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National Islands Plan Annual Report 2020



THE
ISLANDS
SCOTLAND ACT 2018
ACHD
NAN EILEAN
ALBA 2018



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Foreword from Scotland's Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands



As Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands, I am proud to introduce the Scottish Government's first Annual Report of the National Islands Plan. This has been a challenging year for us all, and none more so than our island communities for whom COVID-19 has had, and continues to have, a profound impact. The pandemic has exposed new vulnerabilities, but has also revealed some new found strengths. I would especially like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank our island communities for their resilience and their response to the pandemic and for everything they are doing in our collective fight against COVID-19.

Despite the challenges of 2020, we have nevertheless continued to work collaboratively towards the implementation of the National Islands Plan and its ambitious Strategic Objectives, whilst remaining flexible in order to best support our island communities as we move towards a post-pandemic recovery.

The production of this Annual Report marks a key milestone in the implementation of Scotland's first National Islands Plan. To ensure that the Plan is inclusive, it is essential that island communities are kept informed of progress towards its delivery. I am heartened to see good progress is being made across a number of issues, despite the difficulties posed by the unprecedented events of 2020.

The National Islands Plan is already working, but we know that in light of the pandemic and its after effects, the next few years may not be easy. The Scottish Government, alone, cannot deliver all of the commitments that will continue to improve outcomes for our island communities. However, now, more than ever, is the time for us to redouble our efforts to work closely with island communities and island leaders to ensure that the voices of Scotland's islanders are fully heard and that any opportunities for positive change that arise from behavioural or other changes during the pandemic response are fully embraced.

The importance of our island communities to Scotland's identity, cultural heritage, economy and civic life cannot be overstated – ensuring that islands communities continue to thrive in the current environment, and in future, is crucial. The ongoing implementation of the National Islands Plan provides the basis for addressing issues today and for preparing for the future and I and my ministerial colleagues and officials look forward to working together with islands stakeholders as we take the next steps in supporting our islands to truly flourish.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Wheelhouse'.

Paul Wheelhouse MSP

Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands

Introduction

The National Islands Plan provides a framework for action in order to meaningfully improve outcomes for island communities. The Plan sets out 13 Strategic Objectives and over 100 commitments which must be delivered over a five year period. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 requires that a report is presented to parliament each year setting out the progress made towards delivery. This document is the first of these reports and covers the entirety of 2020.

Without doubt, the implementation of the National Islands Plan has been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union. However, progress has still been made and Scottish Government remain committed to supporting our island communities through these challenging times.

Whilst we continue to respond to the needs of island communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, we understand that we must continue to deliver on the commitments we have made in the National Islands Plan. However, it is crucial that we remain flexible and responsive, and that we continue to work in close partnership with island communities, our local government colleagues, third sector organisations and others with an interest in islands. The nature of the pandemic is unprecedented and like many of our partners, this past year we have been operating in an uncertain and rapidly changing environment with new urgent health, social and economic priorities to tackle. Understandably, this means we have had to step back from progressing some commitments within the Plan, but this was necessary to allow us to react quickly to support island communities. Now, as the situation appears to be improving, we have once again turned our full energy back towards delivery of the Plan. Over the next few years, we will move forward with our commitments whilst reflecting on the impact of COVID-19 to inform our work.

We are currently developing the National Islands Plan Implementation Route Map as a priority. This is fully informed by our learning of how island communities have responded and adapted to changing circumstances as a result of the pandemic. This is being done with input from local government, Scottish Government policy colleagues and island stakeholders. The Implementation Route Map will detail how we will deliver each of the National Islands Plan Strategic Objectives over the lifetime of the Plan. It will identify the methods we will use to monitor progress towards achieving our outcomes and set out how we will deliver our work over the short, medium and long-term.

Additionally, we have continued to support the Islands Strategic Group to allow us to work closely with our local authority partners on delivery. This, combined with the formation of the new National Islands Plan Delivery Group and continued engagement with island communities, will ensure that we secure broader engagement in the actions we need to take against each Strategic Objective.

This document outlines where progress has been made towards each specific commitment of the National Islands Plan, detailing projects and resource spend where appropriate. By summer 2021, we will also launch a virtual National Islands Plan Progress Dashboard that will allow for real-time progress towards both our Strategic Objectives and commitments to be displayed in an accessible and transparent manner.

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

A Fair, Integrated, Green and Inclusive Plan

The four principles of fairness, integration, environmental (green) protection and inclusiveness underpin the National Islands Plan by guiding us and our partners in meeting its ultimate objective – which is to improve outcomes for island communities.

A **fair** Plan with wellbeing at its heart will strive towards fairer, healthier, happier communities across Scotland. Its human rights approach will support greater accountability and help ensure that island communities' rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

An **integrated** Plan will promote joined-up services based on a cohesive, place-based and holistic approach to policy and will build economic, social and environmental considerations in an integrated approach to island policy.

A **green** Plan will harness the opportunities of a greener, fairer economy while we work toward ending Scotland's contribution to climate change.

An **inclusive** Plan will promote genuine community empowerment at the local level enabling decisions to be taken as close as possible to where their impact will be felt.

COVID-19

We know that every community across Scotland's islands continue to face unique challenges in relation to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. During this unparalleled period, we have necessarily had to re-prioritise our efforts to best support our island communities. This has had a direct impact on our implementation of the Plan itself, and as such many of the previously envisaged timescales have been extended. However, despite the pandemic some progress towards the majority of the commitments in the National Island Plan has still been made. In many instances, the fulfilment of certain commitments was not envisaged to occur within the initial year of implementation in any case, with progress continuing over the five year lifetime of the Plan itself.

Conversely, COVID-19 has allowed us to further develop relationships and knowledge across our islands, and to gain a clearer sense of the effect of the pandemic on all islands' issues. We have been able to utilise the strong links that we made across the islands during the National Islands Plan consultation of 2019. This has meant that we could reach out to our island contacts and respond quickly to the problems concerning them. These issues have included, for example complex and interrupted supply chains, geographical isolation, the wellbeing impact of the pandemic, access to lifeline services, community testing and the overall effect of the outbreak on vital island economies. This has also allowed the Scottish Government's Islands Team to act as a conduit for island communities to ensure that their concerns were heard across relevant policy areas, and, when necessary, triage to find appropriate solutions.

Throughout the pandemic, the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands has also undertaken increased engagement with our local authority partners - both through existing frameworks such as the Islands Strategic Group, Convention of the Highlands and Islands Transport Forum and more widely with other island stakeholders. This has ensured that the unique challenges faced by islands have been properly represented within strategic decision making. This included a series of meetings throughout November and December 2020 between local authorities, Heath Boards and the Deputy National Clinical Director to gather feedback on the implementation of the Scottish Government's Framework for Decision Making and meetings with MPs and MSPs representing Scotland's islands.

We have also supplemented the data that we gathered during the 2019 National Islands Plan consultation exercise with new information from our National Islands Plan through a COVID Lens Survey Results (2020). This allowed our local government colleagues to identify the most important Strategic Objectives within the National Islands Plan to best support recovery and renewal for their islands. The survey highlighted **Transport** as the most significant Strategic Objective with **Sustainable Economic Development** stated as being the second most significant. This was followed by **Digital Connectivity** as the third most important National Islands Plan delivery priority. This new data has informed our development of the Implementation Route Map and this is where we will start in terms of identifying priorities for delivery as we support communities to move towards a post-COVID-19 recovery.

As noted below, we have striven to operate in the true spirit of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 since its introduction, specifically in relation to the introduction of Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs). To help inform this, we invited input from the Islands Partnership Working Group, key island stakeholders and policy colleagues across Scottish Government. This work remains ongoing, and ICIAs were completed in respect of any changes in the Coronavirus Guidance including the recent Travel Restrictions Guidance and Indoor Socialising Regulations.

To help support island economies through the pandemic, in the summer of 2020 a new £2 million Islands Green Recovery Programme (IGRP) was implemented as part of the wider £230 million Restart the Economy Capital Stimulus Package announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance. The IGRP has been designed to support and encourage resilience across Scotland's island communities. It aims to support green recovery and the delivery of National Islands Plan commitments through opportunities for community groups and island-based businesses to implement new projects targeting active and low carbon transport, environmentally-safe tourism, food sustainability, zero waste projects and the development of natural capital.

The IGRP was heavily oversubscribed. Consequently, additional funding was secured to maximise the impact of this capital stimulus investment by funding more projects, bringing the total on-island commitment through the Programme to £2,442,441. Successful applicants also directly contributed £252,652 to the delivery of projects, resulting in a total IGRP spend of just less than £2.7 million.

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 were laid on 3 November and came into force on 23 December 2020. This means that the duty to carry out an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) became a legal requirement for relevant authorities (listed in the Act) from 23 December 2020 and requires Scottish Government and relevant authorities to take island issues into account when developing or reviewing policies, strategies or services.

The laying of these Regulations followed consultation with island communities, relevant authorities and local government partners on the proposed ICIA Guidance and Toolkit, which was published alongside the Regulations on the 23 of December 2020. This can be found online at www.gov.scot

We continue to support our colleagues across the Scottish Government as well as the relevant authorities in implementing the ICIA process. The table in Annex A provides an overview of some of the ICIA's that have been undertaken to date:

We have worked hard to operate in the spirit of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 since its introduction, where possible carrying out ICIA's for all of our new policies, strategies and services. ANNEX A details many of the ICIA's completed by the Scottish Government since the introduction of the Regulations. There are currently a number of new assessments in stream across a range of policy areas and we look forward to reporting on these in due course.

Population Levels

Strategic Objective 1 - To address population decline and ensure a healthy, balanced population profile

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Scottish Government's Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services team produced a report entitled "Depopulation Analysis", which identified areas of high depopulation in rural and island Scotland, focusing on areas with a low working age population and highest dependency ratios.

In the Depopulation Analysis report, "critical depopulation" is defined as an area that has experienced depopulation and that is experiencing a range of additional challenges related to high dependency ratios. This should assist policymakers in identifying areas where the impact of depopulation will be felt most acutely.

On 10 March 2020, the Scottish Government held a repopulation workshop with stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors to develop potential pilots that would deliver repopulation initiatives in partnership with our rural and island communities.

Suggested pilot ideas included remote and/or dispersed working, an extension of the Woodland Croft Initiative to facilitate further access to land, crofting and forestry, delivering small-scale mixed housing and business unit developments to support population and entrepreneurialism and home working, as well as two proposals that provided a 'framework' for developing repopulation interventions.

We are currently working across policy areas to further develop these small-scale pilot proposals, with a view to having them implemented by March 2021. The short, medium and long-term evaluation of these pilot interventions will provide crucial learning in developing our Repopulation Action Plan.

The Scottish Government's Islands Team have also been engaging with officials to support the development of the forthcoming Population Strategy to capture the population challenges facing our island communities.

The recently announced Islands Growth Deal, seeks to address some of these demographic challenges.

The projects within the deal will:

- demonstrate how to achieve Government net zero carbon targets;
- create nationally significant new port infrastructure that will play an important role in supporting Scotland and the UK to achieve net zero targets;
- strengthen their place as unique 'living laboratories' for global innovation in low carbon technologies, wellbeing research and sustainable food production in partnership with our leading universities and research institutes;
- showcase their outstanding natural environment, heritage, culture and creativity to the world; and
- create the foundation for an innovation-focused recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and support inclusive growth across island communities.

As part of the programme, Island Deal partners estimate that projects have the potential to create 1300+ sustainable jobs aimed at retaining and attracting workers aged 16-40 aged workers, supported by a programme to equip the islands workforce with the skills to support their growth sectors.

We committed to understand the impact of Brexit on islands and island communities.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government continues to support our islands in the face of Brexit, and has provided £75,000 to each council, including local authorities comprising of island communities, to coordinate EU Exit preparedness. This covers the period ending 30 June 2021.

We have also commissioned the new [National Islands Plan Survey](#), which will allow us to gather the views of island communities, on a rating scale, across all of the Strategic Objectives, to compare our progress for the duration of the National Islands Plan once further surveys are undertaken. This will allow us to further identify and understand the impacts of Brexit on our island communities.

