



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

NATIONAL ISLANDS PLAN THROUGH A COVID LENS

Survey Results



THE
ISLANDS
SCOTLAND ACT 2018
ACHD
NAN EILEAN
ALBA 2018

The Scottish Government Islands Team would like to take this opportunity to thank participants for their support in this improvement process.

Rationale and Objectives

‘The National Islands Plan (NIP) through a COVID Lens Survey’ was shared online with a targeted audience with the purpose of gathering responses from local authority (LA) colleagues regarding the impact of the (COVID-19) pandemic on the delivery of National Islands Plan Strategic Objectives and Commitments. This was in recognition of the impact of COVID-19, which continues to have a profound impact on our islands, and which has exposed both new vulnerabilities and strengths.

All survey data was collected between 18 June and 10 July 2020.

Survey Results

First and foremost it is important to state the overwhelming message of gratitude and thanks communicated by each LA in recognition of the funding support provided by UK and Scottish Governments to businesses and community groups during the pandemic. There is a strong belief that many island businesses would already have failed in absence of these support mechanisms.

LAs also universally reinforced messaging previously shared with the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands through the Islands Strategic Group; confirming that the Strategic Objectives and Commitments within the NIP continue to be relevant and provide the potential to deliver positive outcomes for our island communities.

Priority Strategic Objectives

In question one, participating authorities were asked to reflect on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and identify the most important Strategic Objectives (SO) within the NIP to best support recovery and renewal. **Transport** was highlighted as the most significant SO to best support recovery across our islands. The next SO selected by LAs was **Sustainable Economic Development** and this was followed by **Digital Connectivity** as the third most important NIP delivery priority. The breakdown of responses are noted in **Annex A**.

Priority Commitments

In response to question two, which asked respondents to highlight any specific aims that will best support local recovery priorities, a significant number of NIP Commitments were identified by LAs as being pivotal to support local COVID-19 recovery priorities. The Commitments that were highlighted multiple times by different LAs are also consistent with the most important SOs identified in response to question one (Transport/Sustainable Economic Development/Digital Connectivity). The most frequently identified NIP Commitments are noted below and all Commitments that were selected are noted in **Annex A**:

Highly Important (NIP Commitments highlighted by three or more LAs):

- 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. **(Transport)**
- Identify key actions to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth on islands, such as community-run businesses, e-commerce and digitally enabled island-based businesses. **(Sustainable Economic Development)**
- Deliver a step change in the quality of digital connectivity across the islands. **(Digital Connectivity)**

Important (NIP commitments highlighted by two LAs):

- 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. **(Transport)**
- 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. **(Transport)**
- Tailor business and community support for island communities to ensure products and services are fit for purpose, accessible and effective. This will include exploring new and innovative models and working with national providers to consider how programmes can better address needs of island communities and businesses. **(Sustainable Economic Development)**
- 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. **(Sustainable Economic Development)**
- Drive 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. **(Sustainable Economic Development)**
- 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. **(Digital Connectivity)**
- 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. **(Digital Connectivity)**

Further to the SOs and Commitments identified from within the NIP as implementation delivery priorities, LAs also contributed constructive observations, suggestions and highlighted areas of concern relative to the key priority areas (Transport/Sustainable Economic Development/Digital Connectivity) as summarised in the following three sections.

Transport

Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and North Ayrshire Council each highlighted the potential value and importance of developing a “Smart Ticketing” approach for travel to our islands. Discussions recognised the pressures resulting from physical distancing measures and consequent reduced capacity that was required across public transport. If implemented, a ‘smart’ approach could prioritise the business, educational, and economic needs of the local community, while continuing to safeguard health and safely support Tourism.

Shetland Islands Council wished to repeat a point that has been made previously to Scottish Government, regarding the provision of full revenue and capital costs required for current and future internal ferry services. Their point referenced “strong cross-party support following Parliamentary debate in December 2017” and SG’s ‘Empowering Scotland’s Island Communities’:

“the provision of transport services should not place a disproportionate financial burden on any Council such that it could be counter to the principles of Article 170, with particular reference to the revenue and ferry replacement costs of the internal ferry services of Orkney and Shetland, and commits to meaningful negotiation now to conclude this issue”.

Shetland Islands Council communicated that internal ferry services enable daily commutes to access jobs, hospital services, participation in education, training, sport, cultural and leisure activities and provide transportation for Tourism, and island businesses. Consequently, any reduction in these services would have an immediate and very serious detrimental effect on extremely fragile remote island areas’ economic and social wellbeing.

