

Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment



Stantec UK Limited

Prepared for:
Shetland Islands Council

Date:
September 2026

Prepared by:
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Project/File:
330910078

Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment
Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

Revision	Description	Author	Date	Quality Check	Date	Independent Review	Date
V1.0	Draft	AdH/JK	June 2026	KM	June 2026	CGT	June 2026
V2.0	Client Comments	KM/JK	June 2026	KM	June 2026	CGT	June 2026
V3.0	Draft Interim Report	KM/JK	June 2026	KM	June 2026	CGT	June 2026
V4.0	Final Report	KM	Sept 2026	CGT	Sept 2026	CGT	Sept 2026



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Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

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Executive Summary

The Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) assesses, in the context of Shetland's Inter-Island Connectivity Programme, how transport connectivity is a major determinant of children's rights and wellbeing in Shetland's island communities, shaping access to services, independence, social participation and long-term community sustainability. This final report therefore identifies a range of measures to maximise benefits for children and young people and to address potential adverse effects through implementation of the Network Strategy and future project development.

The enhanced ferry options are assessed more positively as they seek to improve reliability, flexibility and access where they reduce missed journeys, ease booking pressures, and make same-day travel more feasible for school, appointments and activities. Ferry Do Something offers incremental benefits and is likely to be most valuable where relatively modest timetable or operating-day changes create meaningful improvements in access and participation. Ferry Do Max options were explored in the Network Strategy OBC and shown to provide the strongest ferry-based benefits, particularly on higher-frequency routes, by expanding the range of practical travel times and improving liveability for families. However, even the strongest ferry options do not remove the structural disadvantages associated with long travel times and, in some corridors, multi-leg dependency. For this reason, benefits remain uneven across the network and are likely to be more limited for the more remote islands unless wider integration and resilience measures are also put in place.

Fixed link options have the potential to be transformative for children and young people because they can remove timetabled dependency, provide 24/7 access, and improve reliability for education, health services and social participation. In places such as Bressay, Whalsay, Yell and Unst, this could significantly reduce disruption and widen access to opportunities. However, the assessment also identifies important distributional and equality risks. Benefits are not automatic if access depends heavily on private car use, if tolling creates new affordability pressures, or if linked islands improve while neighbouring ferry-dependent communities are left relatively worse off. The clearest example is the risk that Fetlar could experience a widening relative disadvantage under an Unst fixed link scenario unless ferry service standards and affordability are strengthened in parallel.

Across all options, the assessment therefore points to the need for mitigation measures that protect non-car users, low-income households, and children with disabilities or additional support needs, alongside integrated public transport and accessible service design.

Overall, the assessment concludes that improving the reliability, resilience, affordability and accessibility of inter-island transport has the potential to deliver substantial positive outcomes for children and young people across Shetland. Through improved access to education, healthcare, social opportunities, recreation and support networks, the Programme can help advance children's rights and wellbeing. Realising these benefits consistently across the island network will require continued attention to affordability, inclusive access, transport integration and the needs of communities that may not experience the same level of connectivity improvements as others.



Glossary

Term	Definition
Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA)	A systematic process used to identify, assess and address the potential impacts of proposed legislation, policies, or decisions on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people. A CRWIA considers how proposals align with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and supports decision-making that promotes, protects and fulfils children's rights and wellbeing.
Impact Assessments	A comprehensive suite of impact assessments has been prepared to support SIC in meeting its statutory duties and to consider the implications of the IITCP Network Strategy in accordance with relevant legislation.
Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG)	The Scottish Government's guidance framework for appraising transport projects and interventions. It sets out the process for identifying transport problems, developing options and assessing them against a range of criteria including environment, economy, safety, equality and accessibility.
Transport Planning Objective	A specific, measurable objective set at the outset of a transport appraisal that defines what the investment is seeking to achieve. Options are appraised against the TPOs to determine how well they address the identified transport problems.
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)	An international human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all children (anyone under 18). It establishes the legal and moral framework for ensuring that children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled, and provides the basis against which policies and decisions affecting children and young people are assessed.



List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ASN	Additional Support Needs
CRWIA	Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment
EqIA	Equality Impact Assessment
FSD	Fairer Scotland Duty
ICIA	Island Communities Impact Assessment
IITCP	Inter-Island Connectivity Programme
NHS	National Health Service
OBC	Outline Business Case
SOC	Strategic Outline Case
STAG	Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance
TPO	Transport Planning Objective
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment report has been prepared by Stantec UK on behalf of Shetland Islands Council in support of the Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme Network Strategy Outline Business Case. The purpose of the Shetland IITCP is to develop a high-level timed and costed sequence of island connectivity investments which, taken together, will form an agreed network strategy to meet the needs of Shetland's island communities.
- 1.1.2 The report fulfils statutory duties under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Scotland) Act 2024. It forms part of the wider suite of impact assessments that informed the Network Strategy and Outline Business Case and provides a framework for further consideration of children's rights and wellbeing as individual interventions are developed.
- 1.1.3 This report is intended to be read alongside the Network Strategy OBC. It does not restate the full strategic case, option development process or economic appraisal, which are set out in detail in the OBC. Instead, the report focuses on the potential implications of the IITCP for children and young people and how their rights and wellbeing have been considered at programme level.

1.2 Shetland IITCP Programme Context

- 1.2.1 The Shetland IITCP is a long-term programme of work to develop a timed and costed sequence of interventions to improve transport connectivity between Shetland's island communities. The programme covers eight ferry served islands: Bressay, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst, Whalsay and Yell. The geographic scope of Shetland IITCP is shown below in **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.2.2 The Shetland IITCP has been established by SIC to consider long-term solutions for sustaining and improving transport links across Shetland's islands. The programme responds to a range of strategic challenges, including ageing assets, operational resilience, accessibility, affordability, workforce sustainability and the need to support inclusive economic and social outcomes for island communities. The Programme considered a range of option typologies, including enhanced ferry-based solutions and fixed link options, according to route characteristics and anticipated future requirements.



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Figure 1.1: Geographic scope of the Shetland Inter-Island Transport Connectivity Programme

- 1.2.3 The study area for the Shetland IITCP includes eight island communities currently connected to Shetland mainland via ferry services operated by SIC. These include: Bressay, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst, Whalsay and Yell.
- 1.2.4 It is important to highlight that there are two strands to the IITCP study and option generation and refinement process:
- **Candidate fixed link islands¹ (Bressay, Unst (plus Fetlar, as an integral element of Bluemull Sound), Whalsay and Yell):** For these five islands, the options increment up from the present-day position to a 'Ferry Do Max' option, which is effectively a ferry comparator to a fixed link. The responses to the resident survey for these islands were of a sufficient number to highlight the key areas of dissatisfaction with the service. When combined with other secondary data, it was possible to develop detailed option packages for consideration that incrementally address the problems expressed by communities.
 - **Foula, Papa Stour and Skerries:** For these smaller and more geographically remote islands, the option generation was focused on asset replacement and increments to the current ferry service. The option packages were defined through interviews with each community, supplemented by other secondary data.
- 1.2.5 For assessment and reporting purposes, Unst and Fetlar are considered together within the Bluemull Sound option grouping because their transport connections and outcomes are interrelated. The CRWIA distinguishes between the communities where impacts on children and young people differ. In particular, the fixed link option relates directly to the Yell to Unst connection, while Fetlar would remain ferry-served and may therefore experience a different scale, distribution and timing of effects.
- 1.2.6 An overview of the options for each island is provided below in **Figure 1.2**.

¹ It should be noted that a fixed link to Fetlar was considered and discounted from further consideration in the Strategic Outline Case.



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	Business as Usual	Ferry 'Do Something'	Ferry 'Do Maximum'	Fixed Link
Bressay				
Yell				
Unst				
Whalsay				
Fetlar				
Foula			—	—
Papa Stour			—	—
Skerries			—	—

Figure 1.2: Option Packaging for Each Island

1.3 Impact Assessment Overview

1.3.1 A comprehensive suite of impact assessments has been prepared to support SIC in meeting its statutory duties and to consider the implications of the IITCP Network Strategy in accordance with relevant legislation. A screening exercise confirmed that the following assessments were required in respect of the Network Strategy:

- Equality Impact Assessment
- Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment
- Island Communities Impact Assessment
- **Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment**
- Climate Change Impact Assessment
- Consumer Duty Impact Assessment

1.3.2 The Integrated Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty report also provides consideration to the Consumer Duty under the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 and the Armed Forces Covenant.

