



## **COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24**

In October 2023, it was agreed that a series of Ward visits should be undertaken to encourage dialogue around budget priorities and to hear directly from communities.

A schedule of visits was agreed in conjunction with local elected members, some of whom provided an insight into the ward areas, prior to the meetings with invited community representatives.

The purpose of each meeting was for Cllr Paul Steele, Leader of the Comhairle to meet with Area Forum representatives in each Comhairle Ward. Starting in late 2023 and continuing into 2024 he visited all the Wards in the Western Isles alongside the respective Ward Councillors. The meetings were relatively informal and allowed for a range of topics to be discussed.

These meetings were really important in improving engagement between our communities and the elected Members of the Comhairle and it's Leadership.

In order to encourage discussion and to give the meetings some structure we focused on the areas below, offering some context and most importantly allowing views on the work of the Comhairle to be aired.

### **Corporate Strategy**

The primary aim of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Corporate Strategy is to retain and increase the population of the Western Isles.

The Comhairle has identified 4 strategic priorities that will contribute towards achieving this aim and in turn address population decline:

- (1) Strengthening the local economy
- (2) Supporting children, families, and young people
- (3) Supporting resilient communities and quality of life
- (4) Being a sustainable and inclusive Council

## **Budget**

Over the last number of years, the budget strategy has used a combination of reserves and savings, to set a balanced budget. This has ensured that the impact of funding reductions has been spread out over a longer period, protecting the services we have been able to deliver.

The budget gap for 2024/25 is estimated at £6m, potentially rising to £12m in 2026/27. This figure is subject to change.

It is essential that the Comhairle maintains some level of reserves to allow the authority to respond to and address unexpected costs and emerging issues. With this consideration the level of available reserves will not cover the £6m (and rising) budget gap and therefore savings will be required.

## **Budget Discussion**

Do you have suggestions for how the Comhairle can address the stated budget gap?

- Encourage community benefit clauses for windfarm developments
- Tourist tax consideration for Cruise Ships
- Seek an energy tariff specifically for Western Isles communities
- Renewable Energy opportunities asset development
- Fixed Links option rather than reliance on ferries
- Spaceport in North Uist could be developed further

## **Single Island Authority**

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has engaged in internal and external discussions on the topic of the Single Island Authority. It is the Comhairle's view that a Single Island Authority would present solutions to the financial and strategic challenges facing the delivery of public services in the Western Isles.

A Single Island Authority could see Local Government, Health, Enterprise, and Housing services in the Western Isles delivered by one organisation lead by democratically elected representatives.

The Single Island Authority model has been mentioned by politicians including the First Minister and has been highlighted as a topic for future discussion.

### **Our Work Your Comhairle**

Following this series of community meetings, we will be launching a new campaign to inform the public of the work carried out by teams within the Comhairle and to highlight the challenges to service delivery.

<b>Discussion Notes of the meetings held in each Ward</b>			
Ward 1	Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh		Pages 5-9
Ward 2	Uibhist a Deas, Èirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faoghla		Page 10-11
Ward 3	Uibhist a Tuath		Pages 12-13
Ward 4	Na Hearadh		Pages 14-16
Ward 5	Sgìre nan Loch		Pages 17-18
Ward 6	Sgìr' Ùige agus Carlabhagh	Bernera Forum	Pages 19-20
Ward 6	Sgìr' Ùige agus Carlabhagh	Uig Forum	Pages 21-23
Ward 6	Sgìr' Ùige agus Carlabhagh	Dalmore - Lochganivich	Pages 24-26
Ward 7	An Taobh Siar agus Nis		Pages 27-31
Ward 8	Loch a Tuath		Pages 32-33
Ward 9	Steòrnabhagh a Tuath		Page 34
Ward 10	Steòrnabhagh a Deas		Pages 35-36
Ward 11	Sgìre an Rubha		Pages 37-39



## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

## WARD VISITS 2023/24

**Ward 1** Barraigh agus Bhatarsaigh - Barra Area Forum - 17 January 2024

## In Attendance:

Cllr Kenneth MacLean; Cllr Iain MacNeil; Gerard MacDonald - Chair of CBAB; Eoin MacNeil - VABV manager (via teams); Donald MacNeil (Barra & Vatersay Community council); Paul McGuire (B&VCC); Katie Denehy (B&VCC); Sarah Ann MacLeod (B&VCC); Eileen Frater (B&VCC)

## Apologies:

Rose MacDougall (B&VCC); All Northbay Community Council members

Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.

**Corporate Strategy:**

It was agreed that housing was seen as a top priority as without affordable housing on the island, we have no current means to attract people back.

- Currently there are 5 on the housing waiting list for Vatersay and 25 for Barra.
- Barra currently has the highest 2nd homeowners in the Western Isles with 15% of houses being 2nd homes.
- It was discussed can priority be given to people who have jobs in the area and this be a pre-requisite for an allocation of a house.
- What more can HHP do?
- How do we make representations to the highest level
- How do we as a community support the development of housing?
- External insulation on council houses should happen as a block and not 3 at a time like Vatersay. Why not have a more joined up thinking approach and have all the houses insulated in the one area at the same time.
- It was agreed that there has been a sharp decline in investment into infrastructure on the island and this is reflected across Barra & Vatersay

- The structure of the school is basically falling apart with most rooms leaking with numerous buckets catching all the leaks. In the last few days, there are reports of a teacher received an electric shock from water running down inside the classroom.
- Moral is low in the school from both pupils and teachers due to the deteriorating structure.
- ASN was brought up as well as speech therapy. School teachers are stretched due to lack of additional support staff despite there being a marked increase in the number of children who require ASN. Speech therapy is delivered online and there is no face-to-face speech therapy input anymore for any children on the island.
- It was raised just how long do the young people of the island have to put up with this?
- The decision by Scottish Government Health secretary minister Micheal Matheson to not invest in the new hub development was the worst news this island could have been given as there have been years of campaigning to get a hospital & care home fit for purpose.

*Cllr Paul Steele along with Chief Executive Malcolm Burr met with Jenny Gilruth, Cabinet Secretary for Education on December 20th 2023. A further meeting is scheduled to take place between Education and Health Department to Health status and then Comhairle hoping to meet Scottish Government after that.*

- Community Benefit from hub development. It was agreed that it would be of huge benefit to the community if it could be written into a contract that part of the community benefit would be take on local apprenticeships. This would help skill up local young people and add benefit to the skill set and local economy.
- Renewables & Energy Assets. In order for Barra & Vatersay to become more sustainable, we need to have more control of resources and currently the island is curtailed by the one cable installed which connects Barra to Uist and beyond. The community cannot build any more wind turbines and is unable to connect to the grid.
- We need more Comhairle representatives to come up with visionary ideas to help find positive solutions and more dialogue and partnership working with community groups to work together.

- It was asked can Comhairle look into developing an Energy Assets company and start to invest in local resources and create an Energy/ Buying & selling company.
- It was also asked what the Energy strategy for wind regeneration in the southern isles was as currently the Comhairle does not seem to have a strategy paper on this.