Orkney Islands Council believe that Transport is an even greater priority now than before this pandemic. They indicated that their outer isles are profoundly disadvantaged by the comparatively small sizes of ferries, which are perceived to be a significant and continuing equality issue for those living in these areas.

Orkney Islands Council also indicated that Transport is an essential pre-requisite to economic recovery on the islands, as it affects Tourism, Agriculture, Food and Drink, and many other sectors of the economy. These sectors, in many cases, represent very small and marginally profitable family businesses, which make the difference between a family being able to make a living on, or having to move away from, the islands.

In their response, Argyll and Bute Council urged Transport Scotland to undertake a national review of air services, and investigate potential synergies between services which are currently operated largely in isolation by a range of different organisations. Argyll and Bute Council believe that this would be in keeping with the SG’s ‘*Scottish Ferries Review*’, which took place over 10 years ago. This review should take into consideration public services and those operating commercially. In particular, the LA believe that Coll and Colonsay were affected in a way that was distinctly different to other islands as the Council subsidised aircraft had to be grounded for maintenance during the pandemic.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar requested that CalMac continue to explore creative solutions for increasing ferry capacity, whilst aligning with necessary physical distancing measures, to ensure an economic recovery for the islands in a safe and sustainable way.

Sustainable Economic Development

A shared consensus exists regarding the particular fragility of island economies. The pandemic has highlighted the pitfalls of the over-reliance on certain business sectors (e.g. Tourism), which are often dominated by low paid jobs. Furthermore, the aging demography of islands has resulted in increased pressures for communities and LAs during the pandemic (i.e. high numbers shielding and requiring support). Respondents consistently identified the requirement for resilience to underpin the recovery phase, in all aspects and sectors of the economy, including:

- food supply
- supply chains for industry
- digital connectivity and communications
- transport networks
- community confidence
- energy supply, and
- public services.

Shetland Islands Council intimated that for island communities, the issue of resilience is all the more pressing, as island areas face difficulties relating to distance from supply chains and main markets, inadequate connectivity, physical barriers, high costs of living and services, and dispersed populations. Suggested mechanisms to overcome these barriers included special consideration in national policy responses, a greater LA say in the impacts of national policy on regions and localities, and greater delegated decision making; in order that policy responses can be appropriately shaped for local needs. Shetland Islands Council also noted potential sources of recovery, highlighting large-scale infrastructure projects (in pivotal sectors) that can generate employment, have positive supply chain impacts and contribute to the aforementioned local resilience.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar also discussed the inextricable link between sustainable economic development and transport, as a complete dependency on ferry transport can determine the viability of Tourism. As a result, special measures have been requested to support, develop and protect island ferry services.

Digital Connectivity

Digital connectivity featured prominently in each response. Shetland Islands Council referred to this as “a basic necessity of modern living”. A survey of S4-6 pupils undertaken in May 2020 (Senior Phase Pupil Voice in Shetland – COVID-19) also showed that 92.7% of respondents were communicating with friends using social media. Figures from the Shetland Employment Survey (2017) also showed that the proportion of local employers using social media platforms for business purposes rose from 45% in 2014 to 60% in 2017, use of cloud computing rose from 23% to 36%, and use of applications for smartphones, tablets etc. rose from 26% to 37%. The LA highlighted in our survey that, despite local and Scottish Government efforts to make improvements, it is estimated that 26% of homes and businesses in Shetland are still not connected to a network capable of delivering 30mbps or more; well above the estimate of 5% in Scotland.

Shetland’s COVID-19 experience has shown how critical digital connectivity is to their islands. Being connected enables local businesses to continue operating, pupils and teachers to engage in online learning through GLOW (Scottish Schools National internet system, which had average daily usage of 1193 and 3136 sessions respectively during the pandemic). Additionally, local democracy is enabled through virtual meetings, Council staff can continue providing essential services like Government grant disbursement, and families can stay connected with loved ones while adhering to lockdown measures. Having agreed its ‘Recovery and Renewal Framework’ on 2 July 2020, the LA aims to build a more resilient and flexible organisation that can withstand future pandemic waves, where people and communities are able to plan and deliver solutions to future challenges. Within the Framework, digital services are a key priority, and crucial for delivering the Council’s social and economic growth objectives, both in terms of delivery of Council functions and provision of services to others.

Shetland Islands Council noted that the NIP highlights how the National Performance Framework contains a commitment that “every member of society has a right to live with dignity and to enjoy high quality public services wherever they live”. Consequently it was felt that if high speed and resilient mobile and broadband connectivity is not addressed, there is a risk of a widening digital divide. This could become a serious issue for fairness and equalities across the islands, particularly as we learn to adjust post-COVID-19.

