# Social Security Scotland
# Island Communities Impact Assessment
# Place Project
# Final V1.0

Dignity,
fairness,
respect.

## 1.    Develop a clear understanding of your objective:

### 1.1    What are the objectives of the proposed activity?

As services develop within Social Security Scotland our national property requirements are increasing. The Place Project has been tasked with providing national premises in appropriate locations from which to deliver our client facing Consultation Service and Fraud and Error Resolution Service.

Our objective is to deliver accessible client facing spaces across each of Scotland's 32 local authority areas which is sympathetic to existing arrangements and complements these to provide a joined up service which fully meets our clients' requirements. Our project aims to provide a measurable improvement in the support given to citizens who use our services. In addition, the project will have responsibility for delivery of Social Security Scotland's Travel and Transport requirements to support our staff in carrying out their day to day duties.

### 1.2    How are islands identified for the purpose of the proposed activity?

Social Security Scotland delivers numerous benefits across Scotland. Our approach is one that takes account of the needs of Scotland's diverse communities and this includes island communities.

Island communities have been considered as part of the wider delivery model for Social Security Scotland. Our Local Delivery, Consultation and Interview under Caution Services will be delivered across Scotland by our Local Delivery staff, Health & Social Care staff and Fraud & Error Resolution staff.  We are engaging with island communities to understand how best to deliver our services.

### 1.3    What are the intended impacts/outcomes and how do these potentially differ in the islands?

The Place Project objectives and deliverables focus on providing consistency of service and the same opportunities to access Social Security Scotland's services, regardless of location.  The objectives aim to help eliminate discrimination, advance equality of access to Social Security Scotland's services and foster good relations with our clients, staff and stakeholders. Specific positive impacts will include:

- Choice of access to benefit services directly through Social Security Scotland for our clients
- Equality of access to benefit services, regardless of location
- A positive and supporting work environment for our clients and staff
- Sustainable travel & transport network for our staff to facilitate delivery of business as usual activities

These positive impacts should be felt by islands communities. However, we are aware there are issues such as digital inclusion, transport challenges and accessibility that will challenge how we implement our objectives and deliverables.

### 1.4 Is the proposed activity new?

This is a new delivery service.

## 2. Gather your data and identify your stakeholders:

### 2.1 What data is available about the current situation in the islands?

Overall Scotland had 93 inhabited islands with a total population of 103,700 - 2% of Scotland's population as per 2011 census.

The range of data that has guided our assessment includes:
- Census 2011
- Scottish Household Survey Annual report 2019
- ONS Information
- Poverty in Rural Scotland : evidence review report
- The National Plan for Scotland's Islands report
- Workshops held with third sector stakeholders based in island, rural or remote community settings across a variety of organisations, including local health authorities, housing associations and local authorities.
- Workshops with internal Social Security Scotland staff with direct experiences of living and/or working in an Island, rural or remote community setting

### 2.2 How does any existing data differ between islands?

The large data sets examined are based on Local Authority area and not always specific to Islands communities, therefore we do need to be cautious on how we approach the results. We have however consulted with our people based on island, rural and remote communities to understand the impacts and have reviewed a number of island specific research reports.

### 2.3 Are there any existing design features or mitigations in place?

The Place Project will deliver spaces that provide clients with the opportunity to seek a face to face appointment to complete a Consultation appointment. Where this isn't suitable for the client, or is unavailable for other reasons then a number of other options are available including; digital access, telephone access and home visits.

Interviews under Caution will take place face to face in a suitable location when the need arises.

## 3. Consultation:

### 3.1 Who do you need to consult with?

We consulted with clients, our people and stakeholders.

We organised a series of workshops with clients and stakeholders from island, rural and remote communities across various sectors and organisations to gain input and evidence to inform the assessment. To ensure a more comprehensive set of results was collated we also issued questionnaires to those clients and stakeholders who were unable to attend an event.

We also consulted with internal Social Security Scotland staff based throughout Scotland, and with lived and/or working experience of island, rural or remote communities, to understand both our clients' and our people's views.

### 3.2    How will you carry out your consultation and in what timescales?

Our consultation was carried out in three stages.

Stage 1 – We reviewed objectives and deliverables from the project and analysed evidence already available, including the Place Project Equality Impact Assessment and Experience Panel data. At this point very limited islands evidence was collected.

Stage 2 - Between April 2022 and June 2022, we held a series of workshops and issued questionnaires to stakeholders who wanted to contribute but couldn't attend a session.

Stage 3 – The formal island impact assessment process was undertaken at stage 3.

### 3.3    What questions will you ask when considering how to address island realities?

When designing the workshops and questionnaires we considered whether the questions asked at island events needed to differ, however in consultation with our people based on the islands, it was agreed the format was suitable.

We asked:

- Are you aware of Social Security Scotland and the services it offers and delivers?

