Orkney
Community
Planning
Partnership

Orkney Matters Two

Public consultation

May – October 2024

Contents

Artwork produced as part of the Orkney Matters Two Creative Collaborations art project.

Introduction

Orkney Matters Two (OM2) follows on from the successful Orkney Matters project held in October 2021 – March 2022, which involved different community planning partners and was led by the council. This original Orkney Matters was conducted by survey, followed up by meetings in each community area. The goal of OM2 was to bring the conversation to the community, so instead of mainly relying on a survey form (a necessity when Covid was still a very significant threat), the emphasis was on meetings in each parish. This was a single listening exercise by community planning partners, reducing the need for multiple community consultations.

From May to October 2024, twenty Orkney Matters meetings were held – eighteen in-person, and two online.

A "World Café" approach was adopted, with conversations around particular themes happening at tables of 4-8 people.

Each meeting discussed five predetermined topics: Transportation, Health, Housing, the Cost of Living Crisis, and Digital Connectivity. The first three topics were chosen as they were frequently discussed at the previous Orkney Matters project. The other two topics were chosen as they were considered to be increasingly relevant to Orcadians. An open forum at the end of each meeting allowed for additional discussions on whatever issues the community thought were important.

The meetings were arranged in collaboration with community councils, development trusts, and community associations, and thanks are due for everyone who helped host them.

To recognise and protect the unique perspective of ferry-linked isles residents, this report has separated the responses from Mainland residents and Isles residents. Both Mainland and Isles sections have been broken down into response by theme, with an open forum section at the end. At the top of each theme, there is an executive summary in a coloured box, which will give you the headlines from any theme.

This report represents the perceptions and opinions of the community. It does not censor or verified any viewpoints.

Turnout

Mainland and road-linked isles:

- Nine meetings were held for Mainland residents, eight in-person and one online.
- A total of 57 residents attended, an average attendance of seven resident per meeting (0.3% of the population).
- Harray and Sandwick had the lowest attendance with only two members of the public attending.

Ferry-linked Isles:

- Eleven meetings were held for Isles residents, ten in person and one online.
- A total of 101 residents attended an average of ten residents per meeting (3.7% of the population).
- This is significant when taking account of the low population on the isles – for example, nine people attended the Flotta meeting which accounts for one in eight residents.

In summary, the 'town hall meeting' approach worked well on the isles and less well on the Mainland.

There was greater engagement with the OM2 Creative Collaborations art project, which is the subject of a companion report to this one.

Transport - Mainland

Concerns include road safety and speeding, public transport and bus services, infrastructure and maintenance, the impact of tourism and the lack of safe cycling and walking paths. The responses also highlight the reliance on ferry services and the need for reliable and frequent sailings.

Road Safety and Speeding

Rural communities such as Sandwick, Firth and Stenness, and Orphir raised concerns about speeding and road safety. Issues include high-speed traffic, lack of safe walking paths, and the need for better speed enforcement measures. For example, in Sandwick, speeding on the main road with a 50mph limit makes it unsafe for pedestrians. Similarly, in Orphir, speeding drivers pose a risk to both older and younger walkers.

Public Transport and Bus Services

Issues with bus services include timetabling, route coverage, and the quality of buses. Firth and Stenness reported worsened timetabling despite improved bus quality. In Holm, there are gaps in the bus schedule, particularly in the afternoon. Flexible community-based transport solutions, like Dial-a-Bus services, were discussed in Evie and Rendall.

Infrastructure and Maintenance

Poor road conditions, including potholes and flooding, were common concerns. Holm, Evie and Rendall emphasized the need for regular maintenance and better communication from the Roads team. In Stromness, unadopted roads and parking issues were highlighted.

Tourism Impact

The influx of tourists during the season, creates challenges for local residents. Issues include overcrowded buses, and poor use of passing places. In Firth and Stenness, tourists using the X1 bus service have made it difficult for locals to get on the bus.

Cycling and Walking Paths

The lack of safe cycling and walking paths was a recurring theme. Communities like Stenness and Holm expressed the need for dedicated cycle paths and safer walking routes. In Tankerness and Deerness, the presence of walkers, cyclists, and horse riders on the roads highlighted the need for respectful road use and better signage.

