the north of Islay and has a population of 99. There is a small video conferencing system, which can host a meeting of up to 10 people, together with 2 PC's and the same facilities as the other islands. On Colonsay there is also one member of staff provided by Colonsay Development Company.

The servicepoints, as they are known, are open to all and access is available to local, national, European and worldwide organisations. Businesses are encouraged to use the video conferencing system to hold meetings between remote staff on the islands and in their head offices, for example Diageo staff hold video meetings between Elgin in the northeast of Scotland and Islay, where there are several whisky distilleries. The software enables anyone to access the internet and specially designed software allows the staff to record and evaluate usage of the Service Point. At each Service Point there is interoperability with and between Government agencies, the Council, Health Boards, and the local enterprise network. For example AIE can use the systems to download and pass on business information; and the Primary Health Care Trust use it for linking to their G.P. on Jura, and Colonsay.

Technical specification of the video conferencing equipment:

1. Islay - Polyspan FX Codec 1 Polyspan 384/S72 Codec 2 JVC AV29SX4 Monitor 7 Monitor Carts (Beech coloured) 7 JVC SVHS Video Recorder HR-S7700 3 JVC Visual Presenter AV-P750 3
2. Jura - Polyspan 384/S72 Codec JVC AV29SX4 Monitor 2 Monitor Carts (Beech coloured) 2 JVC SVHS Video Recorder HR-S7700 1 JVC Visual Presenter AV-P750 1
Description
3. Colonsay - Polyspan 384/S72 Codec JVC AV29SX4 Monitor 2 Monitor Carts (Beech coloured) 2 JVC SVHS Video Recorder HR-S7700 1 JVC Visual Presenter AV-P750 1.

Explanation of Visual Presenter:- The JVC Visual Presenter or visualiser as it is known, allows 3D object to be displayed on screen. Thus a person could demonstrate an object or work of art which he/she wishes to sell to a retailer elsewhere; or an architect could show a 3D model of a proposed building to the planning authority.

C.INCLUSION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The policy of the project has consistently been to be inclusive of both Gaelic and disabled people. The signage and letter headings are in Gaelic and English. The island of Islay has numerous Gaelic speakers and there are some on both Jura and Colonsay. It was also agreed to try to have the provision of Gaelic services within the servicepoint itself and to this end the servicepoint manager, who speaks Gaelic but has not used it for some time, is being trained by the Gaelic Centre on Islay to improve her written and spoken Gaelic. To help her with written Gaelic and to provide a special service for Gaelic Speakers, a Gaelic keyboard for the computers for each of the servicepoints has been purchased for use by staff and public. All servicepoints have full disabled access, large print keyboards are available for partially sighted people and the provision of hearing loops in the video conferencing room is being sourced.

D. FINANCIAL

Capital Funding Partner Capital Funding £000 % Funding MGF (Scottish Executive) 417 60 Argyll andamp; Bute Council 204 30 Argyll andamp; Islands Enterprise 60 9 Argyll andamp; Clyde health Board 10 1 Total 691 100.

Table 1. Capital Contributions to the Three Islands Partnership.

The Three Islands Partnership is funded 60% from the Modernising Government Fund and 40% from contributions from partners (see table 1). An indication of the partners' commitment to the success of this project is that the level of their capital contributions far exceed the 25% minimum specified in the bid guidelines.

Table 2. Three Islands partnership capital budget Expenditure Budget:

Capital Expenditure £000 % Funding Structural 355 52 Infrastructure 227 33 Research andamp;
Development 70 10 Publicity 15 2 Training 24 3 Total 691 100

Reflecting the technological nature of this project, 85% of the capital budget has been spent on converting the three Island Centres, and the 2 mainland links so that they can deliver an integrated package of ICT services for public, private, voluntary and community users alike.

E. ONGOING REVENUE COMMITMENT

Partners have agreed that a revenue budget in excess of £120,000 be set aside to support ongoing service delivery. As a result of the ITC provision in the new or adapted buildings the residents of these three islands now have access to Council, business and Health Services that were previously expensive and costly in time to obtain.

- **Resources - Key Factor: Public eServices public-civil society partnerships**

3IP encourages the continued and extended use of traditional skills - such as crofting.

Activities

To implement the case, innovative use has been made of local community groups to manage the use of video conferencing and ICT links with council and other public agencies, and to encourage local people residing on the 3 islands to access these facilities.

