

National Islands Plan Annual Report 2023



THE
ISLANDS
SCOTLAND ACT 2018
ACHD
NAN EILEAN
ALBA 2018

Laid before the Scottish Parliament by
the Scottish Ministers March 2024

SG/2024/18

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the Scottish Ministers March 2024

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Ministerial Foreword



I am pleased to introduce the National Islands Plan Annual Report for 2023. It provides a holistic overview of the work undertaken across the Scottish Government, our agencies and delivery partners to progress the implementation of the National Islands Plan.

As this report shows and I will never tire of underlining, our islands bring a uniquely important contribution to Scotland's society, culture and economy. Confident and dynamic island communities are a core component of our government's vision for Scotland as a highly successful country in which to live, work, study, visit and do business.

From green energy solutions and the space sector, to food and drink production and the marine industries, our islands are at the forefront of innovation while remaining true to their rich heritage and traditions. This pioneering mix, combined with spectacular landscapes, contributes to their attractiveness as world-class tourism destinations.

Yet, as I heard very clearly from young delegates at the inaugural Scottish Rural and Islands Youth Parliament in November 2023, island communities continue to face a set of interrelated challenges that test their resilience. And if we look at the years since its publication in 2019, the National Islands Plan has had to navigate a succession of crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, the barriers imposed by an unwanted Brexit, soaring energy and food prices and the ongoing threat of climate change.

Many of these challenges are particularly acute for islanders, but the Scottish Government will continue to work hard alongside them to improve the lives of those choosing to make Scotland's islands their home.

Across our islands, households and businesses continue to face severe economic pressures. The Scottish Government is taking action within our limited powers to ensure islanders get the help they need. Since December 2022, we have made £2.4 million available through our Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund to support tangible measures like electricity vouchers, meals provision and local food initiatives. In 2024-25, we will also offer a new 100% relief for hospitality businesses located on islands.

Some island communities are also dealing with complex housing challenges. In October 2023, we published a new Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan which recognises that housing can have a powerful and generational impact, supporting people to access the homes they need and enabling young people to stay in the communities they grew up in. The action plan supports our target to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with at least 10% delivered in rural and island areas.

Resilient and affordable transport links are equally critical in supporting sustainable island lives. To support people and businesses in our island communities, ferry fares have been frozen on the Northern Isles and Clyde & Hebrides networks until the end of March 2024. Earlier this year, we launched a public consultation to inform our forthcoming Islands Connectivity Plan and I would encourage islanders to share their views and ideas with us.

The launch of the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan in February of this year fulfilled one of the commitments made in the National Islands Plan. The document features a list of tangible actions and established a new fund to give fresh impetus to the Scottish Government's efforts to address demographic challenges which, whilst felt by communities across Scotland, often have a disproportionate impact on islands.

Working collaboratively with local authorities, our Islands Programme continues to assist the delivery of the strategic objectives identified in the National Islands Plan. In 2023-24, we invested another £4 million to support critical island infrastructure that meets local needs and ambitions. A total of 13 projects have been awarded funding over the last year, including a recycling hub in Shetland, the modernisation of care home facilities on Tiree, new equipment for the UHI Stornoway campus and the improvement of airfield terminals on some of Orkney's outer islands.

While at the sharp end of climate change, Scotland's island communities show that cutting emissions and building resilience is an opportunity. In 2023, the Scottish Government continued to support the Carbon Neutral Islands project, working with six islands (Yell, Hoy, Raasay, Barra, Islay and Great Cumbrae) to become carbon neutral by 2040. Last June, I had the pleasure of announcing the publication of six new Community Climate Change Action Plans resulting from extensive community engagement on each island. Over this past year, the six islands have undertaken hands-on climate action projects spanning from reforestation and improving energy efficiency in community buildings, to food security. We are now at an important phase of the project, where we will start sharing lessons learnt with other islands and, where relevant, mainland communities.

Co-delivery and extensive engagement with local communities are at the heart of our approach to island policy. Between July and November 2023, we carried out a public consultation on the National Islands Plan to gather reflections from stakeholders and inform a review of its implementation. We wanted to make the consultation as accessible as possible for islanders. For this reason, as well as encouraging responses through a dedicated website, we ran a series of in-person and online workshops offering a more interactive opportunity for people to share their views. We are now analysing the feedback we received and we will publish a full report soon.

Going forward, the Scottish Government will keep listening to islanders and work collaboratively with communities to deliver the right policies and the most effective investments. Together, we can ensure our islands thrive and fulfil their ambitions, sharing their considerable expertise and many excellences with domestic and international partners alike to continue inspiring positive change well beyond their shores.

Mairi Gougeon

Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

Summary of Strategic Objectives

The National Islands Plan sets a direction for the Scottish Government and provides a framework for action to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Plan has 13 Strategic Objectives which will direct our work:

- **Strategic Objective 1**
To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile
- **Strategic Objective 2**
To improve and promote sustainable economic development
- **Strategic Objective 3**
To improve transport services
- **Strategic Objective 4**
To improve housing
- **Strategic Objective 5**
To reduce levels of fuel poverty
- **Strategic Objective 6**
To improve digital connectivity
- **Strategic Objective 7**
To improve and promote health, social care and wellbeing



Strategic Objective 8

To improve and promote environmental wellbeing and deal with biosecurity



Strategic Objective 9

To contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation and promote clean, affordable and secure energy



Strategic Objective 10

To empower diverse communities and different places



Strategic Objective 11

To support arts, culture and language



Strategic Objective 12

To promote and improve education for all throughout life



Strategic Objective 13

To support effective implementation of the National Islands Plan

Implementation Route Map

Within the National Islands Plan, Scottish Government committed to publishing an Implementation Route Map that addresses each of the 13 Strategic Objectives and accompanying commitments listed in the Plan.

Following collaboration with Local Authorities, key stakeholders and island communities, the first [National Islands Plan Implementation Route Map](#) (IRM) was published in March 2021.

Publication of the IRM came with a commitment to regularly review it and it was therefore published as a living document in recognition that priorities for island communities can change. Revised versions of the IRM were published in [2022](#) and in [2023](#).

For transparency and ease, against each commitment in this Annual Report we have included the actions listed in the 2023 IRM. Linking the two documents in this way demonstrates both the work that has been undertaken towards fulfilment of the overall commitment, and how it relates to the actions listed in the IRM. The IRM is regularly reviewed to keep proposed actions current. A 2024 version will be published soon as work on National Islands Plan commitments advances.

**Please note:
Work is ongoing for each commitment unless otherwise specified.**

Population Levels

Strategic objective 1 – Address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to utilise and promote the Scottish Island Regions (2023) geography, a grouping of Scotland’s islands into nine different island regions. This new geography is based on the Scottish Island Regions Framework (2020) initially developed by the James Hutton Institute (JHI) and used as the basis for the National Islands Plan Survey (2020). Grouping islands together into regions is one feasible way to provide aggregate statistics on the Scottish island population, overcoming the challenge that many of the islands are very sparsely populated. Using this new grouping will mean that National Records of Scotland will be able to produce Scottish Island population data every year. By continuing to promote this new data-zone based geography, it is hoped that other types of data such as house prices will also be available at the Island level.
- Retaining and attracting young people is one of the key objectives of the Islands Growth Deal. Both the Scottish and UK Governments are each investing up to £50 million in the Deal. Full Deal Agreement for the Islands was signed on 20th January 2023, and the Deal will be delivered over the next 10 years.
- The Scottish Government is also contributing £25 million to the Argyll and Bute Growth Deal, £135 to the Inverness and Highland City Region Deal and £103 million to the Ayrshire Growth Deal, which all include projects helping to drive sustainable and inclusive growth across Scotland’s islands. The Argyll and Bute Deal consists of projects and programmes spanning sustainable tourism, digital, business innovation, housing, skills, aquaculture, low carbon and regeneration.

Commitment 1.1 Identify islands where population decline is becoming a critical issue in order to ensure that these islands have their needs addressed.

Scottish Islands Data Dashboard

The Scottish Islands Data Dashboard Report and [interactive dashboard](#) were published in December 2023. This dashboard brings together Scotland’s island-level data indicators, and the accompanying report draws out key findings relating to each of the strategic objective topic areas set out in the National Islands.

The recent release of the [Scottish Islands Region Geography](#) has facilitated new islands evidence sources, including the National Records of Scotland [Scottish Island Regions population dashboard](#), household estimates [occupied and vacant dwellings data](#) publication and the [Sub-Scotland Economic Statistics database](#). Charts on households (including second homes and vacant properties) have now been added to the [NRS Island regions interactive dashboard](#).

Addressing Depopulation Action Plan

The Scottish Government published the [Addressing Depopulation Action Plan](#) on 16 February 2024, outlining a strategic approach to supporting local communities facing population decline, with a specific focus on rural and island depopulation and the sustainability of island communities. For more information, please see commitment 1.3.

The Scottish Government's Ministerial Population Taskforce, chaired by the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees is progressing all 36 actions of the [Population Strategy](#). In 2023, the Taskforce oversaw the development of the Talent Attraction and Migration Service for Scotland, set to launch in 2024.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) leads a population working group attached to the Convention of the Highlands and Islands advocating for communities facing population decline by addressing housing, connectivity, transport, health, childcare, and employment challenges.

Funded by Scottish Government and local authorities with support from HIE, the group ran a 'Settlement Officers' project in Uist, Northwest Highland, and Argyll and Bute to combat population decline. The Uist officer addressed 310 queries as of 15 January 2024, providing relocation advice and assistance to 26 families or individuals. In Argyll and Bute, the officer conducted a detailed community assessment and survey. Each settlement officer worked to improve the digital footprint of their communities, supporting population attraction and retention initiatives.

Islands Growth Deal

The Islands Growth Deal is now in its delivery phase, driving sustainable, inclusive economic growth across Orkney, Shetland, and the Outer Hebrides, while investing in people, projects, and priorities to increase opportunities for all.

It is jointly funded with investment of £50 million from the Scottish and UK Governments, with the Full Deal agreement signed on 20 January 2023. This is a significant milestone, which will see funding for individual projects and programmes released once Full Business Cases have been approved.

The Deal seeks to leverage the islands' assets and opportunities to transform their economies and change their demographic trajectory. It aims to deliver up to 1,300 jobs by 2032, attracting people to the islands and helping them to be among the first places in the UK to achieve net zero.

The Scottish Government will invest in thirteen of the Deal's sixteen projects, focusing on three key themes:

- £16 million for three projects in the Low Carbon theme, which will contribute to our net zero commitments by supporting energy transition, delivering port infrastructure for decommissioning, and piloting decarbonisation in an island context.
- £15.5 million for six projects in the Growth and Future Industries theme, developing island tourism, cultural assets, and innovation in key space, food and drink and creative industries.
- £18.5 million for four projects in the Thriving Sustainable Communities theme: expanding learning facilities, providing sustainable housing, and investment in a skills programme for key sectors including decarbonisation and renewable energy.

Two crucial projects are being delivered to address demographic challenges:

- The [Islands Centre for Net Zero](#), which aims to drive decarbonisation, create sustainable, well-paid jobs and reduce fuel poverty and costs associated with island living.
- The Outer Hebrides Campus Redevelopment, which will improve the islands' education and skills offer to attract and retain young people.

Argyll and Bute Growth Deal

The Argyll and Bute Growth Deal will promote economic growth, benefitting individuals, businesses and communities. It will use the area's natural marine resources to develop the aquaculture industry, enhance sustainable tourism, offer training opportunities and creating high value jobs. The Deal has three main themes:

1. Connecting: Improving physical and digital infrastructure to strengthen communities and support their high value and growth sectors to connect with national and international business markets;
2. Attracting: Providing skills, training and opportunities to attract and retain young talent and boosting the tourism offering.
3. Growing: Doing more of what works by making more of their resources and supporting innovation and growth.

Commitment 1.2 Understand the impact of Brexit on islands and island communities.

The Scottish Government continues to closely monitor the multifaceted impact of Brexit on islands, their communities and economy.

The latest [Highlands and Islands Enterprise Business Panel](#) published in January 2024, reflects survey findings conducted between November and December 2023. The report emphasises ongoing Brexit-related concerns, such as increased costs, delivery delays, and more red tape for regional businesses.

The food and drink sector, well represented on Scottish islands, faces disrupted supply chains, new trade barriers and higher food prices.

The loss of EU funding continues to hinder sustainable economic growth on our islands and proposed rural funding from the UK Government is not enough to replace lost EU funds. Scotland will lose around £93 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25.

The UK Government's Levelling-Up support fails to consider Scotland's unique economic circumstances, specifically for rural and sparsely populated regions by utilising a methodology of metrics for prioritisation which fails to take into account Scotland's distinctive needs.

Due to Brexit, Scotland's island communities no longer have access to important EU programmes such as Atlantic Area, North West Europe, North Sea, URBACT, and INTERREG Europe. However, the Scottish Government strives to support organisations on the islands to maintain valuable relationships with European partners facing similar environmental and social challenges.

The end of freedom of movement is another unwelcome consequence of Brexit, compounding the population challenges experienced by some island communities.

In September 2022, the Scottish Government proposed a Rural Visa Pilot, based on the UK Government’s Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommendation to attract migrants to rural areas. Working with local authorities and business organisations, the Scottish Government’s Expert Advisory Group on Population and Migration have designed a practical and deliverable proposal to facilitate migration to rural communities.

The Rural Visa Pilot was endorsed by a clear majority in the Scottish Parliament, showing strong cross-party support for differentiated migration schemes that reflect the unique demographic needs of rural and island communities.

Following this endorsement, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands wrote to the Home Secretary, requesting collaboration between the UK and Scottish Governments and local partners on the migration scheme. Although a formal response is pending, there has been ministerial engagement in support of the proposal, including with Scottish and UK parliamentary committees. The [MAC’s Annual Report](#) described the scheme as “*sensible and clear in both scale and deliverability*” and noted it would be within the UK Government’s interest to trial it.

The Scottish Government is developing a Talent Attraction and Migration Service to launch in 2024. This service supports the [Scottish Government’s population strategy](#), which addresses challenges faced by island communities. It aims to address demographic pressures by welcoming workers with the skills that our economy needs.

The service will aid Scottish employers and for those wishing to set up in Scotland to navigate the UK’s immigration system to address Scotland’s skills and labour needs.

It will also provide reception support for people moving to Scotland, including those who have chosen to make the islands their home, through providing information and advice for migration, relocation and community integration.

Commitment 1.3 Develop an action plan to support repopulation of our rural and island communities and work with partners to test approaches using small-scale pilots.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We are currently developing a strategic plan aimed at providing the policy framework to enable population retention and repopulation across rural and island communities. This work will include:
 - Mapping levers currently used by Scottish Government (strategies, funding, planning regulations) and the limitations of our approach at present;
 - Commissioning research and evidence building to mainstream population, depopulation, and repopulation across government policy in future;
 - Setting out current engagement with key partnerships (Convention of the Highlands and Islands, Convention of the South of Scotland, COSLA);
 - We aim to publish the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan in Autumn 2023.

This commitment is now fulfilled

The Scottish Government developed an [Addressing Depopulation Action Plan](#) to enable population retention and repopulation across rural and island communities. It was published on 16 February 2024.

For the purposes of the Action Plan, addressing depopulation is defined as follows:

- identifying the spectrum of factors influencing depopulation at community level;
- highlighting the role of regional and local actors in supporting communities and economies to thrive;
- setting out how the Scottish Government will support the objectives of local communities.

The Scottish Government has taken a genuine partnership approach to the development of the Action Plan to support communities to thrive, aligning with the Verity House Agreement's maxim of '*local by default, national by agreement*'.

We worked closely with depopulating local authorities, directly and through the Scottish Government/COSLA population policy roundtable. We also consulted the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) and Convention of the South of Scotland, building on previous collaboration.

Additionally, external organisations like Bòrd na Gàidhlig, COSLA, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the James Hutton Institute were invited to join a working group.

The Scottish Government is clear that the publication of the Action Plan represents the first phase of a longer-term programme of work and will establish an Addressing Depopulation Delivery Group to monitor progress on delivery of the Action Plan.

Addressing Depopulation Fund

As part of our commitment to acknowledge the role of local leadership in addressing depopulation, the Scottish Government will launch an Addressing Depopulation Fund from April 2024, to enable communities to trial bespoke pathfinder measures intended to support population attraction and retention within their local area.

The Fund will initially select three local authorities to receive £60,000 each in financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26. It is anticipated that, as well as supporting specific challenges within communities, the interventions will also generate learning which will be more broadly applicable across Scotland.

Settlement Officers

The Scottish Government has provided £67,500 in the 2023-24 financial year to part-fund the extension of an existing network of Community Settlement Officers, in partnership with the three local authorities in which they are based (Argyll and Bute, Highland and Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar). These roles support people who are currently living in or are moving to the areas, and involve working with agencies and other organisations to tackle challenges people face when moving into the area.

Conversations are ongoing between the Scottish Government and host local authorities about maintaining existing roles in the next financial year.

Commitment 1.4 Work with young islanders to identify actions to encourage them to stay on or return to islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Young Islanders Network (YIN) was officially launched by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands on Orkney in August 2022, providing children and young people with a platform to support meaningful contributions to National Islands Plan (NIP) delivery and to their current and future life on islands. YIN members are empowered to set their own agenda based on how they want to address the local and national priorities that matter to them the most. At the launch event, Ms Gougeon formally invited YIN representation onto the National Islands Plan Delivery Group. This will ensure that through the Network, the voices of young people are heard and they genuinely shape the delivery of the commitments within the Plan, which will include input that helps to influence a broad range of actions that support and encourage young islanders to stay on or return to islands.
- Work on the Student Retention project is continuing. Student Retention aims to encourage students to remain in Scotland (and rural locations/move to islands) after completing study – this applies to any students from Scotland or the rest of the UK. Working with young islanders will help us develop our understanding of what would make them want to stay or return after study.

In 2023, the Scottish Government continued to support the Young Islanders Network (YIN) to ensure that the views, recommendations and ambitions of young people living on Scottish islands are heard as part of the design and delivery of initiatives that support them to stay or return to islands.

YIN members are empowered to set their own agenda, based on how they want to address the local and national priorities that matter to them the most.

In October 2023, YIN published their [Transport Challenge Report](#) and are now carrying out follow up discussions with Scottish Government officials, public agencies and other relevant stakeholders to set out the issues and proposals identified in the report.

The YIN also launched a consultation in relation to their [Housing Challenge](#), designed and shaped by the membership. Aimed at people aged 12-25, the consultation has attracted over 60 responses. YIN's Senior Development Worker also led a housing session at the Scottish Rural and Islands Youth Parliament in Fort William in November 2023.

YIN members' views are valued by public bodies and local decision makers who involve them in program reviews and new project developments. For example, the Ferries Communities Board and Tiree Community Development Trust have welcomed young islanders onto their boards. YIN members are gaining confidence in sharing their voices within their communities, alongside ongoing efforts to ensure engagement remains relevant without overwhelming them.

Youth workers and members of wider islands communities have praised the positive impact that YIN membership has had on young people. For instance, YIN engaged with some young people who are home schooled and experience isolation. This has led to increased confidence and enthusiasm as well as new skills and a reduced feeling of isolation.

Please see commitment 2.2 for more information on student retention initiatives.

Commitment 1.5 Fully consider policy developments, such as the findings of the Scottish Government research “rural planning to 2050” when ensuring that the needs of Scotland’s islands are taken into account by the Ministerial Task Force on Population.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 1.6 Ensure that policies aim to retain and attract Gaelic speakers to live and work in Gaelic speaking island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Ongoing completion of Island Communities Impact Assessments by relevant authorities, will support this process following the 2022 update to the ICIA Guidance and Toolkit.
- Established quarterly meetings between the Gaelic and Scots Team, the Islands Team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig will continue.

The Scottish Languages Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament at the end of 2023. A key commitment included in the Bill concerns the establishment of Areas of Linguistic Significance for Gaelic, which will aim to build on existing initiatives to support Gaelic and to retain and attract Gaelic speakers to live and work in island communities. An Island Communities Impact Assessment for the [Scottish Languages Bill: Island Communities Impact Assessment](#) has been completed.

Several Gaelic bodies are based on islands, retaining and attracting Gaelic speakers. Local authorities and public bodies operating in these areas have published plans to support the learning and use of Gaelic.

There is also a significant commitment to Gaelic medium education in these island communities which also contributes to retaining and attracting Gaelic speakers.

Since 2019, the Scottish Government has provided support for Gaelic bodies and initiatives active in island communities. This includes support for Gaelic medium education, MG ALBA, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Storlann, and others.

Commitment 1.7 Work with policy colleagues to produce a National Development Plan for Crofting which will set the long-term strategic direction for crofting – highlighting the core elements necessary to ensure crofting remains at the heart of our rural and remote communities.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2021](#) for further details.

Commitment 1.8 Work with the Crofting Commission to encourage a healthy turnover of croft tenancies on our islands to create opportunities for new people into crofting.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Commission will further expand its Residency and Land Use team, enabling it to increase its work in addressing absenteeism and bringing crofts back into active use, which will create opportunities for new entrants.
- The Crofting Commission has also created a Crofting Development Team and has employed officers based in the Western Isles who will continue to engage with crofting communities and grazings committees to encourage active croft use and identify opportunities for new entrants.

In October 2023, the Crofting Commission launched a croft succession pilot across Uist, Barra and North-West Sutherland to tackle barriers and promote croft succession – particularly living succession. The pilot aims to identify opportunities for new entrants and to target new approaches aligned with the [National Development Plan for Crofting](#).

In 2023, the Commission collaborated with the Scottish Land Matching Service (SLMS) to introduce the SLMS Crofting Resource, allowing people interested in crofting to register for opportunities with the SLMS database free of charge.

The Commission is growing its Residency and Land Use Team to boost enforcement efforts, target absenteeism, and revive unused crofts. The Commission will broaden the scope of the team to include owner-occupiers of vacant crofts, and will take action against those who are not resident on their croft and/or not cultivating it. Tackling absenteeism will make more crofts available for new entrants, supporting both population retention and the local economy.

The Commission has also expanded its Western Isles-based Crofting Development Team, which is working with island crofting communities to encourage occupancy and active management of common grazings. The officers have been key in driving forward the Commission's croft succession project and collaboration with the SLMS.

The Commission have reported around five hundred new crofting entrants each year. From April 2022 to March 2023, there were over 500 new entrants, over 52% of whom are island crofters. 45% of the new entrants were female, and over 29% were aged under 40.

Since 2019, the Scottish Government supported crofting and croft businesses in island communities through grants like the Croft House Grant, Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS), Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS), Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Greening, and the beef and sheep schemes.

Since 2019, of the £15.2 million in CAGS funding, over £9 million has supported over 1,400 island croft businesses, over £3.3 million has been approved under the Croft House Grant for 112 island crofters. This has supported 60 new houses and 52 house improvements in island communities. Since 2020, the Scottish Government raised the Crofting Commission's budget by 38%, allowing for more staff, development, and regulatory improvements.

Commitment 1.9 Continue to provide support for island crofters to make improvements to their crofts and help to sustain their businesses, these will include Croft House Grant Scheme, Cattle Improvement Scheme and other crofting support mechanisms.

Commitment fulfilled - This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Sustainable Economic Development

Strategic objective 2 – Improve and promote sustainable economic development

Commitment 2.1 Identify key actions to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth on islands such as community-run businesses, e-commerce and digitally enabled island-based businesses.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will consider this as part of work being taken forward under the [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#) (NSET) to transform the way in which the public sector in Scotland provides support for workers and businesses. NSET recognises the need to build a model that reaches every community, rural or urban, and connects people and businesses with the support they need. Building on the work of the Business Support Partnership, which is responsible for the Find Business Support website, this will include a review of the products and services available. It will provide businesses with greater clarity on the support they can expect at a local, regional, national and international level through clear and consistent communication.
- We will establish a Digital Productivity Fund focused on supporting business to improve firm-level productivity through the adoption and successful integration of new and advanced technologies.
- We will continue to work with teams and our agencies delivering the priorities of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation in ways that maximise benefits for island communities.
- We will develop joint programmes of action to increase digital understanding and adoption in sectors where business models have been transformed rapidly due to new technology.
- To ensure that the National Islands Plan leads to meaningful, positive and sustainable change, there needs to be ongoing collaboration with our island communities for the duration of the Plan. We will continue to consult and collaborate with our island communities on a regular basis.
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has been allocated a net budget of just under £62.7 million in 2023-24 to support its work to optimise regional strengths and opportunities whilst addressing barriers to growth, in order to unlock the region's full economic potential. HIE will continue to flex its delivery for rural communities and businesses through its area team approach, adjusting intervention rates and criteria for programme support to increase entrepreneurship, innovation and productivity. HIE will continue to enable place-based opportunities, recognising and enhancing the role of distinctive natural, built and cultural assets and human resources as they exist in local areas across the Highlands and Islands.

- HIE will also continue to support growth, innovation and productivity in sectors which are fundamental to the rural economy and will drive transformational change, both those which are well-established such as food and drink, tourism and creative industries and those which are developing including renewable energy, the blue economy and space.

In March 2023, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) published a Digital Economy Skills Action Plan (DESAP) involving stakeholders from island communities. DESAP Priority Action 4 recognises the importance of addressing geographical inclusion if we are to have a fair and diverse digital economy. SDS is currently implementing this five-year action plan with representatives from islands and collaborating with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) to create resources that support employers, including video case studies from island-based digital employers.

Over the course of 2023, the Scottish Government continued to offer zero-interest Digital Development Loans of up to £100,000 to businesses to develop their digital capacity and skills. This is in addition to the DigitalBoost Programme offering digital support to SMEs including workshops, 1-2-1 advice and health checks.

Work is also ongoing with Scottish enterprise agencies, including Highlands and Islands Enterprise, to identify how the full range of stakeholders delivering services can best work together to offer a single joined-up national service for businesses. Outputs from this collaboration, along with findings from the Digital Productivity Lab pilot, will guide the next steps for the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.

Several Gaelic media initiatives contribute to economic growth in island communities, bodies such as Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Ceòlas. Island communities were highlighted in a 2023 Short Life Working Group report on the interaction between Gaelic and the economy. The Scottish Government is considering the recommendations made in the document.

Commitment 2.2 Explore how best to ensure the needs of islands are met within emerging regional economic partnerships including the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI).

Implementation Route Map 2023

- All island local authorities are active members of, and their needs well represented at CoHI and are represented on the Regional Economic Partnership.
- HIE will continue as a key partner in the Business Support Partnership which has a leading role in the delivery commitments of NSET. It is also a key partner and driving force in the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (REP).
- With regards to Talent Attraction, there will be ongoing work with HIE to develop understanding of the issues faced and how the Talent Attraction and Retention Programme, Skills Recognition Scotland, and Student Retention project can positively impact repopulation efforts.

All island local authorities continue to be active members of both CoHI and the Regional Economic Partnership, creating regular opportunities for engagement and ensuring their needs are well represented. The Convention met on South Uist in March 2023.

Skills Planning and Skills, Talent Attraction and Retention

The Scottish Government has committed to take responsibility for skills planning nationally and regionally by collaborating with stakeholders to address shortages, gaps, and align the education system with economic demands.

Employers, colleges, universities, regional economic partnerships, Health Boards and others in the public sector, local authorities, and our public bodies are key partners in this process.

Through the National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the Scottish Government has committed to implement a Talent Attraction programme to support employers recruit workers with the skills they need.

Graduate retention

Good practice in retaining students post-qualification will be used to provide a platform to build from, working with Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Colleges, and industry to create opportunities for students to stay in Scotland after graduating, including in island areas. We aim to connect students with employers, focusing on sectors with skill shortages.

Commitment 2.3 Tailor business and community support for island communities to ensure products and services are fit for purpose, accessible and effective. This will include exploring new and innovative models and working with national providers to consider how programmes can better address needs of island communities and businesses.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Government has committed to growing Community Wealth Building (CWB) as a practical approach to delivering on our Wellbeing Economy aims. We have supported five pilot areas, including the Western Isles, to develop bespoke CWB action plans. Alongside this pilot work, the Scottish Government committed £3 million to advance CWB across the Ayrshire region, through Ayrshire Growth Deal. The 2021 Programme for Government and the National Strategy for Economic Transformation confirmed our plans to introduce legislation on Community Wealth Building during this Parliamentary session. The legislation we plan to introduce will attempt to address blockages identified within the areas leading the implementation of CWB and support further embedding of this approach across Scotland. A Bill Steering Group, chaired by the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth, has been established and contains representation from a range of public, private and third sector stakeholders, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and North Ayrshire Council. The Scottish Government recently held a consultation on CWB legislation which closed on 9 May 2023 which provided all interested stakeholders with the opportunity to participate in shaping the legislation and the changes required to grow local wealth and give communities a greater stake in the economy. The consultation responses will help inform the development of the legislation going forward.

- Figures from the latest Social Enterprise Census show there is a greater density and a continuing over-representation of social enterprise activity in Scotland's Island communities. We will continue to provide specific targeted funding and support for rural and island locations through organisations like Inspiralba and Social Enterprise Academy to ensure that these social enterprises, which often form the life blood of island communities, continue to have the opportunities to thrive and grow.
- HIE will continue to flex its delivery for rural communities and businesses through its area team approach, adjusting intervention rates and criteria for programme support to increase entrepreneurship, innovation and productivity. Examples include its Graduate Placement Programme which received higher quotas for recruitment of graduates in more rural and island locations, which were priorities for repopulation interventions.
- HIE will continue to provide business and industrial premises in rural locations where market failure exists and develop innovation assets to support transformational opportunities. HIE will also continue to support community wealth building through building community capacity, capability and developing community assets.