*Cllr Paul Steele discussed the situation in Orkney which has invested in renewable energy and invested 5m into doing this. Currently the Comhairle does not have this type of investment to put into a renewable initiative but is investigating opportunities. Cllr Paul Steele stated that hydrogen energy was a potential future option for storing energy on the islands. Cllr Paul Steele also stated that the Comhairle have the 5th highest rate of borrowing in Scotland. Discussions have taken place with Lewis wind power to invest and have a % of that income but it will not be until 2030 that there will more interconnectors to enable energy to be dispersed.*

- Connectivity of the islands. Patient travel was highlighted as an issue which has become increasingly alarming due to the long and protracted discomfort for many elderly patients to attend hospital appointment in Stornoway.
- The local locality planning group have raised this issue with MSP/ MP and Chair of Transport Uisdean Roberston.
- The solution is for patients to be able to have the choice to travel directly to Glasgow which is a 50-minute journey compared to 8 hour journey overland.
- State of roads - Poor signage/ crash barriers potholes, it has been noted the disrepair of the road due to the abundance of potholes island wide and the ongoing challenges the bus drivers have negotiating all the potholes.
- Complaints have escalated and been reported to the council in regard to this from both community councils, Ward Cllrs and residents.
- Reports have also been submitted to the council in regard to poor road signage, in particular in the Castlebay area in and around the school.
- There have been numerous lampposts which have been reported due to disrepair and for Health & safety reasons.
- The time scale to get these complaints seen too is far too long. It has been noted that the length of time seems to have extended since losing the clerk of works, which was the main point of contact for all works.

- It was raised that one lamppost in Horve which was in disrepair was reported in 2019 and was repaired in November 2023. The CnES contractors, however, did not fit the lamppost with a bulb which then had to get reported again.
- The question asked is why everything takes so long to get repaired and do we as a community need to wait 4 years to get one lamppost repaired.
- Street Lights on at night. Lights on lampposts go off too early and this has been reported countless times yet to no avail.
- Accidents have happened with people falling in the dark and what we ask for is the lights to stay on as long as they do in other places.
- It was stated that there was a huge state of neglect in regard to planned maintenance and care in ensuring ditches were cleared of debris to help reduce the issue of localized flooding. One main example is the ditches in and around Horve and the grass football pitch.
- The service for uplifting old and abandoned vehicles stop at Eriskay and is a major problem for car owners on the island. In order to get old vehicles uplifted residents have had to take their cars to Eriskay for this service.
- Question was asked why is this the case?
- Keep libraries open. It was discussed and noted the need for local libraries to remain open for all members of the community and to lose such a service would be detrimental to the community as a whole.
- Retain all youth activities on the island. Services, facilities and activities are essential for all children and young people, and it was agreed that there is a real need to provide a clubs, activities & sports
- Support local Charities. It was raised the need to support and highlight the local charities and 3rd sector groups who support many vulnerable members of the community and are an essential lifeline to many community members.


### ***Single Isles Authority & role of Area forum – what does this mean?***

*Cllr Paul Steele outlined the vision of what a Single Island Authority could look like and the role the Area forum would have in this. It could mean that all Ward areas would be responsible for their own area financially and could have the power to make decisions in their own area. Each Area Forum could have an appointed officer to help support the Area forum duties and this model would help empower communities.*



*Cllr Paul Steele stated that Western Isles, Shetland and Argyll and Bute are currently in discussion as to adopting this model of practice.*

- Barra & Vatersay demographics. It was discussed the fact that Barra & Vatersay are one of the only 3 areas in the Western Isles which population is not decreasing. The Last Socio-Economic update showed North Barra's population increased by 1.7 % and Vatersay to Castlebay increased by 2.7%.
- We discussed that it would be good to do a survey to see the reasons why people are attracted to the island and what the factors are that retrain people on the island.

	<p>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</p> <p>WARD VISITS 2023/24</p>	
<p><b>Ward 2</b> Uibhist a Deas, Eirisgeigh agus Beinn na Faohla - Area Forum – 9 September 2024</p>		
<p>In Attendance: Stoneybridge Hall</p>	<p>Helen Bagley, Benbecula CC; Dave Adey, Benbecula CC; Iain M. Macleod, Cllr; F MacInnes-Begg, CnES; Marie Campbell, Bornish CC; Donald John Macdonald, Bornish CC; Kathryn Martin, Lochboisdale CC</p>	
<p>Apologies:</p>	<p>Cllr. Susan Thomson; All Eriskay and lochdar Community council members</p>	
<p>Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.</p>		

**Corporate Strategy:**


Comments/Questions –

- Climate change is not noted in the Corporate Strategy and should be
- Uist Repopulation Zone – not clear to those present, what it is currently doing, info should be conveyed more widely to communities
- Political lobbying is required
- Community councils should be more empowered
- Reduce bureaucracy by having one back room dept

*Paul shared that the Uist Economic Taskforce is being reviewed and should include reps from all local groups that exist including the Uist Repopulation Zone group and Community Energy Forum and local community representatives. Also, Uist Association of Community Councils is currently being re-established.*

- Social Care; Education; Community Transport; Refuse Collections; Sports Centres are budget areas that should be protected
- Economy of scale for contracts was queried

- Accommodation savings – Council offices/LEC
- Lack of childcare is an issue – Uist Repopulation group is addressing this.
- Positives are Spaceport developments; inward investment via windfarms, hydrogen developments and reserves totalling one million.
- Review of ward boundaries
- Multiple council tax letters
- Move More Programme withdrawn
- Levelling Up monies – Investment of £20 million for Uist & Barra. Ideas for spend included: Cnoc Soilleir improvements, Creating an Enterprise Park linked to the Spaceport, Creative Industries Hub, Freight ferry x 3 daily, Roads Improvements
- Speeding /Policing should be raised via community councils
- Addiction Services
- Mental Health Services – Lack of CPN's
- Royal Mail Service Reduction

 <b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</b> <b>WARD VISITS 2023/24</b>	
<b>Ward 3 Uibhist a Tuath - 10 September 2024</b>	
In Attendance: Claddach Kirkibost	Cllr Paul Steele; Cllr Mustapha Hocine; F MacInnes-Begg, CnES; Laura Skinner, CnES; David Porter, NUDC; Joan Ferguson, NUCC; Lynda MacLean, UCC/Baleshare Causeway; Ann MacLean, Baleshare Causeway; Nikki Woodhead, NUCC; Eilidh Carr, Berneray Community Council; Ada Campbell, NUDC; Lorna Mackillop, Berneray Community Council; John Macdonald, NUCC; Sheena Stewart, UCVO
Apologies:	
Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.	
<p><b>Corporate Priorities:</b></p> <p><b>Comments/Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agreement by those in attendance that the Corporate Strategy priorities were all relevant.</li> <li>- Childcare is a continuing issue. Dependant on central govt and Scottish govt funding. Retain extra provision, funding and legislation have pushed out tsi providers.</li> <li>- Funding – Tax relief (Share with group members)</li> <li>- Renewable Energy opportunity – funding stream?</li> <li>- Uist Population Zone considering childminder strategy. Requirement to employ staff to provide management support for individuals</li> <li>- Economy is an issue</li> <li>- Young People – support and services, no adequate transport, no centres to support Youth groups, Transport links not helpful (sml bus being used).</li> <li>- volunteer fatigue</li> </ul>	

