

# National Islands Plan Annual Report 2022

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THE  
**ISLANDS**  
SCOTLAND ACT 2018  
ACHD  
**NAN EILEAN**  
ALBA 2018

Laid before the Scottish Parliament by  
the Scottish Ministers March 2023

SG/2023/74

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# Foreword from Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands



It gives me great pleasure to introduce the third National Islands Plan Annual Report. Every year the report gives me an opportunity to reflect on highlights, challenges, and opportunities over the past year, and to start thinking about future developments for islands policy in Scotland.

This year the global pandemic and its negative effects on human health and society have thankfully slowed down. However, other global pressures have stepped into our daily lives, like the war of aggression in Ukraine and the cost crisis. Furthermore, pressures stemming from Brexit have not gone away. It is in this complex and challenging global picture that the Scottish Government has collaborated with its partners to implement the National Islands Plan.

My officials in the Islands Team have been working closely with the Scottish Futures Trust and local authorities to deliver this year's £4.45 million share of the Islands Programme. This includes eleven infrastructure projects benefitting thirty-five islands from Papa Stour to Cumbrae. Between them, they contribute to all of the National Islands Plan strategic objectives, with a strong emphasis on sustainable economic development and community empowerment. The projects directly support population retention and growth, deliver new facilities and services to help to alleviate child poverty, provide innovative circular economy solutions and address climate change impacts. They are also supporting new facilities, iconic heritage projects, and key local services. Thirty-four infrastructure assets are being created or brought back into use, twenty-eight community facilities are being supported – with the anticipated creation of forty new jobs and thirty-six training places in addition to significant carbon reduction as a result of environmental improvements. I am delighted that our Islands Programme funding has helped to unlock and maximise leverage of partnership, investment and cross-policy funding. It works in synergy with other Scottish Government programmes investing in our islands, including funding from the Islands Growth Deal and the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund.

At the same time, the Islands Team has been working on several Programme for Government commitments whose objectives align closely with National Islands Plan strategic objectives. One of these is the Carbon Neutral Islands project on which I had the pleasure to lead a Parliamentary debate in January around the first steps to decarbonise the six islands included in the Project. The islands (Barra, Great Cumbrae, Hoy, Islay, Raasay and Yell), are being supported to implement a strategy focused on three key stages – Carbon Audits, Community Climate Change Action Plans, and Climate Change Investment Strategies. I am incredibly pleased to see how the Project is enabling communities to steer the direction of decarbonisation on their islands whilst helping us to meet at least three of the strategic objectives in the National Islands Plan. It is always better if islanders are in the driving seat when it comes to implementation and this Project reminds us of this very strongly.

Another important initiative supported by the Islands Team is the development of the rural and islands element of the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan. Building on extensive consultations with island communities, the team has now had the opportunity to bring island voices into the new Plan. This will help us to address population retention, one of the key priorities and strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan. My officials are also supporting the development of the Remote Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan and Scotland's Blue Economy approach, showing active collaboration across government, and enabling the interests of island communities to be brought front and centre of important policy developments.

As I mentioned earlier, we have all been impacted by key global challenges over this past year. One of these has been the cost crisis. I was pleased to see how quickly and proactively we were able to react to this for island communities. From putting together evidence of how the crisis was hitting island households particularly hard, to the development of a bespoke island response, we moved swiftly and established a £1.4 million Cost Crisis Emergency Fund, which is being delivered to those most in need across our islands by our local authority partners.

I wish to conclude this introduction with a few remarks on where we are going with the National Islands Plan and Scotland's international partners when it comes to island policy. The National Islands Plan was developed in 2019 in a world without COVID, pre-cost crisis, and where the impact of Brexit was not yet entirely clear. We now live in a completely new world! The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 requires us to review the National Islands Plan every five years and so we will therefore implement a review process during the course of 2023 to inform future publications of the National Islands Plan and ensure that our island policies are fit for purpose. My ministerial colleagues and I are looking forward to working with local authorities, relevant island partners and island communities to better understand what has worked to date in the implementation of the National Islands Plan, and importantly, what we can and should do better. As part of this review we also want to engage with our increasing number of international partners. Whilst Scotland is one of the few countries with bespoke island legislation, it is not the only one. We will all benefit if we can put ourselves in a position to learn from other countries and how they have supported their island communities and economies.

I would like to finish with a warm thanks to our partners for their hard work in implementing the National Islands Plan. I look forward to our continued collaboration.

# Introduction

The National Islands Plan provides a framework for action to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Plan sets out 13 Strategic Objectives and over one hundred commitments, to be delivered over the five-year lifetime of the Plan. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 requires that a report be presented to parliament each year setting out the progress made towards delivery. This Annual Report fulfils that requirement, outlining where progress has been made towards each specific commitment of the National Islands Plan, and detailing projects and resource spend where appropriate.

Additionally, the implementation of the National Islands Plan continues to be supported by both the Islands Strategic Group (ISG), the Senior Officers Group which supports the ISG and the National Islands Plan Delivery Group. The Islands Strategic Group allows for greater involvement of the relevant local authorities in helping design solutions to the challenges islanders face, whilst the Delivery Group ensures that work continues to be driven forward in a collaborative way that involves island communities.

# Summary of Strategic Objectives and Values

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



## 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



# Island Communities Impact Assessments

As stipulated by the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the Island Communities Impact Assessments (Publication and Review of Decisions) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 came into force on 23 December 2020, meaning that the duty to carry out an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) became a legal requirement for Scottish Government and relevant authorities when developing or reviewing policies, strategies or services.

Since the laying of Regulations and publication of the associated ICIA Guidance and Toolkit, we have considered feedback from across government, and from relevant authorities. We published an updated version of the [toolkit](#) in July 2022. We also published a [support leaflet](#) and an accompanying [educational video](#) on the process to further support those undertaking an ICIA. Gaelic versions of the [support leaflet](#) and accompanying [educational video](#) are also available.

Island Communities Impact Assessments which the Scottish Government have carried out to date can be found in the publications section of the Scottish Government website [Publications - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). Assessments completed by Relevant Authorities (as listed in the Islands Act), are published by them, usually on their websites, where they are also required to complete annual reporting setting out how they have complied with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 during the reporting period.

We will continue to support our colleagues across the Scottish Government as well as the relevant authorities in implementing the ICIA process on an ongoing basis.

# 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 on 24 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. Following a review of the format of the IRM, a [revised version](#) was then published in March 2022. The 2022 revision takes a more forward looking, action-focused approach and was developed in collaboration across Scottish Government, with those policy areas who have responsibility for delivering a commitment within the National Islands Plan, advising how they intend to deliver their commitments over the lifetime of the Plan.

For transparency and ease, we have included the agreed action that was published in the 2022 IRM, against each commitment in this Annual Report. 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 will be kept under regular review as work progresses on delivery of the commitments in National Islands Plan, thus ensuring proposed actions within it remain current and relevant. A reviewed version for 2023 will be published shortly.

# Population Levels

## **Strategic Objective 1 – To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile**

**We committed to identify islands where population decline is becoming a critical issue in order to ensure that these islands have their needs addressed.**

### **Implementation Route Map 2022 action**

- Retaining and attracting young people is one of the key objectives of the Islands Growth Deal. Both the Scottish and UK Governments will each invest up to £50 million in the Deal. The Islands Growth Deal will be delivered over 10 years from Full Deal being signed.
- We will work with island communities, local authorities and stakeholders to develop Island Profiles. This work will seek to develop easily accessible profiles providing demographic, economic, and locally identified and developed data for each island. A small number of test profiles will be developed and delivered in 2022. The learning from this work will help shape how the Island Profile concept may be scaled up and delivered across islands.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Scottish Government's Ministerial Population Taskforce, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs, and Culture, continues to deliver on the 36 actions of the [Population Strategy](#). Over the course of 2022, the Taskforce has been driving forward work on the Talent Attraction and Migration Service for Scotland due to be launched in Autumn 2023. Equally, Scottish Government continues to take a collaborative approach with regional and local partners to support population retention and attraction in communities. In 2022, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands announced at the Convention of the Highlands and Islands that the Scottish Government would be developing an action plan focused on the challenge of depopulation in Autumn 2023. This plan will set out actions as part of a long-term national approach to population decline, bringing together key portfolios across housing, transport, land, digital, skills and talent attraction.

There is no quick fix to population challenges and the Taskforce is clear that the long-term approach taken must look across systems of policy. Migration – particularly in the wake of the ending of Freedom of Movement – remains a vital component of the population challenge for Scotland. The Taskforce is clear that immigration reform is required to meet the long-term needs of rural and island communities. In September 2022, Scottish Government published a proposal for [Scottish Rural Community Immigration Pilot](#) to trial a place-based, community-driven approach to supporting repopulation and addressing skills shortages in rural and island areas. The proposed pilot was modelled on place-based immigration schemes in Canada and Australia and is proposed to run for 5 years. Since publication, the proposal has gained cross-party support in the Scottish Parliament, support from island local authorities, and from the

UK Government's own Migration Advisory Committee. Scottish Ministers will continue to call on the Home Secretary to implement this Pilot and ensure people with the right skills can be attracted to live and work in island areas.

## Islands Growth Deal

The Islands Growth Deal aims to drive sustainable, inclusive economic growth across Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, and help address the islands demographic challenges by investing in local people, projects and priorities to increase opportunities for all. It is jointly funded with investment of £50 million from both the Scottish and UK Governments and following the signing of the Full Deal agreement on 20 January 2023, has now entered its delivery phase. This is a significant milestone which will see funding for individual projects and programmes released once Full Business Cases have been approved.

The Deal will help leverage the islands assets and economic opportunities to transform their economies and change their demographic trajectory. It also aims to deliver up to 1,300 jobs by 2032, thus attracting people to the islands, supporting the islands to be among the first places in the UK to achieve net zero, and creating the foundation for an innovation-focused recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sixteen projects and programmes in the Deal will focus on: developing infrastructure to support the growing renewables cluster; innovation programmes to maximise the value of primary and emerging growth industries, such as space and food & drink; boosting the sustainable tourism and cultural offerings; and equipping the workforce with skills to meet current and future demand. Some of the projects and programmes which will have a key role to play in addressing demographic challenges include:

- Knab Redevelopment will provide much needed housing and student accommodation in Lerwick, making Shetland a more attractive destination to people wishing to relocate there while enabling families to stay.
- The Talented Islands programme and the Outer Hebrides and Shetland Campus Redevelopment projects will improve the islands' education and skills offer, and so encourage young people to remain and attract others to relocate and study there.
- The second phase of the Orkney Research and Innovation Campus (ORIC 2) will provide facilities for low carbon, marine engineering and associated technology businesses, providing increased economic opportunities for local people and potentially attracting those out with the islands to work and undertake research in these specialist fields.
- Spaceport 1 in the Outer Hebrides has priorities around recruiting, where possible, from the local community, while the Shell-Volution project in Shetland and the Outer Hebrides Food and Drink programme aim to expand the long-term capacity of existing key industries and thereby create jobs within local communities.
- The Islands Centre for Net Zero aims to drive decarbonisation in an island setting, creating sustainable well-paid jobs while delivering innovation that will help reduce fuel poverty and some of the additional costs associated with island living.

## Argyll and Bute Growth Deal

The Scottish Government has also committed to investing up to £25 million in the Argyll and Bute Growth Deal over 10 years. The Deal seeks to address demographic challenges through Argyll and Bute including its Islands and has three main themes:

- Connecting: improving physical and digital infrastructure to strengthen communities and supporting their high value and growth sectors to connect with national and international business markets;
- Attracting: providing additional skills, training and learning opportunities to attract and retain young talent and boosting the tourism offering; and
- Growing: doing more of what works; making more of their natural and built resources, supporting the innovation and growth of their key sectors.

Heads of Terms for the Deal were signed on 11 February 2021, and it is expected to reach Full Deal in the second half of 2023. The Deal includes the Low Carbon Economy Project which will complement the work being undertaken to support the development of a local energy plan for Islay as well as the Scottish Government Carbon Neutral Islands project and will lead to the implementation of local energy initiatives across the island. This will help address fuel poverty as well as demographic and other challenges Islay faces including a constrained Grid network, high fuel and transport costs, high energy usage from distilleries and low local energy generation.

In addition, the Rural Skills Accelerator programme will provide learning in all aspects of STEM through use of advanced digital technology. Physical STEM Hubs will be supported by a programme of enhanced mobile and digital outreach to enable delivery of STEM-focused lessons and workshops across Argyll and Bute including inhabited islands.

### **We committed to understanding the impact of Brexit on islands and island communities.**

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Scottish Government has reviewed research by a range of sources, including Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Business Gateway, and the Scottish Islands Federation, on the impact of Brexit on island communities.

Through their regular business panels Highlands and Islands Enterprise gathers information on the interests and concerns of businesses with research in June 2021 showing “more than two-fifths (44%) of businesses in the Highlands and Islands reported a negative impact from Brexit on their business”. Similarly, a panel in October 2021 found that many Brexit related concerns “were more acute for island businesses: they were more likely than average to say they were concerned about supply chain issues (64% vs 57% of those in mainland areas), transport (56% vs 40%), recruiting and retaining staff (47% vs 40%) and accessing export markets (19% vs 12%).”

In June 2021 Business Gateway surveyed businesses in Shetland. In this survey 29.57% identified Brexit as a major barrier to growing their business – with only Covid 19 (56.52%) being identified by more businesses. Almost as many businesses (28.7%) identified a shortage of skilled staff as a major barrier.

The Scottish Islands Federation, on behalf of the Scottish Government ran a survey in February 2022. This [unpublished] survey found that 70% of respondents considered Brexit to have had a negative impact upon their community and only 1% indicated the impact was purely positive. The main specific concerns expressed were on staff shortages, however falling visitor numbers, increased costs and challenges for shipping, rising prices of goods and the loss of EU funding were all highlighted.

**We committed to developing 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 2022 action

- Develop 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;
  - Setting out current engagement with key partnerships (Convention of the Highlands and Islands, Convention of the South of Scotland, COSLA);
  - Commissioning research and evidence building to mainstream population, depopulation, and repopulation across government policy in future.
- The 2021-22 Programme for Government contained a commitment to ‘develop a Rural Visa Pilot proposal, to support people to move to and work in our rural communities, submitting a proposal to the UK Government in 2022’. The main aim of this proposal is to facilitate migration to rural and remote areas impacted by depopulation, in a way which best meets the needs of the communities affected. A short life working group is being established, comprising a range of local, regional and national stakeholders, to collaboratively input into the development of pilot proposals, and the Scottish Government plans to submit these proposals to the UK Government and the Migration Advisory Committee during Summer 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### Addressing Depopulation Action Plan

A key route towards addressing population decline has been our work with the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI) exploring actions to tackle depopulation in the region. At the CoHI in March 2022, it was announced that Scottish Government would be progressing with our commitment to developing an Action Plan to address the challenge of depopulation, with a view to a draft publication in 2023. Work on this has been progressing throughout 2022 and we hope to publish the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan in late 2023.

Delivering on the National Islands Plan, we will develop a strategic plan aimed at providing the policy framework to enable population retention and repopulation across rural and island communities.

The Action Plan will have three key components:

- Mainstreaming Depopulation;
- Rural and Islands Depopulation; and
- Urban Depopulation.

The learning and suggestions gathered through the Islands Bond consultation undertaken in 2021/2022 will be utilised in shaping a range of Practical Policy Tests to inform the 'Addressing Depopulation Action Plan'.

These Practical Policy Tests are a series of projects that aim to facilitate change and enable progress on locally identified priorities in the short term. However, in relation to the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan, these projects will provide a practical evidence base to help shape the development of the action plan through providing models that other communities and stakeholders could adapt to their own unique population challenges.

Projects will include, but are not limited to, childcare delivery in rural and island areas, a key issue for our communities; exploring how to encourage a greater level of living succession in crofting; explore bespoke solutions to skills development and employment challenges in island communities and developing more efficient and collaborative models for delivering infrastructure in rural and island areas.

## **Rural Visa Pilot**

In September 2022, the Scottish Government published a proposal for a Rural Visa Pilot, following the UK Government's own Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) recommending in 2019 the piloting of a scheme to attract and retain migrants in rural areas. The Scottish Government has worked with local authorities, key business sector organisations, and our Expert Advisory Group on Population and Migration to design a practical and deliverable pilot proposal to facilitate migration to remote and rural communities. COSLA were also involved in the development of the pilot.

The Rural Visa Pilot proposal was endorsed by a clear majority in the Scottish Parliament during a parliamentary debate on Scotland's population on Tuesday 27 September 2022. This demonstrates a clear cross-party consensus for differentiated migration schemes which will target Scotland's distinct demographic needs, for the benefit of our communities.

Following the endorsement of the proposal the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands wrote to the Home Secretary requesting that the UK Government works with the Scottish Government and local partners to establish and deliver the proposed scheme, to address the urgent need for targeted migration solutions expressed by Scottish rural and island communities during the development of the proposal. While we have yet to receive a response to this letter, a range of ministerial engagement in support of the proposal has since been undertaken, including with Scottish and UK parliamentary committees. The [MAC's Annual Report](#), published in December 2022, described the proposal as "sensible and clear in both scale and deliverability" and noted it would be within the UK Government's interest to trial it.

## **We committed to work with young islanders to identify actions to encourage them to stay on or return to islands.**

### **Implementation Route Map 2022 action**

- The Young Islanders Network Project provides the opportunity for island residents aged 5-25 to highlight the issues facing them and develop a network that will help to address these. We will continue to work with the Young Islanders Network to identify actions that would encourage young people 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 or highlands) after completing study – this applies to any students from Scotland or the rest of the UK. Working with young islanders would help us develop our understanding of what would make them want to stay or return after study.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Through the Young Islanders Network (YIN), which is facilitated by our delivery partner Youth Scotland, children and young people on islands are being empowered to set their own agenda; based on how they want to address the local and national priorities that matter to them the most. This is being achieved in close collaboration with existing youth anchor organisations already operating in island communities and by facilitating engagement across our islands.

The YIN involves those aged 5–25 years, with particular ambitions to support minority and hard to reach children and young people, including the unemployed, care-experienced, those with mobility and access requirements or additional support needs and mainland-based student islanders that aspire to return to island living.

Engaging young people from primary school age, through secondary school and into young adulthood, Youth Scotland is supporting a growing, grassroots island youth representation to deliver meaningful outcomes for young people across island communities. In addition to reaching out to young people that aspire to return to the island that they are from, all of the activity associated with the delivery of the Young Islanders Network is designed to both identify and deliver actions that encourage children and young people to stay on or return to islands.

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. This will align with Scotland's identified key sector strengths and new market and cluster building opportunities and provide a joined-up "landing zone" for targeted employees and their families supported through our commitment to create a Migration Service for Scotland.

Brought together, the Talent Attraction programme and Migration Service for Scotland will improve Scotland's ability to attract and recruit workers from outside of Scotland with the skills that our economy will need in the future and support international workers in the migration and relocation process. An effective Talent Attraction and Migration Service takes the pressure away from the employer to provide relocation support, both initially and in the longer term, linking in with relevant experts and other services.



As part of the Talent Attraction Programme, we will work with colleges, universities and sector representatives, to explore whether more can be done to increase the number of international and Scottish graduates that stay in Scotland, particularly in rural and island communities, post-qualifying. Existing 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 and incentivise students to stay in Scotland after graduating. The project will aim to formalise links between students and employers (including public sector), particularly in sectors with skills shortages.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to ensuring that policies aim to retain and attract Gaelic speakers to live and work in Gaelic speaking island communities.**

#### Implementation Route Map 2022 action

- Completion of Island Communities Impact Assessments will support this process following the 2022 update to the ICIA Guidance and Toolkit.
- Quarterly meetings are established between the Gaelic and Scots Team, the Islands Team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to support this process.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Scottish Government continues to support Gaelic projects and initiatives located in areas with a high percentage of Gaelic speakers. Scottish Government also recognises that a number of sectors in island communities provide opportunities for Gaelic to be used and feature prominently, including tourism, arts, child-care, media and community trusts. Gaelic medium education is also demonstrating the potential for further growth at all levels in island communities. Local authorities and public bodies have a contribution to make and have a role to play in the employment of Gaelic speakers in island communities and in recognising how larger infrastructural factors such as housing, transport and employment can contribute to retaining and attracting Gaelic speakers to live and work in island communities. Gaelic also continues to feature prominently in the work of working groups such as Convention of the Highlands and Islands and the Faster Rate of Progress initiative.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed 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 2022 action**

- The Commission has expanded its Residency and Land Use team and, as a result of this, will be increasing its work in addressing absenteeism and bringing crofts back into active use.
- The Commission has also created Crofting Development roles, and has employed officers in the Western Isles who will engage with crofting communities and grazings committees to encourage active croft use and identify opportunities for new entrants.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Crofting Commission received an increase to its 2022/23 budget which enabled it to increase its staff resource. This has allowed the Commission to improve delivery of its regulatory functions, and to expand its residency and land use enforcement work, which has enabled it to increase its focus on addressing absenteeism and bringing crofts back into productive use, thus creating opportunities for new entrants.

The Commission has also expanded its Islands-based Crofting Development team, which is working with island crofting communities to encourage croft occupancy and active management of common grazings. The officers are exploring methods to encourage a culture of succession and turnover of crofts, including delivery of a croft availability network, which will also create opportunities for new entrants.

The Commission has reported that recently there have been over five hundred new entrants to crofting each year. From April 2020 to October 2022, there were over 1,000 new entrants, 42% of whom are island crofters. In total, over 40% of the new entrants were female, and over 25% were aged forty or under.

**We committed to continuing 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.

The Scottish Government approves and provides croft businesses with over £40 million each year through various support mechanisms, including the crofting specific Croft House Grant, Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme, and the Cattle improvement scheme. Crofters can also access Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme, the Basic Payment Scheme and Greening, Young Farmers Payment, Agri-Environment Climate Scheme, the Sheep Scheme, and the Beef Scheme which has an islands specific fund. Crofters who wish to engage in woodland creation and management activities can access the Forestry Grant Scheme, which has a specific premium option aimed at the Northern Isles, Western Isles and crofting counties where establishing trees can be more expensive. The Crofts Woodlands Project delivered in partnership with the Woodland Trust, the Point and Sandwick Trust provides direct forestry advice and support for crofters. Further support is available through the Small Woodlands Loan Scheme. Crofters can also access advice and guidance through the Farm Advisory Service.

Since the Croft House Grant scheme was launched in 2007, over £24 million has been awarded to over 1,098 crofters and their families in rural and island communities helping to build and improve their croft residence - approximately half of which has been awarded to island crofters. Since March 2021, we have awarded over £1.9 million in grant funding to help build and improve sixty-four homes, forty-seven of which were in the islands.

# Sustainable Economic Development

## **Strategic Objective 2 - To sustain and promote sustainable economic development**

**We committed to identifying 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 2022 action**

- 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 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.
- We will continue to work with teams delivering the projects of the recently published National Strategy for Economic Transformation in ways that maximise benefits for island communities.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### **Digital Economy and Data Driven Business**

Digital technologies continue to be vital for our economy and businesses regardless of sector or location. Through 2022 we have continued to offer our Digital Development Loan to businesses offering a zero-interest loan up to £100,000 to develop their digital capacity in skills. This is in addition to the [DigitalBoost Programme](#) offering digital support to SMEs including workshops, 1-2-1 advice and health checks.

Data produced through previous programmes have shown that some businesses need more than just financial support to successfully implement digital projects. Government is currently piloting its [Digital Productivity Labs](#) so that future programmes can be fully aligned to the specific support SMEs require.

Work is also ongoing with Scottish enterprise agencies, including Highlands and Islands Enterprise, to identify how the full range of stakeholders delivering services in this area can best work together to deliver a single joined-up national service for businesses. Outputs from this collaboration, along with findings from the Digital Productivity Lab pilot will determine next steps which will be taken forward as part of work on the Government's [National Strategy for Economic Transformation](#).

There are many community initiatives and projects in island areas that contribute to the local economy and have a focus on supporting the Gaelic language. A number also have a digital capability. These are varied and include initiatives such as Sabhal Mor Ostaig, Ceolas, Feisean nan Gàidheal. Projects operating in the heritage sector also make an important contribution to Gaelic and local economic growth. The work of Gaelic community development officers is also important here and a number of community trusts are taking steps to support Gaelic in their areas.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) lead on the Destination Development Programme in the Islands Growth Deal which consists of five third sector led tourism projects. These projects are rooted in the communities and aim to increase community cohesion through employment and year-round facilities and events, alongside expanding the tourism offer to support economic growth.

**We committed to exploring 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 2022 action

- All island Local Authorities are active members of, and their needs well represented at, CoHI. Local Authorities across the Highlands and Islands region are currently discussing whether a Regional Economic Partnership would provide additional value to existing partnerships. Scottish Government will continue to engage with and support them as required.
- Ongoing work with Highlands and Islands Enterprise 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.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (REP) has become more established during 2022, following its inaugural meeting in December 2021. This regionally led body brings together regional interests across Highland and Island areas, focuses and aligns resources, shares knowledge, and develops joined-up plans to drive the regional economy in the Highlands and Islands. It has a standing update at each meeting of the Convention of the Highlands and Islands (CoHI) and is closely aligned to CoHI's work. In 2022, key areas of focus for the REP have included efforts to promote Highland and Island contributions to national frameworks such as Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 and National Planning Framework 4, engagement with the Scottish Government's new National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) and in particular the workstream around productive regions, long-term planning for the future transformational developments around renewable energy, and building understanding of how wider factors such as population and transport constrain or enable economic growth.

**We committed to tailoring 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 2022 action

- The Scottish Government has committed to growing Community Wealth Building (CWB) in Scotland as a practical approach to delivering on our wellbeing economy aims. The Scottish Government has 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 recent NSET 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.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

#### Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building (CWB) continues to be implemented in a number of localities and sectors, in addition to the pilot areas supported by the Scottish Government, who have now embedded this economic development model. In the 2022-23 Programme for Government, we outlined our commitment to hold a consultation on CWB prior to the introduction of legislation, this builds on the learning gained via the pilots and other areas implementing CWB, and feedback received from a range of stakeholders and members of the CWB Bill Steering Group. In addition to the work on CWB, within NSET, we have committed to undertake and publish a review of how to best significantly increase the number of social enterprises, employee-owned businesses and cooperatives in Scotland, supporting regional regeneration and the wealth of local communities.

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) continues to offer bespoke and tailored support to island community organisations and social enterprises through the [Support for Communities Framework](#) and Delivery Resource Programme (employment of development officers), working closely with Scottish Government. Support ranges from developing new income generating assets to delivering new services that focus on Net Zero and environmental sustainability.