Community Wealth Building

An [independent analysis](#) of consultation responses published in October 2023 will inform the development of CWB legislation and policies to support and grow local wealth and give communities a greater stake in the economy.

The Scottish Government continues to provide funding and business support for Scotland's rural and island based social enterprises through programmes like the Rural Social Enterprise Hub, Accelerate and Just Enterprise. These programs provide growth opportunities for these vital community organisations.

The concept of CWB is central to Highlands and Islands Enterprise's (HIE) place-based approach. Working with the Regional Economic Partnership (REP), HIE is forming an officers' sub-group to explore regional CWB approaches. Research commissioned by HIE will guide future community development and their CWB Plan. Findings from this work and the 2024 Social Enterprise Census will shape HIE's allocation of funds for rural areas.

Building community capacity/capability and developing community assets, HIE has also worked to provide business and industrial premises in rural locations where market failure exists. Examples include units in Broadford, Mull, and Tiree, with ongoing support for the Colonsay Community Development Company to develop two units on the island.

Non-Domestic Rates

Recognising the distinct challenges of hospitality business on Islands, a 100% relief will be available in 2024-25 for hospitality businesses located on islands as defined by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, capped at £110,000 per business. We estimate that 1,200 properties may be eligible for the 100% relief for hospitality businesses on Scottish islands, which is expected to save these businesses £4.3 million in 2024-25.

Commitment 2.4 Work in partnership to support strategic projects which deliver sustainable economic growth in the islands, e.g., Orkney Research and Innovation Campus and Stornoway port developments.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Through the Islands Growth Deal, in which both the Scottish and UK Governments are each investing up to £50 million, we will be investing in local people, projects and priorities in partnership with the three island authorities, the UK Government and a wide range of public, private and third sector partners. This will spread the benefits of inclusive economic growth across Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, increasing opportunities for all.
- The Scottish and UK Governments have each committed £1.5 million funding to complement the work being undertaken to support the development of a local energy plan for Islay and lead to the implementation of a local energy network across the island. We will continue to work with stakeholders to support the development the local energy plan, which is being developed for consideration as part of the Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal.

Islands Growth Deal

As set out under commitment 1.1, the Islands Growth Deal Full Deal agreement was signed by the Scottish Government, UK Government, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in early 2023.

Sixteen projects are included in the Full Deal document, and these include the [Islands Centre for Net Zero](#), Dales Voe Deep Water Port in Shetland, the Outer Hebrides Energy Hub projects and the Outer Hebrides and Shetland Campus Redevelopment projects.

Understanding, quantifying and minimising carbon emissions are objectives built into the design of all Growth Deal projects, which must also consider their long-term sustainability from a community and financial perspective. Specialist advice provides help to partners to achieve these outcomes. In addition, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) provides support through the calculation and quantification of their carbon emissions.

Argyll and Bute Growth Deal

The Scottish and UK Governments committed up to £25 million each for the Argyll and Bute Growth Deal over 10 years, with Heads of Terms signed in February 2021. The Deal, shaped by local input involves collaboration with partners including the Scottish Futures Trust, HIE, Scottish Enterprise and various educational institutions to further develop their proposals. The proposed projects span sustainable tourism development, business innovation, housing, skills, aquaculture, low carbon, and regeneration with a focus on strengthening communities by making Argyll and Bute a more attractive place to live and work.

Stornoway Port Development

The Stornoway Deepwater port project is developing docking facilities to support the island's ambitions in anchoring renewable energy clusters in the area and increasing tourist flows by enabling cruise ships to stop there. The Scottish Government – along with HIE and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – is a key partner, providing over £33 million in resource funding over 25 years through the Growth Accelerator Model. The first grant payment (subject to achievement of agreed outcomes) is due in March 2024.

Regeneration Capital Grant Fund

The Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) has been delivered in partnership between the Scottish Government (SG) and COSLA since 2014. RCGF supports locally developed, place-based capital regeneration projects that involve local communities and help to tackle inequalities, whilst contributing towards Scotland's target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2045. RCGF is primarily aimed at providing new infrastructure or enhancing existing one to improve the economic, social and physical environment of communities.

To date, RCGF has supported over 30 projects in island communities awarding funding totalling over £29 million. This includes over £3 million approved for projects due to commence in 2023-24, such as the extension of the Tobermory Light Industrial Park, the redevelopment of the Loch Carnan area of Uist and Aros waterfront development.

Commitment 2.5 Drive forward the many socio-economic opportunities arising from the 2019 Science and Innovation Audit report 'Maximising Opportunities for the Marine Economy in the Highlands and Islands' as well as enhance those arising from growth deals.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Several projects are being taken forward as part of both the Islands Growth Deal and the Argyll and Bute Growth Deal that have a strong focus on the Marine Economy. Both the Scottish and UK Governments will continue to work closely with partners in both Deals to develop these projects to the benefit of coastal communities.
- Following on from the 2019 Science and Innovation Audit "Maximising Opportunities for the Marine Economy in the Highlands and Islands", HIE published a report on "The Blue Economy in the Highlands and Islands" in February 2023. The research studied eleven marine sectors and acknowledged the significant socio-economic contribution that the blue economy makes in island communities. The report identified opportunities for growth that have the potential to be transformative, and the role that HIE might play in catalysing and supporting this growth. These strategic priorities have informed HIE's 2023-2028 Strategy (not yet published), which highlights opportunities for development in marine renewable energy, aquaculture, marine biotechnology and processing.

- HIE are proactively supporting private sector and academic partners to develop the business cases for transformative Region Deal projects in the marine economy – Shell-volution (Shetland), Marine Aquaculture Programme and Machrihanish Innovation Campus (both Argyll). When the final business cases are approved, the delivery of these multifaceted projects will be led by the University of the Highlands and Islands, Scottish Association for Marine Science and University of Stirling, respectively. HIE will seek to embed impacts and outcomes by working strategically and tactically with local enterprises and communities over the next decade.

Inshore Fisheries Management and Coastal Communities

We continue to deliver Scotland's [Fisheries Management Strategy](#) and have made progress with a range of policies intended to improve the sustainability of fish stocks and the wider marine environment. This protects fishing opportunities, jobs, and food security especially for island communities with a strong history of fishing activity.

We have researched and engaged with stakeholders to understand the impacts fishing can have on climate change and the potential impacts that climate change will have on fish stocks and our seas. This will inform future actions help the fishing industry to adapt to the projected changes in our marine environment.

We place a strong emphasis on co-management, collaborating with stakeholders to deliver fisheries management actions. Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) continue to play a pivotal role in this, along with our Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) Group.

The Shell-volution project

Working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and UHI through the Islands Growth Deal, on the Shetland-led [Shell-volution project](#). The latter aims to increase output and efficiencies in the mussel industry, increasing and sustaining employment in island communities. The project will achieve its aims through significant investment in research and development through both universities and the private sector.

The Shell-volution project has been designed as an innovative technical programme enabling growth in the low-carbon and sustainable mussel farming sector in Shetland, and more widely in Scotland. Productivity and resilience of existing farm sites will increase, while some new locations will be developed. Growth Deal partners anticipate that employment supported by the sector will broadly double as a result of investment. Consumer markets are considered to have capacity to absorb this gradual increase in production and mussel processors in Scotland will also benefit from the sustainable growth in farmed production.

Seafood Trade

Scotland's marine sector is vital for our economy, particularly for coastal and island communities where employment options can be limited. Supporting our marine sector to reach its full potential is essential to ensuring vibrant communities.

Although some of the more acute pressures from the immediate aftermath of Brexit are now being managed, it is clear that challenges remain. 2022 survey data from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (see also commitment 1.2) has shown that those Brexit impacts have been more marked among food and drink businesses – including the seafood sector – and felt more strongly in the Highlands and Islands than elsewhere in the country.

We continue to call for urgent reforms to the UK Government’s immigration policy which has failed to meet Scotland’s needs, and which is limiting the ability of seafood businesses in our islands to access the labour they require to succeed.

We continue to press the UK Government to honour its commitment to maintain long-term funding for marine and fisheries following Brexit, taking responsibility for the full costs of Brexit for our marine sectors and providing a fair and appropriate share of funding to Scotland above and beyond the £14 million per annum currently provided for the Marine Fund Scotland.

Notwithstanding that, we will continue to use the funding available to deliver vital investment in infrastructure like ports and harbours, important scientific research and monitoring programmes, and support for innovation in the seafood sector to ensure economic growth in island communities.

Commitment 2.6 Display leadership in the public sector by demonstrating that jobs and careers can be successful on islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Workforce Dispersal aims to demonstrate that work can be carried out from most locations. Scottish Government will continue to engage and reflect on this emerging work which has been supported through engagement with the CoHI Population Working Group.
- The Scottish Government has committed through the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) to implement a focused Talent Attraction programme to attract key skills and talent from the rest of the UK (rUK). The Talent Attraction programme includes a number of workstreams with the aim of attracting and retaining working age people with the skills to support Scotland’s economic recovery and help to address the population challenges.

Please see commitments 1.1, 1.2 and 2.2 for more information on CoHI’s Population Working Group, Talent Attraction and Migration Service for Scotland, and graduate retention initiatives.

The Stornoway-based Scottish Government team delivering European Structural Fund payments will be able to continue working from the Isle of Lewis after their current responsibilities come to an end in 2024-25. This means the staff will stay on the Isle of Lewis instead of moving to other parts of Scotland. This approach supports job retention in the islands and provides valuable experience for a more flexible staff location policy, guiding the upcoming review of our hybrid working policy in 2025.

The Scottish Government is committed to flexible hybrid working, supporting staff to work from a range of settings and locations. This means we can maximise opportunities to develop strong relationships with communities across the whole of Scotland. The Scottish Government estate is being reviewed so we can plan for affordable, inclusive, accessible, modern, secure, energy-efficient buildings and provide best value. We also continue to monitor the size, deployment and location of our workforce to best meet the needs of the communities we serve.

Commitment 2.7 Promote a thriving business environment that allows individuals to pursue a wide range of economic opportunities on islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- As is the case across Scottish Government, much of our work to support island economy sectors is mainstreamed and lies across many policy areas and as such we will continue to collaborate to ensure that the needs and interests of islands are served.
- We will continue to ensure that new and revised policies, strategies and services are island-proofed by supporting colleagues with their duty to conduct Island Communities Impact Assessments, which play a critical role in supporting and developing sustainable economic development on islands.
- Our [Programme for Government](#) makes a number of commitments to support Scotland's rural economy, to be taken forward this year. These commitments reach across a wide range of sectors from agriculture to tourism, fishing and connectivity.
- In addition to mainstreamed business support, our Islands Programme will continue to support capital investment over the lifetime of the National Islands Plan (NIP), by supporting a range of areas, including tourism, infrastructure, innovation, energy transition and skills. In order to ensure that this investment provides best value for our island communities, whilst supporting them in their economic recovery, the framework for the Islands Programme is underpinned by the principles of place-based community wealth building, whilst also reflecting the four key pillars of the NIP to ensure it promotes a fair, integrated, green and inclusive approach to island policy.

Please see commitments 1.1 and 2.4 for more information on the Islands Growth Deal.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) supports island businesses and social enterprises through island-based area offices, offering advice and access to infrastructure and investment. They collaborate with Business Gateway officers to ensure a streamlined customer journey for clients.

Through its flagship Innovation Programme, HIE offers support ranging from protecting Intellectual Assets, to new product development and R&D advice. Island based enterprises from across sectors – including aquaculture, tourism and textiles – have received support through the programme.

The Scottish Government is investing £4 million in 2023-24 through the Islands Programme to support the improvement, creation or safeguarding of locally developed infrastructure projects that align with the strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan. The Islands Programme is delivered in partnership with local authorities and islands communities, reflecting and addressing local needs.

A total of 13 projects are being supported through the 2023-24 round of the Islands Programme, including the redevelopment of UHI's Stornoway Campus, the construction of new accommodation for workers in Mull and a contribution towards the Bridge Street Development Project in Kirkwall.

Commitment 2.8 Create and promote apprenticeships and job opportunities for young islanders.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Education Scotland's comprehensive review of Foundation Apprenticeships was published in March 2023. We have established a stakeholder group, chaired by Scottish Government, which has developed an Improvement Plan to strengthen the programme and address issues highlighted in the report.
- We are also establishing a Graduate Apprenticeship Enhancement Group to develop longer term policy objectives for Graduate Apprenticeships including how they can support rural and island employers and young people.
- Similarly Modern Apprenticeship policy will also be reviewed to ensure that apprenticeships help to drive economic growth, address skills gaps in the labour market and support the delivery of Scottish Government commitments, including net zero and sustainable rural and island communities.
- SDS provide an all-age career service in every local authority highlighting the options available to people across Scotland, including Modern Apprenticeships. SDS undertakes further activity, together with employers, to highlight the importance of Modern Apprenticeships, particularly through Scottish Apprenticeship Week. We continue to work closely with SDS to support Modern Apprenticeships throughout Scotland.
- Work on the Student Retention project is continuing. Student Retention aims to encourage students to remain in Scotland (and rural locations/move to islands or Highlands) after completing study; this applies to any students from Scotland or the rest of the UK. Working with young islanders will help to develop our understanding of what would make them want to stay or return after study.
- A review of the Agriculture frameworks is currently underway. The most recent meeting of the Technical Expert Group (TEG) took place on June 8th. The TEG is where the Occupation Profiles are agreed, which lead to the Apprenticeship Framework and Standard being developed and approved. The Occupation Profile then forms the basis of what the qualification(s) required to be developed. The TEG will also decide the number of apprenticeships, the pathways and what level is required. The wider Land-use includes Horticulture, Game & Wildlife, Agriculture, Environmental Conservation and Rural Skills.

Please see commitments 1.2 and 2.2 for more information on skills planning, Talent Attraction and Migration Service for Scotland, and graduate retention.

Lifetime Skills and Apprenticeships

In 2022-23 there were 196 New Modern Apprenticeship (MA) starts in Na h-Eileanan Siar, 81 in Orkney and 158 in Shetland. MA starts were highest in sectors such as construction, health and social care, and food and drink.

As a member of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Forum, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has supported the implementation and recent refresh of the UHI Islands Strategy, which sets out how UHI will work with partners to extend and strengthen its activities across Orkney, Shetland, the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Bute and Arran.

The strategy aims to support a highly skilled workforce across the islands, nurture entrepreneurial talent, match educational curriculum with sector needs, and attract talent to the islands.

Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs)

SDS and the Scottish Funding Council continue to work with Robert Gordon University, Heriot-Watt, UHI and others to develop GA programmes that meet the needs of learners in the Highlands and Islands region.

Institutions continue to deliver hybrid programmes which support remote learners to undertake a GA without having to travel to a central campus, offering flexibility in learning time and reducing the burden of travel time for the learner and their employer.

UHI have broadened their GA offer with three additions to the Early Years GA. The university gained approval to offer:

- BA GA Business and Management
- BSc (Hons) GA Software Development
- BEng (Hons) GA Construction.

Land-Based Apprenticeships

Following extensive engagement with employers and industry stakeholders, work on the development of the new Land-Based Apprenticeships is approaching a successful conclusion. The New Apprenticeships are expected to include:

- Agriculture (SCQF 5 & 6)
- Trees and Timber (SCQF 5 & 6)
- Land and Nature (SCQF 5 & 6)
- Horticulture (SCQF 5 & 6)
- Greenkeeping and Sports Turf (SCQF 5 & 6)

This is a slight consolidation on the overall number of apprenticeships, supporting a clearer and less cluttered offer to employers whilst ensuring coverage for the existing footprint. All apprenticeships will have meta-skills embedded, supporting individuals to develop, adapt and progress in their careers.

We are working closely with the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Awarding body and the Apprenticeship Approvals group to confirm a date for the associated qualifications to become available.

Commitment 2.9 Ensure that skills provision is agile and responsive to future demand and enables individuals to take up opportunities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The National Strategy for Economic Transformation's Skilled Workforce Programme aims to ensure that people have the skills they need at every stage of life to have rewarding careers and meet the demands of an everchanging economy and society and that employers invest in the skilled employees they need to grow their businesses. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring the education and skills system is agile and responsive to the economic needs of our regions and sectors. As part of this, in June 2023, the Scottish Government published the final report on the Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape which was submitted by James Withers, Independent Advisor. The Review highlights challenges within the current system and makes recommendations on how it should change to ensure that it is fit for the future.
- The Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland (2019-21) sets out our strategic, partnership approach to support current and future skills needs of the rural economy. Considerable progress has been made across all five priority areas in the Plan. The Scottish Government and SDS continue to be committed to a strategic, partnership approach to support current and future skills needs of the rural economy and continue to resource oversight of delivery of this work. The are ensuring completion of the few remaining actions in the Plan. The broader policy landscape is likely to be changing given the work on the Rural Delivery Plan (and the education and skills component of that), the independent review of the skills delivery landscape and review of the Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan and others. To ensure that the co-ordination and delivery of skills in rural Scotland is relevant and takes account of the findings from this work we will continue an interim position whilst we develop our sustainable, long-term approach.
- The Scottish Government independent Commission to review land-based learning submitted their report to Scottish Ministers in January 2023. This has 22 recommendations on how to attract and improve learning pathways to equip more people with the skills and knowledge needed to work in Scotland's land-based and aquaculture sectors. The Scottish Government has committed to consider the report and to produce a response in 2023. The review considered how to provide opportunities and qualifications through early years, school, college, university and work-based learning for more people, and specifically more women and young people, to work in land-based and aquaculture sectors.
- The Argyll and Bute Deal includes Rural Skills Accelerator programme which will comprise mobile STEM Academy which, will serve island and remote communities in the region.
- The Islands Growth Deal's Talented Islands programme will improve the education and skills across all sectors in the Islands Deal programme, particularly in the net zero and renewables sectors.

The Island Skills and Repopulation Project was delivered in partnership with the CoHI's Population Working Group (see commitment 1.1) funded engagement with island communities to address unmet demand, support training and test barriers to skill acquisition affecting community retention and attraction. Learnings from the pilot will be evaluated and used to inform future decisions.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is also contributing to the Uist Repopulation Zone Action plan and supports the development of the [TalEntEd Islands Programme](#), a part of the Islands Growth Deal, aiming to enhance education, skills and entrepreneurship, on the islands. Other project partners include UHI, Robert Gordon University and Herriot Watt University.

Through the delivery of the Pathfinder Heat Decarbonisation project, SDS is working with UHI and others in Shetland to implement changes in the education and skills offer that support the decarbonisation of domestic and commercial heating.

Scottish Government officials are collaborating with the UK Government, Argyll and Bute Council, and partners to agree the Full Deal for project delivery. This will involve the development and approval of the necessary full deal documents (implementation, governance, and financial plans) and outline business cases for each of the projects included in the Heads of Terms agreement. Good progress is being made and there is a shared ambition to conclude the Full Deal as soon as possible.

Commitment 2.10 Build on Scotland's National Marine Plan to ensure that fishing and other economic activities stemming from the sea provide increased opportunities for island communities, but at the same time that they are pursued in a sustainable manner.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- A [statutory review of Scotland's Marine Plan](#) was published in March 2021 which found that whilst the plan remains effective, national and global developments point to a need to update and replace. Scottish Ministers have considered the findings of the Review, and announced the intention to develop new National Marine Plan in September 2022 in the PfG. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition in the [First Minister's Policy Prospectus](#) April 2023 reaffirmed this intention and committed to publish and begin implementation of a new national marine plan, in line with Blue Economy Vision, by 2026.

Inshore Fisheries Management and Coastal Communities

Our continued approach to securing fishing opportunities through international negotiations seeks to maximise the benefits of fishing to our local communities whilst also ensuring that fishing activity is carried out at sustainable levels. This includes many of our fishing communities based on islands. Quota secured at an international level helps to maintain and grow local businesses, providing employment opportunities both offshore and onshore.

Our [Fisheries Management Strategy](#) is focused on improving sustainability of fish stocks. In 2023, we consulted on the rollout of vessel tracking and monitoring systems to the under 12m fishing fleet which predominantly fishes in inshore waters. This technology will help build our evidence base for a range of fish stocks, and enhance our decision making in the marine environment.

The updated National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) is under development and will be designed with stakeholders. It will provide the planning framework for the sustainable management of our shared marine space, supporting our commitments to net zero, protection of the marine environment, energy and food security, and to thriving communities.

The NMP2 will adopt a blue economy approach, considering our marine economy, local communities, and the environment altogether. This will help to get the right planning framework in place to address the increased competition for marine space, whilst safeguarding sustainable marine sectors and recognising the importance of specific sectors, such as fishing, to our coastal and island communities.

Commitment 2.11 Ensure that sustainable land use including agriculture and forestry continues to provide jobs and opportunities to island communities.

Please see commitment 1.8 for more information on crofting and initiatives promoted by the Crofting Commission.

Work continues on the implementation of the forestry sector's skills action plan and creating a technical training hub, a public-private sector initiative that will lead to the establishment of a not-for-profit company to address market failure in certain areas of technical training with a view to growing forestry businesses across Scotland - including our islands.

We have also funded various community woodland groups that are helping create and maintain jobs for island communities. For example, through Scottish Forestry's Community Fund, we supported South West Mull and Iona Development (SWMID) with the establishment of a sawmill in Tiroran Community Forest. Not only does the sawmill allow the community to use more of their own timber, it has also led to the employment of a new member of staff.

Scottish Forestry funding has also enabled the Community Woodlands Association to run a mentoring scheme. SWMID/Tiroran Community Forest and North West Mull Community Woodland Company are both members and can access technical forestry support free of charge.

Financial support to the Scottish Woodlot Association has facilitated further advice to SWMID/Tiroran Community Forest on establishing woodlots on the island. If implemented, it would support local households and small businesses, as well as benefitting landowners through active ongoing woodland management and silviculture.

Forestry and Land Scotland provide direct local employment on the islands and support employment opportunities through contracts for activities such as tree felling, planting and maintenance.

Commitment 2.12 Work with relevant partners and stakeholders to make tourism more sustainable and less seasonal, and encourage development of a year-round offer across a wider range of islands that delivers economic, environmental and social benefits.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- To support the long term recovery of Scotland’s tourism and hospitality industry, the Tourism Recovery Programme (10 projects that had a positive impact across Scotland) was completed in March 2022. The ten projects were designed to support the four outcomes (Diverse Businesses, Passionate People, Memorable Experiences and Thriving Places) identified in Scotland Outlook 2030. As we move beyond the immediate short term challenge of the pandemic, the industry and the government must continue to work together to align Scotland Outlook 2030’s priorities with the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET). Partners are now working together through the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group (ILG) which will provide strategic direction to drive Scotland’s ambition to be the world leader in 21st century tourism. The ILG will provide strategic leadership to help grow the economic value and enhance the benefits of tourism, while delivering the very best for visitors, businesses, and communities across Scotland.

[Scotland Outlook 2030](#), Scotland’s national tourism strategy, sets out the shared ambition for Scotland to be a world leader for responsible tourism and to be one of the most economically, environmentally and socially sustainable destinations in the world.

The Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group (ILG), co-chaired by the Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade, provides strategic direction to drive this ambition. In 2023, the ILG established five missions to help realise the ambition. These are:

- Proud and valued people working for Scotland
- Embracing rapid technological change
- Community-led tourism
- Net zero acceleration
- Sustainable transport

Each of these missions has significant relevance to island communities and the sustainable growth of tourism to Scotland’s islands. Going forward, the ILG will use the missions to identify and influence the strategic game-changing actions needed to drive investment and ultimately lead to sustainable growth.

The Scottish Government provides core funding to VisitScotland, our national tourism organisation, to help grow the value of tourism across Scotland, including to our islands. In growing the value of the visitor economy, VisitScotland is focused on increasing regional and seasonal spread, increasing satisfaction – among visitors, residents and businesses – and developing responsible tourism.

VisitScotland is engaged in the development of Growth Deal programmes and projects that will support the visitor economy, such as the [Outer Hebrides Destination Development programme](#) and the [Orkney World Heritage Gateway project](#). It works closely with Regional Economic Partnerships to develop and deliver ambitious tourism plans and support partners to deliver tourism strategies on our islands. It has dedicated teams on a number of islands, supported by national resource and expertise in order to help deliver its activities. It provides specialist support for tourism businesses and community enterprises on islands to help develop quality experiences, build digital capability, reach new markets and move towards more sustainable practices.

VisitScotland's marketing approach is year-round promotion of the different experiences available on all of Scotland's islands, across its consumer and intermediary marketing activities.

In 2023, a key example of its work to promote islands and encourage responsible tourism was the Spirit of the Highlands and Islands campaign, in partnership with High Life Highland. The campaign inspired visitors to explore less visited places and to discover the region at quieter times of the year.

It is recognised that tourism can contribute to preserving and promoting Gaelic language and culture as well as supporting economic growth in island communities. The [Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland 2024-2029](#), was published in February 2024. For more information please see commitment 2.22.

Agritourism

The Scottish Government has committed to providing up to £443,000 of support to Scottish Enterprise to establish a new Agritourism Monitor Farm Programme over the 2023-24 and 2024-25 period. We believe Scottish Agritourism has a long-term sustainable future that delivers a high-quality, authentic visitor experience with agriculture and food and drink at its core. Agritourism can sustain the future of family farms with self-generation of income and contribute to our islands' economies by keeping multiple generations of farming families in employment.

An Agritourism Implementation Board – co-chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands – brings together economic development agencies, government (local and national) and the private sector to oversee the implementation of the 2021 Scottish Agritourism strategy. The Scottish Government also provided £35,000 in 2022-23 to enable Scottish Agritourism to provide a leadership role in relation to the strategy, with further £35,000 agreed for 2023-24.

Islands Programme – Canna Hub and Hebrides People Visitor Centre

Through the 2023-24 round of the Islands Programme, we offered the Highland Council a grant of up to £298,900 to redevelop a former coal store beside Canna pier to create a reception hub and accessible facilities to support the sustainable growth of the island's economy. The building will help support the increasing number of visitors that form a major part of the island's economy.

Separately, up to £55,000 has been awarded to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to complete RIBA Stage 3 and 4 work to enable the refurbishment and extension of the existing facilities at the Seallam! Hebrides People Visitor Centre to be upgraded to provide a much-needed quality attraction in South Harris, which is owned and run by the community.

Cruise Ship Levy Proposal

COSLA asked for the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill to include the power for a council to introduce a local tax relating to cruise ships, if they wished. The Scottish Government therefore convened a working group in summer 2023 with COSLA and local government to scope out the work needed.

We have committed to a public consultation on a cruise ship levy, once proposals have reached a suitable stage of development, to hear the views of all relevant stakeholders, including island communities.

The Scottish Government is aware the cruise industry is of particular importance to some island communities. We will therefore continue to engage with our local authority partners and undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment to ensure that any proposed levy is developed through close and meaningful engagement with island communities.

Depending on the outcome and timing of that work and consultation, the Scottish Government remains open to putting forward amendments on a cruise ship levy at stage 2 of the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill, or alternatively considering another appropriate legislative vehicle.

Commitment 2.13 Ensure that crofting continues to provide jobs and opportunities to island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Scottish Government will continue to provide support to help sustain croft businesses. Officials continue to consider potential changes to the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, which include widening the scope of activity which can be grant supported.
- The Crofting Commission received an increase to its budget in 2022/23, enabling it to expand its staff resource, including its Crofting Development Team based in the Western Isles. There are now 6 Commission staff based on our Islands. The Commission will continue to review this in the future consider further positions in other island crofting areas.

Please see commitment 1.8 for more information on crofting and initiatives promoted by the Crofting Commission.

Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill

The Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament in September 2023. It aims to provide Scotland with a future framework that will support farmers and crofters to meet more of our food needs sustainably, while assisting efforts to meet our climate change targets. The powers in the Bill will be used to further the key outcomes of Scotland's Vision for Agriculture published in August 2022: high-quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation, nature restoration and wider rural development. Co-design with rural and islands partners will be the foundational approach to the development of support structures and delivery.

Crofting Bill

The Programme for Government 2023-24 commits the Scottish Government to developing and consulting on proposals for reform of crofting law. By the end of December 2023, there had been 14 meetings of the Crofting Bill Group since it was reinstated in May 2022. The Group is composed of stakeholders including the Scottish Crofting Federation, Crofting Commission, Law Society of Scotland and National Farmers' Union of Scotland. It also includes crofters from island areas.

The Crofting Bill will provide clarity in law to increase crofting activities across the islands and other crofting areas. It will also be a means to simplify existing legislation, enabling the Crofting Commission to regulate and support crofting more efficiently and flexibly, thereby encouraging new entrants to crofting and strengthening crofting communities.

Commitment 2.14 Deliver the Islands Passport initiative, which promotes the opportunity to visit a wider range of Scotland's inhabited islands, encouraging visitors throughout all seasons and by public transport, thereby delivering economic opportunities for island communities.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2022. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2022](#) for further details.

Commitment 2.15 Work with the food and drink industry to leverage its economic potential and explore options for sharing some of its benefits with island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We are providing £5 million support in 2023/34 towards the work of the new Food & Drink Industry Strategy. The strategy was launched in June 2023 and sets out aims and actions for the sector over the coming years to help food and drink businesses throughout Scotland leverage their economic potential.

