



OUTER HEBRIDES COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Minute of Meeting held in Committee Room 1, Council Offices, Stornoway and through Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 18 December 2024 at 2.00pm.

PRESENT

Cllr Paul Steele, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Chair)
Ms Angela Smith, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Dena Macleod, Hebridean Housing Partnership
Ms Dolina Smith, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Donna Macleod Bray, Violence Against Women Partnership
Cllr Duncan MacInnes MBE, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Eilidh Nicolson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Mr Euan Cowan, Police Scotland
Mr Finlay MacLennan, Community Land Outer Hebrides
Ms Fiona MacInnes Begg, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Mr Iain Watson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Jemma Macvicar, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn/ Galson Estate
Ms Joanna Peteranna, Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Mr Joe MacPhee, UHI North, West and Hebrides
Cllr Kenneth Maclean, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Linda Cunningham, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Mr Malcolm Burr, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Michelle Macleod, Third Sector Interface Western Isles
Mr Niall Houston, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Mr Ranald Robertson, HITRANS
Ms Sheena Stewart, Third Sector Interface Western Isles
Ms Susan Macrae, Skills Development Scotland

APOLOGIES

Mr Colum Durkan, NHS Western Isles
Mr David MacLennan, NatureScot
Ms Ealasaid Dhòmhnaillach, Bòrd na Gàidhlig
Ms Gillian McCannon, NHS Western Isles
Cllr Gordon Murray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Hannah Ritchie Muir, UHI North, West and Hebrides
Ms Jane Mackenzie, Police Scotland
Cllr Malcom Macdonald, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
Ms Susan MacPherson, SEPA

MINUTES

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and the above apologies were noted.

The Chair, on behalf of Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership noted his appreciation of the significant contribution made by Mr Colin Gilmour, who has recently retired from NHS Western Isles, in supporting community planning and wider public health in the Outer Hebrides, and on behalf of the OHCPP wished Mr Campbell a happy retirement.

The Chair, on behalf of Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership noted his appreciation of the work carried out by Group Commander Dougie Campbell who had recently retired from the Western Isles Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The Chair noted that Mr Campbell was a valuable member of the Community Planning Partnership and had played a significant role in protecting the people of the Outer Hebrides, and on behalf of the OHCPP wished Mr Campbell a happy retirement.

Minute of Meeting
of 22 August 2024

1. The Minute of the Meeting of 22 August 2024 was approved.

Integrated
Children's Services
Plan

2. Ms Eilidh Nicolson, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submitted the Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023 – 2026 (ISCP). The ISCP is a statutory plan and sets out an ambitious and aspirational plan for the Outer Hebrides to be amongst the best places for families to raise children in Scotland. The Plan indicated an aspiration for the Outer Hebrides to be a destination of choice for young people/families to move to, where children and young people are safe, have opportunities to meet their potential and satisfy their dreams, and when they do leave the Outer Hebrides to study and work, that they return and contribute to the community and economy.

Ms Nicolson noted that the Children and Young People's Planning Partnership (CYPPP) had worked collaboratively and constructively with other members of the Community Planning Partnership, as well as with children, young people and their families at various stages of the plan's development and review. The CYPPP has established a number of sub-groups (Mental Health and Wellbeing, Corporate Parenting, Additional Support Needs) to lead on key actions in line with existing partnership models e.g. Child Protection Committee. The Corporate Parenting Sub-Group will focus on exploring and addressing the needs of care experienced children and young people and future planning, and actions have been incorporated into the Promise Plan 2023-2026. It was noted that a Children's Rights Plan would be developed by the CYPPP.

It was noted that the Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023 – 2026 had been approved by the Comhairle's Education, Sport and Children's Services Committee on 26 November 2024, and that the Report would be published on the Comhairle's website.

It was agreed to approve the Report.

Renewable Energy
Schemes

3. Ms Joanna Peteranna, Highlands and Islands Enterprise noted that a significant level of both onshore and offshore major developments are planned for the Islands, particularly in relation to the Isle of Lewis, following the announcement that construction of a 1.8GW HVDC subsea interconnector cable to link the Outer Hebrides to the north of Scotland will be delivered as part of national 'Pathway to 2030' proposals.