1.3.3 The screening exercise also recommended the preparation of a non-statutory Health Impact Assessment to understand the implications of the preferred options on key health and wellbeing considerations across Shetland and the communities directly affected by the IITCP routes.

1.3.4 The Shetland IITCP has been established by SIC to consider long term solutions for sustaining and improving transport links across Shetland's islands. The existing inter-island



transport system is essential to daily life and underpins access to services, community wellbeing and the functioning of sectors of national importance. However, ageing infrastructure, increasing operational pressures and rising expectations around resilience, accessibility and decarbonisation mean that the current network faces challenges that will intensify over time.

1.4 Purpose of the CRWIA

- 1.4.1 This final CRWIA forms part of the wider suite of impact assessments that informed the IITCP Network Strategy Outline Business Case and the identification of preferred connectivity interventions. The assessment has sought to ensure that decisions on future connectivity take account of the rights, wellbeing and interests of children and young people, reflect Shetland's distinctive island context, and support fair, inclusive and sustainable outcomes.
- 1.4.2 The CRWIA provides a programme-level assessment based on the option definitions and evidence available for the Network Strategy. It identifies the principal pathways through which connectivity may affect children's rights and wellbeing, potential differential effects between island communities, and the mitigation and enhancement priorities that should inform implementation. The Implementation Route Map provides the anticipated sequencing of preferred interventions, while more detailed matters will be considered through project-level assessment as individual interventions are developed.

1.5 Relationship to the Outline Business Case

Role of the CRWIA within the Business Case Approach

- 1.5.1 This report supports the OBC by providing structured evidence on child rights and wellbeing impacts at a programme level. It complements the strategic, economic and financial analysis presented in the OBC and helps demonstrate that due regard has been given to statutory duties in the development of the network strategy.
- 1.5.2 The assessment has been undertaken in parallel with option development. Findings have been shared with the programme team to inform the identification of option strengths, risks and mitigation measures.

Scope and Coverage

- 1.5.3 The scope of this report includes:
- Programme level assessment of potential impacts arising from different option typologies.
 - Consideration of impacts on children's rights and wellbeing under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.
- 1.5.4 Detailed option appraisal, route specific design assumptions and cost information is provided in the OBC and are not repeated here.

Relationship to the Implementation Route Map and Project-Level Assessment

- 1.5.5 The suite of impact assessments were integral to the appraisal of options and the selection of a preferred option for each island community.



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- 1.5.6 The Draft Network Strategy Outline Business Case (OBC) was approved by Shetland Islands Council on 30th June 2026. Elected Members made the following decisions:

Table 1.1: Preferred programme level options emerging from the IITCP Network Strategy OBC

Route / Island	Preferred programme level option
Bluemull Sound	Fixed link between Unst and Yell, with a dedicated vessel for Fetlar operating over an extended day. Investment in the Bluemull Sound ferry service will be required in the immediate term.
Bressay	Continued investment in the ferry service with a longer-term commitment to a fixed link.
Whalsay	Continued investment in the ferry service with a longer-term commitment to a fixed link.
Yell	Fixed link
Foula	Business-as-usual
Papa Stour	Ferry Do Something
Skerries	Ferry Do Something

- 1.5.7 The Council is now progressing the preferred programme-level options emerging from the Network Strategy OBC into an Implementation Route Map (IRM), a prioritised and phased plan for delivering the outcomes of the IITCP. This is effectively the temporal expression of the Network Strategy OBC, and thus the impact assessments have not been specifically updated to cover the IRM.
- 1.5.8 For each project emerging from the IITCP (i.e., the programme), individual impact assessments will be undertaken, building on these programme level assessments.
- 1.5.9 This CRWIA provides the programme-level assessment appropriate to the Network Strategy and Outline Business Case. It establishes the principal impact pathways, distributional considerations and mitigation priorities that should inform subsequent project development. Each preferred intervention will be subject to proportionate project-level impact assessment as its design and delivery arrangements are developed. This will build on, rather than duplicate, the findings of the programme-level CRWIA and will consider matters such as detailed alignments and landing points, vessel and terminal design, service patterns, construction and transition effects, public transport integration, workforce implications, and fare or toll arrangements.



2 CRWIA Assessment Approach

2.1 Legislative Duties

- 2.1.1 Public authorities in Scotland are required to apply a range of impact assessments to ensure that strategic proposals take account of societal needs and rights, and that they advance positive and fair outcomes. This impact assessment report considers the following statutory duties and associated assessments:
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which requires consideration of whether existing and emerging legislation, policy and guidance have an impact on children and young people and to assess what further action is required to ensure compliance with the UNCRC. The UNCRC (Scotland) Act 2024 builds on this by incorporating the Convention into Scots law, placing a direct duty on public authorities to ensure that, in carrying out relevant functions, they do not act incompatibly with UNCRC requirements.
- 2.1.2 There are four general principles of the UNCRC which must always be considered in policy appraisal:
- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination;
 - Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration;
 - Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development; and
 - Article 12 – Right to express a view and have that view taken into account.
- 2.1.3 These articles underpin all other rights in the Convention and have formed the basis for consideration in this CRWIA. Additional articles are considered to be relevant to this appraisal and are set out below:
- Article 23 – Rights of disabled children;
 - Article 24 – Right to health and health services;
 - Article 28 – Right to education; and
 - Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.
- 2.1.4 The assessment has been informed by SIC policies and guidance alongside Scottish Government guidance.

2.2 Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA)

- 2.2.1 This CRWIA has been undertaken as a proportionate programme-level assessment. It identifies the likely direction and relative scale of effects based on the option definitions available for the Network Strategy. It does not represent a prediction of the final effects of an individual project, which will depend on detailed design, delivery arrangements, mitigation, engagement and the findings of project-level assessment.
- 2.2.2 A CRWIA asks a range of questions to encourage and guide thinking around potential impacts. This includes questions around impacts on specific groups of children, potential



positive and potential negative impacts, and how children have been engaged to obtain their views and inform decisions made.

Guide Framing Questions

- 2.2.3 The CRWIA framing questions cover four themes, with each theme containing associated questions to be considered in the assessment process. The four themes and questions are set out below.

1. Access to education, health and essential services

- How would each option influence access to schooling, early learning, further education, specialist healthcare and other essential services for children and young people.
- Would any option reduce long or complex journeys, early starts or multiple connections for school-age children.
- Could any option strengthen access to services for children with disabilities or additional support needs.

2. Safety, wellbeing and participation in daily life

- Would any option improve the safety, comfort or predictability of travel for children, including during winter or severe weather periods.
- Could changes to service frequency, timing or vessel type affect children's independence, supervision or safe travel to and from education and activities.
- How might changes in travel time, comfort and predictability affect wellbeing factors such as fatigue, stress, sense of belonging and opportunities for social connection.
- Would any option provide benefits for families in managing schooling, childcare, appointments and access to essential services.

3. Participation, inclusion and equality of opportunity

- How might different options influence children's ability to take part in sport, cultural activities, youth groups and community events across Shetland.
- Would improvements in journey time or reliability enhance equality of opportunity for children living on smaller or more remote islands.
- Could any option introduce affordability issues or new barriers for children from low-income households.

4. Long-term rights and sustainability considerations

- Are there islands where impacts on children are likely to differ significantly due to geography, service availability or population size, and how should this be accounted for in decision-making.
- Could any option contribute to sustaining island communities in ways that support children's long-term rights to safety, development, culture and participation.



2.3 Assessment Framework and Criteria

2.3.1 The assessment considers each of the options and their potential impact on different island geographies.

2.3.2 The following matrix, provided in **Table 2.1**, has been used to assess the scale of any potential impact linked to each impact assessment. The assessment criteria provide an objective means of undertaking and reporting the assessments to help inform decision making. Commentary is provided on any identified impacts within the main assessment. The colour coding also allows for rapid identification of the impacts most likely to be significant, generally those assessed as having a major positive or negative effect. Where any major negative impacts are identified mitigations and recommendations are provided.