- Spaceport – links to schools/apprenticeships should be explored
- Bakkafrost Issue
- Digital – some difficulties with fibre.
- Mobile blackspots – Paul will follow up
- Community Transport;
- Care Home charges – full cost recovery, costs are high
- Look at revenue streams – Teacher Numbers are ring fenced
- Freezing of Council Tax has contributed to lack of income
- Community Transport – needs to be consulted on
- Councillors wage increase
- Inter Island flights
- Positives:
- Spaceport – Community Benefit
- Transport Links - SSEN
- Fixed Links option – Faroes example
- Lewis Wind Power – community benefit, 20% stake
- Greater Infrastructure
- MRI facility moving from Glasgow to Stornoway, use funding to support inter island
- Move More Programme – joint programme ended due to lack of funding
- Overall agreement on taking Single Island Authority model forward by those present.
- Winter maintenance/road gritting video would be good– Locheport, explaining to public how the process works
- Videos on Roads maintenance Budget and Tarring and chipping process
- Lack of response to queries by council officers
- Lochmaddy Street Lighting – issue off all night and on at 6.30am?
- Communication



## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

## WARD VISITS 2023/24

**Ward 4 Na Hearadh 13 November 2023, Tarbert Council office**

In Attendance:	Cllr Paul Steele- CNES; Mairi MacIver – CLD; Kenny MacLeod – Harris Development Ltd; Angus J MacLeod- Harris Development Ltd; David MacDonald- Harris Forum Development Officer; Agnes Morrison – North Harris Community Council; Catherine MacDonald – North Harris Community Council; Donnie MacDonald – South Harris Community Council/ Harris Transport Forum; Peggy MacKay- Western Isles Community Care Forum; Neil MacDonald- West Harris Trust; Calum MacKay- North Harris Trust; Michael Hunter – North Harris Trust; Gordon Ness- Scalpay Community Association
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Apologies:	Cllr Paul Finnegan; Cllr Grant Fulton
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Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.

**Discussion on Corporate Strategy**

- Retention of population is key. Lack of volunteers is an issue, same faces at every meeting.
- Housing- Severe lack of housing is a problem.
- There are jobs but lack of housing means people can't live here. Projected figures show that demand from local businesses could be met by providing housing, Businesses are suffering.
- 12 HHP houses being built in Leverburgh. The SHIP model means there is a cap on the value of the property. The shortfall increases the further you are from Stornoway. The model needs to change. It is only subsidised to a certain level.
- What influence do councillors have on the corporate strategy and what is the purpose of the meetings with the community if they are already decided? SHIP model needs to be revised. Is it that the executive doesn't want change?
- Money must be used through a registered social landlord. This would avoid the procurement process and HHP
- There needs to be another housing organisation other than HHP.

- A Housing Trust would be the way forward.

### **Discussion on Budget**

- Cutting jobs limits the capacity to deliver services.
- Council Tax freeze will not help.
- Perception that Community Empowerment is controlled by Edinburgh and Stornoway.
- Money is being wasted/ lost that could be spent on communities.
- Stornoway Port Authority should contribute to the infrastructure/ roads etc as the islands are not equipped for the volume of visitors coming ashore on cruise ships. The lack of buses and places to eat are an issue.
- Tourist Tax could be an income ring fenced for infrastructure and tourism.
- Outer Hebrides Tourism have too much influence. Other member organisations should have the same sway.
- Social Care must not be affected by the budget cuts.

### **Discussion on Single Island Authority**

- Local area committees could be responsible for local decisions and given resources to deliver services. In kind man hours could be used for example access to CNES specialist staff.
- Harris Forum has a housing subgroup – CNES could help to set up a housing association.
- Further meetings with a specific topic are needed. Eg affordable housing
- Communication is central, more openness. Sharing information is key.
- Upgrade of website is needed.
- Other means of communication needed other than Facebook, X etc
- Easy access to documents online is needed.
- Why are some organisations not easy to find?

### **Open Discussion**

- Regular Audits/KPI's? – CNES should share that this takes place.

- Short Term Lets- Is this going to be pursued as there are some who are still to do this. Could the admin be outsourced if there aren't enough council staff to deal with it?
- The importance of meeting with elected members was stressed.
- The issue of supply teachers and the number of staff on short-term contracts was raised.
- Local childcare issues. The real possibility of the Sgoil Araich closing due to not being able to recruit staff. Candidates who were capable and willing to undergo the appropriate training were not considered. There needs to be flexibility from HR.





## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24

### Ward 5 – Sgìre nan Loch 27 November 2023, Ravenspoint, 7.30pm

<p>In Attendance: Ravenspoint Centre, South Lochs</p>	<p>Emma Mackenzie, Pairc Trust; John Murdo Matheson, Pairc Trust; Donnie Morrison, Pairc Historical Society; Sarah Macdonald, NLCA &amp; NLCC; Iain Macaskill, NLCA &amp; NLCC; John Randall, Islands Book Trust; Margaret Mackin, Pairc Community Council; David Skene, Pairc Area Forum; Anne Macleod, NLCC, Peter Mackenzie, NLCC; Robert Mackenzie, Councilor; Angus Morrison, Councilor; Kenny Macleod, CNES; Angus McDowall, Pairc Trust, MCWFT/Aline; Magaidh Smith, Lochs News, Kinloch Historical Society; Donna Fairbairn, NLCC, North Lochs Historical Society; Ishbal MacLennan, CCnP, Pairc Area Forum; Fiona MacInnes-Begg, CNES; Paul Steele, CNES Council Leader</p>
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Apologies:	N/A
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Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.

#### COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

- The Council seems to be affected by budgets cuts regularly, is this because there is no director of finance? No
- Verity House agreement cited
- Declining Population and age demographic means working age is missing on the island
- Access to Broadband opens up opportunities.
- Faroes type tunnel could help in terms of travel disruptions.
- Housing – no suitable land is available to build new social housing. 55/45 split. Changes are required to this formula. Modular homes could be considered, island example, resulting in greater resilience/energy.
- Officer capacity is an issue in terms of supporting communities develop further.

#### Budget

#### COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

- Pairc School – no plans to close Pairc School
- Gritting – Wrong policy, not safe to use the roads, at some points, in the winter.
- Gritting Categories don't reflect the working population in the area.

