

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 9 October 2024
15th Meeting, 2024 (Session 6)

PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Introduction

Petitioner Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell & Naomi Bremner on behalf of Uist Economic Task Force

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities, in keeping with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1862>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 24 January 2024.](#) At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Islands Council), Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council, and the Community Councils in those areas. The Committee also agreed to write to the Ethical Standards Commissioner and the then Minister for Transport.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Ethical Standards Commissioner, Shetland Islands Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Delting Community Council, Orkney Islands Council, and Transport Scotland, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.](#)
5. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. [The Scottish Government gave its initial position on this petition on 8 June 2021.](#)
7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 970 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

CPPP/S6/24/15/2

**Clerks to the Committee
October 2024**

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Petitioner

Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell & Naomi Bremner on behalf of Uist Economic Task Force

Date Lodged

24 March 2021

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities, in keeping with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

Previous action

Raised issue with the MSPs Beatrice Wishart, Liam McArthur and Alasdair Allan.

Background information

One of the strategic objectives of the National Islands Plan is designed to empower island communities and strong local partnerships.

We believe that public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities, such as the Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd (HIAL), should have representation from those communities on their boards. We also believe that this is in line with the National Islands Plan.

We believe this change will empower our communities based on a cohesive, place-based and holistic approach to policy. It will build economic, social and environmental considerations in an integrated approach to strategy for the infrastructure and services that support our lifeline services. We believe that local knowledge should be viewed as an essential skill for the Boards of organisations accountable to the Scottish Government. Such knowledge would bring an appreciation and understanding of local community needs relevant to the service which is being delivered. In particular, we believe that local knowledge will bring insight to boards into economic and infrastructure development, local investment and planning, employment, housing, education and health and social care and how these relate to the service the public organisation provides.

This petition comes in the spirit of delivering active change as the communities have overseen community ownership transfers such that much of our land ownership and decision-making is now made in the islands and Caithness by communities themselves. We make this petition in the same belief that our communities should have ownership, through our place on boards, appointed on merit, over assets which

are there to serve us. We want to create more local resilience in our communities through the decentralisation of strategic planning and decision-making.

HIAL is one example where this change could be applied. Its board meets regularly to provide strategic direction for the Company and is responsible for the determination of the company's strategic plan and direction. In particular, the board reviews safety, security, risk management, corporate governance, operational matters, financial management, business and commercial strategy, route development, pay, pensions and human resources.

It is the role of the HIAL board to challenge the senior management team on its strategy for the business and to provide guidance and support on aviation and non-aviation issues. The board is entrusted to provide leadership, direction, support and guidance to ensure that HIAL delivers and is committed to delivering its functions effectively and efficiently and in accordance with the aims, policies and priorities of the Scottish Ministers. The board is also responsible for appointing, with the approval of the Scottish Ministers, the Managing Director.

Major policy decisions are made at board level, drawing on information provided by the management team, the Scottish Government and other appropriate sources. There is, however, currently no specific requirement to draw on information from the Councils or communities that the decisions potentially affect.

Using HIAL as an example, we have set out how our petition aims could be achieved to increase community participation—

1. Reserving a place on the selection panel for the Chair of HIAL, for either the chair (or substitute) of the HITRANS or ZetTrans boards, and include island local authorities in the selection process;
2. Assigning three of the seats on the HIAL board to people who live in the communities served by the HIAL airports (we suggest a preference for island residents, on the grounds of air services being lifeline to islands, but commercially desirable for mainland areas);
3. One of these seats should be retained for a co-opted member from the HITRANS/ZetTrans Board. It is noted that this member while sitting on the HIAL Board would act only in the best interests of the HIAL 'company'; and/or
4. At least one Council allocated a place on the board, from either Western Isles Council, Orkney Islands Council or Shetlands Islands Council. Local authorities should not, however, be excluded from other appointments or limited to involvement just with these appointments, and again while sitting on the HIAL Board the member would act only in the best interests of HIAL, as is the case with members of NHS Boards drawn from local authorities.

We believe that this approach is in keeping with the principles of public appointments, namely appointed on merit, and committed to diversity and equality, with a board that is representative of the community that the organisation seeks to provide services for.