Table 2.1: Assessment Criteria Matrix

Impact Score	Description	Symbol
Major Beneficial Effect	The objective or policy contributes significantly to Children's Rights and Wellbeing, particularly with regards to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	++
Minor Beneficial Effect	The option makes a positive but limited contribution to protecting or advancing children's rights and wellbeing, including equality of opportunity for children experiencing economic, geographic or social disadvantage.	+
Neutral / Negligible Effect	The objective or policy has a neutral effect in regard to Children's Rights and Wellbeing impacts or the relationship is negligible.	0
Minor Adverse Effect	The objective or policy adversely affects Children's Rights and Wellbeing, particularly with regards to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	-
Major Adverse Effect	The objective or policy significantly adversely affects Children's Rights and Wellbeing, particularly with regards to advancing equality of opportunity and meeting the needs of people experiencing economic, geographical or social disadvantage.	--
Uncertain Effect	The objective or policy has an uncertain relationship to Children's Rights and Wellbeing, or insufficient detail or information may be available to enable an assessment to be made.	?
No Clear Relationship	There is no clear relationship between the objective or policy and Children's Rights and Wellbeing.	~

2.3.3 The scores provide a comparative programme-level indication based on the option definitions available for the Network Strategy. They do not represent the final effects of individual projects. Where benefits depend on fares or tolls, public and school transport, accessibility, operational deliverability or supporting service measures, these conditions should be tested through project-level assessment. For Bluemull Sound, the Fixed Link score relates to the Yell to Unst connection; Fetlar would remain ferry-served.



3 Governance, Participation and Evidence

3.1 Governance and Oversight

- 3.1.1 The impact assessment process has been overseen through the programme governance arrangements established for the IITCP. Overall oversight has been provided by the Shetland IITCP Programme Board, which has monitored progress, provided strategic direction and ensured alignment between the impact assessments and the wider OBC. This has helped to ensure that assessment findings are integrated into programme development and decision-making at an appropriate stage.
- 3.1.2 An Impact Assessment Working Group was established to support this process, comprising SIC officers with relevant policy, legal and community expertise. The group has also provided specialist input through a series of topic-specific workshops, designed to capture service-level insights on local pressures, risks and opportunities associated with inter-island connectivity. These workshops have informed the development and refinement of emerging findings across the impact assessments.
- 3.1.3 Across all themes, the engagement consistently highlighted affordability and the cumulative cost of frequent travel, reliability and disruption impacts (including weather and staffing constraints), timetable-related barriers that drive exclusion or overnight stays, and the knock-on effects on access to services, workforce delivery, business costs and social participation. A further recurring message was the need to consider inclusive access alongside any connectivity change, particularly for non-car users, and to recognise potential place-based effects on island identity and community cohesion where connectivity is significantly altered.

3.2 Engagement and Evidence

- 3.2.1 This report draws on baseline evidence and engagement undertaken for the Shetland IITCP Case for Change and Strategic Outline Case (SOC), and on locally available data sources such as the Shetland Partnership's indicators and profiles, health and resident survey material, and engagement findings gathered to date. The assessment also draws on a range of existing evidence from previous consultations, survey and community engagement undertaken as part of transport and island policy development relevant to the Shetland IITCP.
- 3.2.2 This report does not present detailed consultation findings. Instead, it focuses on how engagement evidence informs understanding of potential impacts and priorities.



4 Evidence

4.1 Overview

- 4.1.1 This section outlines the evidence base used to inform the CRWIA for the Shetland IITCP, including the study area and key data sources used to establish baseline conditions and potential impacts.
- 4.1.2 The assessment is based primarily on local datasets and analysis prepared by the Shetland Partnership and its associated public and third sector bodies, providing context on population change, demographic pressures, inequality, socio economic disadvantage and access to services within island communities.

4.2 Study Area

- 4.2.1 The study area comprises eight of Shetland's ferry-served island communities: Bressay, Fetlar, Foula, Papa Stour, Skerries, Unst, Whalsay and Yell. These islands vary in population size, demographic profile, economic structure, service provision and connectivity to the Shetland Mainland.
- 4.2.2 The islands are characterised by small, dispersed populations, high reliance on ferry services and limited alternative transport options, with remoteness and weather exposure shaping access, affordability and resilience.
- 4.2.3 While sharing common island challenges, localities differ in demographic change, health outcomes, employment structure, income levels, housing and digital connectivity, influencing how impacts are experienced.

4.3 Data Sources

- 4.3.1 The impact assessments are underpinned by baseline analysis for the study area's eight island communities. This has drawn on a wealth of available evidence including routine census data, public health data, and briefings prepared through the Shetland Partnership, including local organisation such as the SIC and National Health Service (NHS) Shetland, including:
 - Shetland Partnership Plan Annual Reports²;
 - Shetland Partnership Plan Latest Indicator Data³;
 - Shetland Partnership Locality Profiles Locality Profiles⁴;
 - NHS Shetland Population Health Survey (Nov21-Aug22)⁵;
 - Shetland Mainland and Island Resident Survey; and

² [Annual Reports – Shetland Partnership](#)

³ [Indicators – Shetland Partnership](#)

⁴ [Locality Profiles – Shetland Partnership](#)

⁵ [Population Health Survey - Healthy Shetland](#)



- Shetland Mainland and Island Business Survey.

4.3.2 A summary of key issues relevant to the CRWIA are provided below.

4.4 Baseline Summary

4.4.1 This summary provides an initial overview of the key characteristics related to children and young people across the island localities relevant to the IITCP. It identifies crosscutting issues that are relevant to the scope of the impact assessment.

- **Population change and demographic pressures** are a significant issue in Shetland's localities. Yell, Unst and Fetlar and Skerries show patterns of small or declining numbers of children and young people. Skerries and Papa Stour show smaller and declining populations that are highly sensitive to even minor demographic changes, while Foula, although similarly small, has experienced a more stable population in recent years and a more balanced age profile.
- **These trends include declining numbers of children and young people** and, in some places, the mothballing of schools where there are no school-age children. The absence of local schooling can still have notable impacts, requiring young people to travel longer distances or, in some cases, relocate to access education. This can disrupt family life, social networks and community cohesion, and may influence decisions about whether young people and their families remain in or leave island communities.
- **Patterns of net migration among children aged 0-15 years.** While there was a notable exception in 2011/12 (–26), this age group has generally experienced positive net migration in most years, with stronger gains evident from 2018/19 onwards, peaking at +55 and remaining relatively high thereafter. This suggests increasing inflows (or reduced outflows) of families with children in recent years.
- **Child poverty** increased over the period 2015 to 2021 across Shetland, with the proportion of children in low-income families rising from around 6.6% to around 9.8%, followed by a slight reduction in 2022. Compared to national trend, there is a consistently lower proportion of children living in low-income families across the Shetland Islands between 2014/15 and 2022/23 inclusive.
- **Sustained demand for specialist educational support across island schools.** In 2023, 37% of pupils have additional support needs (ASN) in Shetland which is in line with national average that has increased markedly since 2010.
- **Maternal smoking at the first antenatal appointment** has declined over the long term in Shetland but shows recent variability, standing at around 9.6% in the most recent multiyear reporting period. This indicates ongoing early-years health inequalities and the importance of accessible antenatal and family support services in island settings.
- **Educational access and school rolls:** the school on Bressay was permanently closed in 2014, whilst Papa Stour, Fetlar and Skerries schools have all been mothballed for a number of years. This increases dependency on transport links for young people and may exacerbate out-migration of families.
- **Digital connectivity is uneven across Shetland's islands**, with potential consequences for children and young people. While some islands, such as Whalsay, Unst and Yell, benefit from widespread access to superfast broadband, others currently have more variable levels of connectivity.