Scotland Food & Drink has received £5 million of funding to drive actions in year one of the Food & Drink Industry Strategy "[Sustaining Scotland Supplying the World](#)". Work has included a showcase of island produce at Scotland House London with representatives from Orkney, Hebrides and Bute Regional Food Groups attending. In addition, a showcase of Scottish island produce (over 40 Scottish island brands) was organised on the occasion of the St Andrew's day celebrations co-organised by Scottish Government France Office and SDI at the British Embassy in Paris.

We are working with the Scotland Food & Drink partnership to consider funding options for the strategy in 2024-25.

Commitment 2.16 Seek to expand the range of economic, social and environmental benefits that island communities derive from forestry.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Forestry will continue to work with a range of partners to increase the benefits delivered from forests and woodlands on the islands including: carbon sequestration and climate change mitigation; enhancing and protecting Scotland's rich biodiversity; growing an inclusive and sustainable rural economy; and helping Scotland's people adapt to the changing climate and improve their health and well-being.

With the help of a £9,500 grant from Scottish Forestry and further financial support from Woodland Trust Scotland, Shetland Amenity Trust continued to expand its production of tree saplings, responding to growing demand, particularly from local crofters. Scottish Forestry also awarded a grant worth over £20,000 for the maintenance of almost 30 kilometres of paths at Lews Castle. The grounds are in community ownership and a popular spot with locals and tourists alike.

The Community Woodlands Association (CWA), with financial support from the Scottish Government and Scottish Forestry, has enabled the Raasay Wood Project to supply locally harvested firewood to the island community at reduced costs. This, in turn, has helped to address fuel poverty, increase sustainable management of woodlands and provide physical and mental benefits to local volunteers.

Funded by Scottish Forestry, the CWA has also supported the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust to explore different ways of generating cash income and plan for the next round of harvesting and restocking for the woodlands they own and manage. The objective is to ensure woodland resource benefits the community and they are focused on securing wood fuel supplies to support increased use of wood-burning heating systems and reduce reliance on coal on the island.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) continue to sustainably manage the Scottish Minister's National Forest and Lands on the islands. Their work contributes to supporting local economies (through direct forest management activity, outdoor recreation use and related wildlife tourism), increasing biodiversity and providing opportunities for people to access and use local woodlands.

For example, via a commercial lease, FLS has continued to support the operation and growth of the Fishnish Pier Timber Transport Facility, which provides logistical solutions to increase timber marketing opportunities and movements from the Isle of Mull to a number of processing locations across Scotland and the UK. FLS is also facilitating the construction of Shared Rural Networks masts on the land it manages on Mull, which will increase 4G connectivity across the island. It also supports community use of its assets on the island for health and wellbeing enhancing activities. Leasing fishing rights also helps to support fishing tourism on the island.

FLS continues to run the [Community Asset Transfer Scheme](#) providing opportunities for communities to buy or lease land in support of local objectives, and is engaging with a number of island communities developing asset transfer requests.

Commitment 2.17 Review Scotland's National Planning Framework to ensure sufficient flexibility for island interests, including in how best to meet housing need.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2022. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2022](#) for further details.

Commitment 2.18 Reflect the National Islands Plan and relevant regional perspectives in the review of the National Planning Framework and preparation of National Planning Framework 4.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2022. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2022](#) for further details.

Commitment 2.19 Consider the implications of the National Islands Plan on future infrastructure requirements during the preparation of the 2020 Infrastructure Investment Plan.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2021](#) for further details.

Commitment 2.20 Recognising the services that island abattoirs provide to their communities, work with relevant partners to deliver sustainable and economical viable operations.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2021](#) for further details.

Commitment 2.21 Ensure that legislation and policy relating to early learning and childcare is appropriately island proofed.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Scottish Government will continue to engage with island stakeholders in the development of Early Learning and Childcare policy and legislation, including conducting an Island Communities Impact Assessment where appropriate.

The Scottish Government has continued to work in close partnership with COSLA in the delivery of early learning and childcare (ELC) and especially the programme aiming to deliver and realise the benefits of the [1,140 hours expansion](#). In working with local government to enable the delivery of high-quality ELC services, we ensure the needs of island communities are reflected and met.

Since 2021, we have been phasing in a funding formula that more closely tracks evidenced local need and considers rurality and measures of deprivation, as well the numbers of eligible children in a particular area. The 2024-25 settlement sees the distribution formula methodology being applied for the final year of its three-year implementation period.

In 2023-24, we invested approximately £1 billion in the delivery of funded ELC and in 2024-25 we will continue to invest the same level of funding in the delivery of the programme.

We have also made an additional commitment for 2024-25 to provide local authorities with an additional £16 million in year to deliver our Programme for Government commitment to increase pay to £12 per hour for staff in the PVI sector who are delivering funded ELC from April 2024.

To support delivery of the 1,140 programme, the Scottish Government provided £476 million of capital funding to local authorities to refurbish, re-purpose and extend existing nursery settings, as well as providing over 120 new facilities across Scotland.

This included approximately £9 million invested across Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. Individual local authorities have been responsible for deciding how this funding is used, based on local, evidenced need. The capital programme is now 96% complete with 854 capital projects delivered (as at December 2023).

We recognise how important early learning and school age childcare is for parents, especially those experiencing poverty. Over the next year we will continue to build on work in our early adopter communities, including in Shetland. We will explore the needs of families with children from the age of nine months to the end of primary school to inform local systems of funded childcare for families who need it most.

Since August 2023, all children who defer starting Primary 1 have been able to automatically access an additional year of funded ELC. We will continue to monitor the number of children in ELC settings who have deferred starting Primary 1 to understand any differences between local authority areas. When the new ELC Census commences, there will be an opportunity for more data analysis on the characteristics of children who defer, such as ASN, ethnicity and SIMD.

Commitment 2.22 Ensure that opportunities to develop the wellbeing of the Gaelic language and increase the number of speakers and users are considered as part of sustainable economic development.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to explore and develop a broad range of opportunities that promote and support the Gaelic language across Scotland and operating across a number of sectors. These functions all have a significant economic impact, through direct employment and attracting visitors while simultaneously supporting grassroots, community language use and the wellbeing of the Gaelic language.

A number of bodies involved in economic development have published Gaelic language plans and co-operate in gatherings such as the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI) and the Faster Rate of Progress Gathering.

See commitment 1.6 for more information on the promotion and protection of the Gaelic language.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

SDS is working to develop a second Gaelic webinar, following on from the one that was held in February 2023. Where the previous webinar was aimed at parents and carers, the next one will focus on other influencers, such as pupils, teachers, guidance teachers and employers.

An Islands Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) has been completed and approved on SDS's [Gaelic Language Plan 2022-2025](#).

SDS is looking to roll out Gaelic training for staff from early 2024.

Gaelic Tourism Strategy

VisitScotland worked with partners including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Historic Environment Scotland, Creative Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to develop the [Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland 2024-2029](#), which was published in February 2024.

As well as supporting Gaelic, the strategy will contribute to economic, environmental and social benefits in island communities. The increasing interest in the Gaelic language and culture, from both domestic and international visitors, creates new opportunities for tourism and events businesses across Scotland to integrate Gaelic into our tourism proposition, crafting authentic and unique experiences our visitors desire, while in turn supporting jobs for Gaelic speakers and strengthening Gaelic communities.

Priorities include increasing visitor awareness of Gaelic, improving access to Gaelic resources for the tourism industry, and supporting businesses to incorporate Gaelic within their offering.

Commitment 2.23 Support women in agriculture on Scottish islands to succeed, including encouraging their participation in the Women in Agriculture Development Programme.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will encourage the delivery of Islands-specific Women in Agriculture Development Programme courses during 2023.
- We will provide targeted support for Practical Training Funding to enable training courses to be hosted on islands.
- We will provide additional travel and subsistence for island women to attend courses on the mainland.
- We will continue to promote online and in-person training provision to women in Scottish islands.
- We will encourage Women in Agriculture groups to increase networking on islands.

The Scottish Government has committed to increase support up to £600,000 per year over the course of this Parliament to deliver practical solutions to improve the lives of women living and working in agriculture, including enabling women to build more resilient businesses. This support is available to all women living and working on Scottish islands.

In 2023, funding was provided for the final Be Your Best Self (BYBS) personal development course. This online course is easily accessible and attracted participants based on Scottish islands. In addition, the Women in Agriculture Development Programme offered further practical training through the Practical Training Fund – administered by Lantra – with support for women from island communities one of the topics covered. We were able to offer support to cover travel and accommodation costs for women who had to travel off the islands to attend.

In 2024, we will launch a new Business Skills programme, comprising two courses: “Knowing your Finances” (an entry level course) and “Knowing your Business”. The programme is designed to equip women involved in agriculture with the skills to increase their knowledge and confidence in relation to business, profitability, effective business planning, climate change, diversification and improving overall business performance. Online delivery will make it accessible to all island-based women.

In 2023, we provided external funding of £8,500 to support the Women in Agricultural Scotland (WiAS) membership group to facilitate networking events and allow women from across Scotland, including the islands, to make new connections. In early 2024, the WiAS group will be holding open networking events on the islands of Arran and Skye, with further events planned for later in the year.

Commitment 2.24 Work with relevant local authorities to develop regional food and drink action plans to support growth of the sector on islands, including a focus on the vital Whisky sector.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to engage with sector leads across Scottish Government and their industry stakeholders on the Working with Business Action Plan to identify actions that could be taken to help mitigate the effects of labour market shortages on businesses and to help stimulate economic recovery. We will continue to feed this information into the ongoing development of the Talent Attraction and Retention programme.

Please see commitments 1.2 and 2.2 for more information on skills planning, Talent Attraction and graduate retention.

Regional Food Groups

The Regional Food Groups have delivered numerous initiatives to drive individual growth of businesses on islands which have collectively contributed to growing the value of Scotland’s food and drink sector as a whole.

Some highlights include a showcasing event at Scotland House London with representatives from Orkney, Hebrides and Bute and Arran Regional Food Groups attending. In addition, a showcase of Scottish island produce (over 40 Scottish island brands) was organised on the occasion of the St Andrew’s day celebrations co-organised by Scottish Government France Office and SDI at the British Embassy in Paris. It allowed buyers, importers, distributors, trade press, and chefs to build relationships and introduce new products from across Scotland.

Representatives from Orkney, Arran and Bute Regional Food Groups attended a learning journey in Cornwall which facilitated sharing of knowledge and best practice.

Commitment 2.25 Work with relevant local authorities to encourage take up of Food For Life accreditation to help stimulate local sourcing in public sector settings.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We continue to support the delivery of the Food for Life Programme with a focus on school meals and the Soil Association are targeting all Scottish local authorities to encourage them to apply for accreditation through the scheme. This is being done through a process of education, and relationship building, and there are currently 17 councils who now hold FFL accreditation, this includes Orkney and Shetland who achieved bronze level accreditation in 2020/21 and 2021/22 respectively. Our support this year includes funding for a Public Sector Expansion Pilot in Glasgow to bring fresh, local and sustainable meals to new public sector settings across the city, with the aim of taking learnings from that and scaling up the programme in other areas of Scotland.

We continue to support the delivery of the Food for Life Programme (FFL) which primarily focuses on school meals, with 17 Scottish Councils currently holding accreditation. This includes Orkney and Shetland, who both hold bronze FFL awards.

Against a backdrop of increasingly pressured local authority budgets, the Soil Association continue to work with unaccredited councils to encourage them to apply for FFL accreditation, and with existing award holders to help them to maintain and/or upgrade their accreditation.

Transport

Strategic Objective 3 – Improve transport services

Commitment 3.1 Ensure that existing and future transport-related policies, strategies and services are fully island-proofed so that they truly meet the needs of island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- In 2022, Transport Scotland undertook an [Islands Communities Impact Assessment](#) for the actions in the first National Transport Strategy Delivery Plan (2020-2022), alongside other impact assessments. We will continue to undertake Island Communities Impact Assessments for any relevant actions which we are considering, including in future strategies and policies and will undertake further consultation with islands stakeholders on specific topics where required.
- Transport Scotland will continue to engage with island and rural communities on key projects including STPR2, Fair Fares Review and concessionary travel.

Project Neptune

The [Project Neptune Community Engagement Report](#) was published in June 2023 and sets out a series of recommendations and island community views on the future management of ferries.

Further work on improving governance and accountability across Scotland’s ferry services will be taken forward as part of the activity needed to consider the direct award of the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS) contract to CalMac.

Fair Fares Review

The Fair Fares Review, which has been undertaken to consider options to address issues relating to the cost and availability of public transport services, has now reported its findings, recommendations, and proposed actions to Ministers internally. These are being carefully considered in the context of the Scottish Budget set out on 19 December ahead of publication in the coming weeks.

The Fair Fares Review will establish a framework which will be built upon as we progress with wider work to deliver on our vision for the Future of Public Transport. The Review will also highlight the challenges facing public transport and present options on the short, medium, and long-term actions that are available to reform our current transport offering to deliver more effectively.

Ferry Fares

Ferry fares are heavily subsidised through our Clyde & Hebrides and Northern Isles ferry services contracts and the roll out of Road Equivalent Tariff has delivered further significant fare reductions.

To support people and businesses in our rural and island communities, fares were frozen on the Northern Isles and Clyde & Hebrides networks in 2023 until the end of March 2024.

Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP)

The feedback received from communities during a number of engagements and consultations with Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government's Islands Team were key in informing the development of the [Island Connectivity Plan Strategic Approach](#).

In addition, feedback from key stakeholders has been incorporated into the [Vessels and Ports Plan](#) following publication of the initial document in December 2022.

In parallel, an Islands Communities Impact Assessment is being carried out to inform the development of the overall Islands Connectivity Plan. This process aims to ensure that the impacts on island communities are captured and considered in the development of policies and plans detailed in the draft Islands Connectivity Plan. The consultation on the overall plan opened in February and is currently scheduled to close on 3 May 2024.

We intend to publish and invite comments to an interim Islands Communities Impact Assessment ahead of finalising the Islands Connectivity Plan.

An Islands Communities Impact Assessment is also underway for the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferries Contract.

Concessionary Travel

Through our concessionary travel schemes over two million people in Scotland, including all children and young people under 22, eligible disabled people and everyone aged 60 and over are eligible for free bus travel.

We also announced the extension of the ferry concession scheme, which offers four free single ferry journeys a year to the mainland, to all island residents under the age of 22. At present the scheme covers 16-18 year olds and eligible full time volunteers up to the age of 26. More people will be able to access ferry vouchers as a result of this change.

Aviation Strategy

An online public consultation on developing an aviation strategy has concluded and we have published an [independent analysis](#) of the responses. Work is ongoing across the Scottish Government to develop a response to the consultation.

The consultation covered growing international connectivity and airfreight, the transition to low and zero-emission aviation, domestic connectivity and governance arrangements in the Highlands and Islands region.

Islands Programme - Airfield Terminal Buildings

Through the 2023-24 Islands Programme round, we granted Orkney Islands Council £216,307 for upgraded airfield buildings at Papa Westray and Stronsay. The enhancements include improved access, separate waiting areas, modern toilets, Wi-Fi, more parking with electric charge points, and potential bicycle rentals managed by the communities.

Commitment 3.2 Engage with local authorities, island communities and transport operators in developing regulations and guidance for the bus services provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which aim to enable local authorities to better respond to local needs.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Following the completion of the consultation in late 2021, Transport Scotland have continued working with partners on the implementation of the bus provisions in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. The [consultation analysis](#) was published 11 March 2022. Since June 2022, local transport authorities have had the powers to run their own local services, which sits alongside their existing ability to subsidise local bus services. Regulations improving the information sharing process when operators vary or cancel a service came into force on 1 April 2023. Later this year, we will begin to introduce secondary legislation to enable the remaining bus provisions of the Act (partnerships and franchising). Transport Scotland will continue to work with partners as these regulations are developed.

The Scottish Government has now delivered all the bus powers within the 2019 Act to enable local transport authorities to consider all the powers available to them. This includes partnership working, franchising and local authority run services sitting alongside their ability to subsidise services. Further regulations and guidance will be laid throughout 2024 to give full effect to these powers. We will continue to engage with stakeholders as these are developed.

Commitment 3.3 Produce a long-term plan and investment programme for new ferries and development at ports to improve resilience, reliability, capacity and reduce emissions to give confidence to island communities on our ongoing commitment.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The second [Strategic Transport Projects Review](#) (STPR2) will inform the Scottish Government's transport investment programme in Scotland over the next 20 years. STPR2 sets out 45 recommendations for future investment in Scotland's strategic transport network. We intend to develop a Delivery Plan to provide further insight on the prioritisation of the STPR2 recommendations.
- Transport Scotland's draft Long-Term Plan for Vessels and Ports was shared with key stakeholders and published on the TS website on 30 December 2022. We will further revise this draft in 2023.

As part of the development of the Islands Connectivity Plan, the updated [Vessels and Ports Plan](#) provides detail on the Scottish Government's objectives for the Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services and Northern Isles Ferry Services which the Scottish Government is directly responsible for.

The Vessels and Ports Plan is an updated version of the draft Long-term Plan for Vessels and Ports that was published in December 2022, and reflects the feedback received from stakeholders. The Vessels and Ports Plan provides a long-term plan, to 2045, for the vessel and port investment considered necessary to address the key challenges of reliability and resilience.

Once complete, the Islands Connectivity Plan will comprise an overarching Strategic Approach, supported by a number of delivery plans, of which the Vessels and Ports Plan is one.

The Vessels and Ports Plan, along with the Strategic Approach, are the first two elements of the Islands Connectivity Plan that have been published for formal consultation, which is currently set to run until 3 May 2024.

Commitment 3.4 Develop a new Ferries Plan¹ that will meaningfully contribute to delivering the outcomes of wider Scottish Government strategies as set out in the National Transport Strategy and this National Islands Plan.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue with developing the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) as the successor to the Ferries Plan 2013-22. The ICP will include objectives based on supporting delivery of NTS2 and the National Islands Plan, and develop proposals to meet those objectives which represent value for money. This work is currently programmed for 2023.

The Islands Connectivity Plan Strategic Approach and the updated Vessels and Ports Plan were published for public consultation on 1 February 2024.

The Plan was based on feedback from communities and sets an overall strategic direction for future island transport connectivity.

The [Strategic Approach paper](#) sets out an overall vision for island transport connectivity relevant to all island communities. This includes services and assets provided by local authority, private companies and others. It also proposes a Vision supported by four Priorities for the future of ferry services in Scotland. This sits within the policy context set out in the [National Transport Strategy](#) and the [National Islands Plan](#).

For more information on the Islands Connectivity Plan please see commitment 3.1.

Commitment 3.5 As part of the next Ferries Plan, review the impacts of Road Equivalent Tariff (RET) and consider future ferry fares policy options that will meet the needs of islanders and support island economies.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The RET Evaluation Report published in March 2021 will inform the fares review workstream being conducted as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) and the wider Fair Fares Review.

¹ The Ferries Plan is now known as the Islands Connectivity Plan.

Fares Policy, a key element of our Islands Connectivity Plan, sets out proposals to reform fares to ensure our ferries are financially sustainable and that lower fares are targeted at those who need them most. Work on fares has been recently conducted across all our public transport modes – including ferries – through Transport Scotland’s Fair Fares Review. The review will report shortly. It will build on several independent evaluations of RET, Scottish Parliament’s Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommendations and stakeholder engagement to set out a range of options for change and further consideration.

Transport Scotland officials are gathering input through online consultations and events in ferry-dependent communities. Further work will be required with operators and stakeholders to develop implementation plans.

Further detailed policy development on ferry fares will be taken forward beyond the Fair Fares Review whilst recognising the importance of building confidence in our island businesses and supporting inclusive, sustainable economic development and growth.

Commitment 3.6 Also as part of the Ferries Plan, review and promote integration between ferries and other modes of transport on the mainland and islands, with a view to better facilitating the use of active, public or shared transport for all or part of journeys to and from islands in an affordable and accessible manner.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- This work is being taken forward as an element of the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP). An Onward and Connecting Travel (OCT) Action Plan will be produced during 2023, in parallel with the other subsidiary elements of the ICP.
- The priorities identified in that for improving connectivity will be taken forward as an ongoing programme from 2024 in collaboration with our ferry network operators, other modal transport providers, and relevant wider stakeholders including local authorities.

The Islands Connectivity Plan’s “*onward and connecting travel*” (OCT) workstream will review and then promote better integration/connectivity between our ferry networks and other modes of transport. In particular, active modes (cycling, walking and wheeling), public transport, and other more sustainable modes (vehicle hiring/sharing etc) both on the mainland and islands.

The OCT workstream is in development and we are welcoming views on what should constitute priority activities to make the biggest difference in increasing connectivity. Those may differ across locations, but likely themes for improvement are:

- Better provision of information on public transport options and for active travel – at ports, on vessels, and via digital platforms (those of operators and third parties);
- Better options for integrated fares and ticketing across modes (e.g. evolved “rail and sail” type tickets), compatible with future smart ticketing;
- Exploring potential for greater financial or other incentivisation to use public transport or active travel modes, rather than taking private vehicles on board ferries;

- Full coordination between ferry operators and other public transport operators on timetables to allow interchange, and promotion of each other's services as coordinated options for travel;
- Improved facilities on vessels and at ports for active travel – such as bike racks, maps of suitable access routes, charging points for e-bikes;
- Enabling the provision of services like bike and car hire at ports, especially where public transport is difficult to provide.

Commitment 3.7 For the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, we committed to develop and introduce a new booking, reservation and ticketing system, with Smart Ticketing capability, to replace the existing system.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The delivery of this action is in three phases, the first phase will go live on 16 May 2023. Timing for the other phases are still being developed, and updates will be provided in due course.

CalMac's new e-booking and ticketing platform (Ar Turas) launched on 17 May 2023. Its introduction fulfilled a commitment under the Clyde and Hebrides contract. The new Ticketing & Reservation System – "Ar Turas" is funded by Transport Scotland.

The benefits of Ar Turas include better 'live' deck space management for use of capacity, better communication around disruption, a standardised, accessible, digitally enabled service both on-line and through apps and a means to purchase tickets and apply changes instantly.

Commitment 3.8 Use the feedback from the NTS consultation to inform the NTS Delivery Plan which will seek to address the different transport challenges faced across Scotland's different areas and regions including islands.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 3.9 Determine strategic transport investments from our island communities through STPR2 – which will also inform Transport Scotland's Ferries Plan 2.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- STPR2 was published on 8 December 2022 and in it, we have set out 45 recommendations for future investment in Scotland's strategic transport network. The consultation closed on 15 April 2022. The number of responses received was 424, comprising of 159 individuals, 165 organisation and 100 non-disclosed responses. The consultation response, particularly relating to the level of support for the individual recommendations, has also fed into the prioritisation process. A Delivery Plan to provide further insight on the prioritisation of the STPR2 recommendations will follow.

Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2)

This year, we will publish the transport infrastructure delivery plan for STPR2, outlining investment priorities and providing further insight on the programming of the 45 STPR2 recommendations. Work is progressing to deliver thirty-eight recommendations, with consideration ongoing on how best to mobilise the remaining seven. There are a number of recommendations related to island communities including:

- Recommendation 18: Supporting integrated journeys at ferry terminals to enhance the interchange facilities for all trips at terminals, especially longer-distance trips, providing more seamless travel choices and improving services, particularly for those not travelling with a car. (Status: already in progress).
- Recommendation 22: Framework for the delivery of mobility hubs to build on existing guidance produced by Collaborative Mobility UK, covering the preparation of a delivery framework for mobility hubs, in collaboration with stakeholders, to facilitate the creation of high-quality mobility hubs across Scotland. (Status: not yet commenced).
- Recommendation 24: Ferry vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation. This recommendation involves renewal and replacement of CHFS and NIFS vessels including progressive decarbonisation by 2045. (Status: already in progress).
- Recommendation 28: Zero emission vehicles and infrastructure transition. This recommendation aims to support the shift to a zero emission road transport network, through technological change. Delivering this is crucial for reducing CO2 emissions from road transport to meet the Scottish Government's net zero goal. (Status: already in progress).
- Recommendation 41: Potential Sound of Harris and Sound of Barra fixed link and fixed link between Mull and Scottish mainland. STPR2 suggests more work on business cases to better understand the benefits, costs and challenges of a Sound of Harris fixed link, a Sound of Barra fixed link and a fixed link between Mull and the Scottish mainland. (Status: not yet commenced).
- Recommendation 42: Investment in port infrastructure to support vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation involving an investment programme in ferry port infrastructure, including shore power supplies to ferry vessels, to support STPR2 Recommendation 24 set out above. (Status: already in progress).

Commitment 3.10 Work in partnership with local authorities and communities to improve walking and cycling infrastructure, the design of place and access to bikes, facilities, promotion and education to make walking and cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys including as part of multi-modal journeys.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- TS has grant funded Cycling UK to continue the Rural Connections programme in 2023 which will support people in Shetland, Orkney, and other island communities to cycle, walk and wheel for everyday journeys, leisure and adventure. The programme is being funded as part of our UCI Cycling World Championships response, and offers a wide range of cycling and walking activities for all abilities.
- The online portal for applications to Places for Everyone re-opened on 25 July 2022. This was fully publicised to all local authorities who were able to apply for funding for new walking wheeling and cycling infrastructure through the fund. Projects will be progressed in 2023.
- Sustrans officers are now in place in Orkney and Dumfries & Galloway, and will continue to support those local authorities with their active travel strategies and projects.

Transport Scotland funds infrastructure, behaviour change, and bike access for island authorities directly or via community and partner bids for active travel schemes to promote sustainable travel.

Transport Scotland awarded direct Cycling Walking Safer Routes (CWSR) grants totalling £461,000 in 2023-24 (along with a proportion of Argyll and Bute Council and Highland Council funding) to deliver active travel schemes on islands. These are a pro-rata share of the total £35 million grant. The breakdown is: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar received £170,000, Shetland Islands Council received £147,000 and Orkney Islands Council received £144,000. In addition, Zetrans received £350,000 to design projects as part of Transport Scotland's direct funding to Regional Transport Authorities.

Some of the key projects delivered through CWSR funding have continued from previous years and include expansion of and lighting in the Ness area of Lewis and delivery of signage to support new 20 mph zones around ten schools in Orkney.

Every year, Transport Scotland funds Sustrans to implement the Places for Everyone active travel program in Scotland. In 2023-24, over £1 million was allocated for projects in various island locations like Skye, Orkney, Barra, Bute, Islay, and Jura, covering design and construction work.

As the start of a transition away from PfE towards more direct funding to local authorities, Transport Scotland opened a new Transformation Fund in 2023-24 through which we provided £385,000 to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and £107,000 to Shetland Islands Council.

Sustrans provides support to Orkney Islands Council and the Highland Council through Embedded Officers who assist in developing active travel strategies, routes, and funding bids.

Increased Active Travel funding has supported more active travel and safety schemes on trunk roads, especially on Skye, including improvements at Portree High School with the junction layout simplified and traffic signals with controlled pedestrian crossings installed, costing £325,000. Future schemes under consideration for the next financial year may extend the footpath at Sconser and add a pedestrian crossing at Portree High School.

Paths for All, through the Ian Findlay Paths Fund, enhance local paths to encourage active travel. The £60,000 Ardnish Path Restoration Project was delivered on Skye in 2023 renovating a 1km path that had become inaccessible for a number of users. The new path connects the townships of Upper and Lower Breakish and Waterloo providing a safe, active travel route to places of work and key amenities in Broadford.

We continue to deliver behavioural change programmes in the islands, including increasing the uptake of child and adult cycle training. Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney and Shetland have received £30,000 to deliver Bikeability training in all primary school in 2023-24, and over £350,000 since 2012.

The Cycling friendly Programme has funded over £300,000 for access to bike schemes and storage in island communities, with £158,000 to install facilities across 10 NHS Western Isles sites, all working towards Cycling Friendly Employer accreditation to promote cycling for staff throughout the Western Isles.

In addition, £587,900 was awarded to island local authorities in 2023- 24 through the Smarter Choices Smarter Places Programme to encourage more journeys by walking, wheeling, public transport and sustainable travel. This included £50,000 each for:

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to fund a post providing support for active travel and public transport promotional activity across the Western Isles;
- Orkney Islands Council to deliver evening bus services to reduce car use, increasing usage of door-to-door transport to the wider community;
- Shetland Islands Council to continue the Love to Ride initiative and deliver a website enabling advocacy and inclusiveness whilst providing participants with up to date information to address barriers and improve their confidence.

In 2023-24, we granted Cycling UK £1 million to run the Rural Connections Project, improving bike access in island areas like Shetland and Orkney. This supports bike storage, maintenance, and training in communities without repair shops, aiming to expand bike loan options and offer adapted cycles for disabled people.

Islands Programme - Dyemill Park

Through the 2023-24 Islands Programme, we granted North Ayrshire Council £220,625 for an accessible bike park at Dyemill on Arran to enable cycling, fostering community growth and skills development.

Commitment 3.11 Explore the potential to reduce the need to travel by using the planning system to promote places which bring people and services together.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was approved in February 2023 and is now in force. NPF4 includes a new policy on local living including the principle of 20 minute neighbourhoods which connect people to a range of amenities and services close to home and recognises that it is a flexible approach that can vary across the country and settlements to suit the context. A consultative draft of guidance on Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods was published in Spring 2023, to support the implementation of NPF4. As a priority, we will now take forward the implementation and monitoring of NPF4 through the [Delivery Programme | Transforming Planning](#).

