Community Resilience in Scotland's Islands during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

June 2022

Aim and approach

Research aim: to produce cases study examples of community resilience in the islands, providing lessons for how to strengthen community resilience in future, and helping to inform the National Islands Plan.

Desk research and in-depth interviews were carried out with 5 case studies:

Galson, Na h-Eileanan Siar

The Galson Estate coordinated communications support and a prescription and crofting supplies delivery service. The group received some funding for activities, and these came to a natural end as restrictions eased.

Bressay, Shetland Islands

Curious Pilgrims, a community interest company, organised a prescription delivery service for residents. The service was funded and came to a natural end as restrictions eased.

Sanday, Orkney Islands

The Sanday Development Trust led an initiative that provided help with food costs and support with fuel costs, technology, communication and general wellbeing. Activities were funded and some are ongoing.

Broadford & Strath, Highland

The Broadford and Strath Community Company delivered food and cooked meals to vulnerable residents. The service was funded and community resources continue to be used.

Islay, Argyll & Bute

New and existing groups came together to provide financial, food, communications and wellbeing support for residents. The group received some funding for activities, and some of these are ongoing.
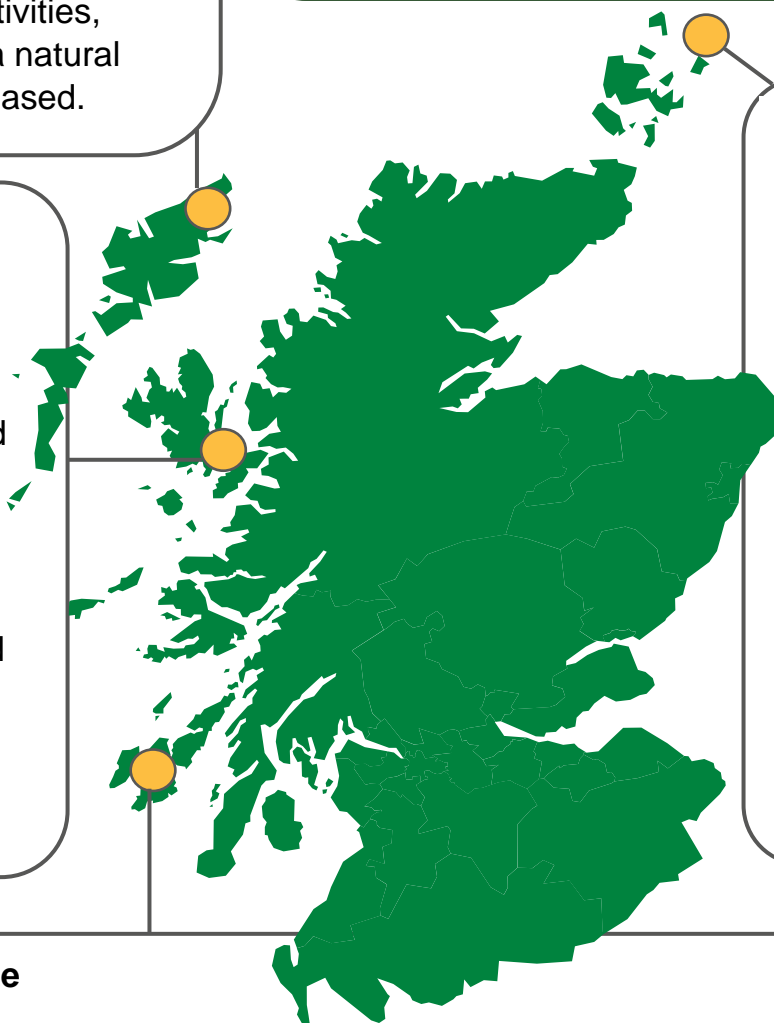
Key learnings

Case studies highlighted a number of shared characteristics that they felt helped make their communities resilient during the pandemic.

Mobilisation and coordination

Communities acted quickly thanks to an established network of community groups. Having a group or individual responsible for coordinating the response was key.

Local knowledge and networks

Tapping into existing community networks (formal and individual) and utilising local knowledge helped communities target and deliver support effectively.

Emergency planning

Existence of emergency planning groups and emergency plans at the island level helped communities respond quickly.

Community resilience

Communication

Communication within and between communities, and with local authorities, helped ensure effort was not duplicated and support was appropriate.

Tackling stigma

Initiatives sought to tackle stigma and minimise the barriers to accessing support by adopting open and proactive approaches involving direct outreach.

Autonomy and support

Communities welcomed having control and autonomy in decision making at a local level, including flexibility with how funding could be used, but with support from local authorities where necessary

Capacity and scale

Community capacity was considered a core part of community resilience. This had an impact on the ability for communities to deliver an island-wide, or a more location-specific, level of support.

Recommendations

Networks and infrastructure

1 Support and encourage communities to tap into existing networks and infrastructure to respond quickly to future emergencies.

2 Where network have been eroded or are at risk, prioritise rebuilding those networks as part of pandemic recovery.

Emergency planning

3 Support and encourage the development of local, community level planning involving communities, and promote existing resources.

Communication

4 Support and encourage communication between communities, at times of crisis and on an ongoing basis.

5 Ensure there is regular communication between communities and local authorities to avoid duplication of efforts during a crisis or emergency.

Tackling stigma

6 Consider ways to tackle stigma associated with seeking support to ensure that it is accessible to those in need during an emergency.

Signpost resources

7 Signpost communities to funding or other resources that can help them respond to emergencies and/or support their ongoing resilience (including Ready Scotland).

8 Ensure there are flexible resources in place to enable communities to meet their local needs (as was the case with COVID-19 funding).