Additional Concerns and Priorities

Although only Argyll and Bute Council highlighted Population as being one of the three most important Strategic Objectives (SO) within the NIP at this time, this featured prominently as a concern throughout survey responses. Shetland Islands Council linked the provision and development of key services to the prevention of unabated population decline. Shetland Islands Council communicated the vital importance of modernising and improving provisions such as education, health and care to prevent inequalities in basic quality of life, in comparison with other areas of Scotland and the UK. In the absence of developments that tackle this issue, coupled with employment pressures and their knock-on effect on economic activity, house prices, business start-ups etc., there is concern that a considerable downward trajectory in the islands would become increasingly unsustainable.

The importance of prioritising Education, and supporting children and young people as they grow and develop at a time of great uncertainty, was also noted. This included the need to develop increased opportunities for vocational training and skills development, which can support employment transition, local business sustainability, individual wellbeing, and resourcing of future economic development opportunities.

The value and importance of confirming the Islands Growth Deal for the three Island Authorities was identified as a key priority (subsequent to survey completion UKG and SG match funded a £100M Islands Growth Deal). The underpinning objectives for the Islands Deal are to create the conditions to harness unique islands assets, and to help address some of the key economic and social challenges across our islands – all of which is central to recovery for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council.

Recommendations for Special Consideration

Further to the main objectives and strategy of Scottish Ministers, in relation to improving outcomes for island communities that result from, or are contributed to by the carrying out of functions of a public nature, as set out in the National Islands Plan, in response to question three, Local Authorities provided recommendations for additional recovery response requirements that are deserving of special consideration.

Given that responses were not aligned to NIP Strategic Objectives or Commitments, LA recommendations covered a broad number of priority areas. A small number of areas were mentioned by two or more LAs, which are listed in order of frequency of references:

1. Local Authority Funding and Empowerment (4 mentions)
2. = Sustainable Local Food Supply and Production (3 mentions)
2. = Population Decline Resulting from Unemployment (3 mentions)
2. = Local Retailers and Local Supply Chains (3 mentions)

Primarily, LAs communicated their desire to see increased funding at a local/regional level to support increased local empowerment. The pandemic has also emphasised the reliance on centralised food production and processing, which has contributed to uncertainty and difficulties getting sufficient supplies and services to the islands quickly and efficiently. The price of food on islands is also a concern. In terms of population, concerns exist regarding the longer term impact of unemployment, which could lead to young people leaving the islands to seek work. This in turn may impact negatively on both population levels and demographic balance. Conversely, potential was recognised for islands to be identified as a more attractive post-COVID re-location option for those currently residing on the mainland. Local supply chains have in some cases been shortened, which has helped to keep added value within island areas. There exists a desire to retain more localised food and retail sector business models where this has worked well and to build increased resilience and growth into local production, localised supply chains and local retail. Local retailers provided support for island towns and communities during the pandemic and are also seen as crucial to delivering a green local economy.

In addition to the four areas identified above, the remaining recommendations for special consideration in direct response to COVID-19 were all listed by one LA and are noted as below. Additional information is available in **Annex A** (Question 3):

- Aviation
- Brexit
- Community Anchor Organisations
- Community Wealth
- Debt Counselling
- Energy Security
- External Contractors
- Furlough Scheme
- Key Workers
- Legacy of Business Failures
- Local Health Services
- Mental Health
- Private Sector Economy
- Procurement
- Remote Working
- Social Enterprises/Third Sector

Suggested Packages of Support

In response to question four, LAs were invited to detail packages of support that would be constructive, achievable and deliverable to best support COVID recovery.

Suggested packages of support mentioned by two or more LAs included:

- Support to develop island transport infrastructure and sustainability
- Digital investment
- Support to develop island community wealth programme
- Support to develop circular green economies
- Devolvement of powers to Local Authorities
- Place-based investment
- Bespoke island specific fund – recognising unique vulnerabilities

Suggested packages of support mentioned by a single LA included:

- Diversification of the economic base of island communities
- Job creation (and support) linked to the natural environment
- Further investment in renewable energy (including smart grid systems)
- Develop island centres of innovation (incl. education) and new industries (e.g. sustainable seaweed farming).
- Support to develop localised food and drink produce (including farming, fisheries and aquaculture)
- A review of all capital investment (to focus on recovery)
- Development of drone technology for island connectivity
- Increased investment in electric vehicles and charging points
- Support packages for retro fitting energy conservation measures
- Increased affordable housing (including for key workers)
- Support to develop food processing hubs
- Increased active travel investment
- Address the gaps in R100 proposals
- Flexible approach to use of Islands Growth Deal for recovery purposes
- Targeted SG support in response to locally identified priorities
- Delivery of the Western Isles interconnector
- Re-mobilisation costs for struggling businesses
- Infrastructure and training costs to support physical distancing
- Financial support to address reduced productivity during transition from COVID-19 constraints
- Further taxation relief
- Further business relief required
- Support to revive island Tourism as an international destination

Barriers to Local Recovery and Mitigations

In question five, LAs were asked to highlight identified barriers to local recovery (short/medium/long-term), and provide suggestions regarding how these might be mitigated going forward. Summary responses are provided below and full responses are available at **ANNEX A**.