We committed to develop an action plan to support repopulation of our rural and island communities and work with partners to test approaches using small-scale pilots.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Despite delays due to the impact of COVID-19, the work on Workforce Dispersal has now resumed. Scottish Government intends to be at the forefront of this area and plans to form a new working group are being discussed to initially look at our internal workforce and how jobs can be done across any areas of Scotland.

There are two key pilots currently ongoing in this area. Working with the Woodland Croft Partnership, exploring the expansion of the Woodland Croft Initiative to facilitate further access to land, crofting and forestry, and working with Rural Housing Scotland to develop a toolkit based on the experience of projects currently exploring small-scale mixed accommodation and business unit developments to support population, entrepreneurialism and home working. The pilots include communities in Orkney, Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Argyll and Bute, and Highland. These pilots will help inform the development of our Repopulation Action Plan and we look forward to reporting on their progress within the coming year.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We are happy to report that the Student Retention project is continuing. This project aims to encourage students to remain in Scotland after completing study, and we will work with young islanders to develop further understanding of what would make them want to stay or return after study.

Additionally, to inform the establishment of our new Young Islanders Network, the [Young Islanders Challenge Project](#) was launched on 16 January 2021 in collaboration with Youth Scotland. This will provide 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 committed to fully consider policy developments, such as the findings of Scottish Government commissioned research “Rural Planning to 2050” when ensuring that the needs of Scotland’s islands are taken into account by the Ministerial Taskforce on Population.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

The Ministerial Population Taskforce is due to publish Scotland’s first Population Strategy in early 2021. The paper includes a strategic building block for ‘a more balanced population.’ During the development of the Population Strategy, all 32 local authorities engaged with the Scottish Government at official level through roundtable discussions, which were coordinated via COSLA. Careful consideration of the specific demographic needs of island communities has been given by the Taskforce, and the need for further action is reflected in the Strategy’s vision and next steps. The Strategy and its vision were endorsed by COSLA leaders in January 2021.

In support of the long-term vision of the Population Programme, The Scottish Government’s Islands Team and Population officials have joined the CoHI officials population working group. Scottish Government officials will support the group to undertake initial work around cross-cutting interventions that can address depopulation in island regions.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government Gaelic policy seeks to ensure that job opportunities using Gaelic are located in island communities and that authorities and public bodies are employing Gaelic speakers where possible. Specific Scottish Government Gaelic funding contributes to this commitment, but it is noted that there is potential for larger employers to locate jobs and housing in island communities and consider Gaelic skills, which Scottish Government encourages.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Work is ongoing in regards to the National Development Plan for Crofting, which will be published in the coming year. We are committed to working across policy to ensure that our island communities are fairly represented in all discussions informing this work.

We committed to work with the Crofting Commission to encourage a healthy turnover of croft tenancies on our islands to create opportunities for new people into crofting.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

In the last two years, we have seen over 830 new entrants into crofting - 44% of these are women, and 32% are aged 40 or under. As over 50% of crofts are on our islands, the majority of these new entrants will be island based.

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

This commitment has been fulfilled.

All croft specific schemes have continued over the first year of the National Islands Plan. Over the last 12 months we have approved 40 Croft House Grant applications from island crofters, with a total value of £1.2 million. This comprises of 23 new homes and 17 home improvements grants.

Of the 40 successful island applications, 24 were in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, 12 were in Highland, 2 were in Shetland, and 2 were in Argyll and Bute.

Sustainable Economic Development

Strategic Objective 2 - To improve and promote sustainable economic development

We committed to 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The recently announced Islands Growth Deal aims to address common challenges faced by Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and looks at innovative ways to support new and improved industries, moving away from fossil fuels towards net zero carbon. The Scottish and UK Governments have each committed £50 million investment over ten years, where the resulting £100 million is shared between the three island authorities.

As part of the £230 million 'Restart the Economy' Capital Stimulus Package and through a broad range of ongoing projects, the £2 million Islands Green Recovery Programme (IGRP) has provided opportunities for community groups and businesses to contribute to sustainable economic growth that supports green recovery and carbon emissions reductions. This has been delivered through investment in active and low carbon transport, sustainable environmentally-safe tourism, food sustainability and zero waste projects that support and impact upon the green circular economy. On-island investment through the IGRP was extended through collaborative partnership working to over £2.6 million.

- £2,442,441 was committed through 67 grants for community businesses and organisations on 30 islands across the 6 key local authority areas with islands.
- Of that, £442,441 of additional funding was secured through the European Regional Development Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and re-directed Scottish Government finance.
- Grantees/successful applicants also contributed £252,652 to the delivery of projects, resulting in a total IGRP spend of more than £2.6 million.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

All local authorities who have islands within their area are active members of 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 islands officials will continue to engage with CoHI and support as required.

Scottish Government is also working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise to develop further understanding of the issues faced by our island communities and how the Talent Attraction Service, Skills Recognition Scotland, and Student Retention Project can positively impact repopulation efforts.

We committed to 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government has committed to growing Community Wealth Building (CWB) in Scotland as a practical approach to delivering our wellbeing economy aims. CWB looks at ways to use public investment to give maximum economic benefit to local people, businesses and communities.

Building on success in Ayrshire we are supporting five additional areas, including Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, to identify bespoke community wealth building solutions that will support local people and businesses, particularly local and socially orientated business. The CWB action plan for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is due for completion in February 2021.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Islands Deal aims to support sustainable economic growth with Orkney, Shetland and Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

In December 2020, a £49 million Scottish Government commitment was announced for the Stornoway Deep Water Harbour Project, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the development of island infrastructure. Additionally, the Talent Attraction Service aims to identify where there are skills gaps and skills shortages. We committed to 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.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan 2020-2025 sets out Scottish Government's ambitions to enhance access to skills training, which is critical for successful decarbonisation and will help create new, high-quality green jobs, enhanced regional growth, and improved access to growing 'green markets' across the globe for Scotland's diverse businesses. Through Island Communities Impact Assessments the Action Plan will ensure that policies and skills interventions do not discriminate and where possible, promote equality of opportunity, as set out in the Action Plan.

In 2021/22, as part of our commitment to developing a Repopulation Action Plan, we are designing a pilot project to support communities to identify the opportunities and barriers to the diversification of the local economy to support a sustainable population. This work will include how employers, including the public sector, can better support a location neutral working policy.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Islands Growth Deal aims to support Orkney, Shetland and Na h-Eileanan an Iar to look at innovative ways to support new and improved industries, moving away from fossil fuels towards net zero carbon. The Growth Deal is, however only one part of a wider range of economic support, delivered across all sectors and in partnership with our local authorities and HIE.

We committed to create and promote apprenticeships and job opportunities for young islanders.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Skills Development Scotland and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar signed a charter in 2019 which sets out how they will work together and invest in supporting a thriving education, learning and skills sector in the Na h-Eileanan an Iar. This includes a joint commitment to apprenticeships. Work has remained ongoing, with the signing and promotion of the Orkney Charter and the finalisation of the Shetland Charter also underway. Scottish Government continue to support recovery planning through apprenticeships, upskilling and re-skilling.

Additional funding is available through a Rural Uplift to training providers, to support delivery and assessment of training in rural areas (Argyll and Bute, the Isle of Arran and the Orkney, Shetland, and Na h-Eileanan an Iar). The 2019/20 spend in the Highlands and Islands was £459,250.

Funding is also available to support travel and subsistence for apprentices who are required to attend structured and formal off-the-job training.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The [Skills Action Plan for Rural Scotland](#) was launched in June 2019, and we have been working to ensure it aligns with the Strategic Objectives of the National Islands Plan and regional and sectoral skills investment plans. It has a clear focus on collaborative action through five priority areas:

- To better understand the skills that rural employers need and align provision to support this.
- To provide individuals with accessible education and skills provision to secure, sustain and progress their careers in rural areas.
- To develop the current workforce in rural areas through upskilling and reskilling.
- To build a secure pipeline for the future.
- To take a coordinated, strategic approach to tackling skills in rural areas.

The Talent Attraction Service aims to identify and address skills gaps and labour market shortages through:

- Building Scotland's reputation as a career destination, promoting our growth sectors to students and workers across the UK and beyond including mapping and extending spousal support interventions.
- Recognising that Scotland needs people with a variety of skills, in a variety of sectors.
- Working collaboratively with stakeholders and public and private sector employers to promote occupations and sectors where we have a competitive advantage and/or a global reputation to attract and facilitate recruitment.
- Developing and piloting a student retention programme aimed at reducing the outflow of students to outside Scotland once further/higher education is complete (Scottish, UK and international students).

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Work on this commitment has been delayed by the need to prioritise our operational response to COVID-19.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scotland's forestry sector employs people across Scotland where job creation is most needed, including our islands and among younger age categories. 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 25 jobs for young people. Employment in the private

forestry sector will also grow in response to rising levels of woodland creation and increasing domestic timber production. The Scottish Government is encouraging forestry companies to support new jobs on islands.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) continue to sustainably manage Scottish Minister owned National Forest and Lands on the islands such as the Isles of Arran, Mull and Skye. The management of these areas supports local economies (through forest management activity and outdoor recreation use), enhances the environment and provides opportunities for people to use and enjoy local woodlands. These woodlands also indirectly support local outdoor recreation and wildlife tourism companies.

As part of its role in managing Scotland's National Forest and Lands, FLS run the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) to support communities to buy or lease land to empower local communities and support local objectives. Community ownership of woodlands and land is creating new jobs and income, and most recently FLS agreed a lease with Raasay Development Trust for a community hydro scheme, to be part-funded by community shares, to generate income and sustainable energy for the island.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism is committed to supporting this work across the islands as part of our recovery and renewal work. The islands continue to be an important part of our rural tourism offering and we are keen that all of Scotland benefit from the economic advantages it can bring.

There has been an unprecedented package of support announced from both the Scottish and UK Governments to support businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to help employers preserve their business, maintain jobs and pay their workers throughout this crisis. Tourism and hospitality businesses across Scotland are to benefit from a £104.3 million package of support in 2021, as part of the £185 million package previously announced by the Finance Secretary.

We have committed £175,000 in 2020/21 and £25,000 in 2021/22 towards our Programme for Government commitment to develop an Islands Passport Project which will play a key part in supporting the economic recovery of our island tourism economy.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

In 2021 the Scottish Government will publish the Crofting National Development Plan. The overarching aim of this Plan will be to help crofters to develop and diversify crofting activity in order to secure productive crofting systems and thriving crofting communities, including those on islands. The Plan will aim to remove and minimise barriers to entry so that crofting offers opportunities to new entrants. It will also identify development priorities such as encouraging diversification through engaging with common grazing committees to encourage appropriate use of the grazings, including peatland restoration and tree planting.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism has also announced the formation of 5 farmer-led groups who will provide advice on what key farming sectors can do to shift to low carbon farming and land management and use. These groups will help guide Scottish Government in how to deliver key policies in Programme for Government and the Climate Change Plan update.

These groups are a key initiative that encourages those with knowledge and expertise to propose practical workable solutions to ensure that agriculture contributes to Scotland's climate targets. The formation of these groups provides an opportunity for the Scottish Government to work with farmers and crofters to identify opportunities to support these sectors to ensure their sustainability – both economically and environmentally.

We committed to deliver the Islands Passport initiative, which will promote 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The 2018-19 Programme for Government made a commitment to develop an Islands Passport Scheme. This continues to be supported jointly by the Scottish Government's Islands Team and Tourism officials, on behalf of the Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism respectively. However, progress has been significantly delayed due to the impact of COVID-19.

The project, which aims to become self-sustaining, was due to launch a pilot in summer 2020 and use this opportunity to gather user data and feedback prior to full launch. This was delayed due to COVID-19. A limited pilot was undertaken in autumn 2020 focusing on locals and those already travelling to Shetland. This was successful in gathering user feedback.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Food and drink businesses from our islands produce a wide range of high-quality products, which have a strong competitive advantage associated to place, people and provenance. At present, the industry in Scotland is worth £15 billion and with the aim to double the value of the industry to £30 billion by 2030 driving growth via innovation, integrating supply chains, investing in people and skills, and focusing on market growth opportunities domestically and internationally.

