A Stronger Third Sector for Argyll and Bute

ABTSI Strategy 2026–2031

Draft revised version following feedback from Board on 27th October 2026

1. Our purpose

Argyll and Bute Third Sector Interface exists to support, connect and champion the third sector across Argyll and Bute.

We work with charities, community groups, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, volunteers and community-led networks. Our role is to help the sector thrive, so that people and communities across Argyll and Bute can access support, shape decisions, build local capacity and contribute to a fairer, healthier and more resilient place.

This strategy is both an ABTSI strategy and a sector-facing strategy. It sets out what we will do as the local Third Sector Interface, but it also reflects the wider ambitions, challenges and contribution of the third sector in Argyll and Bute.

2. Our vision

People and communities across Argyll and Bute thrive through a strong, connected, influential and sustainable third sector.

3. Our mission

To strengthen the third sector in Argyll and Bute by providing knowledge, voice, capacity building and connection.

We will do this by supporting organisations and volunteers, improving evidence about the sector, creating spaces for collaboration, influencing public policy and investment, and helping communities take forward preventative, locally rooted solutions.

4. Our values and principles

Our work will be guided by four values and principles.

Community-rooted

We start with people, communities and place. Argyll and Bute is rural, remote and island-based, but it is also diverse, creative and community-led. Our strategy must reflect the reality of local life and the importance of locally trusted organisations. We will be

evidence-led and use data, research, lived experience and sector intelligence to demonstrate need, show impact and inform better decisions.

Ambitious for the sector

We believe the third sector is central to the future of Argyll and Bute. It is not simply a provider of services; it is a source of leadership, innovation, volunteering, advocacy, prevention, local knowledge and community wealth.

Collaborative

We will work in partnership with third sector organisations, communities, public bodies, funders, businesses and national partners. We will also be honest that collaboration takes time, trust, facilitation and shared accountability.

We will be inclusive and work to ensure that smaller organisations, rural and island communities, volunteers, carers, people with lived experience and communities facing inequality can shape decisions that affect them.

Sustainable

We will support long-term resilience, fair funding, good governance, workforce wellbeing and environmental responsibility. We will avoid overpromising and be clear about what depends on partnership, policy and resources.

Figure 1 below shows the logic behind our strategic approach, integrating the different levels of our work

5. Why this strategy matters now

Argyll and Bute's third sector is essential to the area's wellbeing, resilience and future prosperity. It supports people before they reach crisis, creates opportunities for volunteering and employment, brings communities together, attracts external investment, and often reaches people and places that statutory services cannot easily reach.

However, the sector is under pressure. Organisations are managing rising demand, insecure funding, workforce and volunteer shortages, governance pressures, rural delivery costs, transport barriers and uncertainty about public sector budgets. At the same time, public services face major financial and demographic pressures and need stronger preventative, community-based models of support.

This creates both a challenge and an opportunity.

