

Shona Barton  
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Our ref: 201900009429  
16 January 2020

Dear Shona,

Thank you for your correspondence of 03 December 2019 regarding my attendance at the Argyll, Islands Strategic Group on 29th August 2019 on Islay.

In terms of key working housing I am aware that in Moray council area they have an allocations policy which offers key workers points to eligible applicants. In determining eligibility for these points, the Council assesses whether the applicant will provide skills that are not available locally. The Council also operate a relocation scheme which provides financial assistance to attract staff who have specialist skills or who are needed to address local skills shortages. The scheme specifically prioritises teaching staff taking up 'hard to fill' posts. Argyll and Bute Council may wish to contact Moray colleagues to hear more about how their policy operates.

You will be aware the National Islands Plan was launched on the 27 December, which is a historic moment for our islands and we hope it reflects a Fair, Integrated, Green and Inclusive Plan. On all of these four aspects, Scotland is already providing global leadership and its island policy builds and adds to this. However, the National Islands Plan is just the start and we are now moving forward to develop an ambitious implementation route map that will include clear actions and indicators to explain how we will deliver on the commitments present in each of the Plan's 13 strategic objectives.

The National Islands Plan is a Scottish Government Plan. However, for it to deliver on improved outcomes for island communities, SG will continue to work closely with local authorities (and other relevant stakeholders) in the implementation of the National Islands Plan. We have started work on the development of an implementation route map which is being co-created with island communities and stakeholders and which will set out the specific actions and timescales for each of the commitments within the Plan.

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In terms of possible 'education' housing on Jura, can I draw you two commitments under Strategic Objective 4 within the National Islands Plan which we hope will improve the situation:

- Ensure that the regulation of short-term lets takes account of the unique circumstances of island communities and make special provision for them where required.
- Explore how the rural and island housing fund might be adapted in the future to expand the range of options to support housing development in remote and island communities.

Regarding the Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs) my officials are currently developing the guidance and templates for this provision of the Act. We received 414 responses to the online consultation on the National Islands Plan and Island Communities Impact Assessments. Respondents highlighted that the ICIA needs to act as a 'backstop' to ensure that island communities are not unfairly disadvantaged. Overall the main objectives of the ICIAs, as submitted by the respondents, will be:

- To consider the uniqueness of each island – no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- To ensure benefit for island communities.
- To ensure transparency and accountability.

Based on the responses received during the consultation policy instructions are being drafted and officials are working together to finalise an illustrative timetable. Ideally, the regulations will come into force in early 2020. My officials within the Islands Team will continue to liaise closely with local authorities, island communities and relevant stakeholders to ensure that the ICIA work is developed in a fully collaborative manner.

In the meantime, although the requirement to carry out an ICIA has not yet been formally commenced, the expectation is that, where possible Scottish Government will continue to operate in the spirit of the Act and taking island issues into account when developing or reviewing policies, strategies or services.

I note your comments regarding freight capacity issues on ferries, and can confirm that currently Transport Scotland are working with CalMac and CMAL on the Islay vessel project which is considering the ability to operate freight-only overnight sailings. There are a range of issues to be assessed including additional operating costs, revenues and wider benefits, crewing and crew accommodation, timetabling and other operational implications within the design of the vessel. The steering group meets regularly and will consult with council representatives, communities, businesses and the local ferry committee on the vessel design in the coming months.

The design of the new Islay vessel is 'based on' the MV Finlaggan as a starting point in terms of vessel dimensions, which the Islay Steering Group conveyed at the public meeting in August 2019. The detailed design work currently being undertaken by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd (CMAL), the steering group and the naval architects is looking to improve on the MV Finlaggan vessel design which includes carrying capacity, deadweight, speed/power, fuel consumption, fuel type, emissions, and freight taking account of future demand, as well as passenger comfort. In addition, the group are aware of the proposed freight vessel from Western Ferries and are taking cognisance of this.

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CMAL and the steering group are meeting with the naval architects in January 2020 and a vessel design report is expected shortly thereafter. Public information events on the Islay vessel project are expected to take place in February 2020.

*Kind regards*



**PAUL WHEELHOUSE**

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