- **Fetlar is expected to benefit from planned improvements through the R100 programme, while Foula has access to 4G connectivity that can provide superfast-equivalent speeds in some circumstances:** However, connectivity can be variable and is not always reliable. Where connectivity is limited or less consistent, this can restrict access to remote learning, digital resources, telehealth and social interaction, exacerbating existing barriers caused by geographic isolation and reducing opportunities to fully participate in education, social life and future employment pathways.
 - **Limited access to social and cultural opportunities:** Children and young people on remote islands may have restricted access to social, cultural and sporting activities due to transport constraints and limited local provision. This reduces opportunities for participation, peer interaction and wider engagement, with travel barriers increasing reliance on leaving the island and limiting inclusion in events and activities.
 - **Transport constraints, independence and islander identity:** Children and young people on remote islands experience limited independence due to reliance on others for transport, with long travel distances placing time and cost pressures on families. Barriers to driving further restrict autonomy, while changing connectivity and travel patterns may also influence young people's sense of islander identity.
 - **Access to services and local provision:** Children and young people on remote islands benefit from strong local services, but these operate within fragile systems.
 - **School staffing recruitment and retention:** Recruiting and retaining school staff in remote islands is challenging, with transport constraints and ferry reliability affecting staffing, service delivery and cover for absences. While flexible planning helps minimise disruption and any impacts on learning, the fragility of staffing and transport systems continues to pose risks to consistent and high-quality provision.
 - **Weather-related disruption:** Extreme weather limits children and young people's participation in social, cultural and sporting activities, with frequent cancellations and travel uncertainty reducing opportunities for regular engagement and interaction.
- 4.4.2 Overall, the baseline highlights a complex set of interrelated demographic, service access and infrastructure challenges affecting children and young people across Shetland's islands. These dynamics are compounded by structural barriers, including limited transport, uneven digital connectivity, restricted access to social and cultural opportunities, and pressures on local services and workforce capacity, which together influence participation, wellbeing and long-term life chances. While strong local provision and adaptive systems provide some resilience, these issues remain unevenly distributed and are likely to shape how children and young people experience access, opportunity and quality of life across different island communities.

4.5 May 2026 Engagement Summary

- 4.5.1 The Council and consultant team undertook a series of engagement activities in May and June 2026. This comprised in-person public drop-in sessions in the candidate fixed link islands of Bressay, Unst, Whalsay and Yell, as well as Fetlar, which forms an integral part of the overall Bluemull Sound solution. In addition, a MS Teams discussion took place with the Papa Stour community.
- 4.5.2 The purpose of the engagement was to update communities on progress since the previous round of engagement in March 2025, including presentation of the Transport Planning Objectives (TPO), the approach to option development, headline appraisal findings, and next steps. The sessions also provided an opportunity for attendees to ask questions and provide



feedback on the emerging options. It is important to note that this programme was not intended to provide a representative sample of public opinion, but rather to inform communities and capture a range of views.

- 4.5.3 Feedback received through the engagement indicated a generally positive view of fixed link options across several communities, reflecting perceived benefits in terms of improved accessibility, connectivity, and resilience of transport links. Across locations, key issues raised included the affordability of options, the potential need for phased delivery, and the implications of reduced reliance on ferry services. Engagement materials were generally well received, although some participants noted a degree of technical complexity.
- 4.5.4 In addition to the May and June 2026 engagement programme, earlier engagement with children and young people was undertaken as part of the IITCP. This included participation in the Shetland Youth Voice Transport Summit in January 2025 and engagement with Shetland's Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs). These activities provided opportunities for young people's perspectives on inter-island transport and connectivity to be considered as part of the wider engagement evidence informing the programme-level assessment.
- 4.5.5 Further information from the public engagement sessions are presented within the island-specific Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) appraisal sections of the Network Strategy OBC Report where this has been considered under the criterion of Public Acceptability.



5 Business as Usual

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 All island routes are covered by this option.
- 5.1.2 Business as Usual assumes continuation of current ferry provision and operating patterns, with like-for-like asset replacement over time but without structural change to service availability, operating day, frequency, capacity management, or onward integration.
- 5.1.3 In terms of child rights, Business as Usual largely maintains existing barriers and unequal outcomes between islands. It does not proactively advance children's rights beyond current mitigations such as national concessionary travel for under-22s.
- 5.1.4 This assessment is framed by the UNCRC general principles and relevant articles identified in **Section 2.1**:
- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination;
 - Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration;
 - Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development;
 - Article 12 – Right to express a view and have that view taken into account;
 - Article 23 – Rights of disabled children;
 - Article 24 – Right to health and health services;
 - Article 28 – Right to education; and
 - Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities (as directly relevant to transport connectivity and daily life).

5.2 Access to Education, Health and Essential Services

- 5.2.1 Across Shetland, baseline evidence shows that ferry reliability, timetable constraints, capacity and booking frictions act as recurring barriers to travel, including for essential appointments and education-related journeys. Under Business as Usual these constraints continue, with implications for islands where children and young people already face long or complex journeys and limited-service choice. Such impacts include:
- Continued constraints on travel windows, day returns and reliability risk ongoing missed education-related opportunities, particularly where schooling requires off-island travel.
 - Continued cancellations and timetable rigidity can lead to delayed or missed appointments and additional cost burdens for families.
 - Business as Usual does not materially improve accessibility or the predictability needed for some disabled children and those with additional support needs.



Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination;
- Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration;
- Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development;
- Article 28 - Right to education;
- Article 24 - Right to health and health services;
- Article 23 - Rights of disabled children; and
- Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 5.2.2 **Bluemull Sound (Unst and Fetlar):** There are acute impacts on access to health appointments and education opportunities, with high levels of reported “missed out” activities due to constraints on travel. Under Business as Usual, multi-leg journey dependency and capacity pressures continue, reinforcing unequal access for children and young people, including those who require accompanied journeys or predictable schedules. This engages Articles 24 (Right to health and health services) and 28 (Right to education) directly, and Article 2 (Apply rights without discrimination) and 3 (Best interests of the child to be a primary consideration) where barriers fall disproportionately on smaller or more remote communities and those with less flexibility. Active school rolls on Unst have remained relatively steady in recent years, while Fetlar’s school has been mothballed for a number of years due to the absence or very low numbers of school-age children.
- 5.2.3 **Yell Sound (Yell):** As a community and a gateway to other North Isles, dependence on timetabled travel continues to constrain access to specialist services and education and increases the planning burden on families. Business as Usual maintains these pressures, including for young people needing access to training or health services on the mainland. While school rolls on Yell remained relatively stable for many years there has been a decline in recent years.
- 5.2.4 **Bressay:** Bressay Primary School closed in 2014, and children living on the island now travel to Lerwick for education. Proximity to Lerwick means frequent travel is central to accessing services. The evidence indicates that affordability and service usability affect the frequency of children’s participation in social and leisure activities. Business as Usual sustains the cumulative burden of frequent crossings for families and young people, with implications for Articles 2, 28 and 31.
- 5.2.5 **Whalsay:** Constraints on reliability and capacity continue to influence access to services and participation, including health appointments and leisure. Business as Usual does not reduce the friction that limits participation for children and young people who rely on adults’ time and vehicles for transport, predictable connections, and weather conditions. While school rolls at the secondary level in Whalsay have increased over time, access constraints remain a key factor influencing participation.
- 5.2.6 **Papa Stour:** The evidence highlights lifeline dependency and the disproportionate impact of non-sailing days and constrained day returns. Business as Usual maintains the need for travel planning around limited sailings, which can translate into missed or delayed access to essential services and reduced participation opportunities for children and young people, for



example with sports, culture, arts and social interaction. There is no active school roll on Papa Stour.

- 5.2.7 **Skerries:** Timetable gaps and limited flexibility will continue, sustaining the barriers to access services and participation. These can be disproportionately experienced by families and young people in small, remote communities. Children and young people are required to travel for school needs and access to education and health services. There is no active school roll on Skerries.
- 5.2.8 **Foula:** The ferry's supply-chain function is central; passenger travel is more commonly supported by air. Under Business as Usual, the direct impacts on children's access to education and health via the ferry are limited, but the resilience of supplies still underpins daily wellbeing and living conditions. Foula has a small number of school-age children, and the school roll remains low, reflecting the island's small population.
- 5.2.9 Access to services is already constrained, and more so where services are not available at all, such as a lack of dental services on some islands. There are services for all types of operation, such as school, concessional and blue badge. Some cost issues are covered by under-22 concessionary to keep costs down for children and young people.
- 5.2.10 Specific needs for children and young people are access to early years education, primary and secondary schooling, college, apprenticeships, jobs, sports, extracurriculars, competitions and social interaction. Such services are not accessible on their home islands, with the requirement to travel to Mainland Shetland and nearby islands for schooling.
- 5.2.11 There are existing limitations particularly for young people who miss out on connection with peer groups, leisure and recreation. Young people are missing opportunities for social interaction, other sports, access to sport, and there is more pressure on islander players to travel further afield. There is challenge in getting non-Shetland and mainland participation events to be held in more remote islands.
- 5.2.12 There is restricted access to events and social life for young people. For example, attending a winter ball is harder as there are no later ferries to return home. Some facilities are kept open later into the evening to provide access, including libraries and school clubs.
- 5.2.13 Attracting staff is an issue in general for schools and facilities – across the Shetland Mainland and the islands but these are higher for the islands. The fragility of the ferry service is a problem for staff, and this causes difficulty for those who need to book travel slots, such as for school inspections or active schools, rescheduling exams or coverage for libraries and events, or in cases of sickness which incurs travel time for replacement teachers. Business as Usual would continue to influence these limitations.
- 5.2.14 People take long distances for relatively simple journeys – for example, it can be a lengthy round journey for food shopping, school, sports, events, and the cost of parental time spent travelling. This pressure would continue this option would not reduce long or complex journeys, early starts or multiple connections for school-age children.
- 5.2.15 Business as Usual would maintain current access arrangements but would not address the specific barriers experienced by children and young people, including disabled children, those with additional support needs, children in lower-income households and those dependent on accompanied or multi-leg travel.