Additionally, HIE delivers economic and community development for the region through eight area-based teams which enables the response to meet local needs and opportunities using extensive local knowledge, partnerships, and a customer-focused approach. Intervention rates and eligibility criteria for programmes are often flexed to increase support to islands. New products are developed to target the needs of entities in the area based on feedback from business survey reports and business census reports. Products are shaped in discussion with the national Business Support Partnership and are made available through the SG platform: <https://findbusinesssupport.gov.scot/>

## Scottish Enterprise

Some Scottish Enterprise (SE) activities operate across all of Scotland, including island communities. These include [inward investment and overseas market development](#) via Scottish Development International, operating in collaboration with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). SE also offers major grants programmes, including [Regional Selective Assistance \(RSA\)](#) and [SMART: SCOTLAND](#) grants, as well as [growth investment funding](#) for the early stage investment market. Companies in island communities have also benefited from the [Scottish Manufacturing Advisory Service](#), [Co-operative Development Scotland](#) and [Scotland Europa](#)

**We committed to 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 2022 action

- Through the Islands Growth Deal, in which both the Scottish and UK Governments will each invest up to £50 million, we will be investing in local people, projects and priorities in partnership with the island authorities and UK Government to spread the benefits of inclusive economic growth across the Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, increasing opportunities for all.
- We will continue to work with stakeholders to support the development of a local energy plan for Islay, which is being developed for consideration as part of the Argyll and Bute Rural Growth Deal.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

## Islands Growth Deal

The Islands Growth Deal has three main themes: leading the way to a low carbon future; supporting growth and future industries; and building thriving sustainable communities. Sixteen projects are included in the Islands Growth Deal, and these include the Islands Centre for Net Zero, Dales Voe Deep Water Port and Outer Hebrides Energy Hub, which are particularly focused on decarbonisation, and TalEntEd Islands, which will enhance the education and skills offer around green jobs, in preparation for the transformational move to renewable energy. Understanding, quantifying and minimising carbon emissions is also built into the design and development of all Growth Deal projects, which also must consider their long-term sustainability from a community and financial perspective. Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) have been supporting partners in the calculation and quantification of their carbon emissions.

## Argyll and Bute Growth Deal

The Argyll Rural Growth Deal regions covers the mainland but also many island communities. Specific projects such as the Islay Low Carbon and Rural Housing projects are based solely on islands with others such as the Rural Skills Accelerator project and Marine Industry Training Centre having significant positive benefits for island communities. HIE are involved in supporting the latter two and ensuring island communities benefit from these investments.

## Stornoway Port Development

Following the signing of contracts for the construction of the Stornoway deep water terminal in March 2022, work commenced on the construction project and has proceeded throughout 2022 according to schedule and on budget. An Advisory Board of key partners sponsoring the project has been providing oversight to ensure that planning for the infrastructure required to respond to increased port activity (including cruise traffic) is in place and to secure the broader socio-economic benefits from the project, for example by maximising synergies with aspects of the Islands Growth Deal, such as the Outer Hebrides Energy Hub.

A Cruise Forum was formed during 2022 with partners (Stornoway Port Authority, HIE, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Visit Scotland, Outer Hebrides Tourism) coming together to create a Cruise Destination Development Strategy and Action Plan.

**We committed to 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 2022 action

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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

## Inshore Fisheries Management and Coastal Communities

We continue with the delivery of [Scotland’s Fisheries Management Strategy](#), and published a delivery plan to support implementation in September 2022. The twelve-point action plan within the Strategy includes commitments to deliver increased sustainability on a range of sea fisheries management issues, including delivering enhanced environmental protections where these are required. As part of the Strategy, we introduced the Scottish economic link licence condition to increase the volume of fish landed into Scotland by Scottish fishing vessels, which in turn will increase the benefit of fishing to local communities.

The Fisheries Management Strategy places a strong emphasis on co-management, working in partnership with stakeholders to deliver fisheries management actions. The Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups (RIFGs) continue to play a pivotal role in this, along with our refreshed Fisheries Management and Conservation Group which we have worked to improve and refocus during 2022.



## Seafood Trade

The Scottish seafood sector is extremely important to the Scottish island economy, with total exports of Scottish fish and seafood valued at £788 million in 2021.

[The Strategy for Seafood](#), published 6 October 2022, affirms the importance of the seafood sector and sets out how we are supporting industry to contribute to achieving our Blue Economy aspirations in these remote coastal and island locations.

Our marine environment contributes significantly to our commitment to being a Good Food Nation, with locally sourced seafood also forming part of a healthy sustainable diet which is the ambition of the Local Food Strategy across mainland and island communities.

The Strategy for Seafood takes an end-to-end look at the supply chain, recognising that Scotland's world-renowned seafood sector is a vital part of our economy, particularly supporting our coastal and island communities, and will also be an essential part of our green recovery. We are working on next steps to implement some of the recommendations contained within it, which will improve the socio-economic benefits from seafood, for island communities.

Through the Islands Deal, we are working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), who have provided significant support to the University of the Highlands and Islands Shetland led [Shellvolution](#) projects. This project aims to increase output and efficiencies in the mussels industry – thereby 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 Shellvolution project has been designed as a new and innovative technical programme enabling future growth in the low-carbon and sustainable mussel farming sector in Shetland, and more widely in Scotland. Through a phased programme of research and development, focusing on better ways to farm within the marine environment, small businesses in the sector will be able to share in an anticipated growth in output to 18,000 tonnes by 2037. Productivity, efficiency and resilience of existing farm sites will increase, while some new locations will be developed. Employment that is supported by the sector is anticipated to broadly double to support this. 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.

## **We committed to display leadership in the public sector by demonstrating that jobs and careers can be successful on islands.**

### **Implementation Route Map 2022 action**

- Workforce Dispersal aims to demonstrate that work can be carried out from most locations. Plans to form a Workforce Dispersal working group are being discussed, initially looking at the Scottish Government workforce and how jobs can be undertaken from across Scotland. This work has been supported through engagement with the CoHI Population Working Group, who presented a paper at the October 2021 CoHI meetings setting out policy considerations and suggested locally led population initiatives for discussion. Scottish Government will continue to engage and reflect on this emerging work.
- Ongoing development of a Talent Attraction and Retention Programme.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### **Sector Skills and Talent Attraction**

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. This will align with Scotland's identified key sector strengths and new market and cluster building opportunities and provide a joined-up "landing zone" for targeted employees and their families supported through our commitment to create a [Migration Service for Scotland](#).

Brought together, the Talent Attraction programme and Migration Service for Scotland will improve Scotland's ability to attract and recruit workers from outside of Scotland with the skills that our economy will need in the future and support international workers in the migration and relocation process. An effective Talent Attraction and Migration Service takes the pressure away from the employer to provide relocation support, both initially and in the longer term, linking in with relevant experts and other services.

The wider Talent Attraction programme aims to attract people from the rest of the UK (rUK). Migration from rUK accounts for almost 50% of inward migration to Scotland and has no legal barriers. As part of this priority NSET action, an Industry Advisory Group for rest of UK Talent Attraction, chaired by Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise Minister has been formed to share talent attraction expertise to identify and develop effective approaches to attracting talent from rUK.

Membership of the Industry Advisory Group reflects the priority growth sectors identified in the NSET, which will create jobs and bring overall benefits to Scotland's regions and wider economy, including life sciences, technology/fintech, advanced manufacturing, mechanical and electronics, financial services, space, and renewables. This Industry Advisory Group will explore how best to shape a talent attraction programme which can expand Scotland's talent pool at all levels, to give employers the skills pipeline needed to take advantage of opportunities and benefit our economy.

We continue to support the Skills Recognition Scotland process, supporting workers with skills and qualifications gained outside the UK to overcome unemployment and underemployment and support employers to recruit talent and help address skills shortages. We will also develop a Student Retention programme to support students to stay, live, and work in Scotland post-qualifying.

**We committed to promoting a thriving business environment that allows individuals to pursue a wide range of economic opportunities on islands.**

### Implementation Route Map 2022 action

- As is the case across 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. 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### Islands Growth Deal

The Islands Growth Deal sets out a number of collaborative and island specific proposals, designed to address the islands' demographic challenges, as well as supporting business innovation, and the move towards net zero. The sixteen projects within the Islands Growth Deal focus on developing infrastructure to support the growing renewables cluster, innovation programmes to maximise the value of primary and emerging growth industries, boosting the sustainable tourism and cultural offering, supported by a programme to equip the islands workforce with the skills to meet current and future demand. The projects span several areas including low carbon, housing, skills, sustainable tourism, creative industries, space, food and drink and business innovation.

The Argyll and Bute Growth Deal projects span sustainable tourism, business innovation, housing, skills, aquaculture, low carbon and regeneration. In the context of the climate emergency and the need to address the economic challenges facing island and rural communities in Argyll and Bute, the Deal will look to harness opportunities provided by the region's abundant marine renewable resources.

## Co-Innovate

[The Co-Innovate Programme](#) was supported by the European Union's [INTERREG VA Programme](#), managed by the [Special EU Programmes Body \(SEUPB\)](#) and delivered in the Highlands and Islands by HIE. The aim of the programme was to stimulate innovation in some of the region's most rural businesses, supporting them to make local connections whilst also embark on international collaboration to drive innovation. Of the nine cross border business and academia projects completed in 2022, three of those projects were awarded to small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Outer Hebrides which allowed them to create employment; develop new products, services and business models; as well receive expertise from an Irish academic partner. Many businesses accessed a business review with an innovation manager resulting in an action plan and signposting to further support. Programme activity completed December 2022.

## Highlands and Islands Enterprise Innovation Support

HIE continued to provide support to enterprises seeking innovation advice. Support ranged from protecting Intellectual Assets, to new product development and Research and Development advice and across sectors including aquaculture and textiles. HIE's innovation programme launched in November 2022 and is open to all enterprises across the Highlands and Islands.

## We committed to creating and promoting apprenticeships and job opportunities for young islanders.

### Implementation Route Map 2022 action

- HM Inspectors are producing a report for Scottish Government in 2022 to evaluate Foundation Apprenticeships. This will identify what is working well, highlight any barriers to implementation, and make recommendations regarding aspects for improvement. The review of Modern Apprenticeship provision was paused in 2020/21 in response to the pandemic and will recommence in 2022. On completion this process will build on the evidence base for how apprenticeships can support pathways to positive destinations in our island communities.
- 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.

## Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government provided a £40,000 investment through The Adhartas Trust, to help deliver a targeted host employer service in the Outer Hebrides, with a focus on remote communities suffering from pronounced population decline. The funding offer to the Adhartas Trust enhanced the existing local offer, for those aged 16 years upwards.

The project, which is supported by the local authority and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), is underpinned by existing infrastructure, experience and skills to help retain and retrain members of the local community or support and attract new talent to transition into communities in the Outer Hebrides. This has supported small businesses to employ apprentices, who were supported to upskill/reskill and provided with sectoral specific training. All opportunities are linked to identified economic needs, by equipping remote island communities with the innovation, skills and infrastructure to thrive, even under the most challenging of economic circumstances, and by providing a host employer service; all enabling communities suffering from population decline to be supported to remain sustainable. During 2022, the Adhartas Trust has supported apprentices across a range of academic opportunities, from SVQ level 2 through to Masters level courses. Additionally, the Trust has supported 8 apprentices into full-time employment, 2 into part-time employment and 12 have commenced skills and training development activity connected with what is hoped will become a positive employment destination in 2023.

This programme has been instrumental in the support offered to local organisations that would otherwise not have the mechanisms and/or capacity in place to support apprentices. Simultaneously, young people are provided with the opportunity to learn specialist skills and continue to live, earn and learn locally.

**We committed to ensuring that skills provision is agile and responsive to future demand and enables individuals to take up opportunities.**

#### Implementation Route Map 2022 action

- The 2019 Future Skills Action Plan (FSAP) sets out Scottish Government's ambition that people across Scotland should have access to high quality skills support throughout their working life. Since the Plan's launch, socio-economic conditions have changed greatly and while some of the trends and actions set out in FSAP have been delayed, others have been accelerated. Scottish Government have now progressed into a second phase of the plan, allowing us to take stock of labour market changes and emerging economic challenges, and to align closely with the National Strategy for Economic Transformation.
- The Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland (SAPRS) sets out our partnership approach to developing the skills and talent needed to make sure that Scotland's rural and islands economy and communities continue to flourish and grow. It is a joint initiative supported by Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Government, stakeholders and partners. An evaluation of the SAPRS is currently underway; it will be published in 2022. This will help inform what future action is needed to drive forward coordination and delivery of skills across Scottish rural and islands communities.
- We have set up a Commission to undertake a review of learning for Scotland's land-based and aquaculture sectors – from early years to adulthood – to provide opportunities and qualifications through school, college, university and work-based learning including apprenticeships, for more people, and specifically more women, to work with and on the land, particularly in green skills. The Commission will provide independent, evidence-based advice and recommendations to Scottish Ministers.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

[The Future Skills Action Plan](#) sets out our strategic, partnership approach to support the skills needs of rural and island Scotland, by addressing skills shortages, talent retention and attraction and demographic challenges through enhanced work-based learning pathways and increasing access to education and skills provision in rural and islands areas. The Plan was launched in 2019 as a two-year plan and an [evaluation](#) was published in November 2022. The Scottish Government will respond fully to the evaluation findings and recommendations in 2023.

[The Commission to review land-based learning](#) committed to submit their report and recommendations to Scottish Ministers in January 2023. Commission membership included island representatives who contributed a wide range of expertise and experience.

**We committed to building 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 2022 action

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, including the recommendation to update the National Marine Plan, and all feedback received from stakeholders on the Review. We anticipate making a formal announcement on the outcomes of the Review shortly.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### Inshore Fisheries Management and Coastal Communities

Our 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 in the Highlands and Islands, with significant benefits flowing to (for example) Shetland as a result. Quota secured at an international level helps to maintain and grow local businesses, providing employment opportunities both offshore and onshore.

Extensive research commissioned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) has recognised the contribution the blue economy makes in ensuring the future resilience of island communities, whilst simultaneously supporting economic growth and responding to climate change. As a priority, HIE will pursue significant regional opportunities in marine environmental services, offshore renewable energy and aquaculture.

## Kaly Group

Supported by Scottish Enterprise, Kaly Group Ltd completed a seed investment round led by the TRICAPITAL Syndicate LLP in 2022. Kaly will use the proceeds to develop a seaweed farm and associated operations on the Isle of Skye. The investment highlights the growing interest from private capital in seaweed farming as part of the Blue Economy. The project provides investors with an opportunity to participate in the growth of an industry that will create much needed jobs and economic growth in coastal and rural communities while delivering environmental and health benefits and a diverse array of lower-carbon products in areas like food, animal feed, fertiliser, and bio-based feedstock for plastic replacements, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and textiles.

**We committed to ensure that sustainable land use including agriculture and forestry continues to provide jobs and opportunities to island communities.**

### Implementation Route Map action

- As part of the green recovery, Scottish Forestry is doubling its recruitment of Assistant Woodland Officers, and Forestry and Land Scotland is doubling the number of opportunities for young people (including modern apprenticeships) creating an additional twenty-five jobs for young people. The Scottish Government will continue to encourage forestry companies to support new jobs on islands.
- The Crofting Commission received additional funding in 2020/21 which enabled it to appoint four permanent Crofting Commission staff in the Western Isles. The Commission intends to review this in the future, with a view to considering further Commission positions in other island crofting areas. The new officers will liaise with crofting communities to encourage croft occupancy, working with assessors, landlords and townships to encourage opportunities for new entrants, and encourage active croft use and management of common grazing land. The Commission has also expanded its Residency and Land Use team, in order to increase its work in addressing absenteeism and bringing crofts back into active use.
- The Scottish Government continues 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.
- SDS will shortly undertake a review of the Agriculture Modern Apprenticeship and seek industry input to develop and future proof the qualification.
- The Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB) was established in August 2021 to contribute to Scottish Government's work to implement policy reform, incorporating the relevant recommendations of the farmer led groups to cut emissions across agriculture, support the production of sustainable, high-quality food, and design a new support system and approach. The Board are helping to develop the National Test Programme, which will support and encourage farmers and crofters to learn about how their work impacts on climate and nature, including offering financial support to carry out carbon audits and nutrient management plans, establishing a clear baseline and options for action for all who participate.

- Our Vision for Agriculture was published on 2 March 2022 and outlines our aim to transform how we support farming and food production in Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. This commitment will sit at the heart of a robust and coherent framework to underpin Scotland's future agriculture support regime from 2025 onwards. A new Scottish Agriculture Bill will be brought forward in 2023 to replace the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and deliver on the vision.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Scottish Government continues to support the expansion of the forestry workforce to respond to the increase in woodland creation and sustainable timber production. The Scottish Government published its [Scotland's Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-2025](#). The plan contains a number of partnership actions that will support forestry jobs across Scotland and the islands including implementing the forestry sector's skills action plan and the development of a technical training hub. Work has commenced on the [Land Use and Agriculture Just Transition Plan](#) which will publish in draft alongside the Climate Change Plan in November 2023.

### **We committed to 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 action**

To support the long-term recovery of Scotland's tourism and hospitality industry, the Scottish Government established its Scottish Tourism Recovery Taskforce (STRT) in June 2020. Phase One of the Tourism Recovery Programme is well underway. Alongside implementing Phase One, officials have been working with Scottish Tourism Emergency Response Group to co-produce plans for a Phase Two of recovery (2022-23 and 2023-24) and we are now considering the best approaches to support Phase Two recovery work.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We have focused on the holistic recovery of the Tourism and Hospitality sector in 2021-22, including for island communities, through the implementation of 10 projects from the [Tourism Recovery Programme](#). We established the Tourism and Hospitality Industry Leadership Group in 2022. The group is a network of individuals from across the public, private and the third sector. The ILG will champion the national tourism strategy, [Scotland Outlook 2030](#), a key component of the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET). More specifically, 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. The Group has regular meetings and is co-chaired by the Scottish Tourism Alliance and Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise. Collaboration is at the heart of the ILG. It will work with industry, public agencies and Scottish Government to help drive recovery and sustainable growth in the long term. In addition, in 2023, VisitScotland in partnership with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Scottish



Government, the Gaelic tourism industry and other stakeholders will be revising the Gaelic tourism strategy which, among other things will focus on opportunities in island areas. Creative Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland will be working with Visit Scotland on this new strategy.

**We committed to ensuring that crofting continues to provide jobs and opportunities to island communities.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

- The Scottish Government continues 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 additional funding in July 2020 which enabled it to appoint four permanent Crofting Commission staff in the Western Isles. The Commission intends to review this in the future, and, if successful, can consider further positions in other island crofting areas.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Scottish Government continues to provide support to croft businesses, helping to support the rural economy. The Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS) and the Croft House Grant (CHG) play a key role in supporting rural and island businesses and communities. The CAGS is designed to aid and develop agricultural production on crofting businesses, thereby sustaining the economic basis of crofting, and the CHG provides support to improve and maintain the standards of crofter housing, with the aim of attracting and retaining people within our island communities, allowing them to achieve the full potential of their crofts while generating economic activity.

The Crofting Commission has received an increase to its budget, which has enabled it to increase its staff resource. Since 2020, the Commission has employed over twelve individuals from across the crofting counties, including on the islands, and remains committed to employing individuals from within the communities it serves.

In 2023 the Commission intends to expand its Assessor network, providing opportunities for individuals to become involved in supporting crofting for our rural and islands areas.

**We committed to delivering 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.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

Work on delivering the Islands Passport Initiative is led by Scottish Government's delivery partner, HITRANS, alongside wider stakeholder engagement. Scottish Government have continued funding of this project in 2021-22, bringing our total support for the project to £200,000. The project officially launched in 2022.

**COMMITMENT FULFILLED**

The Scottish Islands Passport was launched by the Minister for Business Trade Tourism and Enterprise on 11 April 2022. The [website](#) contains information on sixty-six island locations and HITRANS continues to work on supplementing the information through engagement with island communities and businesses. HITRANS continue to gather data on the Passport and its performance which is expected to improve as it grows in popularity year on year.

**We committed to 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 action

The three-year Food and Drink Sector Recovery Plan was launched in November 2020 and has so far received £10 million from Scottish Government to support the programme, with industry also committed to raising £3 million in private sector funding to support the programme through to 2023. The plan does not provide direct financial support to businesses but is wrap around holistic support identified by Industry themselves and contains fifty actions to support all sectors of Scotland's food and drink industry, including Island communities to recover from Covid-19 and mitigate the impact of Brexit. Moving forward we will be working with the industry in refreshing Ambition 2030 as the sector adapts to the changing operating landscape post pandemic and Brexit. This work will, as the Recovery Plan before it, underpin the sustainability of the sector and the jobs it creates, especially in remote, rural and island communities.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### Food and Drink Recovery Plan

The Scottish Government provided support of £15 million towards the [Food and Drink Recovery Plan](#) over 2020–23. The Plan contains fifty actions to support all sectors of Scotland's food and drink industry to recover from Covid and Brexit, including help for businesses on the Islands. With the Recovery Plan phase due to end in March 2023 we are working with the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership in a refreshed Food and Drink Strategy, which will set out aims and actions for the sector over the coming years.

### Isle of Eigg Brewery

Isle of Eigg Brewery is Scotland's first co-operative brewery, and they have ambitions to become carbon neutral. This is an innovative project demonstrating the commercial opportunities a community business can bring alongside community benefit. This example is a values led business that demonstrates the principles of inclusive growth and aligns with the Scottish Government's Community Wealth Building ambitions.

**We committed to seeking to expand the range of economic, social and environmental benefits that island communities derive from forestry.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

Scottish Forestry will continue to work with a range of partners to increase the use of forests and woodlands on the islands to help improve people's health, wellbeing and life changes.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Scottish Forestry continues to support sustainable woodland creation on the islands through the [Forestry Grant Scheme](#). In response to demand the Shetland Amenity Trust's tree nursery in Lerwick is expanding its production. This demand for trees has been generated by the success of local crofters integrating trees into their crofting businesses. Funding of around £400,000 from the [Strategic Timber Transport Scheme](#) has supported projects on the Isle of Arran on the Ross Road and at North Sannox that will help reduce the impact of timber transport on residents and visitors.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) continue to sustainably manage the Scottish Minister's National Forest and Lands on the islands 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. FLS continues to run the [Community Asset Transfer Scheme](#) providing opportunities for communities to buy or lease land in support of local objectives. This includes the transfer of six hectares of land to the Arran High School Mountain Bike Club to develop an all-weather skills trail facility at Dyemill Forest, Lamlash. Also in 2022, Raasay Community Renewables celebrated switching on their community hydro schemes, which are operating under 40-year leases agreed with FLS.

**We committed to review Scotland's National Planning Framework to ensure sufficient flexibility for island interests, including in how best to meet housing need.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

The draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was laid in the Scottish Parliament in November 2021 for scrutiny and is also available for public consultation until 31 March 2022. We are working towards laying a final version for the Scottish Parliament's approval in Summer 2022. The draft NPF4 proposes land use planning policies on key issues supporting island and coastal communities' lives, such as: engagement, local living, housing, spaces and places, rural and coastal policies, health and wellbeing and connectivity.

**COMMITMENT FULFILLED**

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) has been adopted and is now in force. It forms part of the development plan for day-to-day decision making in the planning system. It also informs the preparation of local development plans by planning authorities across Scotland, including the islands.

NPF4 sets out six spatial principles that apply across Scotland and form 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. NPF4 spatial strategy addresses the northwest coast and islands. It reflects the National Islands Plan priorities including growing the population and economy, improving transport and housing, and ensuring island communities are served by the facilities, jobs, education and services they need to flourish.

The strategy aims to build long-term resilience and self-reliance by minimising the need to travel whilst sustaining dispersed communities and rural patterns of development. The strategy is clear that the concept of local living, including 20-minute neighbourhoods, can be applied in a flexible way in island communities to find local solutions to local living, which may include service hubs with good public transport links. For homes, greater choice, flexibility and affordability are needed including to support varying housing needs.

Refurbishment of existing building stock is supported, and the additional costs of island-based development is recognised as an element to be factored into the planned approach. Local, place-based solutions and innovation is recognised as needed, including to provide homes for older people and younger people to stay in or return to their communities. The strategy supports encouraging economically active people to previously inhabited areas. Key sectors are also recognised, including the blue-green economy and renewables, oil and gas decommissioning, ports and harbours, spaceports, food and drink and tourism.

The thematic policy on rural development will apply country-wide and encourages economic activity, innovation and diversification whilst safeguarding and enhancing the distinctive character of rural areas, the service function of small towns, and the natural and cultural assets in the area. Policy on housing has been revised to separate out rural homes and seeks tailored approaches to rural housing provision by local development plans, including for small scale housing and resettlement of previously inhabited areas. It aims to meet identified local housing need, linked with service provision, while retaining distinctive character, sense of place, natural and cultural assets in the area.

**We committed to reflect the National Islands Plan and relevant regional perspectives in the review of the National Planning Framework and preparation of National Planning Framework 4.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

The draft NPF4 was laid in the Scottish Parliament in November 2021 for scrutiny and an online consultation ran until 31 March 2022. The aims and priorities of the National Islands Plan are reflected in the draft NPF4 in the spatial strategy and supporting policies including for: engagement, local living, housing, spaces and places, rural and coastal policies, health and wellbeing and connectivity. We are working towards laying a final version for the Scottish Parliament's approval in Summer 2022.

**COMMITMENT FULFILLED**

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) has been adopted and is now in force. It forms part of the development plan for day-to-day decision making in the planning system. It also informs the preparation of local development plans by planning authorities across Scotland, including the islands.

The aims and priorities of the National Islands Plan are reflected in the NPF4 with the spatial strategy and policies identifying a range of challenges and opportunities for islands, supporting a just transition to net zero and creating flourishing communities.

**During the preparation of the 2020 Infrastructure Investment Plan, we committed to considering the implications of the National Islands Plan on future infrastructure requirements.**

### **COMMITMENT FULFILLED**

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

**Recognising the services that island abattoirs provide to their communities, we committed to 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.

**We committed to ensure that legislation and policy relating to early learning and childcare is appropriately island proofed.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

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.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We work in close partnership with COSLA in the delivery of early learning and childcare and particularly, the [1140 Hours Programme](#). This partnership working with local government enables delivery of high-quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) services across Scotland, to help ensure that the needs of remote areas and islands 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. In 2022-23, over £1 billion is being invested in the delivery of the 1140 Hours Programme.

An upcoming legislation change in August 2023, means all children who defer starting Primary 1 can automatically access an additional year of funded ELC. To evaluate the impact this change may have on different communities, ten pilot local authorities introduced the policy early. Argyll & Bute and Shetland Islands Councils have been involved in the pilot to ensure we understand the impact on island communities.

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. Individual local authorities have been responsible for deciding how this funding is used, based on local, evidenced need. This is now 90% complete with 825 capital projects delivered (August 2022).

The childcare sector representative organisations, including Care and Learning Alliance, are also crucial the development consultation and implementation of Early Learning and Childcare. Stakeholders have provided valuable feedback and insight during the refresh of the [Funding Follows the Child and National Standard guidance](#), including through the Joint Delivery Board, Childcare Sector Working Group, ADES Early Years Network and ELC Quality Improvement Group. They have also played an integral part in informing our response to the impacts on the childcare sector brought about by the global COVID pandemic, in particular through of the Childcare Sector Working Group and, previously the ELC and Childcare Sector Recovery Group.

Impact assessments have been carried out throughout the programme to expand the provision of funded ELC to 1140 hours per year for all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds, including an islands impact assessment that can be found [online](#). An agreed principle of ELC funding is to acknowledge regional differences and seek to support local authorities to make decisions that support evidenced need within their own communities. Our [evaluation of the ELC expansion](#) will consider rurality in the analysis where possible with the data and sample sizes available. For example our recent [survey of parents' use of and views on ELC](#) (2022) drew out some differences for parents living in rural areas.