Ms Peteranna noted that the scale of proposed investment in the islands was unprecedented, with recent forecasts indicating a total investment of £7bn across the Outer Hebrides. It was noted that a Major Development Forum has been established, with representation from developers for all proposed major sites and key stakeholders. Engagement through the Forum has been excellent, with work focussing on areas for collaboration, mapping of timescales for projects, anticipated workforce, skills, accommodation etc needs, and looking at how the Outer Hebrides can maximise the opportunities major developments present, including legacy housing outcomes for the islands. All developers have subscribed to a series of agreed developer principles.

It was noted that HIE had carried out two rounds of data gathering in relation to anticipated timescales, supply chain requirements, skills needs, worker levels, accommodation requirements, and freight needs.

A series of sub-groups have been established to address key themes in relation to planned developments, Accommodation, Industry Skills, Transportation and Logistics, Supply Chain and Peat Management.

Ms Anne Murray, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar noted that the Comhairle had established a Major Development Oversight Board to consider the impact of developments on key services including, planning, economic development, housing, roads and infrastructure, waste etc.

Cllr Duncan MacInnes, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar noted the impact of major developments on transportation, with a recognition that ferries are often operating at capacity during peak months. It was noted that Transport Scotland had initially dismissed concerns in relation to major development impacts on capacity, but following robust discussion, including input from the MDF, senior representatives from CalMac and support from the Depute First Minister had now recognised the challenges in place.

In discussion, it was recognised that planned developments are a divisive issue across communities, and that some employees engaged in the proposals had received personal challenge on social media. It was recognised that significant work is being carried out to address community concerns and ensure maximised benefits for the islands, but that this cannot be shared outwith ongoing discussions due to commercial sensitivities. Ms Dena Macleod, Hebridean Housing Partnership noted that a Communications Sub-Group is being established for the Major Development Forum, and that there is a need for clear, standard messaging through the Forum, following some misinformation being presented to communities.

Mr Ranald Robertson noted that the draft HITRANS Regional Transport Strategy had been submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, and that there would be merit in highlighting anticipated freight challenges and air service impacts for the islands further in relation to the level of planned projects in the islands.

Ms Jemma MacIver, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn noted that the West Coast Community Energy Ltd had secured a grid offer, and would deliver 43MW through a new community-owned windfarm in north-west Lewis, and that there could be merit in establishing links with the Major Development Forum.

Mr Joe MacPhee, UHI North, West and Hebrides noted that the UHI North, West and Hebrides is working with partners through the MDF Industry Skills Group, and in discussion with developers to ensure that the UHI is delivering appropriate courses to meet anticipated skills needs.

Cllr MacInnes noted that on 4 December 2024, the Comhairle had approved a planning application for the installation of a 25MW 'Grid connected' Battery Energy Storage (BESS) facility in Stornoway.

It was agreed that:

- (1) Mr Ranald Robertson, HITRANS and Ms Joanna Peteranna, Highlands and Islands Enterprise would meet to consider the impact, challenges, options and opportunities as part of data gathering in relation to transportation and logistics for planned major developments in the islands; and**
- (2) the Community Planning Partnership Board would continue to receive regular updates in relation to renewable energy major developments in the islands, and would monitor and review the impact/ forecasted impact on communities/ services.**

4. Ms Susan Macrae, Skills Development Scotland noted that the consideration of the Scottish Government Post-School Education and Skills Reform: Consultation on legislation is ongoing. The consultation sought views on proposals for changes to the roles of the three funding bodies in the post-school system: Student Awards Agency Scotland; the Scottish Funding Council; and Skills Development Scotland to simplify responsibilities for apprenticeships and student support to improve outcomes and be more efficient.

It was noted that Mr Davy Thompson of White Ribbon Scotland presented at a recent Western Isles Violence Against Women Partnership meeting on the prospect of the Western Isles engaging with the White Ribbon Programme; the White Ribbon Programme provides information and training to stand up to violence against women for men, organisations, colleges and schools.

The Western Isles Violence Against Women Partnership unanimously agreed to engage with the White Ribbon programme and their aim for 2025 is to recruit across the islands and set up the project in the islands and are open to members of the Community Planning Partnership engaging in the process.

It was agreed that details on the White Ribbon Programme and contact details for the Western Isles Violence Against Women Partnership Co-ordinator would be shared with Board members following the meeting.

