

Brendan O'Hara MP

ARGYLL & BUTE



Spring | 2021
Newsletter

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'B O'Hara'.

In the constituency

Going the extra mile - ferry employees at the heart of our communities.



The amazing Megan's Miles team are pictured in Oban.

Photo: Kevin McGlynn

I was delighted to take part in a parliamentary debate on passenger boats and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) recently.

This gave me the opportunity to pay tribute to all of those workers from Caledonian MacBrayne, Western Ferries and Argyll & Bute Council who have worked so hard over the past 12 months to keep our island and rural communities connected, in extremely difficult circumstances.

In my speech I made particular reference to the fantastic fundraising efforts of CalMac employees in Oban who rallied round to support a colleague.

The 40-strong Megan's Miles team have walked over 5,000 miles and raised over £11,000 for charity SAMH; this is an incredible achievement. Well done to them and thank you to everyone who has supported them so far.

In recognition of their achievements, I put down a motion in Parliament which means their fantastic efforts in support of Megan and mental health awareness are now on the official record. The parliamentary motion can be found [here](#).

More information on the Megan's Miles appeal and how to make a donation can be found [here](#).

In the constituency

Driving forward plans for a replacement
A83 Rest and Be Thankful



It is vital that the best permanent fix is found for the A83 for everyone who lives, works and visits Argyll & Bute

I was glad to receive confirmation from Transport Secretary Michael Matheson that the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland are working to deliver short, medium and long term solutions to the problems at the A83 Rest and Be Thankful.

Although the Scottish Parliament is not sitting due to the forthcoming election on May 6, Transport Scotland

will continue accelerating preparing and delivering solutions in the meantime.

This reassurance is so important for residents and businesses who have had to endure more than eight months of disruption and diversions which are both costly and time-consuming.

I was glad to have the opportunity to meet with the recently formed RABT Campaign group which has

been working hard to highlight the issues for businesses across the area and rightly so and am grateful that Transport Scotland officials have agreed to my request for them to meet with the group.

It is vital we work together to agree the best possible long-term solution for everyone in Argyll & Bute and that a new road is constructed as soon as possible.

In the constituency

Public safety and jobs must take priority over profits

29th March

MPs voice fear over proposed firefighter cuts at HMNB Clyde



By Craig Borland | [@helensburghadv](#)
Senior Content Editor



MPs Brendan O'Hara, top right, and Martin Docherty-Hughes have voiced their concerns over Capita's plans to cut firefighter posts at HMNB Clyde

0 comment

HELENSBURGH'S MP has raised his concern with the UK's defence secretary at plans to cut specialist firefighting jobs at Faslane and Coulport.

Argyll and Bute MP Brendan O'Hara and his West Dunbartonshire colleague Martin Docherty-Hughes have contacted Ben Wallace to voice their fear at reported plans by private firm Capita – which has been responsible for fire and rescue cover at HM Naval Base Clyde since April 2020 under a £525 million contract – to cut jobs and use cover from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Reduced firefighting capacity may also result in increased demand on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, taking them away from keeping our communities safe. None of this is acceptable.

I have not yet had a response from the UK Government but I am grateful to the Scottish Government's Directorate for Safer Communities for confirming it has asked for a meeting with the MoD to discuss the implications this could have on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. You can read more on this [here](#).

My colleague West Dunbartonshire MP Martin Docherty-Hughes and I have written to the Secretary of State for Defence asking him to safeguard the livelihoods of highly experienced firefighters based at HMNB Clyde and make sure public safety is not put at risk at the same time that the MoD plans to expand its nuclear stockpile on the Clyde.

Last year the Ministry of Defence outsourced provision of the defence fire and rescue service to Capita, in a multi-million pound deal, and now the private firm has announced it is looking at a range of job cuts across Scotland including the Faslane and Coulport sites.

In the constituency

Making sure our rural and island communities stay connected



Good connectivity whether that's ferry services or broadband is vital to our island communities

Ensuring connectivity for our island communities is vital and during the pandemic we have seen just how fragile they can sometimes be.