Scottish Government is a member of the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership, which comprises industry via their trade bodies and other public sector agencies, with the shared ambition to grow the reputation and value of the industry. The [Scotland Food and Drink Recovery Plan](#) was launched in November 2020. This national recovery plan amplifies and accelerates the current core work of the Scotland Food and Drink Partnership in delivering Ambition 2030. Critically though, it adds new catalyst actions to jump-start and expedite recovery, including to those in the sector who live on our islands.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Woodland creation projects are making an important contribution to the delivery of the Scottish Government annual woodland creation target to help mitigate climate change, improving biodiversity and are supporting local businesses.

An example of such a project is Torosay Hill on Mull, which is a 430ha native woodland creation and ecological restoration project supported through the Forestry Grant Scheme. This project aims to reverse the habitat decline through a landscape-scale woodland restoration programme with a 150-year vision. Tree planting will continue in stages until 2022. Where local expertise is available, island-based contractors have been used for the operational establishment phase. A local woodland establishment business is planning to expand their capacity to deliver the project, including offering apprenticeships that provide training and mentoring in practical woodland management.

The Scottish Government's Strategic Timber Transport Scheme (STTS) supports projects that facilitate the sustainable transport of timber in rural areas of Scotland, including the islands that deliver benefits for local communities and the environment. This is demonstrated by improvements to the Machrie Moor Road on the Isle of Arran, which utilised an STTS grant of £55,000 to add 4 passing places and road strengthening to 1km of the public road, matching government spending through Forestry and Land Scotland on improvements on in-forest roads.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Scottish Government's Islands Team will continue to utilise feedback collated through the National Islands Plan Consultation (2019) and the National Islands Plan through a COVID Lens Survey Results (2020). This is in addition to regular and ongoing engagement with local authorities and community stakeholders to identify key infrastructure priorities that can be supported; both within the policy area and across Scottish Government.

The Infrastructure Investment Plan states that Scottish Government will invest £30 million in delivering the National Islands Plan over the next 5 years, by supporting a range of areas, including tourism, infrastructure, innovation, energy transition and skills - informed by our learning of how island communities have responded and adapted to COVID-19.

This new capital funding will support projects encouraging repopulation, delivering on our net-zero ambitions, and supporting a green economic recovery. We will work with our island partners, stakeholders and across government to ensure that this capital resource aligns to local priorities, contributes to ongoing collaborative repopulation work and creates jobs while also delivering against the National Islands Plan.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Work in relation to this commitment is still at the scoping stage, and requires consultation and engagement with Environmental Health officers and officials to determine the viability of workable, safe operations within existing legislation.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

It became a duty to carry out Island Communities Impact Assessments for Scottish Government and local authorities from 23 December 2020. This places a requirement on relevant authorities to take island issues into account when developing or reviewing policies, strategies or services. Early Learning and Childcare policy will be fully impact assessed with support from the Scottish Government's Islands Team.

We committed to ensure that opportunities to develop the wellbeing of the Gaelic language and to increase the number of speakers and users are considered as part of sustainable economic development.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government Gaelic policy seeks to ensure that economic development opportunities using Gaelic are located in island communities and that authorities and public bodies continue to see the potential of Gaelic to contribute to sustainable economic development. There are a number of Gaelic projects and initiatives such as MG ALBA, Ceòlas, Fèisean nan Gàidheal, Storlann and more that contribute to economic development and this emphasis has been central to Deputy First Minister's Faster Rate of Progress and Community Engagement initiatives.

As a result of measures such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig Gaelic plans, CoHI discussions and Island Communities Impact Assessments, it will be possible to see Gaelic increasingly considered as a part of economic development.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Women in Agriculture Development Programme (WiADP) was developed for women across all parts of Scotland. We consulted with 22 women across 12 different Scottish island communities in relation to their training needs. Of the applications received for the pilot Be Your Best Self training course, 8% were from women in island communities. Additional support was given to those who required it in order to attend the first workshop. The subsequent workshops have taken place online.

We have established the [Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund](#), to which all women living in all parts of Scotland can apply for financial support with practical training courses.

We are working with island communities to explore potential solutions around childcare in rural and remote areas, as this was identified as a central barrier for many women's further involvement in agriculture.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The growth in both the value and reputation of Scotland's food and drink sector over the last decade is well recognised across the public and private sectors. The sector's profile has increased hugely, and like tourism, the impact of that success is felt right across the country from our cities to Scotland's most peripheral, rural communities.

Linkage with local authorities is key to supporting the growth of the Food and Drink Sector, and a national fund to support the development of Scotland's regional food groups/networks was launched in September 2020 with the work accelerated as part of the COVID-19 response. Grants of £10 - £15,000 have been made available to fund a co-ordinator in regional food groups across Scotland for one year with an expectation that these grants will be match-funded from within their local area, and ideally by local authorities.

Regional Food Groups in Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides have all been successful in securing funding for their respective groups and this will help drive individual growth of businesses on the islands. In turn, will grow 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government support the Food For Life team within the Soil Association to actively engage with all local authorities across Scotland to encourage and assist sign up to Food For Life and have undertaken significant work with Highland Council, who have held the award for over 10 years, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

Orkney Islands Council were awarded the bronze FFLSH award in December 2020 for their primary and secondary school meals and Shetland Islands Council have applied for accreditation, with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar having undertaken some menu and gap analysis with the team.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We have made commitments that ICIA's will be undertaken for the NTS2 Delivery Plan (in addition to the ICIA carried out for the National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) document in February 2020), the Strategic Transport Planning Review (STPR2) and the free bus travel for under-19s workstreams in 2021. Working in collaboration, the Scottish Government Islands Team, and Transport Scotland will ensure that regard is given to Island Communities when developing transport-related policies, strategies and services.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The implementation of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2018 has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union. Combined with associated resource constraints for local authorities, this has impacted on the development of guidance and regulations and the related consultation processes.

However, Transport Scotland are currently organising a virtual workshop in spring 2021 to involve stakeholders in developing materials for a forthcoming consultation on implementing the Bus provisions of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2018. The consultation paper is expected to launch later this year.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Work on this was not envisaged to start in 2020. However, a further Vessel Replacement and Deployment Plan report for the Clyde and Hebrides network has been drafted and discussed with key stakeholders with a view to issuing for consultation.

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 the National Islands Plan.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Ferries Plan will be replaced by an Islands Connectivity Plan. Work on this has been delayed by the need to prioritise our operational response to COVID-19 and the majority of the work will now be undertaken in 2021 and 2022. However, we have been able to undertake some initial work on topics including fares, emissions and investment planning during 2020.

The NTS2 Delivery Plan of December 2020 states that:



We will also 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. The ICP will be closely linked to the outcomes of the STPR2, in order to consider island connectivity more broadly having regard to aviation, ferries and fixed links, and to connecting and onward travel. 

We committed to review the impacts of Road Equivalent Tariff and to consider future ferry fares policy options that will meet the needs of islanders and support island economies.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We are still committed to reducing fares on northern routes and have introduced a three year islander fares freeze for passengers, non-commercial vehicles and cabins on Aberdeen-Kirkwall-Lerwick routes from January 2020.

An evaluation of RET has been undertaken and the report has been published on March 15th 2021. This report will be used to inform the upcoming fares review being conducted as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan. This brings the total additional funding provided, over and above the annual government settlement, to £19.2 million for financial year 2021/22.

A further £7.7 million has been allocated in the draft budget 2021-22 to support inter-island ferry services in Shetland, Orkney, Argyll and Bute for which those local authorities are responsible, meeting their revenue asks in full as well as extending the timetable and enabling the introduction of RET fares by Orkney Islands Council to its inter-island ferries.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

This commitment will be a strand of work undertaken as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan and the Strategic Transport Projects Review and this will take account of the particular needs of those with mobility issues.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

A project has been initiated to procure and implement a new booking and ticketing system for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services. The procurement phase has recently been completed and a contract awarded. CalMac Ferries Ltd are now working with the supplier on implementation.

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.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

The [NTS2 Delivery Plan](#) was published on 17 December 2020 and sets out Scottish Government actions for achieving the NTS2 priorities. In 2021, Transport Scotland will work with our partners to develop a Working with Partners document, setting out the wider-than-Scottish Government actions for delivering our shared Strategy.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The second STPR2 will inform transport investment in Scotland for the next 20 years.

Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, we revised the STPR2 programme and are now taking forward a two-phase approach to the reporting of recommendations for future transport investment opportunities.

On 3 February 2021 the [Phase 1 recommendations and associated impact assessment progress reports](#) were published. These are the first STPR2 recommendations for transport investment, focusing on recommendations for transport projects or interventions that significantly contribute to STPR2 objectives, align well with NTS2 priorities, and can be progressed or delivered within the current spending period and will help support a green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phase 2 will contain further recommendations and will complete STPR2. These will be reported in Autumn 2021.

An updated national [Case for Change](#) contained within the [STPR2: Update and Phase 1 Recommendations Report](#) was also published. This includes the options groupings that will be taken forward for further appraisal in Phase 2 of STPR2. Updated [Case for Change](#) reports have also been published for STPR2 regions, including four of which cover Scotland's island communities.

We committed to 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.

There is a five year commitment of over £500 million that enables our partners to have confidence to invest in large scale programmes including ambitious active travel infrastructure projects, many of which span several years and which will support more people to walk, wheel and cycle more often.

Over £50 million of the active travel budget goes into the Places for Everyone active travel infrastructure programme every year.

Infrastructure investment will be supported by continued investment in behaviour change programmes, as evidence suggests encouragement, training and advocacy need to be combined with access to bikes and safe, high-quality infrastructure to encourage more people to walk, wheel and cycle.

Future transport investment decisions will be made in line with both the Sustainable Travel and Sustainable Investment hierarchies, prioritising walking, wheeling, cycling and public and shared transport options in preference to single occupancy private car use and supporting reduction in unsustainable travel. Walking and cycling is key to supporting a just transition to net zero and reducing health inequalities given their importance for people and families on low incomes.

Through the Islands Green Recovery Programme, we have provided £75,000 to support the Isle of Kerrera to develop a pilot Island Bike Hire scheme to encourage greater use of active travel for visitors and island residents. This includes the use of eCargo bikes to support active travel options for island residents when travelling to Oban for shopping and other supplies.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Work is underway to review NPF4, which has been delayed due to the reduced capacity of stakeholders and Government to support the emergency response to COVID-19. We will now lay a draft in Parliament in autumn 2021, rather than September 2020, which highlights the building of 20 minute neighbourhoods as a key opportunity. An Island Communities Impact Assessment will also be prepared.

It is recognised that in rural areas including islands, there is heavier reliance on the private car, but by taking a place-based approach informed by the 20 minute neighbourhood concept we aim to develop strategies to improve connectivity. Through remote working, community hubs, innovation and electric vehicle charging infrastructure we will support a long term low carbon and sustainable approach to rural repopulation.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government intend to undertake a full review of general fares policy, including freight fares, as part of 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.

Housing and Fuel Poverty

Strategic Objective 4 - To improve housing

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Housing policy continues to be developed taking the needs of island communities into consideration. In our 2018-19 Programme for Government, we made a commitment to plan together with stakeholders for how our homes and communities should look and feel in 2040 and the options and choices to get there. The Housing to 2040 Routemap has been informed by extensive engagement with the housing sector, stakeholders and the public.

This includes feedback received from those living in and working with island communities. Findings from feedback provided as part of the National Islands Plan consultation have also been taken into account.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We are working with stakeholders to develop guidance and finalise legislation for a short-term lets licensing scheme. The principal component of our licensing scheme is a set of mandatory standards which will apply to all short-term lets across Scotland, including those on island communities. The Government intends to lay legislation to establish a new licensing scheme in June 2021.