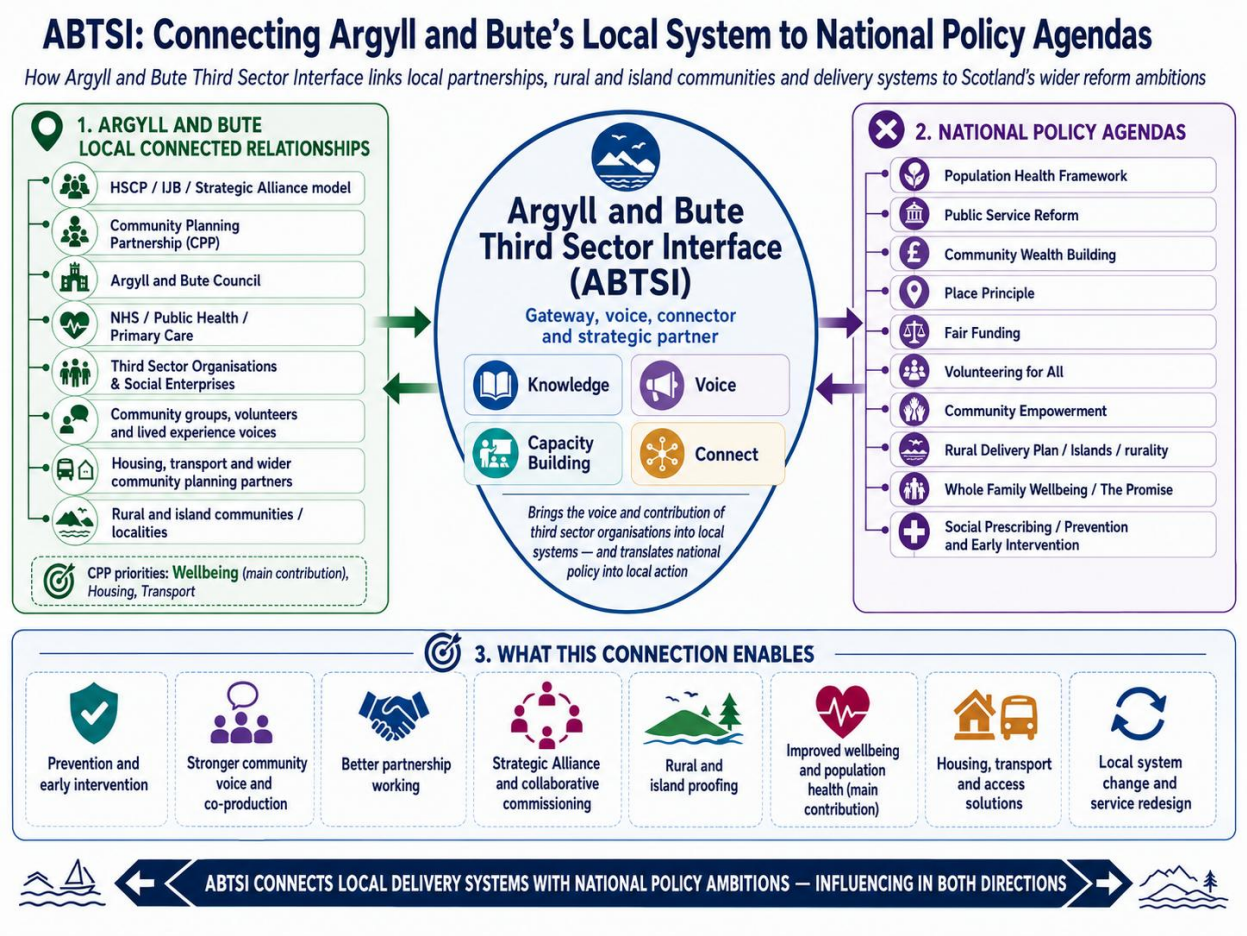
The challenge is that the third sector cannot simply absorb more demand without sustainable investment, clear priorities and respectful partnership.

The opportunity is that Argyll and Bute already has the community infrastructure, relationships and local creativity needed to build a more preventative model of public service and community wellbeing.

This strategy sets out how ABTSI will help make that possible.

Our recent work through the TSI Scotland Network on the Programme for Government 2026–2031 and Public Service Reform reinforces this direction. The Network welcomes the emphasis on prevention and partnership, while calling for a funded shift towards communities: fair, multi-year funding and full-cost recovery; a formal TSI role in reform; investment in volunteering and community capacity; and meaningful third sector involvement in planning and commissioning. ABTSI will bring rural and island experience into this work, advocating for reform that strengthens local preventative support and accountability.

Figure 2 below: How Argyll and Bute TSI can help connect third sector organisations with wider local and national policy agendas



6. Plan on a page

What we heard	What this means	What ABTSI will do
The third sector wants stronger influence.	Sector intelligence and lived experience need to shape local plans, budgets and commissioning.	Strengthen ABTSI's role as a strategic voice for the sector.
Collaboration is essential but difficult.	Partnership needs time, trust, facilitation and clear accountability.	Create practical spaces for collaboration and support new models of alliance working.
Volunteering needs renewed attention.	Volunteering should be valuable, meaningful, sociable and purposeful.	Develop a stronger local approach to volunteering, including pathways into learning, work and community leadership.
Funding and capacity are major risks.	The strategy must be ambitious but realistic.	Prioritise fair funding, sustainability, evidence of impact and clear delivery choices.
The sector needs to demonstrate value.	Social, economic and preventative impact must be better evidenced.	Build shared data, social value evidence and stronger communications.