Therefore, I was pleased to facilitate a meeting between members of the Gigha community, CalMac and Kintyre councillors to see if we could overcome some of the issues created by a change in the law on unaccompanied loose freight. For Gigha this has meant that every item bound for the island has

to go with someone and cannot go on the boat itself, which has been the case for many years.

This has resulted in some difficulty for ad hoc items like prescriptions, fresh bread and school milk deliveries as well as Sunday newspapers.

I am grateful we were all able to get round the table – albeit remotely – and see what can be done to make sure no one on the island goes without.

Digital connectivity is also an issue which constituents raise with me frequently and while this is an issue primarily reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Government also has a role to play.

I was glad to hear that the Scottish Government had taken over some Emergency Service Masts in the constituency, including one at Glenbarr in Kintyre, therefore enhancing 4G provision in the area.

In the constituency

Making sure our rural and island communities stay connected ... continued

The Home Office has primary responsibility for developing these masts though and has infrastructure in place at six other sites across Argyll & Bute. Over the last few months, I have been trying to find out when they will make these sites fully

operational as it would allow for mast sharing by commercial operators, therefore increasing connectivity across our communities.

I have submitted a number of questions to the Home Office which can be found

on the website [theyworkforyou](https://www.theyworkforyou.com) and I hope the UK Government may be spurred on to match the investment made by the Scottish Government, helping ensure that as many people as possible are able to benefit from better connectivity.

NHS and emergency services at forefront of Covid response

Harsh winter weather and the huge logistical challenge of delivering vaccines to some of the most rural areas of Argyll & Bute and our islands, didn't stop NHS staff from managing to vaccinate over 27,000 people by the end of February.

This was a huge achievement in the circumstances and, of course, since then the number of people receiving their first dose of the Covid vaccine, and many also a second dose, has escalated rapidly. There is no doubt the vaccine roll-out across the



NHS Highland area - and the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area as well – would not have been so successful if it wasn't for the devotion of all of those involved who have worked relentlessly on the vaccination programme over the last few months.

In fact, I know that NHS staff have overcome many hurdles trying to get vaccines to centres including having one batch taken via snowplough when the snow became too deep for normal vehicles.

NHS and emergency services at forefront of Covid response ... continued

We also have an exceptional example of NHS resilience on the Isle of Mull where, in bad weather, District Nurse Moira Westland and Staff Nurse Cara Donnelly made the journey on foot to reach the homes of their patients ensuring no one missed out.

The amazing contributions of NHS Highland staff and Moira and Cara in particular have been put on record in Parliament.

You can read the Early Day Motions [here](#) and [here](#). There is no doubt that NHS staff have been the backbone of our response to Covid, working so hard to keep us safe during the pandemic and for that they deserve our full support.

I was glad to hear First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announce the Scottish Government will increase NHS staff pay by 4% if the SNP is re-elected at Holyrood. This is in addition to the £500 thank you payment the Scottish Government gave health and social care staff in November last year.

All staff in our frontline services have worked so hard particularly over the last year and it was great to see Lochgilphead's fire station being chosen as a pilot Scottish Fire and Rescue Covid testing site.

The success of this pilot saw the programme expanded to a further 21 fire stations including Dunoon, Campbeltown, Rothesay, Tarbert, Cove and Arrochar, enabling so many more people to access testing facilities nearer to home and I'm grateful to those on the ground in these communities for making this important contribution to our Covid response.

Our police officers have also made a massive contribution to our communities during the pandemic and I was glad to see the efforts of Campbeltown officers being recognised at the Scottish Women's Development Forum held on International Women's Day.