Argyll and Bute Council

- There are concerns that island communities feel more vulnerable, which needs to be addressed.
- Islands are heavily reliant on visitors from an economic development perspective. There needs to be a move away from the high reliance on the Tourism sector and we need to look at the creation of more sustainable and well paid jobs linked to our natural environment.
- There is an increased need for local decision making set within the context of the national recovery.
- There is a need for the public sector to take the lead and for the creation of a regional economic partnership to be created and supported with funding from SG to support jobs and infrastructure investment in the areas that are most fragile.
- Early intervention will prevent islands falling behind.
- Island communities have an important role in a green national recovery. To make this a reality, sufficient resources will be required, including making it more attractive for the private sector to invest in island communities.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

- All sectors will take some time to recover from the financial shock of COVID-19 and markets/working practices will have to dramatically change.
- Some businesses will simply not survive. Businesses will need to be supported to move forward, including investing in new working practices for staff and customers, increasing digital capacity and presence, supporting innovation, while also supporting the concept of localism within the economy to better withstand future shocks.
- The Scottish Government should allow flexibility in how national policies and fiscal measures can be adapted and delivered at the local level in order to support adaptation to this new working environment, and to enable responsiveness to island-specific issues as we emerge from COVID-19.
- Some islands and some economic sectors have been more severely affected than others, the full detail of this will emerge in coming months. Recognition of this in the Scottish Government responses, and in the implementation of the National Islands Plan would be beneficial.
- Some islands and communities will face greater challenges in a post-COVID 19 environment than others due to the extent to which sectors such as tourism, fishing and aquaculture have provided a significant source of employment and income.
- Outer Hebrides Tourism have highlighted in recent correspondence that in parts of the Outer Hebrides such as Harris and Barra, tourism accounts for as much as 40% of economic activity. It is important to bear in mind that the visitor season usually starts in March and is unlikely to resume at full capacity even once travel restrictions are lifted.

North Ayrshire Council

- The community of Arran is divided in its response to the easing of restrictions.
- This presents a challenge we move into recovery since we need to progress together.
- Part of the community are happy to see health prioritised and travel restricted to all but full time residents or supplies and services.
- The reliance on the island community for leisure and tourism is at direct odds with this.

Orkney Islands Council

- Government support will be needed to enable our transport operators to provide sufficient capacity to carry passengers at a lower density.
- The sudden demand to work remotely has highlighted digital inequality in both infrastructure provision and socio-economic capacity.
- It is likely that home working will remain essential for many during the recovery period and beyond, and this will not be achievable without urgent investment in both areas.
- We are pleased to see that Connecting Scotland has begun to address socio-economic digital inequality, and we would certainly support the continuation and enhancement of this programme.
- However, far more significant investment will be needed to achieve infrastructure equality, as the slow progress of R100 has evidenced.
- Orkney Islands Council's IT team has demonstrated that where there is a will, there is a way, and has delivered a remote working programme originally scheduled to take 2-3 years within the space of 2-3 months.
- We would like to see a comparable acceleration in the national rollout of full fibre connectivity in order to support our students, workers and businesses to recover.
- Such urgency requires the Scottish Government to use its procurement powers to take non-competitive action to achieve this.

Shetland Islands Council

- Further to Shetland Islands Council's local Shetland Partnership Plan, the National Islands Plan supports the things that cannot be delivered at a local level and need national Government support.
- Therefore, although we acknowledge the importance of engagement going forward, it does not replace the fact that the National Islands Plan is an important Scottish Government flagship policy and commitment that requires to be adequately resourced at the national level.
- The National Islands Plan commits Scottish Government to working "with young people across all 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". This objective is critical as we emerge from lockdown and seek to plan for the future.
- At a local level, we have considered the 2020 #lockdownlowdown report, which 208 young Shetlanders participated in (almost 10% of the total survey respondents) and have supplemented that information with further survey work involving S4-6 locally. However, we are disappointed to note that the Young Islanders' Network has not been taken forward.
- A failure to resource the Young Islanders Network is not a positive indication of Government commitment to National Islands Plan implementation and achieving the many positive outcome commitments it contains.