- 1. Local Partnerships

The Council has made innovative use of the opportunity to enter into service level agreements with the local Development Companies on Jura and Colonsay. On both of these islands the local companies have taken on the role as direct employer of staff on behalf of the Council. The Council refunds the costs to them on a monthly basis. This means that local people have responsibility for the running of the buildings and dealing with staff issues. They are supported by the Council with training and funding. The link to the project leader has improved confidence in the Council because of the direct personal contact with a known person.

- 2. Council Services

Any Island user of services can make an appointment to see a professional member of staff based on the mainland to discuss individual issues. Before this facility was available this could only be done by telephone. They can now speak face to face by video conference, and with the use of the visualiser can discuss plans, documents, minutes etc. whilst both looking at the same document at the same time, thus they can agree changes and avoid misunderstandings.

- 3. Business Services

With a direct link to Argyll andamp; the Islands Local Enterprise Company Headquarters in Lochgilphead, Islanders can discuss business plans with a Business Adviser. They can use the 3D visualiser to display objects and thus contact suppliers or potential outlets for sale of goods, at the initial discussion level.

- 4. Health Services

Where appropriate patients can see their consultants by video conference to prevent lengthy tiring journeys by ferry, car or bus. Local doctors can use the system to discuss issues with their health boards and with social workers.

- 5. Training

Training has been provided for staff and volunteers in accordance with the personalised training plan -

(see file3_training_schedules.pdf.)

This includes all staff being encouraged to participate in the European Computer Driving Licence Scheme and specialised video conferencing training in its use and implementation. The Islay staff have taken the opportunity to do an internet "balanced life" (stress management course). Later in 2003 all staff will commence an SVQ (Scottish Vocational Qualification) in Customer Services, a programme which was designed by Highland Council and is being adapted for the specific use required by the 3-islands servicepoints. Specialised computer training has been provided by a local Islay business who has been able to support the servicepoint staff at short notice, and has also helped them in the initial phase of the project. At the Islay servicepoint the back offices have been reorganised so that a trained servicepoint person is always available in the reception area. The Council's Library Catalogue is now accessible from each servicepoint.

- 6. Publicity

The facilities have been publicised in local publications (the Ileaf on Islay, Jura Jottings and the Corncrake on Colonsay) all of which have almost 100% circulation on their respective Islands. Publicity has also been by newsletters, fliers, posters and articles. Open days have been held at each servicepoint. On Islay which has the largest population of the 3 islands, different user groups have been targetted on different occasions; for example farmers, business people, voluntary organisations. These open days continue to be held on a regular basis.

- 7. Partnership

Links have been opened up with other Government Organisations many of whom have used the facilities to contact their users. These include the Crofters Commission, the Scottish Agricultural College, the Benefits Agency, the Scottish Legal Aid Board (through access to their website), and the Scottish Courts Administration by making a video link available to the local Sheriff Court. At the start of the project, there were discussions with Orkney Islands Council, and as a result the IT members of each team have kept in touch to share information.

- 8. Change Management

Procedures have been put in place to deal with the increased demands for services as a result of the more user friendly and accessible offices and staff. Staff from mainland offices have been encouraged to use the video conferencing on some occasions, as an alternative to travelling for face to face meetings. Staff management has also been carried out by video conference on occasion and frequent contact with council staff encourages them to make the best use of the facilities. Registers and logging systems have been created for the use of rooms and equipment. Staff have learnt how to use the equipment themselves and to show the public how to use it.

- 9. Out of Hours Access Arrangements

Two half time posts of keyholder have been created, each to be shared between Ionad Chaluim Chille Ile (the Islay Gaelic centre) and Islay Servicepoint so that both can have access to an individual who will open the buildings out of normal hours. These key holders will also be trained in the use of video conferencing and the posts will allow the office staff to concentrate on helping the Islanders during the busier times.

- 10. Charging Policy

The charging policy has evolved since the Service Points opened as a result of discussions with users and providers. A copy of the current charging policy can be found on the 3IP pages of Argyll and Bute Council's website (www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/content/technology/thethreeislandspartnership/3ippricing).

-11. FAQ

The development of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) database has taken the full implementation period to achieve. During the course of working on this part of the project, it became apparent that this system would be of use to everyone working for the council and it was decided to make it accessible from the website in its final format. This work is underway.

- 12. Risk Assessment

This section describes the risks associated with the project which were identified at the start. Some preventative measures and damage reduction measures were also identified and these were taken into account in the design of the project. The detailed project implementation plan establishes monitoring procedures to ensure that risk management is a continuing feature of the project. The allocation of the financial risks between the partners has been included in the service level agreements. It is concluded that, although there were a number of risks associated with the project, these were addressed through project design and by setting up robust management and reporting arrangements. Early warning mechanisms for

potential problems, a positive approach to communication and sound management procedures minimise and control the risks to a readily acceptable level. The following risks were all identified prior to commencement of the project and this assessment has proved a useful guide to prevent any of them taking place. These can be found in the attached document [See file2_risk_assessment.PDF]

Output and Results

Quantitative

1] Project monitoring was by way of the development of an existing council help desk software known as HEAT. This software was adapted to deal specifically with the monitoring of the usage of the servicepoints on Islay, Jura and Colonsay.