We believe that by having community and island representation on this, and other, boards will increase accountability and participation. This is consistent with principles of accountability, inclusion and community empowerment, and a more human rights-based approach. This would create ownership, monitoring and accountability, a fair and inclusive approach which is consistent with the Scottish Government's Purpose and National Outcomes.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1862 on 24 January 2024

The Convener: Agenda item 4 is consideration of continued petitions, the first of which is PE1862, which was lodged by Rona MacKay, Angus Campbell and Naomi Bremner on behalf of the Uist economic task force. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to introduce community representation on boards of public organisations that deliver lifeline services to island communities, in keeping with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

We previously considered the petition at our meeting just before Christmas, on 20 December, when we heard evidence from all three petitioners. During the evidence session, the petitioners spoke about ways to ensure that island residents can influence and truly feel part of the decision-making process. Specifically, they spoke about the importance of including local island knowledge as an essential criterion in the skills matrix for appointments to public boards.

Having had the opportunity to reflect on the evidence that we heard, and following our brief informal discussion after the evidence session last month, do members have any comments or suggestions for action?

Fergus Ewing: I suggest that we write to the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland and to Western Isles Council, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council to seek their views on the action that is called for in the petition—specifically, the suggestion that island knowledge should be added as an essential criterion in the skills matrix for boards that deliver lifeline services to island communities, and the processes for encouraging island residents to apply for those roles.

In addition, we should write to the Minister for Transport to seek a response to the four suggestions that are set out in the background information on the petition; to ask what consideration has been given to developing a more structured role for local councils to suggest potential candidates when vacancies arise on public boards that deliver lifeline services to island communities; and to seek further information on the methodologies that are being used to encourage more applications from island residents and give them confidence to engage with the recruitment process. For example, video conferencing technology could be used to allow people to participate in interviews, rather than there being a requirement to physically travel, which can involve an awful lot of time and expense and is a deterrent in some cases, as we have heard.

The Convener: The point about individuals being able to participate in interview processes was well made. That is a comprehensive list of suggestions. Do colleagues have any additional suggestions?

Foyso Choudhury: We should also write to island community councils to get them involved.

The Convener: I am happy to include them in the list.

CPPP/S6/24/15/2

Are we content with those suggestions? If Mr Torrance can just nod his head, I will know that he is content, too.

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We will keep the petition open and take forward the action that the committee has agreed to take.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Ethical Standards Commissioner submission of 31 January 2024

PE1862/H: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

I am writing in response to your letter of 26 January, in which you sought clarification of my views on the action called for in the petition, specifically the suggestion that island knowledge should be added as an essential criterion for the skills matrix for boards delivering lifeline services to island communities, and the processes for encouraging island residents to apply for these roles.

It may first be helpful to clarify the statutory functions conferred on me by the [Public Appointments and Public Bodies etc. \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#). These require me to prepare and publish a Code of Practice (and accompanying guidance) to guide the Scottish Ministers in making fair and open appointments based on the merit of people who apply to take up a position on the boards of any regulated public body in Scotland. I published the [most recent version of the Code of Practice](#) and [accompanying guidance](#) in March 2022 and it took effect for all appointment rounds commencing on or after 3rd October 2022.

In introducing the 2022 Code of practice, I was keen to ensure that it met both ministerial and parliamentary ambitions to diversify Scotland's public body boards. The intention was to diversify boards in the widest possible sense including broadening diversity of thought, contribution and other relevant attributes such as values. The Committee may be interested to read the following extract from my introductory text in the 2022 Code:

“Organisations that understand and reflect the people and communities that they serve are more likely to have credibility with them and deliver better services; this in turn promotes wider engagement and public trust in board decision-making.

I am strongly supportive of diversity of thought and contribution resulting in better corporate governance and decision-making, and, in turn, supporting the continuous improvement of our public services in Scotland. For this reason, the revised Code is unashamedly focused on enabling more creative and ambitious approaches to attracting and appointing the best new board members from the widest possible pool of applicants.”