7. Our strategic framework

This strategy is organised around the four national TSI functions:

1. Knowledge
2. Voice
3. Build Capacity
4. Connect

These functions provide a simple structure for ABTSI's work. Within each function, we set out:

- what the sector needs;
- what ABTSI will do;
- what we want to achieve by 2031.

Figure 3 above: A strategy that helps deliver for the wider sector and how ABTSI will work to create change

The strategy also responds to six sector priorities identified through research, consultation and engagement:

1. Stronger system leadership and advocacy
2. Shared data, evidence and learning
3. Networking, collaboration and partnership
4. Operational support and organisational resilience
5. Communication and championing the sector
6. Sector mapping, intelligence and future planning

These priorities are not separate from the four TSI functions. They are woven through them.

8. Strategic function one: Knowledge

What the sector needs

Argyll and Bute needs better shared knowledge about the third sector: who organisations support, where they operate, what pressures they face, what contribution they make, and where there are gaps in provision.

The sector also needs accessible information about policy, funding, public service reform, community wealth building, health and social care, volunteering, regulation and governance.

Good knowledge should help the sector influence decisions, demonstrate value and plan for the future.

What ABTSI will do

ABTSI will act as a central source of knowledge about the third sector in Argyll and Bute.

We will:

- strengthen our sector mapping and intelligence function;
- maintain and improve accessible information about local third sector organisations, services and networks;
- use the State of the Sector research and annual national TSI survey to track change over time;
- share intelligence with public partners, funders and policy makers;
- develop better evidence of social, economic and preventative value;
- support the sector to use data and impact evidence proportionately;
- produce briefings on key policy issues affecting the sector;
- improve how we communicate evidence to members, communities and partners.

What success will look like by 2031

By 2031, ABTSI will be recognised as the trusted source of evidence and insight about the third sector in Argyll and Bute. Sector intelligence will be used more consistently in local planning, commissioning, funding and public service reform.

We will be able to show more clearly how the third sector contributes to prevention, community wellbeing, volunteering, social enterprise, community wealth building and local resilience.

9. Strategic function two: Voice

What the sector needs

The third sector needs a stronger and more consistent voice in local and national decision-making. This includes decisions about health and social care, community wellbeing, poverty, transport, housing, economic development, volunteering, funding and public service reform.

Voice is not only about representation. It is about ensuring that the experience of communities, service users, carers, volunteers, staff and local organisations influences decisions before they are made.

What ABTSI will do

ABTSI will champion the role, value and contribution of the third sector.

We will:

- represent third sector interests in strategic partnerships, including the Community Planning Partnership, Integration Joint Board and relevant planning structures;
- support stronger third sector input into the CPP Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities of community wellbeing, transport and housing;
- continue to advocate for prevention, early intervention and community-based support;
- support the sector to contribute to the HSCP Living Well strategy and the wider Joint Strategic Plan;
- strengthen routes for smaller organisations and community groups to influence policy;
- use evidence and case studies to demonstrate the impact of local organisations;
- support campaigns and collective positions where there is a clear sector mandate;
- be clear when ABTSI is speaking as an organisation and when we are reflecting a wider sector view.

What success will look like by 2031

By 2031, the third sector will have a stronger, more organised and more influential voice in Argyll and Bute. Public bodies and funders will better understand the sector's contribution and will involve it earlier in policy, planning and budget decisions.

The sector's role in prevention, community wellbeing and public service reform will be more clearly recognised and better supported.

10. Strategic function three: Build Capacity

What the sector needs

The third sector needs practical support to remain strong, well-governed, sustainable and responsive. Many organisations are managing complex pressures: funding insecurity, volunteer shortages, governance demands, digital systems, staff wellbeing, rural delivery costs and rising community need.