Legislation allowing councils to establish short-term let control areas was approved by the Scottish Parliament in February, and will come into force in April 2021.

We committed to 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

In November 2020, Scottish Government announced an extension to the Rural and Island Housing Fund beyond March 2021 of £30 million. This demand led fund supports the supply of affordable housing across all tenures, and groups such as community organisations, development trusts and private landowners to build new affordable housing, refurbish existing properties, bring empty properties into use, including the conversion of commercial and non-domestic properties into houses. It includes feasibility funding to help groups explore the range of possibilities and is helping to provide a strong pipeline of projects.

Projects supported through the Rural and Islands Housing Fund include:

- [Ulva Ferry, Isle of Mull, Argyll and Bute](#)
- [North Ronaldsay School House Renovation, Orkney](#)
- [Isle of Rum, Highland](#)

We committed to continue to provide grants to crofters to build and improve croft houses.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

We have continued to provide grants to crofters and over the last 12 months, have approved 40 Croft House Grant applications from island crofters, with a total value of £1.2 million. This comprises of 23 new homes and 17 home improvements grants.

Of the 40 successful island applications, 24 were in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, 12 were in Highland, 2 were in Shetland, and 2 were in Argyll and Bute.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Local authorities are the statutory housing authority and are responsible for assessing housing requirements in their areas and using the available tools to make the best use of existing stock alongside the delivery of new homes to meet identified needs and support effective place making. The Scottish Government updated guidance for local authorities in 2019. The guidance requires local authorities to set out the number of empty homes in their area and the authorities' plans to address the issue, including through the use of Compulsory Purchase Order powers where appropriate.

Tackling empty homes remains a priority for Scottish Government. We want to see no homes left empty without good reason. To help achieve this we fund the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership to work with local authorities, and owners, to return them to productive use. The work of the Partnership has helped to bring around 6,000 homes back into use since 2010 and we are keen to see this figure continue to grow. Dedicated empty homes officers are fundamental to this approach and we want to see them working across all of our island communities.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Through the wider Affordable Supply Housing Programme and the Rural and Islands Housing Fund, over 4,800 homes have been delivered in rural and island communities over the first four years of the Parliament, including 589 on island communities alone.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Housing policies will continue to be developed and implemented in a way which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society in line with the provisions of the Equalities Act 2010.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Through our energy efficiency schemes, Scottish Government already spend more per head on energy efficiency in remote rural and island areas, where we know installation and labour costs are higher. For instance, fuel poor households in remote rural and island communities benefit from an additional £2,000 uplift to reflect the increased delivery costs in these areas.

Our Warmer Homes Scotland scheme has introduced additional renewable and enabling measures, including ground source heat pumps, micro-wind, micro-hydro and micro-CHP systems that will be of particular benefit to households living off the gas grid, which is the case for most island based communities.

We will continue to regularly review how delivery schemes can be adapted to work better locally, and that funding is adequately distributed to our island communities.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Previously, during the passage of the legislation which became the Fuel Poverty Act 2019, we undertook an ICIA to fully consider the implications for island based households. This entailed a number of workshops organised in each of the six local authority areas which encompass island communities.

The feedback we received contributed to our decision to include in the new definition of fuel poverty, adjustments to the UK Minimum Income Standard which take proper account of the generally higher cost of living in the islands.

We committed to produce an Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) on the final Fuel Poverty Strategy, ensuring that representatives from island local authorities are fully involved in its development

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

An ICIA will be undertaken on the Fuel Poverty Strategy. Development of the Strategy is currently paused due to COVID-19, but will be resumed as soon as possible and published in 2021.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

As we come to prepare our Fuel Poverty Strategy we are committed to continuing to take full account of the special circumstances faced by those living in island areas and undertake the necessary research and analysis to meet the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act 2019.

Digital Connectivity

Strategic Objective 6 - To improve digital connectivity

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Through the Reaching 100% (R100) programme, Scottish Government will ensure that every home and business can access superfast broadband. This is being delivered through the £600 million R100 contracts, our Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS) as well as continued commercial deployment.

The Scottish Government will invest £384 million in the R100 North lot contract which covers the majority of Scotland's inhabited islands. This contract was signed with BT in December 2020, following a legal challenge to procurement. As was the case with the earlier commencement of the Central and South contracts of the R100 programme, the Scottish Government will provide BT with an updated intervention area (the list of addresses eligible for public sector subsidy) which we have recently consulted upon. BT will update their implementation plan based on the new intervention area, which takes into account changes to commercial deployment plans. Our online address checker will be updated in stages to reflect these roll-out plans where these have changed since the North lot was tendered as they are confirmed, with a full picture across the North contract area expected by the summer.

16 new subsea cables will be delivered through the North lot contract providing gigabit capable, future-proofed, resilient connectivity for those islands.

These cables will connect to 15 Scottish islands including Colonsay, Iona, Lismore, Eigg, Eday, Flotta, Hoy, Rousay, Sanday, Shapinsay, Stronsay, Fair Isle, Unst, Whalsey and Yell.

There will also be a cable laid between Sanday and Fair Isle.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Through the R100 North lot contract, delivery of gigabit capable infrastructure was mandated in South Mull, Uig/Timsgarry, Sanday, Stronsay, Yell and Unst. The R100 contract will deliver 16 new subsea cables, building on those already delivered through the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme, providing future-proofed gigabit capable connectivity to those islands. The R100 contracts, alongside our SBVS will ensure that anyone who requires a superfast broadband connection by the end of 2021 can have one.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government officials have met with United Kingdom Government (UKG) counterparts on a number of occasions with regards to their gigabit plans and to seek agreement that Scotland will be prioritised. The UKG has indicated that £1.2 billion will be made available across the UK to deliver their gigabit ambitions by 2025; initially £5 billion had been committed alongside a universal gigabit coverage by 2025, but this has now been scaled back by 85% coverage and only £1.2 billion is available for the period up to 2025. We are continuing to engage with UK Ministers on options for the deployment of some of this funding to augment or own investment. We therefore continue to work with UKG to ensure Scotland sees its fair share of this investment and will endeavour, through various work streams, to identify investment opportunities across Scotland, including Scotland's islands.

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.

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

However, it is expected to progress in 2021.

Through the Scotland 5G Centre, 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Led by the University of Strathclyde, the [Rural Testbed project](#) is delivering a 5G testbed in two locations (Orkney and Loch Lomond), and is backed with £1.9 million funding from the Scotland 5G Centre. In the first quarter of 2021, fibre backhaul will be deployed at the key site of Westray to support the testbed (expected to connect a number of locations across Orkney) and its associated key use cases of 5G fixed wireless access, IoT (internet of things), energy, and mobile/roaming access.

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.

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Work is planned for 2021/22 to ensure progress is made towards this commitment.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government's Islands Officials will be exploring how we might build on the learning from previous work, such as the £1 million Digital Start Fund that was launched in May 2019, to develop a digital skills programme designed by island communities to meet their needs in 2021/22.

The Digital Start Fund is an inclusive growth policy which aims to assist those on low incomes or in receipt of benefits to gain digital qualifications and enter the labour market. A number of providers have been awarded funding to support those living in rural areas through this, including the University of Highlands and Islands to deliver cyber, data and software development courses jointly with ScotlandIS, and to North Highland College to deliver cyber training.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government Islands Officials will be exploring the potential for delivering any new clubs and digital inclusion programmes in 2021/22.

Health and 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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Scottish Government's Primary Care Division continues to regularly engage with health boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs), including those covering our island communities, regarding the implementation of the 2018 GP Contract and wider issues such as support to dispensing doctors. Ongoing Consultation with island health boards has reported that regular pharmacy cover was difficult to achieve for GP practices geographically distant from centres of population, and highlighted challenges in moving staff between practices in rural areas.

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, which could be crucial for our more remote island communities. Additionally, a fund of £117,252 has been set up to directly support the three island health boards and HSCPs with administrative and project management or quality improvement support required to implement the GP Contract. NHS Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles are each allocated £39,804.

The Scottish Government has also offered support to dispensing practices with delivery of prescriptions to patients during the pandemic up to March 2021. Currently, the Western Isles have accepted support whilst we are awaiting confirmation from Shetland, Orkney and Argyll & Bute health boards. A pharmacotherapy service, which provides pharmacist support to every GP practice across Scotland, has also been implemented.

Additionally, NHS Pharmacy First Scotland was launched on 29 July 2020 in all community pharmacies. This service provides extended access to advice and treatment for minor illnesses and common clinical conditions and is for everyone who is registered with a GP practice in Scotland or who lives in Scotland, including those living on our islands. The NHS Near Me video call service has also been rolled out to all community pharmacies and can be used for NHS Pharmacy First Scotland, enabling pharmacists to hold a video consultation with patients at home. Collaborative work with health boards continues with eHealth to determine models of remote access to GP practice systems so that elements of the pharmacotherapy service could be delivered remotely in future.

The Scottish Government has allocated £200,000 to support Rural Relocation expenses, and £400,000 to 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. For 2020/21, the Scottish Government is allocating £72,050 to NHS Shetland to support the Rediscover the Joy in General Practice Project.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Primary Care Improvement Plans (PCIPs) are an annual reporting tool which health boards provide Scottish Government with an update on progress towards the implementation of the GP Contract and health boards can share comments on best practice within their area. Due to COVID-19's impact on resources, a condensed version of the PCIPs were returned from all boards. The analysis of these plans was presented to the National Oversight Group in January 2021.

For 2020/21 Scottish Government is also allocating £342,218 to NHS Highland to support the Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative. The Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative (SRMC) is funded by Scottish Government to develop ways to improve the recruitment and retention of people working in Primary Care.

We committed to support the extension of NHS Near Me/Attend Anywhere, and other digital health initiatives, to reduce unnecessary travel and enable more care to be delivered on Islands.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We have launched the Near Me video consulting service, to enable people to have planned health and social care appointments from home or ideally, wherever is convenient and practical. This is a free and confidential web-based platform.

For rural and island communities, further work is required to assess how people feel about social isolation and use of remote consultations.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government aim to build on the work of [Shaping the Future Together: Remote and Rural General Practice Working Group report](#) to establish a formal proposal for a National Centre for Remote, Rural and island Healthcare in Scotland that is inclusive of the needs, opportunities and models of excellence from the whole remote and rural health and care workforce. The Primary Care Division within Scottish Government is developing a proposal for how the centre for excellence should look, and will shortly be engaging with stakeholders.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

In the creation of the [A Fairer Scotland for older people, A Framework for Action](#) we consulted and listened to the voices and experiences of older people in the Older People's Strategic Action Forum.

Integration authorities 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.

We published an implementation plan (covering the period 2019-2021) for the overarching Self-directed Support Strategy in June 2019. The implementation plan set out actions required to drive forward the changes necessary to fully implement and embed self-directed support across Scotland.

Ministers have also recently extended funding for independent support and advice through Support in the Right Direction for people navigating social care until the end of March 2022.

Support in the Right Direction, a key action in the implementation plan, funds projects worth over £588,265 across all of the 6 island local authority areas who provide independent information, advice and advocacy to people and carers accessing and managing their social care care, as well as supporting them them to exercise choice and control over that care and support.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We continue to work with colleagues in **Sport**Scotland who are engaged in regular discussions with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council regarding current and future opportunities for the development of sports facilities. Similar discussions are also being held with the other local authorities which include island communities.

SportScotland are also in active discussions with Orkney Islands Council in relation to working strategically to put in place facilities that will link to the needs of hosting the Orkney 2025 International Island Games. This will ensure a quality environment that will provide more opportunities for people in Orkney of all ages to participate and be active, as well as providing the best opportunity for young people to develop and perform on local, national and international stages. This project will leave a visual and inspirational legacy from the Orkney 2025 Games.

We committed to promote participation in sport and physical activity by ensuring national programmes such as Active Schools and Community Sport Hubs are serving island communities, and continuing the Island Athlete Travel Award Scheme.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions have significantly impacted on sporting participation across Scotland, including island communities. However, Scottish Government and **Sportscotland** have continued to encourage islanders to be physically active in line with the public health guidance and have provided support to sport organisations to operate through and out of the pandemic.