I am, however, not responsible for defining what attributes might be required for those undertaking a board position. The attributes required to undertake these positions are defined as 'Merit' in the Code and the definition of Merit is very clearly the responsibility of the appointing minister. There is no requirement for the Scottish Ministers to use a skills matrix, although it can be one of a number of useful tools when planning for succession on a board.

If an appointing minister wished to consider including “Island Knowledge” as a requirement for board membership, there is nothing in the Code or guidance which would preclude this. When offering advice on setting criteria for selection, I would

want to be sure that the appointing minister had considered what was sought and why, including ensuring that the criteria are not unnecessarily restrictive so as to limit the field of applicants who might apply. For example, a criterion of “Island Knowledge” without further context might attract applicants who have knowledge without residency, or have knowledge through their residency on the Isle of Man (or other non-Scottish Island) for example. If knowledge of Island life (more generally) is what is sought, this will be helpful in keeping the field of applicants wide. However, if there is a requirement for knowledge of Scottish Island life, the minister will need to give consideration as to whether “Island knowledge” might be more accurately described as Island residency, Island residency or main place of work, or lived experience of Scottish Island life (which may be in the past) for example. The Scottish Ministers are encouraged to use indicators for each criterion for selection in order to properly articulate and specify precisely what is sought.

The 2022 Code of Practice now includes reference to skills, knowledge, experience and **other related attributes** within the definition of merit, and so there would be nothing in the Code of Practice to preclude any appropriate criteria for selection, provided that they are clearly defined such that applicants and selection panels readily understand what is required to meet them. Indeed, the accompanying Statutory Guidance now also includes a “Glossary of Terms” which defines Attributes as:

“Criteria for selection that aren’t readily identifiable as skills, knowledge or experience. Examples include an individual’s values, socio-economic background or **geographical location**. For the purposes of the Code, they don’t include protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.” [Emphasis added in bold for the purposes of this response to the Committee].

In addition, it may be of interest to the Committee that Scottish Government officials, with the support of our office, developed a [“Core Skills Framework”](#) a number of years ago (and most recently updated in 2020) to assist with defining requirements for a public appointment. This is still utilised and considered as good practice. On page 3 of the document, options for what might be considered as priority criteria are listed, with one option being

“Geographic – applicants must live or work in a specific area, there may be a need for the interests of specific communities to be represented on a board”.

In summary, there is nothing in the Code of Practice or guidance which would preclude consideration of Island knowledge, or residency or lived experience of some sort being included in the requirements for a board position, should the Scottish Ministers choose to make this essential or even a priority.

As to attraction, the Code of Practice requires the selection panel to design an appointment plan which is to include, among other elements, the publicity, application and assessment methods to be used. The objective is to “encourage the optimum number of people to apply for positions and for people to find it a comparatively easy exercise to submit applications”.

Our office and the Public Appointments Advisers that we allocate to provide oversight of public appointment activity provide contemporaneous guidance to

panels and Scottish Government officials on both compliance with the Code and good practice in all of these areas.

I trust that this addresses the Committee's question fully but please don't hesitate contact my office if you require further clarification on this or any other matters that I may be able to assist with.

Shetlands Islands Council submission of 14 February 2024

PE1862/I: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Thank you for the invitation to provide Shetland Islands Council's views on the petition seeking that island knowledge should be added as an essential criteria for the skills matrix for boards delivering lifeline services to island communities, and the processes for encouraging island residents to apply for these roles.

I can confirm that Shetland Islands Council would welcome the introduction of islands lived experience into the essential skills mix for the Boards delivering lifeline services to island communities.

It would also be beneficial for all other Boards who are Relevant Authorities under section 7(2) of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 including HIE, SEPA and NatureScot to introduce an island perspective to the essential skills mix to support and guide effective Island Communities Impact Assessment in the development and implementation of their policies, strategies or services.

In terms of the processes for encouraging island residents to apply for these roles, the suggestions set out in the petition to secure community participation on the HIAL Board provide an appropriate route for securing public appointments to the Board bringing island knowledge and lived experience. Such mechanisms can be established for each of the Relevant Authorities whilst still achieving the principles of public appointments.