5.3 Safety, Wellbeing and Participation in Daily Life

- 5.3.1 Under Business as Usual, children and young people continue to experience stress and fatigue associated with constrained travel choices, the uncertainties of booking, and risks of disruption, particularly in winter, storms and during refit periods. An impact is that young people's expressed priorities around being able to participate in normal activities and social life are constrained by travel barriers.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development;
- Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration; and
- Article 12 – Right to express a view and have that view taken into account.

Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 5.3.2 **Bluemull Sound and Yell:** On the North Isles, multi-leg journeys intensify the wellbeing burden, as disruption or capacity failure on one leg of a journey can undermine and disrupt the whole trip and lead to lost opportunities for social participation, sport and youth activities.
- 5.3.3 **Bressay and Whalsay:** high-frequency travel needs mean even modest reliability or affordability pressures can accumulate into reduced participation for children and young people, including reduced spontaneous engagement in clubs, sport, cultural activities and peer socialising.
- 5.3.4 **Papa Stour and Skerries:** For small population islands, timetable gaps reduce spontaneity and can lead to isolation and reduced participation, with a disproportionate impact on the number of children and young people who are residents or visitors.
- 5.3.5 This option would continue the current access to services, education, opportunities for social interaction, and healthcare. It would not improve the safety, comfort or predictability of travel for children, including during winter or severe weather periods. Climate change is impacting weather systems, leading to increased storms, heavier rainfall, and more extreme weather events. This option would not change service frequency, timing or vessel type affecting children and young people's independence, supervision or safe travel to and from education and activities.
- 5.3.6 Booking ferries and travel can induce anxiety and be time consuming. However, when the bookings are cancelled due to timetables, vessels, weather or cancellations, the mental impact from failing to attend appointments or the time wasted can be high, and stressful. This option would mean this impact continues or potentially worsens in more extreme weather conditions.

5.4 Participation, Inclusion and Equality of Opportunity

- 5.4.1 Evidence from the Network Strategy indicates that timetable, capacity, affordability and reliability issues commonly prevent island residents from making all the journeys they would like to make. For children and young people, this translates into unequal access to sports fixtures, cultural participation, youth groups, wider peer networks, and development opportunities.



Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities; and
- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination.

Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 5.4.2 **Papa Stour and Skerries:** In remote and small population islands, limited sailings translate into structurally fewer opportunities to participate in activities, sports, extracurricular, and social interaction compared with other islands.
- 5.4.3 Unequal outcomes are most likely to persist under Business As usual for households on lower incomes, where cumulative travel costs influence participation decisions even where fares are not viewed as a complete barrier to essential travel.
- 5.4.4 Children and young people without access to a car or whose families cannot provide frequent lifts are impacted disproportionately, where constrained integration with public transport and journeys with integrated multi-modal transport options can reduce independence.
- 5.4.5 While current systems have been designed to accommodate the needs of the users, and there is a sense of pride and resilience amongst users and communities, this option would mean children's current ability to take part in sport, cultural activities, youth groups and community events continue as usual, which is limited.
- 5.4.6 This option would mean affordability issues would continue for children from low-income households. Travel remains expensive for ferry journeys and journeys remain lengthy.

5.5 Long-term Rights and Sustainability Considerations

- 5.5.1 Business as Usual is least aligned with long-term realisation of children's rights where sustained population retention and community viability are linked to access to services, opportunities and daily liveability. The Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) evidence highlights the risk of ongoing demographic pressures in several island communities where connectivity friction compounds wider challenges.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development;
 - Article 28 – Right to education; and
 - Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.
- 5.5.2 There will be continued current (and limited) access to services, particularly for families, and low-income households to areas such as childcare, healthcare, housing and transport. There will be continued limited opportunities for interaction and participation, such as sports, where mainland teams may be less likely to travel further to play matches against remote island teams.
- 5.5.3 Islands that are reliant on ferries are quite internally resilience, but this reliance can impact opportunities in the islands and people's wellbeing and access to opportunities such as sports, culture, arts, and social interaction.



5.6 Business as Usual Conclusion

- 5.6.1 Business as Usual maintains current barriers and does not materially reduce the unequal distribution of opportunity for children and young people across islands. It is therefore assessed as **neutral (0)** for smaller island routes and those in closer proximity Lerwick and **minor adverse (-)** for more remote and multi-leg dependent routes, such as the North Isles.



6 Ferry Do Something

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 All island routes are covered by this option.
- 6.1.2 Ferry Do Something introduces incremental enhancements to ferry services, which may include targeted timetable improvements, asset and vessel upgrades and improved capacity. This option has potential to advance children's rights where it reduces the likelihood of missed appointments such as healthcare, sport and education, improves the feasibility of returning home in the same day, and increases participation opportunities, but benefits vary significantly by island geography and route function.

6.2 Access to Education, Health and Essential Services

- 6.2.1 Across the network, the most relevant child rights pathways are improvements to reliability and service usability, reducing booking anxiety and enabling travel at the times required for school, college, health appointments and family life. A positive impact would be where changes demonstrably reduce stress and do not lead to missed opportunities.

Relevance for UNCRC articles

- Article 28 – Right to education;
- Article 24 – Right to health and health services; and
- Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration.

Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 6.2.2 **Bluemull Sound (Unst and Fetlar):** Ferry Do Something is expected to improve predictability and reduce booking friction but does not remove the structural challenge of multi-leg journeys and long travel days. Children and young people benefit where missed connections are reduced, but limitations remain for where education and access to health appointments are time sensitive.
- 6.2.3 **Yell Sound (Yell):** incremental improvements can support access to services and reduce the planning burden, but the route remains constrained by the island's remoteness and functions as a gateway location. Benefits will impact both Yell residents and to onward travellers, including young people in Fetlar and Unst where onward connectivity is dependent, via multi-modal transport options.
- 6.2.4 **Bressay:** modest enhancements and affordability measures can be meaningful because of the high travel frequency of users, such as children going to school. Improved usability supports regular travel for education and participation, particularly for foot passengers, who can travel independently.
- 6.2.5 **Whalsay:** improvements can reduce booking anxiety and improve reliability, supporting more consistent access to education and services, with particular importance for families managing regular trips to school, extracurricular activities and sports.



- 6.2.6 **Papa Stour:** evidence identifies the clear benefits on non-sailing days, where gaps in transport options are addressed. The risk of overnight stays is reduced, and an improved service will provide more reliable access to services and participation.
- 6.2.7 **Skerries:** a shift to a seven-day timetable is identified as materially improving flexibility and reducing disruption and cost burdens, with strong relevance for children's participation and timely access to services.
- 6.2.8 **Foula:** benefits are primarily indirect and seen through improved freight resilience and service reliability which will support living conditions and supplies.
- 6.2.9 This option would increase (to a limited extent) opportunities for social interaction, with an improved service. However, the risk of delays from weather conditions and ferry staffing issues would prevail. An increased ferry service would require more ferry personnel, leading to more recruitment drives to attract people to the islands for such roles. Attracting staff will continue to be an issue in general for schools and facilities – across mainland and the islands but these are higher for the islands.
- 6.2.10 Multi-modal connectivity links between different services are crucial to make journeys smoother and more accessible. An improved service would increase the frequency and ease of carrying out multi-modal and multiple connection journeys. Inter-island ferries could have more capacity, and connections to non-car related travel would support independent traveling throughout Shetland.
- 6.2.11 This could provide better access to mainland services, benefiting vulnerable groups with mobility or childcare pressures. However, journey time would still be lengthy due to the remoteness of the islands.