National Planning Framework 4

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), adopted in February 2023 forms part of the development plan for daily decision making in the planning system and informs the preparation of local development plans across the islands. It sets out six spatial principles, and forms the basis of the national spatial strategy and planning policies: just transition, conserving and recycling assets, local living, compact urban growth, rebalanced development and rural revitalisation.

The NPF4 spatial strategy focuses on the North West Coast and Islands and aligns with the National Islands Plan to improve outcomes for islanders. It builds on long-term resilience and self-reliance by minimising the need to travel whilst sustaining dispersed communities and rural patterns of development.

NPF4 policies promote sustainable transport, place-based approaches to reduce car dependence and early understanding of infrastructure needs and impacts of a place. They support a flexible application of the 20-minute neighbourhood and local living approach so that communities can access local services more sustainably.

NPF4 takes cognisance of NTS2, aiming to integrate transport and land use planning and ensuring transport access and a reduction in the need to travel are integral factors to the location of development. It embeds the NTS2 Sustainable Travel and Sustainable Investment Hierarchies into decision making and development planning.

Local Development Plan Guidance

Published in May 2023, the Guidance explains the relevant sections of NPF4, the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended and associated Development Planning Regulations. This promotes a plan-led system whereby plans are place-based, people-centred and delivery-focused. New style plans increase the focus on community engagement and responding to the local context which is particularly relevant for island communities with their specific set of circumstances.

Commitment 3.12 Subject to requirements as set out in the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service and the Northern Isles Ferry Service contracts, we will always strive to improve, where necessary and possible, issues relating to freight and will engage proactively with operators, communities and stakeholders as appropriate.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Transport Scotland continue to work closely with Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) and our ferry operators to help address the challenges facing our ferry network, and will continue to explore any appropriate second hand tonnage if available subject to terms and affordability of any such arrangement.

Our operators are working with key stakeholders, including those in the farming and aquaculture sectors, to effectively manage the distribution of freight across the network. This includes transfers to the mainland and vice versa ensuring essential goods and services reach our island communities. Transport Scotland continues to work with CMAL and the operators to look at tonnage availability. Recent examples of this include the charter of the MV Arrow, and the MV Alfred.

Housing

Strategic objective 4 – Improve housing

Commitment 4.1 Ensure that Housing to 2040 truly reflects the distinct needs of island communities.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Island Plan 2021 Annual Report](#) for further details.

Commitment 4.2 Ensure that the regulation of short-term lets takes account of the unique circumstances of island communities and make special provision for them where required.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We have introduced regulation of short-term lets through a licensing scheme that is now operational and requires short-term let hosts to obtain a licence before they accept bookings and receive guests. To obtain a licence, hosts must comply with mandatory conditions (that apply to all short-term lets in Scotland) and any additional conditions imposed by local authorities in response to local needs and concerns. This provides assurance to guests that all short-term lets meet consistent safety standards.
- Powers for local authorities to introduce short-term let control areas in order to manage the number of short-term lets in their area. Edinburgh Council designated the whole of the council as a control area on 5 September 2022. From the point of designation it means a change of use to a short-term let is a material change and will always require planning permission.

Licensing schemes opened in October 2022 and new hosts must now obtain a licence before accepting bookings or receiving guests. Hosts who used their accommodation for short-term lets prior to October 2022 were given an extension to apply. Licence applications were required to be submitted before 1 October 2023 to qualify to continue operating while the application was determined. This extension recognised the difficulties hosts, particularly in rural and island areas, were experiencing securing contractors to carry out necessary work.

The Minister for Housing wrote to the Local Government Housing and Planning Committee in January 2024 to share progress to date and we will formally update Parliament on licensing implementation by summer 2024.

Commitment 4.3 Explore how the Rural and Islands Housing Fund might be adapted in the future to expand the range of options to support housing development in remote and island communities.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Island Plan 2021 Annual Report](#) for further details.

Commitment 4.4 Continue to provide grants to crofters to build and improve croft houses.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 4.5 Make best use of all housing stock including derelict properties and options for compulsory purchase.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Through [Housing to 2040](#) we have committed to take a range of actions to help bring empty homes back into use. The first is to undertake an audit to inform how we deliver the other actions. We have therefore commissioned independent research about the scale, characteristics and location of empty homes, and the effectiveness of interventions to bring them back into use. We intend to publish the report findings later this year and set out our response, including actions. We also continue to support and fund the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership which has helped bring over 8,000 empty homes back into use since 2010.
- In April 2023 we launched a consultation on proposals to increase council tax on second and long-term empty homes. The consultation runs until 11 July 2023 and proposes that new powers are introduced to allow councils to charge up to a 100% council tax premium on second homes from April 2024.

The Scottish Government published its [Rural and Island Housing Action Plan](#) in October 2023. The plan identifies the need to make best use of existing homes and highlights actions and potential tools to achieve this goal. Measures include bringing forward secondary legislation to enable councils to apply up to a 100% premium on council tax rates for second homes from April 2024, continuing to work with local authorities to monitor the designation of short-term let control areas and working with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, local authorities, and owners to bring more empty homes in rural and island areas back into use.

Local authorities already have broad compulsory purchase powers that can be used for a wide variety of purposes, including bringing derelict properties back into use. In our Programme for Government, we have committed to reform and modernise compulsory purchase legislation to make the system fairer, faster, and more effective. Work will begin in 2024, starting with the establishment of an expert advisory group to help inform the development of options for reform.

Commitment 4.6 Improve access to homes for people looking to settle in, or return to, island communities. In collaboration with local authorities and relevant stakeholders, we will examine the full range of options to do this, making best use of our existing homes and new supply.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We have committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which 70% will be for social rent, and 10% in remote, rural and island communities.
- In recognition of the challenges with recruiting and retaining staff in remote, rural and island communities we will make up to £25 million available from our affordable housing supply programme budget over the period 2023-2028. The funding will support local authorities and registered social landlords to purchase existing suitable properties which can be rented directly or leased to employers to provide affordable homes for key workers.
- In June 2023, we will publish a Remote, Rural & Islands Housing Action Plan to meet the housing needs of, and retain and attract people to, those communities.

Housing is vital for island communities, helping them thrive, retain young people, and support businesses and services to attract employees. The Scottish Government remains focused on our target to deliver 110,000 affordable homes of which 10% will be in rural and island areas.

The [Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan](#) recognises the need for employers to be able to attract key workers they require, not only to support service delivery but also to support economic growth and prosperity.

The Action Plan includes a commitment to make up to £25 million available, from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme budget, on a demand-led basis from 2023-2028. This will be delivered in the form of the Rural Affordable Homes for Key Workers Fund and will enable local authorities and registered social landlords to purchase properties, including empty homes for key workers who need affordable housing where there is identified need.

Between 2016-17 and 2022-23, through the wider Affordable Housing Supply Programme, over 10,000 affordable homes have been supported across rural and island areas, of which more than 1,100 have been delivered in island communities.

Islands Programme – Tobermory Worker Accommodation Project

In the 2023-24 Islands Programme round, we granted £700,000 to Argyll and Bute Council for site infrastructure on the Isle of Mull for the construction of accommodation for workers. The project will make a significant contribution to meeting the place-based priorities of the local community, that will in turn accelerate local growth and resilience.

Commitment 4.7 Ensure that the impact on Gaelic-speaking communities is considered as housing policies are developed.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- It is expected that Local Housing Strategies will evidence how the development of outcomes have been influenced by community engagement and consultation to deliver national priorities, plans and targets, and how the Place Principle is being used to deliver change within communities and achieve desired outcomes.

The [Local Housing Strategy guidance](#) includes a strong focus on equalities and all local authorities are required to prepare an Equalities Impact Assessment to support the development of local housing strategies to help inform priorities and outcomes.

The Scottish Languages Bill will provide local authorities with the ability to designate Areas of Linguistic Significance within the authority area. These Areas of Linguistic Significance are expected to work closely with the Gaelic Strategy and Gaelic Standards once they have been developed. There is the potential for those that develop housing policies to give consideration to measures aimed to support Gaelic speakers and promote Gaelic in their area.

Fuel Poverty

Strategic objective 5 - Reduce levels of fuel poverty

Commitment 5.1 Review how delivery schemes can work better locally and review funding for island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The successor to the Warmer Homes Scotland scheme is currently undergoing procurement, to go live in 2023. As part of the design for the successor to the Warmer Homes Scotland scheme, an eligibility working group was formed which reviewed ways in which eligibility levels and processes could be changed to better target support at fuel poor households. Eligibility criteria has now been set and the successor scheme launches in October 2023.

The Warmer Homes Scotland scheme re-launched in October 2023, with a strong focus on decarbonisation, more measures per intervention and with a larger contract value. Eligibility criteria for the scheme was set in conjunction with the Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel (FPAP).

There are currently 9 island installers from a total of 35 nationally: 4 in the Western Isles, 2 in Orkney and 3 in Shetland. Since January 2019, the install/delivery costs for the islands totals £12,032,235.14 (exc. VAT).

In 2022-23, the six islands councils increased the number of energy efficiency measures they delivered and the amount of grant that they claimed through Area Based Schemes. The six councils claimed £9.6 million in scheme costs, around £3 million more than in 2021-22, and delivered just under 300 more improvements.

Since 2013, the six council areas have benefitted from around 18% of Scottish Government investment and delivered 18,000 improvements or around 15% of the total for the ABS programme. The allocation model for ABS funding is based upon levels of fuel poverty and “hard to treat” properties as agreed by Council Leaders and Scottish Ministers.

Commitment 5.2 Develop a remote rural, remote small town and island Minimum Income Standard uplift, with the uplift for island areas to be determined separately.

Commitment fulfilled – Please see the [National Island Plan 2021 Annual Report](#) for further details.

Commitment 5.3 Produce an Island Community Impact Assessment (ICIA) on the final Fuel Poverty Strategy, ensuring that representatives from island local authorities are fully involved in its development.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2022. Please see the [National Island Plan 2022 Annual Report](#) for further details.

Commitment 5.4 Carry out research and analysis to meet the requirements of the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019 that will also enhance our understanding of the costs of living faced by families living in island communities.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Island Plan 2021 Annual Report](#) for further details.

Digital Connectivity

Strategic objective 6 – Improve digital connectivity

Commitment 6.1 Deliver a step change in the quality of digital connectivity across the islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Scottish Government is investing £384 million in the Reaching 100% (R100) North lot contract which covers the majority of Scotland's inhabited islands. In August 2022, the Scottish Government announced that it is investing a further £20.2 million, alongside £9.4 million of UKG funding, to extend full fibre broadband coverage in the R100 North contract to a further 1,488 premises across Argyll & Bute, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney and Shetland Islands.
- The Scottish Government will continue to urge the UK Government to ensure that plans are in place to offer ultrafast connectivity to premises considered by UK Government 'Very Hard to Reach' for the purposes of Project Gigabit.
- We will continue to progress the Scottish Government's 4G Infill (S4GI) programme, with all of the 55 sites to be delivered through the programme being located on islands or in rural Scotland.

Through our Reaching 100% (R100) programme we continue to extend the reach of future-proofed digital infrastructure across Scotland's islands. Over 12,000 island premises are expected to receive a connection thanks to the Scottish Government's £404 million investment in the R100 North contract, alongside £17.5 million of UK Government funding. All of the connections to be delivered through the R100 North contract will be fibre to the premises (FTTP) capable of delivering gigabit download speeds, over 30 times faster than our original superfast commitment.

Our R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme is also making an impact on Scotland's islands with 189 connections delivered by 1 December 2023 thanks to the scheme.

Delivery of the £28.75 million Scottish 4G Infill (S4GI) programme continued at pace over 2023 with 55 masts activated for 4G in rural and island Scotland by the end of December 2023, resolving longstanding mobile notspots and completing the programme's delivery.

This includes 17 masts on island locations (Orkney mainland, Stromness, Stronsay, Shetland mainland, Foula, Lewis and Harris, North Uist, Mull, Skye and Jura) at a cost of £10.02 million which is over a third of the S4GI programme's overall investment. S4GI is improving everyday life for the communities our masts serve, directly supporting wider plans for local tourism and enabling residents to access digital services and stay in touch with families and friends.

Commitment 6.2 Mandate the delivery of gigabit-capable connectivity to selected island locations, through the R100 programme, with many other island communities to benefit once contracts are finalised.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The R100 contracts, alongside our Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, ensured that anyone who required a superfast broadband connections, could access one by end December 2021. The R100 programme has delivered 16 new fibre optic subsea cables providing resilient, futureproofed connectivity to 15 Scottish islands for decades to come. This is in addition to 20 subsea cables delivered through our legacy programme, DSSB. The vast majority of R100 contract build will be fibre to the premises (FTTP), capable of delivering gigabit speeds – putting island communities in Scotland ahead of the curve, even compared to many urban areas.
- Through the R100 North contract, we will continue to progress delivery with over 12,000 premises located in island communities expected to receive a gigabit-capable connection.

During 2023, terrestrial work began to connect premises to subsea cables and by the end of November 2023 around 1,400 island premises had been connected through the R100 North contracts. All of the R100 North contract build will be gigabit-capable fibre to the premises (FTTP).

An example of the transformational impact of the R100 programme is the delivery of improved digital connectivity to Fair Isle in Shetland, almost two years earlier than planned. More information is available [here](#).

Commitment 6.3 Call on the UK Government to prioritise early investment in Scotland's islands as part of their plans for full fibre roll-out by 2025.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to engage with UK Ministers to ensure Scotland receives its fair share of Project Gigabit funding, urging the UK Government to commit a level of funding that allows early investment in Scotland's islands.
- The Scottish Government is investing a further £20.2 million, alongside £9.4 million of UKG funding, to extend full fibre broadband coverage in the R100 North contract to a further 1,488 premises across Argyll & Bute, Na h-Eileanan Siar, Orkney and Shetland Islands. This is expected to complete build on four islands – namely Westray, Rousay, Hoy and Eday.

For more information on the R100 programme, please see commitments 6.1 and 6.2.

In November 2023, we published the findings of our [Public Review](#), used to identify premises eligible for intervention via Project Gigabit. We have worked with Building Digital UK (BDUK), and engaged with the broadband infrastructure suppliers, to develop a number of potential Project Gigabit procurements in Scotland. Initial findings suggest that there is potential supplier interest in a number of areas across Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland.

The first Project Gigabit procurements in Scotland are expected to launch in phases throughout 2024. Throughout this joint work, we will continue to urge the UK Government to commit a level of funding that will enable Project Gigabit to deliver across all of Scotland, including for its rural and island communities.

Commitment 6.4 Call on Ofcom to address the issues faced by island communities when designing telecoms regulation and policy. We also committed to convene a meeting with Ofcom and island representatives to explore how regulatory levers (such as spectrum auctions) could improve both mobile and broadband coverage on the islands and ensure that the needs of islands are represented to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) in UK national policy development.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to work with island partners including local authorities, communities and business to gather evidence of demonstrate needs of islands in regards to mobile and broadband coverage.
- The Scottish Government continues to work closely with representatives of OFCOM to ensure that Scotland's interests are represented and any issues raised. This also includes co-ordinating regular liaison between OFCOM and DCMS representatives with our recognised local authority single points of contact for digital connectivity, including representatives of island communities.

We have successfully secured £17.5 million of UK Government Project Gigabit funding to extend and enhance the R100 North contracts. This is being used, alongside £404 million of Scottish Government funding, to help extend R100 contract build to over 1,400 additional island premises.

We continue to work with island partners including local authorities, communities and business in regards to improving mobile and broadband coverage.

We also liaise closely with representatives of OFCOM to ensure that Scotland's interests are represented and any issues raised promptly and proactively. This includes co-ordinating regular liaison between OFCOM and UK Government Department for Science and Technology (DSIT) representatives with our recognised local authority single points of contact for digital connectivity, including representatives of island communities and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

A deep dive session on digital connectivity was held on the occasion of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) meeting in November 2023.

We also engage on and regularly promote Ofcom's Plan of Work and relevant telecoms regulation and policy consultations to island representatives and use those opportunities to feed in any island-specific concerns.

Commitment 6.5 Through the Scotland 5G Centre, build on the 5G RuralFirst trials currently taking place on Orkney, and working with partners including Ofcom, we committed to develop rural 5G use cases to address the rural digital divide using 5G technology.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Working with the Scotland 5G Centre, and in partnership with the 5G New Thinking project, we continue to monitor the progress of the pan-island testbed 5G network trials (including fixed wireless access and spectrum sharing) and key 5G and Internet of Things (IoT) use case applications (including energy and food & drink), and explore how the trial's outputs and lessons learned can be mainstreamed and help inform policy in addressing the rural digital divide.
- Private 5G networks have been built on Westray and Papa Westray, and on Flotta and Hoy, working with local on-island partners Cloudnet IT Services and Orkney Islands Council. A total of seven 5G rural private network base stations have been installed and providing connectivity to 68 trialists across the these island communities. A 5G network core was set up and a network monitoring system developed for the network operations. Physical deployment activity concluded in March 2022, however, since then, the project team has maintained and operated the network, and also carried out additional engineering to allow scope for further innovative projects.

Work is ongoing in relation to project engagement and deployment on Orkney.

Through the Scotland 5G Centre's Wave 1 rural project and in partnership with the 5G New Thinking project from 2019-22, equipment was procured to build private 5G networks on Westray and Papa Westray, and on Flotta and Hoy working with on-island partners Cloudnet IT Services and Orkney Islands Council. Seven 5G rural private network base stations were installed and provided connectivity to local trialists across communities.

Since the conclusion of physical deployment activity in March 2022, the project team on Orkney has continued to maintain and operate components of the 5G networks, and has carried out additional engineering for progress of further innovative projects with applications for funding submitted to DSIT, UK Space Agency and InnovateUK.

Commitment 6.6 Work with local resilience partnerships and telecoms providers to encourage them to focus on resilience of data links to and from the islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Government will continue engaging with relevant resilience partnerships and, through this engagement, will identify any challenges to resilience of data links to and from the islands.

Work continues on improving data links to and from our islands.

The Scottish Government is investing £600 million in the R100 contracts which are delivering gigabit capable, fibre to the premises connections across rural Scotland. The three R100 contracts are currently expected to connect at least 114,000 premises in some of the hardest to reach areas in Scotland.

Our £28.75 million Scottish 4G Infill (S4GI) investment in future-proofed digital infrastructure has delivered 4G mobile infrastructure to 55 mobile “notspots”, improving rural and island 4G mobile coverage.

Commitment 6.7 Develop a digital skills programme designed by island communities to meet their needs.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to engage with island communities to understand digital skills needs.
- We will learn from existing programmes being delivered in island communities and support their implementation across the islands.
- We will engage with education providers, agencies, and local authorities to understand more of what skills programmes are being implemented across the islands.

Please see commitment 6.8 for more information on initiatives taken in relation to digital skills.

Data Lab Innovation Centre

The Data Lab (TDL) Innovation Centre is funded Scottish Government, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise. It is also receives funding from the Scottish Funding Council through the Innovation Centres programme.

TDL and the Scottish Government have also partnered to establish the Scottish Artificial Intelligence (AI) Alliance. Organisations across Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles and Skye have accessed data and AI courses promoted by TDL.

TDL have worked with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) to ensure their projects are available to people across the region, with a group of students and lecturers from UHI supported to attend the annual Data Talent recruitment event.

Highland and Islands Enterprise (HIE) have also supported both public and private organisations to make a learning journey to the annual Data Summit in Edinburgh, an international showcase of data and AI innovation.

Commitment 6.8 Extend the availability of coding clubs and community-based digital inclusion programmes across the islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will learn from existing programmes being delivered in the island communities and support their implementation across the islands.

Over the course of the 2022-23 financial year, we supported [Silicon Croft](#) to undertake educator engagement and collaboration across Shetland with a view to sharing resources, raising awareness and developing digital skills.

This project aims to create a system that links existing resources together to create a network of learning that allows Silicon Croft members to own their digital skills development. The approach focuses on educator engagement and collaboration, whilst sharing a wide range of resources to raise awareness and develop digital skills. The aim is to integrate digital skills across the curriculum and support the development of rural digital economies.

This continues the progress made in 2022, through holding CodeClubs and engaging with schools in skills development across Shetland, with a view to extending the delivery of the model across Orkney, Skye and Na h-Eileanan Siar. The project is actively engaging with higher and further education providers, and Skills Development Scotland to explore how to align this project with foundation and modern apprenticeships, and future digital careers.

Health and Social Care and Wellbeing

Strategic objective 7 – Improve and promote and health and wellbeing

Commitment 7.1 Work with NHS Boards, Local Authorities and Health and Social Care Partnerships to ensure that there is fair accessible health and social care for those on islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- All of Scotland's islands are attached to Integration Authorities which serve the specific needs of those island communities. Integration Joint Boards will continue to work closely with Health and Social Care Partnerships to ensure each island is recognised within their unique circumstances. Scottish Government has also drafted a Transport to Health delivery plan.

The Scottish Government recognises the distinct challenges facing island communities and over the past year of ongoing National Islands Plan delivery we have remained committed to supporting and developing rural Primary Care.

In early 2023, the Scottish Government prepared a Transport to Health Delivery Plan that sets out the high-level actions focused on access to healthcare, with commitments across the work of Health and Social Care and Transport Scotland. Funding activities include an ongoing commitment to the Income and Expenses Guarantees for General Practice. We invested an additional £23 million to ensure no practice saw a reduction in their income.

We also continued to fund Island Boards to support implementation of Primary Care Improvement Plans as well as funding to the BASICS Charity (British Association of Immediate Care) to deliver pre-hospital emergency care training and support, a vital resource for those medical staff practising in rural areas. Funding was provided for NHS Highland to support delivery of pre-hospital emergency care in Argyll and Bute.

We have also provided support to dispensing practices, a particularly important resource in rural areas. The Dispensing Deep Dive Report was commissioned in 2022 and a working group formed to take forward recommendations. The first of these, the development of teaching resources for dispensers in Scotland, is a good example of the practical work of the National Centre.

National Drugs Mission

In 2023, we marked the halfway point of the five-year [National Mission on Drugs](#) which aims to reduce deaths and improve lives by reducing harm, promoting recovery, and ensuring that access is available to the right form of treatment and recovery at the right time and for as long as it is required all across Scotland.

This year there has been a shift in the mission delivery from setting the foundations towards sustainable implementation and delivery of some key programmes as reported in the [National Mission on Drugs: annual report 2022-2023](#).

The [Scottish Alcohol and Drug Partnership \(ADP\) annual survey](#) provides information on the activity undertaken by each Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) and evidences the progress of the National Mission. The commitment to provide £250 million of additional funding over the lifetime of this Parliament to reduce the number of drug-related deaths in Scotland and improve lives has continued and gone directly to local areas via local ADPs.

Over the course of the 2023 calendar year, Island Boards have collectively received approximately £1.7 million of investment, to support alcohol and drug services including implementation of the [Medication-Assisted Treatment \(MAT\) Standards](#), [Residential Rehabilitation](#) and Lived and Living Experience panels. The Corra Foundation administer funds on behalf of the Scottish Government to support the National Drugs Mission, the [National Drugs Mission Funds Report 2021-2023](#) highlights the outcomes, progress, challenges and successes of the projects. Five projects in the Islands received funding totalling £324,000 in 2023-24.

Commitment 7.2 Identify and promote good practice, especially as regards the improvement of services in islands and other remote areas.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to implement the recommendations from the '[Shaping the Future Together: Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group](#)' report.
- Work is continuing to finalise the business case for the National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Social Care, which was one of the recommendations from the Shaping the Future together report.

Since 2018, we have delivered the innovative ScotGem programme – Scotland's first Graduate Entry Medicine programme – in partnership with St Andrews and Dundee Universities. ScotGem has had a focus on general practice and rural working. We have also delivered our £20,000 GP Speciality Training Bursary (sometimes called the 'TERS' Targeted Enhanced Recruitment Scheme), which incentivises training in 'hard-to-fill' and often rural locations. In addition, we continue to deliver our standard GP rural fellowship, providing extra training and support for GPs who wish further experience in rural practice.

A credential in rural health (unscheduled and emergency care) has been developed by NHS Education for Scotland and subsequently approved by the General Medical Council (GMC). The credential has now been added to the GMC website and work is underway to move to the delivery stage.

Boosting workforce capacity

A number of mechanisms are in place to support the recruitment and retention of staff within our island areas. The Scottish Distant Islands Allowance is a non-superannuable payment paid to NHS Staff who work on islands. It is paid to assist with travel costs to and from the mainland and is a lever that can encourage people to take up employment within those communities. The allowance is uplifted in line with the AfC pay increase each year. Effective from April 2023, it amounts (per-annum) to:

- £2,256 for Shetland
- £1,504 for Orkney
- £1,279 for Western Islands, Tiree, Jura, Islay, Coll and Colonsay

NHS Boards have the facility (in line with HMRC rules) to reimburse relocation expenses. This is a lever that Boards can use to encourage individuals to move home from elsewhere in the UK. The decision to offer relocation expenses lies with individual Boards.

The £10,000 Golden Hello payment incentivises GPs to take up eligible posts in rural practices, while the Rediscover the Joy GP cover boost scheme – currently operational in Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles and Highland – provides GP covers to practices with sustainability issues.

Our current GP Retention Working Group is considering retention issues and may recommend changes to the national approach. We anticipate this will include specific retention initiatives for GPs in rural areas.

We continue to invest in education and training routes for individuals wishing to live and work in rural areas.

The Open University provides a pathway for Scottish healthcare support workers to train to become registered nurses while remaining in the workforce in their local Board area.

In January 2024, a third cohort of students from across Scotland will start a shortened midwifery distance learning programme at Edinburgh Napier University. This programme allows existing adult nurses to fully qualify as midwives in just 20 months while continuing to work in their home regions, including northern Scotland's Health Boards.

In the [National Workforce Strategy for Health and Social Care](#), published in March 2022, we committed to developing a Rural Workforce Recruitment Strategy by the end of 2024. This strategy will provide a framework which will support employers to ensure that the health and social care needs of the people who live in our rural communities are met by supporting health boards and social care employers in those communities to recruit and retain staff.

Please see commitment 7.4 for information on the National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care.

Commitment 7.3 Support the extension of NHS Near Me, and other digital health initiatives, to reduce unnecessary travel and enable more care to be delivered on Islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- NHS Near Me will continue to be utilised across every Health Board in Scotland to provide greater flexibility, whilst supporting remote working, reducing the need to travel and promoting greater access to specialist services.
- Procurement of a 'once for Scotland' digital solution for the education and management of type 2 diabetes is ongoing and is forming part of wider digital transformation work being led by ANIA which will explore a potential value case for Digital Solution to support T2 Diabetes and prevention agenda.

We continue to promote the need for the public to have a choice and a say in how they receive care. That means having a variety of options available to them.

Near Me video consultations provide general benefits through saving time and money by reducing the need to travel. They are available for use in all Health Boards. Other condition management initiatives including Connect Me for monitoring conditions from home and digital therapies continue to be rolled out at scale to support more people to take control of their wellbeing at home.

The development of the Rural Centre of Excellence for Digital Health and Care in Moray is significant in looking to address health and care issues across rural areas including addressing citizen data requirements and supporting place-based care in the community. There is an opportunity for island and other rural areas to ensure this realises its potential and can attract investment and economic growth in the future.

The [Digital Health and Care Delivery Plan for 2023/24](#) sets out the ambition for digital services across Scotland with a refreshed plan expected in 2024.

Commitment 7.4 Work with stakeholders to develop propositions for a national centre for excellence in remote, rural and island health and social care.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- In the 2022 Programme for Government we have committed to ensuring that our islands and rural areas are not left behind as we work to improve health services by creating a centre of excellence for rural and remote medicine and social care, with scoping work starting this year. A final business case has been progressed.

The National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care launched in October 2023, and is being delivered by NHS Education for Scotland (NES). The Scottish Government is providing funding of £3 million until 2026.

The development of a National Centre was a recommendation made in the [Shaping the Future Together Report](#), published by the [Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group](#) in January 2020. The Group, chaired by Sir Lewis Ritchie, was established to support the implementation of the 2018 GP contract in rural and island areas. The Report was informed by extensive workforce and user engagement across rural communities.

Both the Scottish Government and NES engaged with stakeholders throughout the scoping and development of the Centre and NES will continue that engagement as the Centre delivers its work.

The Centre has been established as a Proof of Concept, with an initial focus on Primary Care. It is intended to generate innovative rural and island solutions and delivery models through four workstreams with a specific rural and island focus. These are Education and Training, Recruitment and Retention, Research and Evaluation, and Leadership and Best Practice.

The Centre will provide a resource to support Health Boards and Health and Social Care partnerships in their responsibilities and drive essential improvements in sustainability, whilst improving the capability of rural and island primary and community care-based service delivery.

Commitment 7.5 Work with stakeholders to ensure that we develop a plan to adequately support the ageing population of island communities so that they remain active, connected, engaged and have access to suitable, quality opportunities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Integration Authorities will continue to work closely with their communities to develop strategic plans for delivery of health and social care services most suitable to the specific needs of their communities.

Integration Authorities have continued to work closely with their communities to develop strategic plans for the delivery of health and social care services most suitable to the specific needs of their communities.

Islands Programme – Tiree Community Care Hub

We granted Argyll and Bute Council up to £450,000 through the 2023-24 Islands Programme for the Tiree Community Care Hub project, focusing on modernising and reconfiguring the Tigh a Rudha Care Home. This project aims to better address current and future care needs, supporting population growth plans. Tigh a Rudha will be transformed into a modern, flexible hub with key worker accommodation, care facilities, and GP beds.