**We committed to 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 action

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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Sustainable economic development in island areas remains a key priority for Gaelic policy and programmes. Scottish Government supports a number of Gaelic projects which make an important contribution in island areas. In addition, a new focus was brought to this last year with the establishment of a ministerial short life working group to look at Gaelic and economic issues and how these could both support each other. This ministerial group will be presenting its recommendations to ministers in 2023. In addition to this, the Scottish Government will maintain its commitment to work towards increasing the number learning, speaking and using Gaelic in Scotland.

Scottish Enterprise has developed its first [Gaelic language plan](#). At the heart of the plan is an ambition to ensure all customers, stakeholders and colleagues have equal opportunities to maximise Scotland's economic potential via the use of Gaelic. Not only will this help ensure we are making the most of this unique asset, but it will help support our ambition to ensure everyone in Scotland can contribute to and benefit from economic growth. The plan importantly will require SE to be proactive and seek out opportunities (including with partners) for Gaelic speakers and Gaelic speaking communities to engage more significantly in economic development and share in the rewards of doing so.

**We committed to support women in agriculture on Scottish islands to succeed, including encouraging their participation in the leadership development programme, addressing unconscious bias by organisations and businesses and breaking down cultural barriers.**

#### Implementation Route Map action

We will deliver Islands-specific Women in Agriculture Development Programme courses during 2022 and will continue to promote online and in person training provision to women in Scottish islands.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

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 the Scottish islands. Funding in 2022 year has been used to deliver the Be Your Best Self (BYBS) personal development course. This online course is easily accessible, with five of the participants attending from the islands. In addition to the BYBS course The Women in Agriculture Development Programme delivered further practical training through the Practical Training Fund, administered by Lantra, including providing support for women from island communities. For those women we were able to offer additional support to cover travel and accommodation costs if they had to travel off the islands to attend the training course.

In 2023 we will be launching a new Business Skills programme, comprising two courses 'Knowing your Finances' (an entry level course) and 'Knowing your Business'. This 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. The programme will be delivered online and will therefore be available to all women living and working on the islands.

In 2022 we provided external funding of £40,000 and £8,000 respectively to support the Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs (SAYFC) and the Women in Agricultural Scotland membership group. SAYFC have just over 260 members on the islands and the funding provided will develop a training programme for Board of Trustees, which will encourage behaviours and cultural changes which will make SAYFC a more inclusive and diverse organisation. Funding to WiAS supported the group to provide networking events to allow women from across Scotland, including the islands, to make new connections and to increase the membership of, and engagement in, the WiAS Group.

During 2022, the Women in Agriculture (WIA) team continued to work with Scottish Government Islands Communities and Early Learning and Childcare colleagues to award £180,000 to the Mull and Iona Community Trust (MICT) to develop and deliver school-age childcare services on Mull, considering the flexibility that is required in island communities as well as utilising local partnerships and existing community resources.

The findings from the project and the recommendations made in the [Accessing School-Age Childcare in Scotland's Rural and Island Areas research report](#) will help support the development of new school age childcare policies and the WIA team will continue to work in partnership with Scottish Government colleagues to develop solutions that deliver for women in agriculture in relation to their childcare requirements, including the specific challenges of providing that provision on the islands.

**We committed to 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 action**

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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### **Labour Market Strategy**

High unmet demand for staff continues to drive shortages in Scotland's labour market. We are working with business, providing further upskilling, and retraining support in response to skills and labour shortages, and to promote Fair Work, which will benefit business and make organisations more attractive to workers. Through our [No One Left Behind](#) approach to employability, and our devolved employability service [Fair Start Scotland](#), our employability support system aims to deliver a system that is more tailored and responsive to the needs of the individual and the local labour market. However, many of the levers the Devolved Governments require to tackle these challenges remain reserved – restricting the action we can take to fully address these labour shortages issues. The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work has written to the UK Government in tandem with the Welsh and Northern Irish Governments, to request a joint Taskforce to tackle labour shortages.



### Regional Food and Drink Plans

Grants of £10,000-£15,000 have been made available to fund a co-ordinator in regional food groups across Scotland which were match-funded from within their local area. Regional Food Groups in Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides were all successful in securing funding for their respective groups and to help drive individual growth of businesses on the islands which, in turn is growing the value of the food and drink sector as a whole in a truly collaborative way, and for the first time offers some real linkage between Scotland Food and Drink, Regional Food Groups and Local Authorities on a partnership level.

### **We committed to 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 action

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. Through a process of education, and relationship building, delivery of the program is progressing steadily, and there are currently eighteen 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 increased 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.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We continue to support the delivery of the [Food for Life Programme](#) with a primary focus on school meals, and the Soil Association are targeting all Scottish local authorities to encourage them to apply for accreditation through the scheme. Through a process of education, and relationship building, delivery continues to progress against a backdrop of increased pressure on local authority catering budgets. There are now nineteen accredited councils, with several actively working to upgrade their level of certification.

# Transport

## Strategic Objective 3 – To improve transport services

**We committed to 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 action

We will do an Island Communities Impact Assessment for any relevant actions which we are considering including in future strategies and policies and will undertake further consultation with Highlands and Islands stakeholders on specific topics where required.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

On 5 December 2022 we published the final [Island Communities Impact Assessment report](#), setting out the findings of the impact assessments on island communities for the strategic policies within the National Transport Strategy's Delivery Plan (2020-2022).

The [final recommendations](#) of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) were published on 8 December 2022, alongside the STPR2's [Island Communities Impact Assessment report](#). Recommendations related to island communities include:

- **Recommendation 18:** Supporting integrated journeys at ferry terminals
- **Recommendation 22:** Framework for the delivery of mobility hubs
- **Recommendation 24:** Ferry vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation
- **Recommendation 28:** Zero emission vehicles and infrastructure transition
- **Recommendation 41:** Potential Sound of Harris, Sound of Barra fixed link and fixed link between Mull and Scottish mainland
- **Recommendation 42:** Investment in port infrastructure to support vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation

The [Project Neptune report](#), setting out the strategic framework of options for the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services network, was published on 8 September 2022. Community engagement across Scotland will be undertaken in early 2023.

The Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) will consider island transport connectivity more broadly having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connecting and onward travel. An advance copy of the draft of the first element of the ICP – the [Long-Term plan for vessels and ports on the Clyde and Hebrides and Northern Isles networks \(2023-2045\)](#) – was shared with key stakeholders and published on 30 December 2022. We intend to commence a formal public consultation in early 2023 and we will continue to work and engage on other elements of the ICP this year.

Our Fair Fares Review is considering both the availability of services and the range of discounts and concessionary schemes which are available on all modes, including bus, rail and ferry. The review is expected to conclude in early 2023.

Ferry fares will be reviewed as part of the ICP. We have also frozen fares on the Northern Isles and Clyde & Hebrides ferry networks at current levels from April until the end of September 2023 to help people and businesses from Scotland's remote rural and island communities.

Extending free bus travel to all children and young people under twenty-two is making public transport more affordable, helping to improve access to education, leisure, and work, while enabling them to travel sustainably early in their lives. This may also help to increase patronage on rural services, enhancing their viability in the longer term.

In April 2022, we published the [analysis of consultation responses on the Aviation Strategy](#) which ran from October 2021 to January 2022. Outcomes of the four stakeholder workshops are included within the analysis report.

**We committed to 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 action

Following the completion of consultation late 2021, Transport Scotland will continue working with partners on the implementation of the bus provisions in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. [The consultation analysis](#) was published 11 March 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Since the publication of the consultation analysis report in March 2022, we have introduced and implemented half of the bus powers (section 34 – local authority run services and section 39 – information for bus service reductions and cancellations) contained within the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

Work is now progressing on the development of secondary legislation for partnership and franchising powers, which will be introduced before the end of this year. We are working with our partners on the development and implementation of this measures to ensure that all local transport authorities have a range of tools available to them to improve bus service provision regardless of where they are in Scotland.

**We committed to 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 action

The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan (February 2021) reinforced the National Islands Plan commitment to a 'long term plan and investment programme' which will be taken forward in 2022 with the aim of publication by the end of the year.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Scottish Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIP) 2021/22 to 2025/26 committed to the production and maintenance of a long-term plan and investment programme for new ferries and development at ports. The long-term plan would help address and improve resilience, reliability, capacity, accessibility, increase standardisation, and reduce emissions across the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service (CHFS) and Northern Isles ferry service (NIFS) network, to meet the needs of island communities. This measure is supported by investment of at least £580 million during those five years.

During 2022, work has been undertaken on producing a draft of the Long-Term Plan for Vessels and Ports on the CHFS and NIFS networks through engagement with key stakeholders. An advance copy of this draft Plan was shared with key stakeholders and published on the Transport Scotland website on 30 December 2022. The intention is to consult on this draft Plan in early 2023 and complete it by the end of the year as an element of the Islands Connectivity Plan.

During 2022, Scottish Minister approved the funding to enable Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL) to award shipbuilding contracts for two new vessels for Islay and to commence the procurement of two additional vessels of the same design for deployment on the CHFS network; CMAL has now completed the awards of shipbuilding contracts for all four new vessels. 2022 also saw the deployment of the MV Loch Frisa to the Craignure-Oban route, enabling the enhancement of services to Skye and South Uist via vessel cascades.

**We committed to develop a new Ferries Plan 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 action

We will prepare the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) as the successor to the Ferries Plan 2013-22. We will develop 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 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) will replace the Ferries Plan and consider island transport connectivity more broadly having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connecting and onward travel. Work in 2022 has focused on the preparation of the Long-Term Plan for Vessels and Ports (see above), a key element of the ICP.

**As part of the next Ferries Plan, we committed to 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 action

The RET Evaluation report published in March 2021 will inform the upcoming fares review being conducted as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) that will be set in the context of NTS2 and NIP. This work is currently programmed for 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Fares policy work in 2022 has focused on addressing the high rate of inflation and cost of living crisis. As a result, on 15 January 2023 the Scottish Government announced that ferry fares would remain frozen until October 2023 to help people and businesses from Scotland's remote rural and island communities and in recognition of recent disruption, particularly on Clyde and Hebrides services.

Ferry fares policy will be reviewed as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan and Fair Fares Review, with further stakeholder consultation on future fares policy options taking place in 2023.

**Also, as part of the Ferries Plan, we committed to 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 action

This will be a strand of work undertaken as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan and the Strategic Transport Projects Review. This work is currently programmed for 2022.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

This element of the Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP), which will replace the Ferries Plan, will be commenced in 2023.

**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 action

The first of three phases of this project are expected to go live in October 2022. A second phase of functionality delivery will start immediately after, and a third phase which will include smart and integrated ticketing will follow.

Delivery of the Action is in three phases, with the first phase delivering around the start of March. Timing for the other phases is not yet clear.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The procurement phase for a new booking and ticketing system for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services was completed and a contract awarded in 2021. Since then, CalMac Ferries Limited have been working with the supplier on Implementation.

Known as "Ar Turas," this work being taken forward by CalMac Ferries will see a modern ticketing and booking system, (funded by Transport Scotland). The implementation of the new system is for Spring 2023 and will offer customers an improved booking and travel experience, maximising the use of car deck capacity and improving communications with customers.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to determine strategic transport investments from our island communities through STPR2 – which will also inform Transport Scotland's Ferries Plan 2.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

- STPR2 will inform transport investment in Scotland for the next 20 years. Due to Covid-19 we revised the STPR2 programme and are now taking forward a two-phase approach to the reporting of recommendations for future transport investment opportunities. Phase 1 recommendations and associated impact assessment progress reports were published in February 2021. Phase two will contain further recommendations and will complete STPR2. These will be reported in Autumn 2022.
- We launched a consultation on the second draft Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) [Summary Report](#), which sets out draft transport recommendations for the next 20 years, on 20 January 2022. Consultation responses will inform the final STPR2 Report, which will be the evidence base for future spending decisions on strategic transport investment by Scottish Ministers up to 2042 and will inform the development of future transport investment delivery plans.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The [final recommendations](#) of the second Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR2) were published on 8 December 2022, alongside the STPR2's [Island Communities Impact Assessment report](#). Recommendations related to island communities include:

- **Recommendation 18:** Supporting integrated journeys at ferry terminals
- **Recommendation 22:** Framework for the delivery of mobility hubs
- **Recommendation 24:** Ferry vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation
- **Recommendation 28:** Zero emission vehicles and infrastructure transition
- **Recommendation 41:** Potential Sound of Harris, Sound of Barra fixed link and fixed link between Mull and Scottish mainland
- **Recommendation 42:** Investment in port infrastructure to support vessel renewal and replacement, and progressive decarbonisation.

**We remained committed to working 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 action

- TS and Paths for All colleagues will work with Cycling UK to agree further grants for the Rural Connections Project through the Paths for All Open Fund Grant.
- Work with Sustrans to re-open the Places for Everyone on-line portal in 2022 to allow Island communities to make applications for walking, wheeling and cycling infrastructure.
- We will work with Sustrans to agree that they provide embedded officers for both Orkney and Dumfries and Galloway to support those local authorities with active travel strategies and projects.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Transport Scotland funds a range of infrastructure, behaviour change and access to bike schemes that all island authorities and community groups can bid into for delivery of active travel schemes that enable and encourage sustainable travel choices.

Sustrans Scotland receive over £50 million each year to deliver the Places for Everyone active travel infrastructure programme, where several projects are being delivered in the islands ranging from the £21 million Skye network to smaller schemes across the Western Isles, Orkney, Jura and Islay. The programme has again reopened for further applications following a short closure.

The Island authorities also received a direct Cycling Walking Safer Routes grant of over £450,000 in 2022-23 from Transport Scotland (along with a proportion of Argyll and Bute Council and The Highland Council funding) to deliver active travel schemes in the Islands; projects delivered this year include 20mph zones around 10 Orkney schools and a footway linking Habost and Lional in Lewis.

Orkney Islands Council and Highland Council also now benefit from additional funding from Sustrans for embedded officers who support the local teams to develop active travel strategies, plans and bids for funding of these.

Our free Bikes for Children Who Cannot Afford One pilot continues to run in Shetland. It is supported by a number of groups, has provided eight cycles to eligible children to date, and is funded to continue the programme until March 2023. A national scheme will be put in place thereafter and will ensure that all island communities are covered, and that all eligible children of school age receive a free bike.

We continue to deliver a variety of behavioural change programmes in the islands, including increasing the uptake of child and adult cycle training. The new Rural Connections project has reached thousands of residents of rural Scotland to enable them to walk, wheel and cycle more. Since 2021, Rural Connections has operated in seven locations across Scotland including two island communities where the project contributes to connectivity by providing individuals with the equipment and support to cycle for everyday journeys as well as fitness and adventure. Rural Connections has also provided more than twenty cycle fleet loans to local businesses and organisations, supporting the development of innovative and efficient services and economic opportunities in rural communities.

We also grant fund Cycling UK £656,000 to run the Rural Connections programme which supports people in Shetland, Orkney, Western Isles, Argyll and Bute and other rural mainland areas to cycle, walk and wheel for everyday journeys, leisure and adventure. The programme offers a wide range of cycling and walking activities for all abilities.

Transport Scotland also funds the Smarter Choices Smarter Places LA programme, managed by Paths for All, where almost £600k in grants was awarded for sustainable travel behaviour change projects across the Islands. A further £5 million Open Fund is open to all third sector organisations and community groups across Scotland for grants of between £5,000 and £100,000.

**We continued to 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 action**

The draft National Planning Framework 4 (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. We are working towards laying a final version of NPF4 for the Scottish Parliament's approval in 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was approved by the Scottish Parliament on 11 January 2023. Once adopted by Scottish Ministers it will form part of the development plan for day-to-day decision making in the planning system. It will also inform the preparation of local development plans by planning authorities across Scotland, including the islands.

NPF4 sets out six spatial principles that apply across Scotland and form 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.

NPF4 spatial strategy addresses the Northwest Coast and Islands. It reflects the National Islands Plan priorities including growing the population and economy, improving transport and housing, and ensuring island communities are served by the facilities, jobs, education and services they need to flourish.

The strategy aims to build long-term resilience and self-reliance by minimising the need to travel whilst sustaining dispersed communities and rural patterns of development. This recognises that in certain rural areas, where the top three tiers of the sustainable transport hierarchy have been judged as unfeasible, electric vehicles and shared transport options will play a key role. Digital connectivity can crucially influence travel demand and plays a role in sustaining businesses and communities through service provision.

NPF4 policies support development in locations accessible by sustainable modes of transport and place-based approaches that look to reduce car dependence. The



policies also support an early understanding of the infrastructure needs and impacts of a place. In addition, the policies and strategy support a flexible application of the 20-minute neighbourhood and local living approach in the Northwest Coast and Islands so that communities can access key local infrastructure and services more sustainably.

NPF4 also takes cognisance of National Transport Strategy 2, with both documents aiming to better 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. NPF4 embeds, for the first time, the NTS2 Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and Sustainable Investment Hierarchy into planning decision making and development planning. NPF4 was also developed alongside the newly published Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 which sets out forty-five recommendations which will help to deliver the vision, priorities and outcomes for transport set out in the National Transport Strategy 2. Many of the recommendations are applicable within the Island regions.

### **Local Development Plan Guidance**

Local development plan regulations and guidance are being prepared to enact the new style development plan system. 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.

**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 action**

We intend to undertake a full review of general fares policy (including freight fares) through the Islands Connectivity Plan, which will set out the long-term ferries strategy from 2023. This will allow for a holistic view of fares across all services and networks.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We have commissioned two new vessels for Islay and announced additional funding of £115 million to allow CMAL to procure two further major vessels for deployment on the “Little Minch” services – these new vessel deployments will bring significant increases in the freight carrying capacity of services to Islay and the Western Isles. The MV Arrow has been chartered to provide additional capacity.

We continue to progress investment in key ports and harbours including the completion of substantial upgrade works at Tarbert (Harris) that will enable a wider range of vessels to access the port.

In December 2022, the Minister for Transport also announced that freight fares on the Northern Isles would be frozen for the period Jan 2023 – March 2023. Furthermore, our ferry operators also continue to work very closely with the freight sector to manage demand and utilise capacity as effectively as possible.

# Housing

## Strategic Objective 4 – To improve housing

**We committed to ensure that Housing to 2040 truly reflects the distinct needs of island communities.**

### COMMITMENT FULFILLED

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

**We committed to 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 action

Short-term lets licensing scheme will deliver national consistency on safety standards, and autonomy for local authorities to add further conditions in response to local needs and concerns. We consider that the legislation is appropriate for the whole of Scotland, including island and rural communities, and offers considerable flexibility to local authorities on how it is implemented.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Licensing schemes opened in October 2022, and new hosts must now apply for, and obtain, a licence before accepting bookings or receiving guests. In recognition of the wider cost of living crisis that is placing pressure on existing short term let hosts and businesses, we have announced that we will introduce legislation in January 2023 to extend the deadline for existing hosts to apply for a licence from 1 April 2023 to 1 October 2023. This will give businesses more time to spread the cost of the licence fee, and any necessary work to secure compliance with mandatory conditions. Additional time will also assist those businesses who are facing difficulties in procuring contractors to carry out necessary work such as gas safety checks, and energy performance assessments to obtain an EPC (particularly in rural and island areas).

We committed to review levels of short term let activity in summer 2023. The extension to the transition period for existing hosts until October 2023 will mean this review will take place in early 2024. This will assess how the actions we are taking are working and whether any further measures are required. This review will also seek to confirm that the wider sector is still healthy and checking there are no unintended consequences.

**We committed to 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 2020. Please see the [National Island Plan 2021 Annual Report](#) for further details.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to make best use of all housing stock including derelict properties and options for compulsory purchase.**

#### Implementation Route Map action

Through Housing to 2040 we have committed to take a range of actions to help bring empty homes back into use.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Tackling empty homes remains a priority for Scottish Government. We continue to fund the work of the [Scottish Empty Homes Partnership](#) which has helped to bring more than 8,000 privately owned homes back into use since 2010. Research is currently underway to gather evidence on the scale of the problem, the effectiveness of current interventions and views to help shape future policy including any funding schemes.

**We committed to 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 action

- Through Housing to 2040 we have committed to take action so that rural and island communities have access to high-quality, affordable and market housing which has been planned alongside the economic and physical infrastructure and helps people to live, work and thrive – and we will help to stem rural depopulation.
- Since publication of Housing to 2040, the Scottish Government has made a commitment to develop a Remote, Rural & Islands Housing Action Plan to meet the housing needs of, and retain and attract people to, those communities.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

In February 2023, [National Planning Framework 4](#) was adopted and published by the Scottish Government. Specifically for rural areas, a new national planning policy on Rural Homes promotes development, ensuring the needs of people and communities are met in a sustainable way, in the right locations. The [Rural Homes policy](#) sets out the circumstances in which new homes in rural areas will be supported, and also that local development plans will be informed by population change, setting out tailored approaches to rural housing and recognising some differing needs in remote rural areas.

The [Programme for Government 2022-23](#) makes clear we are committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 of which at least 70% will be available for social rent and 10% will be in our remote, rural and island communities.

We aim to publish the Remote, Rural and Island Housing Action Plan in Spring 2023 and in December 2022, the Cabinet Secretary [wrote](#) to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee to provide an update on priority work strands.

**We committed to ensure that the impact on Gaelic-speaking communities is considered as housing policies are developed.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

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.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Scottish Government Gaelic team, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and others have regularly suggested that the impact of island housing policies and developments on communities with significant numbers of Gaelic speakers should be a key consideration. The Short Life Working Group on Gaelic and the Economy, set up by ministers will also consider housing as a key priority in areas where Gaelic is spoken.

# Fuel Poverty

## Strategic Objective 5 – To reduce levels of fuel poverty

**We committed to review how delivery schemes can work better locally and review funding for island communities.**

### Implementation Route Map action

The successor to the Warmer Homes Scotland scheme is currently undergoing procurement, to go live 2023. As part of scheme design, an eligibility working group has been formed which is reviewing ways in which eligibility levels and processes could be changed to better target support at fuel-poor households. This will take cognisance of the particular issues affecting households in remote and island communities.

The Scottish Government continues to support those in fuel poverty in our island communities through our Advice and Delivery Schemes. This has included work to ensure that our schemes are fit for purpose and effective at meeting the requirements of our island communities.

In December 2022, the [Home Energy Scotland \(HES\) Grant and Loan Scheme](#) was launched to support the installation of energy efficiency and zero emission heating, replacing the previous HES Loan and Cashback Scheme. The Grant and Loan Scheme offers eligible owner-occupiers across Scotland, including in the islands, a standalone grant that can be taken in tandem with an optional interest free loan. The new scheme offers applicants the opportunity to take a standalone grant without having to undergo credit checks, unlike the previous loan and cashback arrangements.

The new grant provides funding for heat pumps up to £7,500 and for energy efficiency improvements – up to 75% of the combined cost of the improvements and up to the maximum grant amount of £7,500. An additional £7,500 of funding is available as an optional interest free loan for both heat pump and energy efficiency improvements.

The HES Grant and Loan Scheme introduced a rural uplift of £1,500 to both the heat pump and energy efficiency grants. This uplift increases the heat pump grant flat rate and the maximum limit of the energy efficiency grant to £9,000, meaning rural and island households can claim up to £18,000 in grant funding compared to £15,000 in non-rural areas.

The rural uplift is a recognition of the higher costs faced by rural and island households associated with the installation of measures such as increased transportation costs and accommodation costs for installers. The rural uplift aims to support rural and island applicants with these additional costs.

Our [Area Based Schemes \(ABS\)](#) were launched in April 2013 to support local authorities to reduce fuel poverty by delivering energy efficiency programmes in fuel poor areas. Local schemes are designed and delivered by local authorities, in conjunction with utility companies and local delivery partners, to offer measures at no or reduced cost to owner occupiers and private landlords with fewer than four properties. The support is available for households in or at risk of fuel poverty, and funding is also provided for some 'infill properties' to enable works that can be completed.

Scottish Government funding for ABS reflects the higher levels of fuel poverty need in some communities. Allocations to councils are based upon a needs-based funding model agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). This year ABS funding allocated to the six island local authorities (as per the Islands Act) was just under £11.4 million. This compares with £12.2 million in 21-22; £10.9 million in 2020-21; £9.6 million in 2019/20; and in 2018/19, we awarded £9.5 million in grants to these authorities. Over the last three years we have provided funding to enable over 3,000 fuel poor households in island council areas to benefit from energy efficiency improvements.

Research for the Scottish Government found evidence for additional living costs for households in remote rural Scotland that typically add 15-30% to a household budget, compared to urban areas of the UK. Therefore, this year we have increased the value of our uplift for remote rural and island communities to reflect costs that are 22% greater on average. This is equivalent to an additional £2,000 – £3,000 per property in remote rural and island communities.

Our [Warmer Homes Scotland Scheme](#) is the Scottish Government's national fuel poverty scheme, designed to make homes warmer for those living in fuel poverty or at risk of fuel poverty through installing insulation and heating measures into individual properties. The scheme operates throughout Scotland, including the islands, and improvements are recommended as bespoke packages on a house-by-house basis.

Warmer Homes Scotland is targeted at those living in owner occupied properties who are in or at risk of fuel poverty, with a limited offer for those in private rented sector where measures installed are not covered by the landlords' obligations. Eligibility to the scheme is determined using proxies which indicate that a household is in or at risk of being in fuel poverty.

Through Warmer Homes Scotland we have made available renewable heat and new insulation measures, which may be particularly beneficial to rural and island communities not served by the gas grid. Grant levels in the scheme have been increased to accommodate deep energy efficiency retrofit and low-carbon heating systems, which are more likely to be of benefit in rural and island communities.

There are twenty-four contractors now registered with Warmworks, the Warmer Homes Scotland Managing Agent. Six are in island areas, providing a local service as part of a national delivery network.

The [Home Energy Scotland \(HES\) Advice Line](#) is a domestic advice service which acts as a single point of access for free, bespoke and impartial advice on energy efficiency, zero emission heating and fuel poverty support in Scotland, and acts a gateway to Scottish Government Heat and Energy Efficiency Delivery Schemes such as Scotland's flagship fuel poverty Scheme, Warmer Homes Scotland, outlined above.

The Home Energy Scotland network is set up to provide coverage on an equitable basis across Scotland in both rural and urban areas through five regional advice centres, with a six-centre offering an out of hours service. The five regional centres cover the following areas: The Highlands and Islands, North-East Scotland, Strathclyde and Central, South-East Scotland and South-West Scotland.

The cost of in-person advice provision does vary widely with geography. Overall, the cost of provision per head of population will be significantly higher in remoter areas and this pro rata cost per head of population is factored into the HES budget allocated to each area. To serve the Highland and Islands region and to fulfil the requirement that advice centres offer the same degree of service throughout Scotland, HES centre contractors have recruited outreach staff who fulfil multiple roles including providing home visits, promotional and engagement work and attendance at local events and activities.

HES have well established referral pathways with partners covering rural areas, enabling them to refer households through the secure Home Energy Scotland referral portal to Home Energy Scotland advisers for advice, support and onward referral/signposting to other specialist organisations.

**We committed to 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**

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

**We committed to 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.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

In the 2021/22 Programme for Government we committed to publishing the Fuel Poverty Strategy by the end of 2021. We are committed to continuing to take full account of the special circumstances faced by those living in island areas and will be undertaking a further Island Communities Impact Assessment, specifically on the Strategy.