6.3 Safety, Wellbeing and Participation in Daily Life

- 6.3.1 Ferry Do Something can improve the predictability of travel and reduce stress associated with not being able to secure bookings or return the same day. However, disruption risk linked to weather and staffing remains, and in some cases increased use can increase exposure to disruption impacts unless resilience is improved alongside frequency.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development;
- Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration; and
- Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.

Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 6.3.2 **Bressay, Whalsay, Yell, and Bluemull Sound:** These routes with strong evidence of missed social and leisure opportunities will benefit where additional sailings or improved usability increase feasible evening or weekend participation.
- 6.3.3 **Papa Stour, Skerries, and Foula:** Small population islands benefit disproportionately where timetable gaps are removed because a single missed sailing can otherwise lead to significant impacts.



- 6.3.4 This option would increase (to a limited extent) opportunities for social interaction, with an improved service. However, the risk of delays from weather conditions would lead to missed opportunities for school, access to after-school clubs, and leisure facilities.
- 6.3.5 Leisure facilities, libraries and youth clubs are often open later in the day and evening to allow for children to access opportunities for activities and sports.

6.4 Participation, Inclusion and Equality of Opportunity

Ferry Do Something has potential to advance equality of opportunity if enhancements are designed to address the barriers most relevant to children and young people. However, benefits remain uneven if improvements focus on some routes more than others.

- 6.4.1 The barriers most relevant include:

- Timetable constraints limiting youth participation in after-school activities and events;
- Capacity and booking frictions preventing travel at critical times; and
- Affordability for families who need to travel frequently.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination; and
- The programme-level distributional risk identified in the ICIA.

- 6.4.2 This option could provide incremental access to mainland services, benefiting travel for children with reduced waiting times, more ferry options, and fewer risks of needing accommodation in case of cancellations and delays. Increased and improved vessels and assets would improve safety and comfort, with ferry assets being updated, and in better condition for seafaring, storms and operations. However, with an increase in ferry services leads to an increase in passengers, and greater numbers of people potentially impacted by weather conditions or needing sudden accommodation due to cancelled trips.
- 6.4.3 There could still be occurrences of young people missing or having restricted access to events, social interactions, access to sports. There could still be challenges in getting non-Shetland and mainland participation events to be held in more remote islands.

6.5 Long-term Rights and Sustainability Considerations

- 6.5.1 Ferry Do Something can support the sustainability of island living for families where it reduces the day-to-day friction of access and enables participation in education, health and social life without disproportionate burden. However, it is an incremental option and may not be sufficient to reverse structural disadvantages on the most remote or multi-leg routes.
- 6.5.2 The mobility of young people will be slightly enhanced because they have more opportunities, however, for others, they have never known anything else. Increased ferry services would still retain an island culture, with remoteness being a reason for why people live there.
- 6.5.3 There will be continued reduced opportunities for interaction and participation, such as sports, where mainland teams are less likely to travel further to play matches against remote island teams.



- 6.5.4 Islands that are reliant on ferries are quite internally resilient, but this reliance can impact opportunities in the islands and people's wellbeing and access to opportunities such as sports, culture, arts, and social interaction.

6.6 Ferry Do Something Conclusion

- 6.6.1 Overall, Ferry Do Something is assessed as **minor beneficial (+)** where it materially improves flexibility and reduces exclusion risks, with the strongest benefits on routes where small changes to the operating day or capacity produce benefits for children and young people.



7 Ferry Do Max

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 The island routes covered by this option: Bressay; Yell; Whalsay; Bluemull Sound (Unst & Fetlar)
- 7.1.2 Ferry Do Max represents the highest feasible enhancement of ferry provision, typically involving substantial increases to ferry frequency, extended operating hours and stronger relief to ferry capacity. Child rights benefits occur where service levels begin to emulate and follow “mainland-like” flexibility, reducing missed opportunities and supporting children’s development and participation.

7.2 Access to Education, Health and Essential Services

- 7.2.1 Ferry Do Max can most directly support children and young people by increasing the range of feasible travel times for school, college, appointments and support services, and by reducing the likelihood of missing essential trips due to capacity and limited sailings.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 28 – Right to education; and
- Article 24 – Right to health and health services.

Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 7.2.2 **Bressay:** high-frequency travel needs mean there are major benefits from improved ferry service frequency and affordability. This supports more flexible participation in education, childcare arrangements, and after-school activities, particularly for foot passengers.
- 7.2.3 **Whalsay:** increased capacity and frequency of ferry services will reduce competition for space and improve regular access for families and young people. The benefits will depend on whether increased service is deliverable and resilient, such as changing weather conditions.
- 7.2.4 **Bluemull Sound (Unst and Fetlar):** greater frequency of ferry services will support access to education, health and essential services, but the long travel day and multi-leg dependency remain a defining constraint. The benefits for Fetlar require particular attention because the travel corridor already demonstrates that there are unequal baselines in terms of accessibility and greater sensitivity to missed connections. Journeys will still remain lengthy.
- 7.2.5 **Yell Sound (Yell):** Ferry Do Max improves flexibility of services and travel options, but this option may still not fully address structural remoteness and gateway pressures. The benefits are strongest where reliability and integration of services, such as multi-modal transport options, help to reduce risks of a whole-journey failing. Greater confidence in this option would come from integrated journey options.
- 7.2.6 This option would increase opportunities for social interaction, with more ferries and reduced overall travel times. However, the risk of delays from weather conditions and ferry staffing issues would prevail. A ferry do maximum service would require more ferry personnel, leading to more recruitment drives to attract people to the islands for such roles. Attracting staff will continue to be an issue in general for schools and facilities – across mainland and the islands



but these are higher for the islands. This impacts children's ability to learn and study, and options need to consider how to reduce the risk of lost learning hours.

- 7.2.7 The impact would be similar to Ferry Do Something, but with increased capacity and connections, to reduce long or complex journeys, early starts or multiple connections. Access to social and sports events could be improved, with increased ferry connections for sports teams. Parental or carer support would still be required to drive school children to ferry connections, and lengthy journey times would still be a problem for Bluemull Sound and the smaller more remote islands (Papa Stour, Skerries and Foula). Additional crossings may reduce congestion and give more opportunity to book on other vehicles; however, lengthy journey times would still be an issue.

7.3 Safety, Wellbeing and Participation in Daily Life

- 7.3.1 Higher frequency of services reduces the extent to which children and young people's daily life is structured around a narrow set of sailing windows. It can reduce fatigue and stress by enabling daily returns, reducing waiting times, and improving confidence in being able to attend activities and return home. There are some key remaining risks, including:

- Operational deliverability: if high-frequency expectations are not met, the perceived reliability can decline and undermine any associated benefits with wellbeing; and
- Affordability: increased opportunity to travel can translate into higher household spend unless fare policy mitigations are included.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination;
 - Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development; and
 - Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration.
- 7.3.2 This option could provide better access to mainland services, benefiting travel for children with reduced waiting times, more ferry options, and fewer risks of needing accommodation in case of cancellations and delays. Increased and improved vessels and assets would improve safety and comfort, with ferry assets being updated, and in better condition for seafaring, storms and operations.
- 7.3.3 However, an increase in ferry services leads to an increase in passengers, and greater numbers of people potentially impacted by weather conditions or needing sudden accommodation due to cancelled trips.
- 7.3.4 There could still be occurrences of young people missing or having restricted access to events, social interactions, access to sports. There could still be challenges in getting non-Shetland and mainland participation events to be held in more remote islands.
- 7.3.5 There is a need for more entrepreneurialism, which could be positively impacted by improved (Do Something or Do Max) services.
- 7.3.6 Increased and improved ferry services would reduce travel and waiting times. Larger vessels could increase comfort, with more space for passengers. Wellbeing factors such as fatigue and stress could be decreased, with shorter waiting times, more frequent ferries, and options for travel as well as increased social interaction by accessing other communities. While larger



vessels could also be better equipped to travel through a range of storms, weather and sea conditions, journey times would still be lengthy.

- 7.3.7 Where health outcomes are exacerbated, for example by travel times, sitting for long hours in car and on ferries, waiting times for appointments or due to travel delays, an increased ferry service could reduce these. Although pressure on family members or carers would still prevail, as they are needed to drive young people and children to appointments.