5. Ms Angela Smith, Housing Strategy Manager, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar delivered a presentation in relation to '*Housing Issues and Potential Solutions*'. The Presentation detailed an overview of the Comhairle's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) which give strategic oversight on all housing matters in the Outer Hebrides, and sets out the strategic vision for the delivery of housing and housing related services and the outcomes that it will seek to achieve over the period of the LHS.

The current LHS carries a vision that 'Housing provision and services in the Outer Hebrides should make a strong contribution to health and well-being, encourage population retention, and support the sustainability of our communities'. Ms Smith noted that the LHS is under review and is anticipated to be delivered across a similar vision and outcome model to the previous Strategy.

The presentation detailed how the LHS 2025 – 2030 has been developed, including consideration and analysis of a Housing Needs and Demand Assessment, Housing Supply Targets and the Strategic Investment Plan. A broad range of consultation events have been delivered across 2024, including early engagement surveys, in-person meetings with students and young people, and focussed consultation within communities. Emerging themes from the consultation work carried out to date include: population decline, supply of affordable housing; fuel poverty; land availability and cost; conditions of homes in the private sector; poor transport links; securing a home a barrier to employment; inability of businesses to recruit; lack of support to keep people in their homes; climate change and rising sea levels; increase in mental health support required; and mortgage affordability/ availability, with a recognition that there is a high cross over across themes. The presentation noted key housing issues within themes, and what the LHS can potentially do to address and alleviate each issue.

The presentation gave particular focus on the need to address empty homes in the islands to address housing challenges. There are approx. 700 empty homes in the islands with 291 of these being empty for more than 10 years. It was noted that once a property has been left empty for a significant period, it becomes extremely costly to restore, and ultimately may not be cost effective.

Ms Smith noted that it is anticipated that the Local Housing Strategy will be submitted to the Comhairle's Sustainable Development Committee in September 2025 for approval, with key aims to:

- Enable the right home in the right place at the right time
- Stabilise and grow population
- Make best use of the areas Rural Housing status
- Ensure good placemaking and sustainability
- Repurpose what is in place – not always about building new
- Build new homes where there is need
- Increase funding streams where possible
- Regenerate workforce
- Help us to communicate better with each other

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Presentation;**
- (2) that members of the OHCPP Board would submit any relevant data/ comments for consideration as part of the Local Housing Strategy to Ms Angela Smith, Housing Strategy Manager, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar;**
- (3) to circulate the presentation following the meeting; and**
- (4) that the draft Local Housing Strategy would be shared with the OHCPP Board once finalised.**

Transport/Lifeline
Services

6.

The Chair noted that the Executive Group had agreed to collate the lived-in experiences where disruption of transportation/ lifeline services have impacted on services and communities. The collated data will be used to inform case studies and evidence for wider discussions in relation to required actions at a national level.

Mr Ranald Robertson, HITRANS noted that a consultation on community views on CalMac's proposed summer timetable for when new ferries enter service across the Little Minch in 2026 had received significant input from communities, and that an enhanced offer of sailings is anticipated to be delivered from summer 2026, delivering increased economic opportunities for the islands.

It was noted that representatives from Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL) - which owns ferries, ports and harbours and infrastructure necessary for vital ferry services serving the west coast of Scotland and the Clyde Estuary, and the Northern Isles – had met with communities and businesses in Uist to consider recent issues and explore actions and opportunities.

Mr Robertson noted that Western Isles Connectivity for Health Travel Working Group had been established to consider the immediate issues and opportunities which have been identified across the Western Isles in relation to health services and transport, and to make recommendations to the Scottish Government for action.

It was agreed that:

- (1) Board Members would share information in relation to the impacts of disruption to transportation and lifeline services with the CPP Administrator; data would be collated and used to inform case studies and evidence for wider discussions in relation to required actions at a national level – submissions to be submitted by 31 January 2025; and**
- (2) Mr Ranald Robertson, HITRANS, would provide an update in relation to the recommendations made to the Scottish Government in relation to health services and transport in the Western Isles following consideration of the draft Report by the Scottish Government.**

Mr Malcolm Burr, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submitted a Report which set out proposals for a review of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) 2017-27 and the development of a refreshed LOIP and Performance Management Framework for 2027 onwards. The Report detailed the need for additional resources from partner agencies and listed projected requirements.