Capacity building must support both day-to-day resilience and longer-term transformation.

What ABTSI will do

ABTSI will help organisations and volunteers build the capacity they need to achieve positive change.

We will:

- provide governance, funding, organisational development and volunteering support;
- strengthen support for smaller community groups and rural or island organisations;
- help organisations understand and respond to changes in regulation, policy and funding;
- support fair work, workforce wellbeing and good leadership practice;
- support volunteering as a core part of community capacity, not simply a source of unpaid labour;
- develop volunteering opportunities that are valuable, meaningful, sociable and purposeful;
- strengthen links between volunteering, skills development, employability and community leadership;
- explore practical tools such as opportunity boards, time banking and improved volunteer matching;
- support social enterprises and community organisations to develop sustainable models;
- pursue the ambition of shared back-office and support functions for the third and social enterprise sectors, recognising that this will require dedicated development capacity and funding.

What success will look like by 2031

By 2031, more third sector organisations in Argyll and Bute will feel confident, resilient and well-supported. Volunteers will be better recognised, better supported and more connected to wider opportunities.

ABTSI will have helped develop practical models of support that reduce duplication, strengthen governance and improve organisational sustainability across the sector.

11. Strategic function four: Connect

What the sector needs

The third sector needs spaces to connect, collaborate and learn. Organisations want to work together, but collaboration can be difficult when resources are scarce, contracts are competitive, capacity is stretched and relationships are complex.

Connection cannot be left to chance. It needs facilitation, trust-building, shared purpose and clear follow-through.

What ABTSI will do

ABTSI will provide leadership, coordination and convening support so that the sector can respond more effectively to local priorities.

We will:

- create regular opportunities for third sector organisations to meet, share learning and identify common priorities;
- build on the momentum created through recent focus groups and strategy engagement;
- support thematic networks, including adults and wellbeing, children and families, volunteering, community wealth building and social enterprise;
- use both online and in-person approaches, recognising the geography of Argyll and Bute;
- support collaboration where it adds value, while being honest about the time and resources required;
- help develop a strategic alliance approach for preventative community-based health and social care;
- work with partners to explore pooled investment, fair commissioning and shared outcomes;
- support the development of an “All Argyll Fund” as a long-term ambition, while recognising that this will be complex and will require significant partnership, governance and resourcing;
- strengthen relationships with local, regional and national partners.

What success will look like by 2031

By 2031, third sector organisations in Argyll and Bute will be better connected to each other and to key public and funding partners. Collaboration will be more purposeful, better supported and more focused on shared outcomes.

There will be clearer routes for developing strategic alliance models, shared investment approaches and community-led prevention.

12. Major initiative for the strategy period: a preventative community model

A central priority for this strategy period will be to support the development of a more preventative, community-rooted model of health, social care and wellbeing in Argyll and Bute.

This will build on the contribution already made by local charities, community groups, carers organisations, social enterprises, volunteers and lived experience networks. These organisations often support people early, locally and relationally, helping to reduce isolation, maintain independence, strengthen resilience and prevent crisis.

The financial context makes this urgent. Public services face severe budget pressure, including significant HSCP savings requirements. A sustainable future cannot be built through short-term reductions that weaken preventative community support. Instead, partners need to develop a different model of investment, commissioning and collaboration.

ABTSI will therefore work with the third sector, HSCP, NHS, Council, IJB, Community Planning Partnership and national partners to explore a strategic alliance approach. This will need to be developed carefully, with attention to trust, accountability, evidence, governance and fair resourcing.

This is not a quick fix. It is a long-term shift in how partners work together.

Stakeholder interviews, survey evidence and local practice have informed the first in a series of prevention workshops which took place on 22 October 2026. It explored collaboration between public services, the third sector and communities. The discussion will inform a proposed partnership brief and provide practical next steps, subject to partner agreement and resourcing.

13. Cross-cutting commitments

Across all four strategic functions, ABTSI will make six cross-cutting commitments.

1. Prevention and early intervention

We will champion the third sector's role in preventing crisis, supporting wellbeing and reducing demand on statutory services.