#### **COMMITMENT FULFILLED**

We have maintained our commitment to produce a dedicated Island Communities Impact Assessment for the final [Fuel Poverty Strategy](#), which was published in December 2021 and builds upon the ICIA produced for the [Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\) \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#). A compressed timetable for our Strategy publication, combined with ongoing Covid-19 restrictions across 2021, limited our opportunities for consultation to online stakeholder events, which included Island based stakeholders.

As required by the 2019 Fuel Poverty Act, a new statutory Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel was established from January 2022. The panel is an advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB) which will oversee the implementation of the Fuel Poverty Strategy, providing an important means of external scrutiny of our progress towards meeting the statutory targets. As the 2019 Act requires the Scottish Government to formally consult with the panel on the strategy, we are presently working with them in relation to appropriate next steps, with a view to refresh our Fuel Poverty Strategy expected by Spring 2023. Officials will at the appropriate stage in advance, consider and review the necessary impact assessments, with any required action to ensure these are an up-to-date reflection of the current landscape.

**We committed to carrying 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 Islands Plan Annual Report 2021](#) for further details.



# Digital

## Strategic Objective 6 – To improve digital connectivity

**We committed to deliver a step change in the quality of digital connectivity across the islands.**

### Implementation Route Map action

- The Scottish Government is investing £384 million in the R100 North lot contract which covers the majority of Scotland’s inhabited islands.
- The Scottish Government will provide BT with an updated intervention area (the list of addresses eligible for public sector subsidy) upon which we have recently consulted.
- Sixteen new subsea cables will be delivered through the North lot contract providing gigabit-capable, future-proofed, resilient connectivity for those islands.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Over the summer of 2022, as part of the R100 North Contract, BT completed the building and testing of 16 new subsea cables connecting 15 Scottish Islands. These new cables will provide gigabit capable, future-proofed, resilient connectivity to island communities for decades to come. Some planned post-laying activity is continuing with work to establish terrestrial connections on the newly connected islands now underway.

In August 2022 we announced a £36 million expansion to the R100 contracts which will result in an additional 2,637 rural premises being connected to gigabit capable, Fibre To The Premises (FTTP). This will ensure delivery of the Gigabit Islands commitment as set out in the 2021/22 Programme for Government and will complete broadband build on several islands including Westray, Rousay, Hoy and Eday. This contract expansion will be funded jointly, with the Scottish Government providing £20 million and the UK Government’s Project Gigabit funding £16 million.

Over 12,000 premises located in islands communities are now expected to receive an FTTP connection through the R100 North Contract. As of the 1 December 2022 (the latest figures available) 3,650 premises had had an FTTP connection delivered through the R100 North Contract.

As of the 1 December 2022 (the latest figures available) 105 island premises have had a superfast connection delivered through the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) and a further 120 vouchers have been issued for installations that have been requested but are not yet complete. Vouchers can be used for a variety of technologies including satellite, 4G, 5G, Fixed Wireless and FTTP.

Delivery of the £28.75 million [Scottish 4G Infill Programme](#) continued at pace over 2022 with 30 masts activated for 4G by the end of December 2022, including 9 on island locations (Orkney mainland, Shetland mainland, Lewis and Harris, North Uist, Mull and Skye). Delivery of the programme will conclude in 2023, including on further island locations.

**We committed to 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 action

The R100 contracts, alongside our SBVS, will ensure that anyone who requires a superfast broadband connection can have one.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

As the R100 North Contract delivery progresses many more island premises, including in the mandated areas, will be connected to new full fibre networks, particularly now that work to lay sixteen new subsea fibre cables has been completed.

The R100 superfast broadband commitment was delivered by ensuring that everyone could access a superfast broadband connection, if they chose to, by the end of 2021 either through the R100 contracts, the R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme or commercial coverage.

**We committed to 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 action

We will continue to engage with UK Ministers to ensure Scotland receives its fair share of the project gigabit funding and early investment in Scotland's islands.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We continue to work closely with the UK Government to ensure Project Gigabit can be successfully deployed alongside R100 build and to make sure that Scotland receives its fair share of Project Gigabit funding.

**We committed to 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 action

- We will continue to work with island partners including local authorities, communities and business to gather evidence of, and demonstrate needs of islands in regard to mobile and broadband coverage.
- We will convene a meeting with Ofcom to present a report on island engagement on needs in order to inform telecoms regulation and policy design.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

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.

**Through the Scotland 5G Centre, we committed to building 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 action**

Working with the Scotland 5G Centre, we will 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Through the Scotland 5G Centre's Wave 1 Rural project, in partnership with the 5G New Thinking project, equipment was procured to build private 5G networks 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 were installed and providing connectivity to sixty-eight trialists across the three 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 carried out additional engineering for further innovative projects to follow in 2023.

**We committed to 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 action**

Scottish Government Islands Team 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 is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

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 - as of 31 December 2022, almost 19,500 properties now have access to improved broadband thanks to the R100 programme.

During 2022, 16 subsea cables – measuring 224 kilometres in length and weighing over 1,000 tonnes in total – were deployed to 15 Scottish islands as part of R100; providing future-proofed, resilient connections to those island communities for decades to come. Upon completion of build, over 12,000 island properties will have access to gigabit capable, fibre to the premises connections thanks to R100 subsea deployment.

Furthermore, through the [Scottish 4G Infill \(S4GI\) programme](#), we are investing in future-proofed infrastructure to improve rural and island 4G mobile coverage. Our investment of £28.75 million is delivering future-proofed, 4G mobile infrastructure to fifty-five mobile “notspots” – providing connectivity in rural and island areas. Thirty-two masts are now live and delivering 4G services – and work continued in 2022 on our pipeline of further build activity and site activations through to the project’s completion in spring 2023. 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.

### **We committed to develop a digital skills programme designed by island communities to meet their needs.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

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

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

In 2022, Scottish Government supported the delivery of a project aimed at developing a system that engages the next generation of digital talent and supports the growth of Scotland’s rural digital economy. The [Silicon Croft](#) 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. The project is currently delivered in Shetland. However, it is intended that this model could be tested in other locations. Initial consideration is being given to Skye, Orkney and the Western Isles.

### **We committed to extend the availability of coding clubs and community-based digital inclusion programmes across the islands.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

Learn from existing programmes being delivered in the island communities and support their implementation across the islands.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Through the approach of “educating the educators” of the aforementioned [Silicon Croft](#) project, it is hoped that community-based digital inclusion can be improved through building the local skills base that will empower and facilitate communities to develop their own approaches to digital inclusion.

# Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

## **Strategic Objective 7 – To improve and promote health, social care and wellbeing**

**We committed to 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 action**

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.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

All the islands are attached to Integration Authorities which serve the specific needs of those island communities. Integration Joint Boards continue to work closely with Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCP) to ensure each island is recognised within their unique circumstances.

The Primary Care Division of Scottish Government continues to engage regularly with Health Boards and HSCPs regarding the implementation of the 2018 GP Contract and wider issues. The Scottish Government has also allocated £600,000 to support Rural Relocation expenses, and fund Golden Hellos as set out in the Statement of Financial Entitlement. These initiatives will help address workforce challenges across remote, rural and island general practice.

'Rediscover the Joy of General Practice' is a collaborative project which provides the opportunity for GPs to work in different areas of Scotland and is co-ordinated from the central hub based in NHS Shetland. For 2022/23, the Scottish Government is allocating £198,000 to NHS Shetland which will allow for 249 weeks of GP cover for supporting practises.

The GP Contract is a substantial reform programme that requires some services to be delivered differently. In some cases, these will be moved out of general practice into community settings and the primary care workforce will adopt expanded and enhanced roles. The three Island Health Boards are supported in the change management process through the GP Change Management fund, which provided £117,252 in 2022/23.

Recognising the different skills requirement in island and rural Primary Care, £24,000 of funding was provided in 2022/23 to a Perthshire based charity BASICS which provides training in prehospital emergency care for health professionals practising in rural and island areas. The Scottish Government has also [reported](#) following a deep dive on dispensing practises and future projects.

The second year of the National Drugs Mission was focused on implementation and delivery with the [National Drugs Mission Plan: 2022-2026](#) setting out the framework for delivery for the remainder of the mission and the outcomes we want to achieve, followed by the [National Mission on Drugs: annual report 2021 to 2022](#). 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 Alcohol and Drug Partnerships. Island Boards have received approximately £1.7 million of this investment<sup>1</sup>, including implementation of the Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards<sup>2</sup>, Residential Rehabilitation<sup>3</sup> and Lived and Living Experience panels.

The Corra Foundation administer funds on behalf of the Scottish Government to support the National Drugs Mission. Local organisations can also apply to the Local Support Fund, Local Support Fund Micro Grants, Improvement Fund, or Children and Families Fund. Three projects in the Islands received funding totalling £175,000 in 2022/23.

**We committed to identify and promote good practice, especially as regards the improvement of services in islands and other remote areas.**

#### Implementation Route Map action

We will continue to implement the recommendations from the 'Shaping the Future Together: Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group' report.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Island-based Integration Authorities and Integration Joint Boards continue to work closely with island communities to ensure each islands unique circumstances and specific needs are being met. Islands Integration Authorities are represented on the Strategic Planning and Performance Officers Group (SPPOG), the Chief Officers' Network for sharing good practice. There are also regular updates with Scottish Government, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care. Work is now underway to review progress against the recommendations from the ['Shaping the Future Together: Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group'](#) report and establish the remaining priorities.

NHS Education for Scotland (NES) host the Remote and Rural Healthcare Educational Alliance (RRHEAL) which coordinates healthcare education, development and training for all the remote, rural and island areas of Scotland.

1 Funding is provided each financial year (April to March). This funding is an approximation of total funding for the calendar year (January to December).

2 [Supplementary information for the national benchmarking report on implementation of the Medication Assisted Treatment \(MAT\) standards - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

3 [Interim monitoring report on statutory funded residential rehabilitation placements - Publications - Public Health Scotland](#)

For 2022/23 The Scottish Government is allocating £176,000 to NHS Highland to support the Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative which is funded to develop ways to improve the recruitment and retention of people working in Primary Care.

To ensure access to breaks from caring in practice, including overcoming unique barriers in island communities, the Scottish Government provides a Short Breaks Fund. The fund was £3 million per year up to 2021-22 and has been increased by £5 million in 2022-23 to expand easy-access short breaks support. Under this fund, the Time To Live and Take a Break Scotland grants, and the Creative Break and Better Break projects are delivered. In addition to the Short Break Fund, the Promoting Variety in Short Breaks project, run by Shared Care Scotland and Health Improvement Scotland, helps local authorities and integration authorities meet their responsibility to promote availability of different short break support services in their areas. These grants and projects take into consideration the additional costs of providing breaks to carers in rural and island communities and are designed to ensure the flexibility and creativity necessary are in place to ensure access to breaks from caring.

**We committed to 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 action**

- NHS Near Me has been implemented and is being utilised across every Health Board in Scotland with upwards of £1.3 million appointments undertaken using the platform since early 2020. This continues to provide greater flexibility, whilst supporting remote working, reducing the need to travel and promoting greater access to specialist services. We also continue to support people to manage their condition from home with new digital platforms established for things like blood pressure and Covid-19 monitoring being rolled out across the country. This project is a first step in understanding how we create our own services which can be tailored to meet the needs of the Scottish population.
- Procurement of a 'once for Scotland' digital solution for the education and management of type 2 diabetes is being considered.
- Scottish Government Digital Transformation Service (DTS) will undertake a research and service design project into type 2 diabetes and weight management services which will identify patient needs, the gaps in current services and how these can be addressed.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**



The use of digital continues to be a key priority to support better choice and access to health and care services. The Near Me video consultation service has now supported more than 1.8 million people through appointments since early 2020 across Scotland, avoiding over sixty million miles of unnecessary travel with important benefit for those on Islands and rural areas. Remote monitoring of conditions is also being prioritised with over 40,000 people now having monitored their blood pressure from home through our Connect Me service with further developments for other conditions underway. Digital for Mental Health has seen significant growth with a range of self-help guides, self-referral therapy and self-management options now available to the public. Scotland's Digital Health and Care Strategy (2021) and supporting [delivery plan](#) set out the approach to continue to support people with digital services options to complement existing service delivery.

**We committed to work with stakeholders to develop propositions for a national centre for excellence in remote, rural and island health and social care.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

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. We will continue to scope and engage with stakeholders.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Centre is anticipated to be established in 2023 and will measurably improve the sustainability, capacity and capability of the remote, rural and island Primary Care and community-based workforce and the vital services they deliver to support people living in Scotland.

**We committed to 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 action**

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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

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.

**We committed to support relevant local authorities to plan and develop sports facilities on the islands that respond to the needs of communities.**

### Implementation Route Map action

- **sport**scotland 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.
- **sport**scotland and the 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.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We continue to work with colleagues in **sport**scotland who engage strategically with local authorities (through their capital planning processes) and island communities with regards to opportunities to deliver improved local facility provision for sport and physical activity.

In August 2022, **sport**scotland made an award of £190,470 to Arran High School Mountain Bike Club via its Cycling Facilities Fund. The investment will be used to develop a community cycling hub comprising bike trails, a pump track and a hub building. The new hub will be open to the community for free use throughout the year and will be suitable for all levels of participants with dedicated coaching available. The Club will also set up its own bike station and maintenance facilities to provide further education opportunities for young leaders to gain knowledge in maintenance and coaching. Already recognised by Scottish Cycling as a notable example of a school cycling club, the new development at Arran High School has the potential to have a huge impact on cycling participation in the local area.

In November 2022, **sport**scotland made an award of £61,124 to Tong Recreation Association via its Sport Facilities Fund. The investment will be used to construct a new and modern skatepark on the Isle of Lewis. Within travel distance from Stornoway, the nearest large town on the island, the skatepark will provide an alternative sport opportunity for those who do not see themselves participating in traditional sports such as football, rugby and athletics on offer across the island. It is hoped that that this new facility will encourage more active lifestyles, improve mental well-being and create a connection across generations in the community. There is a commitment to provide targeted opportunities for woman and girls (an area of high growth in the sport) to take part through organised events and sessions. This new facility and targeted opportunities will hopefully help support a reduction in rural inequalities.

**sport**scotland is also currently engaged in conversations with Argyll & Bute Council on further facility development, as part of the Sports Facilities Fund, which will potentially see applications for investment into Island communities. These conversations have already resulted in **sport**scotland awarding £17,600 to the Isle of Seil Golf Club in August 2022 to purchase the golf course. The award will preserve the main sporting facility on the island as it was under threat from sale by the landlord. The preservation of the golf course will also allow existing water sports to develop a base on the island and utilise the land owned by the club for a launching point.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to 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 action**

- **sport**scotland 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.
- **sport**scotland 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.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

**sport**scotland partnered with the Orkney Island Games Organising Committee and Orkney Islands Council to deliver a Planning Weekend at Glenmore Lodge, in September 2022, with ten (of the thirteen) Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs) that will be involved in the Orkney 2025 Games. The weekend was also supported by Serco North link Ferries and Stagecoach, who provided transport to Orkney based delegates to Aviemore. A key aim of the event was to connect SGBs with their respective clubs responsible for organising their sports' events within the Games.

The weekend agenda focused on the construction and development of detailed plans to ensure Orkney have the key elements in place to deliver the Games. This included the right facility infrastructure, well trained people and volunteers and coaches and athletes, who will not only contribute to a successful Games but will also inspire and provide a sustainable infrastructure for the people of Orkney to thrive and lead active lives in the future. The weekend successfully concluded with clubs having created stronger relationships with their respective SGBs, detailed plans in place, as well as support networks established and strengthened.

**sport**scotland also supported the development of the Physical Activity and Wellbeing Strategy for Orkney, which is aligned to local and community priorities. The strong process of stakeholder engagement has been chaired by an elected member with input from key partners including Orkney Islands Council, NHS Orkney Pickaquooy Trust, Inclusive Orkney, and other third sector organisations. The Strategy launch was delayed due to staffing challenges and the Council election; however, it is due to launch in the early part of 2023 through the Community Planning Partnership.

**We committed to 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 action**

- As highlighted in A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22, we aim to ensure that all eligible children who are victims or witnesses to abuse or violence will have access to a 'Bairns' Hoose' by 2025. That means the services they need will all be available via a coordinated approach designed to reduce the number of times children have to recount their experiences to different professionals. Children below the age of criminal responsibility, whose behaviour has caused harm, will also have access to the services it will provide. 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 in one setting. A new National Bairns' Hoose Governance group is currently being established and will consider issues around implementation in rural and island settings.
- 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. The National JII Governance Group has established the Remote and Islands Joint Investigative Interviewing Implementation Subgroup in recognition that a particular focus on the implementation challenges in remote and island contexts will help realise our shared ambition that all children in Scotland have access to the Scottish Child Interview Model for joint investigative interviewing where this would best meet their needs.
- We will remain committed to investing in interventions which provide evidence of being able to change the attitudes of offenders. We will expand the availability of the Caledonian System. This is an internationally recognised behavioural change programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse which involves working with the whole family to reduce the risk of harm to women and children. We will progress work over the next two years to support the national rollout of the system, with the aim of making it available to all 32 Scottish local authorities by the end of the parliamentary term.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We remain committed to investing in interventions which provide evidence of being able to change the attitudes of offenders. The Scottish Government and Community Justice Scotland are currently exploring practical options to safely and sustainably deliver the Caledonian System to the Islands. However, consideration must be given to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of the Caledonian System, our ability to assess and evaluate during this period, and what lessons might be learned to further enhance the overall programme and ensure those areas already delivering the project are supported.

## Bairns' Hoose

We have committed to improving the experience of Scotland's child protection, criminal justice and healthcare systems for children who have experienced trauma by ensuring that every child referred will have access to the services of a [Bairns' Hoose](#).

Over the last year, Scottish Government officials, in conjunction with the Chair of the National Bairns' Hoose Governance Group, have carried out extensive engagement with key partners from across children's services, health, justice, and the third sector. This includes Chief Officers' Public Protection Groups (COGs), who will play a key role in the delivery of Bairns' Hoose. We are developing a phased approach to the implementation of Bairns' Hoose across Scotland, with a Pathfinder phase beginning in spring of this year (2023). During this phase, national standards will be tested in multi-agency pathfinder sites. We will publish further information on our plans for delivery in the coming months, along with a progress report on our Bairns' Hoose Project Plan.

While work on Bairns' Hoose progresses, we continue to make improvements to children's experiences in the justice system through the Scottish Child Interview Model for Joint Investigative Interviews, which is currently progressing with a three-year national rollout to the end of 2024. The Scottish Child Interview Model will be a cornerstone to the Bairns' Hoose approach to justice in Scotland. Ministers have agreed that overarching principles are essential, with flexibility for local delivery partners to adapt the model for their local context. This should be flexible enough to allow local authorities to tailor Barnahus to suit local circumstances. Close collaboration across agencies and between local partnerships is a prerequisite for development, implementation and evaluation of the approach. A working group has been established under the national governance group for joint investigative interviews to look at this issue for implementation of the Scottish Child Interview Model, applying the principles detailed in the Scottish Government published Island Communities Impact Assessments. We will take learning from their findings to apply in our development of a national Bairns' Hoose model.

Our [Delivering Equally Safe fund](#) is providing £19 million per year to 121 organisations to help implement Equally Safe, Scotland's strategy to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls. A priority area of the fund is working with those in remote or island communities. We are funding ten organisations and partner agencies who provide services to Scotland's Island communities just under £3 million through the Delivering Equally Safe Fund. 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.

**We committed to 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 action**

- Scottish Women's Aid published the findings from their Participating-in-Equally-Safe-in-the-Highlands-and-Islands consultation. We will be working with partners on how to implement the recommendations following 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 September 2023.
- Additionally, the Scottish Government has 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, which will commence in 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Review of the Funding and Commissioning of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Services was announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government during the Scottish Parliament debate held on 25 November to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls. It will be chaired by Lesley Irving and will report by March 2023. The principal aim of the review is to develop a more consistent, coherent, collective and stable funding model that will ensure high quality, accessible specialist services across Scotland for women, children and young people experiencing any form of [VAWG](#). Services for children and young people in their own right as victims will be included. The review will also include those services which recognise the vital role of prevention in increasing safety for women, children and young people.

Scottish Government's [First Data Strategy for Health and Social Care](#) was published on 22 February 2023. It sets out how we will work together in transforming the way that people access their own data to improve health and wellbeing; and how care is delivered through improvements to our systems.

**We committed to 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 action**

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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

In 2020-22, we awarded the Mull and Iona Community Trust (MICT) £180,000 to develop and deliver school-age childcare services on Mull considering the flexibility that is required in island communities as well as utilising local partnerships and existing community resources. While many families benefitted from access to affordable childcare, the project found challenges with the availability, recruitment, and retention of suitably qualified workers. These challenges will be reflected in the Strategic Framework for Scotland's Childcare Professionals which will be published later this year.

The findings from the project and the recommendations made in the [Accessing School-Age Childcare in Scotland's Rural and Island Areas research report](#) will help support the development of new school age childcare policies. The research report complements the testing we are already carrying out through our Access to Childcare Fund, which has been supporting services across Scotland, including in rural areas, to deliver childcare for families on low incomes. We have built on the learning from the Access to Childcare Fund to develop community-level tests of change through our Early Adopting Communities programme, which will allow us to understand the systems needed to support a childcare offer that is locally appropriate.

Work is also currently underway with our People Panel, which is working across Scotland (including in remote and rural and island areas) to understand parents and carers needs from the future system of school-age childcare.

This year, we will publish a School-Age Childcare Delivery Framework which will set out the approach and principles that we will apply to designing and building a new system of school-age childcare. The Delivery Framework will be supported through an initial investment of £15 million in 2023-24. This will build on the investment we made in 2020-22 and 2022-23 to develop tests of change to provide targeted school-age childcare services before and after school, and throughout the summer holidays.

We are currently making decisions on the administration of this funding; however, it will continue to be targeted towards the six priority groups identified in the [Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#), and will be spread across a diverse range of communities in Scotland.

**We committed to ensure that health, social care and wellbeing services are available through the medium of Gaelic to support Gaelic speaking island communities.**

#### Implementation Route Map action

- NHS Highland commitments to Gaelic are outlined in its Gaelic Language Plan, 2017-2022.
- 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Using Gaelic plans, Bòrd na Gàidhlig is continuing to work with health boards in island areas to encourage the use of Gaelic in the delivery of services and raise the profile of Gaelic in these communities. The Scottish Government welcomes the creation of Gaelic plans by health providers and looks forward to commitments that will make a difference where Gaelic is spoken.

**We committed to 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 action

- 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 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.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

In March 2022, we published our second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery plan – ‘[Best Start, Bright Futures](#)’ alongside an [Island Communities Impact Assessment](#). The plan sets out ambitious action to drive progress to the child poverty targets and takes a holistic, person-centred approach to supporting children and families.

During 2022, the Scottish Government has continued to work with island local authorities, as part of the national Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, to ensure successful delivery of key commitments. This includes delivery of 1,140 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare and continued investment in parental employability support and free bus travel for under 22s. We also provided funding for Discretionary Housing Payments to provide direct financial support to people struggling with housing costs and to mitigate UK Government welfare policies.

Alongside action to support parental employment and reduce costs of living, key Scottish Government investment in social security is helping local areas to tackle poverty and enhance the support available for parents and families. This includes the Scottish Child Payment which, from 14 November 2022, was increased to £25 per week and applications were opened to all eligible 6-15 year olds. The payment is estimated to lift 50,000 children out of poverty in 2023/24.

Together with national partners, including the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, the Scottish Government have worked with island authorities and others to support development of Local Child Poverty Action Reports and development of effective action to tackle child poverty in our islands communities – where poverty can often be hidden in national level statistics due to the higher cost of living experienced.



Many of our rural and island communities face different challenges and barriers and have unique assets that can be brought to bear in tackling child poverty. We have commissioned research into rural and island child poverty and will act on the findings, taking targeted action to tackling child poverty in rural settings, focusing on unique solutions rooted in these communities. Furthermore, a Rural and Island Child Poverty Network has been convened by the Improvement Service, bringing together key professionals to help collate the evidence and enable us to tackle child poverty effectively in these communities. Future projects to emerge from this work will follow the pathfinder approach, supporting local actors to test different community-based solutions, building partnerships, improving data and monitoring of actions.

Future projects to emerge from the research will also align with the work being led by the Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty Unit and have strong synergies across four key COVID-19 Recovery themes:

- person centred services;
- creating good jobs;
- tackling poverty; and
- improving wellbeing of children and young people.

Collectively, and as part of a government-wide focus, our work on child poverty across rural communities and on our islands will support:

- the tackling child poverty delivery plan, 'Best Start, Bright Futures'(2022-2026);
- our Programme for Government commitments on child poverty;
- COVID-19 Recovery; and
- the identification of future interventions to tackle and child poverty.

### **Tackling Child Poverty – Rural and Island Activity**

Tackling Child Poverty is a national mission for this government, and we are using all the powers and resources available to us to tackle poverty and help all those struggling to make ends meet. We know that there are particular and distinct challenges, barriers and opportunities for our rural and island communities.

It is therefore vital that we identify and deliver place-based solutions that mitigate the detrimental impacts of child poverty and help young people to navigate the challenges that they face. Our vision is to better understand the specific contextual difficulties for tackling child poverty in rural and island communities and to ensure that this understanding is embedded in the policies that are developed and delivered across Government and in our communities.

### **Island Cost Crisis Emergency Fund**

The £1.4 million Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund was developed to support those on islands facing even more significant cost of living challenges. Islands already experience higher costs of living. High fuel costs, a colder climate and the lack of consumer choice is also intensifying the impact of the cost crisis. This fund was provided directly to island local authorities on a 100% population basis, as approved by COSLA, to support them to take urgent action to help households through the cost crisis. The criteria and reporting processes required are minimal to lessen the impact on the workloads of local authority colleagues. To respond to the specific needs of islands communities and acting in the spirit of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, the Island Cost Crisis Emergency Fund complimented action carried out by local authorities within their respective geographical areas.

### **Demand Responsive Transport (DRT)**

ZetTrans and HITRANS have been supported in developing both a DRT study and the rollout of DRT software, respectively. In December, the Islands Team, HITRANS, and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar met to discuss how DRT can support the Comhairle's focus on addressing local priorities in Uist such as depopulation, social inclusion and tackling child poverty – which will inform next steps and decision-making on future policy development considerations.

**We committed to 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 action**

- 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 (March 2022).

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We continue to work closely with national partners, including the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, to support local island authorities and others in developing their Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs). This has included refreshing the non-statutory guidance on LCPARs in consultation with local leads, to ensure clear, focused reports which reflect the wealth planned and ongoing local action to tackle child poverty.

Building on the “[Poverty in rural Scotland: evidence review](#)” (December 2021), SRUC were commissioned to undertake the research project, “Improving our understanding of child poverty in rural and island Scotland” which was published in June 2022. We will act on the findings, alongside local experts, to deliver targeted action on child poverty. We are also supporting gathering existing data, identifying gaps, and sharing good practice through the Rural and Island Child Poverty Network convened by the Improvement Service. The Network brought together key professionals, including Public Health Scotland and colleagues from our Tackling Child Poverty Unit. This collaborative, cross-sectoral and outcome driven partnership accelerated our response to research, using existing child poverty action reports to support locally led interventions. Furthermore, in November 2022 IS published a solutions paper: ‘[A Design Based Approach to Understanding and Tackling Rural Child Poverty](#)’.

