

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.