Sportscotland is currently investing in four year Partnership Agreements (2019-23) with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council. As part of these agreements, **Sportscotland** is providing annual financial investment to support the delivery of Active Schools and Community Sport Hubs across each island local authority.

This investment continues to support the employment of 15 (FTE) Active Schools staff covering every Secondary school cluster from Unst to Barra. There are also Active School staff working with the island schools in Highland, Argyll and Bute and North Ayrshire, through our investment in those local authorities. Our investment in the three island authorities supports the employment of six Community Sport Hub Officers supporting local communities to develop better connected pathways.

Sportscotland continues to support those with athletic potential through the Athlete Travel Award Scheme (ATAS). Athletes can benefit from up to £1,500 per year from the programme to help with travel and accommodation costs when attending training and competitions on the mainland. The programme has supported 56 island athletes over the past three years, however the programme paused in 2020/21 and will recommence when travel restrictions are lifted.

Sportscotland will continue to support and contribute into each local authority to deliver the aims set out in their respective sport and physical activity strategies including 'Active Hebrides Strategy', 'Active Shetland Strategy' and 'Orkney Physical Activity and Well-being Strategy', with the latter currently in development.

Sportscotland will also continue to be represented on each Island Community Planning Partnership (and sub-groups) and will contribute to shared outcomes in relation to sport, physical activity, health and well-being as required.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

As a consequence of the Guernsey Games being cancelled in 2021 due to COVID-19, Orkney will now host the games in 2025. **Sportscotland** will continue to support Orkney Islands Council, Orkney Islands Organising Committee and local sports associations to add value to Orkney hosting the 2025 International Island Games through the development of the local infrastructure of people, places and pathway opportunities. **Sportscotland** will continue work

with the Community Sports Hub Officer and with the Orkney Islands Games Organising Committee to deliver a needs based programme of coach education for coaches and officials.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government continues to fund the Improvement Service to provide support to all multi-agency VAW Partnerships across Scotland to help them measure the progress being made to implement Equally Safe at a local level and identify any areas for improvement.

Scottish Government, COSLA and the Improvement Service published the [Equally Safe Delivery Plan 2 year report](#).

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Women's Aid published the findings from their [Participating-in-Equally-Safe-in-the-Highlands-and-Islands](#) consultation with 188 women in the Highlands and Islands about the barriers women in rural areas face in participating in local action to end violence against women and girls. We will be working with our partners on how to implement the recommendations following the report.

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.

In July 2020, we opened our £3 million Access to Childcare Fund which will test new models of school age childcare that will be more accessible, flexible and affordable for low income families. 15 projects have been awarded funding, including [Hame Fae Hame](#) in Scalloway, Shetland.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Responses to our 2019 consultation on out-of-school care were independently analysed and a full [report of the findings](#) was published in November 2020.

Our consultation question on rural provision received 833 responses, and issues relating to rural childcare availability were highlighted. Issues relating to transport and location of services were raised. It was felt that a one-size-fits-all approach would not work in rural areas, and local consultation on services was important. The Scottish Government 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.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The NHS Trusts of Highland and Western Isles are aware of the benefits for patients of being able to use Gaelic when these services are being offered. NHS Highland commitments to Gaelic are outlined in its [Gaelic Language Plan](#), 2017-2022.

NHS Western Isles, who are a large employer of Gaelic speakers on the islands, has the potential to make a significant contribution to the use of Gaelic in health, care and well-being services. NHS Western Isles is currently revising its Gaelic Language Plan.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 requires local authorities and health boards to jointly produce annual Local Child Poverty Action Reports, setting out the action taken locally to tackle child poverty and the future action planned for this purpose.

Through this focus local areas are building their understanding of child poverty and the action needed to tackle it. Key Scottish Government investment in new support, including the Parental Employability Support Fund, is helping local areas to tackle poverty and enhance the support available for parents and families. £7.35 million was provided for the Parental Employability Support Fund in 2020-21.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government continue to provide funding to the Improvement Service for a national child poverty coordinator to support local officials in the development of action on child poverty and in preparation of Local Child Poverty Action Reports. This support includes a peer support network, online resources and webinars for local child poverty leads, senior officials and elected members – helping to share practice and raise the profile of child poverty across Scotland, including in island communities.

The Scottish Government also continue to provide funding to the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit (SPIRU) to provide analytical support to local authorities.

The Scottish Government works closely with Public Health Scotland, COSLA and other national partners to share and support development of good practice. Islands Integration Authorities are represented on national fora such as the SCIN and the Chief Officers' Network, for sharing learning.

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).

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Wellbeing Economy Governments group (WEGo) met virtually in policy labs in 2020 to share ideas on how a Wellbeing Economy approach can help guide response to COVID-19 and economic recovery. The focus, due to the pandemic, was on the economic recovery, which is covered in the CWB data in Strategic Objective 2, relating to sustainable economic development.

We continue to learn, and to engage and collaborate with other countries and organisations to creating an economy that supports all of our communities across Scotland, including our island communities, to access opportunities that deliver local growth and wellbeing through tackling inequalities.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government continues to support and fund the National Rural Mental Health Forum, which was established following the [Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027](#). The Forum membership continues to grow with a network of 180 organisations, with an outreach to 500,000 people in rural Scotland, including those in our island communities.

In 2020, the Forum researched the possible impact on the mental health and wellbeing of rural communities and businesses in Scotland from Brexit and most recently how COVID-19 has impacted on marginalised communities throughout rural Scotland, specifically young carers, refugees and asylum seekers and LGBT+. The [Marginalised communities Report](#) was published in February 2021. The Scottish Government looks forward in exploring this report with the Forum and helping deliver and fund potential projects on our islands from its outcomes.

Environmental Wellbeing and Biosecurity

Strategic Objective 8 - To improve and promote environmental wellbeing and deal with biosecurity

We committed to protect island biodiversity.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

During the first year of the National Islands Plan, five nature conservation Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) have been designated, three of which are in proximity to islands; North East Lewis, Shiant East Bank and Sea of the Hebrides. Additionally, twelve new Special Protection Areas have been designated, 7 of which are in proximity to islands; Seas off Foula, Seas off St Kilda, Coll and Tiree, East Mainland Coast Shetland, Sound of Gigha, West Coast of the Outer Hebrides and Rum.

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

- The Seas of the Outer Hebrides (SEASOH), a partnership between NatureScot, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Marine Scotland, University of the Highlands and Islands and Creative Carbon Scotland, aims to pilot a co-management approach to MPAs in the Outer Hebrides marine region. We have completed phase one of community engagement, identifying key issues and priorities for MPAs and their management. The project is expected to conclude in March 2022.
- Species on the Edge is a partnership of NatureScot and 7 nature conservation charities, all dedicated to improving the fortunes of 40 priority species found along Scotland's coast and islands. Funding was secured from National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop a 4 and a half year programme of work to tackle the impacts of environmental change on wildlife to benefit both nature and people.
- Agreements are in place to manage land in Islay, Uist, Coll, Tiree and South Walls for the benefit of Greenland barnacle geese and Greenland white-fronted geese, whilst supporting farmers whose land and crops are affected by the birds.
- A key focus of the Landscape Partnership Project is aimed at improving and managing habitats for key native bird species on a number of non-connected Orkney Isles.
- Support is in place to maintain a viable red-billed chough population on Islay, whilst a long term approach to population management is developed and agreed. The population is at risk of extinction without intervention.
- NatureScot commissioned 3 reports evaluating the impact and intervention options for mammalian invasive non-native species on island protected areas including Rum, Noss and Hermaness on Unst.
- The project to remove invasive rhododendron from Kinloch village on Rum is ongoing.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Marine Scotland have undertaken a [campaign](#) to raise awareness of invasive non-native species, American lobster (*Homarus americanus*), targeted at fishermen to encourage reporting for lobsters caught in Scottish waters. American lobsters could have a negative impact on native European lobsters and other species in the marine environment, by acting as a disease vector, competing for food and shelter and interbreeding. By encouraging reporting, Marine Scotland aim to understand more about the threat from the species by obtaining information about where they are, in what quantities and if they are breeding.

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.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

Zero Waste Scotland supported the Scottish Government on the 'island-proofing' of the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), holding a series of engagement events with island communities in October 2019. The feedback from these events fed into an [Island Communities Impact Assessment](#) and helped shape changes to the regulations that are designed to make sure the scheme works for all of Scotland's communities.

A DRS Islands Forum has been established to provide an ongoing engagement mechanism for representatives of island communities to support development of this impact assessment and subsequent implementation planning. Those on the Forum can input directly and help to identify or contact other suitable representatives across the islands and within communities.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Through the Islands Green Recovery Programme (IGRP) and collaboration with Zero Waste Scotland, grant funding provided by the Scottish Government and European Regional Development Fund will empower shops, from 12 Scottish islands, to reduce packaging by introducing shoppers to reusable alternatives. In addition to seeing waste frequently washing up on the shores around them, island communities often have to bear the double burden of dealing with imported single-use items being shipped off-island. The £268,388 IGRP Refill Fund investment provides dispensing equipment that enables customers to obtain grocery products in reusable containers brought from home.

Additionally, 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.

We committed to continue and refresh the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, which has benefited island communities through provision of infrastructure to mitigate the impact of increased tourism benefiting islands' communities and environment.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

The Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund is administered by VisitScotland and is open to local authorities and National Park Authorities to apply for in partnership with their communities. A total of £6 million funding was split between 2018-19 and 2019-20. The announcement of the first round was made on 5 October 2018, with round two on 6 June 2019. The announcement of a further £3 million for the fund was made in the First Minister's Programme for Government on 3 September 2020.

We committed to develop work with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy's Non-Native Species Action Group to increase public information around minimising particularly high-risk invasive species movements on islands.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Although the SBS action group has not yet met to discuss this action, the ongoing island eradication projects listed below are run by NatureScot or RSPB, who originally proposed this action to the Group. All of these projects engage with island communities to raise awareness of invasive predators and, in particular, to help prevent them from spreading onto adjacent islands.

- NatureScot continue to work to eradicate American mink from the Outer Hebrides. The population has been reduced to close to the point of eradication, but small numbers of individual animals remain.
- Work to assess the feasibility of removing hedgehogs from North and South Uist in order to protect internationally important bird populations is in progress in partnership with RSPB Scotland. Work was delayed due to COVID-19, however the feasibility study is scheduled to conclude in 2021.
- Work is ongoing on Orkney to non-native stoats. Due to COVID-19, community outreach has been restricted to social media and radio interviews. Community outreach is a strong element within the project, which also has a schools programme. Following an extended period required to gain land access, [eradication of non-native stoats](#) on Orkney has now begun.
- [Biosecurity for LIFE](#) are working to raise awareness of the threat of invasive predators and put in place systems to prevent their accidental introduction to islands. The project is primarily a communications project aimed at engaging island communities and visitors to prevent rodents and stoats getting to islands as stowaways in boats and cargo. In particular they focused primarily on 41 island special protection areas (SPAs) in the UK that are

designated for breeding seabirds. 28 of these SPAs are in Scotland and 13 are in the rest of the UK. This project includes school programmes, plans for seabird islands and advice for boat users in development, community consultations, training workshops and island checks which are currently delayed due to the pandemic.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government supports continued collaboration with island partners to ensure nature based solutions are used to tackle to continued threat of climate change. Several key projects that have been undertaken during the first year of the National Island Plan are noted below:

- The Adaptation Scotland Programme, delivered on behalf of the Scottish Government by sustainability charity Sniffer, is supporting climate adaptation work on the Scottish islands. Adaptation Scotland is working with the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership to develop adaptation actions for inclusion in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (see update under Strategic Objective 9). This includes developing links with existing and upcoming projects to explore nature based solutions to climate challenges on the islands.
- In the period 2012/13 to 31 March 2020 Peatland Action has delivered 16 peatland restoration projects across our islands (Arran, Islay, Lewis, Mull, Shetland, Skye), putting 810 hectares on the road to restoration and further work is underway this financial year.
- On Rum, there has been a reduction in wild herbivores over 10,000 ha to enable ecological restoration, reduce red deer impacts, improve habitat and peatland condition as set out in Rum NNR habitat management plan.