Another important outcome from this work is our research into the ‘[Anchor Project](#)’ on Shetland. This work is deepening our understanding of this extraordinarily successful, multi-agency rural child poverty initiative. The Anchor Project wraps support from existing frontline services around the needs of families to directly tackle poverty and inequality, while avoiding the stigma sometimes associated with support provided through other services.

**We committed to 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 action

We continue to learn and collaborate with other countries and organisations to create an economy that supports our island communities, aiming to ensure that they have access to opportunities that deliver local growth and wellbeing through tackling inequalities.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We continue to learn and collaborate with other organisations to create an economy that supports our island communities, aiming to ensure that they have access to opportunities that deliver local growth and wellbeing through tackling inequalities. The Community Wealth Building (CWB) model of economic development continues to act as a framework against which our local authorities can work with the private, third and community sectors to deliver a genuine, tangible wellbeing economy. The model is designed to add value and influence the activities of the landscape of partnerships we already have in place.

**We committed to 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 action

- We have committed to reviewing the Mental Health Strategy 2012-2027 at its halfway point in 2022. Reviewing the Strategy also provides us with an opportunity to systematically review all 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.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We are committed to developing a new [Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) in the coming year, building on the implementation of our [Mental Health Covid Transition and Recovery Plan](#). The new strategy will allow us to look ahead to make sure we are doing the right things to meet changing Mental Health needs over the coming years; and will set out a clear vision for future population mental health, wellbeing and care, and our priorities to help us get there.

We want to ensure that our future strategy is evidence based, informed by lived experience, and underpinned by equality and human rights. It will focus on outcomes and will be driven by data and intelligence. The scope of the strategy will be wider than our previous work in this space, with an increasing focus on wellbeing and prevention. We will also consider how the strategy can take account of social factors and inequalities that may impact a person's mental health and wellbeing.

We know that a cross-Government effort will be required to achieve this, and we will be working closely with colleagues across different portfolios, and relevant stakeholders to inform our approach to this important work.

### Mental Health Performance in the Island Boards

We are committed to continuing to ensure that people get the right support, at the right time, and in the right setting. This means continuing to work and invest across sectors, and across community and acute settings, including for our island communities.

Scottish Government officials meet with Mental Health Leads in the Island Health Boards to review performance against mental health waiting times standards for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and Psychological Therapies. We recognise that although local performance varies, there are shared challenges for remote and rural boards. These include workforce recruitment and retention, as well as the impact of small teams which makes them more susceptible to staffing changes. 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 in a timely manner. In 2022-23, we are allocating funding of £46 million across Scotland via the 2022-23 Mental Health Outcomes Framework to

improve the quality and delivery of mental health and psychological services for all. The priorities for the funding this year are to continue delivering improvements in CAMHS, psychological therapies, eating disorders and neurodevelopmental services, as well as ongoing innovation and service reform.

Our Transition and Recovery Plan recognised that there can be challenges relating to rural isolation, which may be increasingly felt by those in remote communities because of the pandemic. We have committed to working in partnership with the [National Rural Mental Health Forum](#) to develop an approach to ensure that these communities have equal and timely access to mental health support and services, including consideration of whether dedicated pathways are needed. We are keen to support efforts by NHS Boards to promote the use of digital services, to maximise the benefits for rural communities; whilst recognising that this is not the solution for everyone.

### **Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults**

The [Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund](#) for adults – providing £36 million over two years – was launched by the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care in October 2021 to help tackle the impact of social isolation, loneliness and mental health inequalities made worse by the pandemic.

In 2021-22, £21 million was distributed to around 1,800 community projects in Scotland, highlighting the significant role that small, grass roots, community groups play in supporting adult mental health and wellbeing. This includes over £2.4 million to projects in areas covered by the National Islands Plan. For example, funding was provided to Argyll and Bute Cowal Elderly Befrienders, a service aimed at older men living at home in Cowal and Bute who are identified as being over sixty-five and at risk of loneliness and social isolation. Outreach Worker visits weekly and a working bond is established.

The funding supported 1,026 projects with a focus on social isolation and loneliness across Scotland and 468 projects with a focus on those disadvantaged by geographical location. For example, Bragar and Arnol Siorra Project (Freedom Project) in the Western Isles aims to reduce social isolation for a targeted group of isolated individuals in a remote community. This project is being run by a community group who are using a befriending model.

### **Community-based Mental Health Support for Children and Young People**

In addition to adult community mental health support, the Scottish Government provided local authorities with £15 million in 2022 to fund community-based mental health supports for children and young people and their families. These services are focused on prevention and early intervention and include supports for positive mental health and wellbeing as well as emotional distress. The funding gives councils the flexibility to implement supports based on local priorities such as an Emotional Wellbeing Service delivered by Action For Children in Orkney which focuses on early intervention for children and young people aged 8-18 in need of support. This links to the partnership drugs initiative, which is a whole-family approach intended to provide support to the young person affected by or misusing substances or alcohol. In Shetland, the local authority has commissioned Mind Your Head to provide a Well Youth children and young people's support service. This includes self-referral, drop-in, telephone support, and referral from other services.

## National Rural Mental Health Forum,

The Scottish Government continues to fund the National Rural Mental Health Forum, which was established to help people in rural areas maintain good mental health and wellbeing. This forum helps develop connections between communities across rural Scotland, so that isolated people can receive support when and where they need it.

## Mind to Mind

In May 2022 the Scottish Government announced the launch of [Mind to Mind](#), a new site to support the mental wellbeing of the general population in Scotland, including in rural and island communities. Mind to Mind showcases advice from people with lived experience of mental health and wellbeing challenges and highlights the practical things people can do to help themselves regardless of where they live or work.

It has been designed to provide a reliable place for people to find information on mental wellbeing, complimenting traditional mental health and wellbeing services across Scotland. It is not meant to replace them. Importantly, 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. We will continue to further develop content on Mind to Mind and identify further resources for inclusion.

## Primary Care

The Scottish Government provided £1.5 million in December 2021 to Island Authorities to support the development of local Mental Health in Primary Care Service implementation plans. These were developed at a local level, in collaboration with partners, throughout 2022 and submitted to the Scottish Government. Given the Emergency Budget Review we continue to collaborate closely with stakeholders, including the Mental Health in Primary Care National Oversight Group, to develop plans to best use the resource available across the system in 2023/24, and in future years. Nonetheless, Mental Health in Primary Care has been signalled within the Mental Health Outcomes Framework allocation this year. The aim is to signal that this remains a priority and to enable local flexibility.

We have also continued to prioritise significant investment to build mental health capacity in primary care through Action 15 and the Primary Care Improvement Fund. In March 2022: the Scottish Government's Action 15 commitment had seen an additional 356.1 WTE mental health workers recruited to GP practices; and 259.9 WTE mental health workers had been recruited under the Primary Care Improvement Fund (PCIF).

The PCIF also funds Community Link Workers (CLWs) as part of primary care multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) and, in March 2022, 248.9 CLWs had been recruited to support GP practices.'

# Environment and Biosecurity

## Strategic Objective 8 – To improve and promote environmental health and deal with biosecurity

### We committed to protect island biodiversity.

#### Implementation Route Map action

The National Islands Plan Annual Report 2021 sets out a series of projects that are currently supporting this commitment and will continue to support island biodiversity going forward.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Projects have been undertaken across our island communities to improve and promote environmental wellbeing and deal with biosecurity:

#### Species on the Edge

In June 2022, National Lottery Heritage Fund approved the [Species on the Edge project](#). Species on the Edge is a partnership of NatureScot and seven nature conservation charities, all dedicated to improving the fortunes of thirty-seven priority species found along Scotland's coast and islands. Delivery of the £6.7 million project will start on the ground in 2023 and take place over 5 years, tackling the impacts of environmental change on wildlife to benefit both nature and people.

#### Goose schemes

There is a national policy for goose management, but islands support concentrations of wintering migratory geese because of their location on the international flyway. In locations where migratory geese cause significant agricultural damage, there are management schemes in place. Currently, these are Islay, Coll, Tiree, Uist and South Walls. Resident greylag geese also cause agricultural damage, particularly in crofting areas, and management has been supported by NatureScot and the Scottish Government to try to reduce populations of resident greylag on Tiree, Coll, Uist, Lewis, Harris and Orkney. The current budget for goose management focused mainly on islands is around £1.3 million.

#### 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, there are concentrations on islands – particularly Mull, Skye and the Outer Hebrides. In 2022, there were ninety-nine Farms, Crofts or Sheep Stock Clubs in island locations receiving support from the SEMS (sixty-one holdings in Skye & Raasay, sixteen in Mull, ten in Lewis & Harris, six in the Uists and Benbecula, two in Eigg and Islay and one in Barra and Lismore).

## Orkney Native Wildlife Project

[The Orkney Native Wildlife Project](#) is making substantial progress towards removing the non-native stoat from Orkney to prevent a catastrophic decline in native wildlife (Orkney vole, short-eared owl, hen harrier and various waders and sea birds species). Considerable work is also being done to implement an Island biosecurity plan.

## Northern Isles Landscape Partnership

The work to improve and manage habitats for key native bird species on a number of non-connected Orkney Isles has progressed significantly with additional opportunities and demand from Island land managers being realised.

## Chough

NatureScot, in consultation with the Scottish Chough Study Group, are developing a 'population recovery' programme that seeks to deliver extensive habitat management across Islay and Colonsay, a programme of monitoring and if required, population reinforcement. Resourcing for this recovery programme will be sought over the coming years, with opportunities for private and public investment explored with partners. NatureScot continue to fund supplementary feeding of chough at key roost sites, in addition to population demographic monitoring. The Nature Restoration Fund paid for the replacement of the populations main roost site at Ardnave, which has been successfully restored and is once again being used by roosting chough. NatureScot and partners were successful in receiving funding from HLF for the Species on the Edge Project, which is dedicated to improving the fortunes of thirty-seven priority species, including chough, in the Scottish coast and Islands.

## Rum

The Rum National Nature Reserve Non-native intervention plan is in place covering brown rats, *Rhododendron ponticum* and Cotoneaster and feral goats. Surveillance of impacts of presence of avian influenza in the Manx shearwater colony took place.

## Avian flu

NatureScot is coordinating the response to the unprecedented deaths of seabirds and wildfowl due to the outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). This included monitoring of mortalities in the islands' internationally important breeding colonies and using this intelligence to advice land managers and tourist operators. The outbreak required the development of new surveillance and monitoring protocols. Through the Scottish HPAI Task Force, chaired by NatureScot, these protocols, in tandem with advice and knowledge from the scientific and local communities, will allow a more flexible and targeted approach to managing activities that may have an impact on birds if a further outbreak returns in the 2023 breeding season.

**We committed to 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 action

We will continue to undertake island specific projects where required to address biosecurity in an integrated manner.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**



[The Orkney Native Wildlife Project](#) has developed a biosecurity plan to prevent the spread of stoats to the non-linked Orkney Islands. Good progress is being made in forming individual Island community led stoat incursion response hubs. A newly created Orkney Island stoat biosecurity group has also been formed to engage with stakeholders and deliver the biosecurity plan. Training is being given to parts of the Orkney tourism sector to raise awareness of non-native stoats to both tourism guides and tourists. Engagement is ongoing with tourism transport operators such as the cruise liner industry and supporting infrastructure to ensure biosecurity forms part of the discussion around sustainable economic tourism development in Orkney.

[The Seabird Island Biosecurity Project](#) is helping to protect more than thirty offshore seabird islands from invasion by mammalian invasive non-native species has been extended for a further three years, with support the Nature Restoration Fund.

**We committed 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.

**We committed to 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 action

Zero Waste Scotland has embedded an officer within Highlands and Islands Enterprise to develop a strategic approach to driving the circular economy across island communities.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### Zero Waste Scotland

Zero Waste Scotland (ZWS) have worked with work with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) on the development of the [Highland Community Composting Decision Toolkit](#): a one stop shop for resources related to setting up a community composting initiative in Highland. Developed in collaboration with the Highland Council and Highland Good Food Partnership. ZWS are formal partners in a collaborative [Keep Scotland Beautiful](#) initiative to create The Highland Cup Movement, a trial focused on supporting consumers and businesses to choose reusable cups as opposed to defaulting to single use products. They are also founding members of [Highland Adapts](#), focused on building Circular Economy into regional adaptation research and plans. This year they have been working on a climate risk assessment for Highland and a climate economic impact assessment with a Circular Economy focus.

In addition to work with HIE, the Recycling Improvement Fund (RIF) awarded funding to Western Isles Council which will provide additional refuse and recycling capacity through more bins and glass banks being made available to the public, as well as an electric vehicle to allow expansion of recycling to rural areas. The [Return and Recycle Orkney Initiative](#) was also launched in November 22. The initiative provides a charity donation for every container deposited (within the two Reverse Vending Machines installed) and through Employability Orkney, a number of local charities will benefit until the initiative is completed prior to the launch of the Deposit Return Scheme in August 2023. To date over 7,000 beverage containers have been recycled through the initiative.

**We committed to continue, and to refresh the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which has benefited 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 Islands Plan Annual Report 2020 for further details.

**We committed to 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 action**

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 ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### **Hebridean Mink Project (HMP)**

HMP has been struggling with staff resources during and after COVID-19 and it has been recognised that the project is unlikely to achieve eradication without additional resources. That said, the mink population is being restricted to extremely low levels with the continuing benefit to a range of ground nesting bird species throughout the Outer Hebrides. Maintaining this low-level mink population is vital to protect these species from predation and mitigate a range of other pressures including those linked to climate change.

### **Uist Wader Project (UWP)**

UWP is continuing to maintain North Uist as hedgehog free and monitors this area to ensure that the ground nesting birds, particularly waders, continue to be protected. In the rest of the Uists the project partnership, which includes the RSPB, continue the process of identifying funding and the development of a project to firstly remove hedgehogs from Benbecula, translocating them to the mainland of Scotland, and utilise the lessons learned from this stage to continue an expanded project down to a larger geographical scale project on South Uist.

### Orkney Native Wildlife Project

The Orkney Native Wildlife Project has developed a communications plan with its partner NatureScot, RSPB and the Orkney Islands Council to maximise its potential for increasing public awareness around the projects aims and the risk of further spread of the non-native stoats. The project has agreed on an integrated learning programme with Orkney Islands Council for the Orkney Schools. A shift to more 1:1 volunteering opportunities via a resident volunteer programme has proved a success in 2022 and is being continued again for 2023. The project currently has ninety-five active volunteers with over nine thousand hours logged so far. Following delays due to the covid pandemic, the project has now also managed to set up a Youth Forum with nineteen active members to date.

**We committed to 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 action

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

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### Outer Hebrides

In November 2022, the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership published its [Climate Rationale and Case for Action](#). These documents provide a shared foundation for taking forward climate change adaptation planning in the Outer Hebrides, with the importance of the natural environment underpinning everything.

### Highland Adapts

[The Highland Adapts](#) initiative brings our communities, businesses, land managers and public sector together to facilitate transformational action towards a prosperous, climate ready Highland Council area - including our island communities. Its objectives are to:

- Develop a strong knowledge and evidence base, setting out the climate risks and opportunities that will affect the region
- Facilitate information sharing through a range of resources
- Identify opportunities to reduce and overcome these climate risks
- Develop a shared adaptation strategy and suite of action plans
- Support others to use plans to form the basis of projects and activities across the public sector, community, land management and business sector plans, strategies and investments
- Support the public sector to embed climate change adaptation throughout their business
- Support community climate change action.

The focus for the coming year will be phase 1 of the Highland Climate Risk and Opportunity Assessment. The aims of this piece of work are to:

- Identify and prioritise the risks and opportunities from climate change to Highland's society, economy, and environment between now and 2080
- Lay the foundation for a transformational approach to climate adaptation and resilience for the region
- Support a just transition to a net zero and climate resilient economy, in a way that delivers fairness and tackles inequality and injustice.

## Orkney

The Orkney Partnership launched a public consultation in December 2022 of a strategic plan (2023-30) which has sustainable development as one of three key priorities. This seeks to balance the needs of people against those of the environment, using the concept behind the Doughnut Economics model, which the group is adapting for Orkney. Adaptation and mitigation are integrated within this to ensure communities, habitats and wildlife are protected from the effects of climate change. In addition, the island of Hoy has been selected by Scottish Government for its Carbon Neutral Islands project, which will enable the group to pilot innovative low carbon techniques in sectors of particular importance to islands, such as agriculture and marine transport.

## Argyll and Bute (Islands)

The [Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership](#) has identified a clear need for Argyll and Bute to take a thorough and strategic approach to combat Climate Change. This initiative will begin in January 2023 and bring everyone from across the region together to develop a strategic approach to mitigating, adapting and engaging on climate change. The initiative will set out the climate risks and opportunities that are affecting Argyll and Bute. This will be used to develop a shared strategy and a suite of action plans which will embed action to mitigate, adapt and engage across organisational, community and sector plans, strategies and investments.

In addition, the island of Islay has been selected by Scottish Government for its Carbon Neutral Islands project, which will enable the group to explore low carbon techniques in sectors of particular importance to islands, such as agriculture and whisky.

Peatland restoration projects have been initiated on the Isle of Rum to address natural erosion. Additionally, partnership work with Scottish Government to find investment into a hydropower scheme upgrade continues.

## Peatland Action

During 2022, Peatland ACTION offered funding to deliver three peatland restoration projects in Shetland totalling just over 120 hectares and 385 hectares on Islay, twenty-nine hectares on Mull, and 55 ha on Arran.

There are currently 1.6 FTE Project Officers on Shetland, and a 1 FTE Project Officer in Lewis to deliver peatland restoration projects. These posts are employed by local Development Trusts and funded by Peatland ACTION who are actively seeking opportunities to locate a further 2 FTE posts within the islands in the coming year - details as yet to be confirmed.

In October 2022, four days of training were delivered on Islay with thirty-nine attendees, to provide local contractors with skills to carry out on-the-ground peatland restoration work.

# Climate Change and Energy

## Strategic Objective 9 - To 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.**

### Implementation Route Map action

- We will support the development of one or more community climate action hubs across our islands, empowering 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.
- The Programme for Government states that we will identify at least three of our islands to progress towards becoming fully carbon neutral by 2040. We are taking this ambition even further, aiming to support six islands to progress towards being fully carbon neutral by 2040.
- A report will be published on the Carbon Neutral Islands Project in summer 2022. This will set out the islands that will be part of the project. We will consult with communities to understand local impacts.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The North Highlands and Islands Climate Hub supports communities across Orkney and Shetland, raising awareness of the climate emergency and enabling groups to take climate action.

Work to date has focused on raising awareness and capacity building. There is now high interest in training and networking events from groups and individuals on the islands. The Hub has run several online training events as well as holding climate conversations, offering groups seed funding, project support and signposting to wider funding opportunities.

In October, the Climate Action Hub delivered the Orkney Climate Festival in conjunction with the Orkney Science Festival, with events held in fifteen localities. They are working with the Orkney Local Action Group and with Shetland Islands Council to develop community climate action networks on the Islands.

## Carbon Neutral Islands

The Carbon Neutral Islands project is supporting six island communities in their journey towards carbon neutrality in a bottom-up way. Our delivery partner Community Energy Scotland have developed local steering groups on each of the six islands. These steering groups have identified local anchor organisations that have employed community development officers who will co-ordinate input from the community into the project. This work will lead to community climate change action plans which provide communities the chance to prioritise how they want to decarbonise. Work in the next financial year will focus on supporting them achieve the aims of these plans.

Whilst the project is directly supporting six islands, a key driver is replicability. Knowledge exchange and good practices stemming from the project will be shared to other islands across Scotland.

## **We committed to work with island communities to look at alternative solutions to managing waste, particularly in respect of Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy.**

### Implementation Route Map action

This year's Programme for Government committed us to the development of a route map to achieving our recycling and waste targets for 2025 and beyond. This is in development for consultation later this year which will include consideration of the impact on island communities. We are also committed to bringing forward a Circular Economy Bill and will undertake an Island Communities Impact Assessment as part of this.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

In May 2022, we consulted on a [Circular Economy Bill](#) and [Waste Route Map](#), setting out the actions that must be taken to meet Scotland's waste targets and deliver a circular economy in Scotland. These consultations set out considerations and potential impacts for island communities, and sought further views, information or evidence relating to these impacts. The Island Communities Impact Assessment Screening for the Route Map can be found [here](#).

The [analysis](#) of the response to the consultation on the Bill proposals has been published. The analysis of the response to the Waste Route Map consultation will be published in early 2023. Following analysis, development and research work, we will publish the final Route Map later in 2023. As part of this process, we are committed to assessing the impact of proposals on island communities, and the feedback we have received will be used to update the initial impact assessments accompanying the original consultation.

The Circular Economy Bill will be brought forward ahead of summer recess (2023) and will include an Island Communities Impact Assessment.

The Scottish Government, through Zero Waste Scotland, has continued to collaborate closely with local authorities to help those currently without solutions for their residual waste when the ban on landfilling residual municipal waste comes into force in 2025, to secure contracts. This includes providing centrally supported procurement and legal, technical and procurement consultancy support, as well as working through a dedicated Highlands and Islands group to consider challenges specific for these authorities managing their waste.

The Scottish Government provided funding for a marine litter development officer post through the Scottish Islands Federation, for the duration of the 2022/23 financial year. The main outcomes of this post were focused on the unique problems islands may face regarding types of marine litter, and to support the circular economy through job creation. The post is investigating and developing a methodology for data collection of beach litter on islands, to ascertain if islands are impacted by certain types of marine litter. The results of these studies will be used by Marine Scotland to assist future policy development. By investigating alternatives to landfill to better manage marine waste and litter, the post is supporting island communities towards a more circular economy.

**We committed to work with local authorities to help them work towards their statutory targets.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment but will be considered and actions defined during 2022.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### **Green Growth Accelerator**

Through our Green Growth Accelerator (GGA) programme, we are initially supporting six pathfinder projects, including the Net Zero Hub in Lewis. The creation of the Net Zero Hub will be the first step in demonstrating the islands' green hydrogen capability and will stimulate private investment in an array of low carbon activities.

The Green Growth Accelerator programme, launched in June 2021, aims to unlock £200 million of capital investment in low carbon infrastructure that supports our transition to net zero. This is a notable example of the Scottish Government's ambitious and integrated approach with local authorities, demonstrating how, by working together, we can capitalise on the economic, environmental and social benefits that our journey to net-zero present.

## Adaptation

Through the [Adaptation Scotland Programme](#), we have supported the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's (OHCPP) Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) since 2019 to develop adaptation planning activities on the islands. During 2022 we helped the group to develop a Climate Rationale, and an accompanying Case for Action.

The OHCPP board has now welcomed and approved both documents, setting a positive direction of travel for the OHCPP to move from evidence gathering, capacity building and awareness raising activities to focus on developing and delivering adaptation actions, and accessing resources to enable a safer, healthier and flourishing Outer Hebrides.

### **We committed to work towards creating net zero emission islands and providing global climate change leadership.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

- We will publish a report setting out the steps we will take to support six islands in becoming carbon neutral as part of the Carbon Neutral Islands Project. Community consultation and relevant impact assessments will be completed to allow for the implementation phase of the project to begin in 2022.
- We will publish an Islands Energy Strategy in 2023 setting out approach to decarbonisation for Scotland's island communities, ensuring that their differing needs and priorities are reflected, and that renewables solutions implemented promote resilience, enhance sustainability and meet energy needs now and in the future. The Strategy will support the delivery of actions outlined in our Heat and Buildings Strategy Island Communities Impact Assessment including the Carbon Neutral Island's commitment and review of the evidence base and options for an 'islands uplift' across our delivery programmes as part of our commitment to provide additional support for rural and island homes for heat and energy efficiency.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### **Heat Strategy**

The Scottish Government has committed to investing at least £1.8 billion in heat and energy efficiency over the course of this Parliament, and this includes support to households in island communities.

In December 2022 we launched the new Home Energy Scotland (HES) Grant and Loan scheme with a new rural uplift of £1,500 applicable to both the heat pump and energy efficiency grants. This uplift increases the heat pump grant flat rate and the maximum limit of the energy efficiency grant to £9,000 to reflect higher delivery costs in more remote areas.



Our Area Based Schemes aim to reduce fuel poverty by enabling local authorities to design and deliver energy efficiency programmes in fuel poor areas. Households in extreme fuel poverty in remote rural and island areas can benefit from energy efficiency improvements worth up to £21,100 as part of this scheme.

## Heat in Buildings

The Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), delivered by Local Energy Scotland (LES) on behalf of the Scottish Government, behalf provides advice and support – including funding – to communities across Scotland, including our island communities, looking to develop renewable energy, heat decarbonisation and energy efficiency projects.

The *Let's Do Net Zero: Community Buildings Fund* provides a rolling programme of support to communities, charities and faith organisations across Scotland to decarbonise their buildings and reduce energy bills. This support takes a whole building retrofit approach covering energy efficiency measures, zero emissions heat installations and additional small-scale generation where there is a clear benefit to the community organisation in terms of energy bill reduction.

In addition, CARES is providing a tailored package of support to some of Scotland's more remote and rural off-grid communities, helping them to upgrade their energy systems and decarbonise their energy supplies.

## Carbon Neutral Islands

The Carbon Neutral Islands project, which aims to support six islands reach carbon neutrality by 2040 in a just way, is now being delivered on Barra, Cumbrae, Hoy, Islay, Raasay and Yell.

We committed £820,000 to support the development of carbon audits and Community Climate Change Action plans on each island. This work is being led by Community Energy Scotland (CES). To embed the project within island communities CES has supported the development of a steering group on each of the six islands. These steering groups have identified local anchor organisations who have employed community development officers who will co-ordinate input from the community into the project. The project is intended to benefit all Scottish islands, not only those included directly as part of the project. This will be through knowledge exchange and sharing of good practices stemming from implementation. This year we are also mapping net zero related skills with a view of collaborating with partners to strengthen training and programme delivery in these fields.

We published a [progress report](#) setting out the steps taken so far in January 2023.

**We committed to 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 action

- 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 new budget to help councils plan for and take action to adapt to coastal change will be distributed to councils in their general capital grant settlement from 2022-23.
- Continued engagement through the Adaptation Scotland Programme with the Island Community Planning Partnerships, local authorities and support of the development of climate impact assessments and adaptation plans.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

#### Supporting partners in the Outer Hebrides

During 2022, the [Adaptation Scotland programme](#) has continued to support partners in the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's (OHCPP) Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) by:

- Assisting the group to take stock of successes, challenges, and enablers of adaptation through online focus group discussions run by Sniffer, using the Scottish Government-funded [Traction Framework](#).
- Facilitating an in-person workshop series to consolidate and analyse the group's evidence base, before co-developing and publishing a [Climate Rationale](#) and [Case for Action](#). These documents will help the OHCPP identify, agree and implement locally led actions and explore opportunities to establish sustained, long-term resources to support the work in the islands moving forwards.
- Funding and commissioning a local artist in collaboration with the Met Office UK and local partners to develop a [creative 'Climate Storyline'](#) – the first project of its kind in the UK. The Climate Storyline uses soundscapes to combine Met Office analysis of future changes to winter storms with local lived experience of climate impacts. Adaptation Scotland also supported local partners to trial the Storyline piece in a variety of community and engagement settings to prompt discussions about climate impacts and adaptation priorities, and it remains an open-source engagement tool for use in future.