- All residents pay council tax so should be entitled to the same service
- Travel Costs to mainland are excessive particularly given the reliability of ferries/planes

### **Single Island Authority**

#### COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:

- Hospital could be a step-down facility, given the change from its original status. Proposal has been drawn up as a stage one.
- Community Benefit clauses need to be looked at, there are currently areas that have and areas that have not.
- Spaceport in North Uist is a community asset already
- Income from Windfarms should be shared throughout the islands

### **Additional Discussion**

- Communication is key to ensuring communities involvement in discussions
- Social Infrastructure creates positivity
- Whatsapp Groups leads to greater knowledge of community events. Pairc has started one and is reaping the benefits.
- Pairc Trust has two vacant posts – Communications Officer and Partnership/Project Officer which should help with support for groups and information sharing.
- Previously, village reps were identified to share information
- Comhairle's Hardship Fund, groups co-ordinated with those in North Lochs to ensure a system that best suited each area for dissemination of support.
- Pairc Area Forum is operational and is working well with reps from local groups represented and collective decisions being made that benefit the community.



## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24

### Ward 6 Sgìre Uige agus Carlabhagh, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024, Uig Community Forum mtg with Cllr Paul Steele

In Attendance:	Cllr Paul Steele- CNES; Alice Murray – CLD; Cllrs R Fraser & N Macdonald, CNES; James Mackinnon, Comms Officer, CnES; Roddy Mackinnon, Uig Development Trust; Janet McNaughton, Uig Community Council; Yvonne Agg, Cairdeas Group; Kevin Agg, Comunn Eachdraidh Uig Donnella Macdonald, UCCA & Bhaltos Trust; Peter Macdonald, UCCA & Uig Community Council; John Smith, Gallan Head Community Trust; Catriona Maclean, Uig Community Council; Sandy Adams, Kneep Grazings/Campsite
Apologies:	
Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.	
<p><b>Discussion on Corporate Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stats for each area can be obtained from Kathleen Shirkie, CNES.</li> <li>• The communities in the Uig area have an ongoing issue with their EE signal.</li> <li>• Community Concern – Web &amp; Phone Connectivity in Uig. People working from home and new families moving in – relying on Wi-Fi.</li> <li>• Starlink – is an alternative to EE but is very expensive. Fibre to households by 2028. 5G – Ofcom spoke to them last year about ongoing issues.</li> <li>• Community Concern – Jobs - are not able to fill vacancies due to lack of people and lack of accommodation if people want to move here.</li> <li>• Community Concern – Housing - £3k per sq metre that HHP estimate to build a house. Croft prices are extortionate. No priority for housing – people who move in get priority over locals.</li> <li>• Community Concern – Supporting Families – there are currently no senior youth clubs on the island. Balivanich Youth Café meets after school and transport element is provided.</li> <li>• Eriskay Community Transport – have their own minibus and run it. (Funding from Community Transport Funding). CNES to give funding towards a minibus rather than cutting existing budgets. (Paul can pass on details of contact for Eriskay Community Minibus). Elderly people &amp; wanting to go into Town and teenagers staying in after school. Cost of Living crisis more effective to have community transport.</li> <li>• Community Concern - Empty Houses left to become ruins. Funding required to do these houses up. There is an Empty Houses Office – grants available. Crofting</li> </ul>	

commission – used crofts & some not used against tenancy. Assigning a croft – process takes so long; they are stalling everything. If there is an issue they suspend your query, and you then have to start all over again. The crofting issue has been discussed at a Member Officer Working Group (MOWG).

### **Budget**

- Mainland placements for a child with ASN is ¼ of a million (£250k). Looking at providing this here in the Western Isles.
- Councillors have been going through budgets. Look at statutory budgets, half of which are ring-fenced in various areas. Most of the ring-fenced is for staffing.
- Roads – do not go near in the budgets. £750k over for gritting last year. Harris roads are clear in the winter, no gritters on the road before school bus. Not putting enough grit on the roads. Provide grit in tubs locally, SEPA will not allow designated salt piles.
- Winter maintenance being looked at first.
- Deer is a big issue – deer management and deer fencing are required, put a plan in place. Estate needs to be pushed – Uig & Hammnaway estate is management, but nothing is happening. A community meeting regarding deer management should be arranged.
- Winter Maintenance Team – are same team for summer maintenance. Windscreens being broken after spray & chip; they are not sweeping up the loose chips often enough and damage is caused. Phone Technical services re drainage on Reef & Valtos roads.
- Levelling Up Fund – road improvements, unadopted roads – tourist access to beach/campsite.
- Community Skips – are at the shop & campsites. For heavy items you need to phone the Council for collection, not allowed to put them in the local skips.
- Social Work is part of the Integrated Joint Board (IJB) and not solely the Council. New Care Home – has less beds than all the previous homes. Improve the terms & conditions – not attractive enough to encourage people to apply for the people to be interested in applying. IJB has 4 Councillors and 4 Health Board reps. A view expressed by the Community is that social care is provided on a postcode lottery. Look at providing career pathways – maybe didn't do this too well and lost carers to nursing and as a result families are having to pay for private care.

### **Single Island Authority**


- Delayed discharge from hospital – HB/IJB/Gov.
- Model devolves decisions – when Health ran Social Care it was better is a view expressed by the community.
- There are pros and cons. Positive feeling that this is good. Might not be real – need more transparency. Local flavour of getting local people on board to make local decisions.

**Comhairle's Campaign – Our Work - Your Comhairle**

- Roads dept will be highlighted first.

**Additional Concerns**

- Spaceport in North Uist – revenue stream potentially.
- Lewis Windfarm – Stornoway Trust Partnership. Housing Project to attract families. Power Project – housing. HHP housing – Gravir and Bernera (4 houses in each area).
- Are the Council looking at buildings that they own that are currently not used and could be sold.
- Those present agreed to the set up of an Area Forum

	<h1 style="margin: 0;">COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR</h1> <h2 style="margin: 0;">WARD VISITS 2023/24</h2>
<p><b>Ward 6 Sgìre Uige agus Carlabhagh, 9<sup>th</sup> November 2024, Bernera Community Centre</b></p>	
<p>In Attendance:</p>	<p>Cllr Paul Steele, CnES; Cllrs R Fraser &amp; N Macdonald; Alice Murray, CLD; Callum Macaulay, Great Bernera Dev Trust; Norma Macleod, Bernera Community Association; Karina Macaulay, Bernera Community Association; Colin Halliday, Bernera Historical Society; Fiona Darling, Bernera Historical Society; Ben Johnstone</p>
<p>Apologies:</p>	
<p>Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.</p>	
<p><b>Corporate Strategy:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priorities 1- 4 resilient communities – requires equity across the board.</li> <li>• Priorities 1 -3 are connected, priority 4 is separate. Making jobs available for people to move back to the islands. Years ago there were 120 people employed at Kirkibost pier.</li> <li>• Local economy – housing/jobs/retaining people in the islands.</li> <li>• Broadband – getting fibre into islands. No plan in place for after its been received. How would you plan to support communities?</li> <li>• Northland – jobs etc on Westside. People moving here and are working from home. How to access local employment, digital nomads.</li> <li>• Phone Signal – doesn't exist in some areas, really bad in other areas. BT/Vodafone/EE.</li> <li>• Mast signal – nobody has been in touch.</li> <li>• Iron Age House – had just under 5k visitors this year.</li> <li>• Visitors – no signal at Bosta Beach. Not able to get emergency services. Mast – all companies working together to have 1 mast. HIE were dealing with this – but not currently. Ofcom – this discussion has taken place with them regarding masts.</li> <li>• New port – jobs, boost from Tourism, boats. Iron Age had 4 tour buses. Bosta road is not suitable for buses. Garenin road is the same issue.</li> <li>• Cruise ship passengers need to be managed so that all of them don't go to the same place at the same time. Stornoway Port Authority – need to come out to visit groups on the Westside to find out what the issues are and what can be</li> </ul>	

offered. No income scheme from Port Authority, Don't think they factored in to infrastructure.