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.

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Progress towards this commitment has been difficult to achieve due to COVID-19. However, we will make this a priority in the coming year via the Island Strategic Group and other relevant island stakeholders, whilst working to highlight our islands at COP26 in Glasgow.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Continued engagement indicates a growing interest in adopting the circular economy approach in relation to energy in reducing unnecessary waste in the system and across the wider Scottish economy. The circular economy approach is already having an effect in the manufacturing sector, with more thought given to the use and reuse of materials in manufacturing processes.

An example of a circular economy approach can be seen in the Outer Hebrides Local Energy Hub. This project involves the transfer of fish waste from SSC's processing plant on the Isle of Lewis, which is integrated with other local household and garden waste to produce biogas in an anaerobic digester at the CnES Household Waste and Recycling Centre in Creed. The biogas fuels a Combined Heat and Power plant, with some of the electricity generated used to drive an electrolyser which in turn produces hydrogen and oxygen for use at SSC's hatchery in Lewis, as well as providing fuel for CnES's hydrogen-powered bin lorry. This project is the first of its kind in Scotland and will help sustain the local economy.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

However, we will work in collaboration with our local authorities in the coming year to best support their climate change ambitions.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Local Energy Policy Statement (LEPS), published January 2021, sets out the importance in recognising the individual characteristics of an area, and its community, in planning the transition to a net zero future. Each local area, or island community, will have different physical characteristics, for example, geography, building stock, and existing energy infrastructure. Equally, each area will also have its own ambitions and priorities, such as reducing fuel poverty, increasing life expectancy, improving employability, creating new employment opportunities, and reducing declining populations. LEPS delivery framework set out its support to inform decisions of both those participating, and those developing energy projects which are contributing to the energy systems transition to a low carbon future.

Additionally, Local Energy Scotland (LES) continue to deliver the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) supporting community groups and organisations and rural SME's to explore their renewable energy options. CARES advice and funding support is available to communities across Scotland, including our island communities. CARES has supported 87 island renewables projects to date.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Dynamic Coast 2 Project will launch in 2021 and will assess how sea level rise will increase and accelerate coastal erosion and impact assets along our coast. Outputs from the project will include detailed analysis of coastal change on Tiree and at Bay of Skail, Orkney.

We announced a new budget of £12 million (over four years from 2022-23) for coastal change adaptation in the Programme for Government. Officials are discussing how the budget will be allocated. However, priority will be given to projects that protect and work with nature, including those on our islands.

The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership has set up a Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) tasked with improving understanding of climate change, building collaboration across organisations and developing actions to embed in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan. Adaptation Scotland is working with the CCWG to deliver an adaptation project which is gathering evidence on how the Outer Hebrides are being impacted by climate change, planning an effective approach to involving communities, and assessing climate risks and opportunities to inform the development of adaptation actions. As part of this work, specialist input from the Met Office has been secured to develop climate storylines for the Outer Hebrides. This will focus on communicating climate trends and projections in a way that is accessible and engaging for communities, and is the first project of its kind in the UK. Nature Scot, who chair the CCWG, have recruited a graduate student placement until September 2021 to support this work.

Adaptation Scotland is also supporting Community Planning Partners on the Orkney Islands, who are committed to jointly responding to the Climate Emergency and the green recovery for the islands, including delivery of adaptation work. Orkney Islands Council has recruited a new climate change post which includes a strong emphasis on climate change adaptation and will support the development of this work.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The Minister for Energy, Connectivity and the Islands will write to Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP (Minister for Energy) in 2021 to highlight the key issues and challenges facing renewable generation and infrastructure development across Scotland's main islands, and the need to maximise our islands' potential in order to achieve our decarbonisation targets.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

However, we will work in collaboration with Resilience Partnerships to encourage them to focus on the resilience of islands' energy supply networks.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

In terms of aviation, we have committed to decarbonising scheduled flights within Scotland by 2040 and will work with the sector to encourage sustainable growth post COVID-19. As announced in our Programme for Government we will aim to create the world's first zero emission aviation region in partnership with Highlands and Islands Airports. The New Climate Change Plan update also commits to exploring the potential for the purchase of zero/low emission aircraft by the Scottish Government, for lease back to operators, with more detailed assessment expected in the forthcoming Aviation Strategy.

The New Climate Change Plan update also states that 30% of Scottish Government owned ferries will be low emission by 2032. This is supported by a commitment to 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, learning from experience in other countries.

In terms of road infrastructure, a sustainable investment hierarchy is embedded in the second STPR2 which is considering future transport investment plans. The Review will cover the strategic road and rail networks, and national infrastructure investment to support active travel and island connectivity. Phase 1 was published on 3 February 2021. Phase 2 will be published in Autumn 2021. Together, Phase 1 and Phase 2 will set out Scottish Government's transport investment priorities for the next 20 years.

Funding continues to be provided to all local authorities to enable them to grow and develop zero carbon transport infrastructure such as EV charging.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government remains committed to supporting the expansion of renewable energy technology across our islands, with details of our current and new policies set out in the [Climate Change Plan Update](#) (CCPU).

Scottish Government will also publish the energy strategy position statement ahead of the 2021 pre-election period which will provide a comprehensive overview of how we are contributing to a green economic recovery, in respect of energy, whilst remaining aligned to our net zero ambitions.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government continues to support sustainable woodland creation through the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) delivered by Scottish Forestry. Increased support is available for woodland creation on the Na h-Eileanan an Lar and Northern Isles recognising the additional costs of planting trees in these areas. Work is underway across the islands with communities, crofters, farmers and landowners to expand the area of forests and woodlands to support the delivery of the Climate Change Plan annual tree planting target, to sequester carbon, enhance biodiversity and support economic development.

An example of this is near Dunvegan Castle on the Isle of Skye where a 239 hectare woodland creation project has been approved. The planting on the Macleod's Estate will be predominantly of native broadleaves which will greatly expand the existing native woodland habitats and is planned to be completed by the end of 2021.

Since 2015, Scottish Forestry have worked 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. Under the initiative around 640 hectares of new woodland has been created, a total of 829 site visits have been carried out and 678 people have been on training courses throughout crofting counties.

An example of a project supported under the Croft Woodland Project is on the Shetland Islands. Support and approval of FGS funding to plant 2,500 trees on Burravoe Croft will help the crofter meet their woodland expansion aims. The project will revitalise the croft business and support diversification, and the tree planting will provide shelter belts for livestock and a scenic setting for glamping pods.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Our current thinking on the direction of travel for National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was set out in the NPF4 [Position Statement](#) published in November 2020. It identifies four key outcomes that we expect NPF4 to focus on achieving: net-zero emissions, resilient communities, a wellbeing economy, and better, greener places. The preparation of this next generation of planning policy is a significant opportunity to help deliver the Climate Change Plan update, rapidly providing a coherent vision for carbon conscious places.

The Position Statement notes that it is right to develop island areas in a different way to urban centres and highlights that ongoing work is exploring policy changes to support prosperous and sustainable rural and island communities. Sustainable travel for island communities and climate change resilience for coastal communities are highlighted with broader opportunities including renewable energy generation, low and zero carbon design, new models of low carbon living, the circular economy, green infrastructure and biodiversity.

We committed to support the adaptation of Scotland’s aquaculture and fishing industry.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government published the 2020 Marine Climate Change Impact Partnership (MCCIP) [Review Card](#), including briefing papers on projected climate impacts on the [fishing](#) and [aquaculture](#) sectors that affect our island communities. We have also established the [Farmed Fish Health Framework](#) and [Fisheries Innovation Scotland](#) to further support Scotland’s aquaculture and fishing industry.

We committed to work with a range of stakeholders to develop an action plan to improve resilience to properties at flood risk.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Government launched the [‘Living with Flooding’ Action Plan](#) in November 2019. We are now working with the Property Flood Resilience Delivery Group to deliver the action plan.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

This year’s Programme for Government announced a £70 million Recycling Improvement Fund, to support local authorities in improving recycling infrastructure. The Recycling Improvement Fund will be available to all local authorities, including our island authorities, over the next five years from 2021/22. Through the joint Scottish Government & Local Government Strategic Steering Group on Circular Economy and Waste, we are continuing to work with COSLA, SOLACE, representatives from the Waste Management Officers’ Network and Zero Waste Scotland to agree an approach to distribution of the fund and identify opportunities to maximise its impact. Particular consideration is being given to how best to support local authorities in developing and delivering projects, addressing local circumstances and priorities.

Our Programme for Government 2019/20 also included a commitment to consult on the current rural exemption for food waste collections and review the food waste separation requirements. We will publish a consultation on the range of commitments identified in the 2019 Food Waste Reduction Action Plan in due course.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Launched in January 2021, the Local Energy Systems Scottish Industry Network (LESSIN), a key initiative in the Local Energy Policy Statement, is a pan-Scotland programme supported by the Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the European Regional Development Fund. The project seeks to facilitate and deliver the collaborative measures necessary to decarbonise the whole energy system.

Collaboration between tech companies, project managers, regulators, networks and investors within the network will enable businesses to innovate and grow in response to consumer need, producing investment, innovation and internationalisation.

The project will provide a platform for the sector to collaborate and share knowledge and lessons learned, which will be of benefit to island communities. It will facilitate the growth of inclusive employment opportunities and allow for local energy projects to support the creation of jobs and provide support to the development and strengthening of the Scottish supply chain.

We are also currently in the process of developing our Islands Energy Strategy which we committed to in the publication of our January 2021 Local Energy Policy Statement. This Islands Energy Strategy will be implemented to complement the existing National Islands Plan, ensuring the continued resilience of energy across Scottish islands and providing support to islands and their communities in their decarbonisation plan. We are currently seeking the views of relevant policy leads across Scottish Government in advance of consulting with stakeholders.

Empowered Island Communities and Strong Local Partnerships

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The second phase of the Local Governance Review was delayed due to COVID-19. As a result, further Democracy Matters engagement to explore in detail potential new arrangements for community level decision-making was also postponed. The findings from the first phase of the review, alongside recommendations from the Social Renewal Advisory Board and Citizens' Assembly of Scotland suggest that democracy in Scotland continues to be an important debate.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We have continued to regularly engage with island communities to inform the implementation of the National Islands Plan. This includes increased, targeted engagement at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for real time information to be relayed from island communities to the appropriate policy department within Scottish Government. We have also continued to support the Islands Strategic Group to allow us to work closely with our local authority partners on delivery, and have recently undertaken island stakeholder workshops to inform the development of the Implementation Route Map for the strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan.

Additionally, the Young Islanders Network Pilot project was launched 16 January 2021. The Project will provide the opportunity for island residents aged 5-25 to highlight the issues facing them, and develop a network that will help to address these. This, combined with the formation of the National Islands Plan Delivery Group and continued engagement with island communities, will ensure that we secure broader engagement in the actions we need to take against each Strategic Objective.

Scottish Government has committed significant investment in participatory budgeting (PB) over the last 5 years, with around £7 million provided from the Community Choices Fund. That has enabled 122,000 people to vote on the dispersal of more than £6.6 million, with around 47,000 people attending events across the country, including island communities.

The Scottish Government and COSLA continue to work in partnership 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.

The newly established national PB Strategic Group will help inform the role PB has in the COVID-19 recovery phase and how it fits within broader reform of community empowerment.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

As mentioned above, we have continued to regularly engage with island communities to inform the implementation of the National Islands Plan, including the recently held Implementation Route Map workshops and ongoing formation of the National Islands Plan Delivery Group.

Since asset transfer legislation came into force on 23 January 2017, 249 asset transfer applications have been made including from island communities. We have established a National Asset Transfer Action Group to look at the asset transfer three year evaluation report and recommendations published in July 2020.