Ferry Services

Reliance on ferry services and the need for reliable and frequent sailings were mentioned by several communities. Sandwick emphasized the importance of a lifeline ferry service (to mainland Scotland), while Stromness emphasised maintaining the lifeline ferry service despite private services.

Health and care - Mainland

> Respondents discussed the challenges facing communities in accessing health care services, particularly due to the aging population and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health and wellbeing are highlighted as critical issues, with communities recognising the need for better support systems and services. Social care and support are also emphasised, with concerns about the shortage of care staff and increasing reliance on private and charitable organisations. Additionally, the importance of community engagement and activities in promoting health and wellbeing was underscored, with a call for more community events and involvement.

Access to Healthcare Services

Healthcare access is a widespread concern, amplified by the aging population and the impact of COVID-19. Communities like Holm have difficulties accessing mental health services and need more home carers. Hope and Burray are anxious about the sustainability of local doctors and the impact of retiring doctors. Tankerness and Deerness mentioned the lack of dental services and challenges older residents face in accessing transport.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental health is a significant concern, with better support systems and services needed. The pandemic has exacerbated mental health challenges, making it essential to address these concerns promptly. Holm community members discussed the stigma around mental health and the need for better services.

Social Care and Support

Social care and support are vital, especially for the elderly and vulnerable populations. The shortage of care staff and increasing reliance on private and charitable organizations highlight the need for a more robust social care system. Holm and Orphir mentioned the shortage of care staff and the difficulties in organizing and coordinating care at home. There were concerns about the reliance on private healthcare and charities to fill in the gaps.

Community Engagement and Activities

Community engagement and activities play a crucial role in promoting health and wellbeing. The decline in social events due to the pandemic has affected community cohesion.

Several communities emphasized the importance of community engagement and activities for overall health and wellbeing. Holm community members noted the positive impact of social interactions and the need for more community events.

Healthcare Infrastructure and Resources
Adequate healthcare infrastructure and resources are essential. Communities like Kirkwall, Tankerness and Deerness discussed issues with accessing dental services and the reliance on locum doctors. This may indicate a need for investment in healthcare facilities and personnel.

Cost of living - Mainland

The responses from various communities in Orkney reveal a multifaceted impact of the cost of living crisis. Economic strain is a common thread, with rising costs affecting everything from daily necessities to housing. Energy and fuel poverty are particularly pressing issues, despite local energy production. The need for community support services is evident, though there is a reluctance to use them due to stigma. Overall, these themes illustrate the widespread and varied challenges faced by residents, necessitating both individual adjustments and broader systemic solutions.

Economic Strain and Rising Costs
Communities like Firth and Stenness, Holm, and Kirkwall highlighted increasing costs of everyday items and services, with local hotel prices rising and wages not keeping up with increases. This reflects the widespread economic pressure felt by households, leading to a need for economizing and difficult spending decisions.

Impact on Daily Life and Choices
Communities like Hope and Burray and Sandwick discussed how the cost of living crisis affects daily life, including the availability and cost of childcare, and the necessity to shop around for better prices. Adjustments are being made, such as changing shopping habits and managing fuel costs.

Energy and Fuel Poverty
Residents in Holm and Kirkwall are struggling with high energy and fuel costs, despite Orkney generating more electricity than needed. This highlights the disparity between local energy production and community benefits.

Community Support and Services
The importance of community support services was noted, particularly in Holm and Kirkwall. Foodbanks are well-used but stigmatised, making people reluctant to seek help.

Housing and Property Costs
In Tankerness and Deerness, rising costs of building and maintaining property were discussed, highlighting the broader impact on housing affordability and the financial burden of property upkeep.

Digital connectivity - Mainland

Many communities reported issues with poor mobile signals and unreliable broadband, but there are positive developments such as the installation of a 4G mast in Hope and Burray and improved fibre broadband in Stenness. Concerns about digital inclusion and accessibility, particularly for older residents and those in rural areas, were highlighted. The recurring issues of connectivity, coverage, and accessibility suggest a need for targeted interventions and community engagement to address these challenges.

Connectivity Issues and Improvements

Many communities reported connectivity issues, such as poor mobile signals and unreliable broadband. Kirkwall residents mentioned that cruise ships use up all the connectivity, and issues with the Orkney Ferries booking system. Holm residents faced issues with Openreach cancelling visits and service unavailability. However, there were improvements, such as the installation of a 4G mast in Hope and Burray and improved fibre broadband in Stenness.