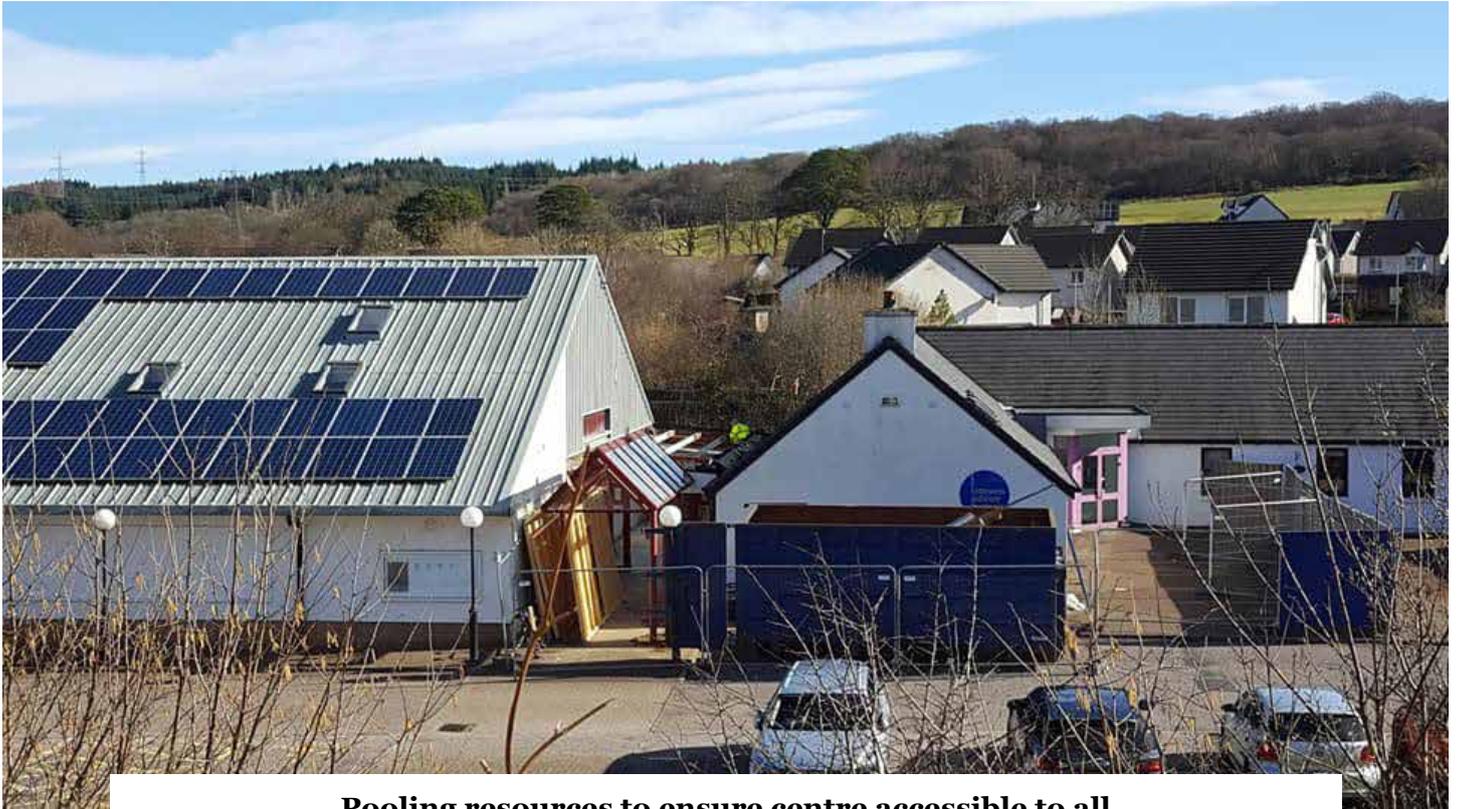
Detective Lindsay Wallace was named Police Officer of the Year and Police Constable Karen Cairns scooped the community service award. These awards are fitting recognition of the work these officers and their colleagues do to keep us safe. I was pleased to show my support with a motion in Parliament [here](#).

Also putting others first were father and daughter team Stuart and Abby Charnock of Lochgilphead who successfully raised awareness of the thousands of veterans currently homeless on the UK by fundraising for the Royal British Legion Industries charity.

Stuart, who is a police officer in Lochgilphead, and Abby, fundraised for the Royal British Legion Industries charity which provides employability services to disabled and disadvantaged members of the armed forces community. It's for that reason that I wanted to submit a motion to parliament which can be found [here](#).

In the constituency

Pooling resources to ensure centre accessible to all



Pooling resources to ensure centre accessible to all

This past year it has been difficult to make much progress with big projects so it has been great to see the team at Mid Argyll Community Pool in Lochgilphead buck the trend with a successful application to Sport Scotland's Sport Facility Fund for £100,000.