The Report indicated that in August 2024, the Chief Executive had updated Board that while the Comhairle would continue to provide secretariat support to the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership and to the Executive Group it has also established an additional post of Strategy Officer with duties including informing and influencing strategic direction on key areas of policy and strategy, including anti-poverty measures. It was noted that there is some scope within the remit of this post to support community planning structures, and to develop plans, measures and processes, but there is a need for enhanced strategic support and input from partners.

The Report noted the Comhairle's contribution to the Community Planning Partnership through the Strategy Officer, Administration and Anti-Poverty Strategy support, and detailed the projected resource requirements from lead partner agencies, ideally for a Strategy Officer or comparable post, which would work alongside the Comhairle's Strategy Officers.

It was agreed:

- (1) to note the Comhairle resource allocated to support the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership;**
- (2) that additional strategic resource is required to support the development of a revised LOIP for the Outer Hebrides;**
- (3) that Community Planning Partners urgently consider the request for partner agency resource of 0.6FTE at Strategic Officer level to support the development of a refreshed LOIP and Performance Management Framework, alongside Annual Performance Reports - responses to be submitted to the CPP Administrator/ Chief Executive, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar by 31 January 2025; and**
- (4) that the Chief Executive, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar would circulate the OHCPP Board Constitution, detailing both statutory partners and local partners, and the job description for the former post of Co-ordinator for the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership to members of the Board.**

See item 7.

Mr Malcolm Burr, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submitted a Report which detailed the work undertaken thus far by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to develop the concept of a Single Authority Model (SAM) for the Outer Hebrides. It was noted that the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2023 – 24 confirmed that the Government will continue to work with island local authorities with an ambition to develop alternative governance arrangements, including Single Authority type models, and agree place-specific reforms that offer the greatest potential to improve outcomes for local people.

Mr Burr noted that the Comhairle viewed the move to a Single Authority Model as a necessary means of protecting island-based services and jobs and noted that there remained a need to consider how this would be delivered in practical policy, legal and financial terms.

Mr Burr noted his appreciation of the valuable contribution made to the draft Report, and the work carried out in relation to the establishment of a Single Authority Model thus far by Mr Niall Houston, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the late Mr Nigel Scott, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The draft Report has been submitted to the Scottish Government for initial consideration and amendment.

Ms Dena Macleod, Hebridean Housing Partnership noted that HHP had been included as part of the organisations which plan, resource and deliver services to and for the Western Isles but was not an organisation which received public funding as other organisations listed did. Ms Macleod indicated that she was not of the view that a SAM would deliver a better product than is currently in place for the islands, and noted concern that senior jobs based in the islands could be removed.

Ms Joanna Peteranna, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) noted that HIE has a wider remit than the Outer Hebrides, and that there were a number of advantages to this, including enhanced staffing levels and resources in the Outer Hebrides in comparison to other areas within the region; the Outer Hebrides population represents 6% of the Highlands and Islands region but receives 27% of the investment delivered by HIE.

In discussion, it was recognised that the University of the Highlands and Islands North, West and Hebrides is a public funded organisation, and covered a wide region of Scotland but also delivered on specific localised projects in collaboration with community planning partners. Mr Burr noted that he would meet with representatives from UHI North, West and Hebrides, and wider partners in early 2025 to explore options and opportunities in relation to the concept and delivery of a Single Authority Model for the Outer Hebrides.

It was agreed:

(1) to note the Report; and

(2) that Single Authority Model (SAM) would form a standing item at meetings of the OHCPP Board.

Cross Party Group
on Islands -
Inaugural Islands
Economy Showcase

10.

Discussion was held in relation to the Scottish Government's Cross-Party Group on Islands Inaugural Islands Economy Showcase event planned for 2 April 2025. The event will provide an opportunity to showcase the strengths and potential of the islands' economy, and for island enterprises to engage informally with MSPs. The event is being supported and designed by representatives from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. It is anticipated that up to six organisations will be invited from each island authority area, capturing different sectors. It was noted that a planning meeting for the event will be held in early 2025.

Executive Group

11.

The Minute of the Executive Group Meeting of 5 September 2024, and the Draft Minute of the Meeting of 5 December 2024 were submitted for information.