Shetland Islands Council looks forward to hearing your further deliberations and the decision of the Committee in due course.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar submission of 26 February 2024

PE1862/J: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 provides for participation in decision-making by specified persons having public functions with a view to reducing inequalities of outcome which result from socio-economic disadvantage.

Highlands and Islands Regional Transport Partnership (HITRANS) is named as a duty holder under Part 2 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, and is a member of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership. However, David MacBrayne Limited (DML), Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd (HIAL), and Caledonian Maritime Assets Limited (CMAL) are not. There would be a greater

degree of accountability to island communities if DML and HIAL, as front-line service providers, were members of the Partnership.

The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 requires Scottish Ministers and other relevant public bodies to have regard to island communities in the carrying out of their functions. DML, HIAL, and CMAL are named as relevant authorities introduced by Section 7 (2) of the Act, but it is not clear that they are effectively 'island proofing' their policies and services in line with the provisions of the Act.

In January 2018, HIAL introduced its Air Traffic Management Strategy (ATMS) involving remote tower operations and a combined surveillance centre. Following pressure from key stakeholders, HIAL agreed to undertake a retrospective Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA) of its ATMS in August 2020. The Scottish Government's Islands Team was consulted for guidance as ICIA guidance was not published until December 2020. Some relevant groups reported that they had not been consulted in this process and the resulting ICIA is not currently available on HIAL's website.

The Comhairle recognises that it is important to ensure good skills mix on a Board of Directors and that, fundamentally, Board members have the skills and knowledge to set the strategic vision and challenge the executive leadership of the organisation on its implementation. Islanders have felt frustration at both the poor operational planning and strategic direction taken by the senior management of CalMac Ferries Limited over many years. Yet we have seen little or no evidence of a Board which has any understanding of the impact of this and appears to lack the fundamental knowledge base required to challenge the executive leadership of the company. This directly affects and undermines the delivery of lifeline services, and often leads to extremely poor value for taxpayers with bad decisions going unchallenged.

A full-scale overhaul is needed of the membership of these Boards which are charged with the planning and execution of vital public services and act, in effect, as custodians of lifeline island transport networks. The involvement of people with lived island experience and residential awareness of the impact of strategic policy making would ensure better informed decision making. Parliament must listen to the feedback of island communities in respect of how communities are empowered in the delivery of lifeline services. To do otherwise borders on the disrespectful, and suggests that island residents are somehow ill-equipped for this role. Exclusion of this nature does not happen anywhere else in the UK. For example, approximately 50% of the Isles of Scilly Transport Board membership comprises islanders who are resident on the islands that the company serves, demonstrating islanders should not be excluded from the Board of a company charged with lifeline connectivity. The Isles of Scilly population of 2,500 compares to the population of the island of Harris. Closer to home, the Board of Orkney Ferries is made up entirely of Orkney residents.

Civil Servants advise that the skills mix of Board members must be comprehensive and include experience in governance, audit, business, and human resources. All these skills sets are widely represented across Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Service (CHFS) islands.

Regarding DML governance, the Comhairle's CHFS3 contract consultation response calls for the Transportation Committee Chairs from the four Local Authorities with

Islands (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council, Argyll & Bute Council, and North Ayrshire Council) within the CHFS3 operational area to be given places on the DML Board alongside community representatives.

Since HIAL and CMAL operate on a wider regional basis (CHFS3 operational area plus Orkney and Shetland), the Comhairle recommends that the Chairs of Transportation from the six Local Authorities with island areas (CHFS3 Local Authorities plus Shetland Islands Council and Orkney Islands Council) should sit on the boards of HIAL and CMAL on a rotating basis along with two island residents / service users. To enhance regional focus, consideration should be given to HITRANS representation on the three boards. In their present configuration, the size of the DML, HIAL and CMAL boards may be too small to adequately represent the islands and include individuals with relevant service and governance experience, so it is recommended that the Cairngorm National Park governance model be explored where seven members are appointed by Ministers, five are directly elected by the community and seven are nominated by the five Local Authorities with a territorial interest in the Park.

The Crofting Commission has a board of nine with six directly elected by the service users, the crofters.