Work to date with partners in the Outer Hebrides has built a strong, collaborative partnership. Adaptation Scotland is delighted to see partners moving from evidence gathering, capacity building and awareness raising activities to focus on developing and delivering actions, and accessing resources to enable a safer, healthier and flourishing Outer Hebrides.

## Working with other islands

Adaptation Scotland is also supporting other islands, for example by:

- Facilitating discussion between Shetland Islands Council and partners in the Outer Hebrides to share learning to support the Shetland Community Partnership's goal to create a place-based Shetland Area Climate Change Strategy and action plan.
- Delivering a full day *Highlands and Islands Place Based Adaptation* knowledge sharing event in December 2022, in partnership with Highland Adapts and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. This hybrid event brought attendees together in Inverness and online to explore tools to embed local knowledge in adaptation and place-based action. Of just under forty attendees, fifteen island representatives participated from the Outer Hebrides, Shetland, Orkney and Raasay, representing local authorities and community groups.

## Carbon Neutral Islands – initial steps on adaptation

During December 2022 Adaptation Scotland worked with Community Energy Scotland to develop a process to help the six carbon neutral islands incorporate adaptation and resilience into the Carbon Neutral Islands project. In addition to project representatives attending the event above, Adaptation Scotland is collaborating with the Community Development Officers for each island so that they are equipped to:

- Understand climate impacts for their island now and in future;
- Use processes and resources to involve communities in understanding how their place will be impacted by climate change and what is needed to strengthen locally led action
- Have greater insight into the scale of resources, skills and finances that may be needed to address climate resilience at an island scale.

## Water Environment and Resilience

Argyll and Bute, Highland, Orkney and Shetland Councils have been prioritised for funding for coastal change adaptation and have each received £160,000 capital funding in 2022-23.

Dynamic Coast provided data and analysis assistance to Orkney Islands Council, to enable them to better understand coastal change and flood risks to communities, infrastructure and assets. Such analysis supports Orkney Islands Council's proposed LiDAR survey (2023-24) and contributes towards their planned Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (2024 onwards). Dynamic Coast also provided data to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and climate partnership in support of their Climate Adaptation work, and data and advice to Luing Community Council.

**We committed to 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 action**

- 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Scottish Government believes that the progress of energy generation developments on our islands, and their influence on the delivery of transmission links to the Scottish mainland, will help stimulate economic growth as the economy recovers from COVID-19. Developing these abundant resources can also help unlock the islands' potential to supply low-cost renewable electricity for the benefit of consumers across Scotland and Great Britain, as well as many social, community and economic benefits.

Work has begun on the first stage of the Shetland High Voltage Direct-Current link project. When complete, this subsea cable will link Shetland with the UK's mainland grid and provide a reliable means of transmitting substantial amounts of power over long distances, unlocking Shetland's potential for exporting future renewable energy generation.

In December 2022, Ofgem approved the need for a new 1.8GW link, connecting onshore and offshore wind in the region to the GB electricity system. This was an important milestone for communities and developers who have been waiting for decades to unlock the abundant renewable resources on the islands.

The Scottish Government will continue to call on Ofgem to ensure there are no delays to the new 1.8GW interconnector and to remove any remaining barriers. This includes addressing the issue of transmission charges which continue to frustrate development in regions with the greatest resources

Scottish Government has continued to work with stakeholders including BEIS and Ofgem to remove barriers to deployment and investment in Scotland. We also continue to engage closely with island councils and industry to assess the risks and opportunities as Scottish island wind projects approach this year's Contract for Difference (CfD) allocation round.

**We committed to work with Resilience Partnerships and energy providers to encourage them to focus on the resilience of islands' energy supply networks.****Implementation Route Map action**

- 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.

## **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

We want to ensure the fastest possible just transition from dependence on a fossil fuel energy system to one that maximises the value we obtain from Scotland's rich and varied renewable energy resource.

Some Islands communities rely on carbon intensive diesel generation as a backup in the event of an extended cable fault. These arrangements for securing supplies are not compatible with the transition to net zero, as diesel generation is carbon intensive, costly to operate and sometimes needs to operate for long periods while islands are disconnected from the mainland. In situations such as these, local renewables may need to be turned off to ensure the network operates within safety parameters.

Our recently published [draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) has identified that there is an opportunity to explore solutions for these situations and we will work to understand more about this ahead of the final Strategy and Plan.

## **We committed to work with transport-related stakeholders to have the most energy-efficient and climate-friendly transport services possible across the islands.**

### **Implementation Route Map action**

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.

During 2022 we have continued to work with a range of transport stakeholders to support development of EV infrastructure guidance and to refine our draft Vision for future public charging networks in Scotland, the final Vision will be published early 2023.

The Vision recognises the potential challenges that islands may experience in attracting private sector investment to support growth of charging networks at scale as part of a just transition, that the future charging network should work for all of Scotland and that EV charging should be powered by clean, green, renewable energy.

Working with the Scottish Futures Trust, we have provided support to local authorities to develop EV charging strategies and expansion plans, including planning related to EV infrastructure requirements across all of Scotland's islands. We have continued to support the Energy Saving Trust to develop guidance that will support the planning and delivery of electric vehicle infrastructure, this guidance includes cases studies from some of Scotland's islands, the guides are expected to be published early 2023 and will help to inform planning for future zero emission transport infrastructure in island communities.

**We committed to 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 action**

The Energy Strategy Just Transition Plan will be published in 2022. This will take a whole-systems view of how the energy sector must evolve to drive our transition to net zero. The document will also set out what is needed to deliver a just transition for the sector, in line with the principles laid out in our National Transition Planning Framework, published in September 2021. The Plan will also consider how, for example, the islands' abundant renewable energy resources can further contribute to meeting Scotland's climate commitments whilst supporting strong local economies, and addressing existing social and economic inequality.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

On 10 January 2023, the [draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) (ESJTP) was published for consultation. This sets out our vision that, by 2045, Scotland will have a flourishing, climate friendly energy system that delivers affordable, resilient and clean energy supplies for Scotland's households, communities and businesses. The draft ESJTP sets out a route map of ambitions, milestones and actions to deliver on the vision and will guide decision making and policy support out to 2030. This involves ensuring that the transition delivers maximum benefit for all parts of Scotland, including island communities, enabling us to achieve our wider climate and environmental ambitions, drive the development of a wellbeing economy and deliver a just transition.

Reflecting our commitment to a just transition across all parts of Scotland, the draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan aims to:

- Maximise the economic benefits of Scotland's transition to net zero, including ensuring a pipeline of skills for net zero jobs;
- Deliver a fair distribution of opportunities, benefits and risks, including community benefits; and
- Ensure an inclusive and fair process via co-design with stakeholders and the public.

Throughout 2022, we engaged with a wide range of stakeholder, including businesses, trade unions, workers, communities and places to develop the Strategy and Plan. In the coming months, we will continue to refine the draft through further engagement during the consultation period, including with island communities.

**We committed to work with communities, crofters, farmers and landowners to expand forests and woodlands on the islands, recognising wider land-use objectives.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

- 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.

## Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

### Land Use Strategy

Scotland's [third Land Use Strategy](#) was published in March 2021. The strategy sets out the Scottish Government's long-term vision and objectives for sustainable land use. This third 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. It resets the overarching focus on to the integrated nature of land use, by 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 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.

### Regional Land Use Partnerships

In February 2021, the Scottish Government announced five Regional Land Use Partnership pilot regions:

- Cairngorms National Park;
- Highlands Council Region;
- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park;
- North East Region (Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils); and
- South of Scotland Region (Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders Councils).

Working across their respective regions to enable natural capital-led consideration of how local land can maximise the contribution to addressing the climate and environmental crises. The five pilots aim to facilitate collaboration between local and national government, communities, land owners, land managers and wider stakeholders, whilst testing approaches to partnership governance that best suit the local situation and priorities. The outcome of this work will be the development of Regional Land Use Frameworks which are due by the end of 2023.

## **We committed to 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.**

### Implementation Route Map action

The draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) sets out a vision for more sustainable locations and types of development in Scotland to achieve net zero. It includes five action areas across the country and is clear that our north and west coast and islands will be at the forefront of efforts to reach net zero. It is supported by radically improved and new planning policies to help reach netzero emissions and adapt to climate change, including for flood risk, coastal vulnerability, temperature change and infrastructure resilience.

### Commitment Fulfilled

Revised Draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was laid in the Scottish Parliament on 8 November 2022 for approval. Once approved by Parliament and then adopted by Scottish Ministers it will form part of the development plan for day to day decision making in the planning system. It will also inform the preparation of local development plans by planning authorities across Scotland, including the islands.

NPF4 puts climate and nature front and centre of our planning system, whilst also tackling longstanding challenges and inequalities, and is a significant step forward towards achieving a net-zero Scotland.

NPF4 requires us to think differently about our places and lead the transition to stronger, greener, fairer and healthier communities across Scotland.

NPF4 is effectively a national development plan for Scotland. It sets out a long-term spatial plan including regional priorities and 18 national developments, as well as a full suite of 33 national planning policies, including:

- a requirement that local development plans address the global climate emergency including through emissions reduction and adaptation to current and future risks from climate change.
- Significant weight should be given to the global climate emergency in decision making on development proposals, which will be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions;
- Development proposals will be sited and designed to adapt to current and future risks from climate change;
- Retrofit measures to existing developments that reduce emissions or support climate change adaptation will be supported;
- promoting local liveability through 20-minute neighbourhoods, applied according to the circumstances of each area; reducing the need to travel unsustainably; prioritising walking, wheeling and public or shared transport; and an infrastructure-first approach; and
- enabling the infrastructure we will need including green energy, heat networks, facilities for a circular economy, and sustainable transport.

The spatial strategy sets out a vision for more sustainable locations and types of development in Scotland to achieve net zero, and includes five Regional Spatial Priorities across the country. One of these, 'North and West Coast and Islands', covers the island communities of Shetland, Orkney, the Outer and Inner Hebrides and the coastal areas of Highland and Argyll and Bute. The priorities for the area are to: work with its exceptional assets and natural resources to build a more resilient future for island and coastal communities, aiming to maximise the benefits of renewable energy while enhancing blue and green infrastructure, decarbonising transport and building resilient connections; support coastal and island communities to become carbon neutral; and seize the opportunities to grow a blue and green economy.

The following national developments will support delivery of the spatial strategy for this area.

- Energy Innovation Development on the Islands
- Pumped Hydro Storage
- Strategic Renewable Electricity Regeneration and Transmission Infrastructure
- Circular Economy Material Management Facilities
- National Walking, Cycling and Wheeling Network
- Digital Fibre Network



It is clear that our north and west coast and islands will be at the forefront of efforts to reach net zero.

## **We committed to support the adaptation of Scotland's aquaculture and fishing industry.**

### **Implementation Route Map action**

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

## **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### **Blue Economy Vision**

In March 2022, we published a Blue Economy Vision for Scotland. The Vision sets out the need for transformative change to create fairer, more prosperous, nature-positive marine sectors and communities in Scotland. It defines the Scottish Government's long-term ambition for shared stewardship of Scotland's marine environment, to support ecosystem health, improved livelihoods, economy prosperity, social inclusion and wellbeing, by 2045. At its core, our Vision recognises that economic prosperity and wellbeing are embedded within nature, and in order to harness blue opportunities, we must transform our economy and society to thrive within the planet's sustainable limits.

The Blue Economy Vision sets out six outcomes to achieve social, environmental and economic goals, in tandem, and represents a long-term strategy that serves as an overall framework for Scotland's marine policies, plans and decisions. The seafood industry is a key component of the Vision, in the food security, health and nutrition outcome, for Scotland to be a global leader in providing healthy, high-quality and sustainably produced and harvested blue foods for our own population and beyond.

Most recently, in November 2022, 'Delivering Scotland's Blue Economy Approach' set out the first phase of delivery towards our Vision. In it, we commit to mainstreaming a blue economy approach across government and wider, to build a sense of collective ownership of our blue economy and empower actors to support delivery and ensure the sustainability of our marine sectors and coastal communities.

### **Aquaculture and Recreational Fisheries**

The developing Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture will support island communities through supporting the aquaculture sector to play its part in Scotland achieving net zero-emissions by 2045. This will be achieved through innovation and a variety of steps including 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 is being 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 our [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 committed to work with a range of stakeholders to develop an action plan to improve resilience to properties at flood risk.**

### Implementation Route Map action

We will continue to work with stakeholders to deliver the Living with Flood action plan, which was reviewed in 2021.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

## Water Environment and Resilience

We have continued to work with stakeholders to deliver the Living with Flood action plan, which was reviewed in 2021.

**We committed to work with local authorities to strengthen recycling and food waste services in island communities.**

### Implementation Route Map action

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

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

In May 2022, we consulted on a [Circular Economy Bill](#) and [Waste Route Map](#), setting out the actions that must be taken to meet Scotland's waste targets and deliver a circular economy in Scotland. These consultations set out considerations and potential impacts for island communities, and sought further views, information or evidence relating to these impacts. The Island Communities Impact Assessment Screening for the Route Map can be found [here](#).

The Route Map consultation contained several proposals designed to support improvements to recycling and waste services in island communities. This included a commitment to consult on the current rural exemption and food separation requirements for food waste collection, as set out in our Food Waste Reduction Action Plan (2019); and a proposal to launch a new co-design process for high quality, high performing household recycling and reuse services (including food waste recycling), working with service operators and households to design service standards. This process will help us understand opportunities for better service design, putting people at the heart of how services are designed and delivered, and improve our understanding of what works best for different contexts, including islands communities. This will lead to the development of statutory guidance for provision of high-performance household waste services in different contexts, including rural and island settings.

The analysis of the response to the Waste Route Map consultation will be published in early 2023. We will publish the final Route Map later in 2023.

We continue to support island local authorities and communities to increase the quality and quantity of recycling. We are supporting island-based local authorities to deliver ongoing projects from our landmark £70 million Recycling Improvement Fund. This includes £784,458 for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, allowing the council to redesign kerbside collection services to increase the quality of material collected, and to extend services to areas where kerbside recycling collections are not currently available; and in North Ayrshire, £74,535 to support Household Waste Recycling Centre improvements (including Brodick, Isle of Arran).

With our partners, work continues to support all local authorities to assess opportunities and develop project proposals for future infrastructure investment through the Recycling Improvement Fund.

**We committed to 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 action

- 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.

#### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

To ensure an orderly and managed transition to net zero, the Scottish Government committed, in 2021, to delivering a series of Just Transition Plans, for sectors and regions that will have an important role to play in a transformed net-zero economy. The first of these Plans – the Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan – was published in draft in January 2023 following extensive engagement with stakeholders across Scotland, including in the islands.

Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work, met with energy industry representatives in the Shetland Islands in August 2022, when he visited the Garth Wind Farm in Yell (one of the Carbon Neutral Islands) and the Viking Energy Wind Farm. Mr Lochhead also attended the UK Government Islands Forum in Orkney in November 2022 after which he met with representatives from the European Marine Energy Centre, and undertook a visit to the tidal energy test site near Eday.

In March 2022, Scottish Government officials participated in a Just Transition-themed “Community Conversation” overseen by Shetland Islands Council. Further engagement will be undertaken throughout 2023 to ensure that the specific needs of islands communities are fully reflected in both the final Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, and in further sectoral Just Transition Plans, relating to land use and agriculture, buildings and construction, and transport, all due to be published in draft by the end of the year.

# Empowered Communities

## Strategic Objective 10 – To empower diverse communities and different places

**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 action

Our 2021-22 Programme for Government confirms that we will conclude the review and take forward its recommendations within this parliament. Further engagement with local government, wider public services and communities will take place as part of this.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

As part of the [Local Governance Review](#), a wide range of public sector partners and over 4,000 people from diverse backgrounds got involved in conversations about the future of local decision-making. Overwhelmingly, people wanted to see a meaningful transfer of power into our communities – along with the associated resources and suitable support – to transform local democracy and improve lives. Progress on the review slowed due to COVID. However, the response to the pandemic demonstrated what can be achieved when the two spheres of government, and our public service partners, work collaboratively with each other and local people. We expect to see a renewed focus to joint work on the Local Governance Review with COSLA over the course of 2023, and for this to include detailed consideration of proposals submitted by Islands authorities and their local partners for alternative governance arrangements.

**We committed to support participatory processes aimed at providing island communities with a strong voice in the implementation of the Plan.**

### Implementation Route Map action

- We will continue to work with the National Participatory Budgeting Strategic Group in supporting the implementation of Participatory Budgeting (PB) and building capacity across Scotland to ensure best possible practice. We will work with the group to deliver on the new PB Strategic Framework with a particular focus on health and wellbeing, education, housing and climate justice guided by the Framework’s indicators for success.
- We will continue to work in partnership with COSLA to help 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.
- 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.

## **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### **Participatory Budgeting**

The Scottish Government continues to work with COSLA to help local authorities reach the target of having at least 1% of their budget subject to participatory budgeting (PB). As part of this support in 2022, the Scottish Government has provided funding to COSLA to lead the development and maintenance of CONSUL. This is a Citizen Participation software specifically designed to support community empowerment through open dialogue, deliberation and voting tools, of which COSLA is providing this software support to councils.

With the support of Bòrd na Gàidhlig, CONSUL has now been fully translated into Gaelic, making it possible for community engagement processes to take place online in Gaelic and help to empower island communities to be increasingly involved in PB and wider participatory processes. The software also includes the first Gaelic translation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Gaelic translation will be formally launched in March 2023.

### **The Islands Bond**

In 2021, the Scottish Government announced a commitment to develop an Islands Bond fund, providing up to £50,000 each for up to one hundred households by 2026, by providing financial support for island residents to remain in their community, or to encourage people to move there. Through an online consultation, islands-based workshops and meetings, we collaborated very closely with communities and stakeholders to investigate what sort of impact the Bond policy may have – both positive and negative. This allowed us to gather input on how we might best help to address depopulation at an island level.

The feedback we received, particularly from island communities, was clear. Whilst a renewed focus from the Scottish Government on the population challenges being faced across our islands is to be welcomed, a more strategic focus on the drivers of depopulation would be far more beneficial. Based on what we heard from partners and communities, the Islands Bond policy was withdrawn, and the focus turned to the delivery of more localised solutions. Consultation with communities who are directly impacted by the introduction of new policies or strategies is a crucial part of policy development and taking this decision demonstrates our continued commitment to listen to island communities, so we can ensure that policy is delivered in collaboration with them. Far from being a wasted effort, the engagement on the Islands Bond has provided invaluable opportunities to discuss the challenges, and opportunities for addressing these at a local level.

We remain fully committed to addressing our population challenges and will deliver this through a collaborative plan aimed at responding to the key drivers of depopulation. The learnings and suggestions gathered through the Islands Bond consultation will be used in shaping a range of Practical Policy Tests to inform the 'Addressing Depopulation Action Plan' which we aim to publish in late 2023. This work will be driven forward in close collaboration with island communities, by delivering interventions that respond to unique island needs. This cross-sectoral approach responds directly to feedback received from islanders through our engagement on the Bond.

## **We committed to explore ways to strengthen the voice of island communities whilst capturing the differences between islands in local and national decision-making.**

### **Implementation Route Map action**

- Work has started to review the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 – a 2021 Programme for Government commitment – where we will be consulting people on community empowerment mechanisms and explore how communities can be more actively involved in public sector outcomes.
- 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.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 has provided a legal framework to promote and encourage community empowerment and participation, creating new rights for community bodies and placing new duties on public authorities. Work to review the Act has now begun, and will be undertaken until late 2023, to ensure it is fit for purpose with a particular focus on the implications of the legislation for disadvantaged communities, whether of place or interest. The review provides an opportunity for island communities to engage with public decision making and outcome improvement processes, enabling them to have their voices heard in the shaping of service delivery. The review will be welcomed by the sector and involve a consultation process with communities and stakeholders, both on-line and face to face, and planning for local workshops is currently underway. Work will be conducted in collaboration with COSLA, the wider public sector, third sector and communities.

The review, launched by the Minister for Public Finance, Planning, and Community Wealth at the Loch Ness Community Hub in July 2022, will ensure the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 remains fit for purpose, and will consider how we can give more local people including from our islands communities a say in the things that matter to them in their community.

Over two hundred asset transfer requests have been awarded using new community empowerment legislation, including many of our island communities taking on assets, such as a water tower and land in Skye being transformed into a community park; and a large forest on Mull being transferred from Forestry and Land Scotland to local community ownership.

**We committed to working with island communities and local authority partners in the development and introduction of a Transient Visitor Levy Bill.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

Work paused at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic will be recommenced in 2022, when the policy development work completed to date will be carefully reviewed alongside renewed stakeholder engagement.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Our Programme for Government confirmed we will introduce a [Local Visitor Levy Bill](#) in the 2022-23 Parliamentary Session, 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.

**We committed to 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 action**

- We have commissioned research looking at Community Resilience in Scotland's Islands during Covid-19 and will publish this in 2022 with a view to disseminating learning from this.
- 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

## Community Resilience in Scotland's Islands during Covid 19

The challenges presented by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic prompted extraordinary responses from many communities across Scotland, including the islands. To capture the learning from this, the Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos Scotland – Pollyanna Chapman of Impact Hub Inverness, to produce a series of case studies exploring examples of community resilience across Scotland's islands. [The research](#) uses the learning from impacts encountered and solutions that have been identified during the pandemic to further build the resilience in Scotland's island communities. In the coming year we will carefully consider the recommendations set out in the report to consider how community resilience may be strengthened across the islands.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to 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 action

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

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The powers and duties in the Scottish Crown Estate Act 2019 provide further opportunities for island communities. The Act allows for the transfer and/or delegation of management of Scottish Crown Estate assets to other eligible bodies.

The first round for the transfer or delegation of Scottish Crown Estate management functions ran from 1 November 2021 until 2 May 2022, this allowed for eligible bodies to apply for Scottish Crown Estate management functions to be transferred or delegated to a more local level. If applications progress, they will be required to complete an Islands Impact Assessment as appropriate as the impact assessments have been embedded into the wider process.

CES are continuing the implementation of the Pilot scheme and are in regular discussions with participants which include three island local authorities.

**We committed to ensure that Gaelic speakers in island communities are encouraged and supported to represent themselves through the medium of Gaelic.**



### Implementation Route Map action

- The Scottish Government Gaelic & Scots team has prepared the new Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan. 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's manifesto commitments also include 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 Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan, the Gaelic & Scots team is liaising 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.
- In 2022, Education Scotland will publish, 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.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

[The Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan](#) offers to engage through the medium of Gaelic and to take written requests in Gaelic. The three island local authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council and Argyll and 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. A network of Gaelic development officers is in place to encourage and support the use of Gaelic in island communities.

# Arts, Culture and Language

## Strategic Objective 11 – To support arts, culture and language

**We committed to 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 action

- Many continuing projects such as Ceolas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, An Comann Gàidhealach, the Heritage Forum and centres such as Lanntair, Kildonan Museum, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Sabhal Mòr 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. The Scotland's Year of Stories 2022 Open Events Fund, administered by EventScotland, has been designed to support new, creative event proposals and programming that will provide high profile content, created especially in response to the 2022 Themed Year opportunity.
- The Scotland's Year of Stories 2022 Community Stories Fund was deliberately designed to support organisations and community groups to take part in and celebrate Scotland's Year of Stories 2022, spotlighting the unique stories that matter to them with new, creative events, activities and programming. This recognises that it is important that local communities across Scotland are given the chance to tell their own story and discuss their experiences.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

There are a number of events, activities and initiatives in island areas which seek to invest in our cultural and historic resources, to ensure that islanders are encouraged to engage with, and participate in, arts and culture. This includes a range of festivals, arts centres and community trusts but also bodies such as Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An Comann Gàidhealach and the Heritage Forum.

### Sponsorship, Funding and Historic Environment

As part of its commitment to the delivery of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy, Historic Environment Scotland (HES) is grant funding [Scotland's Islands Research Framework for Archaeology \(SIRFA\)](#). The project began in 2018 and is managed by The Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. SIRFA is coordinated by the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Islands Archaeology Institute staff at Lews Castle College UHI, in partnership with local authority archaeologists at the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CnES), Shetland Amenity Trust and Orkney Islands Council.

HES is also grant funding research into the eroding medieval cemetery at Newark Bay, which is being undertaken by Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology (ORCA). This project is bringing together and publishing archive material from past excavations at the site, undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the human remains, including a DNA analysis, and training volunteers in archaeological recording techniques.

HES is also grant funding the University of Bradford and the Swandro Trust to excavate and record the eroding multi-phase archaeological site at the Knowe of Swandro on Rousay in the Orkney Isles. The site is being rapidly destroyed by the sea, and the investigation has focused on the excavation of a complex series of buildings, including a massive Iron Age roundhouse, which is built into an earlier tomb mound. Also in the Orkney Islands and as part of HES's day-to-day work, the post-excavation analysis of the Mayback Viking burials on Papa Westray is ongoing. This was a Historic Scotland human remains call off project from 2015. HES is releasing information on the investigation process as blogs and has had some media interest in the project so far. The next release will focus on the human remains. HES is awaiting the results of a DNA analysis from the Crick Institute before finalising this.

HES plays a role in the UK Government and Scottish Government assurance process, reviewing Islands Growth Deal projects/programmes, Strategic Outline Cases (SOC), Outline Business Cases (OBC) and Full Business Cases (FBC), for a wide range of projects, and facilitating input from HES colleagues and expertise across the organisation. HES also has representation on the Islands Growth Deal - Advisory Forum, as well as relevant programme and project boards, enabling HES to contribute strongly and develop wider project work regionally.

## **EventScotland**

EventScotland's existing funding programmes offer opportunities for event organisers to apply for funding on the basis that it meets the programme criteria. Events are assessed on their merits, and EventScotland will look at ways the event will create a positive impact for the host region and Scotland as a whole.

Events are assessed in terms of their viability and event management experience as well as the five impact areas; Economic - Tourism and Business; Brand, Identity and Reputation; Media and Profile; Social and Cultural and Environmental Sustainability.

In 2022, EventScotland supported twelve events located in island communities from its existing National and International programmes, and the Community Cycling Fund including; Shetland Folk Festival, Orkney Food Festival, St Magnus International Festival, Tiree Music Festival, HebCelt, Shetland Wool Week; BWA Tiree Wave Classic, 50th Mull Rally; Fèis Ìle - The Islay Festival, Orkney International Science Festival, Spaceport Community Open Day, and Oban and Kerrera Big Bike Weekend.

EventScotland also has plans in place to support Tall Ships Lerwick as part of a portfolio of sporting and cultural events taking place across Scotland in 2023.

## Scotland's Year of Stories 2022

Themed Years use key Scottish assets in tourism, culture and major events to deliver economic benefit across all sectors and, increasingly, community wellbeing. The most recent year, Scotland's Year of Stories 2022, engaged on a wide range of issues including culture, tourism, heritage, equality, literacy, creative industries and events.