Mobile Signal and Broadband Coverage

Several communities need better mobile signal and broadband coverage. Tankerness and Deerness residents expressed concerns about the lack of signal, especially in emergency situations. Orphir residents mentioned long waits for broadband service after changing suppliers. Holm residents raised concerns about the transfer from copper to fibre and the impact on emergency alarms.

Digital Inclusion and Accessibility

Digital inclusion and accessibility are a concern, particularly for older residents and those in rural areas. Holm residents suggested more multimedia marketing as not everyone uses the internet. Orphir residents suggested that web designers and communication teams should work with everyday users to improve accessibility.

Community Involvement and Awareness

Communities emphasised the need for community involvement and raising awareness of connectivity issues. Firth and Stenness residents suggested that community councils address the Long Wave Service for electricity meters. Holm residents also discussed the need for a general awareness-raising campaign about the transfer to fibre.

Positive Experiences

Despite challenges, positive experiences were reported. Stromness residents mentioned their digital connectivity, and Sandwick residents were satisfied with theirs. Improved broadband speeds enabled some residents to work from home, highlighting the importance of a good connection.

Housing and planning - Mainland

Housing availability and affordability emerged as a primary concern, affecting various aspects of community life. There is a notable gap in mid-market rental properties, making it difficult for young people leaving home. Planning and development challenges were frequently mentioned, with strict building regulations seen as barriers to development and modernisation. Additionally, the need for improved infrastructure and services, such as shops and post offices, and concerns about environmental impacts of development projects are emphasised.

Housing Availability and Affordability:
Communities like Firth and Stenness, Holm, Orphir, Tankerness and Deerness, and Kirkwall, expressed concerns about the lack of affordable housing. The gap in mid-market rental and rising property prices due to inwards migration make it difficult for local young people to access housing.

Planning and Development Challenges
Orphir and Stromness residents have faced difficulties in obtaining planning permission for new builds and modifications, which can hinder development and modernisation efforts.

Infrastructure and Services
Orphir and Holm mentioned the lack of essential services such as shops and post offices, and concerns about road conditions and traffic management in Stenness.

Community and Social Issues
Housing shortages affect community cohesion and the availability of social care. Holm residents noted that new housing developments have not integrated well into the community, and poverty and energy efficiency persist in Stenness and Kirkwall.

Environmental and Conservation Concerns
Firth and Stenness residents expressed concerns about the impact of SSEN's cable laying and substation build on the local environment. Better flood protection measures were a concern in Holm and Kirkwall.

Transport - Isles

Isles residents' responses reveal a range of common themes, including accessibility, booking challenges, cost, service frequency, infrastructure, and unique community needs. These themes highlight the critical role of transport in ensuring access to essential services and opportunities for residents of Orkney's islands. Addressing these issues through improved infrastructure, more frequent and reliable services, and affordable travel options will be key to enhancing the quality of life for these communities.

Accessibility and Capacity Issues

Many communities, such as Stronsay, Papa Westray, and North Ronaldsay, highlighted the lack of accessible transport options, including difficulties for people with mobility issues to use ferries and planes. Capacity issues were a concern, with many communities noting that there are not enough seats on planes or space on ferries, especially during peak time.

Booking and Scheduling Challenges

Several communities, including Stronsay, Papa Westray, and Sanday, mentioned problems with the current booking systems for planes and ferries, such as the inability to book multiple flights at once, and the need for an integrated booking system for planes and ferries.

Cost and Affordability

The high cost of transport was a recurring theme. Communities like Stronsay, Flotta, and Hoy expressed concerns about the expense of ferry and plane tickets, suggesting discounted or subsidised travel for residents.

Service Frequency and Reliability

Many responses, including those from Eday, Papa Westray, North Ronaldsay, Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre emphasized the need for more frequent and reliable transport services, including calls for daily flights and additional ferry sailings.

Infrastructure and Maintenance

Communities such as Graemsay and Hoy pointed out the need for better infrastructure and maintenance of transport facilities, including road conditions, piers, the ageing ferry fleet, and the need for more EV charging points. Eday residents mentioned issues with livestock transportation and the safety of livestock pens at the pier.

Community-Specific Needs

Each community had unique needs. For example, Eday mentioned the potential for a secondary link to Sanday to support families and tradespeople, while Rousay highlighted the benefits of electric bikes and community e-cars.