Commitment 7.6 Support relevant local authorities to plan and develop sports facilities on the islands that respond to the needs of communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- **sportscotland** will continue to engage strategically with local authorities (through their capital planning processes) and Islands communities with regards to opportunities to deliver improved local facility provision for sport and physical activity.
- **sportscotland** and the Scottish Government Islands team are continuing to have discussions with Orkney Islands Council regarding strategic facilities investment that would deliver improved local facility provision in preparation for the 2025 Orkney Island Games and beyond.

sportscotland, our national agency for sport, continues to engage strategically with local authorities and island communities to identify opportunities to deliver improved local facility provision for sport and physical activity.

In June 2023, **sportscotland** granted £55,000 to the Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust for an outdoor floodlit multi-use games area (MUGA) facility. The community are working closely with the Argyll and Bute Sports development and Active Schools team to design a programme of activity from school through to adult usage and to develop coach education opportunities. The new MUGA will greatly impact activity levels on the island. The nearest alternative facility requires a two-hour public transport journey via ferry and bus to Tarbert or Campbeltown.

In November 2023, **sportscotland** granted £50,000 to the North Ronaldsay Trust in Orkney via their Sport Facilities Fund. The facility, in collaboration with Orkney Islands Council, will enhance the island community's access to a range of physical activities and events to help promote connectivity and wellbeing.

sportscotland has also invested a further £29,138 via its Cycling Facility Fund to the previously funded Arran High School Mountain Bike Facility. This supplementary award will help alleviate the additional costs experienced when developing a capital project on an island. It will also ensure that the project can realise its full potential of creating a sustainable cycling facility, which can be accessed by the pupils and the wider community and visitors to Arran.

Commitment 7.7 Promote participation in sport and physical activity by ensuring national programmes such as Active Schools and Community Sports Hubs are serving island communities, and continuing the Islands Athlete Travel Award Scheme.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 7.8 Work with Orkney Islands Council and other partners to use the hosting of the 2023 Islands Games by Orkney to strengthen sports development on the island.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- **sportscotland** will continue to support Orkney Islands Council, Orkney Islands Organising Committee and local sports associations to add value to Orkney hosting the (rescheduled) 2025 International Island Games through the development of the local infrastructure of people, places and pathway opportunities.
- **sportscotland** will continue work with the Community Sport Hub Officer and with the Orkney Islands Games Organising Committee to deliver a needs based programme of education and development for coaches and volunteers.

In 2025, Orkney will host the 20th International Island Games. There is clear alignment between the successful delivery of the Games with **sportscotland**'s commitments to the [Active Scotland Outcomes Framework](#) and [National Islands Plan](#).

sportscotland provides technical expertise and staff support, and hosts Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGB) planning events to strengthen partnerships required to deliver sports event action plans. In November 2023, they invited all 13 competing SGB sports to Orkney for a two-day visit which provided representatives with a chance to meet organising clubs and Sports Competition Managers. SGB representatives undertook site visits to improve understanding of the support required for the Orkney Games. **sportscotland** now sit on the Orkney 2025 Committee which is critical in terms of both continuing to add value and in having oversight on any confirmed investment that will support the delivery and legacy of hosting the Island Games.

Orkney Islands Council, SGB and sports clubs and **sportscotland** have confirmed a package of investment and resource of up to £850,000 across four thematic areas:

- Partnerships – Governance, political, and strategic input;
- People – Subsidy for training and development of volunteers, coaches and officials;
- Places – Major facilities upgrades, equipment and technical support; and
- Performance – Athlete and coach support.

This additional capacity, resource and strengthening of infrastructure will enhance the games, create a lasting positive impact, and encourage more participation in sports and physical activities.

Commitment 7.9 Work with our partners to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and take steps to assist with promoting equality and meeting people's different needs.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Bairns' Hoose – based on an Icelandic model “Barnahus” – will bring together services in a ‘four rooms’ approach with child protection, health, justice and recovery services all made available via a coordinated approach designed to reduce the number of times children have to recount their experiences to different professionals. Bairns' Hoose provides Scotland with an opportunity to provide a genuinely child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced trauma, including, but not only, child sexual abuse. Children below the age of criminal responsibility, whose behaviour has caused harm, will also have access to the services it will provide. Implementation of the Bairns' Hoose is a key action identified in our Keeping The Promise Implementation Plan. National Bairns' Hoose Standards were published on 31 May 2023. Standard 3.4 states that “Children in rural and island communities can access Bairns' Hoose in a way that is right for them.” From September 2023, these National Standards will be implemented across Scotland by several Pathfinder partnerships. As described in our [Bairns' Hoose Project Plan Progress Report and Pathfinder Delivery Plan \(2023–25\)](#), the Pathfinders will act as proof of concept and form part of a quality improvement and service design process. The Pathfinders will identify how the Standards may be applied to different contexts, including remote or islands areas. The Pathfinder phase will be followed by pilot phase, then national rollout.
- The new Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative Interviews, is being introduced nationally from 2021 to 2024 and will be seen as the ‘justice room’ of the Bairns' Hoose. A Remote and Islands Subgroup sat throughout 2021 and it was useful in bringing together those with island communities to consider what some of the key challenges were in implementing the Scottish Child Interview Model. The national JII Team recognised that the solutions to implementation challenges were bespoke to each local authority so, since early 2022, have worked on an individual basis with each of the areas represented on the Remote and Islands Subgroup (which were Highland, Argyll and Bute, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland) and have not re-convened the subgroup. The national JII team continue to engage with each of these areas, plus Orkney and Shetland, on an individual basis, supporting them to consider how to ensure children living in remote and island communities have access to the Scottish Child Interview Model.
- The Caledonian System is an internationally recognised behavioural change programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse which involves working with woman and children to reduce the risk of harm that domestic abuse can have. Consideration is being given to the lessons learned during COVID and the needs of island communities. We remain committed to investing in interventions which provide evidence of being able to change the attitudes of offenders. We will continue to explore with Community Justice Scotland the safest, most effective way in which we can increase the availability of the Caledonian System across Scotland.

Child Protection

We are committed to ensuring that robust child protection measures are in place across Scotland, and continue to be followed at all times. The Scottish Government published revised [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland](#) in August 2023. The guidance describes the responsibilities and expectations of everyone who works with children, young people and their families in Scotland. It was revised to ensure it is consistent with the legislative and policy framework and current practice developments. It includes updates derived from learning from implementation of the 2021 Guidance.

Bairns' Hoose

National Bairns' Hoose Standards were published on 31 May 2023. Standard 3.4 states that "Children in rural and island communities can access Bairns' Hoose in a way that is right for them".

Delivering on one of the commitments made in our Programme for Government, in October 2023 we launched Bairns' Hoose Pathfinders, which will be implemented across Scotland by several Pathfinder partnerships. The latter include Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Fife, North Strathclyde, the Outer Hebrides, and Tayside.

Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Sycamore Partnership (Edinburgh, East Lothian and Midlothian), and Highland have become Affiliates Partnerships.

These partnerships will identify how the Standards may be applied to different contexts, including islands areas.

Commitment 7.10 Address any equality, health and wellbeing related data gaps that exist in respect of, for example, women and girls, pregnancy and maternity, gender reassignment and sexual orientation.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Women's Aid published the findings from their [Participating-in-Equally-Safe-in-the-Highlands-and-Islands](#) consultation. This report will be considered as part of next iteration of Equally Safe. We will be working with partners to consider the recommendations in the report.
- A priority of the Delivering Equally Safe Fund is working with those in remote or island communities. The fund will run from October 2021 to March 2025.
- Additionally, the Scottish Government committed to an independent strategic funding review to look at how national and local specialist services for women and children experiencing gender based violence are commissioned and funded across Scotland. The findings of this review were published on 6 June 2023 and we will now consider, along with COSLA, local authority partners and wider stakeholders, to ensure a stable footing for funding in the future is developed.

Scotland's [Equally Safe Strategy](#) was refreshed in December 2023 and sets out our vision for a flourishing Scotland where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation – and the attitudes that help perpetuate it.

Equally Safe acknowledges that women living in different geographical communities – including island communities – may experience different challenges. For example, the distance between houses in rural settings are often greater than in urban areas meaning that victims/survivors of abuse may be further isolated with abuse and its harms more hidden. Help-seeking and service interventions can be more challenging as services may be located many miles away. Women may face greater risks in small rural or island communities when seeking support, or when leaving abuse, through lack of privacy and anonymity, with limited and highly public routes to reach safety, heightening chances of surveillance and interception. Women may lack places where they can seek refuge or assistance in times of danger.

We will publish an Equally Safe Delivery Plan in spring 2024.

Our Delivering Equally Safe fund is providing £19 million per year to 121 organisations to help implement Equally Safe. We are funding ten organisations and partner agencies who provide services to island communities, worth just under £3 million. These organisations include Women’s Aid Orkney, Western Isles Rape Crisis Centre, Shetland Rape Crisis and Argyll and Bute Violence Against Women and Girls Partnership.

It is vital that we make the best use of resources to continue to tackle this issue. The Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Sustainable Funding Project Board is being established to take forward our commitment to develop a flexible and stable funding model that will ensure a focus on prevention and high quality, accessible, specialist violence against women and girls services.

Commitment 7.11 Consider our consultation on out of school care through which we have gathered views from parents on the challenges of accessing childcare and range of activities for school age children in island communities. Responses to our consultation will, together with continued engagement, inform development of a future strategic framework which will be published before the end of this parliamentary term.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We are currently developing potential rural childcare projects in island communities which aim to explore models of delivery that can provide the flexibility required by the local workforce, including women in agriculture.

School Age Children

In October 2023, we published the [School Age Childcare Delivery Framework](#) which sets out our commitment to deliver affordable and accessible school age childcare, which will be funded for those families who need it most.

The Delivery Framework sets out our action areas for the next two to three years and outlines our people-centred and place-based approach, which will be applied to designing and building a new system of school age childcare. This means that the system and the services that make up the future school age childcare offer will be co-designed with users and providers.

The Framework includes a section on rural and island communities, summarising the evidence we have gathered on the challenges they face in delivering year-round systems of childcare. It sets out our commitment to test solutions that support the sustainability of school age childcare services within rural and island communities.

As part of our people-centred and place-based design work, we have carried out two co-design projects that demonstrate our approach in practice.

The first involved parents and carers who use, or may use, the school age childcare system. This project was carried out in 2022 in Argyll and Bute, Shetland, Dundee, Perth, Fife and Glasgow where 100 parents and carers and 30 providers shared experiences of making complex decisions about work, family, childcare and finances. It provided insight into how childcare can support families to take up or remain in work.

The second included children from schools in urban, rural and island communities, and with diverse experiences across Scotland. It allowed us to co-design a [National Children's Charter for School Age Childcare in Scotland](#) to further understand children's needs and views about school age childcare. The National Children's Charter sets out children's views on why we need school age childcare, how it can be run and by whom, where it should take place, and what activities should be on offer. It also sets out six principles that children agreed should be respected in school age childcare settings. These are kindness, community, fairness, happiness, fun and choice. Local charters have been co-created in a number of areas across Scotland - including Shetland - to support and inform our place-based approach.

Through our Early Adopter Communities, we are testing new models of targeted childcare provision as part of our national mission to tackle child poverty. We have committed to work in specific communities in six local authority areas to develop the local infrastructure and services needed to provide childcare for families who need it most.

In the 2023 Programme for Government, we announced the establishment of a new Early Adopter Community in Shetland, recognising the specific challenges of setting up and sustaining childcare provision in rural and island communities. Within this project, we will work with identified communities in Shetland where there are currently no school age childcare services. A dedicated local co-ordinator has been appointed to undertake engagement and scoping activities to explore and understand the needs within each community. This will include individual childcare needs, specific local infrastructure, and the range of services needed to sustain childcare for families - including in relation to challenges concerning transport and workforce.

We have also invested into our Inspiring School Age Childcare Spaces Capital Fund, which is delivering improvements to the learning estate that will support the provision of School Age Childcare. Successful projects and local authorities are looking at innovative ways to improve the learning estate (both indoor and outdoor) to enhance the experiences of children attending after school clubs, especially for those targeted primary age children from low-income households. Shetland has been awarded funding to improve the facilities and spaces for three services across the islands, which will enable high quality experiences for children and young people in those communities around the school day and during the holidays.

Over 2023-24, we have also continued to support nine Access to Childcare Fund projects. The Access to Childcare Fund was established in 2020 to test innovative models of school age childcare for families most at risk of poverty, providing low cost or free childcare places. The projects are exploring new models of School Age Childcare, including holiday provision, flexible delivery, specialist services for children with additional support needs, whole family support and outdoor provision.

One of those projects is led by [Hame Fae Hame](#), a rural childcare provider located in Shetland. The funding provided has supported them to develop their outdoor space, offer flexible and subsidised places and provide a drop off and pick up service from Scalloway Primary School. This service has hugely benefitted local families thanks to a flexible, short notice booking policy. This is having the most direct effect on family stability and wellbeing, allowing families to tailor their childcare needs to match their working patterns and thus control their finances better. Furthermore, 100% of families who returned a completed survey stated that as a result of Hame Fae Hame's childcare, they were able to access employment or increase their hours of work, improve their family wellbeing and increase their monthly household income.

The table below sets out funding provided to projects based on Scottish islands since the National Islands Plan was published in December 2019.

Project	2020-2022 (Phase one of project)	2022-2023	2023-2024
Hame Fae Hame	£88,400.00	£58,399.63	£63,352.00
Mull and Iona Community Trust	£174,440.83		
ISACS capital fund: Sandwich Junior HS			£131,000.00
ISACS capital fund: Scalloway School			£34,550.00
Shetland Islands Early Adopter Community			£12,956.50
YEARLY TOTAL	£262,840.83	£58,399.63	£241,858.50
TOTAL	£563,098.96		

Commitment 7.12 Ensure that health, social care and wellbeing services are available through the medium of Gaelic to support Gaelic speaking island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- NHS Highland commitments to Gaelic will be outlined in its revised Gaelic Language Plan, 2023-2028.
- NHS Western Isles is currently revising its Gaelic Language Plan and will submit it to Bòrd na Gàidhlig soon. NHS Western Isles commitments to Gaelic will also be set out in its Gaelic Plan when approved. BnG has also commissioned a study looking at Gaelic and wellbeing. This will be available later this year with recommendations.

Health and education are areas where Gaelic can be encouraged and commitments set out in Gaelic plans demonstrate how local authorities and public bodies can provide support for Gaelic.

As a result of progress achieved so far, local health boards are able to offer patients services such as speech assistance technology through Gaelic. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, through its scheme of community grants – Taic Freumhan Coimhearsnachd – has funded projects like Alzheimer’s Scotland’s Còmhraidhean Gàidhlig and Fàs na Gàidhlig. These projects used Gaelic to create a link between people in Skye, Lochaber and Wester Ross living with dementia and the region’s Gaelic primary schools. Gaelic served as a medium for reducing the social isolation of a particular group and allowed for the fostering of intergenerational links within the community. These examples provide foundations for further work as well as evidence for the social and health benefits of Gaelic.

In addition to existing services, the [Report on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic](#), published in June 2023, contains recommendations for the greater use of Gaelic in the health and social care sectors. The recently introduced Scottish Languages Bill also has the potential to improve provision in island areas.

Commitment 7.13 Align our ambition to eradicate child poverty with the Plan by continuing to work with island local authorities and health boards to build on their understanding of child poverty in their areas – helping to focus efforts on lifting families out of poverty and mitigating against its damaging impact.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We published the second [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#) in March 2022. The Plan outlines the transformational actions we will take alongside our delivery partners – including island local authorities and health boards – to deliver on our national mission to tackle child poverty.
- Island local authorities and health boards will continue to be required to produce Local Child Poverty Action Reports under the terms of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, and the work with national partners set out below will continue to help to inform local action.

Tackling Child Poverty – Rural and Island Activity

During 2023, the Scottish Government continued to work in partnership with the Improvement Service to support island local authorities and health boards to build on their understanding of child poverty in their areas. Following on from the [Design Based Approach to Understanding and Tackling Rural Child Poverty](#) in 2022, work has continued to support and exchange good practice on data sharing and use of data to inform services. This has included work with a small number of local authorities and the Scalable Approach to Vulnerability through Interoperability (SAVVI) initiative to explore how rural and island authorities could approach data sharing.

The Remote, Rural and Island Child Poverty Network continued to meet in 2023 to discuss issues of interest to these authorities and health boards and to share interesting practice and learning. The group has maintained a strong emphasis on data sharing while expanding its focus to facilitate discussions on issues such as transport and ensuring the voice of direct experience is heard and acted upon in rural contexts.

Through the [Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund](#) (CPAF), the Scottish Government is supporting areas to test some of the solutions emerging from the network. This includes supporting Argyll and Bute to test the usefulness of third-party datasets for identifying communities in need of financial support.

The Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund

In 2023-24, the Scottish Government has provided an additional £1 million for the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund to support islanders facing high fuel, food and energy costs in order to help meet cost of living pressures. This built on the £1.4 million provided in 2022-23.

Commitment 7.14 Work alongside national partners, continuing to share good practice identified across Scotland which could be applicable to child poverty in our island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to work with national partners to ensure knowledge and good practice is shared and to support and improve local responses to tackling child poverty, including in our island communities.
- The Scottish Government Islands Team committed to working closely with Child Poverty colleagues to adapt the wider measuring framework for island policy delivery – ensuring that evidence is robust and aligns with and forms part of the work and reporting being led by the Tackling Child Poverty Unit and led by the new [Tackling Child Poverty Development Plan](#).

The Scottish Government has continued to work with national partners – including Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland, COSLA, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Child Poverty Action Group and the Poverty Alliance – to support local authorities and health boards to strengthen their approach to developing Local Child Poverty Action Reports.

In September 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands hosted a roundtable discussion on child poverty in rural and island communities to identify best practices, gaps and opportunities for greater collaboration between delivery partners to improve outcomes for families.

In 2022-23, the Scottish Government provided £29,000 to support the evaluation of the Shetland Anchor project. The success of this community-based model resulted in Anchor for Families being rolled out to the whole of the Shetland Isles. The third and final evaluation to understand the impact of the project, how sustainable that impact is and how learning can be shared more widely, concluded in January 2024. A 'blueprint' to enable shared learning with rural and island areas will be published following internal review in early 2024.

Commitment 7.15 Work with islanders to contribute, where we can, to the creation of a fairer, healthier, happier nation for all of Scotland by supporting the work of the group of Wellbeing Economy Governments (WEGo).

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We continue to learn from and collaborate with other countries and organisations through WEGo, and more broadly, to transition to a fair, green, wellbeing economy that puts people first, serving current and future generations. That means empowering our island communities to take a greater stake in the economy, tackling inequalities, and aiming to ensure that they can seize the opportunities from the just transition to net zero to deliver greater prosperity and increased wellbeing.

A fair, green, and growing economy, which benefits all of Scotland's communities and people, is critical to the Scottish Government's three interconnected missions of Equality, Opportunity and Community. Economic success means making the most of the incredibly rich resources we have and using them to build an economy that works for people, not the other way around. As we create a Wellbeing Economy, we will engage directly with communities and continue to learn from and collaborate with other organisations to support our island communities and provide opportunities for all.

Commitment 7.16 Work with our partners to consider a range of options to ensure that adequate mental health care is available, whilst taking into consideration the uniqueness of our island communities

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We have committed to reviewing the Mental Health Strategy 2012-2027. Reviewing the Strategy provides us with an opportunity to systematically review all of our other existing commitments and make sure that our policies around rural mental health are current and appropriate for those living throughout rural and island areas in Scotland.
- We will continue to work with the National Rural Mental Health Forum to ensure to understand the emerging needs of island and rural communities around Covid-19 recovery and in particular to share community based solutions to support good wellbeing. This will look at the role of place and future Community Led Development opportunities to support resilience in our Communities in partnership with others.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

We published our new [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#), developed jointly with COSLA, in June 2023. It was followed, in November 2023, by a [Delivery Plan](#) and [Workforce Action Plan](#). The Strategy sets out a vision of a Scotland free from stigma and inequality, where everyone fulfils their right to achieve the best mental health and wellbeing possible. The accompanying plans lay out actions designed to make progress towards this vision and tackling mental health inequalities.

We worked closely with stakeholders to gather evidence and agree actions that have equalities and human rights at their core, recognise the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach and are informed by lived experience. This has included working closely with our Equality and Human Rights Forum, with members including the National Rural Mental Health Forum.

We know we need support, services, care and treatment that are person-centred, culturally sensitive, age-appropriate, fully inclusive and in a range of formats. That is why we included an Inequality Action Table in our Delivery Plan, recognising that different people have different needs. The table highlights three key areas that are known to impact the mental health and wellbeing of people who live in rural areas: loneliness and isolation, stigma and geographical inequalities. The Delivery Plan includes several actions to help tackle these challenges, such as expanding community mental health provision, improving mental health support in primary care and broadening the range of ways people can access help when they need it.

[Creating Hope Together](#), our 10-year Suicide Prevention Strategy with COSLA, aims to reduce the number of suicide deaths in Scotland, whilst tackling the inequalities that contribute to suicide. One of the guiding principles in the strategy is our commitment to ensuring our work is relevant for urban, rural and island communities.

We are currently taking forward intensive work with Samaritans Scotland in West Highlands and Skye to improve our understanding of help-seeking among isolated workers in rural and island areas, and using that to design future models of support. Additionally, suicide bereavement service pilots are underway in the Highland, Ayrshire and Arran regions reflecting the increased suicide rate in those communities. This work will provide insights about how we can adapt our suicide prevention approach for island communities.

Mind to Mind

Launched in May 2022, [Mind to Mind](#) is a digital resource that aims to support the mental wellbeing of the general population in Scotland, including in rural and island communities.

It showcases reliable advice from people with lived experience of mental health and wellbeing challenges, highlighting the practical things people can do to help themselves regardless of where they live or work. It is designed to complement in-person mental health and wellbeing services across Scotland. It is not meant to replace them.

Mind to Mind is hosted on NHS Inform which is a whitelisted site. Visitors do not use their mobile or internet data when visiting the site. Officials in the Scottish Government and NHS 24 have been working with organisations across Scotland, including in island areas, to develop content and identify further resources for inclusion.

Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults

Since 2021, we have invested £51 million in our Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults, with approximately 3,300 grants made to local projects across Scotland in the first two years alone to help tackle the impact of social isolation, loneliness and mental health inequalities made worse by the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis.

The Fund has a strong focus on prevention and early intervention, prioritising a range of 'at risk' groups including those people disadvantaged by geographical location (particularly islands and rural areas). It has a focus on those facing socio-economic disadvantage made worse by the cost-of-living crisis.

The Fund supports grassroots community groups in building resilience and aims to reduce the need for clinical interventions by supporting community-led initiatives and local support services.

The Year 2 Monitoring Report shows that people disadvantaged by geographical location were among the most common target groups, with 1,239 projects including a focus on social isolation and loneliness.

More than £4.8 million has been allocated to supporting projects in areas covered by the National Islands Plan, since the Fund was set up in 2021.

Over 700 awards have been made to community projects supporting people disadvantaged by geographical location (including rural areas). For example, the Assist Project, based in Bernera in the Western Isles focuses on reducing social isolation and loneliness.

National Rural Mental Health Forum

Since 2016, the Scottish Government has offered annual grants of £50,000 to Change Mental Health to support the work of the [National Rural Mental Health Forum](#). The latter focuses on exchanging knowledge, experience and learning about mental health and wellbeing in rural areas, enabling participants to better understand and support rural communities. The Forum openly shares ideas and good practice, building an evidence base that feeds into policy.

In partnership with the Forum, we are working to ensure rural communities have equal and timely access to mental health service and we are supporting efforts by NHS Boards to promote the use of digital access to services for rural communities.

The Forum are supporting innovative practice through, for example, the Rural Community Engagement Project, which promotes mental health recovery for people who face additional inequalities, including refugees and asylum seekers, young carers and the LGBTI+ community.

Community Mental Health Support for Children and Young People

The Scottish Government provided local authorities with a further £15 million this year to continue delivering community-based mental health supports and services for children, young people and their families. These services are focused on prevention and early intervention and include support for positive mental health and wellbeing as well as emotional distress. The funding enables councils to implement supports and services on the basis of local priorities, which means that the specific needs of island communities can be better addressed.

Examples of the supports and services in place include art therapy in the Western Isles to help children and young people aged 5-18 work through difficulties while providing a safe space for them to communicate issues that they may not be able to verbalise, and mental health training for staff and volunteers at Skye Camanachd to build confidence and self-esteem through sport.

Mental Health Services and Performance

The Scottish Government remains committed to supporting Island Boards' mental health services to develop their workforce, increase service provision and ensure that those who need care can receive it, at the right time and in the right place.

Scottish Government officials regularly meet with Mental Health Leads in the Island Health Boards to review performance against mental health waiting times standards. We recognise that, although local performance varies, there are shared challenges for rural boards. Officials facilitate access to professional advice, and support island mental health colleagues to work together to implement best practice.

In 2022-23, we allocated funding of £46 million across Scotland via the Mental Health Outcomes Framework to improve the quality and delivery of mental health services for all. This included a critical resource floor for Island Boards so they can continue to recruit and maintain well-staffed services.

Supporting people in distress

Our innovative [Distress Brief Intervention](#) (DBI) support model offers compassionate community-based problem-solving support for people in distress. It is nationally available through NHS24 (for anyone over 16) and we also continue to support NHS boards to have the DBI model embedded into local services, including in island communities.

The DBI model is already in place in Arran, Orkney and Shetland, and will shortly be offered in the Western Isles. The DBI support model can be adapted to suit the needs of local communities, as shown by the innovative partnership between Blide Trust and Penumbra to deliver the Orkney DBI service.

Environment Wellbeing and Biosecurity

Strategic objective 8 – Improve and promote environmental wellbeing and deal with environmental security

Commitment 8.1 Protect island biodiversity.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The [National Islands Plan Report 2022](#) sets out a series of projects that are currently supporting this commitment and will continue to support island biodiversity going forward.

In 2023, the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) provided support to land managers as follows:

Table 1: AECS 2022 APPLICATION ROUND

	Islands	All Scotland
applications submitted	288	1028
applications approved	245	701
contracts accepted	233	681
area under annual recurrent options	70k ha	218k ha
total funds committed for lifetime of contracts	£9.3m	£43m
agri-environment measures	£8.8m	
organics	£0.5m	

Table 2: LIVE AECS CONTRACTS IN 2023

	Islands	All Scotland
contracts in place	700	2245
area under annual recurrent options	181k ha	816k ha
payment due in claim year 2023 (the final actual amount paid could end up slightly lower if some works did not go ahead)	£6.1m	£31m
agri-environment measures	£5.2m	
organics	£0.5m	
slurry stores	£0.4m	

Species on the Edge

[Species on the Edge](#) is a partnership led by NatureScot that works with seven other conservation organisations to secure a future for thirty-seven of our most threatened coastal and island species. As well as carrying out direct conservation action, the programme is working with local communities to provide varied opportunities for them to get involved in protecting their unique wildlife. It is also developing new ways for partners to work together beyond the lifetime of the project.

Species on the Edge works across seven project areas to deliver nine multi-taxa delivery plans. Priority species are all highly reliant on coast and island habitats and cover a diverse range of taxa. They include Arctic, common and little terns, brown long-eared, common pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats, great yellow bumblebee, small blue and marsh fritillary, four species of burnet moth, Scottish primrose and Irish lady's tresses.

The programme has a team of Project Officers and People Engagement Officers based in the project areas. Delivery started in early 2023 and will continue until March 2027. Species on the Edge is active in four island areas - Shetland, Orkney, the Outer Hebrides and Argyll and the Inner Hebrides - as well as the North Coast, the East Coast and the Solway. Species on the Edge is receiving £4.2 million funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund towards an overall budget of over £6.5 million. Other funders include the Scottish Government, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Dulverton Trust.

Goose schemes

Scottish islands play an important role in supporting concentrations of wintering migratory geese due to their location on the international flyway. In locations where migratory geese cause significant agricultural damage, management schemes are in place. These include Islay, Coll, Tiree, Uist and South Walls.

Resident greylag geese can also cause agricultural damage, particularly in crofting areas. Management initiatives have been supported by the Scottish Government and NatureScot to reduce populations of resident greylag on Tiree, Coll, Uist, Lewis, Harris and Orkney.

The current budget for goose management actions focused on islands is over £1 million. NatureScot have also provided financial support for projects dealing with the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza outbreak, which had a significant impact on goose populations on Islay.

Sea Eagle Management Scheme

Sea Eagle Scheme Agreements are in place through the Sea Eagle Management Scheme (SEMS) to support land managers who are experiencing difficulties with white-tailed eagles preying on livestock. Whilst there is a national policy for white-tailed eagles, concentrations are significant on islands – particularly Mull, Skye and the Outer Hebrides. In 2023, 120 Farms, Crofts or Sheep Stock Clubs in island locations received support through the SEMS (74 holdings in Skye and Raasay, 19 in Mull, 11 in Lewis and Harris, 8 in the Uists and Benbecula and 2 each in the islands of Eigg, Islay, Barra and Lismore).

Chough – Islay and Colonsay

NatureScot continued to fund supplementary feeding of fledgling chough at specific roost sites on Islay and Colonsay. This was the first year that birds on Colonsay took to the feeding, something that birds on Islay have been doing for many years. Studies demonstrate that food availability in the first few months following fledging is the most significant factor in first year survival. During 2022 and 2023, NatureScot recorded first- and second-year chough surviving the winter and we are hopeful these birds will become part of the breeding population soon. The majority of farms supporting nesting and roost sites are under management supported by AECS or NatureScot management agreements. Change in farm occupancies and ownership have raised uncertainties regarding future management of some sites for chough. NatureScot are providing advice to these customers on management requirements and available funding streams.