Since participation requests came into force on 1 April 2017, 63 participation requests have been made. The majority of those were submitted by community councils and received by local authorities. The three year evaluation report published in April 2020 indicates that the legislation is working as intended but we take on board their recommendations on monitoring, raising awareness and supporting marginalised groups.

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

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Plans for the implementation of a Transient Visitor Levy were put on hold as part of the Scottish Government response to the COVID-19 crisis and in recognition of the severe economic impact COVID-19 has had on the sector.

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.

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

Due to the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, specific actions relating to the resilience of island communities have yet to be delivered. However, at national level, the development and dissemination of guidance and tools for communities on Ready Scotland [Advice for emergencies in Scotland \(ready.scot\)](https://www.ready.scot) have been put in place to support all of our communities so that they can safely help each other during the COVID response.

The Scottish Government's Islands Team will work across policy to ensure that progress is made towards this commitment in 2021.

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.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

The Additional Powers Request (Scotland) Regulations 2019 were laid on 5 July 2019 and subsequently approved by Parliament on 25 September. The Regulations were signed on 17 October and are therefore now in force. No additional powers requests have been submitted thus far but the Regulations are recognised as an exciting provision which acknowledge the uniqueness of our island communities.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Scottish Ministers' vision for the Scottish Crown Estate is that it is:



managed sustainably, responsibly and fairly, and in a transparent and inclusive manner, delivering financial benefits and wider and long-term social, economic and environment benefits for Scotland and its communities. ”

The Crown Estate Scotland asset management pilots scheme launched in 2018 and is designed to encourage local authorities, development trusts and other eligible bodies to manage Scottish Crown Estate land and property rights in their local area. The Local Pilots Management Scheme will continue to assist with testing and putting in place the practical arrangements for enhanced local management of Scottish Crown Estate assets through the powers in the Scottish Crown Estate Act 2019.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

We continue to encourage bodies and authorities to increase Gaelic use with mechanisms such as Bòrd na Gàidhlig's Guidance on Gaelic plans and ensure that Island Communities Impact Assessments are undertaken for appropriate policy and legislation.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The majority of public-facing activities planned for Year of Coasts and Waters during 2020 had to be rolled forward into 2021, although these remain dependent on the necessary Public Health safety levels being reached in order to be run in 2021.

Early stage planning for Year of Scotland's Stories during 2022 is underway, working with a range of stakeholders through our delivery partner, EventScotland.

Scotland's Winter Festivals in 2019/20, and again in 2020/21, continue to support a range of activities across communities and geographic locations.

Scottish Opera took their Opera Highlights touring production to a number of islands in February and March 2020, including Islay, Mull and the Shetland mainland.

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.

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that many creative practices had to stop, and opportunities to take forward this commitment have been limited. We have sought to ensure that financial support for the creative industries has reached all parts of Scotland, including the islands.

We committed to support all of Scotland's indigenous languages and dialects in ways that are relevant to the communities where these are spoken.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

From October 2020, Education Scotland and e-Sgoil have been delivering Scots language education sessions for children and young people who are shielding long term from coronavirus. There have been sessions delivered thus far as part of an offer e-Sgoil extends to all of Scotland.

Throughout the 2020-2021 lockdown there have been Scots language lessons included in the Education Scotland 'Scotland Learns' offer for remote learning. This material, as well as other Scots language material is available on the National Improvement Hub, where resources have been tailored to suit individual dialects of Scots language including, Shetlandic, Orcadian, Caithness and Doric.

In November 2019, the Open University and Education Scotland held a free public event in Lerwick to promote the newly launched 'Scots Language and Culture' course. This course is also free to anyone for studying, and includes chapter written by Shetlanders and Orcadians, with numerous references to the dialects used in the Northern Isles throughout.

Education Scotland also works in partnership with the Shetland based community group 'Shetland ForWirlds'. This collaboration includes an extensive quantity of education material available for schools in Shetland, as well as material for adult learners.

In partnership with the Scottish Book Trust, Education Scotland ran a national competition for children and young people in 2020 to write in Scots language – including any dialect of Scots – with the winner being announced at an online ceremony in October 2020.

Throughout the 2020-2021 lockdown, there have been Scots language lessons included in the Education Scotland 'Scotland Learns' offer for remote learning. This material, as well as other Scots language material is available on the National Improvement Hub, where resources have been tailored to suit individual dialects of Scots language including, Shetlandic, Orcadian, Caithness and Doric.

In November 2019, the Open University and Education Scotland held a free public event in Lerwick to promote the newly launched 'Scots Language and Culture' course. This course remains free to anyone for studying, and includes chapter written by Shetlanders and Orcadians, with numerous references to the dialects used in the Northern Isles throughout.

Education Scotland's Scots Language Co-ordinator also works in partnership with the Shetland based community group 'Shetland ForWirlds'. This collaboration includes an extensive quantity of education material available for schools in Shetland, as well as material for adult learners.

In partnership with the Scottish Book Trust, Education Scotland ran a national competition for children and young people in 2020 to write in Scots language – including any dialect of Scots – with the winner being announced at an online ceremony in October 2020.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

All authorities and bodies that prepare Gaelic Plans must have regard to the priorities in the [National Gaelic Language Plan](#) (NGLP). Most bodies that operate in island communities, including Scottish Government, have Gaelic Plans and as such must have regard to the NGLP.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The introduction of ICiAs and Gaelic Language Plans will support progress towards the commitment in the coming year. The Scottish Government's Islands Team will continue to support our colleagues to undertake ICiAs for island-specific policies and initiatives.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The introduction of ICIAs and Gaelic Language Plans will support progress towards the commitment in the coming year. The Scottish Government Islands Team aim to ensure that Gaelic was adequately addressed in the ICIAs Guidance which encourages relevant authorities to fully consider Gaelic. Additionally, we continue to publish all key documents relating to the National Island Plan in Gaelic.

We committed to work with relevant authorities to improve Gaelic provision for Gaelic speaking island communities in delivering their functions and services.

Work has yet to be progressed in relation to this commitment.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Historic Environment Scotland continue to support sustainable management of the historic environment on our islands. This includes contributing to the development of the Orkney Island Gateway, and partnering with relevant organisations who may benefit from funding. This includes work undertaken with Urras nan Tursachan adjacent to Callanais.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) has developed an [Islands Strategy](#), the main purpose of which is to articulate how UHI will work with partners to extend and strengthen its activities across Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. The UHI Islands Strategy consists of College Principals, local authority officers, CEOs, SDS, HIE and Scottish Government officials.

Through funding provided by the UHI Regional Strategic Body (RSB) colleges located on Scottish islands are supported to provide a range of education and training opportunities.

The four island colleges work collaboratively with UHI Executive Office to help deliver a broad range of further education (FE) and higher education (HE) programmes to the communities that they serve. All UHI colleges, of which there are 13 in total, meet regularly and work collaboratively. The RSB allocates funding to island colleges based on population and deprivation and the demand for the programmes that they deliver. Scottish Funding Council applies a funding formulae which takes into account individual college's geographical location and circumstances.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

As mentioned above, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) has developed an [Islands Strategy](#), collaborating with College Principals, local authority officers, CEOs, SDS, HIE and Scottish Government officials. This commitment also links to the [Student Retention programme](#) which provides pathways for people to remain on islands.

Through its broad range of networked and online higher education (HE) programmes, UHI enables residents of Scotland's dispersed island communities to access and benefit from studying a broad range of HE provision, whilst remaining residents within their communities. Often these programmes involve active contributions from local employers who are keen to support the development of a skilled and qualified workforce. HE provision extends from Higher National Certificate (HNC) provision up to PHD level of study.

Given the low number of residents within their communities, there are often more limited subject choice options for further education (FE) learners. This is because many FE programmes are vocational in nature and require craft skill development through appropriate workshop provision. (eg, construction, engineering, hair and beauty, hospitality etc.) This often has a bearing on the vocational subjects offered for study at island colleges.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

e-Sgoil continue to deliver a national e-learning programme, which provides a broad curriculum to children and young people across Scotland, and is primarily designed for island students.

The national e-learning offer, of which e-sgoil is part, was developed to support educationalists. It has shown how we can meet young people's aspirations for learning and career pathways in a more equitable way.

e-Sgoil's main purpose is to enhance equity for curricular and subject choice for all learners. This is irrespective of geographic location or the school they attend in Na h-Eileanan an Iar. It also aims to address recruitment challenges in key subject areas. On receipt of funding from the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, e-Sgoil's remit took on a national dimension as other local authorities were experiencing similar challenges with regard to Gaelic and STEM subjects in particular. The development of e-Sgoil has helped to drive forward the development of the Scottish Wide Area Network (SWAN) to improve digital infrastructure and connectivity for island communities.

Through utilising digital tools and platforms, e-Sgoil has sought to enhance and enrich learners' experiences by looking to remove barriers restricting young people's choice. This includes designing and developing a variety of 3-18 programmes for learners, as well as for those who experience interrupted learning patterns.

Following a request from the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG) in August 2020, e-Sgoil developed a 3-18 offer for schools and educational centres to access as part of their remote learning plans. This included an after school Study Support programme for senior phase learners (via Glow) and a "Lockdown Live" series with open access (non-Glow) for primary and secondary learners, including hosting the Developing Young Workforce (DYW) live programme.

There follows some key features of e-Sgoil's provision.

- **Developing the Young Workforce - Live**

e-Sgoil and Education Scotland work with a wide range of national partner organisations to create an exciting, virtual national learning offer for children and young people. This aims to develop career education and enhance learners' employability, career management and work-related skills. It enables island communities to experience inputs from a wider range of employers who may, for example, be based in mainland Scotland. From January 2021, this has given schools and centres a unique opportunity to build the entitlements from the Career Education Standard 3-18 into their curriculum planning.

- **Study Support**

In September 2020, e-Sgoil designed and developed a national study support programme across a range of levels and subjects in the senior phase. This provision is free to access, held securely in the Glow platform, and has been delivered both within and out with the traditional school day. This support is live and interactive, and delivered online with specialist teachers supporting learners. This programme continues to expand and offers learners access to high-quality study support from their own homes, irrespective of geographical location.

- **Gaelic Language, Culture and Wider Achievement**

e-Sgoil has also increased the proportion of learning through Gaelic that may be accessed by young people. For example, in music performance and participation, embracing local culture, whilst customised to the needs of individual island communities. This aspect of e-Sgoil's provision continues to grow.

- **Employment, Development and Industry**

E-sgoil has increased employment opportunities and pathways. This includes teachers and technical, clerical and administration support. e-Sgoil offers flexible working arrangements in terms of time commitments and geographical location. This has potential benefits for our remote and island areas. This has resulted in ecological benefits given the reduction of travel, and educational benefits resulting from increased learner contact time.

e-Sgoil has, through Northern Alliance funding, increased their Senior Leadership Team to allow for more alignment between local authorities. The initiative has offered island communities the opportunity to no longer be seen as being on the periphery of Scotland. It has allowed the periphery to become a central hub of curriculum design and enactment, and digital innovation. All of Scotland's 32 local authorities have engaged with e-Sgoil in some form since its inception. This has brought indirect economic benefits with groups of people - from mainland Scotland and further afield - visiting the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to learn more about e-Sgoil.

We committed to work 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 commitment has been fulfilled.

Education Scotland has delivered professional learning within the Northern Alliance regional improvement collaborative to support staff in taking forward children's rights. These sessions provided an opportunity for practitioners to discuss through the medium of Gaelic and share practice from islands. The publication, *How good is OUR school?* provides a framework to encourage children and young people's involvement in improving their schools - which in this case was adapted for Gaelic use.

The Young Islanders Network Pilot project was launched 16 January 2021. The Project will provide 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 committed to continue to support and promote Gaelic medium education at all levels.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Progress continues to be made with Gaelic medium education (GME) at all levels and new initiatives such as Comhairle nan Eilean Siar introducing a 'Gaelic First' enrolment process at Primary 1 to support the growth and success of GME, e-Sgoil's national online learning offer and Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig's resource development and online presence remain crucial to the longevity of the Gaelic language.