Additional Comments

Question six in the survey provided an opportunity for any other comments, questions or feedback. Summary responses are provided below and full responses are available at **ANNEX A**.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

- The National Islands Plan Implementation Routemap, and island-proofing through the Island Communities Impact Assessments, are viewed by the Comhairle as an important part of the COVID-19 recovery process and should be progressed as a matter of urgency.

North Ayrshire Council

- Lack of capacity in the ferry fleet is the biggest constraint on preventing the economy recovering on islands as it will on the mainland.
- In the case of Cumbrae, the educational needs of primary school children on the island who need teaching staff to be able to travel in and the outgoing travel requirements for pupils attending the Largs Campus, is extremely challenging given the reduced ferry and bus capacity.
- It is requested that safely maximising capacity and extending the business support in place will recognise that islands may not be able to have a normal tourism season until 2021.
- There exists a data deficiency related to our islands and whilst some that are single unitary authorities are able to produce good info, others such as Arran are struggling, which is challenging when measuring the impact of what is happening, consequences, and supporting an evidence based approach to decision making.
- We have uncovered a new level of social and health need as a result of the community hubs set up to respond to the pandemic. There is much goodwill and volunteer support on both islands to address this, but this has not been evidenced in data before, which is troubling and needs addressed, along with the needs.
- We would like to see an Island fund that could support work around climate change, community wealth building and community empowerment.

Shetland Islands Council

- It is understood that the Islands Team is seeking to find a way to prioritise the National Islands Plan in light of COVID.
- As the Plan has been developed, quite rightly, recognising the interlinked nature of islands life and how policy interventions naturally affect other areas, it is very difficult to effectively prioritise.
- This Council supported the creation of the Plan as we agreed with the Minister in seeing it as an historic milestone. We therefore see all of the 13 Strategic Objectives as being important to our islands' future sustainability and growth and wish to record our desire to see everything outlined in the published Plan resourced and delivered in full.
- It is acknowledged that resource pressure in responding and planning recovery will affect (Scottish) Government ability to deliver all of the Plan in the short term.
- However, as the Plan references many existing Scottish Government policies and strategies, it may be the case that many of the Commitments for Strategic Objectives can be delivered as part of that ongoing work.
- As an example, the Plan contains an aim under the Sustainable Economic Development Objective which states: "During the preparation of the 2020 Infrastructure Investment Plan, consider the implications of the National Islands Plan on future infrastructure requirements".
- It is understood the Infrastructure Commission will publish its second report this summer and it will be interesting to note if islands' infrastructure requirements are included within that.

Annex A

Summary of Responses

QUESTION 1

From the 13 detailed in the NIP and in light of the impact of COVID please note your 3 most important Strategic Objectives to best support recovery across our islands (a = most important).

Response Data Summary and Aggregated Score - Question 1

Strategic Objective (#)	Selected as 'a'	Selected as 'b'	Selected as 'c'	Aggregated Score*
Population (1)	1			3
Digital Connectivity (6)	1	1	1	6
Empowered Communities and Strong Local Partnership (10)			1	1
Climate Change and Energy (9)	1			3
Sustainable Economic Development (2)		3	1	7
Transport (3)	2	1	1	9
Housing (4)			1	1

'Aggregated Score' calculated on the basis of 3 points for selection 'a', 2 points for selection 'b' and 1 point for selection 'c'.

QUESTION 2

Further to your three responses to the above question please highlight any specific Commitments that will best support local recovery priorities (Commitments are documented beneath each Strategic Objective in the NIP).

Response Data Summary - Question 2

NIP Aim (Strategic Objective #)	Number of Selections
Develop an action plan to support re-population of our rural and island communities and work with partners to test approaches using small-scale pilots. (SO1)	1
Identify key actions to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth on islands, such as community-run businesses, e-commerce and digitally enabled island-based businesses. (SO2)	3
Tailor business and community support for island communities to ensure products and services are fit for purpose, accessible and effective. This will include exploring new and innovative models and working with national providers to consider how programmes can better address needs of island communities and businesses. (SO2)	2