- Inclusive Council – including everyone. Support Area Forums and Community Councils.
- Who would the groups go to if they had an issue in the community?
- Quality of Life – all Sorts Group (elderly people) – everyone has a different version of quality of life. Wanting street lights or not.
- Families – some families are now home-schooling. When you have a school in a community it makes it a lot easier.
- Corporate Strategy – has a more detailed breakdown, available to anyone to view.
- Covid – were supported and everyone helps each other. A lot of people still isolating and having the effects of Covid. Communities are just getting back to pre-covid.

### **Budget**

The budget gap for 24/25 is estimated at £6m and this will rise to £12m in 26/27. Due to unexpected costs of electricity, oil, general inflation, we have had to go into our reserves. The Council needs to maintain some level of reserves

Are there areas within the Budget that you don't want the Council to cut further?

- Social Carers – we have an ageing population. There are currently 37 posts in Social Care waiting to be filled. Cant get people to fill these posts.
- Don't like things being centralised. We used to have Community Wardens in the Community but these were all taken and decentralised to Stornoway.
- Procurement laws and legislation, where jobs are and having to travel to work.
- Decentralise jobs – maybe create outlying hubs – this was hit by Covid.
- 98% of the Council's funding is received from central government.
- Council Tax – 5% increased.
- £120m - £60m is ring-fenced, and therefore savings need to be made.
- The Verity House Agreement – money in reserves cannot be touched.
- Inter-island flights, it's a Public Service obligation and we receive around £400k to deliver it but it's not ring fenced and it also doesn't cover the increased costs, for example last year we had one tender who offered a 2 day service for almost double the allocated budget. Bed-blocking, social care, social work, GP's. If we could manage the budget better. Do we need 2 Chief Executive's – centralise the back room functions between everyone and it will have savings. There is duplication at the moment.

**Single Island Authority** could see local government, Health, Enterprise & housing association in the Western Isles delivered by one organization led by democratically elected representatives.

Western Isles & Orkney are all looking at slightly different models. Shetland is watching with interest to see how it works.

**Comments/questions:**

- Overall agreement that this could be useful

**Comhairle's Campaign – Our Work-Your Comhairle**

- Need to get better at sharing this with members of the public. Challenges – Winter Maintenance.
- Campaign on Social Media but also need to do a mail out to those who are not on social media, or who don't have access to social media. This leaflet would be better coming from the local Councillors for each area rather than generically from the Council.

**Additional Comments:**

- Spaceport in North Uist – revenue stream potentially.
- Lewis Windfarm – Stornoway Trust Partnership. Housing Project to attract families. Power Project – housing. HHP housing – Gravir and Bernera (4 houses in each area).
- Are the Council looking at buildings that they own that are currently not used and could be sold.
- Those present agreed to the set up of an Area Forum. Alice will get back in touch in the New Year to arrange a meeting of the Forum.

Alice Murray & Cllr Paul Steele thanked everyone for attending & contributing to the discussions. Cllr Steele is planning to hold more of these meetings.





## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24

### Ward 6 Sgìre Uige agus Carlabhagh, Dalmore- Lochganivich Forum,

In Attendance:

Cllr Paul Steele- CNES; Alice Murray – CLD;  
Cllrs R Fraser & N Macdonald, CNES;  
Cllr Duncan MacInnes, Depute Leader,  
CNES, Iain Macarthur, Historical Society;  
Angus Macleod, Urras an Taigh Mhor;  
Angus Mackenzie, Breasclate Comm  
Council; Ryan Macsween, Carloway Estate  
Trust; Donald Mackinnon, Carloway Estate  
Trust; Kenny MacIannan, Chair of D2L  
Forum; Mairi Steele, Carloway Community  
Association; Neil Macarthur, Torman; K  
Crawford, Garynahine;

Apologies:

Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.

Corporate Strategy is still in draft, and purpose of these meetings is to get community views and the draft version can be changed.

#### Comments/Questions:

- Retention of Population – Rural housing – what is CNES position on this?
- Jobs and housing are interlinked & important key to keeping people on the island.
- Social Housing Improvement Plan – around £50m is allocated to the Western Isles but it can only be spent by HHP. HHP £82k per unit is the level of intervention from the Government, HHP have to find the surplus. Its currently £3k per square metre.
- Money was given to the whole of Scotland. WI rate of £125k. Croft House Grants Scheme only gives a grant of £38k. There are areas that are fighting this amount, Argyll & Bute, Shetland, Orkney and Highlands and Island. Registered Social Landlord – only through HHP. Empty Houses Officer – doesn't have a budget. Derelict housing and what demand there is. Good commuting distance from Stornoway.
- Derelict Homes – requires a budget. Share info from places who have done survey. Contact Harris to find out how survey was done. Social, affordable, market history – Croft House Grant Scheme to change allocation.

- Family & Young People – previously employed Development Officer in childcare in the area & a report was done to tackle the lack of childcare facilities. Increase in hours in the area. Lack of childminders in the area. Self-employed childminders. Better ways of working. Development Worker within the area makes a difference if it wasn't for DO some projects would not have happened.

### **Budget Strategy**

Any areas that need to be protected?

- Education – 45% of budget is statutory but may be able to be done in slightly different ways.
- Bus Service – school services are statutory, but we do not have to provide a bus service. You will still get a bus service but not maybe what communities are wanting.
- Late night bus service – safety issue if people are left in Stornoway if there is not enough room on the bus.
- Eriskay Community Council successfully run the community bus service.
- Community Skip Services – protected, an invaluable service. There are issues in a few areas.
- Abattoir comes up often – really valuable to crofters in the islands. Crofters are happy with increase in services. Improvements done in Abattoir. Efficiency in service to see how it has worked.
- Social Care – very important. Integrated Joint Board (IJB)/CNES – CNES pays carers. There is a shortage of carers in general. Someone who wants to be a carer – treated as a professional, with career progression pathways. We have lost a lot of carers who then start nursing. Some don't want to do the training as they have been doing the job for 20 years, so therefore leave. There are a lot more older people in the community. Agency staff coming in and they cost a lot more, and locals are seeing this and asking why I do it for a lot less. Losing staff to agency. It's an unsustainable position to be in. How can Scottish Government continue to slash budgets and expect the same service delivery. Council Tax freeze as part of the Verity House Agreement.
- Consultations with Community to let them know these potential savings.
- Roads – because of there hasn't been a lot of roads building the direct experience of staff isn't what it used to be.
- £6m revenue budget, £20m for capital budget in total.
- Revenue Streams – windfarms – support CNES as well as community. It's managed decline. £80m worth of repairs.
- Protect School in Breasclete – numbers are going up; more people are moving to Stornoway.
- Can off load services to businesses. Difficult decisions that affect islands don't affect mainland councils.