Figures have been collected for the first year [see file4_user_statistics.PDF]. As a result it was agreed that the statistics were too general for Jura and Colonsay and in future the general enquiries heading will be divided to give more specific information on individual uses at these two servicepoints.

The Scottish Executive has monitored the progress of the initial phase by way of quarterly returns. These include service improvements, project objectives, project control, finance, expenditure profile, key messages and links.

The project steering group meets on a monthly basis with the team of project leader; IT and finance officers meet more frequently. As a result of the tight control over all aspects of the case, they were successful in achieving time scales and budget spend.

2] Cost and time savings. The availability of video conferencing has saved the project leader time in staff management. It is estimated that this amounts to over £8,000 in one twelve month period, when time, cost of travel and subsistence are all taken into account.

For Islanders the cost of travel to the mainland for one trip is as follows:

- from Jura 2 days plus: £300,
- from Colonsay 3 days plus: £476,
- from Islay 2 days plus: £250.

These figures are based on £100 per night to include all costs.

For Officers of the Council to visit the Island the costs are as follows,

- for Islay 1 day: £103 plus time,
- for Jura 2 days: £142 plus time,
- for Colonsay 3 days: £141 plus time, and in each case the cost of overnight accommodation must be added.

Qualitative

~A multiple sclerosis sufferer on Jura, who is now able to consult his specialist at the Southern General Hospital in Glasgow by video link, has saved the Health Board money and more importantly has saved himself the exhaustion of a two day journey for a brief consultation.

~Other uses by the Health Service are regular video conferenced meetings between the Doctors on Jura and Colonsay with Social Work and Health staff in Oban, Campbeltown and Lochgilphead. This means that these Doctors are still on the Island available to their patients instead of having to take a lengthy journey for a meeting and pay for a Locum to be present to cover for them.

~The servicepoint facilities are also used by Voluntary Organisations;

A full time carer on Jura, whose wife has had a stroke, is the Island representative for Crossroads, the local carers group. He has been unable to travel to meetings in Islay or Lochgilphead because he cannot leave his wife alone overnight. He can attend these meetings by videoconference as easily as picking up the phone.

~ It is not only the video conferencing equipment that has proved popular: Anyone can come in and use the PCs and scanners.

~The local family history trust on Islay which has so much hard copy in their archives are scanning their documents to make things more manageable for them in future.

~The whisky distillery business on Islay is a major provider of taxation benefits to the National Government in London. To make these distilleries successful frequent visits have to take place to their headquarter offices. Members of staff employed on Islay have found the use of the facility for video linking to their headquarters in Elgin in the North East of Scotland invaluable.

~The internet access service has proved popular with local farmers who can now look up information on environmental and rural development issues; so while the concept that a group of 60 plus farmers will sit down at a computer straight after a day out on the hill is difficult to envisage, the reality is that those farmers are excelling on a number of different points: They are beating the bias of age, the disadvantage of not being taught about this new technology from an early age in school and the disadvantage of location. They can access a full five day forecast, join an online discussion about farming policy, and have full access to European Union Directives at the touch of a button.

~Video Conferencing links to Brussels have enabled the local Islay National Farmers Union branch to lobby directly to the European Union.

~Councillors and members of the Scottish Parliament use the facility to discuss issues with their constituents.

~Council and other Agency staff use the servicepoints as an office space, providing vital accommodation especially in Colonsay where during the winter months the restricted ferry time table means that staff visiting the Island have to stay for a minimum of three days. Previously staff had to work from their cars or from the lounge of the Colonsay hotel where issues of confidentiality and convenience had to be addressed.

~On Colonsay the crofters have been in discussion with the local development company and the Crofters Commission in Inverness, to try to implement an innovative scheme to encourage new people to take up crofting on the island. The video conferenced meetings mean that there are no misunderstandings about the implications of the project.

~On Jura the service point has sufficient room to house several recycled computers and classes to take place on the premises. The large meeting room with video conferencing is being used for French classes.

~On Colonsay the Registrar of births, deaths and marriages now has an office facility instead of a room in her own house, and carries out marriage ceremonies in the adjacent village hall. The provision of civil marriages was not previously available on Colonsay.