NIP Aim (Strategic Objective #)	Number of Selections
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. (SO2)	2
Drive 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. (SO2)	2
Create and promote apprenticeships and job opportunities for young islanders. (SO2)	1
Ensure that skills provision is agile and responsive to future demand and enables individuals to take up opportunities. (SO2)	1
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. (SO2)	1
Recognising the services that island abattoirs provide to their communities, we will work with relevant partners to deliver sustainable and economical viable operations. (SO2)	1
Ensure that existing and future transport-related policies, strategies and services are fully island proofed so that they truly meet the needs of island communities. (SO3)	1
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. (SO3)	3
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. (SO3)	2
As part of the next Ferries Plan, review the impacts of Road Equivalent Tariff and consider future ferry fares policy options that will meet the needs of islanders and support island economies. (SO3)	1
Also as part of the Ferries Plan, review and promote integration between ferries and other modes of transport on the mainland and islands, with a view to better facilitating the use of active, public or shared transport for all or part of journeys to and from islands in an affordable and accessible manner. (SO3)	1
Work in partnership with local authorities and communities to improve walking and cycling infrastructure, the design of place and access to bikes, facilities, promotion and education to make walking and cycling the most popular choice for shorter everyday journeys including as part of multi-modal journeys. (SO3)	1
Explore the potential to reduce the need to travel by using the planning system to promote places which bring people and services together. (SO3)	1
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. (SO3)	2

NIP Aim (Strategic Objective #)	Number of Selections
Explore how the rural and island housing fund might be adapted in the future to expand the range of options to support housing development in remote and island communities. (SO4)	1
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. (SO4)	1
Deliver a step change in the quality of digital connectivity across the islands. (SO6)	3
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. (SO6)	2
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. (SO6)	2
Call on Ofcom to address the issues faced by island communities when designing telecoms regulation and policy. 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. (SO6)	1
Through the Scotland 5G Centre, building on the 5G RuralFirst trials currently taking place on Orkney, and working with partners including Ofcom, we will develop rural 5G use cases to address the rural digital divide using 5G technology. (SO6)	1
Work with local resilience partnerships and telecoms providers to encourage them to focus on resilience of data links to and from the islands. (SO6)	1
Develop a digital skills programme designed by island communities to meet their needs. (SO6)	1
Extend the availability of coding clubs and community-based digital inclusion programmes across the islands. (SO6)	1
Work with island communities to explore how they can contribute to the circular economy through small-scale pilots for example supporting local food production. (SO8)	1
Work towards creating net zero emission islands and providing global climate change leadership. (SO9)	1
Work closely with island partners, the network owner and all other key stakeholders to deliver existing proposals for electricity transmission links to mainland Scotland. (SO9)	1
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. (SO9)	1

QUESTION 3

The Act says that the purpose of preparing a National Islands Plan is to set out the main objectives and strategy of the Scottish Ministers in relation to improving outcomes for island communities that result from, or are contributed to by, the carrying out of functions of a public nature. The Act goes on to identify the following areas for improvement:

- (a) increasing population levels,
- (b) improving and promoting—
 - (i) sustainable economic development,
 - (ii) environmental wellbeing,
 - (iii) health and wellbeing, and
 - (iv) community empowerment,
- (c) improving transport services,
- (d) improving digital connectivity,
- (e) reducing fuel poverty,
- (f) ensuring effective management of the Scottish Crown Estate (that is, the property rights and interests to which section 90B(5) of the Scotland Act 1998 applies),
- (g) enhancing biosecurity (including protecting islands from the impact of invasive non-native species).

In light of the pandemic are there other areas that require consideration?

Response Data Summary - Question 3

Recommendations for Special Consideration in Direct Response to COVID-19 (Additional to NIP Delivery)	Number of References
Local Health Services - their resourcing is key to support our communities now and to ensure future resilience.	1
Key Workers - were of vital importance throughout the pandemic. This has highlighted their importance to our communities in a time of need.	1
Legacy of Business Failures - may have a lasting impact. If the business was marginal/lifestyle it is less likely to be replaced, which may have a significant impact.	1
Social Enterprises/Third Sector - hugely important to resilience and recovery within island communities.	1
Food Production - there is a need to address the negative impacts of the continued centralisation of national food production and processing. This has been considerable uncertainty and difficulties getting sufficient supplies and services to the islands quickly and efficiently. The price of food on islands is also a significant issue.	3
Local Supply Chains - in some cases supply chains have been shortened and this has helped to keep added value within island areas, where there is a need to retain such business models going forward. Local retailers provided support for island towns and communities during the pandemic and are crucial to delivering a green local economy.	3
External Contractors - there is an over reliance on external contractors to undertake essential works and the need to re-build local supply chains and skills.	1