Health and Care - Isles

Communities expressed the need for improved healthcare access, mental health support, more carers, and better infrastructure. Issues include irregular GP visits, social isolation, reliance on neighbours for transport, and housing shortages. Positive feedback highlighted nurse practitioners and pharmacy services. Concerns also included a lack of first responder support and volunteer training.

Access to Healthcare Services

Many communities, such as Flotta, Graemsay, and North Ronaldsay, highlighted challenges in accessing healthcare services. Issues include irregular GP visits, difficulty in getting dental and eye appointments, and the need for better scheduling around transportation options. Transportation to healthcare appointments is a recurring theme. Residents in communities like Flotta and Eday talked about the reliance on neighbours or community members for transport and the challenges posed by ferry schedules.

Mental Health and Social Isolation

Several communities, including Flotta and Papa Westray, reported issues related to mental health and social isolation. The lack of engagement in social events and the absence of mental health support services is significant as they affect the overall well-being of the residents. Flotta and Shapinsay mentioned various social events and programs aimed at reducing isolation and promoting well-being.

Positive Aspects of Local Healthcare

Despite the challenges, there are positive aspects noted by the communities. Flotta and Shapinsay praised the local nurse practitioners and the home delivery pharmacy service.

Need for More Carers and Support Services

Communities like North Ronaldsay and Shapinsay emphasized the need for more carers and support services. The shortage of carers and the strain on existing services are significant as they affect the ability of residents to receive adequate care, particularly for the elderly and those with special needs.

First Responders and Emergency Services

The role of first responders and emergency services was a common theme. Communities such as Graemsay, Stronsay and Papa Westray expressed concerns about the lack of support and training for volunteer responders.

Housing and Infrastructure

Housing and infrastructure issues were raised by communities like Hoy and Orphir. The lack of suitable housing for carers and the elderly is significant as it affects the ability to provide continuous care and support for residents.

Cost of living - Isles

> **The common thread is the significant impact of rising costs on daily life, with transport and energy being the most pressing issues. Respondents saw these price increases as disproportionately affecting those on the ferry linked isles, as they have additional costs associated with their rurality. Each community has unique challenges, but they all share a need for more affordable solutions and better support.**

Transport Costs

Increased haulage costs, including livestock transport, in Eday, Graemsay, and Stronsay have made goods and services more expensive than on the mainland, resulting in more frequent trips to town and less local shopping. The increased cost of transporting goods has had a direct impact on the consumer, with Graemsay reporting a £1.20 charge to put anything on the boat, and Eday £5.50.

Flotta and Shapinsay reported expensive ferry fares, with bulk tickets being unaffordable for many and residents suggesting that ferries should be treated like buses with free fares for children and those over 60.

Energy Costs

Many isles residents reported increased energy costs compared to the Mainland, including Papa Westray, Flotta, Shapinsay and Graemsay, although oil delivery is subsidised.

On Hoy, residents report that fuel poverty is exacerbated by the high cost of retrofitting homes. Shapinsay suggested to use locally generated electricity to support residents.

Public Services and Infrastructure

Some residents reported a desire for better cost-efficiency measures from OIC, with some suggesting pay cuts for senior managers and questioning spending on unnecessary projects. Flotta residents suggested that the Orkney Islands Council should support local people to progress into higher-level jobs and reduce reliance on external recruitment.

Other residents reported general public service and infrastructure issues. North Ronaldsay is concerned about the lack of safe drinking water and nursery provision, Graemsay reported challenges in spreading grit due to a lack of insurance, and Shapinsay residents want more recycling options and cheaper ferry fares.

Community and Social Issues

The increased cost of living is affecting community cohesion on the isles. North Ronaldsay reports difficulty in attracting and retaining young families to the island due to lack of outdoor play equipment and childcare facilities. Papa Westray was similarly worried about the impact of rising costs on families with children.

On Shapinsay, the shop is a good place to meet people, but residents find shopping on the island to be unaffordable.

Digital connectivity - Isles

The responses from various communities highlight the ongoing challenges and improvements in digital connectivity across the islands. While there are significant issues with broadband and mobile connectivity, especially in remote areas, there are also positive developments such as the installation of fibre optic cables and the ability to work remotely. The concerns about digital skills and accessibility, particularly for older residents, underscore the need for targeted support and training. Overall, the feedback reflects a mixed but hopeful outlook on the future of digital connectivity in these communities.

