

**Report to Partnership Meeting 2 February 2024**

**PARTNERSHIP**

**SCOTTISH AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT – COST OF LIVING: IMPACT ON RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND**

**Purpose of Report**

To provide Members with a summary of the key transport findings captured in the report by the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee in their report on ‘Cost of Living: Impact on Rural Communities in Scotland’.

**Background**

In response to the recent cost of living rises across the United Kingdom and recognising that rural and island communities already experience higher costs of living compared with urban areas the Scottish Affairs Committee launched an inquiry in December 2022 to examine the impact of the rising costs of living on rural populations across Scotland. We issued a call for written evidence which sought views on:

- the particular challenges facing Scottish rural communities in relation to the cost of living compared with other areas of the UK;
- to what extent recent UK Government cost of living support measures meet the needs of rural populations in Scotland;
- whether UK Government cost of living support could be better tailored to meet the needs of rural communities in Scotland;
- any further steps the UK Government could take to support Scottish rural communities in relation to the cost of living; and
- how effectively the UK and Scottish governments have worked together to coordinate and provide support in relation to the cost of living for the people of Scotland.

The Inquiry concluded with the final report included as the appendix to this report. The report captures 32 written submissions to the inquiry and evidence gathered through five oral evidence sessions between February and September 2023, speaking to academics, charities and UK Government Ministers on issues across three broad themes: energy, food and transport. The HITRANS Chair and Partnership Director were among those invited to give evidence to the Committee on transport issues.

Finally, the Committee visited Arran in September 2023 where they gathered evidence from local businesses operating on the island and held a roundtable session on the cost of living with members of the public.

**Recommendations in Report on Transport**

The following recommendations are included in the report in respect to Transport:

- Ferries are existentially important to island communities, but also create knock-on costs for goods and services. The lack of regular, reliable, affordable and integrated

transport provision—including adequate and reliable bus services - is one of the main barriers to remote rural communities mitigating the impact of the current cost of living crisis. Service disruption further hinders connectivity, preventing the movement of people and goods, therefore affecting communities' cost of living in multiple ways. Active travel options provide limited opportunities to ease transport challenges in remote rural locations. (Paragraph 81)

- Given the continued problems the Scottish Government have faced progressing improvements to vital roads and ferry infrastructure, the Scottish Government should work together with the UK Government and local authorities to improve the provision of transport across rural Scotland. The Scottish Government should look to coordinate the operators of these services more rigorously to ensure that timetables are more integrated and meet the needs of people in these communities. Transport investment turbocharges the UK's net zero ambitions and economic growth, and we welcome the action taken by both Governments to tackle this. The Committee shares the anger and frustration of affected communities by the ongoing failure of the Scottish Government to deliver two lifeline ferries which are so far six years late and £250 million over budget. Both Governments should work together to ensure mistakes are not repeated and that timely and cost-effective delivery of vessels happens in the future. (Paragraph 82)

The full report including detailed information from the evidence sessions is included as Appendix A.

### **Risk Register**

RTS Delivery

Impact – Positive

Comment – The Committee has captured evidence of issues separately captured in HITRANS RTS.

Policy

Impact - Positive

Financial

Impact – Neutral

Equality

Impact – Positive

Comment – The Committee Report offers support to the objective of achieving fairness and just transition for rural and island communities.

### **Recommendation**

1. Members and Advisors are asked to note the report.

**Report by:**

Ranald Robertson

**Designation:**

Partnership Director

**Date:**

24<sup>th</sup> January 2024

**Background Paper:**

**Appendix A – Cost of Living: Impact on rural communities in Scotland**