This is a tremendous achievement and one which will enable the Mac pool to be redeveloped into an activity hub, improving community health and well-being and accessible to all.

The efforts of all involved are so impressive I wanted to put it on the parliamentary record and can be found [here](#).

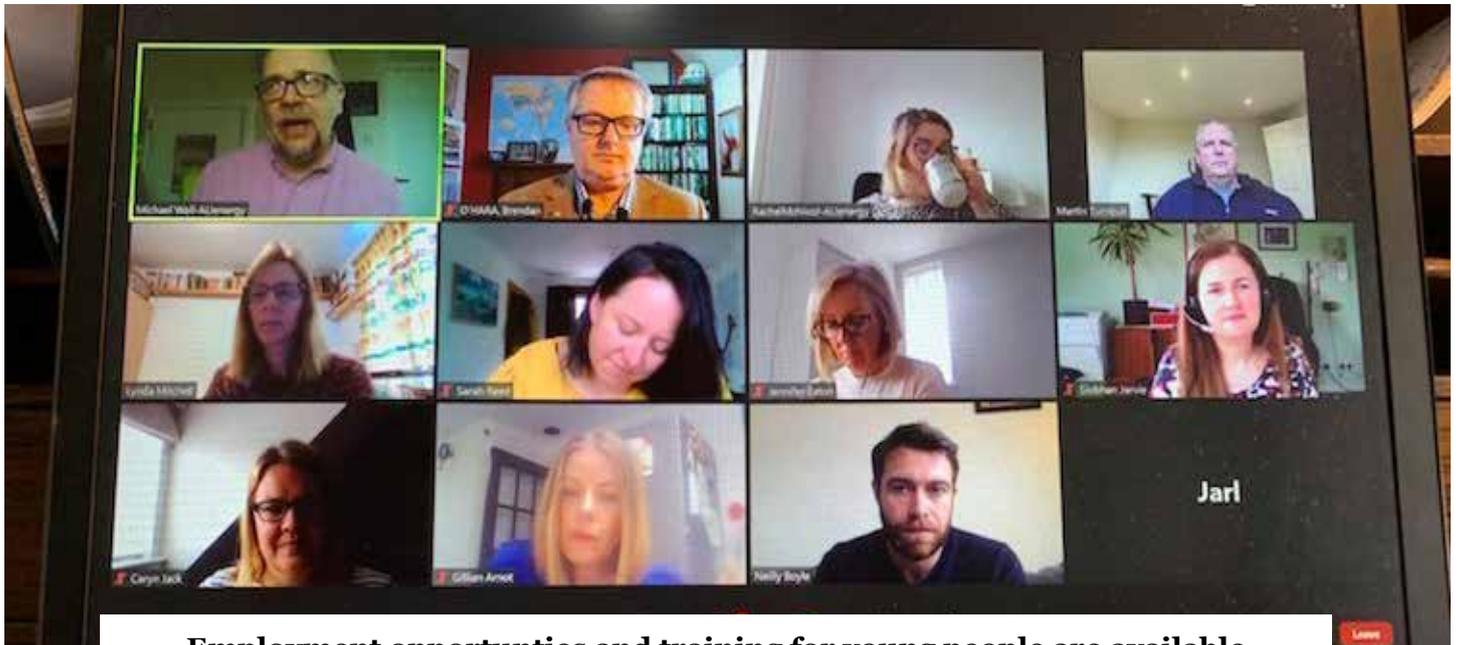
Congratulations must go to all those involved in Campbeltown being named Scotland's Most Improved Place at the 2020 SURF awards. This is a massive boost to the town and very deserving recognition of the sheer hard work and investment that has been made by the community working alongside Argyll & Bute Council.

This £13m project resulted in the renovation of 40 buildings in the town including the repair of 11 tenement buildings housing a total of 58 flats, as well as numerous improvements to shop fronts, the creation of a backpackers hostel and the restoration of Campbeltown Cross.

This truly phenomenal effort truly merited this prestigious award and I was happy to support this with a parliamentary motion as well - [link](#).