Broadband and Internet Connectivity

The isles residents' responses were varied, but all believed that there was still work to do. Graemsay struggles with outdated broadband equipment, with an upgrade pending for two years due to planning permission delays. Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre reported that their broadband is problematic, with the community being part of the 2% not covered by promised services.

Flotta and Shapinsay residents reported that digital connectivity has not improved since 2021, but Shapinsay residents were positive that there are plans to improve broadband connectivity this year. In comparison, North Ronaldsay and Papa Westray have reported improved digital connectivity, however power cuts in the winter remain a significant issue, as well as continued blackspots. Hoy encounters provider co-ordination issues.

Mobile Connectivity

Shapinsay, Flotta, Stronsay, Papa Westray and Hoy reported that overall mobile signal was good, but that there some not-spots on specific areas of the islands. Shapinsay residents rely on landlines as a back-up.

Graemsay and Eday reported good coverage, with 4G or 5G available in some areas.

Digital Skills and Accessibility

Some residents lack digital skills, causing problems with booking ferries and appointments. Stronsay suggested IT skills sessions to help residents adapt to digital changes, and some Shapinsay residents are concerned about the switch from landlines and need help understanding the changes, especially for care alarms.

Positive Developments

Residents of Hoy and Shapinsay reported good digital connectivity, improving quality of life on the isles.

Flotta residents were positive about the new cables laid for fibre, waiting for them to be live.

different career... ? Not in a ship or looking after people.
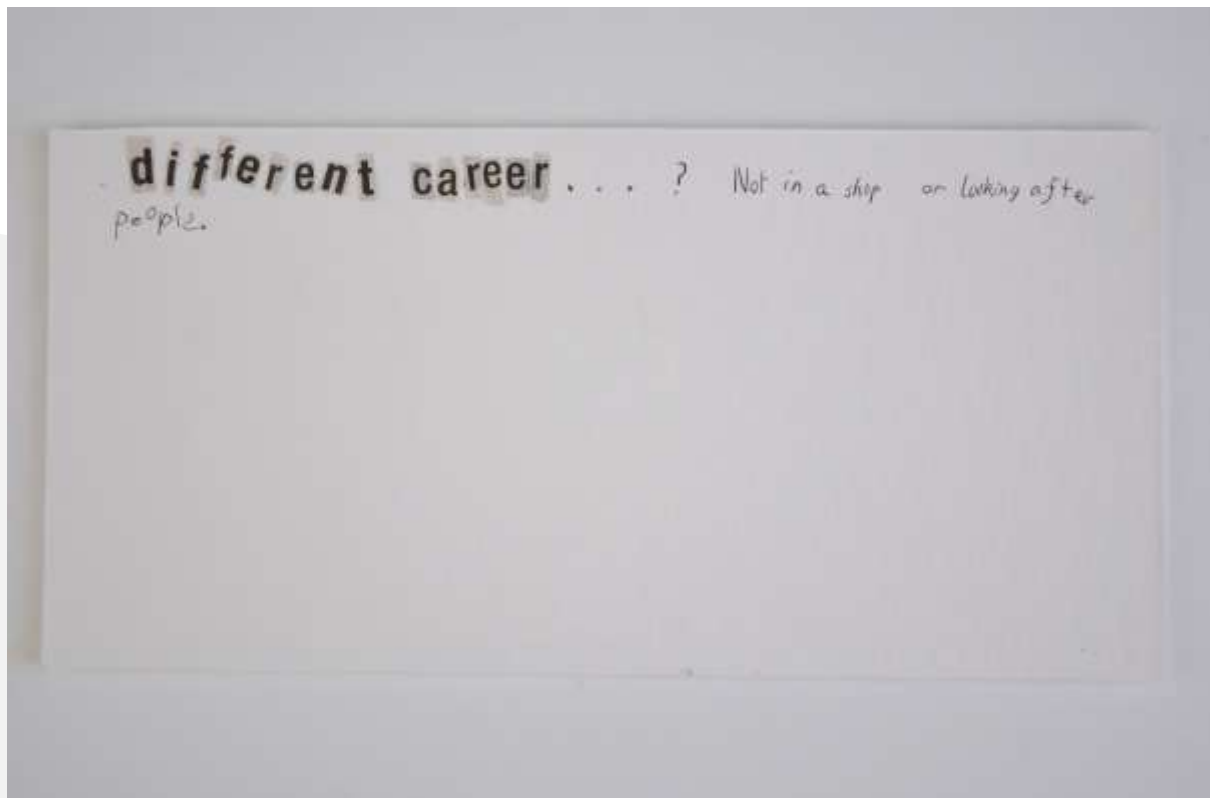
Housing and Planning - Isles