2. Rural, remote and island equity

We will ensure that strategy, funding and policy reflect the real costs and complexities of delivering in Argyll and Bute.

3. Community wealth building

We will support approaches that retain more wealth, opportunity and decision-making power within local communities.

4. Fair funding and sustainability

We will advocate for funding that is proportionate, longer-term, accessible and realistic about the cost of delivery.

5. Lived experience and co-production

We will support communities and people with lived experience to shape decisions, services and priorities.

6. Learning and improvement

We will use evidence, evaluation, quality improvement and feedback to improve our work and demonstrate impact.

14. Delivery risks and how we will respond

This strategy is ambitious, but it must also be realistic. The workshop feedback was clear that money, capacity and trust are major risks.

Risk	Why it matters	How we will respond
Reduced funding for ABTSI or the wider sector	This could reduce capacity at the same time as demand rises.	Prioritise core functions, advocate for fair funding, and be clear about what requires additional resources.
Overpromising	Unrealistic commitments could damage trust.	Distinguish between what ABTSI controls, what we influence, and what depends on partnership or funding.
Collaboration fatigue	Organisations may have limited time to attend meetings or join networks.	Make networks purposeful, practical and connected to real decisions.
Competition for funding or contracts	This can undermine trust and openness.	Support transparent partnership principles, shared outcomes and fair commissioning.
Weak evidence of impact	The sector's value may be underestimated.	Improve data, social value evidence, case studies and

Risk	Why it matters	How we will respond
		communications.
Volunteer shortages	Organisations may struggle to sustain services and activities.	Strengthen volunteer support, recognition, matching and links to skills and employment.
Policy or legislative change	External changes may affect delivery priorities.	Maintain policy intelligence and communicate implications to the sector.
Rural delivery pressures	Geography, transport and workforce challenges increase costs.	Use evidence to advocate for rural-proofed funding and service design.

15. How we will communicate this strategy

The strategy will only succeed if it is understood and used.

ABTSI will therefore develop a communications approach that:

- uses clear and consistent language;
- explains the strategy through a short "plan on a page";
- uses a "You said / We will" format to show how sector feedback has shaped priorities;
- shares short case studies and quotes from local organisations;
- explains complex policy issues in accessible ways;
- keeps members and partners updated on progress;
- celebrates the contribution of volunteers, community groups, charities and social enterprises.

We will avoid producing a strategy that sits on a shelf. The strategy will be used as a working framework for ABTSI's annual plans, partnership work, advocacy, reporting and communications.

16. How we will measure progress

We will measure progress through a combination of quantitative data, qualitative evidence and sector feedback.

This will include:

- annual review of State of the Sector and TSI survey findings;
- membership and engagement data;
- volunteering data and feedback;
- evidence from networks, forums and consultations;

- case studies showing community impact;
- funding and investment secured for the sector;
- evidence of third sector influence on local plans and decisions;
- progress against ABTSI annual business plans;
- feedback from members, partners and communities.

We will report progress annually and use the findings to update delivery priorities.

17. What will be different by 2031

By 2031, we want to see:

- a stronger, more confident and better-connected third sector;
- improved evidence of the sector's social, economic and preventative value;
- stronger third sector influence in public policy, planning and investment;
- better support for volunteering and community participation;
- more purposeful collaboration across organisations and sectors;
- greater recognition of rural, remote and island delivery challenges;
- progress towards strategic alliance models for preventative community support;
- stronger links between community wealth building, wellbeing and third sector sustainability;
- ABTSI recognised as a trusted source of knowledge, voice, capacity building and connection.

18. Closing statement

Argyll and Bute's third sector is one of the area's greatest strengths. It is rooted in communities, powered by volunteers, shaped by local knowledge and committed to improving people's lives.

This strategy is about strengthening that sector for the future.

ABTSI cannot deliver this alone. Success will depend on partnership, trust, evidence, investment and shared commitment. But with the right support, the third sector can play an even greater role in building a fairer, healthier, more connected and more resilient Argyll and Bute.