7.4 Participation, Inclusion and Equality of Opportunity

- 7.4.1 Ferry Do Max provides the strongest ferry-based advancement by expanding feasible participation in sports, youth groups and cultural activity across islands and the mainland. However, service design must ensure children and young people without car access and disabled children can benefit equivalently through accessible vessels, information and integrated onward public transport.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities;
 - Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination; and
 - Article 23 – Rights of disabled children.
- 7.4.2 This option could provide better access to mainland services, benefiting travel for families with increased frequencies, more timing options for travel, and improved vessels to carry more children at more times. New barriers could be increased costs – greater opportunities or needs to travel would mean more spending on tickets. This option would potentially be of more benefit due to further reduced congestion, for example on Bluemull Sound, but the lengthy journey times would still be a problem.

7.5 Long-term Rights and Sustainability Considerations

- 7.5.1 Ferry Do Max can strengthen longer-term conditions for families to remain in island communities by sustaining future activities and journey needs at different stages of family life. Evidence suggests this may support demographic balance and retention, particularly where connectivity friction has been contributing to the pressure to move away from islands or to mainland Shetland or further.
- 7.5.2 The mobility of young people will be enhanced because they have more opportunities, however, for others, they have never known anything else. There will be improved opportunities for interaction and participation, such as sports, where mainland teams have greater access and options to travel further to play matches against remote island teams. Island communities can demonstrate strong internal resilience, although ferry dependency may continue to constrain access to wider opportunities, such as sports, culture, arts, and social interaction.

7.6 Ferry Do Max Conclusion

- 7.6.1 Overall, Ferry Do Max is assessed as **major beneficial (++)** on high-frequency routes where it materially changes liveability, with more limited benefit where geography and multi-leg dependency remain dominant.



8 Fixed Link

8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 The island routes covered by this option: Bressay; Yell; Whalsay; Bluemull Sound (Unst only)
- 8.1.2 Fixed Link involves fixed links for candidate routes (Bressay, Whalsay, Yell and Bluemull Sound - Unst only). Fixed links can be transformative for child rights because they remove timetabled dependency, reliance on ferries or air-transport, and provide 24/7 access. However, evidence highlights that fixed links also introduce distributional risks and equity issues, particularly around toll affordability and non-car access for residents and low-income families.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 24 – Right to health and health services;
- Article 28 – Right to education;
- Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities;
- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination; and
- Article 23 – Rights of disabled children.

8.2 Access to Education, Health and Essential Services

- 8.2.1 Fixed links can improve access by removing the ferry “break in the journey”, improving reliability and enabling travel at the times required for school, college, appointments and emergency situations. Impacts include:
- Improved access and reduced missed appointments and education opportunities support progressive realisation;
 - Tolling and shifted cost burdens may create new inequalities unless mitigated; and
 - Fixed link design and service integration must ensure disabled children and those with additional support needs benefit equally through accessible transport options.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 24 – Right to health and health services;
- Article 28 – Right to education;
- Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination; and
- Article 23 – Rights of disabled children.



Island and route specific considerations for children and young people

- 8.2.2 **Bressay:** 24/7 access to Lerwick strengthens access to education, health services and extracurricular activities. The key sensitivity around equitable access and travel is the high proportion of foot passengers and the need to ensure affordable, frequent non-car options (bus and active travel) to avoid disadvantaging young people who cannot drive or financially do not have access to private vehicles.
- 8.2.3 **Whalsay:** improved reliability and access can enhance participation of children and young people in activities, education and healthcare. These can also reduce stress and anxiety related to cancellations and booking. Impacts depend on toll policy and the quality of public transport integration so that children and young people are not dependent on private vehicles.
- 8.2.4 **Bluemull Sound (Unst only):** a fixed link from Yell provides 24/7 access for Unst, likely improving access to services and opportunities. However, Fetlar remains ferry dependent, creating a clear distributional risk where children and young people in Fetlar may experience a widening relative disadvantage unless service standards and affordability are strengthened in parallel.
- 8.2.5 **Yell Sound (Yell):** a fixed link can improve predictable access to mainland Shetland and reduce reliance on sailing windows. As similar to Bressay, a key sensitivity around equitable access and transport options remains for non-car users and toll affordability.
- 8.2.6 Issues caused by the fragility of ferry service would be reduced for staff, as access will be available 24/7 for all school inspections or active schools, rescheduling exams or coverage for libraries and events, or in cases of sickness, with easier and faster access for replacement teachers. There would be significantly lower risk of lost learning hours for children, or limits to learning as teachers or replacement teachers can access classrooms easier.
- 8.2.7 More space may be required for school parking, or multi-modal transport options such as interconnected bus services from island to island to reduce the number of private cars on the roads. This could increase congestion on roads, leading to longer journeys and wellbeing impacts.
- 8.2.8 With the current service, young people may have been independently travelling via ferry. However, with a fixed link, they would be more reliant on parents or friends to drive them to school.
- 8.2.9 Young people's independent mobility will depend primarily on the availability of safe, affordable and suitably timed public or school transport. A fixed link should not result in greater dependence on parents, carers or access to a private vehicle.
- 8.2.10 The introduction of tolls, and higher frequency of travel, would all add up, compared to areas where they don't have to cross a body of water. Families who do not have access to a car, or are of low-income, would be disproportionately disadvantaged.
- 8.2.11 Constraints such as weather impacts and delays would be avoided. A fixed link option would also remove the congestion, such as on Bluemull Sound, as well as the waiting time at marshalling areas and additional journey time of a ferry crossing, compared to driving the same distance.
- 8.2.12 Depending on onward options chosen, journeys could still be complex with multiple connections, such as ferries or fixed link options from Yell to mainland.
- 8.2.13 For people with disabilities or additional support needs, reliability of access would be improved with 24/7 access to support services across the islands. There would be a reduction



in waiting time for ferries, with vehicular access to support and health services. There could be potentially substantial benefits for vulnerable groups, including families with childcare needs and those in poverty.

- 8.2.14 The introduction of fixed links may reduce the need for overnight accommodation by enabling 24/7 travel between islands and improved access to services and home.
- 8.2.15 Increased connectivity provided by a fixed link to the candidate islands could lead to higher levels of road vehicle traffic, as the provision of additional road infrastructure generally induces rather than alleviates demand. Although connectivity would improve, journey times are likely to remain relatively lengthy, with travel mode shifting from ferry services to private or road-based vehicles.

8.3 Safety, Wellbeing and Participation in Daily Life

- 8.3.1 Fixed links can improve safety and wellbeing through greater predictability and reduced disruption exposure. However, risk pathways arise from:
- Potential increased road traffic and road safety concerns for children and young people;
 - potential increased dependency on private cars, reducing independent mobility for those below driving age; and
 - Potential increased expectations and pressure on families to facilitate participation across a wider geography.
- 8.3.2 Mitigation principles are therefore essential to ensure the option advances rights in practice:
- Non-car user equity: a high-quality public transport offer should be provided across the fixed link, including school transport, scheduled buses aligned to education and youth activity times, and accessible services for disabled users.
 - Toll affordability: concessionary toll approaches should be considered that align with the under-22 policy intent and targeted support for low-income households to prevent exclusion.
 - Road safety and active travel: safe walking and cycling infrastructure and child-focused road safety interventions should be delivered near terminals, schools and community facilities.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 3 – Best interests of the child to be a principal consideration; and
 - Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development.
- 8.3.3 This option could provide greater access to services and opportunities across islands, and improve the safety, comfort or predictability of travel for children, including during winter or severe weather periods. This is due to a fixed link providing 24/7 access, and no reliance or need for cross-water transport options.
- 8.3.4 Increased access through 24/7 availability to a fixed link and services elsewhere may place added expectations on families and support networks to transport children to a wider range of activities and opportunities. While this connectivity can enhance young people's participation, it may also increase reliance on private vehicles. In turn, there could be a greater need for



access to driving lessons and licensing to support young people's independence, particularly in an island context where public transport options may be more limited.