~The awareness of the flexibility of the facility is reaching out to more people all the time. On Jura the local development trust has calculated that every resident has been in at least once to the service point and many attend on a weekly basis for classes or to contact the Council and other bodies. The fact that there is now a member of staff who can advise on such matters as Council Tax, business opportunities and obtaining Planning and Building forms etc... has been seen as a huge benefit to this Island of about 200 people.

~One of the main uses made in Colonsay has been that of the library and the office equipment. The islanders have found these facilities invaluable. Colonsay has a large tourist business of holiday homes, so tourists use the facility for continuing business matters and checking e-mails when on holiday.

~ As far as Colonsay Library is concerned, before this facility was set up, the library consisted of a box of books at the school, changed only twice per annum. Now it is a proper walk in library with access to the main catalogue via a PC. The link to the main catalogue is available at each servicepoint enabling islanders to order books direct from library HQ.

~On Islay the small offices have proved very popular for local voluntary groups. For example, the Islay representatives of Argyll and Bute Credit Union Development Agency (ABCUDA) who would otherwise have to be away from home for two days for a two hour meeting in Lochgilphead, join their colleagues from other credit unions by video link to Lochgilphead and Rothesay on the Isle of Bute.

~The Argyll and Bute Building Preservation Trust which develops schemes to save and regenerate old

buildings, has an interest in supporting a local group on Islay. They have been able to meet by video link to look at photographs and discuss options to try to save the old Church at Kilchoman on Islay.

~The extension of the scheme to the Island of Gigha has been used to share information with Jura and Colonsay where many of the issues are similar. The Gigha Facility has been used to arrange a link to the Community Fund HQ in London, and to the Crofters Commission in Inverness.

Sustainability

There is no doubt that this scheme has proved its worth financially, and with the time saving and the potential to link anywhere in the world, has opened up opportunities that were not there before for Island residents. The Council and Argyll and the Isles Enterprise have agreed to support the revenue costs, some of which are recouped from charges, and the long term sustainability of the project is secure. The Council has gained from the saving in staff time and travel and subsistence costs; and sees this as the future for delivering services to islands because of the demonstrated positive impact of this case.

Lessons and conclusions

BUILDINGS - DESIGN AND COMMUNICATIONS

In the project development phase, a need for specialist advice from a team architect and a Health and Safety specialist was not realised until later on in the project. The architects who designed the buildings were excellent but did not always understand the vision of the project. This has resulted in some changes being required to the internal parts of the buildings after opening, for example the reception area in Islay, storage space on Colonsay, improved disabled facilities on Jura. The quality of workmanship gave cause for concern on Islay and as a result a lot of extra time was taken up with meetings with the builders on site. A permanent architect on the team would have assisted this process. In any future projects the recommendation is that these two specialists (Health and Safety and Architect) will be involved from day one so that they have a complete understanding of what the project is about.

ICT- LEARNING POINTS

The Video conferencing equipment has needed more initial tweaking and training in its use than the suppliers expected. The distances involved have made them reluctant to provide the support as quickly as we would have wished. It is essential that the full nature of the geography and the constraints caused by it are made clear to the suppliers from the beginning. There have been particular issues relating to the video conferencing regarding static electricity and overheated rooms. These have now been resolved by installing special mats and air conditioning. It would have been better if the project team had been advised from the start that there would be a big heat output from the equipment so that air conditioning could have been included in the original works. The availability of telephone lines has been an issue which could have prevented the whole project from being successful. Pressure had to be put on British Telecom by the Scottish Executive and the Head of IT for Argyll and Bute Council to make the project happen. The problem in such a remote area is that no other telecom supplier is interested in the business. Work is now underway in partnership with the Council, Highlands and Islands enterprise and the Scottish Executive to try to introduce broadband facilities to the area. This would mean that a new project on the islands should find the telecom side easier to manage. There are ongoing problems of bandwidth availability for video conferencing which requires constant vigilance to ensure that the equipment works as it was designed to.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

The project team decided at an early stage that an FAQ would be the best way of helping staff on these islands to provide answers to any initial enquiries. West Lothian Council in the East of Scotland had already received some funding from the Scottish Executive to design this system which was eventually made available for adaptation to Argyll and Bute's circumstances. It has taken much longer than had been anticipated to implement this, and the lesson learnt is that it would have been time effective to have employed a contractor to carry out this work instead of doing it in house.

USE OF LOCAL SUPPLIERS

On the plus side, the use of a local firm, (Ile-Tec) to support the staff in the use of the PCs and equipment has proved to be an excellent decision. The firm itself was newly set up having only just opened on Islay,

when the project was starting so working together on a new and innovative project has produced good results for both. The staff feel comfortable about phoning for help to a known person who is able to respond very quickly.