A world of work on our doorstep

Argyll & Bute



Employment opportunities and training for young people are available across Argyll & Bute

I was really pleased to be invited to the premiere of the film, STEM Journeys Argyll which showed the working worlds for four professionals who work in STEM roles in Argyll & Bute and also showcased the beauty of the local landscape.

The film was created by Oban-based Argyll, Lomonds and the Islands Energy agency (ALIenergy) which delivers an Education and Skills Development programme funded by Scottish Power Renewables' Beinn an Tuirc 2 windfarm community benefit fund.

The programme aims to increase awareness among families and young people of the career opportunities available on Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) activities and includes workshops with local schools.

One of the main aims of making of the film was to demonstrate that a variety of employment opportunities and training routes are available to young people on their doorstep, inspiring interest in STEM and ambitions to play a role in the future local economy.

The team at ALIenergy had been working hard to develop a mini-conference event for S2 pupils called The Mid Argyll and Kintyre Science Technology Engineering and Maths Festival or MAK STEM Fest for short.

Sadly, this had to be postponed due to Covid but I look forward to it being rearranged soon and I'm delighted that Lochgilphead High School will host the event.

Well done to all involved!

Community spirit at home and abroad

I was also really pleased to find out about ALIenergys 'Cosy Kits' donation of essentials to foodbanks across Argyll & Bute and commend them on their efforts to support those who are struggling the most during the pandemic.

Pupils at Dalintober Primary School also deserve praise for the support they have given Kintyre Foodbank. The entrepreneurial youngsters took part in

the Virgin Money Make £5 Grow programme and managed to double their initial investment by selling hand-crafted chocolate kits.

They raised over £300, £50 of which was donated to the foodbank while the rest was re-invested into other school enterprises.

The spirit of helping others also extends to Oban and it was good to hear that

thanks to the generosity of people across the area, the First Aid 4 Gambia charity was able to send walking sticks, walkers, wheelchairs and crutches to a hospital in Gambia.

This will make a huge difference to people there. I marked this incredible act of kindness with a motion in Parliament - [link](#).

Praise for all involved in Robert Black helipad

The community of Campbeltown was devastated when well-known and much-loved Scottish Ambulance Service paramedic Robert Black lost his life to Covid-19 last May and it is so fitting that the new helipad has been named in his memory.

The creation of this facility was no easy task but it has been fantastic to see local people and businesses rally round to raise £270,000 to ensure that this project became a reality.

Particular praise is due to Ambulance Technician Stuart McLellan who led the fundraising campaign, supported by local organisations, businesses and residents notably Trust Manager, Eric Spence from South Kintrye Development Trust, the County Air Ambulance Trust, MacFadyens Contractors Ltd, McKinven and Colville Contractors. The helipad will be a great asset to the area, ensuring the safety of anyone needing an emergency transfer to hospital. I have recognised all of their efforts with a motion in parliament.

Bob swings into US Masters action



Oban golfer Bob MacIntyre finished in tied 12th place earning him a place at Augusta 22
Photo (pre-Covid): Kevin McGlynn

I would also like to congratulate Oban golfer Robert MacIntyre on his success at the US Masters in Augusta in early April. Bob made history with the best result for a Scot since Colin Montgomerie in 2002, finishing in tied 12th place and winning automatic entry to next year's event.

I know Bob has worked so hard to get to where he is and I am delighted for him and his family and also for members of Glencruitten Golf Club who have been so supportive.

I was delighted to put his success on the record with a motion in Parliament. This can be found [here](#).

Brexit impact on local livelihoods

Although we have not yet felt the true impact of Brexit due to the restrictions of Covid, there are many areas where the reality of leaving the EU has already wreaked so much damage and this includes Argyll & Bute's important seafood and shellfish industry.

From Day 1 they have been hampered by increased bureaucracy and higher costs and there is still no sign of the UK Government doing anything like enough to make sure valuable produce gets to its markets in Europe.

I have met and been in touch with many of those affected and continue to hold the UK Government to account for its actions in Parliament.

