



# OUTER HEBRIDES COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Minute of Meeting held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Stornoway on Thursday, 14 March 2024 at 2.00pm.

## PRESENT

CLlr Paul Steele, CnES (Chair)  
Mr Colin Gilmour, NHS Western Isles  
Ms Alannah Logue, MSYP  
Mr David MacLennan, NatureScot  
Ms Dolina Smith, CnES  
Ms Erica Clark, CnES  
Mr Finlay MacLennan, Community Land OH  
Ms Jemma MacVicar, Galson Estate Trust  
CLlr Kenneth Maclean, CnES  
Mr Ranald Robertson, HITRANS  
Ms Juliette Desportes, TSI Western Isles  
Mr Anthony Standing, SDS  
Ms Dena Macleod, HHP  
CLlr Donald Macsween, CnES  
Mr Euan Cowan, Police Scotland  
CLlr Gordon Murray, CnES  
Mr Joe MacPhee, UHI NWH  
CLlr Malcolm Macdonald, CnES

## APOLOGIES

Ms Ann Murray, WI Volunteer Centre  
Mr Nick Fayers, WI IJB  
Ms Gillian McCannon, NHS Western Isles  
Ms Hannah Ritchie Muir, UHI NWH

## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Sharon Reid (for item 12)  
Ms Kaleigh MacLeod (for item 12)

## MINUTES

- Minute of Meeting of 24 August 2023 1. The Minute of the Meeting of 24 August 2024 was approved.
- Partnership Headlines 2. Prior to partners giving their updates, CLlr Gordon Murray stated that it would be helpful to hear from partners about their actions on the specific challenges with regards to depopulation given there is no dedicated sub group on the topic.

Mr Malcolm Burr, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, noted that the Minister for Local Government, Empowerment and Planning, Joe Fitzpatrick MSP and the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, Maree Todd MSP are due to officially open the Goathill Care Home on 25 March 2024. As part of the visit, a number of meetings and workshop events will be held; discussions will involve some community planning partners. Public Sector Reform, and opportunities for improved outcomes for the Outer Hebrides will be considered as part of the discussions.

**It was agreed that Mr Malcolm Burr, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar would submit a Report in relation to Public Sector Reform to a future meeting of the Board.**

Discussion was held in relation to depopulation. It was noted that the Comhairle's revised Corporate Strategy for 2024 – 2027 is focused on addressing depopulation and supporting growth, and that the planned review of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) will consider these areas.

Mr Burr noted that the review of the LOIP, and outcomes to address depopulation would require significant collective contribution, whilst recognising that this work will form part of individual services strategic plans. It was recognised that depopulation is a more now a more prevalent issue across the west coast of Scotland and in rural areas across Scotland and wider Europe.

Ms Joanna Peteranna, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) noted that HIE had previously focussed on delivering enhanced high value jobs to the region as a means of supporting a sustainable population and economically thriving communities. It was noted that high value job opportunities had been secured, but there has been significant challenge to fill these posts from local and national markets. Ms Peteranna noted that HIE had adopted a new strategy, with refocussed attention on wider community needs i.e. housing, childcare and that work was ongoing with policy makers to meet wider community needs.

Mr Joe MacPhee, UHI North, West and Hebrides noted that the suite of programmes within the Islands Growth Deal aims to create world class, innovative and globally focused industries that will help address the Islands' severe demographic challenges. The TalEntEd programme in particular will focus on fast-tracking the decarbonisation of the islands by creating opportunities for education, skills, entre and intrapreneurship and commercialisation supporting the increase in sustainable 'green' jobs.

Ms Allanah Logue, Member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP) noted that she had recently been re-elected as the MSYP for the Outer Hebrides, alongside Ms Eillie Denehy, who has been elected for the first time. Ms Logue noted that a meeting had been arranged for late March 2024 with MSYPs from the Shetland Islands, and Orkney Islands to consider pan-island issues and opportunities.

Housing

3. The Chair welcomed the recent announcement that Hebridean Housing Partnership will be taking forward the development of 12 new social rented homes in Leverburgh, Isle of Harris, and noted that the new homes will provide a much-needed opportunity for the community, helping to address immediate housing needs in South Harris, as well as supporting the key issue of population retention. The Chair, on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership commended the work of partners in bringing this development to fruition.