Twenty-one events and festivals were supported through the £600,000 Year of Stories Open Events Fund. Supported events included SEALL's An Tinne, with events across the Isle of Skye, The Scottish Book Trust's Community Campfires events across the Western Isles including on Barra, South Uist, Eriskay, Benbecula and North Uist, Map of Stories events on Orkney and North Uist, Songs from the Last Page's touring event on Skye and Seanachas – a series of events presented to celebrate the Year by An Lanntair in Stornoway. The Edinburgh International Book Festival also delivered an engagement project with young filmmakers in Shetland.

The Scottish Government has supported 180 community-centred projects with £735K of partnership funding delivered through the 2022 Community Stories Fund, delivered in partnership with VisitScotland and Museums Galleries Scotland with support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Supported events included 'Tìr Ìseal nan Òran (Tìree: Low Land of Song)' which took place on Tìree, 'Cliabh An T-Shenachais – The Story Creel' which was delivered on Mull and Iona, 'Sgeulaichean Siarach' and 'Ri tac an teine' which both took place on Lewis, and 'Object Stories' and 'Four Corners' which both took place on Uist, Events took place across Orkney, including the launch of the George Mackay Brown Trail in Stromness, 'Untold Orcadian Stories' and 'Orkney, Scotland and Norway: stories in music and verse'.



## Dandelion

[Unboxed](#) was a major UK-wide programme, celebrating creativity and innovation, featuring ten large-scale commissioned projects designed to reach millions on-line and in person, bringing people together and showcasing creativity across the Four Nations.

Scottish Ministers appointed EventScotland as the Strategic Delivery Body for the commissioning and delivery of the Scottish UNBOXED project, Dandelion, which was funded by the Scottish Government through EventScotland. In total over 589,000 people took part in live, in-person events and hands-on schools' activities, across twenty-four local authorities.

This included every school in Na h-Eileanan Siar taking part in the Dandelion Schools Growing initiative – a huge nationwide experiment into how traditional growing methods compare with 21st-century techniques to shape the food production of the future. Each school was gifted a Dandelion Growing Cube – miniature 1m x 1m indoor farms equipped with growfelt, seeds and LEDs – as a legacy of the project alongside a wide range of creative Learning for Sustainability resources.

Dandelion's Unexpected Gardens sprang up from the Borders to the Highlands to the Islands as spaces to grow and places to gather. The Unexpected Garden in North Uist, led by Dandelion Partner Taigh Chearsabhagh, welcomed over 3,600 visitors and participants to its fifty-nine events ranging from film screenings, theatre on the beach, concerts, plant recording, musical veg workshops, potato printing, magic garden drawing and natural dye making.

Dandelion also supported forty-four local community organisations around the country to grow their own food and make their own creative Harvest events. From veg-growing community football teams to cook-ups in community allotments, apple harvesting and pressing, the chance to make seaweed fertiliser or get hands-on with jam and chutney-making – these rooted celebrations of Harvest sprouted across the country including harvest events in Orkney and Skyem organised by Stronsay Development Trust, North Ronaldsay Transition and Uigshader Living Forest.

In addition to the in-person attendances detailed above, Dandelion's digital and broadcast content allowed the programme to reach a broader audience who might not have been able to take part in events and activities in person, or the schools programme.

Dandelion's digital and broadcast content engaged with 869,960 people and premiered on 11 May 2022 with a specially commissioned film from Heisgeir in the Outer Hebrides, telling the family story of crofter and musician Padruig Morrison and one of Dandelion's Cubes of Perpetual Light.

**We committed to 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 action

- Many continuing projects such as Ceolas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, An Comann Gàidhealach, the Heritage Forum and centres such as Lanntair, Kildonan Museum, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Sabhal Mòr 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 £322,000 Treòir | Voar | Virr programme is funded jointly by the National Transition Training Fund and through the Islands Programme, which supports delivery of the National Islands Plan. We know how challenging the pandemic has been for our artists and that while recovery has begun, with more creative and cultural opportunities opening up, there is still a long journey ahead and incomes are still affected. This programme helps artists, particularly those living on our islands, to contribute to the wider economic and social recovery for communities, which have been impacted by Covid-19 and Brexit.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### Islands Heritage and Culture Project

Our £240,000 Islands Heritage and Culture Project is a local authority partnership initiative that is actively safeguarding, supporting and promoting 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 utilises local creative talent to widen the socio economic benefits derived through the celebration of the arts, language and dialect in island communities – all of which underpin our islands' culture and heritage.

Ongoing activity includes the **Orkney Digitisation Project**, an **Angus Og Project** being developed on the Isle of Skye, the **Shetland Culture and Heritage Hub**, the development of **Outer Hebrides Heritage Trails**, a focus on **The Culture and Heritage of Arran and Cumbrae** and a programme of cultural activity supporting **Artist and Heritage Projects across the Islands of Argyll and Bute**.

### Orkney Digitisation Project

Orkney has a deep and expansive history, which is immediately apparent to visitors as they explore the archipelago, seeing everything from cairns and cathedrals to gun batteries. Orkney Islands Council's museum collection numbers roughly 130,000 items, illustrating all aspects of Orcadian history. More than 70% of this collection is archaeology, which is recognised as a Nationally Significant collection. A proportion is displayed at the Council's four museum sites, which attract thousands of visitors every year, and the balance is stored. Not all the stored items are displayable but instead should be viewed as a research resource.

The primary objective of this project is to improve digital connectivity, accessibility and awareness of Orkney Islands Council's collections, museum resources and visitor attractions, by building a new, engaging web site. The project is helping to populate website with content, which has included the identification and procurement of the equipment required to produce high quality media and then the creation of a robust digitisation policy to ensure a consistent quality and that the legacy is secure. With the aim of an enjoyable user experience, optimised to encourage repeat visits, and coupled with a more proactive approach to social media, this will generate more public engagement with the Museums Service and increase its profile.

### **Angus Og Project - Skye and Lochalsh Archives**

Delivered by the Highland Archive Service in partnership with High Life Highland, The Angus Og Project will bring this exciting, unique and culturally important collection of cartoons back into the public realm by conserving, cataloguing and digitising the collection alongside producing an exhibition and workshops designed to bring Angus Og to a new and wider audience.

Angus Og was created by cartoonist Ewen Bain with his adventures based on the fabled Isle of Drambeg in the Utter Hebrides, a fictional island based on Bain's experience of life on Skye. Angus Og began in the Bulletin and was published in the Daily Record from 1960 through to 1989. There were 158 Angus Og adventures, and the collection of original strips has been donated by Ewen Bain's family to the Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre. The project supports investment in cultural and historic resources, ensuring that islanders are encouraged to engage with, and participate in, arts and culture.

### **Shetland Culture and Heritage Hub**

This project is establishing and developing a cultural and heritage hub, and touring art exhibition programme. It is hoped that the project, delivered utilising a community asset based delivery approach, can become an important programme of heritage and cultural delivery, supporting Shetland's island communities through the delivery of socio economic benefits at an island-level. Community consultation helped inform project development and ensured that project delivery reflected the needs across island communities, and that each of the Shetland islands' heritage, culture, language and dialects are supported and developed in line with community aspirations and priorities.

Meetings with local stakeholders and an engagement session with volunteers provided an invaluable opportunity to share sector challenges. This included higher energy costs in buildings, Developing the Young Workforce issues, as well as retention and recruitment within small island communities. Discussions included the exploration of what format the network could take and what people need the network to deliver on their behalf and as part of a partnership framework approach. Islanders were encouraged to engage with their heritage and culture with collated comments and suggestions during engagement sessions, often written in local dialect, e.g.:

*"Hit's a guid ting."*

*"Accessibility fir aabody."*

*"Maybe working tagedder a bit more."*

*"Rebrand volunteering in heritage. It's doing very interesting stuff in your free time!"*

*"Gie young fok da chance tae be involved, dey ir da future. Invite dem in."*

Further developments have included engagement with a recently formed steering group, in partnership with UHI Shetland, and through a recently launched 'Shetlaen Language Plan'.

### **Outer Hebrides Heritage Trails**

The Outer Hebrides Heritage Trail project, developed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Heritage Service Team, links closely with the Outer Hebrides Heritage Forum (Comann Dualchas Innse Gall - CDIG). The project supports the development of proposals for themed and branded self-guided heritage trails from Barra to the Butt of Lewis - linked to identified economic drivers and existing CDIG venues and facilities that celebrate the unique heritage assets of the local areas, supporting a sustainable flow of visitors and spreading the economic benefits across local communities.

Engagement with community organisations was critical to better understanding what would assist in the development of the identified Heritage and Cultural assets of the Western Isles and the Outer Hebrides Heritage Forum have been pivotal in development discussions and in maximising the positive impact of the project.

### **The Culture and Heritage of Arran and Cumbrae**

This project is focused on capacity building across Arran and Cumbrae and designed to use the existing, rich cultural and heritage assets of the islands in North Ayrshire. This includes work to identify synergies and opportunities for strategic development across the two islands in liaison with North Ayrshire Council's Heritage Team, Arts Team, Island's Officer and a range of local partners to understand priorities in each area and ensure that cultural and heritage practitioners across the islands are fully engaged and provided with support and guidance.

Key features of the project include the creation of opportunities for relevant practitioners across both islands, assisting with grassroots delivery, helping to build long term capacity and sustainability and the development of initiatives that strategically support cultural and heritage activity - including language. This is being achieved through the development of a network of cultural and heritage practitioners and organisations across the islands, by supporting young people to engage with cultural and heritage activity, and the development of associated learning opportunities.

### **Opportunities for the Argyll Islands and Increased Visitor Footfall**

On an ongoing basis this project is supporting the development of heritage and cultural initiatives that simultaneously build arts, culture, heritage and language opportunities and engagement for island communities and a vision to increase visitor footfall. Delivered by Culture, Heritage and Arts Assembly (CHARTS), a programme of cultural activity is supporting artist and heritage expert-led projects across the islands of Argyll and Bute. Development activity has been designed through a collaborative process, and supported through existing infrastructure, positioned to continually guide, inform and enhance the strategic development of CHARTS.

**Committed to support all of Scotland's Indigenous languages and dialects in ways that are relevant to the communities where these are spoken.**



### Implementation Route Map action

- Island Communities Impact Assessments will support this process following the 2022 update to the Guidance and Toolkit.
- Quarterly meetings are established between the Gaelic & Scots Team, the Islands Team and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to support this process.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

There continues to be a significant volume of events, activities and initiatives in island areas which seek to support Scotland's Indigenous languages and dialects in ways that are relevant to the communities where these are spoken. In relation to Gaelic, this includes a range of festivals, arts centres and community trusts but also work undertaken by key bodies such as Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Heritage Forum.

### Treòir | Voar | Virr



The Treòir | Voar | Virr project was funded by the National Transition Training Fund (NTTF) (£212,000) and through the Scottish Government Islands Team resource budget (£110,000) to support delivery of the National Islands Plan.

Delivered by Fèisean nan Gàidheal the aim was to aid recovery in education, while supporting re-training and employment opportunities for creative freelancers through live, online, progressive arts-based cultural workshops that supported various aspects of island culture. This included a focus on Scotland's Indigenous languages and dialects, music, drama, dance, storytelling, craftwork, digital and visual art, offered to all primary schools in Scotland's islands. Overall, sixty-two individuals and seventeen businesses were supported. A showreel video can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/TVVReel>.

NTTF offered Fèisean nan Gàidheal the opportunity to strengthen links with island schools, island-based freelance artists, the Islands Team at the Scottish Government and with staff at West Highland College UHI. Feedback indicates the project benefited all involved, creating employment and training opportunities for freelance tutors following an exceedingly difficult period.

### **Na h-Eileanan Tarsainn – Eigg, Muck and Rum Primary Schools, Highland**

One strand of the programme was the Eileanan Tarsainn project, which aimed to protect and promote local Gaelic culture and storytelling, by giving students contemporary as well as historical context.

Nan Fee is a singer, drama worker and teacher and was paired with traditional musician and artist Gabe McVarish, who, like Nan, is based in Eigg. Both spoke very highly of the impact of the project on themselves and the local communities. Participants were encouraged to hear, learn and develop stories in their local environment. The class teacher of one primary school that benefited reported the following:

*“Working alongside Nan and Gabe on the Treòir project was an incredibly enriching experience. Everyone always really looked forward to the sessions and the activities were always well-planned, engaging and a lovely, collaborative experience. There was so much variety for the children to engage with, and it was wonderful watching them grow in confidence and express their creativity. Storytelling in the classroom improved and this helped the children develop their skills in speaking and listening. They thoroughly enjoyed sharing their own ideas inspired by ‘The Wee Bannock’ and ‘The Secret of Kells’ and were especially proud of all the beautiful artwork and texts they created. Overall, the project was a fantastic opportunity. We all learnt a lot about storytelling and benefitted greatly from the richness of Scotland’s heritage and culture.”*

### **Shetland Primary School – Da Voar Project**

The Da Voar project aimed to promote the local Shetlæn language, by giving students contemporary context to the teaching of its history and development. The Head Teacher of one primary school reported the following:

*“The Voar Project is a great success with our P4-7 class and teacher at Urafirth. The bairns are really involved and we all love seeing Jordan and Christina. They are both so knowledgeable and interesting and their visits always spark off lots of stories and information about Shetland from the bairns too. The online sessions have been very well prepared and resourced but when Christina and Jordan visit in person, that’s when the project really takes off as they can respond more easily on the spot to the class’s questions and ideas. Jordan and Christina have a lovely, relaxed style of delivery and take everything in their stride. I feel the class are benefiting hugely from the experience.”*

The tutors curated the programme as a means of time travel through the history of Shetland, the language and stories of the people. Christina Inkster is a Visual Artist and Community Social Care Worker from the Shetland Isles. Her experience of supporting communities both home and away has led her to the belief and basis of her practice that it is the artist’s responsibility to protect, preserve and promote culture and diversity through contemporary art for it is existential to identity, sense of belonging and connection; all of which relate to, and impact on, health and wellbeing.

**We committed to 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 action**

- The Gaelic & Scots team has prepared the new Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan. This is currently out for public consultation after which the final draft, outlining the Scottish Government's alignment with the National Gaelic Language Plan, will be prepared.
- 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

There are a number of events, activities and initiatives in island areas which seek to 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. This includes a range of festivals, arts centres and community trusts but also bodies such as Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Heritage Forum. A revised version of the National Gaelic Language Plan will be published this year and it will continue to be important that both documents share priorities for Gaelic in island communities.

**We committed to 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 action**

- 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 new Scottish Government Gaelic Language plan with corporate service aims to ensure the equal prominence of Gaelic and encouragement to use Gaelic in communications.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

There are a number of events, activities and initiatives in island areas which seek to 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. This includes a range of festivals, arts centres and community trusts but also bodies such as Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Heritage Forum. Another mechanism that will be important for this commitment is Island Community Impact Assessments and the Gaelic questions that relevant authorities are asked to consider.

**We committed to work with public authorities and community groups in increasing the use and visibility of Gaelic in Gaelic speaking island communities.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

- The Gaelic & Scots team has prepared the new Scottish Government Gaelic Language Plan. This contains corporate service and aims to ensure the equal prominence of Gaelic in Scottish Government logo and branding, the prominence of Gaelic signage in Scottish Government offices, and encouragement to use Gaelic in our public communications and corporate publications. Other Scottish Government agencies, such as Social Security Scotland, provide bilingual material relating to their services and discussions are ongoing with island-based Scottish Government offices to increase their Gaelic provision. A number of Gaelic development officers are located in island communities with the aim of increasing the use and learning of Gaelic.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

There are a number of events, activities and initiatives in island areas which seek to work with public authorities and community groups in increasing the use and visibility of Gaelic in Gaelic speaking island communities. This includes a range of festivals, arts centres and community trusts but also bodies such as Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Heritage Forum. The use and visibility of Gaelic also features in the Gaelic plans of public authorities.

**Work with relevant authorities to improve Gaelic provision for Gaelic speaking island communities in delivering their functions and services.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

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 Scottish Government logo and branding, the prominence of Gaelic signage in Scottish Government offices, and commitments to use Gaelic in our public communications and corporate publications. Other Scottish Government agencies, such as Social Security Scotland, provide bilingual material relating to their services and discussions are ongoing with island-based Scottish Government offices to increase their Gaelic provision. The Faster Rate of Progress Initiative and COHI also have a role here and Gaelic is emphasised in these gatherings.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The commitments in Gaelic plans are important in improving Gaelic provision in island communities. There are also a number of events, activities and initiatives in island areas which seek to work with relevant authorities to improve Gaelic provision for Gaelic speaking island communities in delivering their functions and services. This includes a range of festivals, arts centres and community trusts but also bodies such as Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, An Comunn Gàidhealach and the Heritage Forum.

## **We committed to support approaches that promote the sustainable management of the historic environment.**

### **Implementation Route Map action**

- Our Place in Time: Scotland's 10-year strategy for the Historic Environment, sets out a vision of how our heritage can be understood, valued, cared for and enjoyed. The Strategy will be reviewed in 2022.
- Historic Environment Scotland will soon release a Green Recovery Statement, which sets out how the historic environment delivers as part of a 'Green Economy.'

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

Historic Environment Scotland plays a role in the UK and SG government assurance process, reviewing Islands Growth Deal projects/programmes, Strategic Outline Cases (SOC), Outline Business Cases (OBC) and Full Business Cases (FBC), for a wide range of projects, and facilitating input from HES colleagues and expertise across the organisation. HES also has representation on the Islands Growth Deal - Advisory Forum, as well as relevant programme and project boards, enabling HES to contribute strongly and develop wider project work regionally.

Our Place in Time Scotland's 10-year strategy for the Historic Environment, sets out a vision of how our heritage can be understood, valued, cared for and enjoyed. The Strategy was reviewed in 2022 and a new strategy will be launched in spring 2023. The revised strategy will have three key priorities : Enabling the transition to net zero, empowering vibrant, resilient, and inclusive communities and places and building a wellbeing economy.

### **Climate and sustainability**

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has been researching climate change mitigation, impacts and adaptation in Scotland's historic environment for many years. This includes publishing their findings and advice in INFORM Guides and Short Guides (for planners, owners and contractors), Refurbishment Case Studies and Technical Papers, HES guidance to Planning Authorities in their Managing Change series, comprehensive climate impact risk analysis of the Properties in Care HES look after on behalf of Scottish Ministers, the sector guide on climate change impacts, and their first adaptation plan, Climate Ready HES.

HES published their Green Recovery Statement in 2022, which sets out how the historic environment delivers as part of a 'Green Economy'. The statement outlines how making use of what we already have through the repair, reuse and retrofit of the existing built environment can support sustainable living and reduce carbon emissions. In addition, the maintenance of traditional buildings delivers good, green jobs and skills, and supports heritage-led regeneration to create resilient communities with a distinct sense of place. HES continues to work with Scottish Government, Heat in Buildings Directorate to support the sustainable journey of pre 1919 buildings to net zero.

HES leads the sector in climate change innovation and has pioneered the Climate Vulnerability Index, which has gained international recognition, to measure and assess the impacts on our world heritage sites. This means that Scotland will be the first country in the world to have a Climate Vulnerability Index assessment for each of our world heritage sites.

## **Conservation of our Heritage**

Our historic buildings are vulnerable to climate change, especially those without roofs, which is accelerating. The level of decay we are seeing now, and the remedial work needed are beyond traditional routine visual inspection from the ground. This means that throughout 2022 and now in 2023, HES has been inspecting the condition of several properties throughout Scotland and are reassessing how we care for them in the future. This is a bold step, and we believe HES are one of the first heritage bodies addressing this issue that will be faced over time by most/many owners of older buildings across the world.

## **Communities**

Historic Environment Scotland have a range of Community initiatives such as the HES Community Connections Programme which is a programme that delivers a range of exciting, collaborative projects showing how the heritage that matters to you has a vital role to play in supporting your community's recovery and renewal. The programme spans the whole of Scotland. HES have created a short visitor leaflet on the Orkney Islands, outlining the main sights including breath-taking landscapes and World Heritage Sites. Other leaflets have been created for other island heritage attractions such as St Kilda.

## **Engine Shed**

The Engine Shed is Scotland's dedicated building conservation centre, based in Stirling. Part of Historic Environment Scotland, it serves as a central hub for building and conservation professionals and the public. Our historic built environment is a finite and unique resource, yet its care calls for conservation skills that are in short supply. The learning and visitor resource is helping to encourage a greater understanding of traditional building materials and skills – and inspire future generations to continue to care for Scotland's built heritage. Much of the Engine Sheds resources are available online and accessible for all. As part of the 'Scottish 10' the Engine Shed has undertaken detailed 3D scanning of the Heart of Neolithic Orkney monuments which has given us incredible recordings of the Viking graffiti at Maeshowe and of faint Neolithic artwork at Skara Brae.

# Education

## **Strategic Objective 12 – To promote and improve education for all throughout life**

**We committed to 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 action**

- SDS is working to support the development of the Islands Growth Deal TalEntEd Islands Programme in partnership with UHI, Robert Gordon University, Herriot Watt, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The TalEntEd Islands programme will create opportunities for education, skills, entrepreneurship and commercialisation which will help respond to demographic challenges and the outmigration of young people from the Islands, drive an increase in sustainable green jobs, and fast-track Island decarbonisation.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

### **University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)**

UHI is represented on the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland (SAPRS) Implementation Steering Group (ISG) and through this involvement in 2022, has collaborated with SDS and other members to; share good practice, knowledge exchange, address provision challenges and explore new opportunities in rural Scotland (remote, islands and substantially rural).

UHI is leading on several key Islands Deal projects in areas such as work based learning to support the transition to net zero and creativity and wellbeing, which aim to have a transformational impact for island learners, businesses and communities. UHI's Island Strategy was published in 2020 and is being implemented within a partnership approach with key stakeholders to ensure that the activities are aligned with the needs of island communities.

### **University of Aberdeen**

The University of Aberdeen's Access and Articulation Teamwork with the islands to ensure that they are fully integrated into work to widen access to the University. The team visit the islands and provide additional funding opportunities, so no young person is discriminated against on the grounds of their location and prevented from attending an in-person event. Equally, support and opportunities are delivered, where it would not degrade quality, in a blended format to allow anyone to join regardless of personal circumstances. This widening access applies wider than the islands, however the University is linking directly with the islands.

### **Heriot-Watt University (HWU)**

Heriot-Watt University (HWU) continues to bring MSc and PhD students to its International Centre for Island Technology (ICIT) in Orkney. Over the 30 years that HWU has been in Orkney, many students have elected to stay in the islands, after completing their studies. Most of these young professionals now work in the renewable energy sector. This is reversing the process of depopulation and addressing the age imbalance so common in many Scottish islands. This inward migration and retention are contributing to a flourishing regional economy based on science and technology. January 2023 saw the signing of the Islands Growth Deal, and it is hoped that the Islands Centre for Net Zero (ICNZ), part of the £100 million Islands Growth Deal, will enter delivery shortly. The ICNZ is a £16 million public, private, university collaboration which will identify pathways to net zero for the Scottish islands. This will be a further draw bringing young scientists to the Orkney Islands. Among other things it will provide funding for up to 15 PhD students, who will collaborate with local organisations to help find solutions to the problem of Net Zero.

In 2022, with the support of British Council funding, ICIT developed an exchange programme with Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS) Surabaya, Indonesia. This initiative will link Orkney and Indonesian students who will work together on collaborative projects in the field of marine energy and the blue economy. Opportunities are also being developed, within the Heriot-Watt network, through Go Global. This initiative gives students at HWU campuses in Edinburgh, Dubai, and Malaysia the chance to study in Orkney. Heriot-Watt is committed to developing its Orkney campus and the teaching opportunities there.

### **Robert Gordon University (RGU)**

RGU continues its engagement and activity in the Highlands and Islands through Graduate Apprenticeship delivery, representation on the Islands Deal Forum, the TalEntEd Programme Board and leadership of the Entrepreneurship Work Package (WP2) and research activity that seeks to extend the reach of research impact in remote island communities. RGU is also represented on the Shetland Islands Energy Transition Skills Group, most recently sharing work that RGU's Energy Transition Institute has been doing on workforce transferability.

**We committed to support UHI as it deepens collaboration with island partners to promote learner pathways, innovation and industry/employer engagement.**



### Implementation Route Map action

- The UHI Islands Strategy Director will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government Islands Team through a collaborative, solution-focused approach that seeks to maximise the opportunities that arise through overlapping work streams, 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 Scottish Government'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.

### Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

#### Skills, Talent Attraction and Retention

The wider Talent Attraction programme aims to attract people from rest of the UK (rUK). Migration from rUK accounts for almost 50% of inward migration to Scotland and has no legal barriers and supports the Programme for Government commitment to develop a Talent Attraction and Migration Service to bring in skilled workers and help them to make Scotland their home. As part of this priority NSET action, an Industry Advisory Group for rest of UK (rUK) Talent Attraction, chaired by Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise Minister, Ivan McKee, has been formed to share talent attraction expertise to identify and develop effective approaches to attracting talent from the rest of the UK. This work is of critical importance to Talent Attraction across our island communities.

#### Industry Advisory Group for rUK Talent Attraction

Membership of the Industry Advisory Group reflects the priority growth sectors identified in the NSET, which will create jobs and bring overall benefits to Scotland's regions and wider economy, including life sciences, technology/fintech, advanced manufacturing – mechanical and electronics, financial services, space, and renewables. This Industry Advisory Group is exploring how best to shape a talent attraction programme which can expand Scotland's talent pool at all levels, to give employers the skills pipeline needed to take advantage of opportunities, and ultimately benefit our economy. The Industry Advisory Group will initially focus on priority growth sectors, which will create jobs and bring overall benefits to all of Scotland's regions and wider economy.

#### Student Retention

As part of the Talent Attraction Programme, we will work with colleges, universities and sector representatives, to explore whether more can be done to increase the number of international and Scottish graduates that stay in Scotland, particularly in rural and island communities, post-qualifying. Existing 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 and incentive for students to stay in Scotland after graduating. The project will aim to formalise links between students and employers (including public sector), particularly in sectors with skills shortages.

## University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI)

The Scottish Government Islands Team continues to engage regularly with UHI, in particular with the Islands Strategy Director, who is responsible for the delivery of the UHI Islands Strategy, which is closely aligned to priorities within the National Islands Plan. Given the UHI footprint and focus across the isles, this collaborative and solution-focused approach enables progress for island communities, supported by knowledge exchange that targets the shared priorities and synergies in the Islands Strategy and the National Islands Plan; realising benefits across the full range of UHI tertiary provision.

This is underpinned by the university's enabling themes of equality and inclusion, Gaelic language and climate change, which helps to ensure that through this collaborative relationship, provision in training, education and research is integrated with the needs of island communities and compliments the Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland and supporting community empowerment at the local level. Also, in Skye, and as part of the UHI, the Gaelic college, Sabhal Mor Ostaig offers a range of courses through the medium of Gaelic.

Additionally, through the UHI Islands Forum, key stakeholders such as SDS, HIE and island local authorities continue to support a better understanding of contexts and requirements, and the changing political and economic environment at an island-level. This further contextualises and increases the impact of the work being undertaken by UHI's Island Skills coordinator for example; in collating information relevant to local populations to inform where upskilling and reskilling are required, and what new provision may be required to support sustainable economic development and community wealth building in key sectors such as those facilitating the transition to net zero.