> Housing availability and affordability emerged as a primary concern, affecting various aspects of community life. Planning and development challenges were frequently mentioned, indicating a need for more flexible and supportive planning policies. Infrastructure and services were highlighted as critical for maintaining community wellbeing and supporting growth. Social issues including community cohesion and the burden of social care were also prominent, reflecting the broader impact of housing and planning on residents' lives. Finally, environmental and conservation concerns underscored the importance of sustainable developmental practices.

Housing Availability and Affordability

Many communities expressed concerns about the lack of affordable housing. Hoy faces a severe lack of affordable housing, with young people unable to get housing due to over-inflated prices and poorly maintained existing housing. North Ronaldsay and Eday also highlighted the need for more homes, especially for younger people and those with the skills needed on the island.

Planning and Development Challenges

Several communities mentioned issues with planning permissions and building regulations. Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre residents noted the difficulties in making planning decisions and the impact of regulations set in Edinburgh that don't work for Orkney. Shapinsay noted that they face higher construction and repair costs due to the need to bring tradespeople from Kirkwall.

Infrastructure and Services

The need for improved infrastructure and services was a common theme. Flotta lacks a shop, which affects the community's daily needs. Stronsay and Shapinsay highlighted the challenges of getting tradespeople and the high costs associated with travel and waiting times. Hoy mentioned the centralised allocation process for social housing as a challenge for local people.

Community and Social Issues

Many responses touched on social issues, such as the impact of housing shortages on community cohesion and the availability of social care. Flotta emphasized the importance of housing for people who were brought up on the island to stay and

support elderly parents, reducing the burden on social care. Hoy discussed the outward migration of young people due to the lack of housing.

Environmental and Conservation Concerns
Environmental issues were also raised, particularly in relation to development projects. Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre residents questioned the need for a biodiversity plan and the reinstatement of a bog on top of a hill, highlighting that regulations set in Edinburgh don't always work for Orkney.

Open Forum - Isles and Mainland

> **On the Mainland, the responses to this section were more varied than on the isles. However, common themes can be identified – concern about a Kirkwall-centric Council, a wish for a reduction in manager headcount, and a desire for clear communication.**
>
> **On the isles, themes range from improving local facilities and services, to addressing transportation and environmental issues. The responses highlight the importance of community cohesion, local empowerment, and sustainable development in enhancing the quality of life for residents.**

The Mainland calls for transparency and budget allocation
Holm raised questions about how OIC should spend its budget, with suggestions of grants for redundant properties, cycle paths, and reducing bureaucratic processes – including reducing manger headcount. Calls were made for levelling up money to be distributed more equitably, reaching areas outside of Kirkwall. They also emphasised the need for clear communication about budget spending and other measures. There was a desire for more frequent updates on the progress of actions and achievements, with suggestions to link updates to specific milestones.

Both the Mainland and the Isles discussed environmental infrastructure
Holm, Shapinsay, Hope and Burray, and Eday residents wanted more opportunities for recycling and composting, including increasing accessibility with better transport options to recycling centres. Eday was particularly concerned about the removal of sea farm waste.

The Mainland calls for better tourism management
Concerns about the impact of campervans and cruise liners on the island, led to suggestions for better tourism management and safety.

Isles residents need more community spaces and engagement
Eday, Flotta, Papa Westray, Rousay, Egislay, and Wyre residents expressed the need for more public facilities – neutral spaces for young people, fitness facilities, better postal and banking services.

Graemsay, Hoy, Flotta and Shapinsay emphasises the need for community cohesion and volunteer recruitment. Youth clubs, activities for children, and community empowerment were important to these communities.

Isles residents are worried about education and youth services.
Eday and Shapinsay are worried about the stability of teaching staff, with Shapinsay in particular worried about the declining school roll resulting in fewer teachers.
Hoy and Papa Westray residents are concerned about the lack of school trips, including outdoor education programs, which are opportunities for children to socialise.