Ms Dena Macleod, HHP noted her disappointment at how the process to development had been portrayed in the local media, in that there was an underestimate on the volume of work undertaken by officers to deliver the project, and that HHP had not been 'dragged' to the table. Ms Macleod noted the need for greater partnership and collaborative working.

In response to a request from Cllr Gordon Murray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Ms Dena Macleod noted that there was an estimated £31m potentially available for the Affordable Housing Supply Programme in the Outer Hebrides. Mr Burr noted that a number of discussions had been held with representatives from the Scottish Government in relation to utilising the Resource Planning Assumption on a more flexible basis, with some aspects favourably received and others not. It was noted that the Depute Chief Executive, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, would provide an update in relation to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme at the Comhairle's April Committee Series.

Transport/Lifeline Services

4. Cllr Gordon Murray asked partners and the chair on their opinion of option of inter-island fixed links which had been discussed the Comhairle Transportation and Infrastructure committee meeting at the last Comhairle series whilst welcoming the possibility of linking the islands and the economic benefits that would bring.

The Chair noted that the idea of fixed links (a causeway, bridge, tunnel or combination) between Harris and Uist, and between Uist and Barra, is to be fully studied for the first time according to Transport Scotland's draft Islands Connectivity Plan, published in February 2024.

Mr Ranald Robertson, HITRANS noted that the Islands Connectivity Plan sets out ferry services, supported by other transport modes, will be delivered and strengthened, working towards a long-term vision, and supported by clear priorities and defined outcomes. It was noted that the consultation on the Plan is open until 3 May 2024, and presents an opportunity for partners to raise long-term aspirations for connectivity in the islands, including development of the islands spinal route and action to address climate impacts on existing infrastructure e.g. Baleshare causeway, Braighe etc. Mr Robertson noted that the draft HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy would be issued for consultation in April 2024. In addition, HITRANS are exploring Active Travel initiatives across the region, which could result in funding for initiatives in the Outer Hebrides.

Mr David MacIannan, NatureScot noted that both the Sound of Barra, and Sound of Harris are areas with significant environmental sensitivities and that consideration should be made as to how to mitigate the impacts of any fixed links/ infrastructure proposals for the area at the earliest opportunity. Mr MacIannan noted the need to consider the impact of current and future climate change, including rising sea levels and ensure that existing and new infrastructure is future proofed.

Cllr Gordon Murray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar welcomed consideration of fixed links between the islands, and noted the benefit this could bring in relation to social cohesion between islands, and enhanced opportunities in relation to the internal trade market.

Ms Peteranna noted that there are recognised positives in relation to the opening up of trade and social opportunities, but there is a need to be mindful of any unintended consequences, particularly in relation to Stornoway becoming a larger hub for activity to the detriment of other areas. Ms Peteranna noted that the ferry on the Sound of Harris is only able to operate in daylight hours, negatively impacting on economic opportunities, and that fixed links would remove this barrier, and welcomed the opportunity to explore fixed links further.

Cllr Kenneth Maclean, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar noted reservation in relation to the introduction of fixed links on the Sound of Barra, as this could potentially lead to services being removed from Barra as travel to other areas of the island's network is made more accessible.

Mr Robertson noted that the Islands Connectivity Plan identifies that the option for fixed links would be fully explored, but there is a need to ensure that communities are fully engaged with at an early stage. Mr Robertson noted that the introduction of fixed links had made a positive impact on communities in Eriskay and Berneray, but there is a need to consider impacts directly with communities and take learning from elsewhere.

Mr Burr noted that a Seminar in relation to Fixed Links and Connectivity would be held for Elected Members. The Seminar would consider the need for robust community engagement, potential unintended consequences, including impact on other transport services, particularly air and ferry.

Mr MacPhee noted that the introduction of fixed links between the islands would allow the UHI to intensify what it delivers as disruption on the current transport system is having a significant impact on delivery. Mr MacPhee reiterated the need for robust community debate on the matter, and that lessons should be learned from other areas, both nationally and internationally in relation to the impact of fixed links.

Mr Colin Gilmour, NHS Western Isles noted and that fixed links could provide easier, and more reliable, access to health and care treatment for individuals. Mr Gilmour reiterated the need to fully engage with communities, particularly in relation to potential unintended consequences.

Ms Logue noted the need to ensure that children and young people are fully engaged with in relation to the potential introduction of fixed links, and that MSYPs could support this work in terms of agreeing a set methodology, and supporting the development of young person friendly documentation to ensure that all children and young people are able to provide their views. Ms Dolina Smith, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar noted that this work could be co-ordinated through the Developing a Young Workforce network.

