

Elected Member Briefing – National Islands Plan Seminar

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About this Briefing Note

Briefing by: *Thomas Coutts, Executive Manager - Economic Development*

Date: 11 September 2026

Subject: National Islands Plan

Public / Exempt / Confidential
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Purpose

This briefing note is to provide an update on activity related to the National Islands Plan, and on the Islands With Small Populations Locality Plan, presented to Members at a seminar on 11 September 2026.

National Islands Plan

Francesco Bertoldi, National Islands Plan Team Leader for the Scottish Government, presented an update on the National Islands Plan, as summarised below:

- A new National Islands Plan (NIP) was announced by the Scottish Government in 2026 following consultation, review of the first NIP and the Scottish Islands Survey. Consultation feedback identified a need for clearer communication, greater prioritisation and stronger evidence of progress.
- The new Plan responds to this feedback by simplifying and focusing priorities, reducing the Strategic Objectives from 13 to seven and introducing fewer, more targeted commitments. It will place greater emphasis on linking national and local plans and providing clearer information on delivery responsibilities and timescales.
- The seven Strategic Objectives cover the key challenges and opportunities for Scotland's islands: connectivity; population retention and attraction; housing; health and social care; economy, education and skills; climate, nature and energy; and poverty, social justice, empowered communities and culture.
- Delivery will combine new commitments with existing programmes, including the Islands Programme (capital funding which local authorities can bid for) housing investment, Project Gigabit, childcare, health and

transport actions, island languages and community planning support. Progress will be monitored through the Scottish Islands Survey, an Islands Data Dashboard, annual reports to Parliament and a monitoring framework.

Island With Small Populations

Mark Ratter, Partnership Officer for the Council, introduced an update to the Islands With Small Populations Locality Plan, as summarised below:

- The Islands with Small Populations (IWSP) Locality Plan provides a practical framework for Fair Isle, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour and Skerries, with a focus on building relationships, joint problem-solving and community involvement rather than the plan document itself. Its intended outcomes include improved communication, responsive services, community-led service redesign, population growth and island-proofed policy.
- There has been practical progress over the past year, including community engagement, housing and community asset transfer support, work on cruise tourism, input to the Shetland Partnership Plan, and improved links between communities, workers and senior managers. Survey results indicate strong community satisfaction and belonging, but less confidence that services listen effectively to island communities.
- Persistent challenges include population retention and attraction, housing, connectivity, health, emergency resilience, transport and infrastructure. IWSP's role is to bring communities and relevant services together to address these linked pressures, while providing local evidence and priorities to support the National Islands Plan's focus on locally-led solutions and population retention.

Contact Details:

Thomas Coutts, Executive Manager, Economic Development

Phone 744 969

Email thomas.coutts@shetland.gov.uk

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