Nature Restoration Fund

The Nature Restoration Fund (NRF) competitive schemes have awarded over £16 million since they were established in 2021-22, including support for eight island-based projects during 2023 with a total investment of £602,000. The projects supported were:

- Biosecurity for Scotland's seabird islands, RSPB Scotland (2023-26)
- Development, trial and delivery of a mop up phase methodology required to eradicate stoats from Orkney, RSPB Scotland
- "The Glen" - habitat restoration at Glen Cloy, Arran
- Restoration of Wader Habitat in the North Isles of Orkney, RSPB Scotland
- Green Network Project, Dougarie Estate, Arran
- Turning the Tide - Building Natural Capital and Restoring Nature across the landscape of Luing and Scarba, Cadzow Brothers
- Protecting Gigha's Woodlands, Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust
- Purchase of a survey vessel and other equipment for use in the South Arran Marine Protected Area (MPA) and Lamlash Bay No Take Zone (NTZ), COAST.

Since it was established in 2021-22, NRF has also provided £17 million direct funding as a contribution towards biodiversity projects directed by Local Authorities and National Parks. In 2023-24, this included:

- £123,000 for projects in Na h-Eileanan Siar
- £53,000 for projects in Orkney
- £81,000 for projects in Shetland.

In 2023-24, support was supplemented by an additional sum equivalent to the NRF allocation in order to contribute to work to deliver local nature networks across Scotland.

Commitment 8.2 Address biosecurity in a holistic and integrated manner as a means not only to contribute to environmental wellbeing, but also to contribute to sustainable economic development on Scottish islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to undertake island specific projects where required to put in place measures to address biosecurity in an integrated manner, including on the most important islands for breeding seabirds.

Biodiversity for Life

The [Biosecurity for LIFE](#) project, funded by the EU LIFE fund and NatureScot, came to an end in July 2023. Highlights include advice about biosecurity on boats, biosecurity animations in three languages and a schools resource pack designed by primary-aged pupils from Scottish island and coastal schools.

[Biosecurity for Scotland](#) is building on the legacy of the LIFE project with funding from the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund in place until March 2026. Two Island Biosecurity Officers are working with island managers, communities and other stakeholders responsible for biosecurity checks and measures across 38 unique islands or islands groups that are internationally important for breeding seabirds. They can continue to call on the services of [Jinx the detection dog](#), trained to detect the presence of rats in cargo destined for islands.

Rum Natural Nature Reserve

Following concerns about potential Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreaks, NatureScot has been working with experts to develop a seabird population model and a new rat tracking method to monitor rat activity in important seabird colonies. HPAI impacts could lead to mass die-offs of birds that could result in increased rat populations. Alongside monitoring of the birds, this will allow to pick up any HPAI impacts and react to any changes in rat activity.

Rhododendron ponticum removal at a remote site at Papadil started in early 2023, part of a wider plan to control Rhododendron across the island. Most areas on the island have now had initial treatments.

Orkney Native Wildlife Project

The [Orkney Native Wildlife Project](#) began in 2018 with over £6 million of funding from the EU Life Fund and the National Lottery Heritage Fund as well as match funding from NatureScot and RSPB Scotland. The project aims to safeguard Orkney's unique and internationally significant native wildlife by addressing the threat it faces from stoats. The project has successfully removed over 5,500 stoats and monitoring is showing early indications of species recovery.

Hebridean Mink Project

The [Hebridean Mink Project](#) started in 2001 with the aim of protecting ground nesting birds from predation by eradicating American mink. The project has successfully reduced the population of mink, allowing the indigenous ground nesting bird species to maintain their populations and, in some cases, recover.

Uist Native Wildlife Project

Starting in 2001, this project has succeeded in removed all known hedgehog populations from North Uist and has maintained this status for the past five years. The project has gone through a process of feasibility studies to establish that eradication from the Uists is possible and is nearing the completion of an operational planning phase for a trial to remove all hedgehogs from Benbecula with the potential to then continue into South Uist once this is shown to be achievable.

Commitment 8.3 To establish an islands forum, through Zero Waste Scotland, as part of the implementation of the Deposit Return Scheme, to ensure that key considerations for islands (and rural communities more generally) are reflected. This Forum will support, not only, input into our legislative plans for the scheme but also ensure that key considerations for islands communities are integrated into the implementation planning process.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 8.4 Work with island communities to explore how they can contribute to the circular economy through small-scale pilots for example supporting local food production.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Zero Waste Scotland (ZWS) continues to work actively in this field including by chairing Highland Adapts, Highlands regional adaptation partnership. It is also working on the role circular economy has in adaptation, including trade off synergies.
- ZWS is working in collaboration with HIE to deliver a regionally focused Fuel Change Challenge. A focused development programme getting young people engaged with climate action.
- ZWS is also supporting partners in a Highland cup re-use scheme and it is delivering workshops and follow-up support on circular economy with Highland Council and Shetland Islands Council.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2023 and included details of an [Islands Communities Impact Assessment](#). We published an initial consultation on the Circular Economy and Waste Route Map in May 2022 together with an [Island Communities Screening Assessment](#), publishing the [consultation analysis](#) in 2023.

An updated [draft Route Map to 2030](#) and [island communities screen assessment](#) was published on 18 January 2024. The draft Route Map notes our commitment to end the practice of sending biodegradable waste to landfill from 2025, and we continue to work with local authorities, through Zero Waste Scotland, to support them to put new solutions to managing their waste in place.

Isle of Rum

NatureScot is supporting the Isle of Rum with a number of small-scale projects, which include investigating options for small-scale local venison provision to the local shop as well as discussions with local interested parties who may wish to develop venison business opportunities of their own. NatureScot already sells low-food-miles carcasses to local residents for personal consumption.

A local business leases the stag stalking on Rum, which contributes to the small-isles economy through increased visitors' numbers whilst helping deliver nature objectives by managing the wild deer to a sustainable level.

Islands Programme – COPE and Growing Space Nesting projects

Through the 2023-24 round of the Islands Programme, we awarded a grant of up to £653,613 to Shetland Islands Council to expand the reach and impact of COPE's Shetland Home, a re-use centre that sells furniture, electrical goods, and homeware among other items. Electrical goods that cannot be sold are processed and stripped down to components for recycling. The project will support the circular economy, Scotland's Net Zero ambitions and positively impact on individuals with learning disabilities.

Through the same fund, Shetland Islands Council has been awarded £75,202 for the Growing Space Nesting project, which aims to transition a section of vacant land into a community growing space and park for skills building, food growing and volunteering. It will address the identified local demand for a community growing space and increase regular access to affordable, fresh produce, featuring options for shared, publicly accessible outdoor and undercover growing to allow the production of fruit and vegetables.

Commitment 8.5 Continue and refresh the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which has benefitted island communities through provision of infrastructure to mitigate the impact of increased tourism benefitting islands' communities and environment.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Island Plan 2021 Annual Report](#) for further details.

Commitment 8.6 Develop work with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's NonNative Species Action Group to increase public information around minimising particularly high-risk invasive species movements on island.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will consult with the Non-Native Species Action Group and NatureScot on:
 - which species should be included; and
 - how raising public awareness may be best achieved.

Work is getting under way to develop an Invasive Non-Native Species Action to better target and prioritise resources to prevent the establishment of new species and to control/eradicate invasive non-native species where they are established. The Action Plan will cover all of Scotland, but will look to learn from the experiences of the non-native species and biosecurity projects mentioned earlier in this report to bring together a coherent and achievable Action Plan for both the mainland and islands.

Scottish Government and NatureScot are working with the Non-Native Species Action Group to bring together the expertise required to develop the Action Plan.

Commitment 8.7 Work with island partners to design solutions that address climate change through nature based solutions with multiple benefits including, for example the protection and restoration of peatlands and salt marshes.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Government will continue to support collaboration with island partners to ensure nature based solutions are used to tackle to continued threat of climate change.

Peatland Action

During 2023, [Peatland ACTION](#) offered funding to deliver four peatland restoration projects in Shetland totalling just over 250 hectares with an anticipated value of more than £500,000. Peatland ACTION continue to progress a number of other restoration projects across the Scottish islands.

There are currently 1.6 FTE Project Officers on Shetland, and two FTE Project Officers located in the Western Isles, who are working to deliver peatland restoration projects.. In addition, two 2 FTE Project Officers work in Argyll, with islands part of their remit.

In 2023, training events were delivered on Shetland, Lewis and Skye to provide contractors, agents and new designers with the necessary skills to design and deliver new peatland restoration projects. Just over 100 people participated in these training opportunities.

Peatland ACTION were involved in a further twelve events on Scottish islands to engage with key stakeholder groups. This included attendance at local agricultural shows, a stall at CLS Annual Conference (on Skye) as well as speaking to crofters and land managers at Farm Advisory Service (FAS) events in Lewis and Skye.

On-site interpretation was installed at a peatland restoration site on Shetland and at two sites on Skye, promoting the benefits of peatland restoration to the wider public.

Islands Centre for Net Zero

Funded through the Islands Growth Deal (see commitment 1.1), the [Islands Centre for Net Zero](#) (ICNZ) is co-ordinating decarbonisation efforts across Outer Hebrides, Shetland and Orkney. Tackling emissions related to land use is one of the key focus areas of ICNZ.

Highland Adapts

[Highland Adapts](#) brings communities, businesses, land managers and public sector together to facilitate transformational action towards a prosperous, climate ready Highland region - including its island communities. The partnership's guiding principles include climate and social justice, collaboration, sustainability, and community empowerment.

In its first three years, Highland Adapts has facilitated information sharing within and between sectors, supported community climate action, and developed the first [Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment](#). Through this Assessment, Highland Adapts is pioneering a new approach to place-based climate resilience, driven by lived experiences from across the region. Through the Highland Weather and Climate Story Map, individuals have shared their first-hand accounts of climate impacts and changes in their communities. Six of these stories relate to climate issues on Skye. These involved flooding and high winds and the impact they have had on ferry and road transport.

Argyll Islands

Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership (CPP) is working towards developing a Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation and Engagement Action Plan for Argyll and Bute in partnership with the wider community. The long-term outcome will be an Argyll and Bute region which is not only net-zero, but a significant sequester of carbon for Scotland, and well-adapted to climate change and its impacts. The CPP has secured resources and recruited a Climate Change Project Manager allowing work on the plan to start.

Climate Change and Energy

Strategic objective 9 – Contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation and promote clean, affordable and secure energy

We committed to work with island communities to support their climate change aspirations.

Commitment 9.1 Work with island communities to support their climate change aspirations.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Community climate action hubs across the islands will empower communities to identify the actions that are most appropriate to their needs and provide support in their local areas. They will help groups to take advantage of funding opportunities, and promote collaboration between projects. We will continue to support the development of a further one to two community climate action hubs to ensure full island coverage.
- The Carbon Neutral Islands project will embrace the opportunity for island communities to lead the way in realising Scotland's climate change ambitions. Directly supporting 6 islands in their journey towards carbon neutrality by 2040, this will not only benefit the environment, but support local economies, facilities and general wellbeing through investment in communities.
- A carbon audit has been completed on each island looking at emissions from energy, transport, waste, land and agriculture. Marine was also looked at and where appropriate, further validation of this data will be carried out this year.
- A Community Climate Change Action Plan for each island has been published in June 2023 and includes a consideration of adaptation. Each Plan puts forward priorities and lists of actions and projects from an island perspective.

Carbon Neutral Islands

The Carbon Neutral Islands project continues to support six island communities (Barra, Cumbrae, Hoy, Islay, Raasay and Yell) in their journey towards carbon neutrality in a fair and just way.

In June 2023, each island published a Community Climate Change Action Plan (CCAPs) following carbon audits and the establishment of community led structures in the previous financial year.

We continue to support Community Development Officers who lead on delivery of the project on each island. During the 2023-24 financial year, we have provided £1 million capital investment to support delivery of the CCAPs.

We have also begun exploring ways in which the project can share learning and good practices to other islands in Scotland. Whilst the project continues to directly focus on the six islands, a key driver is replicability. Knowledge exchange and good practices stemming from the project will be shared to other islands across Scotland. Our delivery partner Community Energy Scotland continues to engage widely across islands to understand how we can expand the reach of the project and support other islands in a meaningful way.

In order to deliver the ambitions of the CCAPs, in the coming financial year we will develop investment strategies focusing on the longer-term delivery of the project.

Climate Hubs

The Scottish Government continues to support the Climate Action Hub network to help communities take forward climate action in their areas, with funding allocated in 2023-24 totalling £4.3 million.

The Climate Action Hub network has expanded to 20 hubs throughout Scotland, including the [Highlands & Islands Climate Hub](#), which covers Orkney and Shetland, the [Outer Hebrides Climate Action Hub](#) and the [Argyll and Bute Climate Action Hub](#). These hubs play a pivotal role in supporting place-based climate action, fostering peer-to-peer learning, and establishing local climate action networks.

The Highlands & Islands Climate Hub organised the [Highlands & Islands Climate Festival](#) in September 2023. This festival celebrated climate-friendly actions, initiatives and organisations in the region while encouraging active participation in local community climate efforts. It served as a platform to promote low-carbon sustainable living and raised the profile of the Highlands, Orkney, and Shetland as leaders in community-led climate action and advocates for sustainable, local living, working, and visiting.

Climate Hebrides CIC, who lead on the delivery of the Outer Hebrides Climate Action Hub, held a [Gaelic Climate Convention](#) in November 2023. The event aimed to develop the Gaelic language to encompass climate change terminology as well as supporting policy development of the Scottish Government's just transition plans. The Hub is working with wider stakeholders to produce an adaptation plan for the Outer Hebrides, building capacity to deliver GHG audits locally. The Hub is also working with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) to build audit training into their sustainability programme.

The Argyll and Bute Climate Action hub is currently working towards its public launch.

Local Energy Scotland

The [Off-Electricity Grid Communities Fund](#) has provided financial support to help communities decarbonise and future-proof their existing local independent electrical grids.

Additionally, the [Community Buildings Fund](#) provides a rolling programme of support to communities, charities and faith organisations across Scotland, including in island communities, to decarbonise their buildings and reduce energy bills.

Commitment 9.2 Work with island communities to look at alternative solutions to managing waste, particularly in respect of Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Programme for Government committed us to the development of a route map to achieving our recycling and waste targets for 2025 and beyond. We consulted on this last year, including an [Islands Communities Impact Assessment](#). The final route map will be published this year. We are also committed to bringing forward a Circular Economy Bill in 2023 and will undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment as part of this.

The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2023 and included an [Islands Communities Impact Assessment](#).

We published an initial consultation on the Circular Economy and Waste Route Map in May 2022 together with an [Island Communities Screening Assessment](#), publishing the [consultation analysis](#) in 2023. An updated [draft Route Map to 2030](#) and [island communities screen assessment](#) was published on 18 January 2024.

The draft Route Map notes our commitment to end the practice of sending biodegradable waste to landfill from 2025, and we continue to work with local authorities, through Zero Waste Scotland, to support them to put new solutions to managing their waste in place.

Commitment 9.3 Work with local authorities to help them work towards their statutory targets.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Whilst local authorities do not currently have individual statutory targets for climate change, there are national climate change targets that they have an important role in contributing towards. There are a number of programmes and funding streams targeted at local authorities in this area, which we are continuing to support including EV charging infrastructure fund, support and funding through the Heat Network Support Unit, Local Heat Strategies, support for building retrofits/Heat in Buildings and funding through the Learning Estates programme.

Climate Delivery Framework

Scottish Government and COSLA officials are working together to develop and launch a Climate Delivery Framework (CDF) in early 2024. Scottish and Local Government agree that we should foster reciprocity, share resources to add value, and bring together national and local to address gaps and leverage influence.

Scottish Climate Intelligence Service

We have now established a Scottish Climate Intelligence Service (SCIS), jointly funded by Scottish Government and local authorities, which will help councils build capacity to reduce area wide emissions. The SCIS will provide all 32 local authorities with the data-informed evidence, insights and intelligence they need for continuous improvement of their climate action plans, and the skills, knowledge and confidence to present and use these insights effectively for delivery across Scotland. The SCIS will also have a critical role in supporting Scottish Government and local authorities with meeting the recommendations from the recent Environmental Standards Scotland investigation into local authorities' climate change duties.

Developing new statutory guidance

We are developing new Statutory Guidance for public bodies, to support them in putting their climate change duties into practice. We intend to open a public consultation on the draft guidance in spring 2024, with formal publication of the guidance by March 2025.

Commitment 9.4 Work towards creating net zero emission islands and providing global climate change leadership.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Following the publication of the CNI project community climate change action plans in June 2023, we will focus on implementation of the Climate Change Action Plans and the development of investment strategies aimed at leveraging finance streams to support the project.
- We have worked with the government of Malta and influenced the development of offshore policy in the country. We have also developed a strong relationship with other islands partners around the world and have co-organised a Nordic Energy Research Island Net Zero Conference in Shetland in May 2023.

Please see commitment 9.1 for more information on the Carbon Neutral Islands project.

Over the course of 2023, we continued engaging with international partners to promote Scottish islands' expertise internationally and encourage mutual learning.

In May 2023, the Scottish Government and Nordic Energy Research (NER) - in partnership with Shetland Islands Council and the Icelandic Embassy to the UK - co-organised a two-day series of workshops in Lerwick to facilitate knowledge-exchange between Scottish and Nordic experts on shared challenges and ambitions around the low carbon energy potential of islands. Cabinet Secretary Gougeon opened the event. Discussions are underway on how we can build on the event and ensure Scotland continues to be involved in initiatives promoted by the NER-convened Net Zero Islands Network.

We have also liaised with the Government of Vanuatu, who have expressed interest in learning more about Scotland's island based renewable energy technology and expertise. We are exploring avenues to support longer-term collaboration with Vanuatu on island decarbonisation.

Building on our longstanding contribution to the work carried out by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on islands and rural areas, in 2023 we chaired the first workshop of the new OECD project on Island Economies.

In addition, in October 2023 we convened a workshop attended by officials from the Irish, Finnish and Croatian governments to look at strategic opportunities for knowledge sharing on the implementation of island-specific policies and legislation.

Commitment 9.5 Put in place resilient adaptation plans on islands that are at greater risk from climate change linking these strongly with development plans for those islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- [Dynamic Coast 2](#), which identifies lengths of coastline at risk of erosion from the sea, was published in August 2021. This work considers how future sea level rise could further exacerbate coastal erosion and erosion enhanced coastal flooding. We are encouraging councils to prepare coastal change adaptation plans using evidence from Dynamic Coast. A budget to help councils plan for and take action to adapt to coastal change was distributed to councils in their general capital grant settlement from 2022-23.
- [Coastal Change Adaptation Guidance](#) was published in 2023. Continued engagement through the Adaptation Scotland Programme with the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership and Climate Hebrides to support development of locally led adaptation across the islands. Ongoing engagement with other island stakeholders through national capacity building projects and events.
- An adaptation component runs through the Carbon Neutral Islands project community climate change action plans published in June 2023.

During 2023, the Scottish Government-funded [Adaptation Scotland](#) programme has continued to support island communities and local authorities by:

- Encouraging relevant public bodies to share learning on climate adaptation through the Public Sector Climate Adaptation Network. Members of the network include Argyll and Bute Council, Shetland Islands Council, and Highlands and Islands Airports.
- Continuing to participate in the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's (OHCPP) Climate Change Working Group (CCWG).
- Identifying and securing new external funding for climate resilience work in the Hebrides, including participatory mapping activities to capture lived experience of climate impacts and adaptation priorities.

From January to March 2023, via the Adaptation Scotland programme, Sniffer worked in partnership with Community Energy Scotland and island Community Development Officers to support inclusion of climate adaptation and resilience in the Carbon Neutral Islands Project. This involved:

- Capacity building to establish island needs/understanding of climate impacts and adaptation.
- Commissioning customised climate and coastal change analysis for each island, provided in an accessible, easy to communicate format.
- Facilitating interactive mapping workshops to explore climate impacts and adaptation priorities with community members.
- Provision of £3,000 of funding for each island for adaptation and resilience related action. Funded activities included a seagrass mapping project, community food schemes, facilities for local wood drying and weather stations for local schools.

Dynamic Coast

Guidance for Coastal Change Adaptation Plans was published in February 2023 and is available on the [Dynamic Coast](#) website.

In 2022-23, Argyll and Bute, Highland, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands Councils were awarded £160,000 of capital funding for coastal change adaptation projects. In 2023-24, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has received £150,000.

Commitment 9.6 Work closely with island partners, the network owner and all other key stakeholders to deliver existing proposals for electricity transmission links to mainland Scotland.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to engage closely with island local authorities and industry to assess the risks and opportunities as Scottish island wind projects approach this year's Contract for Difference (CfD) allocation round.
- Scottish Ministers will continue to make clear to Ofgem that its decisions on island links must take the net zero imperative more fully into account, and incorporate a more flexible approach to what are vital strategic investments.

The Scottish Government is working with all stakeholders to ensure that reforms to, and expansion of, the electricity grid are robust and work for Scotland, including our island communities.

Regulation of electricity networks is reserved to the UK government. The Scottish Government has no role in networks regulation apart from its statutory consenting process. However, we are engaging with the UK Government, regulators, the National Grid ESO and Scotland's Transmission Owners to enable the timely delivery of critical energy infrastructure (including those in Orkney, Skye and the Western Isles).

The Western Isles (1.8 GW), Shetland (600 MW) and Orkney (220 MW) transmission links will support continued growth of renewables and the decarbonisation of our islands communities, while creating a host of wider economic and environmental benefits across the islands.

Commitment 9.7 Work with Resilience Partnerships and energy providers to encourage them to focus on the resilience of islands' energy supply networks.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Scottish Government Energy Networks Strategic Leadership Group will continue to be an influential forum for discussing the development of Scotland's energy networks.
- We await the outcomes of draft business plans submitted to Ofgem in December which will influence our approach to the coming year.

While policy and regulation in respect of electricity networks is reserved to the UK Government, these are critical matters for the Scottish Government. We have regular engagement with the networks companies regarding their business plans, and their wider activities, to ensure they reflect the Scottish Government's policies and ambitions. This included the RIIO - ED2 plans which were determined by Ofgem in November 2022 and cover the price control period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2028.

Commitment 9.8 Work with transport-related stakeholders to have the most energy-efficient and climate-friendly transport services possible across the islands.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Transport Scotland has consulted on developing an aviation strategy (closed 21 January 2022). The responses will help us to determine how the Highlands and Islands commitments noted can be progressed:
- We have committed to decarbonising scheduled flights within Scotland by 2040.
- Aim to create the world's first zero emission aviation region in partnership with Highlands and Islands Airports.
- Exploring the potential for the purchase of zero/low emission aircraft.
- Continue to examine the scope for utilising hybrid and low carbon energy sources in the public sector marine fleet as part of our vessel replacement programme.
- Additionally, as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan, we will explore and consult on pathways to zero/low emission ferry transport.
- We will support all island authorities to develop public Electric Vehicle (EV) charging strategy and expansion plans.
- Through schemes such as the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund, we will support local authorities covering rural and island areas to move towards zero emission road transport.

In June 2023, we published [A Network Fit For The future: Vision for Scotland's Public electric Vehicle Charging network](#), which sets out what an ideal electric vehicle charging network for cars and vans could look like, with the needs of local communities, businesses and visitors being central to this.

All six Scottish local authorities with responsibility for islands have developed and submitted public EV charging strategy and expansion plans to Transport Scotland. These strategies show that there are a number of approaches being taken to enabling the private sector to work with local authorities to invest in public EV charging, highlighting challenges around attracting the scale of private sector investment required to meet future EV charging requirements.

Transport Scotland and its partners will continue working with local authorities to address those challenges and reflect their unique circumstances, ensuring island communities are not left behind as Scotland's public charging network grows and evolves.

As part of the range of support available, the Energy Saving Trust has developed the [EV infrastructure Guide](#), an online resource which can be accessed by anyone with an interest or involvement in planning and installing EV charging.

Commitment 9.9 Continue working to unleash the potential of renewable energy as both a way to mitigate climate change and as a driver of sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (ESJTP) was published for consultation in January 2023. The draft ESJTP lays out over 150 actions, as well as consulting on further actions, to help maximise a just transition to net zero. It seeks to deliver a just energy transition that benefits communities across Scotland, including island communities, and provide high-quality jobs and economic benefit, affordability, and protect our environment and energy security. An Island Impact Assessment will be carried out for the final ESJTP.

We are scaling up renewable energy and taking action to transform and expand Scotland's energy generation sector. Scotland has the skills, talent and natural resources with which to become a global renewables powerhouse. Our ambition to grow renewable generation in Scotland by an additional 20GW could power every house in Scotland for over seven years.

A comprehensive [draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) was published for consultation on 10 January 2023, setting out our vision for a future net zero energy system. We expect the publication of the final strategy by summer 2024.

Through our sectoral marine planning process, we are continuing to work with stakeholders to consider the potential impacts on the marine environment and other marine sectors from both the ScotWind and INTOG leasing rounds, as well as the mitigation and management that will be required.

Commitment 9.10 Work with communities, crofters, farmers and landowners to expand forests and woodlands on the islands, recognising wider land-use objectives.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Forestry will continue to support sustainable woodland creation on the islands through the Forestry Grant Scheme.
- Scottish Forestry will also continue to work with a range of partners including the Woodland Trust and Point and Sandwick Trust to deliver the Croft Woodlands Project, which covers all islands, including Argyll and Arran, providing advice and support for crofters.

Forestry Scotland

The Forestry Grant Scheme continues to support sustainable woodland creation. In 2023, grant contracts were signed for nine woodland creation schemes on the northern and Western Isles: three on Shetland, two on Lewis, two on Skye, one on North Uist and one on Harris. These schemes will create over 30 hectares of new woodland and have a total value of almost £270,000.

The Forestry Grant Scheme includes a specific premium option for crofters in the Northern Isles, Western Isles and crofting counties, where establishing trees can be more expensive.

Forestry Scotland continue to work with partners, including Woodland Trust Scotland and Point and Sandwick Trust, to deliver the Croft Woodlands Project, which covers all of the islands and offers free advice and support to crofters to plant and manage woodlands. The project has supported significant increases in woodland planting by crofters.

Forestry Scotland also support the Integrating Trees Network, a demonstrator network of host farmers and crofters across Scotland, who provide information and support to other farmers and crofters who are considering planting trees, including those on the islands.

Land Use Strategy

Published in March 2021, Scotland's third [Land Use Strategy](#) sets out the Scottish Government's long-term vision and objectives for sustainable land use. The Strategy introduces a new landscape scale approach to look at issues of land-use, presenting a more holistic view of all the ways we depend on our land in Scotland and showcasing the range of demands and benefits we get from our land. This approach recognises that it is only through understanding these multiple and sometimes conflicting relationships that we can look to secure the fine balance that will be needed to allow our land to contribute sustainably to our multiple long term national priorities.

Scotland's fourth Land Use Strategy is due for publication in early 2026 and development will commence in spring 2024.

Commitment 9.11 Put the themes of meeting emissions targets and adapting to the effects of climate change at the heart of the preparation of National Planning Framework 4.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2022. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2022](#) for details.

Commitment 9.12 Support the adaptation of Scotland’s aquaculture and fishing industry.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to ensure island fishing representatives contribute to the development of annual fisheries negotiations strategy and priorities.

Fisheries Negotiations

Negotiations with Coastal State partners to set catch limits and management measures for jointly managed stocks in 2024 concluded in December 2023.

Our key priority throughout negotiations is always to protect Scottish interests by securing sustainable catching opportunities. The agreements reached for 2024 include a number of positive outcomes for Scotland, providing key opportunities to vessels and coastal communities, and building on the successes of last year’s negotiations.

As always, close engagement with stakeholders across all sectors was key to the success of the negotiations. Officials consulted with a wide range of stakeholders in the lead up to and during negotiations, and their views played an important role in the development of our negotiating positions and strategies. Officials will continue communicate with stakeholders on a regular basis throughout the year, engaging through a number of fora. This includes the Fisheries Management and Conservation (FMAC) group, formal and informal consultation, and attendance at plenary sessions held during negotiations.

Blue Economy Vision

Scottish Ministers announced their intention to develop a new National Marine Plan (NMP2) in the Programme for Government published in September 2022.

In line with the [Blue Economy Vision for Scotland](#), NMP2 will help to address the global climate and nature crises by delivering sustainable management of our sizeable marine shared space in the interest of the whole of Scotland. The NMP2 will adopt a blue economy approach, considering our marine economy, local communities, and the environment altogether. This will help to get the right planning framework in place to address the increased competition for marine space, whilst safeguarding sustainable marine activities and recognising the importance of specific sectors, such as fishing, to our coastal and island communities.

Aquaculture and Recreational Fisheries

The [Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture](#) was published in July 2023. It aims to support island communities through a focus on the provision of lasting social and economic benefits.

Investment will be required in new technologies and working practices, which will help to build the sustainability of island businesses and communities. This will be achieved through innovation and collaboration in order to realise a variety of outcomes which include delivering emissions reductions in line with climate targets, the development of climate resilience plans, using responsibly sourced feed ingredients and generating more circular economy applications for wastes.

