

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday
26 October 2022

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

Note by the Clerk

Lodged on	24 March 2021
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

Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [4 May 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to invite the Minister of Transport to provide evidence at a future meeting. At its meeting of 26 October the Committee will take evidence from Jenny Gilruth MSP, 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. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

4. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
5. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

Action

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

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe A

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 4 May 2022

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

When we considered the petition on 2 February, we agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands. I am pleased to say that, since that meeting, we have received a response from the Minister for Transport that outlines the process for agreeing who should sit on the selection panel for each public body recruitment exercise. The minister notes that the current process involves a selection panel making recommendations to the minister on all aspects of the recruitment exercise, including what the key criteria for each vacant position should be. The minister therefore indicates that she does not believe that legislative change is required.

Do members have any suggestions? Would we like to hear from the minister and the petitioners to see whether that resolves the issue, or are we satisfied with the minister's response?

Alexander Stewart: I suggest that we take evidence from the minister. That is important because, although the response covers some aspects, more could be teased out.

The Convener: Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.