In discussion, it was noted that housing formed a standing item in Executive Group discussion in recognition of the housing challenges across the islands, and that particular challenge had been identified in relation to constructions costs, particularly in Barra. Ms Dena Macleod, HHP noted that there have been significant challenges in appointing contractors to deliver housing developments in Barra due to the costs involved. The Chair noted that this issue had been raised with the Scottish Affairs Committee as part of the visit to Lewis and Harris in December 2024.

It was agreed that Ms Dena Macleod, Hebridean Housing Partnership would provide an overview of housing costs in Barra in comparison to other parts of Scotland to the OHCPP Board for information following the meeting.

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| Anti-Poverty Group | 12. | <p>The Draft Minute of OHCPP Anti-Poverty Group of 9 October 2024, and the Draft Minute of OHCPP Anti-Poverty Steering Group of 18 September 2024 were submitted for information.</p> <p>It was noted that the Anti-Poverty Group, on behalf of the wider CPP had recently issued a winter awareness campaign detailing supports and contact details for services to address poverty. It was noted that the new Comhairle website (launched 5 December 2024) contains specific information, and useful links to address poverty in the islands.</p> <p>The Chair of the Anti-Poverty Group, and the Chair of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership had submitted joint letters to both the Scottish Government, and the UK Government, which sought consideration that the decision for the complete withdrawal of universal winter fuel payments be reconsidered, and at the very least a more place-based approach is applied, and a range of mitigation measures are developed to reduce the impacts of a potentially devastating decision for older people in the Outer Hebrides.</p> <p>In discussion, it was noted that as part of the Scottish Government draft Budget approx. £250k is anticipated to be allocated to the Comhairle to address poverty in the islands.</p> <p>It was noted that there has been a 40% reduction in the allocation of UK Shared Prosperity Funding for 2024/25 which will have impact the ongoing work to support those on low income.</p> |
| Climate Change Group | 13. | <p>The Draft Minute of OHCPP Climate Change Group form 14 November 2024 was submitted for information.</p> <p>It was noted that OH COP 1 – the largest climate event ever held in the Outer Hebrides, and a call to action to face the unique challenges due to climate change, and to address these head-on – was held on 24 September 2024. Feedback from the sold-out event was wholly positive, with significant input from young people. Due to the success of the event, ‘OH COP 2’ is planned for 2025, and will be delivered over two-days.</p> |
| Stornoway West Locality Group | 14. | <p>It was noted that the Winter Outreach Programme has commenced within the Cearns, with representatives from Tighean Innse Gall, Financial Inclusion, Smoking Cessation, and Hebridean Housing Partnership meeting with the community on a regular basis. Community feedback to officer support in the Resource Centre two-days per week has been positive, with a number of people seeking advice and guidance. Volunteers continue to support projects across the locality, and plans are being explored to extend the Resource Centre.</p> |
| North Uist and Benbecula Locality Group | 15. | <p>Ms Sheena Stewart, Third Sector Interface Western Isles submitted a Report which provided an update on the North Uist and Benbecula Partnership. The Report indicated that the Community Development Officer has been working closely with the visioning consultants, UCVO, CNES and Lochmaddy businesses, organisations, residents and other stakeholders to ensure that the Lochmaddy Visioning Plan benefits all those who live and work in Lochmaddy as well as visitors to the village. The final draft Plan is almost complete and will be shared with the Visioning Steering Group by the end of November.</p> <p>The Report detailed the partnership work carried out to deliver successful projects across the locality, including the Uist in Bloom initiative. The Partnership continues to work across a number of key themes: Care and Maintenance; Climate; Active Travel; Community Wellbeing; Play and Recreation; and Childcare.</p> |

Ms Stewart noted that there remained a desire across the community to extend the remit of the North Uist and Benbecula Locality Group to cover the whole of Uist. It was recognised that this would be explored as part of the review of the Local Outcome Improvement Plan.

Dates of Meetings 16.
2025

The Chair submitted draft dates for meetings of the OHCPP Board and Executive Groups for 2025. In discussion, it was agreed that there would be merit in moving to in-person meetings for the OHCPP Board, in localities across the islands where possible to allow for representatives from the Partnership to meet with communities and consider specific issues/ projects within each community.

It was agreed to approve the provisional dates of meetings for the OHCPP Board and Executive Group for 2025. The OHCPP Administrator would circulate diary invites for each meeting.