The impacts of climate change on fish farming and mitigations continues to be explored through our Farmed Fish Health Framework Forum, with a focus on increasing fish survival and minimising economic loss experienced through climate change related events such as harmful algal blooms.

Fisheries Management

As part of [Scotland's Fisheries Management Strategy](#), we have committed to developing a climate change action plan for sea fisheries in partnership with stakeholders. We have completed a range of baseline research, and have agreed the formation of a climate change stakeholder group to focus activity and identify key actions for progression. We have also committed funding through Marine Fund Scotland to support innovation and development of vessel adaptation solutions.

We are working with academics and stakeholders both within and out with Scotland, to ensure that our data and knowledge base is developed to support us to understand how we might need to adapt our policies and fishing practices in the future, to enable the sector to remain resilient to climate change. This is not something the Scottish Government can or will do in isolation, we will take a co-management approach to identifying and implementing the right solutions.

Strengthening the evidence base for climate change adaptation is pivotal in advancing policy implementation and realising the objectives of climate change adaptation policy. In 2023, through ClimateXChange (CXC) we commissioned research aimed at informing Scotland's fisheries policies seeking to address the evolving impacts in climate and ocean acidification on Scotland's fisheries. This research will provide invaluable insights and scientific evidence that will contribute to shaping robust adaptive management approaches in Scotland.

Commitment 9.13 Work with a range of stakeholders to develop an action plan to improve resilience to properties at flood risk.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to work with a stakeholders to deliver the Living with Flooding: Action plan, which was reviewed in 2021.

The Scottish Government continues to support island local authorities to reduce flood risk to communities. We have provided £38 million of funding to North Ayrshire Council for the Millport Coastal Flood Protection Scheme on the Isle of Cumbrae.

The Scottish Government also provides funding to the [Scottish Flood Forum](#) who offer advice and information to individuals across Scotland to help them protect their homes (or to recover from) flooding.

In 2024, we will be consulting on a new Flood Resilience Strategy for Scotland. The Strategy aims to initiate a transformational change to flood management to set Scotland on a long-term course towards a sustainable level of flood resilience.

Commitment 9.14 Work with local authorities to strengthen recycling and food waste services in island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Continued development of route map for Scotland's waste and recycling targets to 2025 and beyond which will include an Island Communities Impact Assessment.

We continue to support island local authorities and communities to increase the quality and quantity of recycling and expand access to reuse and recycling facilities and services. We are supporting island-based local authorities to deliver ongoing projects from our landmark £70 million Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF). Funding of £846,012 was awarded to Western Isles Council to provide additional refuse and recycling capacity by increasing the availability of bins and glass banks to the public, as well as an electric vehicle to allow expansion of recycling to rural areas. Project delivery is now complete and evaluation of the impact is planned.

North Ayrshire Council was awarded £74,535 to support Household Waste Recycling Centre improvements (including at Brodick on the Isle of Arran). Argyll and Bute Council was awarded £891,945 to support improvements to recycling infrastructure at six Household Waste Recycling Centres, including five island centres on Islay, Mull, Coll, Colonsay and Tiree. Funding of £4,875 has also been awarded to Orkney Islands Council to improve the reuse infrastructure at the Hatston Recycling Centre.

As outlined in the [Circular Economy \(Scotland\) Bill](#), we also intend to launch a new co-design process for a revised, high-quality Household Recycling Code of Practice, to be put on a statutory basis. Working with service operators and households, this will take account of local circumstances and the needs of island communities to design service standards. This process will include delivery of our commitment to consult on the current rural exemption and food separation requirements for food waste collection.

Commitment 9.15 Work closely with key stakeholders to ensure that the voices of islanders are fully heard, achieving a just transition to net-zero, and that islands benefit from the many opportunities associated with a green and sustainable economy.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will engage on a draft Islands Energy Strategy setting out approach to decarbonisation for Scotland's Island communities.
- We are committed to publishing a Just Transition Plan as part of the refreshed Energy Strategy - it will involve extensive engagement with those likely to be impacted by the energy transition, including in the islands.
- We will also publish a sectoral Land Use and Agriculture Just Transition plan, which will be co-produced with relevant stakeholders. Impacts on islands will be a key consideration.

Please see commitment 9.9 for more information on the [draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#).

Carbon Neutral Islands

The Carbon Neutral Islands project continues to work directly with six islands to understand the steps they wish to take in order to decarbonise. A key component of the project has been its bottom-up approach. We support an anchor organisation on each island who employ Community Development Officers to engage with their communities and feed into the delivery of the project.

Within this structure each island has produced a Community Climate Change Action Plan recognising the voice of each island and how they themselves would like to take action to decarbonise.

Land Use and Agriculture Just Transition plan

The Land use and Agriculture Just Transition Plan, currently under development, will focus on the livelihoods, skills, health, and wellbeing of those who live in and rely on Scotland's land and agricultural sector for their livelihoods and wellbeing, as well as focusing on maintaining and supporting thriving rural and island communities. As part of the Scottish Government's commitment to co-design and co-develop, an extensive series of events and workshops, both in-person and online, have taken place across the country. These included 11 community-based workshops, of which two were held on the islands of Arran and Harris respectively. Engagement with rural and island stakeholders will continue as the Plan develops. It is anticipated the draft plan will be published for consultation in 2024.

Regional Just Transition Planning

We have committed to develop regional just transition plans during the course of this parliament and we will be setting out our intended approach in 2024. We will be working with key partners, including the Just Transition Commission, existing regional partnerships, Local Authorities, community, worker and business groups.

Regional just transition plans will aim to outline challenges and opportunities faced by regions, seeking to identify appropriate actions to both mitigate and realise these. They will be underpinned by a commitment to wide engagement and co-design, ensuring that those who stand to be most impacted by the transition, including communities, businesses and workers are engaged throughout the process.

Empowered Communities and Strong Local Partnerships

Strategic objective 10 – Empower diverse communities and different places

Commitment 10.1 We committed to take forward the Local Governance Review with COSLA in order to create a system of local democracy that will be inclusive and improve people's lives.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The commitment remains to conclude the joint Local Governance Review (LGR) with COSLA and implement the findings through a Bill within this parliament. The LGR is a key part of our overall approach to Public Service Reform and future relationship with local government. We are making progress on delivering the overarching policy ambitions of the LGR through a variety of routes. The New Deal for Local Government and commitments on a Local Visitor Levy and council tax on second homes/long-term empty properties all represent material changes which empower local government. Some of these reforms are being taken forward, as necessary, through their own distinct legislative vehicles.
- Scottish Government are also continuing to work with local partners on the Orkney Islands and Western Isles to explore the potential benefits of Single Authority type models. This highly complex work with potentially far reaching implications is in the early stages and we are aware of potential interest from other councils.

The Programme for Government 2023-24 set out the steps we intend to take to progress the Local Governance Review. We confirmed that we will work with island local authorities with an ambition to develop alternative governance arrangements, including Single Authority type models, and agree place-specific reforms that offer the greatest potential to improve outcomes for local people. We also confirmed that we will complete the Democracy Matters national conversation and use the findings to agree new arrangements for inclusive decision making in our towns, villages and neighbourhoods.

Argyll and Bute, Orkney and the Western Isles councils have all expressed an interest in developing governance models to further integrate decision-making on vital public services in ways that are responsive to local circumstances. We will work with local partners in each setting to develop alternative arrangements that demonstrate strong potential to improve outcomes for local people, reduce inequalities and ensure long term financial sustainability.

The Democracy Matters conversation is asking people around Scotland to consider how new arrangements for decision-making in our communities might work in the places they know best. The Scottish Government and COSLA launched the second phase of the conversation in August 2023 for a period of 6 months. A small grants fund has helped communities cover the cost of hosting their own conversation. In addition, the Scottish Community Development Centre and Development Trusts Association Scotland are facilitating conversations with a small number of diverse communities, including on Mull and Skye. We will publish the findings from all submissions received in spring 2024.

Commitment 10.2 Support participatory processes aimed at providing island communities with a strong voice in the implementation of the Plan.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We continue to provide support to the National Participatory Budgeting Strategic Group, which is an independent group responsible for gathering intelligence on PB and building capacity across Scotland to ensure best possible practice. The group meets on a quarterly basis.
- We continue to work with the strategic group to explore how PB can be used as innovative engagement tool to tackle issues around health and wellbeing, education, housing and climate justice.
- We continue to work in partnership with COSLA to support local authorities reach the target of having at least 1% of their budget subject to participatory budgeting, giving local people a direct say in how almost £100 million will be spent.
- The Scottish Government continues to support COSLA's PB team, who have had a particular focus on the development and delivery of CONSUL, a free citizen participation software. CONSUL has been translated into Gaelic, making it possible for online community engagement processes to take place in Gaelic.
- Scottish Government acknowledge that in order to ensure that the National Islands Plan leads to meaningful, positive and sustainable change, there needs to be ongoing collaboration with our island communities for the duration of the Plan. We will continue to consult and collaborate with our island communities on a regular basis.
- The implementation of the National Islands Plan is supported by both the [Islands Strategic Group](#) and the [National Islands Plan Delivery Group](#). The Islands Strategic Group was established to ensure greater involvement of the relevant councils in helping design solutions to the challenges islanders face, whilst the Delivery Group ensures that work is driven forward in a collaborative way that truly involves island communities. We will continue to work closely with both of these groups on delivery of the National Islands Plan.

Participatory Budgeting (PB)

In July 2023, COSLA in partnership with the Scottish Government announced that local authorities reached the milestone of the 1% mainstream PB target. Since 2021, more than 110,000 people took part in participatory processes and directly decided on how £154 million worth of council budgets have been spent.

We continue to work in partnership with COSLA on the development and delivery of CONSUL, a free citizen participation software.

Local Government Settlement

In the most challenging budget settlement, we are providing over £14 billion in the Local Government Settlement. We are increasing the resources available to Local Government by over £795.7 million, equivalent to a 6% cash terms increase (4.3% real terms).

The Scottish Government's policy towards local authorities' spending is to allow local authorities the financial freedom to operate independently. As such, the vast majority of funding is provided by means of a block grant. It is then the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets and to allocate the total financial resources available to them, on the basis of local needs and priorities, having first fulfilled their statutory obligations and the jointly agreed set of national and local priorities.

National Islands Plan Review Consultation

Scotland's first ever [National Islands Plan](#), published in 2019, is now being reviewed as required by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 which states a review must be carried out within five years of initial publication. This review will provide the Scottish Government and their partners with an opportunity to reflect on changes in circumstance for island communities since 2019.

Reviewing the current National Islands Plan will provide a detailed overview of its impact since its publication and it will inform (if the review tells us we need one) a new National Islands Plan.

Our islands are profoundly important and the Scottish Government firmly believe this review should be informed by the views of those on our islands, to the greatest extent possible.

The [National Islands Plan Review consultation](#) ran from 18 July 2023 to 7 November 2023. Consisting of both an online consultation and 16 workshops, of which 13 were delivered in-person on the islands and 3 online, we sought to ensure everyone with an interest in Scotland's islands had the chance to share their views.

Island workshops

Eigg, 21 September 2023
 Grimsay, 26 September 2023,
 Lewis, 27 September 2023
 Cumbrae, 28 September 2023
 Skye, 19 October 2023
 Colonsay, 24 October 2023
 Arran, 25 October 2023
 Mull, 26 October 2023
 Fort William, (Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament), 1 November 2023
 Bressay, 1 November 2023
 Brae, Shetland Mainland, 2 November 2023
 Stromness, Orkney Mainland, 6 November 2023
 Westray, 7 November 2023

The consultation findings are being independently analysed and a report will be published in spring 2024.

The Islands Strategic Group (ISG)

The [Islands Strategic Group](#), established in 2016, consider issues affecting Scotland's inhabited island communities and ensure greater involvement of local authorities with islands in helping to identify and design solutions to meet the unique needs and challenges these communities face.

Group membership comprises of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, Council Leaders and Chief Executives across all local authorities with islands.

During 2023 they group met twice and covered a wide range of issues including the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency fund, transport, housing (including the Remote, Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan), climate change, child poverty, the cost of living crisis, migration and skilled labour shortages.

National Islands Plan Delivery Group

The Scottish Government committed to establishing a group to closely monitor the delivery of the National Islands Plan and the accompanying [Implementation Route Map](#). Established in 2021, and stemming from Strategic Objective 13 of the Plan, the [National Islands Plan Delivery Group](#) supports plan implementation, ensuring island communities are embodied in its delivery.

Delivering a fair, integrated, green and inclusive plan requires strong collaboration and partnership. The Delivery Group provides this collaborative working space, meeting regularly to examine progress and help to identify critical priorities in order to work towards meeting the commitments within the National Islands Plan.

Group membership comprises of the Scottish Government, local authorities, third sector partners, community groups, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, COSLA, the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, relevant academics and subject experts.

Over the course of 2023, the Group convened twice to discuss issues including – but not limited to – energy and just transition, community wealth building and the National islands Plan review consultation.

Commitment 10.3 Explore ways to strengthen the voice of island communities whilst capturing the differences between islands in local and national decision-making.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Work has started to review the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – a 2021 Programme for Government commitment – where we will consider how we can give local communities more of a say over how local public assets are used – whether that is taking on the ownership or management of land or buildings, delivery of services to members of their community, or greater engagement with the public sector to have more say in how services are delivered, assets are used and resources are allocated. The review was launched by Tom Arthur, then Minister for Public Finance, Planning, and Community Wealth at the Loch Ness Community Hub on 21 July 2022. The Scottish Government will ensure it remains fit for purpose and will consider how we can give local people even more of a say in the things that matter to them in their community. The review of the Community Empowerment Act builds on success achieved since the Scottish Government brought this landmark legislation in, with more and more local people having their voices heard about public service outcomes, and ever greater amounts of our public owned land and buildings moving over to community control. We are taking the review forward in collaboration with the public sector, third sector and communities with a particular focus on the implications of the legislation for disadvantaged communities.
- Scottish Government acknowledge that in order to ensure that the National Islands Plan leads to meaningful, positive and sustainable change, there needs to be ongoing collaboration with our island communities for the duration of the Plan. We will continue to consult and collaborate with our island communities on a regular basis.
- The implementation of the National Islands Plan is supported by both the [Islands Strategic Group](#) and the [National Islands Plan Delivery Group](#). The Islands Strategic Group was established to ensure greater involvement of the relevant councils in helping design solutions to the challenges islanders face, whilst the Delivery Group ensures that work is driven forward in a collaborative way that truly involves island communities. We will continue to work closely with both of these groups on delivery of the National Islands Plan.

The Scottish Government introduced Participation Requests (PRs), which help people start a dialogue about the things that matters to their community with a view to having their voice heard in policy and service development. PRs have facilitated community participation for issues such as pier safety, local road improvements, the future of local police offices and improvements to community halls.

In 2023, we asked our partner organisations to look at the experiences of PR's and to work with their networks across Scotland – including from our island communities – to investigate issues. This complements our review of other sections of the [Community Empowerment Act](#) which is currently underway. Findings are due later this year and will help inform how community empowerment can be strengthened to ensure we give local communities and organisations greater powers over their own future.

Commitment 10.4 Work with island communities and local authority partners in the development and introduction of a Transient Visitor Levy Bill.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament 24 May 2023 building on the considerable policy development completed prior to the pandemic. In doing so, we have engaged a range of stakeholders, including industry representative bodies and worked closely with Local Government through a working group convened by COSLA which included officers from a range of local authorities.

This commitment has now been fulfilled

The Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament in May 2023. The development of the Bill was informed by extensive engagement with island communities, local authorities, and industry partners. This included in-person engagement sessions with communities and businesses on the isles of Mull, Skye, Mainland Orkney and Mainland Shetland. An [Island Communities Impact Assessment](#) was undertaken and published alongside the Bill.

As a result of engagement with island communities, the Bill provides local authorities with a range of flexibilities to enable them to tailor any visitor levy to local island circumstances. This includes the ability to include or exclude islands from a scheme, to vary the percentage rate by area, and to designate persons or accommodation types that will be exempt from the levy. The Bill also requires local authorities to consult with local communities, businesses and tourism organisations before introducing a levy, providing the opportunity for councils to engage with island communities and identify any suitable flexibilities.

In considering the use of these new powers, under the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, a local authority will have to comply with its duty to have regard to island communities and where relevant undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment should a proposed levy be identified as having a significantly different effect on an island community compared with other communities.

Commitment 10.5 Explore ways in which to empower and support island communities to enhance their resilience by developing local initiatives and plans in partnership with Scotland's Emergency Responder organisations.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Resilient Communities team is currently scoping a project to establish a baseline of community resilience activity and is working with island stakeholders to ensure that the perspective of island communities is built into the project design.

We delivered a series of four national online workshops on Community Resilience in Emergencies between April and June 2023. Participants included people from rural and islands communities and were provided with a space to consider what community resilience to emergencies meant in their context, and what action they could take to make their communities more resilient. The workshops covered sessions:

- For communities, on the “nuts and bolts” of community resilience in emergencies;
- For resilience practitioners, on sharing good practice and insight on supporting and working with local communities;
- On building connections and partnerships across community led emergency response and long-term adaptation; and
- On inclusion in community resilience.

While the workshops were not islands-specific, the online format was chosen to enable participation from across Scotland, including islands. A full report was shared with all participants.

In 2024-25, we intend to prioritise engagement with island-based stakeholders to look at how this work can be carried forward in an islands context.

Commitment 10.6 Introduce regulations which enable island local authorities, in consultation with their communities, to request that Scottish Ministers promote legislation devolving a function to them, or that the Scottish Ministers transfer an additional function, duty or responsibility to them. These regulations acknowledge the uniqueness of each of our island communities and that one size does not always fit all.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 10.7 Ensure that policies and plans relating to the Scottish Crown Estate are appropriately island proofed and that any manager of a Scottish Crown Estate asset supports implementation of the National Islands Plan as appropriate.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Crown Estate Scotland Unit team will work with Crown Estate Scotland and potential new managers, on a case-by-case basis, to ensure that wider policies relating to the Scottish Crown Estate and that transfer and/or delegation proposals have completed an Islands Impact Assessment and take into account the National Islands Plan as appropriate.

Crown Estate Scotland are currently the sole manager of Scottish Crown Estate Assets and part of this role is to ensure policies and projects are sufficiently islands proofed by supporting the National Islands Plan and ensuring Islands Impact Assessments are carried out where appropriate.

Crown Estate Scotland are developing their new 2025-2030 Corporate Plan and are continuing to take into account the National Islands Plan as part of the development.

Commitment 10.8 Ensure that Gaelic speakers in island communities are encouraged and supported to represent themselves through the medium of Gaelic.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Government published the new Gaelic Language Plan 2022-2027 in October 2022. The Plan has an open offer to engage through the medium of Gaelic. In addition, Scottish Government are happy to take written requests in Gaelic. The Scottish Government has committed to providing more services through Gaelic and extending opportunities to use Gaelic in everyday situations and formal settings. As part of the process for developing the next iteration of the SG Gaelic Language Plan, the Gaelic & Scots team liaised with various island based Scottish Government offices to discuss what further provision they can make for Gaelic. The three local authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council and Argyll & Bute all have Gaelic language plans in place, have Gaelic medium education and have Gaelic development officers to promote and support the use and learning of Gaelic.
- Education Scotland has published a revised Gaelic Language Plan 2022-2027. This is part of HM Inspectors' five-year strategy for Gaelic Education, which also impacts on islands. As part of this, HM Inspectors will continue to provide specialist evaluations of how well establishments and settings are performing in a range of key areas. We provide this specialist evaluation for Gaelic Medium Education and for islands contexts. We will also take forward new high-level aims to support Gaelic.

The [Scottish Government's Gaelic Language Plan](#) commits the organisation to accepting Gaelic communications and then issue a response in Gaelic. This is a long established commitment and one which will be maintained. Similarly, there is an established process for issuing bilingual government documents, with island related issues among those prioritised for Gaelic translation.

The Scottish Languages Bill consultation allowed respondents to participate entirely in Gaelic, if they wished so. The Scottish Government's Gaelic and Scots Division hosted in-person Gaelic events on Lewis and Uist as well as online sessions with other island communities. The number of Gaelic responses received was encouraging and – through collaboration with colleagues in the Scottish Parliament – subsequent stages of the Bill's development will also encourage Gaelic participation.

The Scottish Government supported the Gàidhlig Climate Convention hosted at Cnoc Soilleir in November 2023. The convention was organised by Climate Hebrides and is part of an ongoing project to ensure that Western Isles residents can engage with Scottish Government climate policies through the medium of Gaelic. An important focus of its work is to enable community input into the production of Gaelic climate materials – ensuring that vernacular climate terminology informs official publications. Such a focus also helps emphasise the particular risks climate change poses to island based Gaelic communities.

The Cost of the School Day project was made available in Gaelic to encourage the participation of Gaelic medium pupils. Further work in this vein will be pursued and further opportunities considered to ensure the GME sector can engage with national programmes through the medium of Gaelic.

Arts, Culture and Language

Strategic objective 11 – Support arts, culture and language

Commitment 11.1 Invest in our cultural and historic resources, to ensure that islanders are encouraged to engage with, and participate in, arts and culture.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Many continuing projects such as Ceolas, Feisean nan Gaidheal, An Comann Gaidhealach, the Heritage Forum and centres such as Lanntair, Kildonan Museum, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Sabhal Mor Ostaig Urras Oighreachd Gabhsainn contribute to this objective.
- Working with partners, EventScotland will continue to raise Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage by supporting and securing a portfolio of events and developing the events industry. EventScotland will continue to maintain constant awareness/alignment with wider Scottish Government and VisitScotland initiatives that focus on the islands.
- 'Themed Years' present a unique collaborative platform for a number of partners to work in closer collaboration to achieve shared goals and generate stronger partnership working to deliver sustainable economic development in the linked sectors of culture tourism and events. Creating a rich and varied events programme is a central aspect of the Themed Year approach.

Promotion of Gaelic arts and culture

The Scottish Government's Gaelic and Scots Division champions various cultural and educational initiatives that enable access to arts and culture. Our support of island based cultural venues, such as Cnoc Soilleir in South Uist and Ionad Chaluim Chille Ìle in Islay, provide innovative modern facilities for the celebration of local Gaelic heritage. The Division also funds Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's *Dileab* project which showcases the cultural history of the Outer Hebrides and creates opportunities for intergenerational learning. The online archive Tobar an Dualchais is a vital resource for accessing Gaelic songs and traditions collected by the School of Scottish Studies since the mid-20th century. Its benefits can be seen, among other places, in the inspiration it provides contemporary Scottish musicians to adapt traditional Gaelic music for a modern audience. Through initiatives such as these, and our funding of the work done by bodies like Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, MG Alba and Stòrlann, the Scottish Government is working to ensure that the arts and culture of island communities are encouraged. Our ongoing work on the Scottish Languages Bill and the Scottish Government response to the [Report on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic](#) will build on this.

EventScotland

In 2023, EventScotland provided almost £200,000 of funding from their [national](#) and [international](#) programmes to support nine events in island communities. These included: Hoy on Hoy, Orkney Folk Festival, Tìree Music Festival (cancelled due to severe weather), HebCelt, Tall Ships Lerwick, Leaving Home Exhibition and Western Isles Tattoo Metagama, Orkney International Science Festival, Beatson's Building Supplies Mull Rally, and BWA Tìree Wave Classic.

Following Shetland's successful hosting of this event in 2005, the 2025 Orkney Island Games will offer an opportunity to highlight the profile of Orkney and, more generally, Scotland's island communities as hosts of international sporting events. Please see commitment 7.8 for more information on the Island Games.

The refreshed National Events Strategy identifies the importance of effective partnerships across national and local public and private sector bodies to fully harness the potential of Scotland's islands as events destinations.

Working with partners, EventScotland will continue to raise Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage through sustained development of the events industry and by supporting and securing a portfolio of events. EventScotland will continue to maintain constant awareness/alignment with wider Scottish Government and VisitScotland initiatives that focus on the islands.

Creative Scotland

In 2023, Creative Scotland awarded over £500,000 to applicants, both individual and organisational, based in island communities through open and targeted funding programmes.

Through the Regularly Funded Organisation programme, Creative Scotland supported eight organisations based in island communities with investment in the financial year 2022-23 totalling over £2.2 million. The Touring Network (Highlands and Islands), which supports organisations in island communities, received £120,000. Additionally, Creative Scotland delivered funding via their Youth Music Initiative Formula Fund to each local authority area in Scotland, including islands.

Further support for activities in island communities will come from national organisations such as the Gaelic Books Council, Scottish Book Trust and Hands Up for Trad.

Creative Scotland are also a part-funder of the Shetland Arts Development Agency which hosted the 2023 Shetland Film Festival. "Home Made" was a specific film category at the festival showcasing films which feature Shetland dialect. Entries were judged by Shetland ForWirds, a group of volunteers who are passionate about the Shetland dialect branch of Scots language and hold a variety of events and activities in Shetland to promote the local language.

National Performing Companies

In order to maintain the status of a National Performing Company (NPC) the five NPCs must ensure that a range of high quality performances take place across the country.

In 2023 the Scottish Ballet, the Scottish Opera and the National Theatre of Scotland took productions to island communities. Additionally, the Scottish Ballet runs a specific programme for individuals with multiple sclerosis living in Orkney.

Commitment 11.2 Support, develop and promote the creative talents of islanders, and ensure that the culture of Scotland's islands has a wide audience both nationally and abroad.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Many continuing projects such as Ceolas, Feisean nan Gaidheal, An Comann Gaidhealach, the Heritage Forum and centres such as Lanntair, Kildonan Museum, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Sabhal Mor Ostaig Urras Oighreachd Gabhsainn contribute to this objective.
- Working with partners, EventScotland will continue to raise Scotland's reputation as the perfect stage by supporting and securing a portfolio of events and developing the events industry. EventScotland will continue to maintain constant awareness/alignment with wider Scottish Government and VisitScotland initiatives that focus on the islands.

The Scottish Government's Gaelic and Scots Division supports a range of cultural and educational initiatives that develop and promote the creative talents of islanders. Stakeholders such as MG Alba, Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Ceòlas Uibhist provide islanders with training and career paths in broadcasting, music and performance. An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Royal National Mòd continue to encourage participation in the musical and literary heritage of Gaelic-speaking communities. The engagement of these bodies and programmes with Gaelic medium and Gaelic learner education ensures that the culture and creativity they foster are integral to the school experience in these communities. Furthermore, they enable audiences across Scotland and further afield to participate in these aspects of Scottish island culture. A notable recent example comes from the expansion of FilmG, the Gaelic short films competition, to Canada as part of Nova Scotia's 2023 Gaelic month.

Creative Scotland

Island local authorities are partners in the [Visual Arts and Craft Maker Awards programme](#) which supports visual artists and craft makers in their creative development.

Creative Scotland is a partner in the Culture Collective, led by Shetland Arts to support artists and collaboration across the northern and western islands.

Other Creative Scotland funding, while not specifically targeted on applicants whose base postcode is on an island, can also support island culture. For example, North Ayrshire Council's Place Partnership with Creative Scotland includes support for an Islands Arts Coordinator who works to support development on Arran and Great Cumbrae.

Islands Heritage and Culture Project

Promoted by the Scottish Government’s Islands Team, the Islands Heritage and Culture Project continued in 2023-24 with £210,000 divided equally between the six island local authorities to support initiatives that actively safeguard and promote local heritage and culture. In each case the local authority, or a nominated local charitable body, is delivering initiatives that link to local development priorities and utilise local creative talent to widen the socio economic benefits derived through the celebration of the arts, language and dialect in island communities.

Ongoing activities include:

Orkney Digitalisation Project

The Orkney Digitisation Project has worked to improve digital connectivity, accessibility and awareness of Orkney Islands Council’s collections, museums and visitor attractions. The primary focus is establishing an online catalogue showcasing a digitised collection of thousands of historical pieces. The foundation has been the creation of a new [website](#), which has helped promote Orkney’s heritage, arts, and culture. The online digital catalogue of Orkney Museums and Orkney Archives collections ([example](#)) will be accessible worldwide.

Ongoing digitisation work has seen over 1,000 museum objects digitised. Free to [access](#) 3D models of the collection have been created. The online catalogue will continue to grow throughout 2024.

Angus Og Project – Skye and Lochalsh Archives

The Angus Og Project, delivered in partnership with High Life Highland, showcases cartoonist Ewen Bain’s original drawings. Work has been undertaken by a dedicated Archives Project Officer, supported by local experts, to conserve, catalogue, and digitise the collection. “The Angus Og Collection” exhibition is being held at the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre until May 2024. It has toured the western Highlands and Islands, where creative workshops and educational activities have been held to explore island life through graphic art.

As part of the project, a number of educational events have taken place including storytelling sessions, numeracy workshops, a cartoon ceilidh, Schools Out Comic Club, and an innovative afterschool program Tir nan Og which fosters community-focused literacy, numeracy, and creativity.

Shetland Culture and Heritage Hub: Community Connections

Following the creation of a Cultural and Heritage Forum linking local museums and heritage organisations throughout Shetland, the first-ever Heritage Conference was held in Spring 2023. As a result of improved engagement with the heritage and cultural community, a new ‘Community Connections’ network in Shetland was launched to deliver a programme of skills development in partnership with Shetland Heritage Association.

Planning has begun on a new touring exhibition for 2024 called ‘Island Connections’, which aims to celebrate Shetland’s distinctive sense of identity by touring objects from local museum collections in all accredited museums in Shetland.