### **Single Island Authority**

Could see local government, Health, Enterprise & Strategic Housing in the Western Isles delivered by one organization led by democratically elected representatives.

- Western Isles, Orkney, Shetland and Argyll & Bute are investigating this route, but it will be slightly different in each area.
- Flights to Uist - £700k for 2 days service and the current budget is £400k.
- Patient Travel costs – Health Board do not give funding.
- More joint up working and sharing resources. i.e. one IT Department, Human Resources department.
- Gritting Service – we would like to use reserves more strategically re workforce instead of just to set balanced budgets e.g. take on 2 staff and train them so that when the current staff retires the job is kept.
- Area Forum – under strategic leads. Have a budget. Isle of Skye currently do this method.
- Lack of jobs for educated people to come back to the island to live.
- CNES influence – there would be no inter-island inter-connector.
- The islands are good at opposing projects.
- Communities need to act and get maximum benefit. Only get 1 option on renewables. Discussion taking place with OFCOM to get free electricity.
- Westside Estates Group – N4 dialogue with Northland Power for community benefit.
- Western Isles wide benefit for all communities. Spreading across Western Isles – housing/jobs from those companies need to be provided.

### **Our Work – Your Comhairle Initiative**

Inform the public of what Council teams are doing.

### **Additional Comments:**

- What input will Comhairle have on decision – Marine Scotland and Ministers are the decision makers rather than the Comhairle. Limited area that can be used due to Marine Protection Zone.
- Apprenticeships in all areas of work – planners/carers/lorry drivers etc
- Communication – focus more on these issues.
- Bins – change of schedule. Commercial sites are overwhelmed and not coping with the 3-weekly cycle. Black bags accumulating around places.
- Window cleaning at main Council building – could you ask one of the Community Service team to get them to clean the windows at the main & back entrance.

Kenny MacLennan & Cllr Paul Steele thanked everyone for attending & contributing to the discussions. Cllr Steele is planning to hold more of these meetings.



## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24

### Ward 7 : An Taobh Siar - Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, Barvas Community Centre

In Attendance:	Cllr Paul Steele- CNES; Cllrs K Macleod, JN Macleod & D Macsween, CNES; Alice Murray, CLD Officer; David Macleay, Regeneration Team, CNES; Peggy Macleod, Barvas & Brue CC; Louis Maciver, Barvas & Brue CC; Norman Campbell, Shawbost Comm Council; Joan Mackay, CEN & Airidhantuim Young at Heart; Roderick Martin, Airidhantuim Comm Council; Catriona Campbell, Bragar & Arnol Community Trust; Christine Macleod, CEATS; Donna MacLennan, Horshader Trust; Ivan Brown, Barvas Estate Trust; Johan Macinnes, North Lewis War Memorial; Laura McEwan, Horshader Trust; Neil Mackinnon, Galson Estate Trust; Gordon Matheson, Horshader Trust; Claire Fisher, Barvas Estate Trust; Kaleigh Macleod, Shawbost Comm Council; Jemma MacVicar, Galson Estate Trust;
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#### Apologies:

Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.

#### Comments/Questions:

These notes are views of CNES and Community Representatives present this evening.

Paul started by saying that there were 3 main topics that he wanted to discuss, and people could feel free to ask questions at any point.

#### Corporate Strategy

##### Comments/questions:

- Statistics for local areas – breakdown in February. Different pictures in each area. Might be increase in population but there is a decline in the number of children. School – not enough childcare and or space in nursery.
- Horshader – people in our Trust are having to travel from Shawbost to Back for childcare and are moving away. There are only 2 childminders in the area.
- N4 Windfarm – if it goes ahead there is a family that currently live in the area & said they would be moving away.

- CNES Policy – strengthening local economy. This proposal is sitting with Marine Scotland & Scottish Government at present.
- Maximizing community benefit – need to look at disadvantages & advantages. Long way down the road, the site may not be suitable. Surveys haven't been done yet. Marine Scotland have given the go-ahead. It will only come to the Council when they require planning permission for build on the land. They need to leave jobs/housing – if it goes ahead.
- There needs to be minimum impact and maximum benefit not maximum impact and minimum benefit. Some feel they are too big and too close to land. Health benefits have not been looked at. Detrimental to people's health and animal health. A lot more elderly in the area. No closure zone – apart from the weather over the winter.
- It's a Marine Scotland discussion at the moment and not sure if it's gone to local fishermen.
- Youth Work Provision in the local area – there is no provision for age 10+. Youth work is clear, vital and important. Youth work always gets cuts across all areas.
- In a national newspaper, the Western Isles is the best place to come and live. Happiness guide is what it's based on, not a good story to tell.
- Health Board recruitment is a big issue, taking locums on. There is a good community spirit – access to services, transport etc.

### **Budget**

The current bus contract is up in 2026. Statutory requirement is the provision of a school service only.

### **Comments/questions:**

- Providing services at a lesser level. Support Children & families, do more with less.
- Is there potential available through Gaelic – funding, awaiting decision of Gealtach funding?
- Lionel School – £1.8m is required to make it a Gaelic school.
- If we don't protect people & jobs, then we will have no Gaelic community.
- Root cause – for mental health. Things have changed post-covid – re-evaluating things.
- Decisions that we make – buses have both direct & in-direct impacts. Impact assessments – not going to cut the budget.
- People don't want to work – someone on benefits gets £1300 why would they want to work?
- Taking away a late-night bus – impacts on work/housing, knock on effects on school role etc.
- Contractors are always looking for staff on an ongoing basis. Lost a lot of Europeans when we left the EU, in hospitality/carers/doctors.

- Island Visa – put to Government but knocked back by Suella Braverman.
- Carers – left because of the way they have been treated. £50 per hour in Orkney for agency workers. Terms and conditions are set up nationally. Agency are those who are employed and paid directly. Carers wages are going up a grade but not sure about the terms & conditions. Agency staff are a last resort.
- Carers also have childcare issues due to there being no facilities so therefore they are not able to do the hours. Funded for childcare for 3-5 year olds. The new care home is short by 16 members of staff. Plenty jobs -environment is a big draw. Have relocation packages. There is a lot of paperwork for childminders.
- Health & wellbeing – stats on those who cannot work due to health & wellbeing. Unfit as opposed to unemployed.
- Staff we have are working on specific projects, that may have been covered by 2-3 people.
- Encouraging people into caring, apprenticeships and moving them into nursing. Career pathways to be provided. If the NHS provide a different service, they pay better, CNES will still lose out. More carers and more budgets. The career pathways would be a steppingstone onto something. People who have been doing it for years – leaving as they don't want to do qualifications.