Cllr Malcolm Macdonald, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar noted the introduction of fixed links would provide greater opportunity for islanders to participate in sporting, heritage, social etc events. Cllr Macdonald added that there is a need to consider the potential impact on tourism also, and whether or not the islands would still be viewed on an individual basis, or as a single island.

The Chair welcomed the opportunity to consider fixed link options for the islands, and that there is a recognised need to consider all potential impacts, and fully engage with communities.

**It was agreed to consider the Islands Connectivity Plan, particularly the potential for fixed links between Harris and Uist, and between Uist and Barra, and how the Community Planning Partnership can support community conversations in relation to the ICP, as part of the standing item 'Transport/Lifeline Services' at future meetings of the Board.**

The Chair noted that the Comhairle had awarded Hebridean Air Services the contract to operate the Benbecula to Stornoway Air Service. The agreement with Hebridean Air Services will see the service return to three days operation per week with passengers able to book return flights on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. Mr Burr noted that there could be scope to explore the further development of air services in the Outer Hebrides in collaboration with Hebridean Air Services, including the potential reintroduction of the Barra to Stornoway route. The Chair noted that the agreement with Hebridean Air Services was particularly welcomed given that service was at risk due to the escalating costs of delivery.

Community  
Planning Resources

5. In discussion, it was noted that there is a recognised need for additional resourcing within the Community Planning Partnership to progress and implement actions. Mr Burr noted that the Comhairle was committed to supporting the Partnership but did not have the finances in place to fully support the filling of the Communities Partnership Co-ordinator post.

It was noted that options to explore enhanced resources to address poverty in the Outer Hebrides were being explored by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and NHS Western Isles.

Mr Burr noted that without an enhanced funding commitment from across the partnership, there will be little scope to review the Local Outcome Improvement Plan as a collective, and that individual services could be required to review and revise aspects of the Plan from their own service base. Mr Burr noted that there could be scope for the Comhairle to provide interim Policy Officer resource for 1-2 days per week to support the collation of review findings into a single draft Plan.

**It was agreed that Community Planning Partners would identify a detailed breakdown of the level of contribution they are able to provide to support the review of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan/ Community Planning Policy Work with the CPP Administrator prior to the next meeting of the Board; Community Planning Resourcing and next steps will be considered at the Board meeting of 16 May 2024.**

Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP): Review and Preparation 6. Discussion was held in relation to the review of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP). Mr Colin Gilmour, NHS Western Isles noted that an online questionnaire had been developed and published which offered people across the Outer Hebrides the chance to influence their health and wellbeing, as well as the opportunities and services available to them. It was noted that the questionnaire uses the Place Standard Tool and will use community profiles and feedback to support targeted interventions of emerging themes. Mr Gilmour noted that a series of meetings would be held with partners and the wider community to explore priority areas as part of the revised LOIP. It was noted that the online questionnaire would close on 31 March 2023, and that findings from this would be used to support the review of the LOIP.

**It was agreed that Community Planning Partners would:**

- (1) review the Local Outcome Improvement Plan for consideration of any areas which should be carried over into the revised Plan; and**
- (2) circulate the link to the online questionnaire to Help Improve Communities in the Outer Hebrides across extended networks.**

Executive Group 7. The Minutes of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Executive Group Meetings of 15 June 2023, 2 November 2023 and 18 January 2024 were submitted for information.

**It was agreed to note the minutes.**

Anti-Poverty Group 8. The Minute of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Anti-Poverty Group Meeting of 24 April 2023 was submitted for information. Mr Colin Gilmour, NHS Western Isles submitted the Local Child Poverty Action Report 2022-23. It was noted that the Action Report contained wider information, including the lived experience of people experiencing poverty in the Outer Hebrides, than children and young people, in recognition of how interconnected poverty issues are.

The Report noted key statistics in relation to poverty in the Outer Hebrides; child poverty in the Outer Hebrides is 19.8% compared to the Scottish average of 24.5%. This equates to 913 children. Data reflect a consistency in terms of the national picture, with a recognition that poverty levels had decreased during the pandemic, on an artificial basis, as households accessed temporary supports e.g. furlough. It was recognised that the datasets represented Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report Delivery Update – November 2023 small numbers when compared to other areas of Scotland, but that the areas of Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas, Sgir' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch, Point, Steornabhagh a Tuath, Taobh Siar agus Nis, could be identified as areas for specific focus moving forward.