- 8.3.5 There is a potential risk of employment drifting away, due to more transport links and opportunity of movement. This could also cause a loss of resilience because people could get help and support from elsewhere, as well as young people having to travel further to find employment opportunities away from their families.
- 8.3.6 Project-level engagement should explore whether proposed changes could affect children and young people's sense of island identity, belonging and participation in community life.
- 8.3.7 Connectivity has varied impacts on island identity, some have strong identities and services have been developed as strong as they can be, to provide communities with the best service possible. For some islands, the remoteness is part of the island's identity and the reason many people either live or visit there.
- 8.3.8 Younger families face significant impacts due to limited and expensive travel options which reduce access to childcare and support, making it harder for parents to participate in work. A fixed link would provide 24/7 to services and other islands, however pressure on family members or carers would still prevail, as they are needed to drive young people and children to appointments.
- 8.3.9 Families would save money from expensive ferry journeys, although proposed tolls for fixed links could add to costs. Additional services such as public transport options would reduce pressure on carers and families to provide transport and lifts.

8.4 Participation, Inclusion and Equality of Opportunity

- 8.4.1 Fixed links can substantially expand participation opportunities for children and young people by reducing the planning barrier and enabling evening and weekend participation, as well as improved access to sports fixtures, youth groups and cultural activity.
- 8.4.2 However, inclusivity is not automatic:
- If benefits mainly positively impact car-owning households, non-discrimination is not met;
 - If public transport is not strengthened, younger teenagers and children may have less independent mobility than under a foot passenger ferry model; and
 - Distributional inequity between linked and non-linked islands may widen, particularly for Fetlar under an Unst fixed link scenario.
- 8.4.3 These equity risks should be carried forward as requirements for option refinement and appraisal.

Relevant UNCRC articles:

- Article 31 – Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities; and
 - Article 2 – Apply rights without discrimination.
- 8.4.4 Youth groups from across the islands and mainland would have increased travel options to interact with each other. This option would require an increase in services such as public transport for children to cross safely and access more opportunities for social interaction.



- 8.4.5 However, increased access through 24/7 availability to a fixed link and services elsewhere could put pressure on families and support structures to be available to take children to more events and activities. With increased access however brings increased requirements for accommodation and services for visitors, as well as private vehicles and public transport for young people to travel.
- 8.4.6 This option would remove the congestion on Bluemull Sound, as well as the waiting time at marshalling areas and additional journey time of a ferry crossing – compared to driving the same distance. Lengthy journey times would still be an issue, with the need to be driven by parents or carers instead of independently crossing a body of water via ferry. The introduction of tolls, and higher frequency of travel, would all add up – compared to areas where children do not have to cross a body of water. Island services have been designed to meet the duties in the situations that residents are given, fairly and equitably.
- 8.4.7 In terms of affordability, there would be no need for ferry tickets, but this cost would be transferred to others, namely tolls, fuel and public transport tickets. These would add up, compared to areas where they do not have to cross a body of water.

8.5 Fixed Link Conclusion

- 8.5.1 At programme level, Fixed Link options are assessed as potentially **major beneficial (++)** for children's rights and wellbeing because of the potential for continuous, reliable access. Realisation and distribution of these benefits depend on affordable charging, inclusive public and school transport, safe access arrangements and mitigation of relative disadvantage for neighbouring ferry-dependent communities. These matters require further project-level assessment.



9 Conclusions & Next Steps

9.1 Conclusions

- 9.1.1 This final programme-level CRWIA concludes that the connectivity interventions considered through the IITCP have strong potential to advance children's rights and wellbeing by improving access to education, healthcare, recreation, social participation and support networks. The nature, timing and distribution of these benefits will vary by route, local service context and the inclusivity of the final transport offer.
- 9.1.2 Business as Usual generally maintains existing barriers, with the clearest adverse effects on remote and multi-leg routes. Enhanced ferry options provide progressive benefits where they improve reliability, capacity, operating hours and affordability, although geographic remoteness and whole-journey constraints remain. Fixed links provide the greatest potential change through continuous access, but benefits depend on affordable charging, inclusive public and school transport, accessibility for disabled children and young people, and the management of distributional effects for communities that remain ferry-dependent.
- 9.1.3 The Implementation Route Map provides the anticipated sequencing of preferred interventions and therefore the temporal expression of impacts. Project-level assessment, engagement and mitigation should be aligned with the periods and geographies in which effects on children and young people may arise.
- 9.1.4 An overall summary of potential impacts is provided in **Table 9.1**.

Table 9.1: Overall Summary of Impacts

Route	Overall Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment Score			
	Business as Usual	Ferry Do Something	Ferry Do Max	Fixed Link
Bluemull Sound (Unst & Fetlar)	-	+	++	[Unst only] ++
Bressay	0	+	++	++
Whalsay	0	+	++	++
Yell Sound	-	+	++	++
Foula	0	+	No Ferry Max or Fixed Link option proposed for these routes.	
Papa Stour	0	+		
Skerries	0	+		



9.2 Next Steps

- 9.2.1 The findings of this final programme-level CRWIA should be applied through implementation of the Network Strategy and Implementation Route Map. This should include:
- Undertaking proportionate project-level CRWIA and other relevant impact assessment for each preferred intervention, building on the programme-level findings and reflecting the detail available at that stage.
 - Providing accessible and proportionate opportunities for affected children and young people to express their views, with appropriate approaches for different ages, disabled children and young people, and those with additional support needs.
 - Considering detailed design, construction and transition effects, school and public transport integration, service specifications, accessibility, fares or tolls, road safety, assisted travel and arrangements for disruption.
 - Testing whether proposed transport arrangements enable children and young people without access to a private car to reach education, healthcare, recreation and social opportunities safely, affordably and independently where appropriate.
 - Monitoring cumulative and distributional outcomes across the network as interventions progress at different times and in different geographies, including effects on communities that remain ferry-dependent.
 - Embedding mitigation and enhancement measures within project development so that the best interests of children and young people are considered early rather than addressed retrospectively.
- 9.2.2 For each route and option, some of this development can only be undertaken at project-level business case stage.
- 9.2.3 For any fixed link options, the complementary public transport offer as part of the option, including accessible bus provision, service frequency and span, timetable coordination, and integration with key destinations and onward connections, needs to be defined.
- 9.2.4 Work needs to ensure engagement with young people, children, parents and carers is accessible, proportionate and focused on groups most likely to experience unequal outcomes, including disabled people, older residents, carers, families with young children, and people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- 9.2.5 Use engagement to test how proposed service models at the project level would operate in practice, including:
- Booking and information provision;
 - Disruption communications and alternative arrangements;
 - Assisted and accompanied travel;
 - Affordability and concessions; and
 - Onward connections and interchange safety.



- 9.2.6 Develop mitigation and enhancement measures and embed them in project-level option development.
- 9.2.7 Develop affordability principles for fares, concessions and any charging approach, with the aim of avoiding disproportionate impacts on low-income households and frequent users.
- 9.2.8 Specify measures to protect non-car users where fixed links are proposed, including:
- Accessible public transport frequency and span aligned to the needs currently served by ferry availability;
 - Integration with key destinations and connections; and
 - Practical arrangements for cycles where required, including carriage options, for example, cycling through a fixed link is not possible.
- 9.2.9 Embed inclusive design requirements across vessels, terminals, interchanges and access routes, including:
- Safe pedestrian environments with appropriate segregation from traffic;
 - Suitable and secure waiting facilities;
 - Clear and accessible information, including during disruption; and
 - Step-free access where feasible.
- 9.2.10 Develop and implement construction and transition management measures to minimise temporary disruption, with a particular focus on low-frequency routes where service cancellations can have more significant impacts. This should include contingency arrangements to maintain access and reduce potential effects on communities during periods of change as schemes are developed at the project-level.
- 9.2.11 Consider workforce sustainability and transition requirements, recognising that staffing constraints can affect service reliability, impact on children and access to learning and healthcare, and therefore equality outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluation

- 9.2.12 Develop a monitoring framework aligned to CRWIA objectives, including indicators for affordability, reliability and disruption, non-car accessibility, children with disabilities and specific needs, and access to essential services and opportunities.
- 9.2.13 Establish an approach to identifying and responding to unintended consequences, including review points where mitigation or service design can be adapted if evidence indicates emerging inequalities.
- 9.2.14 Overall, this final CRWIA supports the implementation of the IITCP Network Strategy by identifying where impacts on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people are likely to be greatest, where inequalities could arise or widen without appropriate mitigation, and the measures required to support equitable outcomes. Its findings should inform the sequencing and development of preferred interventions through the Implementation Route Map and provide a basis for proportionate project-level assessment as individual interventions are progressed.