**Single Island Authority** could see local government, Health, Enterprise & Strategic Housing in the Western Isles delivered by one organization led by democratically elected representatives.

- general agreement received from those present.
- Organisations working together. £50m by the Government to build social housing. HHP are the only ones who can access the money. £125k per house, it costs £3k per sq metre. HHP taken decision to be landlord. 55% rural and 45% Stornoway is how they work the housing builds.
- CNES could take a strategic 'housing' role.
- Health Board – interisland flights it costs £400k for 5 return flights a week, now it's £700k for 2 days a week service. The majority of travelers are patients going to hospitals for appointments. Ferries can be booked, but you cannot use ADS on flight bookings. Public Service Obligation – subsidize every seat on the plane by over £100.
- HHP - £250k of £500k to build a house. They have to loan the other £250k to build the house. Match-funding scenario. Very few empty houses by HHP. Could be more flexible.
- Bed blocking – lack of carers. IJB hasn't worked as well as hoped.
- Hospital – 200 bed now only 99 people. Step down from staying as a hospital.
- SIA Model – not a savings exercises. All have chief executives – not required. IT & HR services could be merged and be able to fill higher paid jobs. Lots of things that could be positive. Ways of doing if all services working together.
- Area Forums – Community Empowerment but cannot guarantee that we can carry out what you need.

- Streamlining services at the back to enable us to support the front-line services.
- Adolescent Mental Health – you need to be at a crisis-point before you get help. Additional Support Needs pupils in Nicolson there is no staffing in Nicolson to do 2-1 or 1-1. This influences all pupils and jobs & housing eventually.
- Time frame – 2-5 years only thing that been taken forward by local governments.
- It's been in discussion previously. Islands Plan – separate at the moment. Each model will be slightly different. Shetland/Orkney/Argyll & Bute may have pilots in different areas first, to see potential solutions. Outside the box thinking, look at different ways of working.
- Study of Nicola Sturgeon related to rural Scotland 0.1%. A more political voice, need to be shared. Quietly behind closed doors and on the frontline.
- We are the local authority that is leading on taking this forward. Not talking about what we do enough. Sitting very well at national level, treated equally. National Island Team.
- N4 – guinea pigs. Through the planning process, speak to MP/MSP. Estates are responsible for putting pressure on you. It's not on the Estates to do that representation. We are not at that place yet. There are no official plans. Estates & Comhairle do not have the knowledge. Scottish Government have the resources to look into this. If this is going to happen then communities need to benefit from it.
- Planning will be with the Comhairle when it comes onshore, it is still sitting with the Scottish Government at present.
- Comhairle & Northland 150m high doubled. There must be a way to get people on board. Who do people speak to about this to give feedback/complain etc. Public would need to speak to Marine Scotland as Community Councils are not allowed to comment at this stage. There has been an extension put on the date for comments.

### **Our Work- Your Comhairle Initiative**


- Good work that teams are doing. Different topics/different departments each month.
- First one will cover Winter Maintenance – Gritting video. North of Barvas is not priority 1. Its very difficult to plan gritters going off the road.
- Asking Community to do more – community needs to be supported to do these things. More support given to community groups.
- Eriskay Community Transport – have their own minibus and run it. (Funding from Community Transport Funding). CNES to give funding towards a minibus rather than cutting existing budgets. (Paul can pass on details of contact for Eriskay Community Minibus). Elderly people & wanting to go into Town and teenagers staying in after school. Cost of Living crisis more effective to have community transport.

**Additional Comments:**

- Volunteer Fatigue – offer support from the Community Engagement Unit.
- Finance & resources are always an issue.
- Tolsta Windfarm and Galson generate income to benefit locals.
- Extra capacity and should be space for community groups. Net Zero Hub – Hydrogen Hub. Produce hydrogen and oxygen.

All present agreed to become part of the Ness-Westside Area Forum. Meet twice yearly.



 <b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24</b>	
<b>Ward 8 : Loch A Tuath - Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, Back Community Hut</b>	
In Attendance:	Cllr Paul Steele- CNES; Carlotta Graham, Back Football & Recreation Club; Anna Mackenzie, North Tolsta Community Council; Murdo MacIver, Tolsta Community Development; Andrew Morrison, Back Community Council; Donald Graham, Gress Common Grazings; Colin Thomson, Back Community Council; Margaret Ann MacIver, Back Community Council; Donald Crichton, Councillor; Calum Maclean, Councillor; Fiona MacInnes-Begg, CnES
Apologies:	
Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.	
<p><b>Corporate Strategy:</b></p> <p><b>COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:</b></p> <p>There was agreement in principle that the four areas were correct in terms of focus..</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing – no suitable land is available to build new social housing. 55/45 split. Changes are required to this formula. Modular homes could be considered, island example, resulting in greater resilience/energy.</li> <li>• Crofters Commission delays impacting</li> <li>• Officer capacity is an issue in terms of supporting communities develop further.</li> </ul> <p><b>Budget</b></p> <p>Over the last number of years, the budget strategy has used a combination of reserves and savings, to set a balanced budget. This has ensured that the impact of funding reductions has been spread out over a longer period, protecting the services we have been able to deliver.</p> <p>The budget gap for 2024/25 is estimated at £6m, rising to £12m in 2026/27. This figure is subject to change.</p> <p><b>COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:</b></p>	

- Social Care provision for Elderly
- Gritting – Wrong policy, not safe to use the roads, at some points, in the winter.
- Gritting Categories dont reflect the working population in the area.
- Travel Costs to mainland are excessive, particularly given the reliability of ferries/planes

### **Single Island Authority**

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has engaged in internal and external discussions on the topic of the Single Island Authority. It is the Comhairle's view that a Single Island Authority would present solutions to the financial and strategic challenges facing the delivery of public services in the Western Isles.

A Single Island Authority could see Local Government, Health, Enterprise, and Housing services in the Western Isles delivered by one organisation, led by democratically elected representatives.

### **COMMENTS/QUESTIONS:**


- Those present were in overall agreement with this although more detail would be required


### **Our Work/Your Comhairle**

A campaign to inform the public of the work carried out by teams within the Comhairle is planned to highlight the successes and challenges within service delivery.