Brexit impact on local livelihoods



Scotland's shellfish and seafood producers including businesses from Argyll & Bute, took their concerns to Westminster



The crisis facing the Scottish seafood sector was also the subject for a mock press conference I took part in with journalism students at Glasgow Caledonian University recently.

It was great to take so many great questions about my work in parliament and the constituency as well as my previous career as a TV producer.

While these young people are at the start of their careers the Dunoon Observer has clocked up 150 years and I was pleased to be able to mark the anniversary and it's lengthy contribution to its local community, with a motion in Parliament [here](#).

In the constituency

Constituency casework

While my constituency office remains closed due to the pandemic, my office is still very busy and we continue to prioritise Covid-related casework. This includes helping constituents - particularly business owners - access grants and other sources of funding available, answer questions relating to travel, quarantine and other restrictions and also on the vaccine roll-out.

The pandemic has also resulted in many constituents getting in touch about their employment as well as education opportunities and we continue to receive a high volume of correspondence regarding issues with housing and benefits claims. I will also respond to as many campaign emails as I can as I know these are important. If you need help with any of these matters please get in touch.

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

Taking a lead on Climate Change

**Thank you to the
100 MPs backing
the CEE Bill**



Climate &
Ecological
Emergency
Bill Alliance

Brendan O'Hara alongside 99 other MPs is taking action by supporting the Climate & Ecological Emergency Bill.
Find out more: ceebill.uk/climate100

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

Taking a lead on Climate Change

Climate Change is the biggest challenge facing the planet; it is not something happening elsewhere to other people, its impact is being felt here too. The A83 Rest and Be Thankful is the most obvious example of climate change on our doorstep but also in the same week that the East coast of Scotland was covered in deep snow, firefighters were battling wildfires on our islands.

These extremes are having an impact everywhere and we all have a responsibility to do what we can to stop it. In November, Glasgow will host the UN COP26 climate change conference and the eyes of the world will be on us. I was pleased to be appointed to the SNP COP26 leadership team, and along with my colleague Deidre Brock MP we have got the ball rolling meeting representatives of organisations and charities working to raise awareness of climate change across the globe.

I was delighted to organise a meeting between Stop Climate Chaos Scotland and SNP MPs and MSPs and also to work with those wishing to bring forward the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) Bill. I am doing what I can to support this and have applied for a cross-party Back Bench Business Committee debate to bring this to the fore at Westminster.

You can also read this piece I wrote on climate change and the reason why I support the [Bill](#). Sadly, climate change is having its biggest impact on the world's poorest countries and we must all support efforts to mitigate the impact this is having on them.

It was therefore astonishing to hear that in the same week the UN published a report saying an estimated 34 million people across the globe were, "just one step away from starvation", the UK Government revealed it intends to use billions of pounds cut from its Overseas Development Aid budget, to expand the UK's stockpile of nuclear warheads by 40%.



Making sustainable choices is crucial to tackle climate change. I am supporting the #BuyBetter second hand clothes campaign.

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

Taking a lead on Climate Change

Argyll
& Bute



Cuts to the Overseas Development Aid budget will have an impact on all of us

I took part (virtually) in a Westminster Hall Debate on Government support for non-governmental organisations and churches in developing nations during the Covid-19 pandemic and spoke about the need for the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office reverse this hugely damaging decision.

Cuts to aid will affect the ability of so many organisations including Dalmally-based Mary's Meals, Compassion UK and SCIAF from carrying out vital, life-saving work in some of the poorest countries. It also impacts on crucial research projects.

You can read and watch my contribution to the debate [here](#).

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

Right to freedom of expression

Many constituents across Argyll & Bute have been in touch to voice concern over the implications of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

All SNP MPs at Westminster voted against this Bill when it came before Parliament for its second reading in mid-March, just days after the murder of Sarah Everard.

This Bill imposes disproportionate restrictions on our freedom of expression and right to protest.

It is a rushed and poorly considered bill, which would damage the rights of people across the UK and it should be withdrawn immediately.

Instead of restricting people's rights, my view and that of my SNP colleagues is that the UK government must deliver meaningful action to tackle violence against women.

The death of Sarah Everard was devastating, and my thoughts are with her friends and family.