Outer Hebrides Heritage Trails

The Outer Hebrides Heritage Trail project, developed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Heritage Service Team, aims to build synergy between the various community and heritage groups in the Outer Hebrides, to develop trails which link them all, thereby supporting future growth in the heritage sector, addressing sustainability issues and spreading the economic benefits of tourism.

An Heritage Trails Development Officer has travelled the length of the islands consulting with community organisations and other relevant stakeholders to establish the potential for developing trails. Stakeholder surveys were issued following discussions and closed at the end of 2023. The survey results will be utilised to inform future themes for heritage trails.

The Culture and Heritage of Arran and Cumbrae: Arran Geopark

The main objective of the project is to gain UNESCO Global Geopark status for the area covering the Isle of Arran, Holy Isle, Pladda, and the surrounding seabed. An application was submitted to UNESCO in November 2023. Arran Geopark's development has been intertwined with the creation of Arran's Local Island Plan. The Plan's key strands of environment, community and economy are synergistic with the aims of the Global Geoparks Network.

Cultural and heritage activities held in 2023 included "geoheritage" learning opportunities and Gaelic language interpretation, guided walks, talks, and volunteer work meets. A network of the Geopark's Management Group and Trustees is highly representative of the island's rich culture and heritage. During 2023, the group was extended to include artists, scientists, education practitioners, businesses, heritage organisations, and land managers.

Opportunities for the Argyll Islands and Increased Visitor Footfall

During 2023, the Culture, Heritage and Arts Assembly, Argyll and Isles (CHARTS), implemented Ràmh, a development framework designed to help address cultural needs across islands in Argyll and Bute. Working collaboratively with island-based practitioners and organisations to support the development of networks, projects and opportunities for increased footfall, Ràmh also acted strategically to attract additional project funding resulting in the engagement of residents and visitors in workshops and events.

During 2023, a total of 829 people participated in Ràmh associated arts and heritage projects, network-building workshops and events, including thirteen practitioners who were given one-to-one creative business mentoring support. A Ràmh consultation toolkit was created for engagement with residents under thirty years of age and three new CHARTS member networks were created on the Isles of Bute and Mull with Ràmh support linked to the CHARTS Steering Group, enhancing strategic organisational development.

During 2024, CHARTS will further support cultural infrastructure with a collaborative approach, increasing network development support that responds to need identified by individual practitioners, arts and heritage organisations/festivals, with key plans to include the creation and development of visitor trails and increased skills-building opportunities for young island residents.

Commitment 11.3 Support all of Scotland's indigenous languages and dialects in ways that are relevant to the communities where these are spoken.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Island Communities Impact Assessments will support this process following the 2022 update to the Guidance and Toolkit.
- Quarterly meetings are established between the Gaelic and Scots Team, the Islands Team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to support this process.

The Scottish Government's support of Gaelic medium and learner education helps Gaelic speaking communities guarantee the language's local transmission as well as drawing new speakers to it. Examples of this support include our funding for the educational publisher Stòrlann which produces Gaelic learning materials suited to the language's community contexts. The Gaelic and Scots Division's funding of capital projects like South Uist's Cnoc Soilleir centre and Islay's Ionad Chaluum Chille Ìle provide modern venues where Gaelic heritage can be encountered in an innovative way.

The Scottish Government's support of Gaelic broadcasting, through funding of MG Alba, enables the production of television, radio and online productions which reflect the needs and interests of island based Gaelic communities.

Among the major activities of the Gaelic and Scots Division is its support of Bòrd na Gàidhlig. A significant aspect of that is the development of the [National Gaelic Language Plan](#) and the wider system of public body Gaelic Language Plans produced on its behalf – including the [Scottish Government's own plan](#). This system guarantees that public bodies based in Gaelic communities support the language, provide services within it and consider ways to incorporate Gaelic into their daily operations. It also places an onus on public bodies to pre-emptively consider the impacts of their policies on the language and its communities. In addition to the work of Gaelic language planning, Bòrd na Gàidhlig also funds a wide range of individual and community initiatives across the islands which contribute to the vitality of the language in its local settings.

Islands Programme – An Taigh Mor project

Through the 2023-24 round of the Islands Programme, we offered Comhairle nan Eilean Siar a grant of up to £78,350 to progress the design of An Taigh Mòr, a Grade 2 listed building. The preservation and redevelopment work will ultimately provide space for community use of a size and nature not available elsewhere locally and increase opportunities for the community to engage with its history, language, and culture in an appropriate setting.

Commitment 11.4 Ensure that the commitments in this plan are informed by and aligned with the commitments in the National Gaelic Language Plan, working closely with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Scottish Government's Gaelic Language Plan outlines its alignment with the National Gaelic Language Plan. The SG Islands Team is represented on the Scottish Government's Gaelic Implementation Group. This meets twice yearly and is a forum for ensuring our policy area fulfils the commitments of both the National and Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plans.
- We will continue to work closely with Bòrd na Gàidhlig as members of the National Islands Plan Delivery Group which was established to oversee implementation of the National Islands Plan.

The Scottish Government's [Gaelic Language Plan](#) is produced within the framework of the [National Gaelic Language Plan](#). The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that the aims of the National Gaelic Language Plan are reflected in wider policy work, including through the delivery of the National Islands Plan.

Commitment 11.5 Ensure that the effect on Gaelic language development is considered from the outset in island-specific policies and initiatives and that these link to statutory Gaelic language plans.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Island Communities Impact Assessments will support this process following the 2022 update to the Guidance and Toolkit which now includes consideration of impact on Gaelic speaking communities.
- The latest SG Gaelic Language plan has corporate service aims to ensure the equal prominence of Gaelic and encouragement to use Gaelic in communications.
- Representatives on the Scottish Government's Gaelic Implementation Group ensure their policy areas are mindful of the language and that, where possible, policies serve to advance Gaelic.

The Scottish Government's [Gaelic Language Plan](#) places a commitment on all parts of government to consider the impacts of their policies upon Gaelic and Gaelic speaking communities. This commitment is pursued through the Scottish Government's Gaelic Implementation Group. The latter features representatives from across directorates who ensure that work undertaken within their policy areas is assessed for its potential impact upon Gaelic. The Scottish Government's Islands Team has individual representation on the group in addition to the wider representation provided by the Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Economy.

Please see commitments 10.8 and 11.6 for more information on corporate policies on the use of Gaelic in official communications.

Commitment 11.6 Work with public authorities and community groups in increasing the use and visibility of Gaelic in Gaelic speaking island communities.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Gaelic & Scots team has prepared the new Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan. This contains corporate service aims to ensure the equal prominence of Gaelic in SG logo and branding, the prominence of Gaelic signage in SG offices, and commitments to use Gaelic in our public communications and corporate publications. Other SG agencies, such as Social Security Scotland, provide bilingual material relating to their services and discussions are ongoing with island based SG offices to increase their Gaelic provision.
- The Gaelic Implementation Group established under the plan is an ongoing opportunity for colleagues across the Scottish Government to support Gaelic through their work and the Islands Team, along with other parts of the Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate, are represented on it.
- A number of Gaelic development officers from different organisations are based in island communities with the aim of increasing the use and learning of Gaelic. To help organise their efforts a Gaelic Development Officers Network has recently been formed with support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Scottish Government's [Gaelic Language Plan](#) contains a commitment to increase the use of Gaelic signage in offices and hubs. For example, Gaelic first versions of Scottish Government branding and signage are available for use in island based offices alongside guidance for their use.

The publication of the [Report on Economic and Social Opportunities for Gaelic](#) in June 2023 was the product of a short life working group established with a remit to consider how Gaelic could be better incorporated into all aspects of social and economic life in Gaelic speaking island communities. A steering group is currently in place to consider the report's recommendations and it will publish a response in the first half of 2024.

The Scottish Languages Bill seeks to build on work currently in place to increase the use and visibility of Gaelic in island communities. This is especially significant in the Bill's provisions for areas of linguistic significance. These build on an increasing demand in recent years for a greater community focus within language policy and it aims to enable community groups to play a greater role in local Gaelic development.

Commitment 11.7 Work with relevant authorities to improve Gaelic provision for Gaelic speaking island communities in delivering their functions and services.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The Gaelic & Scots team has prepared the new Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan. This contains corporate service aims to ensure the equal prominence of Gaelic in SG logo and branding, the prominence of Gaelic signage in SG offices, and commitments to use Gaelic in our public communications and corporate publications. Other SG agencies, such as Social Security Scotland, provide bilingual material relating to their services and discussions are ongoing with island based SG offices to increase their Gaelic provision.
- The Gaelic Implementation Group established under the plan is an ongoing opportunity for colleagues across the Scottish Government to support Gaelic through their work and the Islands Team, along with other parts of the Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate, are represented on it. The Faster Rate of Progress Initiative and COHI also have a role here and Gaelic is emphasised in these gatherings.

Through the Faster Rate of Progress initiative, the Scottish Government's Gaelic and Scots Division brings together the main public authorities responsible for Gaelic to consider how provision for the language can be improved. While the initiative, like Gaelic policy, is national in focus it has a pronounced emphasis on matters affecting island communities. This is seen in the composition of its five workstreams, where Comhairle nan Eilean Siar acts (with Bòrd na Gàidhlig) as lead body for Community Engagement while Highlands and Islands Enterprise acts as lead body (with Skills Development Scotland) for the Economy and Labour Market.

Commitment 11.8 Support approaches that promote the sustainable management of the historic environment.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- [Our Past, Our Future: The Strategy for Scotland's Historic Environment](#) is our refreshed five-year strategy for Scotland's historic environment which speaks to our shared heritage, and reflects the positive impacts the historic environment has for people and communities across the country and the beneficial role it will play in our future lives.
- Its three key priorities are: Delivering the transition to net zero, Empowering resilient and inclusive communities and places, and Building a wellbeing economy.

The Scottish Government's investment in culture and heritage continues to support Scotland's inspiring creativity, unique historic environment, and world-class collections, ensuring these are cared for and enjoyed by new and diverse audiences as well as future generations right across Scotland.

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) will continue to promote access to our historic environment and high-quality places and buildings.

HES is at the forefront of investigating and researching the historic environment and addressing the impacts of climate change on its future. HES continues to protect historic places through designations and consents, promotes sustainable development, and provides circa £14 million each year to local communities to repair and revitalise the historic environment.

Additionally, HES provides advice and guidance about the historic environment, offering a wide range of training and learning opportunities.

Education

Strategic objective 12 – Promote and improve education for all throughout life

Commitment 12.1 Work with UHI, the University of Aberdeen, Heriot-Watt University, Robert Gordon University and other education providers to ensure a broad range of options are available to young people.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Scottish Government is aware that a range of positive work has been taken forward in recent academic years within UHI, University of Aberdeen, Heriot-Watt University and Robert Gordon University to ensure young people in Islands communities have access to a wide range of opportunities throughout the lifelong learning and skills system. We will continue to engage with those institutions to monitor ongoing work over the coming academic year.

University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)

Following an online event in May 2023, a full UHI Islands Forum event was held in September 2023 at the UHI Shetland Lerwick campus. It provided an opportunity to review the development of the UHI Islands Strategy as well as offering an overview of UHI's engagement with Island Growth Deal projects. The event included engagement with the relevant local authorities, and stakeholder such as Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig on their key strategic priorities. A further virtual UHI Island Forum was held in January 2024.

University of Aberdeen

The University of Aberdeen delivers the Reach element of National Schools Programme, supporting pupils from rural communities interested in law, medicine and (new for 2023-24) vet medicine in collaboration with SRUC. In order to ensure parity of offering to young people from island communities, funding is offered to attend all in-person events and efforts are made to ensure that timings of events do not preclude those from island communities attending.

The University is working on expanding the Reach model to other disciplines through the Access Aberdeen programme, which delivers advice and guidance to learners to ensure they have the information they need to make informed choices about their futures. In line with research conducted with school pupils, the University is delivering a mix of online and in-person activities in academic year 2023-24 to allow anyone to attend regardless of geographical location. Where in-person is the best medium, funding will again be offered to support attendance from young people in the islands.

In addition, two careers' fairs were held in island locations in 2023, one in Shetland (SDS) and one on Lewis (UCAS).

The University's Access and Articulation Team have designated Secondary/High Schools on the islands as priority schools. The University also decided to guarantee an adjusted, conditional offer of entry to most of their degrees to any pupil from a priority school meeting the minimum entry criteria, therefore taking into account the exceptional circumstances found on the islands.

Heriot-Watt University (HWU)

The throughput of Masters students at HWU's Orkney Campus is widely acknowledged as a key contributor to Orkney's green energy leadership. Incoming students, and graduates that choose to stay and work locally in the sector, are helping to reverse the 'brain drain' and depopulation seen elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands region.

In collaboration with the Orkney Research and Innovation Campus (ORIC) as well as commercial and higher education partners, HWU is contributing to the development of an Orkney Innovation Strategy. The latter is intended to enhance the innovation ecosystem in Orkney, increasing interaction between public, private, third and higher education sectors around renewable energy and the blue economy. This work will also identify strategic goals and priorities for ORIC's development.

Robert Gordon University (RGU)

RGU leads on two of the work packages that are part of the [TalEntEd Islands](#) programme. These focus on entrepreneurship and intra-preneurship respectively and are delivered in close collaboration with the three islands local authorities.

Following the launch of the [RGU Orkney 2023-2028](#) strategy, the RGU Orkney Advisory Group was established. Members include Orkney Islands Council, ORIC, HITRANS, Destination Orkney, Serco-Northlink, Orkney International Island Games and NHS Orkney and Voluntary Action Orkney. Key strategy themes include housing, transport, health and wellbeing and entrepreneurship.

As tenants of ORIC, RGU have supported the development of the ORIC Islands Growth Deal programme working with other tenants to draft an innovation strategy for the campus.

The Orkney Community Clinic, a partnership between the Blide Trust and the RGU Law School, has run throughout the year. The clinic offers confidential and independent advice to those on low incomes in Orkney on areas of social welfare law such as housing, employment, consumer rights, family law and more.

Commitment 12.2 Support UHI as it deepens collaboration with island partners to promote learner pathways, innovation and industry/employer engagement.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The UHI Islands Strategy Director role will continue to be important and support close partnership work with the SG Islands Team through a collaborative, solution-focused approach that seeks to maximise the opportunities that arise through overlapping work streams and synergies, such as UHI projects associated the Islands Growth Deal and Islands Programme investment. Critically this work interconnects as a result of shared priorities, identified through both the [Islands Strategy](#) and the SG's [National Islands Plan](#).
- Ongoing work on Student Retention and Talent Attraction and Retention programmes to support students to stay, including linking with employers, especially those with skills shortages.

Please see commitments 1.2 and 2.2 for more information on skills planning, Talent Attraction and Migration Service for Scotland, and graduate retention.

University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)

UHI undertook a review of their Islands Strategy and a revised document was approved in November 2023. The University's involvement in projects supported through the Islands Growth Deal (see commitment 1.1) is one of the key focus areas.

These projects include [TalEntEd Islands](#), a UHI-led collaborative project with Heriot-Watt and Robert Gordon universities that focuses on fast-tracking the decarbonisation of the islands by creating opportunities for education, entre and intrapreneurship and commercialisation that support the increase in sustainable 'green' jobs across all three island groups.

Islands Programme - UHI Stornoway Campus

Through the 2023-24 round of the Islands Programme, the Scottish Government has contributed £250,000 towards the redevelopment of the UHI Stornoway Campus to enhance learning and training facilities and enable innovative approaches to digital and distance learning. A range of mobile facilities and equipment will further support equality of opportunity and enable outreach capability in Uist and Barra. The Islands Programme funding will support Mobile Equipment and Facilities and Immersive Classroom Technology.

Commitment 12.3 Ensure that young people are given the same opportunities to access education as young people on mainland Scotland.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Education Scotland will include island practitioners in groups and professional learning reviewing curriculum pathways and curriculum planning to continue to increase access to the curriculum for all children and young people.
- The Rural Skills Accelerator programme will include a mobile STEM Academy which will serve island and rural communities in Argyll and Bute.

e-Sgoil

e-Sgoil was established in the Western Isles in 2016, initially offering more equitable access to opportunities for learners across the island archipelago, before quickly expanding to offer a national e-learning service enable young people to access learning opportunities that might otherwise be restricted because of geography or staff availability. e-Sgoil is now delivered by a network of more than 60 partner organisations and employers.

The role of e-Sgoil continues to be important in the support of Gaelic education at all levels, from for formal qualifications through the medium of Gaelic to less formal support and post-school learning. E-Sgoil also provides Gaelic early years sessions and informal session for Gaelic speaking young people to encourage fluency and confidence in the language.

Argyll and Bute Growth Deal

The Scottish and UK Governments committed up to £25 million each for the Argyll and Bute Growth Deal over 10 years, with Heads of Terms signed in February 2021. The Deal, shaped by local input involves collaboration with partners including the Scottish Futures Trust, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Scottish Enterprise and various educational institutions to further develop their proposals.

Scottish Government officials are collaborating with the UK Government, Argyll and Bute Council, and partners to agree the Full Deal for project delivery. This will involve the development and approval of the necessary full deal documents (implementation, governance, and financial plans) and outline business cases for each of the projects included in the Heads of Terms agreement. Good progress is being made and there is a shared ambition to conclude the Full Deal as soon as possible.

Commitment 12.4 Work with young people across Scottish islands to ensure that they are able to contribute to the implementation of the Plan from an education perspective and to ensure that their voices are present.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 12.5 Continue to support and promote Gaelic medium education at all levels.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- A wide range of projects and initiatives are in place to promote and support Gaelic medium education at all levels. This involves SG, a number of local authorities, public bodies and Gaelic organisations. We will continue to support Northern Alliance working group for Gaelic to support collaborative improvement.
- The Scottish Government is committed towards exploring the establishment of a new strategic approach to Gaelic Medium Education. This was consulted on in 2022 and relevant provisions will be made in the forthcoming Scottish Languages Bill.
- We will continue to use evidence and independent evaluation to celebrate success, support improvement and raise standards in Gaelic Medium and Learner Education; taking forward the scrutiny objectives of HM Inspectors' Corporate and Gaelic Language Plans bespoke to island contexts.

The Scottish Government continues to work with local authorities responsible for the delivery of Gaelic and with public bodies that have a key role in promoting the use of Gaelic.

In November 2023, the Scottish Government introduced the Scottish Languages Bill to the Scottish Parliament. This Bill will include Gaelic education provisions which are expected to promote and support Gaelic education in island communities.

Please see commitment 12.7 for more information on Gaelic Medium Education.

Commitment 12.6 Work with all island authorities to scope potential projects that could benefit from successive phases of the new £1 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme which runs until 2026.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- The £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme prioritises schools identified by local authorities as in need of updating, to ensure rapid progress where most required, and will benefit tens of thousands of pupils across Scotland.
- Phase three of the Learning Estate Investment programme opened to local authorities in 2022, and successful projects will be announced by July 2023. Any bids for funding from island authorities, through Phase three of the Learning Estate Investment Programme, will be given careful consideration.

The £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP) prioritises schools in need of updating, as identified by local authorities, and will benefit tens of thousands of pupils across Scotland.

A total of 47 projects have been selected to be supported through Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the LEIP, which includes at least one priority project in all six of the island authorities.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with COSLA, local authorities and Scottish Futures Trust to explore how we can deliver further improvements in the school estate.

Commitment 12.7 Increase our collective efforts to improve the educational outcomes of children living in poverty by continuing to support island authorities/schools plans to raise attainment through Scottish Attainment Challenge programmes such as Pupil Equity Funding.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Education Scotland will continue to collaborate with island authorities to improve educational outcomes of children living in poverty. Five Attainment Advisors work with local authority central staff and individual schools to continue to improve the use of data, identify need and develop appropriate interventions to close the poverty related attainment gap. Joint cross-island professional learning is taking place to develop skills in data use and how to make best use of the Pupil Equity Funding.
- HM Inspectors will continue to share practice using social media campaigns, dedicated sections within Scotland Learns newsletters, webinars and inclusion within thematic reports and other publications. By means of an example, HMI have ensured islands were part of the evidence gathering of the following thematic reports:

[Local approaches to recovery: a thematic review](#)

[Evaluation of Foundation Apprenticeships - March 2022](#)

[Responsive, supportive and resilient communities - September 2022](#)

[Approaches to recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in schools](#)

Effective practice from islands was also shared in professional learning resources. The practitioner resources have self-evaluation and improvement frameworks and exemplars of effective practice:

[Sharing scrutiny evidence on Gaelic Medium Education - early learning and childcare total immersion](#)

[Sharing inspection evidence: leadership and primary Gaelic Medium and Learner Education](#)

[Sharing scrutiny evidence on Gaelic Medium Education - secondary curriculum](#)

Education Scotland – Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC)

Attainment Advisors linked with island local authorities have continued to provide support and challenge to schools and central staff. This is leading to improvement in outcomes in Primary 1, 4 and 7 in a number of areas and is contributing to the national improvement toward closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Attainment Advisors linked to Orkney, Shetland and CnES have collaborated with local authorities and Scottish Government to develop means to compare data across islands and monitor improvements in local authorities where there are no children and young people living in Scottish index of multiple deprivation (SIMD) quintiles 1 or 5. This will support better comparison and collaboration to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Education Scotland have been working with island authorities through the Northern Alliance. The focus has been on developing a shared standard across schools to support the improvement in learning, teaching and assessment, as measured through outcomes of inspection.

As part of the national drive to improve attendance, Attainment Advisors offered support and advice to island local authorities and involved them in the Attendance ‘Deep Dive’ which led to Education Scotland’s national report on attendance. All island local authorities continue to have access to support where required.

HM Inspectors

HM Inspectors successfully delivered the public commitment set out in the annual programme of scrutiny by August 2023. Gaelic Medium and Learner Education was inspected in early learning and childcare, primary and secondary schools across island communities. The sample of inspections included dual medium provision and Gaelic (Learners). At individual establishment level, HM Inspectors identified strengths and areas for improvement, including those bespoke to Gaelic.

The Inspectorate prioritise having an HM Inspector with sector expertise leading inspections for Gaelic Medium Education within the early learning and childcare and school sectors. This enables HMI inspectors to provide specialised first-hand evaluation of the quality of education, promote improvement in Gaelic Education, share highly effective practice and inform the development of educational policy and practice. In such inspections, HM Inspectors use Gaelic language and model high-quality and visible leadership of the language.

HM Inspectors build capacity and gather evidence of children and young people’s range and quality of experience in learning and immersion. In 2022, prior to resuming inspections, HM Inspectors carried out recovery visits to schools and education settings in islands to engage in professional dialogue with staff, learners and, if appropriate, parents and partners. HM Inspectors received a positive response from the Gaelic sector to self-nomination for these visits.

The Inspectorate aims to ensure that people who work on islands, and fulfil the criteria, continue to be represented in our recruitment of associate assessors.

Commitment 12.8 Consider the needs of adult learners in our island communities as we develop our adult learning strategy for Scotland.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- An Island Communities Impact Assessment was undertaken and published in May 2022. We will continue to engage with adult learners in our island communities to identify how we can remove barriers to learning as we deliver the Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland.

The Minister for Higher and Further Education and Minister for Veterans announced in December 2023 an Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD) provision across Scotland. The review will examine the extent to which CLD is delivering positive outcomes for some of Scotland's most vulnerable learners and marginalised groups. It will identify strengths in our current approach to CLD, including in island communities, and highlight where improvements may be necessary.

Implementation and Measurement of the National Islands Plan

Strategic objective 13 – Support effective implementation of the National Islands Plan

Commitment 13.1 Establish a robust process to ensure the timely publication of a detailed Implementation Route Map setting out clear actions with defined responsibilities for action and timescales to support the delivery of the National Islands Plan.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2021](#) for further details.

Commitment 13.2 Develop indicators applicable to each Strategic Objective in collaboration with Scottish Government agencies, local authorities, island communities and relevant island socio-economic actors based on the SMART criteria and building on the National Performance Framework and Sustainable Development Goals.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- Further research is being undertaken to gather the necessary data in order to set the baselines for our measurable outcomes.
- We will undertake a further iteration of the National Islands Plan Survey.

The Scottish Islands Data Dashboard Report and [interactive dashboard](#) were published in December 2023. This dashboard brings together Scotland's island-level data indicators, and the accompanying report draws out key findings relating to each of the strategic objective topic areas set out in the National Islands Plan.

In 2022-23, EKOS were commissioned and have delivered a list of existing data indicators which can be used to monitor each of the Strategic Objectives in the National Islands Plan. Where possible, the existing data sources identified in this framework, in conjunction with the new Scottish islands geography, were combined together in a new Scottish Islands Data Dashboard to provide a further mechanism to monitor the National Islands Plan. The dashboard is organised around each Strategic Objective, and shows the latest evidence from each of the most relevant indicators.

Indicators have been drawn from both secondary data analysis or existing sources as well as the primary data collection being carried out in the Scottish Islands Survey (2023).

The recent release of the [Scottish Islands Region Geography](#) has facilitated new islands evidence sources, including the National Records of Scotland [Scottish Island Regions population dashboard](#), household estimates [occupied and vacant dwellings data](#) publication and the [Sub-Scotland Economic Statistics database](#). Charts on households (including second homes and vacant properties) have now been added to the [NRS Island regions interactive dashboard](#). In addition, future regular house price data by Registers of Scotland will be published for Scottish Islands Regions, and can also be used as an indicator.

These have been used in this new dashboard which is a compilation of Scottish Islands evidence, in conjunction with other sources.

This new interactive Scottish Islands data dashboard uses existing data. It presents the data categorised by the 12 strategic objectives. Some data is not available at a Scottish Islands Region level, so has been inputted at a local authority level instead. It is clear on the dashboard where this is the case.

National Islands Plan Survey 2023

Work on the [Scottish Islands Survey 2023](#) is being conducted by the James Hutton Institute on behalf of the Scottish Government. In November 2023, the survey, which asks about experiences of everyday island life, was sent to 20,000 residents of Scottish islands. The survey closed in January 2024 receiving 4,414 responses. Analysis is currently underway and findings are being compared to the National Islands Plan 2020 to measure change in island communities. The final report is expected to be published this summer.

Commitment 13.3 Host a series of islands based focus group workshops, to discuss and agree the specific actions linked to each of the 13 Strategic Objectives in the Plan.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 13.4 Review the availability, usefulness of, and the wider barriers to, island level data both at an individual island level, groups of islands and consider the creation of a “Scottish Islands” data level in order to better understand the challenges faced by island communities.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

Commitment 13.5 Create a Young Islanders Network constituted by young people from all Scottish islands that will have a consultative role in the implementation of the National Islands Plan to ensure that the delivery of the Plan fully considers the interests and priorities of young people.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) and commitment 1.4 in this report for further details.

Commitment 13.6 Establish a National Islands Plan Governance Group to ensure close monitoring of the Implementation Route Map. This group will oversee the delivery of the National Islands Plan and feedback on progress to the Islands Strategic Group and other interested parties.

Commitment fulfilled – This commitment was fulfilled in 2021. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2021](#) for further details.

Commitment 13.7 Work with island communities to ensure that the Plan is widely promoted and understood by all sections of society.

Implementation Route Map 2023

- We will continue to consult and collaborate with our island communities on a regular basis.
- We will continue to support the Islands Strategic Group to allow us to work closely with our local authority partners on delivery.
- We will continue to support the National Islands Plan Delivery Group to ensure that work is driven forward in a collaborative way that truly involves island communities.

The implementation of the National Islands Plan continues to be supported by both the Islands Strategic Group and the National Islands Plan Delivery Group.

The Islands Strategic Group (ISG)

The ISG was established in 2016 to consider issues affecting the inhabited island communities of Scotland, and to ensure greater involvement of the relevant councils in helping identify and design solutions to the unique needs and challenges these communities face.

Membership of this group comprises of the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, Council Leaders and Chief Executives across all local authorities with islands. The group met twice during 2023 and covered a wide range of issues including housing, transport and health care services.

The National Islands Plan Delivery Group

To ensure that the National Islands Plan leads to meaningful, positive and sustainable change, there needs to be accountability and ongoing collaboration with local authority partners, stakeholders and island communities for the duration of the Plan.

The National Islands Plan Delivery Group (NIPDG) was established in June 2021. The group supports implementation of the Plan, ensures close monitoring of the delivery of the Plan and its accompanying Implementation Route Map. Delivering a fair, integrated, green and inclusive plan requires strong collaboration and partnership, and the Delivery Group provides this collaborative working space.

Over the course of 2023, the Group convened twice to discuss issues including – but not limited to – energy and just transition, community wealth building and the National Islands Plan review consultation.

The National Islands Plan Review

Please see commitment 10.2 for more information on the review.

The Scottish Islands Federation

We continue to fund the [Scottish Islands Federation \(SIF\)](#) to build on its work of bringing together people living on Scottish Islands, sharing and disseminating information and good practice and promoting the interests of Islanders.

SIF is a membership organisation representing over sixty members and is overseen by a board of twelve volunteer directors from across all six island local authority areas. SIF's work creates and develops links to island communities which support delivery of the National Islands Plan, providing a conduit between island communities and Scottish Government policy and decision-making.

Through various channels including learning exchange virtual events, working group discussions, social media, and direct emails, island communities are empowered to influence delivery of the National Islands Plan.

SIF's online events, including an annual members' evening, facilitate discussion across focused areas of the National Islands Plan including the [Carbon Neutral Islands project](#).

Scottish Government officials meet regularly with the SIF project officers to discuss how the National Islands Plan is being supported and implemented, and to hear real time feedback and suggestions from island communities.



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