ADAPTATION OF EXISTING SOFTWARE

The HEAT software monitoring system has evolved to provide reports which meet the need for different types of information and will continue to so evolve. The staff advise on what report headings they think should be included which means that they feel comfortable using the system. Staff have also developed the system of logging room and equipment usage.

CONTACT WITH LOCAL RESIDENTS

The project leader continues to have regular and frequent discussions and meetings with the local development companies and other users. This has been a great strength in ensuring that the facilities meet local requirements which are different on each island. Another excellent decision has been to work closely with the 2 local development companies or trusts on Jura and Colonsay. They have taken on the running of the Service Points and the employment of staff. Through a service level agreement, which has been entered into between the council and the development company in each case, the guidelines are clear and each is aware of their own responsibilities. This arrangement has enabled these voluntary organisations to grow and their capacity to build up their respective communities has been improved. A by product has been that they have a clearer understanding of local government and a known link into the council and AIE offices as well as their elected representative. The council has gained by being able to provide a local service to a remote community at reasonable cost.

VISIBILITY

There is a clear Three Islands Partnership logo which is recognised by users. [see file5_3ip_logo.PDF] The use of Gaelic on the servicepoint signs and headed notepaper emphasises the need for including all residents of the islands. The Scottish Executive, which provided financial support to the case has recognised the beneficial contribution the project has made to society. It has been used as an example of good practice in all 3 modernising government newsletters issued by the Executive and at Transforming Scotland conferences in Paisley in December 2002 and Glasgow in February 2003.

AWARD

In March 2003, the Three Islands partnership project won a prestigious award from the Local Government Chronicle 'Awards for Excellence 2003' in the category "Improving Services with E-Technology"; beating stiff opposition from Councils from all over the United Kingdom. The granting of the award has been the subject of extensive coverage in the local press. A copy of the press release can be found on Argyll and Bute Councils website at the following address (www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/content/news/general/topaward). More importantly, islanders are voting the project a real success by using the technology in their daily lives. Argyll and Bute Council and its partners are all too aware of the importance of being at the "cutting edge" of new technology. To keep our residents in Argyll and Bute; and as importantly to encourage people to return or relocate to this beautiful part of Scotland, we must offer a high level of service to every resident. The Council is developing its web site in line with government directives and is striving to get services on-line as soon as possible. This will mean that a 24/7 Council service will be within the reach of anyone with access to a computer. The Three Islands Service Points are the first step towards giving our most disadvantaged (in terms of their ability to access services) people a chance to access services not only locally but globally.

TRANSFERABILITY

Video conferencing provision has been extended to the island of Gigha off the west coast of Kintyre and a similar provision can be provided to any island or remote mainland community. The people of Gigha, who have purchased their island from the former owner with help from the Scottish Land Fund, have found the opportunity to network by video link to Jura and Colonsay helpful to them in their major task of running a community. The model developed in Colonsay of an extension to a community hall has the potential to be transferred as a package to community halls in small remote and island communities throughout Scotland, enabling a package of services to be made available at relatively low cost. The availability at a remote place of shared office space with equipment and links to main bases has the potential to increase the effectiveness of time spent waiting for scheduled transport links, and to increase opportunities for linking visits to outlying destinations on successive days. This will bring benefits to all areas where a substantial

number of services are delivered from distant bases. The decision to extend the use of the frequently asked questions database to all council staff and anyone with access to the internet has also been a positive outcome of the project. The empowerment of local development companies to run and manage, in partnership with the Council, the buildings and staff who provide the services is an innovative example which can be transferred to anywhere in the country, in Europe or further afield. Using local development companies in this way ensures the success of the project. Partnership with other government agencies has also improved relationships with the Council as a whole. Because staff of different agencies have successfully worked together at the Three Islands Project Servicepoints, confidence in working together on other matters which the Council, Argyll and the Islands Enterprise, the Health Services, Benefits Agency and other partners wish to take forward in future has increased. The lessons that have been learnt by listening to local communities are part of the governments overall community planning vision and an example of how community planning will improve services for Council residents.

References and links

www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/content/technology/

Community Sites:-

www.juradevelopment.org.uk/

www.colonsay.org.uk/

Contact Information

Organisation: Argyll and Bute Council

Name: Deirdre Forsyth

Address:

Dalriada House,Lochgilphead
PA30 8EU Argyll
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 1546 604558

Fax: +44 1546 604530

E-mail: deirdre.forsyth@argyll-bute.gov.uk