CLlr Gordon Murray asked about the remit of the Anti-Poverty Group in the context of lobbying political parties with regards to their approach to the challenges of poverty especially in a general election year.

Discussion was held in relation to the remit of the Anti-Poverty Group. Mr Gilmour noted that the Group had lobbied at a national level in the past, most recently in robust discussion with Ofsted in relation to the increased electricity prices experienced by households in the Outer Hebrides in comparison to other parts of the UK. Mr Gilmour added that the main focus of the group had recently been on collaborative working and information sharing to identify and implement opportunities to address poverty in the islands. The Group is due to meet in early April 2024, and will explore the collation of detailed data (in line with GDPR) and how this can be used to target specific areas/ households with support.

Mr Gilmour noted that significant resource had been allocated to communities to address poverty in the islands from across partners, including the Comhairle where approx. £1.6m had been distributed to those most vulnerable in the community, and there is a recognised need to continue to work with communities to fully understand the lived in experiences of those in poverty and to use data to target specific groups in need and address fuel poverty.

The Chair welcomed the work being done in the islands to address poverty, and noted that it was particularly encouraging to see that partners continued utilise resources to address poverty, in what is a particularly challenging time in relation to public sector finances.

Ms Jemma MacVicar, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn/ Galson Estate Trust noted that the Trust had established an Outreach Income Maximising Programme in collaboration with the Western Isles Citizens Advice Service (WICAS) whereby a member of WICAS, based within the estate, would support individuals and families from the area to access any unmade claims in relation to entitlements. Ms MacVicar noted that the impact of this programme was being collated, but anecdotal information shows a significant increase in the number of referrals for entitlements processed for the region. In discussion, it was recognised that there could be an opportunity to replicate similar initiatives in communities across the islands.

**It was agreed:**

- (1) to note the Minute;**
- (2) to note the Local Child Poverty Action Report 2022-23; and**
- (3) that Ms Jemma MacVicar, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn/ Galson Estate Trust would share the outcome of the Outreach Income Maximising Programme with the Board.**

Community Justice Partnership 9. The Minute of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Community Justice Partnership Meeting of 4 July 20223 was submitted for information.

**It was agreed to note the minute.**

Climate Change Group 10. The Minute of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Climate Change Group Meeting of 20 July 2023 was submitted for information. Mr MacIennan noted that the Group had met in November 2023, and was due to meet on 25 March 2024. At the meeting of 23 November 2023, Dr James Pope, Met Office, delivered a presentation in relation to global climate trends; The presentation noted that 2023 was the warmest year on record; the last nine years were the warmest on record; and that 15 of the warmest years on record had occurred in the last 23 years. The presentation further noted the significant impacts of climate change, including extensive heatwaves, flooding, and the hottest European Summer on record.

Mr MacIennan noted that the Outer Hebrides Climate Rationale and Storymap was evidencing warmer, wetter winters, and that November 2023 – March 2024 had seen a number of significant storm events in the islands.

It was noted that the Outreach Officers, employed by Climate Hebrides CIC continued to meet with communities and utilise the Climate Rationale and Storymap to evidence and populate the lived in experience of communities in the islands in relation to climate change.

Mr MacLennan noted that an event 'Outer Hebrides COP (Communities)' is due to be held in Daliburgh on Thursday, 21 March 2024. The event will deliver a day of discussion in relation to climate change adaptation and mitigation actions in the Outer Hebrides. The event is being led by Sniffer, Outer Hebrides Climate Hub, and the Islands Centre for Net Zero; the event will include breakout sessions, presentations, and engagement session with attendees.

It was noted that Climate Hebrides CIC and the University of the Highlands and Islands North, West and Hebrides had submitted a funding bid to UK Research and Innovation for a dedicated resource to support climate change initiatives in the Outer Hebrides. The outcome of the funding bid is unknown at this time.

Mr MacLennan noted that representatives from Public Health Scotland are supporting climate change initiatives in the Outer Hebrides to roll out the Place Standard Tool with a Climate Lens.

**It was agreed to note the Minute.**

Benbecula and North Uist Locality Group

11. Ms Sheena Stewart, Third Sector Interface Western Isles provided an update in relation to the Benbecula and North Uist Locality Group. Ms Stewart noted that work is ongoing in relation to the Lochmaddy Visioning Strategy, which aims to explore key drivers for future community and project development for Lochmaddy. Consultants had now visited Lochmaddy on two occasions, to visit key locations and meet with the community; a further visit is planned for March 2023. In addition, significant online engagement sessions have been held with the community.

