NATIONAL
COMMUNITY PLANNING
SELF-ASSESSMENT



Shetland National Community Planning Self-Assessment Progress Case Study: Strengthening the Partnership Approach to Tackling Inequalities in Shetland

Shetland Partnership

improvement service

Overview

Shetland Community Planning Partnership (known as The Shetland Partnership) are developing a whole-system approach to tackling inequalities by combining evidence-led decision making, cross-sector collaboration, community participation and action on structural barriers such as transport affordability. The establishment of the Fairer Futures Partnership and the collaborative island-based Minimum Income Standard research provide particularly strong examples of partnership working that could inform practice elsewhere.

Background

Through the National Community Planning Self-Assessment, The Shetland Partnership identified the need to strengthen its understanding of inequalities and improve how progress is evidenced, communicated and acted upon across the partnership. Recognising the unique challenges faced by island communities, partners sought to build a stronger evidence base, improve understanding of the needs of specific communities, and create a more coordinated partnership response to tackling poverty and inequality.

The resulting improvement action focused on understanding the cost of living in island communities, reviewing the impact of transport costs, engaging communities in future planning, developing targeted support for people experiencing disadvantage, and improving communication around progress and challenges.

- **Action for Improvement:** Consider how the partnership can better demonstrate progress in closing the gap around inequalities.



What Was Done?

Building a Stronger Evidence Base on Poverty and Inequality

A significant area of progress has been the partnership's commitment to rerun the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) research in collaboration with other island local authorities, including Orkney, the Western Isles and Argyll and Bute, with support from the Scottish Government Islands Team, Shetland's Housing Association, the Rural & Islands Housing Associations Forum and Public Health Scotland through NHS Shetland. This work aims to provide up-to-date evidence on the cost of achieving an acceptable standard of living in island communities and strengthen understanding of the challenges faced by island residents, creating a stronger shared understanding of poverty and cost-of-living pressures across island communities.

Alongside this, the partnership has drawn on the methodology of Shetland's previous Poverty and Inequality Commission to inform the development of the next Shetland Partnership Plan. The process is designed to broaden participation beyond statutory partners and include community organisations and community voices in shaping future priorities

Understanding Barriers Faced by Island Communities

The Shetland Partnership has also acted to better understand the impact of transport costs and accessibility on inequalities. Following concerns about ferry fare increases, lobbying took place with the Scottish Government regarding fares on the NorthLink service. This contributed to ongoing discussions which resulted in the removal of peak ferry fares for island residents travelling on NorthLink from January 2026.

In addition, ZetTrans, a network partner, introduced a 12-month trial capping adult and child single bus fares at £2, helping to reduce transport costs and improve accessibility for residents. They are also introducinga Friends and Family Fare on the inter-island flights from Fair Isle and Foula.

The partnerships focus on transport affordability highlights the importance of addressing practical barriers that contribute to inequality. Action on ferry, air and bus fares demonstrates how partnerships can influence wider systems impacting communities.



Developing a More Person-Centred Approach

The partnership has used learning from the Person-Centred Shetland Delivery Plan Project to identify opportunities for more targeted support. One outcome of this work was the creation of the Fairer Futures Partnership, bringing together colleagues from health, education, social work, early years and community sectors to develop a more coordinated and person-centred approach to tackling inequalities.

The creation of the Fairer Futures Partnership demonstrates how partners can come together across organisational boundaries to address inequalities in a coordinated way. By bringing together health, education, social work, early years and community sectors, Shetland is working towards a more integrated and person-centred model of support.

Network sessions have been used to share learning between partners, consider emerging evidence and build links with related work, including the Compassionate Shetland Delivery Plan Project. Learning from Fairer Futures is now informing both future Partnership Plan development and Locality Planning activity.

Improving Communication and Awareness

Recognising the importance of communicating both progress and challenges, The Shetland Partnership agreed a partnership-wide Communications Strategy and Plan in March 2025. The strategy introduced regular Partnership Alerts, helping staff across partner organisations understand partnership priorities, delivery plan projects, case studies and supporting data. The introduction of Partnership Alerts and a coordinated communications approach support a stronger shared identity across partners and helps demonstrate collective action rather than organisational activity taking place in isolation.

The partnership publishes an Annual Report and has begun work to refresh locality profiles, with a particular focus on making socio-economic data more accessible and useful in understanding inequalities across communities.



Impact and Challenges

While much of the work remains developmental, the partnership has established stronger foundations for understanding and addressing inequalities. There is now greater focus on evidence gathering, increased collaboration across sectors, improved engagement in strategic planning processes and stronger communication of partnership activity.

Importantly, The Shetland Partnership has moved beyond viewing inequalities as the responsibility of individual services and is developing a more collective, partnership-wide response that combines evidence, engagement, prevention and system-wide collaboration.

The partnership also acknowledged that work to systematically evaluate projects and learn from what is most effective in reducing inequalities has not yet been progressed.



The next steps

The Shetland Partnership plans to:

- Complete the development of the next Shetland Partnership Plan using a broad and participative approach.
- Continue developing the Fairer Futures approach and embed learning within locality planning activity.
- Refresh locality profiles and improve access to socio-economic data.
- Implement the next phase of the Communications Plan.
- Strengthen the partnership's ability to evaluate and learn from interventions aimed at reducing inequalities.

"It was very helpful to get external support and perspective to enable the Management and Leadership Team of the Shetland Partnership to evaluate how they were doing, in order to see where progress had been made, and where attention was required. The discussions helped build the process for the development of the next Shetland Partnership Plan."

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If you would like more information on this approach, please contact:

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