The recruitment process needs to be simpler and more encouraging for islanders with 'islander skills and knowledge' and 'lived island experience' as essential criteria. Applications from island residents should be prioritised. There are reports of interview travel and accommodation expenses being non-refundable, and this is sure to deter capable island residents from applying given the cost and inconvenience of having to travel to a central location for interview.

As stated, by including islanders as Board members, accountability to island communities is enhanced as the members live locally, and are directly affected by Board decisions. The community is suffering fatigue from repeated consultations with no evidence that the island voice is being heard. Instead, the community should be embedded in the decision-making process by direct representation. If islanders continue to feel that they are unable to influence decisions on lifeline services and that these decisions are being made by non-island residents not reliant on effective transport links, depopulation will continue in Na h-Eileanan Siar (6.1% predicted drop in population per latest census data).

Such an approach would be in keeping with the Verity House Agreement maxim, "**local by default, national by agreement,**" which is vitally important when considering lifeline services.

Currently, DML, HIAL and CMAL Boards meet on the mainland with membership drawn from the mainland (CMAL includes one islander) and each organisation decides on the suitability of prospective Board members. The services overseen by these Boards exist for island communities and represent lifeline connections to family, health and business interests on the mainland. It is incongruous that, apart from one island resident member of the CMAL Board, these three Boards do not include island residents, ignoring a wealth of knowledge and expertise which could help deliver fit-for-purpose services for islands. This incongruity also applies to senior management and the more operational positions, which the Comhairle has

long advocated be relocated to Na h-Eileanan an Iar to deliver inclusion for the island community.

Cabinet Secretary for Transport submission of 27 February 2024

PE1862/K: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Thank you for your letter of 26 January 2024 seeking a further update on our work to address the issues raised in this petition. You have asked that I provide a response to each of the 4 points summarised in the petition, and to address 2 further points. I am copying this letter to Mr Fairlie MSP as Minister with responsibility for islands connectivity.

In our previous correspondence, and during earlier evidence sessions with the Committee, I and my predecessors have explained the process followed when carrying out public sector recruitment exercises. The appointments process is based on merit and regulated appointments are monitored by the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC). The process aims to be clear and transparent for everyone who applies for an advertised position.

The appointing Minister agrees who should sit on the selection panel for each recruitment exercise, and that panel makes recommendations to the Minister on all aspects of the recruitment exercise.

In considering what the key criteria should be for each vacancy the selection panel agree what skills, knowledge and experience is required. My officials work with the Board Chair to develop a skills matrix prior to each recruitment exercise. The skills matrix will vary depending on the skills of the current membership of the board, and any other particular requirements identified. For example, sometimes it may be necessary to consider applicants who have specific financial, audit, HR or other skills.

To support the advertising campaign for all future recruitments I will encourage recruitment panels to take a similar approach to that taken in a recent CMAL recruitment – highlighting in all of the recruitment paperwork, including the advert itself our encouragement for island residents to apply. We can also make clear that the required knowledge and skills can be gained in a variety of ways. On every occasion, regardless of what other skills may be required, applicants are asked to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of how lifeline services affect our island communities.

We want our appointments to be based on the experience and abilities of each candidate, and they must reflect the outcome of an open and fair recruitment process. Scottish Ministers do not wish to limit the field of potential applicants by specifying that they must live or work within the islands themselves, or that they already work for a particular organisation. Our view is that the best way of ensuring each board is able to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible is to encourage applicants from a range of backgrounds.

Scottish Ministers' believe that the best way of achieving this is to advertise as widely as possible. As you know we have already taken steps to do this but I would like us to consider if we can go even further. We currently advertise each vacancy on the vessels travelling to and from our island communities, and highlight the opportunities to key bodies, including local authorities and other relevant organisations. It may be that there is scope to do this at a higher level, e.g. by Ministers' writing directly to local councils, and other relevant organisations asking them to highlight the opportunity within their communities. I have asked my officials for advice on this. I have also asked officials to ensure interested candidates are given the opportunity to be interviewed remotely.