### **Additional Comments:**

- Income from windfarms should support infrastructure in communities
- Transport, inter island and off island continues to be an issue

 <b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24</b>	
<b>Ward 9, Steornabhagh a Tuath, 30 November 2023, Pointers Youth Centre</b>	
In Attendance:	Cllr Paul Steele; Cllrs Iain Macaulay; Malcolm Macdonald; Duncan MacInnes; Com Reps - Hilary; Ruth; Belle; Sharon Reid; Fiona MacInnes-Begg - CLD
Apologies:	n/a
Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.	
<b>Comments/Questions</b>	
Budget areas to be protected: Children/Families and Young People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing increase: more properties being built</li> <li>• People in the community being targeted through the day on the streets</li> <li>• Children being picked on (bullied)</li> <li>• Community in fear due to anti-social behaviour</li> <li>• Witnessing adults purchasing alcohol for underage children</li> <li>• Police not turning up when called</li> <li>• Pointers closure and relocation. nothing decided, looking at other options</li> <li>• Don't touch social care want it protected, huge pressures on families to look after family</li> <li>• Discussion around agency work and how it works. Explained to the group.</li> <li>• 40% of Nicolson have ASN, don't cut the Support for learning staff</li> <li>• £100.000 Crown estate possible for Stornoway North</li> <li>• Harbour: Due to more ships being able to dock, lots of revenue to come from this</li> <li>• Interconnector station is an issue if it is going to be located close to homes. It will lower the value of homes and impact on individuals. Need to concentrate on the community benefit that this will generate.</li> </ul>	

	<b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24</b>
<b>Ward 10 : Steornabagh a Deas - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024, Sandwichhill Centre</b>	
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Cllr Paul Steele- Leader, CNES; Fiona MacInnes Begg - CLD Manager, CnES; Ken Kennedy – Sandwichhill Development Trust steering group; Jessie Murray, Stornoway Historical Society; Kirsten MacInnes - Community Development Worker, Stornoway South; Mrs Maclean – Newton Community Association committee; Bob Walker - Sandwich Community Council; Mike McLeod – resident, currently trying to re-establish Stornoway Community Council; Ray MacKenzie – Stornoway South Councillor; Angus McCormack – Stornoway South Councillor; Anji Macritchie - CLD officer for Stornoway South
<b>Apologies:</b>	
Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.	
<p><b>Corporate Strategy:</b></p> <p><b>Comments/Questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developers build houses without facilities for young people. It should be a requirement that they provide facilities for young people.</li> <li>• Affordable childcare provision is essential</li> <li>• Lack of childminders – what can be done?</li> <li>• Situation with An Cothan Nursery provision, folding, noted</li> <li>• Opportunity to use Sandwich Hall for toddlers and childcare provision?</li> <li>• Community development workers are necessary to support ideas</li> <li>• Funding opportunities via Crown Estate could help</li> <li>• Youth engagement – lack of workers engaging with young people</li> </ul> <p><b>Budget</b></p> <p>The budget gap for 2024/25 is estimated at £6m, rising to £12m in 2026/27. This figure is subject to change.</p> <p>Stornoway Town Centre Development has received £100,000 towards improving the town centre.</p> <p><b>Comments/Questions:</b></p>	

- Staff are needed to engage with young people
- Could the old 'Murdo Macleans building' be converted into a space that small traders could hire out individual units at lower cost?
- Housing solutions are required due to new developments to manage the influx of workers
- Transport links need to be improved, both ferries/flights
- Connectivity links also need improved
- Empty homes solutions could help ease the housing issue

#### **Discussion on Single Island Authority**

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has engaged in internal and external discussions on the topic of a Single Island Authority. It is the Comhairle's view that a Single Island Authority would present solutions to the financial and strategic challenges facing the delivery of public services in the Western Isles.

A Single Island Authority could see Local Government, Health, Enterprise and Housing Services in the Western Isles delivered by one organisation, led by democratically elected representatives.


#### **Comments/Questions:**

- Overall agreement that this could be useful and should be explored further

#### **Our Work- Your Comhairle Campaign**

Following this series of community meetings, we will be launching a new campaign to inform the public of the work carried out by teams within the Comhairle and to highlight the challenges to service delivery.

- Our Work- Your Comhairle Campaign will begin with the Roads Dept

 <b>COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR WARD VISITS 2023/24</b>	
<b>Ward 11: Sgìre an Rubha 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, Urras an Rubha</b>	
In Attendance:	Cllr Paul Steele- CNES; Cllrs Finlay Stewart; Norrie Macdonald; Catriona Dunn; Norman Mackenzie Donald Macsween; Angus Lamont; Tom Clarke; George Donna Matheson; Fiona MacInnes-Begg
Apologies:	
<p>Following introductions and using the framework of basing conversations around the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle Budget, the Single Island Authority Model and Our Work-Your Comhairle the following items, points and questions were discussed and raised.</p>	
<p><b>Comments/Questions:</b>            Angus opened the meeting and invited Paul to share his items for discussion.</p> <p>Paul spoke of the purpose of the ward visits being an exchange of information from the Council to communities and vice versa. The following items were discussed:</p> <p><b>Corporate Strategy</b> – Paul asked those present whether the four headings identified were the right ones for the Western Isles going forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primary aim of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s Corporate Strategy is to retain and increase the population of the Western Isles.</li> <li>• In September, Scottish Government published the results of Scotland’s 2022 Census showing a 4.5% decline in the population of the Western Isles since 2011.</li> <li>• The Comhairle has identified 4 strategic priorities that will contribute towards achieving this aim and in turn address population decline: (1) Strengthening the local economy (2) Supporting children, families, and young people (3) Supporting resilient communities and quality of life (4) Being a sustainable and inclusive Council</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Comments/Questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transport/Connectivity/Housing were raised as areas of concern by the group.</li> <li>• Reliability of Flights – delays due to Southampton link?</li> <li>• Self Build support – Crofters Commission timelines are difficult, Comhairle Role?</li> <li>• Barriers for young people – public sector jobs diminishing, other employment opportunities not attractive.</li> </ul>	

**Budget**

The budget gap for 2024/25 is estimated at £6m, rising to £12m in 2026/27. This figure is subject to change.

Areas to be protected: Vulnerable; Elderly.

**Comments/Questions:**

- Pier & Harbour Commission Parking Fees Query
- Duplication of economic development roles/HIE roles?
- Lewis Wind Power Initiative – could/should give 25% to Comhairle as part of Community Benefit clause
- Energy Tariff could be negotiated on behalf of Western Isles
- Tourist Tax – costs of administering might outweigh benefits
- Crofters Commission – not fit for purpose.
- Sheshader Grazing Committee, Grazing monies, could this be looked at?

**Single Island Authority** – maximising services

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has engaged in internal and external discussions on the topic of the Single Island Authority. It is the Comhairle's view that a Single Island Authority would present solutions to the financial and strategic challenges facing the delivery of public services in the Western Isles.

A Single Island Authority could see Local Government, Health, Enterprise, and Housing services in the Western Isles delivered by one organisation lead by democratically elected representatives.

**Comments:**

Agreement round the table that it could be useful.

**Our Work - Your Comhairle**

Following this series of community meetings, we will be launching a new campaign to inform the public of the work carried out by teams within the Comhairle and to highlight the challenges to service delivery.

Our Work – Your Comhairle Campaign will begin with the Roads Dept.

**Additional Comments:**

- Succession Planning will need to be considered given some personnel changes which are anticipated in the near future
- Protecting the Youth Club needs to be a priority
- Community Empowerment should be encouraged
- Inter Island connectivity is still an issue
- Crown Estate Funding – Equity is required but ward funding needs to be recalibrated. Positives were the Development Worker post; Comhairle officers gave a lot of support; Volunteers, although this has been affected by volunteer fatigue post covid and collaboration on funding
- Unadopted Roads Policy query - doesn't exist currently?