### **We committed to ensure that young people are given the same opportunities to access education as young people on mainland Scotland.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

- Education Scotland will continue to lead and support on education recovery in light of Covid-19 recovery.
- HM Inspectors are engaging with establishments to gather evidence for national thematic reports on recovery education, wellbeing and outdoor learning. Island schools, including those that deliver Gaelic Medium Education, are part of these thematics.

### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

## Education, e-Sgoil and our National e-Learning Offer

We continue to support e-Sgoil in the current financial year through a £1.8 million commitment. This investment enables equity of access for children and young people across Scotland; enhancing subject choice; providing study support and facilitating participation in live events; and offering virtual teaching supply cover – across Scotland.

Examples include:

- leadership role in the National Discussion Live, empowering the voices of 26,000 learners including those from the islands
- iSgoil – supporting learners to continue learning when they are unable to attend school physically
- Scotland's Assembly – showcasing Scotland's great places and people including editions on Gaelic, wind farms on Lewis and COAST Arran
- Dug's Discovery Den (also in Gaelic) for early years learners
- Easter Study Support
- year-long evening Study Support
- DYW Live – partnering with hundreds of employers and schools
- conversational English for Ukrainian families which was initiated to answer the needs of refugees in the islands

e-Sgoil was established in 2016 by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to address equity issues across their island schools. It was designed to enable young people to access learning opportunities that might otherwise be restricted because of geography or staff availability. E-Sgoil also makes an important contribution to support Gaelic learning throughout Scotland.

When the COVID pandemic began in March 2020, and with its resulting impact on education, e-Sgoil was well positioned to pivot its service delivery model to meet this challenge. In partnership with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland this response and re-prioritisation resulted in our National e-Learning Offer (NeLO). E-Sgoil's key leadership role in NeLO has strengthened their position nationally and locally and supported the development of new skills and expertise for their staff across all the islands, not just Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

From its base in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis, e-Sgoil teaching staff are employed from across the Outer Hebrides, within neighbouring island authority areas and across mainland Scotland. E-Sgoil's enhanced offer demonstrates how innovation in the islands can be supported and enhanced to the benefit of the whole of Scotland, building strong partnerships, respect and cultural equity for our island communities and local authorities.

## **Employment, training and educational opportunities on islands through our Islands Programme**

This year and as part of our £1 million Islands Programme resource funding allocated to support the implementation of the National Islands Plan, we are committed to developing employment, training and education initiatives that reflect against the nuances of island life and also help to tackle population decline.

This finance has been committed in a number of ways that have a direct impact upon employment, training and educational opportunities, delivered through practical policy tests and in partnership with key stakeholders. The impact of these investments informs future policy development in a way that recognises, celebrates and responds to the unique qualities across our island communities.

Ongoing policy tests include a £250,000 investment to develop an Island Skills and Employment Repopulation Pilot. The Islands Team are supporting local authorities, HIE and SDS with work linked to the forthcoming Addressing Depopulation Action Plan and the population priorities for island communities. It is hoped that this will have a direct impact on addressing local employment and recruitment challenges.

Delivery in North Ayrshire will engage with DWP, council services, youth services and HE/FE providers to identify priority groups including jobseekers, young people, parents, women, minority groups and individuals who require upskilling/re-skilling to enable and encourage continued employment. Delivery in the Western Isles will engage young people, new entrants and career changers and explore opportunities and pathways within local industry. A further project is taking place in Argyll and Bute.

**We committed to 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.

### **Young Islanders Network (YIN)**

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, Ms Gougeon, launched the Young Islanders Network on Orkney in August 2022, providing children and young people with a platform to support meaningful contributions to National Islands Plan delivery and to their current and future life on islands.

Through the Young Islanders Challenge (YIN pilot), young people articulated a desire to contribute to the governance of the National Islands Plan, to support grassroots youth representation and deliver tangible, meaningful and positive outcomes for young people living throughout our islands. The Scottish Government listened to these views and at the YIN launch in August 2022, Ms Gougeon formally invited YIN representation onto the National Islands Plan Delivery Group. This will help to ensure that through the Network, the voices of young people continue to be heard and listened to, while also shaping the delivery of the NIP.

Building on the earlier Young Islanders Challenge, children and young people living on islands were invited to meet online; initially with the senior YIN development worker at Youth Scotland. From the 10 March 2022, Young Island Champions (YICs) from across all the local authority areas with islands were invited to meet and the co-development of the network was initiated. To date there have been twenty online meetings of the YIN via Zoom. The YICs requested to meet on zoom fortnightly until the summer school break. They initially wanted to keep the online meetings open to all ages from 5-25 years old and to use these sessions to get to know each other. In 2022, 348 young people were engaged in introductions to the YIN, through activity-based sessions with a mix of online and face to face meetings.

Young people were invited to participate in the Young Islanders Challenge, which was updated from the initial pilot in March 2022, to include a Year of Stories 2022 element. This provided an opportunity for children and young people to share their favourite island story. The idea behind this was to build on their island identity and to learn more about where they live and share this with other young people across the network.

There are fifty-nine registered YICs, who act as YIN leads, although not all participate on the zoom calls as many are engaging directly through their anchor organisation group, with a local group representative attending the zoom meetings to provide updates. YICs have helped to co-develop the structure of the network, looking at how the champions that attended online meetings could be conduits to feed back to their local groups and to bring to the YIN meetings the voices of others from within their own groups and local areas. Through this approach, young people were invited to be YICs, and to be involved in the challenges without becoming a YIC.

101 schools across the islands have been engaged in YIN development and the 'Challenge Sheets', alongside information on the Carbon Neutral Islands Schools project. The terms of reference for this were co-developed and agreed by the YICs. In addition, seven Young Islanders representative roles were identified, and the young people voted on the post allocations, with appointments made in October 2022. Alongside the seven representatives, depute representatives were also appointed to ensure that the young people had peer support and continuity for the Network.

The YIN is also responding to the specific needs of young people. For example, supporting young people's mental health in response to the pandemic as one area previously highlighted as a priority. Work is underway through the mental health training being offered in partnership with Place2Be. Young islanders are invited to access the Ready for Youth work and Place2b programs, which incorporate peer mental health support for young leaders. YICs have a safe space to express their concerns and views on all issues which affect them and through this peer support they note less feelings of isolation and improved confidence.

YICs have also been heavily involved in the development of the YIN's digital presence. Initially considering whether they would find a website useful, and which, if any, social media platforms they would like to use. This extended to include which roles they would be interested in creating to support and shape the digital presence. On the 17th of June 2022, the [yin.scot](https://www.yin.scot) website was officially launched at an event held on Arran. A designated 'drop box' for young islanders to share stories and content on the website and social media platforms has also been developed and young islanders have shared blogs on the website, with ongoing co-development taking place at each meeting.

Skills and Awards development opportunities for the young people and their workers continue to grow. Six of the YICs have taken part in an introductory ILEAD Engage workshop, with more planned. One YIC has also completed Ready for Youth Work, a Youth Scotland programme which includes leadership skills and peer mentoring. Ten young people took part in leadership and decision-making workshops during the Scaladale residential weekend and in addition, four young people participated in leadership activities at the Big Ideas Weekend in Stirling.

YIN members participating in meetings have undertaken decision-making skills sessions and confidence building activities. Through their participation in the Young Islanders Challenges and Network events, 29 Hi5 awards and 10 Dynamic Youth Awards have been awarded to young islanders. This number is set to increase significantly as young islanders are invited to obtain a Hi5 award by taking part and submitting their completed 'Challenge Sheets' to Youth Scotland.

Content creators' workshops were delivered to young people who wish to be more involved in the digital communications of the YIN. Additionally, STEM, Games and Arts sessions have been delivered to groups on islands and young people have developed skills in engagement and leadership through this. Forty-five young people have been involved in community social action event workshops, looking at ways to identify and deliver on a social action to benefit their communities.

All the YICs and their anchor organisations have been invited to participate in the Inspire 2022 project, run through Youth Scotland. The aim of this is to have YIN representation in running a social action event in 2023. As part of the YIN Transport Challenge and consultation with young islanders, a group of the YIN champions are looking at ways to carry out a social action based on their findings to test change of a proposed solution and to exchange their learning with each other and decision makers.

One young person in Orkney has been successful in a bid to the Audrey Milan Fund 'What's your Big Idea?' following on from their time at the Big Ideas Weekend residential in Stirling with the YIN. They will be using this grant to deliver a workshop to promote the Young Islander Transport Survey and hope to recruit some more young people from the smaller Orkney islands who are based in the Papdale Halls of Residence. Alongside capacity-building work with young people, the Project will build the capacity of adults working with young people. The purpose of which is to better enable them to support the Network (and the National Islands Plan) in the longer term.

It has remained a priority to ensure that young people who engage with the YIN and Network activities, such as community challenges, are from all backgrounds and include those with protected characteristics. Several the YICs that are regularly engaging are benefitting from meeting other young people who experience challenges and feel safe to share their voices and hopes for the future. Work is ongoing to ensure that the network is accessible to all young people from the islands, and that they can all make a meaningful contribution to the islands plan and the project.

Two young people with disabilities recently completed a Dynamic Youth Award through their participation in the Young Islander Challenge, taking place in a setting which met their needs, and using YIN resources in a person-centred led series of sessions; to ensure that they could engage with the challenges, develop new skills and build on their identity as islanders. The aspiration is that the anchor groups will continue to be encouraged to engage with all young people in the islands and that the challenges and access to the network will be inclusive and accessible for all.

**We committed to continue to support and promote Gaelic medium education at all levels.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

- A wide range of projects and initiatives are in place to promote and support Gaelic medium education at all levels. This involves the Scottish Government, 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.
- 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

#### **Gaelic Medium Education**

The Scottish Government, working with local authorities will continue to support a wide range of projects and initiatives which are in place to promote and support Gaelic medium education at all levels in island communities.

The work of other bodies/authorities such as Education Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Scottish Funding Council, Stòrlann, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Comann na Gàidhlig is also important in supporting and promoting Gaelic education in island communities. The Scottish Government has a commitment to develop a new strategic approach to Gaelic medium education and will seek to ensure that island communities benefit from this approach. The support and encouragement for GME is at all levels from early learning to further and higher education.

**We committed to 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 action**

- The £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme prioritises schools in need of updating, as identified by local authorities, to ensure rapid progress where most required and will benefit around 50,000 pupils across Scotland. All projects will be announced, and funding allocated by 2026.
- Phase three of the Learning Estate Investment programme will open to local authorities in 2022, and successful projects will be announced before the end of 2022. Any bids for funding from island authorities, through Phase three of the Learning Estate Investment Programme, will be given careful consideration.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

The £2 billion Learning Estate Investment Programme prioritises schools in need of updating, as identified by local authorities and will benefit tens of thousands of pupils across Scotland.

The first phase of projects to benefit from the Learning Estate Investment Programme was announced in September 2019 and includes Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Barra and Watersay Community Campus project.

The second phase of projects to benefit from the Learning Estate Investment Programme was announced in December 2020 and includes The Highland Council's Broadford Primary School project on the Isle of Skye.

We are currently considering local authorities Phase 3 bids, and we intend to announce the successful projects soon.

**We committed to 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 action**

- 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 has taken 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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**



## **Education Scotland – Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC)**

All the island local authorities have set ambitious attainment stretch aims and have clear plans to support improvement through Strategic Equity Funding. Each local authority has different approaches to raising attainment and the use of Pupil Equity Funding which is appropriate to their context. The joint work of the attainment advisors across Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles facilitates ways in which staff from across the three island local authorities can collaborate and jointly work at solutions for closing the poverty-related attainment gap on islands.

### **The Highland Council**

Pupil Equity plans are now being monitored by collaborative lead officers, who ensure they are aligned with school improvement plans and that data is used to inform interventions. Visits to schools include discussions on the PEF plans. Earlier this year Education Scotland published a PEF evaluation.

The Attainment Advisor has provided a presentation to Head Teachers from the west area (including the island schools) on the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) refresh and use of PEF. Education Scotland's Education Officer for Secondary Curriculum Gaelic has been engaging with a Depute Head Teacher from Portree High School, Skye, who is leading work on increasing attainment in Gaelic literacy. The local authority is also working on finalising a tracking and monitoring data system to be used by all schools across Highland. This will help to ensure attainment data is consistent and used to inform planning and intervention to improve attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap.

### **Orkney Islands Council**

The Attainment Advisor supported the local authority in the setting of its stretch aims. This was achieved by collating and analysing data for 2021-22 and data over time. The SAC leads for Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles and the attainment advisor for each LA meet on a regular basis. They collaborated in the reviewing processes for setting stretch aims. The Attainment Advisor has met with all schools to review their data and the tracking and monitoring of their school targets and LA stretch aims using Orkney's Tracking Toolkit. A particular focus of the meetings is to support Head Teachers and practitioners in identifying gaps for children in receipt of free school meals and those who have experienced care. The attainment advisor worked with the LA to analyse the recently published Achievement of a Curriculum for Excellence Levels. Overall, there is an improving picture in the attainment in P1, P4, P7 and S3.

The Attainment Advisor reviewed all Pupil Equity Fund reports for 2021-22 and the plans for 2022-23. Feedback was provided to all Head Teachers on how these could be improved. In school meetings the Attainment Advisor and Head Teacher discuss the pupil equity fund spend and uncommitted funds to ensure that there are no underspends. At the LA's recent face-to-face day for Head Teachers, the Attainment Advisor provided sessions for all attendees on the importance of ensuring that the pupil equity fund is being used to target gaps within their schools.

The Attainment Advisors for Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles work collaboratively to provide professional learning sessions which focus on the SAC agenda. The sessions are responsive and have been based on the feedback and requests from the target group. Attendees includes Head Teachers, Depute Heads, Principal Teachers and aspiring leaders.

## Argyll and Bute

Since starting in Easter 2022, the Attainment Advisor has been working with the local authority to initially provide support for mainland schools. As the role developed and trusted relationships have been formed the Attainment Advisor has supported more rural and island schools.

As part of the Head Teacher event in September 2022, the Attainment Advisor presented on the SAC stretch aims and facilitated discussion amongst school leaders. This was structured so that island and rural schools were brought together exclusively to discuss what this meant for them in their context. Support visits were undertaken to three schools on the island of Islay in December 2022: Port Ellen Primary, Port Charlotte Primary and Islay High School. Further visits are planned in 2023 to continue professional dialogue and learning around raising attainment.

Argyll and Bute has twenty-three inhabited islands and twelve island schools (some are being mothballed). The local authority has allocated part of their strategic equity funding year 2022-23 to support rural and island schools who currently do not receive pupil equity funding but are aware of a poverty-related attainment gap within the pupil cohort. The Attainment Advisor is supporting the local authority and these schools to implement this funding using examples of best practice.

## Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

The local authority collaborated at length with the Attainment Advisor and colleagues as they worked to develop their stretch aims. The Attainment Advisor also offered cluster Head Teacher surgeries resulting in standards and quality and improvement plans being much more concise and having a clear focus on stretch aims. With the support of the Attainment Advisor, new monitoring and tracking processes for the SAC is part of a wider implementation of tracking and monitoring across the local authority school clusters.

Each school now has a separate detailed planning, tracking, and monitoring process in place for identified pupils working closely with the SAC Education Attainment Workers. Schools and the local authority are in a good place to be able to evidence impact of raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

Head Teachers are proactive in asking for the support of the Attainment Advisor and there is a focus on ensuring the analysis of data leads to improvement and that practitioners understand the data available and how to use it. The Attainment Advisor has also brokered support in a number of curriculum areas and in key cross-cutting themes to support improvement.

## Shetland

Considerable progress has been made in setting stretch aims and implementing the SAC refresh. The SAC lead and Attainment Advisor in Shetland have worked closely to develop an overarching logic model – ‘The Ambition – Our journey to excellence and equity for Shetland’s learners.’ This sets out the local stretch aims and long-term strategic outcomes for the next four years. It has been developed in consultation with central local authority staff and with Head Teachers. Within this, development groups have been set up to plan and take forward each of the stretch aims. The Attainment Advisor has supported these groups to develop plans for each workstream. Head

Teachers have had considerable input into setting the priorities during recent development days. The Attainment Advisor led an input to create a consistency of understanding of what needs to be achieved and of the terminology within the logic model. As a result, there is a keen sense of ownership of the plan. A shared vision is in place for future priorities, both at local and individual school level.

The Attainment Advisor organised a virtual event on achieving 'Excellence and Equity in Shetland.' This was a multi-agency event with a number of professionals attending. The event focused on the SAC refresh, what has been learned so far and on sharing practice from across Shetland. Further plans are being progressed for continued sharing of approaches to the SAC and impact across Shetland.

The Attainment Advisor has worked closely with the central officer team to improve approaches in tracking data from all schools. This will support the tracking and monitoring of progress towards the stretch aims and the provision of targeted support, where required.

### **We committed to consider the needs of adult learners in our island communities as we develop our adult learning strategy for Scotland.**

#### **Implementation Route Map action**

- We will engage with adult learners in our island communities to identify how we can remove barriers to learning as we start to deliver the Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland.
- An Island Communities Impact Assessment will be undertaken ahead of the publication of the new Adult Learning Strategy.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

An Island Communities Impact Assessment was undertaken ahead of the publication of the [Adult Learning Strategy](#) in May 2022 and is available [here](#). The strategy's focus on removing barriers to learning and increasing opportunities for adult learners are likely to have a positive impact on island communities. The immediate focus of the strategy's initial stages of delivery is to engage across the sector and consult further to ensure that the views of adult learners, providers and practitioners are considered before further work is carried out on a number of high-level actions. This will enable a better understanding of the learning journeys that adult learners from island communities take.

There are opportunities in place for Gaelic adult learners in island areas. In these locations such as Sabhal Mor Ostaig, UHI Outer Hebrides, Iomairt Colmcille Ile and Ceòlas are important. In addition, the Speak Gaelic adult learning initiative can be found in classes, on TV, online and on radio.

# Implementation

## **Strategic Objective 13 – To support effective implementation of the National Islands Plan**

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to 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 action**

Further research is being undertaken to gather the necessary data in order to set the baselines for our measurable outcomes. Scottish Government Islands team are currently developing a research index and research working group to ensure that relevant data from our systems of measurement is captured and informs the monitoring of the National Islands Plan. This will include working in collaboration with policy colleagues across Scottish Government, our local authority partners and island community stakeholders to identify pre-existing island statistics to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

We will work with island communities, local authorities and stakeholders to develop Island Profiles. This work will seek to develop easily accessible profiles providing demographic, economic, and locally identified and developed data for each island. A small number of test profiles will be developed and delivered in 2022. The learning from this work will help shape how the Island Profile concept may be scaled up and delivered across islands.

We will undertake a further iteration of the National Islands Plan Survey.

#### **Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

To achieve the objectives set out in the National Islands Plan, we needed to improve the availability of data held about Scotland's islands. Over the last 3 years, work has been undertaken to progress this including five key projects to provide islands-level data in order to measure the progress against each Strategic Objective in the Plan.

1. Islands Data Dashboard (RESAS)
2. The National Islands Plan Survey (James Hutton Institute)
3. Islands geography data zones (RESAS)
4. Island region population dashboard (National Records of Scotland)
5. Existing data indicators framework (EKOS)

## Islands Data Dashboard

In 2020 an interactive dashboard – [Islands Data Dashboard - Infogram](#) – was created using existing data. The dashboard presents the data categorised by the 12 strategic objectives. This workbook which collated all data available at a data zone level. Data zones (see [here](#)) were mapped against islands using a lookup. Some data is not available at a datazone level, so has been inputted at a local authority level instead. Where data was available, this has allowed to understand the demographics, geography etc. of individual islands at an island level.

## The National Islands Plan Survey

Development of this dashboard highlighted that not all data required for monitoring purposes was available at island level, and so a large-scale primary data collection took place. The National Islands Plan Survey gathered data with a view to collecting information about people’s lives against which was used to measure the effectiveness of the Plan.

In October 2020, 20,000 surveys were posted to adult residents of 76 permanently inhabited islands, with options to complete it on paper, online or by phone, and in English or Gaelic. A total of 4,347 people responded to the survey from 59 islands, giving a response rate of 22%.

Survey findings highlight that experiences of island life vary considerably by island group and by age groups. Respondents feel there is a lack of support for young people to remain, move or return to the islands. The data reveals that respondents feel there are a lack of employment, training and higher education opportunities and a lack of childcare options to fit with residents’ working patterns. Respondents also feel there is a poor variety of housing types, sizes and tenures to meet people’s needs and a lack of affordable housing. Respondents also have mixed experiences of accessing healthcare services and of speed and reliability of internet connections. Some feel there is inadequate infrastructure for the number of tourists their islands attract. The National Islands Plan Survey has significantly improved the availability of data held about Scotland’s islands. It has provided baseline data against which to measure the effectiveness of the Plan.

In addition to the survey report, an interactive data explorer ([Scottish National Islands Plan Survey \(2020\): results explorer \(shinyapps.io\)](#)) was developed which allows exploration of the the data by island region, age group, gender, household income, long term health condition/disability, and household type.

## Islands geography data zones

In 2021/22, further work was conducted on the islands geography to allow existing data to be used to as indicators to monitor each Strategic Objective. The key issue was that previously islands geography contained split data zones (those that contain postcodes in different Island regions and both an Island region and part of the Mainland). The challenge was to ensure that data zones uniquely mapped onto the islands regions geography developed by the James Hutton Institute which was used as a basis for the islands survey ([National Islands Plan Survey: final report – gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)). In 2022, a reproducible framework was produced that links the Island Subregion Framework to data zones. The new geography allows islands and mainland to be identified separately. This now allows island and mainland Scotland comparisons

to be used. Most importantly, it allows available data sources to be available at the island level and so existing data can now be used more easily to monitor the each Strategic Objective.

### **Island region population dashboard**

In 2022/23 National Records for Scotland used the new islands geography to publish annual population data for Scottish Islands. The first Island Region Populations dashboard which be made public shortly.

### **Existing data indicators framework**

Concurrently in 2022/23, EKOS have been commissioned to deliver a list of existing data indicators which can be used to monitor each of the Strategic objectives. Using the existing data sources identified in this framework, in conjunction with the new islands geography look-up, will provide a further mechanism to monitor the National Islands Plan.

**We committed to host a series of island-based focus groups 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.

**We committed to 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.

**We committed to 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](#) for further details.

**We committed to 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 2020. Please see the [National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020](#) for further details.

**We committed to work with island communities to ensure that the Plan is widely promoted and understood by all sectors of society.**

**Implementation Route Map action**

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.

**Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.**

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 the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, Council Leaders and Chief Executives across all Local Authorities with islands. The group met four times during 2022 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. It 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. During 2022, the NIPDG was convened a number of times to give their input to several key issues. This included, but was not limited to, development of the Islands Programme funding stream, Cost Crisis funding, Young Islanders Network, islands data and research, governance of the National Islands Plan and accompanying Implementation Route Map and Carbon Neutral Islands.

## Islands Bond consultation

As previously highlighted, extensive consultation took place with island communities in respect of the proposed Islands Bond policy throughout late 2021 and early 2022. Between 14 March and 26 April 2022, in-person engagement events were held, meeting with over one hundred island residents across twelve island communities on the development of the Islands Bond criteria and eligibility. These events allowed island residents from across all six relevant authority areas to discuss the bond, and how it could address the specific needs of their communities.

### Island Workshops

Rum, 14 March 2022

Yell, 22 March 2022

Northmavine (Shetland Mainland), 23 March 2022

Arran, 4 April 2022

Cumbræ, 5 April 2022

Bute, 5 April 2022

Islay, 7 April 2022

Raasay, 11 April 2022

Eriskay, 12 April 2022

Lewis, 13 April 2022

Shapinsay, 25 April 2022

Eday, 26 April 2022

Consultation with communities who are directly impacted by the introduction of new policies or strategies is a crucial part of policy development. Ultimately, based on the feedback received from island communities and stakeholders, the decision was taken to withdraw the Islands Bond and focus on the delivery of more localised solutions. The very approach suggested by communities, stakeholders and Island MSPs. This decision demonstrates our continued commitment to listen to island communities, so we can ensure that policy is delivered in collaboration with them and shows how island communities can influence the direction of policy making in Scotland.

## The Carbon Neutral Islands Project

[The Carbon Neutral Islands project](#) has engaged with communities to ensure their views are actively featured during development. Our delivery partner Community Energy Scotland have developed local steering groups on each of the six islands. These steering groups have identified local anchor organisations that employ community development officers who will co-ordinate input from the community into the project. This work will lead to Community Climate Change Action Plans which provide communities the chance to prioritise how they want to decarbonise. Work in the next financial year will focus on supporting them achieve the aims of these plans.



## The Scottish Islands Federation

We continue to fund the Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) <https://www.scottish-islands-federation.co.uk> 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 and to work with island communities, Scottish Government and Local Authorities to ensure island views and needs are heard in order to help deliver the Plan and improve economic and cultural outcomes for all islands as part of the delivery of the objectives of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

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 Plan. Its online events, including an annual members' evening, facilitates discussion across focused areas of the Plan including Carbon Neutral Islands. These events offer a combination of updates, direct input from the Islands Team, and shared learning. Officials meet regularly with the SIF project officers to discuss how the Plan is being supported and implemented and to hear real time feedback and suggestions from island communities. We fund the role of a dedicated project officer within SIF who supports the Islands Team to ensure island communities can influence the delivery of the Plan and its commitments.

SIF provides a conduit between island communities and policy and decision-making through learning exchange virtual events, working group discussions, social media, and direct emails which facilitates the implementation of the Plan and enables island communities to influence delivery of the Plan. This role has expanded and developed as engagement with policy and island communities grow.

In 2022, SIF's work to support the delivery of the Plan has included:

- **Housing:** Two learning exchanges on community led housing which heard from successful island housing models, facilitated discussion on the Remote Rural and Island Housing Action Plan and included the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan. Following the success of the event SIF has set up a housing group which provides a space for island groups to share learning and support each other.
- **Resilience:** A member session with Ipsos and the Scottish Government's Islands Team to reflect on the research into island resilience during the pandemic. Examples of community best practice were shared and enabled discussion with Scottish Government on current and future resilience. SIF also helps co-ordinate information gathering for Scottish Government on resilience issues impacting islands during disruptive events.
- **Islands Bond:** The organisation and promotion of a series of twelve community workshops to explore the islands bond in Spring 2022. These events led directly to the reconsideration of the proposal. From a SIF member perspective, we have been told the events and Islands Team input and engagement have been very welcome.
- **Island Decarbonisation:** The establishment of a working group which brings together thirteen community representatives from all six island areas. This provides feedback to support the development of the Carbon Neutral Islands programme and focusses on replicability and how best to facilitate exchanges between areas and levels of expertise, to bring islands as mentors and islands as mentees together.

- **Marine Litter:** The setting up of a working group of island marine litter groups from across all six island Local Authority areas. This group meets monthly and has developed a methodology to increase the level of island marine litter data available. Working with this group and the wider group of island marine litter contacts, SIF has responded to the consultation on the Updated Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland. Key points raised included the need for recognition within the strategy of the situation on the ground in islands, which is significantly different to mainland coastal areas. Joint funding from Marine Scotland and the Scottish Government's Islands Programme support's a Marine Litter Network Development post within SIF.



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