Recommendations for Special Consideration in Direct Response to COVID-19 (Additional to NIP Delivery)	Number of References
Procurement - different fiscal approaches for islands would encourage new investment and a new approach to infrastructure provision that take better account of the needs of the community to enable better service delivery and new business starts.	1
Community Wealth - the generation of community wealth should be seen as an overarching objective rather than only focussing on economic growth.	1
Community Anchor Organisations – supported by local authorities, these organisations have played a key role in supporting island communities during the pandemic. There is a need to define what their future role will be and how they can be sustained to assist with the national recovery.	1
Aviation – there is a requirement for greater synergy with regard to the operation of local and regional air services both throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and as we move to recovery.	1
Local Authority Funding and Empowerment – there is an increased need to invest in adequate resources to enable the co-ordination of activity at the local/ regional level.	4
Population – unemployment may lead to young people leaving the islands to seek work, impacting negatively on both population levels and demographic balance. Conversely, there exists potential for islands to become more attractive for people to move to, following the pandemic.	3
Remote Working - there is potential for increased opportunities as businesses and employees realise that they can work remotely away from urban conurbations.	1
Private Sector Economy - COVID-19 has highlighted the dependence of our private sector economy on a small number of sectors (tourism, primary production, etc).	1
Energy Security - different focus required.	1
Debt Counselling - under increased pressure.	1
Mental Health - under increased pressure.	1
Furlough Scheme - considerable anxiety at the prospect of the national furlough scheme ending in October before economic recovery has properly begun.	1
Brexit – increased requirement for SG to engage closely with island LAs to ensure there is a clear and up-to-date understanding of potential impacts and seeks to do everything possible to mitigate the effects.	1

QUESTION 5

Please highlight any identified barriers to local recovery (short/medium/long-term) with suggestions regarding how these might be mitigated going forward.

Full responses are provided as follows:

Argyll and Bute Council

1. There are concerns that as things begin to open up that island communities feel more vulnerable and this needs to be addressed and reassurances provided particularly given those islands that are heavily reliant on visitors from an economic development perspective. There needs to be a move away from such a high reliance on this sector and we need to look at the creation of more sustainable and well paid jobs linked to our natural environment.

2. It has become clear over the past few months that the one size fits all approach does not and will not address the particular needs of our island communities and there will be a need for local decision making set within the context of the national recovery. There is a need for the public sector to take the lead and for the creation of a regional economic partnership to be created and supported with funding from SG. Such a partnership has the potential to shift both jobs and infrastructure investment towards the areas that are most fragile and that will clearly need early intervention to prevent long-term falling behind.
3. Our island communities have an important role to play in the national recovery with so many natural assets available and fitting well into the green recovery agenda. To make this a reality, sufficient resources will be required, including making it more attractive for the private sector to invest in our island communities.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

1. In supporting the islands to come out of lockdown, a resumption of the old ways of living, working and doing business in the islands is highly unlikely. All sectors will take some time to recover from the financial shock of COVID-19 and markets/working practices will have to dramatically change. Some businesses will simply not survive. Businesses have demonstrated adaptability to adopt new mechanisms to build capacity and resilience but will need to be supported to move forward in this new working environment, including investing in new working practices for staff and customers, increasing digital capacity and presence, supporting innovation, while also supporting the concept of localism within the economy to better withstand future shocks. The Scottish Government, working in partnership with the Comhairle and others, should allow flexibility in how national policies and fiscal measures can be adapted and delivered at the local level in order to support adaptation to this new working environment, and to enable responsiveness to island-specific issues as we emerge from COVID-19.
2. Some islands and some economic sectors have been more severely affected than others, the full detail of this will emerge in coming months. However, a recognition of this in the Scottish Government responses, and in the implementation of the National Islands Plan would be beneficial. Some islands and communities will face greater challenges in a post-COVID 19 environment than others due to the extent to which sectors such as tourism, fishing and aquaculture have provided a significant source of employment and income. Tourism has, understandably, been one of the most severely affected economic sectors in the islands. Outer Hebrides Tourism, the industry body for the sector, have highlighted in recent correspondence that in parts of the Outer Hebrides such as Harris and Barra, tourism accounts for as much as 40% of economic activity. It is important to bear in mind that the visitor season usually starts in March and is unlikely to resume at full capacity even once travel restrictions are lifted.

North Ayrshire Council

1. The survey carried out on Arran revealed that the community is divided in its response to the easing of restrictions. This presents a challenge as we move into recovery since we need to progress together. Part of the community are happy to see health prioritised and travel restricted to all but full time residents or supplies and services. The reliance on the island community for leisure and tourism is at direct odds with this.

Orkney Islands Council

1. Having already described why transport is a critical barrier to recovery for island communities. Government support will be needed to enable our transport operators to provide sufficient capacity to carry passengers at a lower density.