This must be a moment for real and meaningful change.

We all have a responsibility to tackle the abuse, harassment, and violence that women face from abusive men every day.

While every single SNP MP voted no to the Bill, almost without exception every single Conservative MP supported it including all Scots Tory MPs.

Campaign to continue Universal Credit uplift

The pandemic has affected all of us but none more so than those who are already struggling financially and those who may have lost their livelihoods over the last year and had to turn to Universal Credit.

Many now know this is not enough to live on and this is why I and my SNP colleagues have campaigned for the Chancellor to continue the £20 universal credit uplift and extend it to all legacy benefits as well.

While Rishi Sunak finally agreed to extend the uplift for a further six months, he has not implemented the £20 weekly increase across the board meaning that many people are still struggling financially, and foodbanks are seeing an unprecedented increase in demand.

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

'Virtual' support for charities



The pandemic has affected the ability of many charities to help those who need it most

In addition to raising vital funds to support people, charities have an important role to play in raising awareness and over the course of the pandemic the Catch Up With Cancer Radiotherapy4Life campaign has drawn attention to the plight of many people affected by the impact of Covid on the delivery of cancer services and treatments.

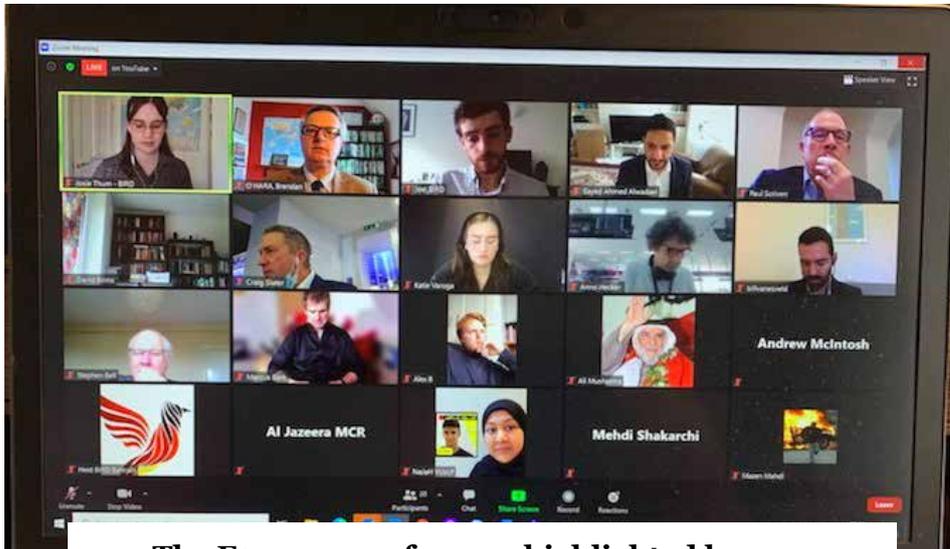
I was pleased to support the group's campaign call for a new cancer recovery plan. The campaign highlights that only investment can deliver this much needed capacity and it called on the UK Government to recognise this need.

Rallying call against human rights abuses

In my role as SNP spokesperson for Conflict Resolution and International Human Rights I have worked on behalf of various groups including the APPG on International Freedom of Religion and Belief, the APPG on Human Rights in the Gulf and the APPG Yemen amongst others to highlight horrendous human rights abuses across the globe.

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

Rallying call against human rights abuses



The F1 press conference highlighted human rights abuses in Bahrain

From school girls being snatched from their homes in Pakistan and forced in marriage to calling for an end to executions in Bahrain and China's detention of Uyghurs in internment camps, I have been working with colleagues across parties to condemn such acts and try to bring about change.

However, it is not always the Governments of these countries that need held to account and recently I took part in an international press conference calling for the organisers of Formula 1 to use their influence to highlight human rights abuses in Bahrain, where the Grand Prix took place.

Many international media attended including Reuters and the Guardian - see clipping alongside from the Guardian.