I hope this reply provides assurance to the Committee of Scottish Ministers' on-going commitment to address the concerns raised in this petition. I would be happy to provide the Committee with an update on our further progress in due course.

Delting Community Council submission of 4 March 2024

PE1862/L: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

There are two elements the Delting Community Council would like to feedback:

1. Legislation needs to recognise Shetland is an island and every piece of legislation that comes from the Scottish Government should consider the Islands Dimension and the Islands Impact Assessment. There should be an Islands Impact Assessment with all legislation.
2. There are times Shetland gets adversely impacted by our location. There needs to be an awareness of cost of living in the communities when allocating funds and recognise the on cost of Island life. Everything has an on-cost due to its location in Shetland. Particular attention should be focussed to the on-cost of living in an island community and the difference in buying power between Scotland mainland and Shetland and the difference in buying power within Shetland between Mainland Shetland and the island communities within Shetland.

Orkney Islands Council submission of 26 March 2024

PE1862/M: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Thank you for your letter of 26 January 2024, seeking the Council's views on the action called for in petition PE1862, specifically the suggestion that island knowledge should be added as an essential criteria for the skills matrix for boards delivering lifeline services to island communities, and the processes for encouraging island residents to apply for these roles.

Orkney Islands Council is entirely supportive of this proposal. It is in the interest of all island residents to ensure that island voices are part of national decision-making processes and are heard when setting the strategic direction of lifeline services.

Without that lived experience, national boards may inadvertently overlook the unintended consequences of national policy on island communities.

As noted by the petitioners, we had all hoped that this issue would be resolved by the provision for island communities impact assessment in the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018. Recent examples, such as STPR2 (Strategic Transport Projects Review 2), have demonstrated that ICIA is not yet being undertaken universally in a timely or competent manner. We therefore feel that there is still a need for this proposal, and for the further proposal made by the petitioners that applications from those with island knowledge should be actively encouraged, and barriers removed to their involvement. There is a wealth of skills and experience in the islands but, to benefit from this, boards must be willing to operate in a way that embraces island locations and transport barriers.

While not wishing to detract in any way from our support of this petition, we would also like to remind the Committee that a wealth of knowledge and experience also resides in the Islands councils, and it is equally important to ensure that they are involved in the setting of national strategic direction and in national decision-making processes. This was not always the case in the development of the National Islands Plan (NIP), resulting in its cluttered landscape of 13 strategic objectives and 134 commitments. We trust that the current review of the NIP will lead to a more streamlined plan which focuses on the top priorities of the islands themselves.

Transport Scotland submission of 1 October 2024

PE1862/N: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities

Scottish Ministers understand the importance of ensuring the views and experiences of island residents inform the delivery of lifeline ferry services in Scotland. In this regard, I am fully committed to ensuring that we continue to do all we can to attract diverse and well-functioning Boards that can support the needs of our island communities.

Since the onset of the Petition in March 2021, Scottish Ministers and officials have taken proactive steps to review and improve the processes involved when preparing for Board appointment campaigns. This has been designed to encourage uptake of applications from a wide range of backgrounds to include island communities. This has included making sure vacancies are made visible to as wide a range of potentially interested candidates as possible, making clear that the required knowledge and skills can be gained in a variety of ways. Adding to this, on every occasion, regardless of what other skills may be required, applicants are also asked to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of how lifeline services affect our island communities.

I can confirm that progress is being made. Recent campaigns have resulted in David Beaton, Murdo MacLennan and Jamie Manson being appointed to the Boards of David MacBrayne Ltd, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd and Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. These individuals have successfully demonstrated that they either have a lived experience or have a knowledge and understanding of how lifeline services

affect our island communities. It is encouraging to see that these Boards now include individuals who can represent the views and the needs of our island communities.

Ministers are clear that Board appointments must be based on the experience and abilities of each candidate and reflect the outcome of an open and fair recruitment process. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport has been clear to officials that more needs to be done to attract and appoint island residents to our Boards. She is also clear that moving forward any new general Board appointments, as opposed to appointments and re-appointments for specialist roles, will have a stronger focus on appointing island residents who can demonstrate that they have the required skills, knowledge and experience to satisfy the criterion for that particular Board position.