A series of workshop events are planned as part of a final on-islands visit by the consultants in March 2024, which will consider key areas relating to:

- *Anchor organisations in Lochmaddy* - (Community Hall, the former School/ Borth Uist Development Company; Lochmaddy Marina; and Taigh Chearsabhagh Arts Centre) which will look at enhanced collaborative opportunities across the area.
- *Lochmaddy's Forgotten Waterfront* - collaborative work to enhance Lochmaddy's waterfront, including opportunities for the 'wee' pier, ferry port, marina and other parts of the waterfront.
- *Inclusive Lochmaddy* - collation and promotion of activities and opportunities in Lochmaddy, including play and recreation, sports facilities etc. with a recognition that investment is required to enhance existing/ build new options.
- *Lochmaddy Gateway* – recognition that Lochmaddy is a key entry point into the islands, and there is a need to promote this and ensure the space is welcoming for residents and tourists.
- *Place, Produce and Productivity* – how the local food market, including fishing, mair, salmon farming/ production, local speciality food and drink, is enhanced and can be accessed by local residents and visitors.

Ms Stewart noted that the North Uist and Benbecula Action Plan was being reviewed and revised; the revised Plan will show areas of progress and areas of carry forward/ new priority. As part of the review of the Action Plan, consideration will be made areas outwith the locality that could benefit from specific locality focus i.e. South Uist and Eriskay in recognition of the success brought to the North Uist and Benbecula region through partnership working. It was recognised that any decision to establish a new Locality Group would require input from partners in terms of data collation and analysis to identify where pressing gaps in provision are.

**It was agreed that:**

- (1) that representatives from the North Uist and Benbecula Locality Group would deliver a presentation on the work of the group, and next steps at the Board meeting of 16 May 2024; and**

**(2) that Ms Sheena Stewart, Third Sector Interface, would share the Lochmaddy Visioning Strategy with Board Members once finalised.**

Stornoway West 12.  
Locality Group

Ms Sharon Reid, and Ms Kaleigh MacLeod, Stornoway West Locality Group delivered a presentation in relation to work being carried out in the Stornoway West and North area. The Presentation noted that the Development Plan remains an live, working document. There was a positive response to a recent community consultation for residents, which highlighted key issues facing the community as being: a lack of space and facilities; loneliness and isolation; anti-social behaviour; lack of events; and cost-of-living impacts.

The information arising from the consultation has been used to develop priority work areas, including: running surgeries on financial advice, how to cook on a budget, and benefit entitlements; secure funding for the continued, longer-term employment of the Development Worker for the area; secure funding to support the sustainability of the Community Fridge; support ongoing youth work; and support community events to help alleviate social isolation and loneliness. Work will be carried out to address poverty in the area, which in line with the Scottish average, had increased in the area; 17.5% of children in the locality are deemed to live in poverty.

Ms Reid and Ms MacLeod noted that significant work had been carried out to support households in the locality, this includes the allocation of £10k in funding secured through the Corra Foundation's Emergency Household Fund to help families who were experiencing hardship; referrals to partner agencies to ensure residents are in receipt of full entitlements; a series of buffet/ health eating workshops and demonstrations; upgrades to facilities; new facilities purchased e.g. catering pod.

It was noted that there has been a focus on youth work in the area, this includes opportunities for bowling, cinema, sea angling, one-to-one engagements, transition support for children from primary to secondary, evening and weekend events, pop up events etc.

In addition, a number of community events have been held across the locality, this included Christmas events and Santa's grottos for children and a tea party for the King's Coronation. Community events have been well attended and well received by attendees. A thank you afternoon tea was held in recognition of the important contribution made by volunteers in the area.

Cllr Gordon Murray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and Elected Member for Steornabhagh a Tuath commended the work being carried out by Ms Reid and Ms Macleod to support the and empower the locality. Mr Murray noted that Ms Reid and Ms Macleod were highly active, and highly regarded in the community, and delivered vital work to support the community.

The Chair, on behalf of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership thanked Ms Reid and Ms Macleod for what was a positive and engaging presentation, and commended the work being done to support the community.

Date of Next  
Meeting

The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Board will next meet on Thursday, 16 May 2024. The Meeting will be held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Stornoway and through Microsoft Teams.