2. We picked out digital connectivity as our third post-COVID priority because the sudden demand to work remotely has highlighted digital inequality in both infrastructure provision and socio-economic capacity. It is likely that home working will remain essential for many during the recovery period and beyond, and this will not be achievable without urgent investment in both areas. We are pleased to see that Connecting Scotland has begun to address socio-economic digital inequality, and we would certainly support the continuation and enhancement of this programme. However, far more significant investment will be needed to achieve infrastructure equality, as the slow progress of R100 has evidenced. Orkney Islands Council's IT team has demonstrated that where there is a will, there is a way, and has delivered a remote working programme originally scheduled to take 2-3 years within the space of 2-3 months. We would like to see a comparable acceleration in the national rollout of full fibre connectivity in order to support our students, workers and businesses to recover. Such urgency requires the Scottish Government to use its procurement powers to take non-competitive action to achieve this.

Shetland Islands Council

1. Shetland Islands Council has made the point in past consultation responses that we are focused on delivering our local Shetland Partnership Plan. We see the National Islands Plan as being the things that cannot be delivered at a local level and need national Government support. Therefore, although we acknowledge the importance of engagement going forward, it does not replace the fact that the National Islands Plan is an important Scottish Government flagship policy and commitment that requires to be adequately resourced at the national level.
2. The (National Islands) Plan commits Scottish Government to working “with young people across all 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”. This objective is critical as we emerge from lockdown and seek to plan for the future. At a local level, we have considered the #lockdownlowdown report, which 208 young Shetlanders participated in (almost 10% of the total survey respondents) and have supplemented that information with further survey work involving S4-6. However, we were disappointed to note that government resource constraints meant the Young Islanders' Network was not taken forward. We would consider that to be a missed opportunity to engage with the demographic that the Plan will seek to benefit most. A failure to resource that activity is not a positive indication of government commitment to National Islands Plan implementation and achieving the many positive outcome commitments it contains.

QUESTION 6

Do you have any other comments or questions for us?

Additional Comments

Question six in the survey provided an opportunity for any other comments, questions or feedback. Full responses are provided as follows:

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

1. Progress with the National Islands Plan Implementation Routemap, and island-proofing through the Island Communities Impact Assessment, are viewed by the Comhairle as an important part of the COVID-19 recovery process and should be progressed as a matter of urgency.

North Ayrshire Council

1. The lack of capacity in the ferry fleet is the biggest constraint on preventing the economy recovering as it will on the mainland. In the case of Cumbrae, the educational needs of primary school children on the island who need teaching staff to be able to travel in and the outgoing travel requirements for pupils attending the Largs Campus, is extremely challenging given the ferry and bus capacity. There is therefore a request to do what can be done safely to maximise capacity but also to extend the business support in place to recognise that islands may not be able to have a tourism season until 2021.
2. In addition, we are recognising a data deficiency related to our islands and whilst some that are single unitary authorities are able to produce good info, others such as Arran are struggling and that is proving to be challenging when measuring the impact of what is happening, consequences, and supporting an evidence based approach to decision making. We have uncovered a new level of social and health need as a result of the community hubs set up to respond to the pandemic. There is much goodwill and volunteer support on both islands to address this, but this has not been evidenced in data before, which is troubling and needs addressed, along with the needs. There is a further point that could be made about capital investment to support resilience – we would like to see an Island fund that could support work around climate change, CWB and community empowerment.

Shetland Islands Council

1. It is understood that the Islands Team is seeking to find a way to prioritise the National Islands Plan in light of COVID. However, as the Plan has been developed, quite rightly, recognising the interlinked nature of islands life and how policy interventions naturally affect other areas, it is very difficult to effectively prioritise. This Council supported the creation of the Plan as we agreed with the Minister in seeing it as a historic milestone. We therefore see all of the 13 Strategic Objectives as being important to our islands' future sustainability and growth and wish to record our desire to see everything outlined in the published Plan resourced and delivered in full.
2. It is acknowledged that resource pressure in responding and planning recovery will affect (Scottish) Government ability to deliver all of the Plan in the short term. However, as the Plan references many existing Scottish Government policies and strategies, it may be the case that many of the Commitments for Strategic Objectives can be delivered as part of that ongoing work. As an example, the Plan contains an aim under the Sustainable Economic Development Objective which states: "During the preparation of the 2020 Infrastructure Investment Plan, consider the implications of the National Islands Plan on future infrastructure requirements". It is understood the Infrastructure Commission will publish its second report this summer and it will be interesting to note if islands' infrastructure requirements are included within that.



© Crown copyright 2021

This document is also available on The Scottish Government website:
www.gov.scot

For further information please contact the team on **info@islandsteam.scot**

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA

ISBN: 978-1-80004-283-4

PPDAS786806 (03/21)

w w w . g o v . s c o t