HM Inspectors provide independent evaluation of the quality of provision across education sectors. This evidence is used to promote improvement, provide advice and assurance to our stakeholders about standards, quality and improvement. In inspecting Gaelic Medium, we use specialist inspectors and associate assessors to give local-based evaluations to support improvement. In February 2020, we introduced a new Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's Report area on our website. This area has messages to support continuous improvement.

Education Scotland works in partnership to support the development of the curriculum and promote a shared understanding of high-quality immersion.

Education Scotland has revised their Corporate Plan to set out how they will lead and support the system during the 'recovery year'. Through this Education Scotland considers requested support targeted at school, community, local authority and regional level.

Education Scotland continues to support recovery of Gaelic Medium Education with the project Scotland Learns, through which our island learners benefit. This offers advice to practitioners and parents on supporting learning and immersion in Gaelic Medium Education as Scotland recovers from the pandemic. It also has a range of activities to support learning through the medium of Gaelic for children and young people's use at home, either self-supported, with a language buddy or as a family.

Education Scotland's national support enables dissemination and sharing of practice. Education Scotland hosted virtual conversations to discuss challenges and solutions for immersion and the curriculum as part of recovery education. This attracted a high level of interest and exchange with island educationalists. Practitioners and senior leaders continue this dialogue and support through an online collaborative network.

The publication, [What Scotland Learned](#) is a collection of inspiring stories detailing how practitioners and partners across Scotland responded during the COVID-19 crisis. It includes contributions from children and young people, adults, families and communities bespoke to the Gaelic sector living in island communities.

Education Scotland established a Northern Alliance working group for Gaelic to support collaborative improvement. At this, local authority officers with responsibility for Gaelic engage in discussion, share practice, build connections and collaborate on what is working well.

Education Scotland has held a public consultation on a draft Gaelic Language Plan, 2020 - 2025 (GLP). This is a five-year strategy on the development of Gaelic Education.

Education Scotland has worked with the Learning Directorate in implementing the Measaidhean Coitcheann Nàiseanta airson Foghlam Gàidhlig (MCNG) as part of the National Improvement Framework. Practitioners from the islands assist with quality assurance process. We also work with practitioners in Argyll and Bute Council to adapt Primary One Literacy Assessments to total immersion. We deliver moderation events to assist with teacher professional judgements of children and young people's progress and achievement in the 5-15 curriculum.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Phase 1 and Phase 2 awards of funding have been granted from the Learning Estate Investment Programme (LEIP), including two key projects in Castlebay on Barra and Broadford on Skye. In addition, there are projects across the islands which are being funded under the Early Learning and Childcare element of the LEIP.

There will be future phases of the LEIP announced up to 2026. The successful projects will be based on a case for change by the local authorities which address the Learning Estate Investment Strategy, core facts and local education and community needs. We will continue to support our island communities to ensure they benefit from the upcoming phases of the programme.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Education Scotland has 32 permanent Attainment Advisors (AA) in place, ensuring every local authority has a dedicated link to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Attainment Advisors provide a link and support to schools and centres to support improving educational outcomes.

Our Regional Improvement Teams had recorded over 5,000 professional practice engagements with Regional Improvement Collaboratives, local authorities, establishments, practitioners and other stakeholders between August and March 2019.

To support improvement and collaboration using an evidence-based approach, Education Scotland has produced 32 local authority data packs, bringing together a range of data to help inform discussions with local authorities on joint targeted support.

We have now published more than 30 sketch notes to showcase highly effective practice identified through inspection.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge produced impact reports to identify the difference that targeting Scottish Attainment Challenge funding on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap for local authorities and individual schools, and Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) for almost all schools in Scotland. This investment into education budgets was a welcome signal and recognition that to achieve more positive and equitable social and economic outcomes for Scotland, we need to invest in our children and young people. Across Scotland, closing the poverty-related attainment gap within the Broad General Education has continued to show a positive trend over the last 5 years. In some senior phase measures performance of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas is improving at a faster rate than those in the 20% least deprived areas. (Education Five years on with the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding and what has changed? - Education (blogs.gov.scot)).

This improvement process has been supported through an Equity Audit, which deepened the understanding of the impact of the (COVID-19) pandemic and school closures on children and young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The experience of lockdown and the evidence in the Equity Audit point to the importance of access to technology (devices and connectivity) for children and young people in allowing them to access a high standard of remote learning. The Scottish Government are investing £25 million to support digital inclusion amongst school-aged children and in total they expect to benefit over 70,000 disadvantaged children and young people through the delivery of devices and connectivity solutions across Scotland. In addition, a further £45 million is being invested by the Scottish Government to assist families with remote learning and this funding can be used flexibly by local authorities to not just purchase additional digital devices but to recruit additional staff and provide wider family support throughout and following the current period of lockdown.

Since June 2020, Education Scotland has been playing a very significant role in leading coordination of the National e-Learning Offer (NeLO) and in working with partners in the design and development of the offer through the National e-Learning Partnership: Education Scotland, the Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), e-Sgoil and Scottish Government. All partners are working together to deliver this single offer that builds coherently on what is already available from schools and local partners, the local authorities and the Regional Improvement Collaboratives. This offer is initially bringing together the live learning option from e-Sgoil, which has its base on the Isle of Lewis. E-Sgoil has been widening access to a range of programmes covering ages 3 to 18 since September 2020 to support the plans of classroom teachers across the country. This includes the offer of daily live, interactive sessions for learners in primary and secondary schools' lessons to young people having to work from home due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and an after school study support programme for senior phase learners. From the start of the current period of remote learning beginning on 11 January, and until it ends, e-Sgoil will provide a daily Lockdown Live programme to support teachers, learners, and parents. Current figures show over 211,000 views for the Lockdown Live webinars. The programme includes an extension of the study support programme into the school day and an increase in the number of courses available. The current number of courses available is 66 (25 during the lockdown daytime provision and 41 in the evening provision). Registrations for all the Study Support webinars sit at just over 11,000 from over 4,000 learners.

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

Work is ongoing in relation to the commitment.

In early 2020, Scottish Government began working with its partners to develop a new Adult Learning Strategy for Scotland. As part of this process, an adult learning survey was published and attracted four thousand, four hundred and forty responses. These responses are currently being analysed. A series of consultation sessions also took place around Scotland in February and March with adult learners and adult learning practitioners (tutors, managers etc working in the public and third sectors). Although a session with island communities was organised for 16 March 2020, this was delayed due to COVID-19. This work was subsequently replaced by online consultations in January 2021 and learners from island communities were invited to join. Analysis of all consultations is underway and will help to inform an Island Communities Impact Assessment which will help shape the priorities in the national strategy.

Work in relation to this commitment has been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19.

Implementation and Measurement of the National Islands Plan

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The initial development of the National Islands Plan Implementation Route Map was significantly delayed as a result of the pandemic.

As a priority, and with input from the Islands Partnership Working Group and island stakeholders, Scottish Government Islands officials are currently developing the National Islands Plan Implementation Route Map informed by our learning of how island communities have responded and adapted to changing circumstances. Scottish Government colleagues, local government partners, and island stakeholders have all provided input to the Implementation Route Map.

The Implementation Route Map will detail how we will deliver our priorities over the lifetime of the National Islands Plan. It will identify the methods we will use to monitor progress towards achieving our outcomes and set out how we'll deliver our work over the short, medium and long-term. The Route Map itself will be shortly published as a living document, in recognition that priorities for island communities and across policy can change, especially in these uncertain times. Therefore, this Route Map is designed so as to be able to respond to fresh challenges and adapt as they arise.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

Further research is being undertaken to gather the necessary data in order to set the baselines for our measurable outcomes. Scottish Government Islands Officials are currently developing a new Research Index and a 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 our 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 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.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

A series of virtual workshops were held in January and February 2021 for each of the National Islands Plan's Strategic Objectives. These workshops were facilitated by a member of the Islands Team and a policy colleague from within Scottish Government who specialises in the specific Strategic Objective that is the focus of the session. The report from each workshop will be used to further develop the Implementation Route Map.

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

This commitment has been fulfilled.

In 2020, Scottish Government undertook an initial scoping exercise which confirmed that there are significant gaps in relation to islands level data across the board. In the absence of objective measures at islands level, there is a need to produce an alternate source of data that will measure the impact and effectiveness of the National Islands Plan in a consistent way. Consequently, we have commissioned the [National Islands Plan Survey](#), which will allow us to gather the views of island communities, on a rating scale, across all of the Strategic Objectives, which we will then be able to compare our progress with for the duration of the National Islands Plan.

The Survey is not a direct substitute for a lack of statistical information, but rather, should complement such data when available. Consequently, taking into consideration the amount of research that would be necessary to fill the aforementioned data gaps, we will undertake a gradual approach to the amalgamation of island level data, which will take course over the first five years of the National Islands Plan.

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.

This commitment has been fulfilled.

The Young Islanders Network Pilot project was launched 16 January 2021, fulfilling our Programme for Government Commitment. The Project will provide the opportunity for island residents aged 5-25 to highlight the issues facing them, and develop a network that will help to address these.

The Pilot is being delivered in three parts:

1. **The Young Islanders Challenge:** Open to young people between the ages of 5 and 25 living in our island communities, this is a data gathering project inviting these young islanders to highlight the issues most important to them. The Young Islanders are being encouraged to document this using any medium they prefer.
2. **Young Islanders Champions:** Youth Scotland will be working to identify an initial small group of young people (30 to 40) from across the 8 Island Hubs to be initial Young Islands Champions. Youth Scotland will work with them more closely and look to give them further skills in decision making and leadership, media skills and participation in team building tasks. The Young Islanders Champions will be encouraged to engage with, and represent the voice of our island youth in forums, organisations and events such as the Youth Parliament and Scottish Rural Parliament.
3. **Mental Health Training:** In April 2020, the [LockdownLowdown](#) report, commissioned by the Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland, and Young Scot found that young people are worrying most about education, mental wellbeing, and financial support during the COVID-19 outbreak. Two-fifths of 2500 respondents stated they are moderately or extremely concerned about their mental wellbeing, and two-fifths of respondents were not confident about accessing the information on mental health. The Pilot YIN project will support Youth Workers and volunteers to participate in Youth Scotland's Mental Health Foundation Course that they are running in partnership with mental health specialist Place2Be. Through the Young Islanders Network Pilot, we have guaranteed 150 places for youth workers and volunteers from the islands on the first course, meeting the need identified in the LockdownLowdown report, and the need to provide further mental health training highlighted in the [Youth Commission on Mental Health Services Report 2019](#).

On 11 March 2021, as part of a series of training sessions, we held a mini-event held enabling the Young Islanders to present some of their early views on the future of the Young Islanders Network, and provide initial feedback from the Young Islanders Challenge direct to Scottish Government Officials.

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.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

The establishment of a new National Islands Plan Delivery Group has been significantly delayed due to COVID-19. However, the Scottish Government are now in the process of establishing this group to ensure the close monitoring of the Implementation Route Map with continued stakeholder and community input.

We committed to work with island communities to ensure that the Plan is widely promoted and understood by all sectors of society.

Work is ongoing in relation to this commitment.

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 continue to consult and collaborate with our island communities on a regular basis. This includes increased, targeted engagement at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for real time information to be relayed from island communities to the appropriate policy department within Scottish Government. Additionally, we have continued to support the Islands Strategic Group to allow us to work closely with our local authority partners on delivery, and have recently undertaken island stakeholder workshops to inform the development of the Implementation Route Map for each strategic objective of the National Islands Plan. This, combined with the formation of the National Islands Plan Delivery Group and our recent Island Life Survey, will ensure that we secure broader engagement in the actions we need to take against each Strategic Objective.

Annex A

Island Communities Impact Assessments completed between 23 December 2020 and 26 February 2021

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 9) Regulations 2020

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 10) Regulations 2020

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 11) Regulations 2020

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 12) Regulations 2020

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 13) Regulations 2020

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 14) Regulations 2020

The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 15) Regulations 2020



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