Argyll & Bute

F1 asked to hold inquiry into Bahrain's alleged abuses

Giles Richards

Formula One has been urged to carry out an independent inquiry into allegations of human rights abuses associated with the Bahrain Grand Prix. A letter calling for the inquiry, backed by a coalition of 22 human rights groups and unions and 57 British MPs, was sent to F1's new chief executive, Stefano Domenicali, teams, the FIA and Lewis Hamilton yesterday.

F1 is holding the first race of the season at Bahrain's Sakhir circuit this weekend but the country's human rights record remains widely criticised. The letter requests the establishment of a "commission of independent experts to investigate the human rights impact of F1's activities in Bahrain" and cites among others the case of an 11-year-old boy who was arrested for joining protests against the 2020 Bahrain Grand Prix.

The letter demands F1 live up to its public commitment to a human rights policy it adopted in 2015 and notes that since 2011, when the race was cancelled amid protests at the suppression of Bahrain's Arab spring democracy movement, the situation in the country has deteriorated.

"The situation in the country has only worsened," the letter reads. "Any semblance of democracy has been abandoned as the government outlawed opposition political parties, forcibly closed Bahrain's only independent newspaper and severely curtailed freedom of assembly, forbidding unlicensed gatherings of more than five people."

An F1 spokesman said: "We fully believe that sport has always had a unique role in bringing different cultures together and crossing borders, being a force for good. We believe that shutting countries off from sport is not the right approach and engagement is far better than isolation.

"Where possible we monitor and audit activities in host countries that relate directly to



▲ Bahrain is hosting the first grand prix of the season this weekend

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

Building relationships in the High North



Working with our Arctic neighbours is crucial in ensuring peace and prosperity

As founder member of the APPG for Greenland and a member of the APPG Polar Regions, I have been working with colleagues to develop our relationships with our Arctic neighbours, learn more about the issues affecting them and how we can work together.

Defence is an area which is particularly important and along with my MP colleagues Stewart McDonald and Martin Docherty-Hughes, we met up with academic experts

to discuss how they see Scotland's role in this.

The APPG Greenland is also helping build relationships especially with those involved in the seafood industry.

Unfortunately, it is not just Scotland's seafood producers that are suffering due to Brexit; a huge swathe of the Greenlandic economy and the entire future of many communities hinges has been affected by the UK

Government's failure to reach a trade agreement with Greenland.

The UK is Greenland's largest market for cold water prawns and many of our major supermarkets, restaurants and wholesalers depend on frictionless trade to ensure supply to customers here.

As a group we will call on the UK Government to take urgent action to avert this crisis.

Standing up for Argyll & Bute in Parliament

OSCE AGM



OSCE AGM

It is a privilege to be a member of the Organisation for the Security and Co-Operation in Europe and recently attended the Organisations AGM.

The Organisation comprises 57 participating States that span the globe, encompassing three continents - North America, Europe and Asia - and more than a billion people and has a comprehensive approach to security that encompasses politico-military, economic and

environmental, and human aspects.

It addresses a wide range of security-related concerns, including arms control, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights, national minorities, democratization, policing strategies, counter-terrorism and economic and environmental activities.

All 57 participating States enjoy equal status, and decisions are taken by consensus on a politically, but not legally binding basis.

Contacts:

 BrendanOHaraSNP

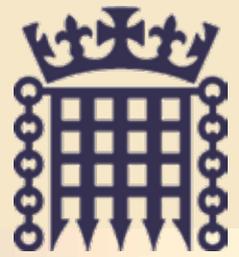
 BrendanOHaraMP

brendanoharamp.scot

brendan.ohara.mp@parliament.uk

Brendan O'Hara MP

ARGYLL & BUTE



2021 did not get off to an easy start with the first part of the year seeing us all in lockdown, businesses forced to stay closed and children doing school work from home.

However, thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of so many people including our health and social care workers, emergency services, council workers and teachers and school staff, we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel, children are back at school, our shops are re-opening and our tourist industry is getting ready to welcome visitors back to this wonderful area once more.

I want to say thank you to everyone for their commitment to keeping safe and your patience in getting to this stage; I know it has been a long process and it hasn't been easy.

Please stay safe, stick to the rules and look after each other, so we can continue our journey back to normality together.

Best wishes,
Brendan

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Brendan O'Hara'.