- What are the potential barriers within your island/rural/remote community to accessing services delivered by Social Security Scotland i.e. digital connectivity, transport links etc.

- Looking at our desired outcomes, do you think they are sufficiently focused on making practical improvements and on addressing inequality within your island/rural/remote community?

- Thinking about face to face service delivery - what would "best" look like for Social Security Scotland?

- How will we know we have been successful in delivering this "best" service?

At each workshop, and within each questionnaire, we also wanted to explore any particular impacts, positive and negative, on the protected characteristics within

island, rural and remote communities. These characteristics are defined as part of the Equality Impact Assessment legislation. Social Security Scotland also considers Care Experience as a protected characteristic.

We asked;

- Might the deliverables of the project impact differently on people with protected characteristics?

- Are there barriers/potential barriers – physical or attitudinal - that could hinder people with protected characteristics access to or participation in this service/place?

As part of the discussion at events we did focus on whether there were any island impacts that differed from the mainland. This drew out a number of issues, which, while not impacting the overall direction of our strategic approach, have been captured and shared across the organisation.

### 3.4    What information has already been gathered through consultations and what concerns have been raised by island communities?

To support the implementation of locations to support delivery of Social Security Scotland's services, the Place Project completed an Island Impact Screening, held stakeholder workshops and issued questionnaires to those stakeholders who couldn't attend but wanted to give their views. We have reviewed these to identify the evidence/impact of issues raised. The main issues identified were:

- Accessibility, frequency, cost and choice of transport.
- Cost of living within island, rural and remote communities.
- Use, availability and accessibility of technology
- Client perception, positive and negative, of being associated with Social Security Scotland.
- Awareness of Social Security Scotland and entitlement to benefits.

3.5    Is your consultation robust and meaningful and sufficient to comply with the Section 7 duty? (Section 7 states that a Relevant Authority must have regard to island communities in carrying out its functions).

Yes

## 4.    Assessment:

### 4.1    Transport

### 4.1.1  Evidence Review

At the Island Community Impact Assessment workshops it was noted that travel, particularly to the islands, is significantly adversely affected by the availability and reliability of the ferry services which serve Scotland's islands.  This peaks during the summer months due to increased numbers of holiday makers visiting the islands and this having a residual negative impact on residents' ability to travel to and from the mainland.

Public transport is generally deemed as cumbersome, infrequent and expensive. For example participants at the workshops described areas within Orkney that have one available bus per day and feeder buses sometimes only run once a week. Access to good public transport options is limited and island residents have a higher reliance on private cars for travel.  This means access to essential services is generally more expensive and takes more time

At the workshops participants spoke about "Land locked islands".  These are described as dispersed communities so remote from others that the challenges and issues they face are consistent with those experienced by island communities. Residents within these communities often have to travel much further to reach essential services, for example it is not uncommon to travel over 100 miles for a supermarket visit.  Public transport options are often limited and residents rely on private vehicles for almost all travel.

The Scottish Household Survey shows a higher level of dissatisfaction with public transport across the islands, rural and remote communities compared to urban areas.

| | Percentage of people very or fairly satisfied with the quality of public transport by Urban Rural Classification | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Adults** | **Large urban areas** | **Other urban areas** | **Accessible small towns** | **Remote small towns** | **Accessible rural** | **Remote rural** | **Scotland** |
| **Public Transport** | 77 | 71 | 60 | 60 | 49 | 48 | 68 |

As can be seen in the table below, adults in remote rural (75%) and accessible rural areas (82%) are more likely to drive to their place of work or education than adults in the rest of Scotland (60%).

**How adults usually travel to work/education by geographic area, 2019**

|  | Remote Rural | Accessible Rural | Rest of Scotland |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Walking** | 14% | 6% | 13% |
| **Driver of a car or van** | 75% | 82% | 60% |
| **Passenger in a car or van** | 3% | 4% | 5% |
| **Bicycle** | 1% | 1% | 3% |
| **Bus (ordinary or works)** | 3% | 2% | 11% |
| **Rail** | 1% | 4% | 6% |
| **Other** | 2% | 2% | 2% |

Source: Scottish Household Survey 2019, Scottish Government (2021b)

4.1.2 Impact

In summary, the impact of accessibility, availability, reliability, cost and options pertaining to travel present considerable barriers to residents of island, rural and remote communities in accessing services. Island communities are clearly disadvantaged when it comes to accessing reliable and affordable public transport.

To mitigate against any barriers clients face accessing our services, the place project aims to provide suitable accommodation for face to face appointments with partner organisations within well populated community areas and within easy access of public transport, with public parking facilities available, where possible. Our staff will work with clients to define most suitable appointment times at a choice of venues that suit their needs.

Social Security Scotland will also provide a variety of options for clients to access our services in the way that most suits their needs. If a client cannot travel to face to face appointment, or would rather not do so, then telephone and online appointments are available, as well as the option for a home visit.

This overall approach will provide a positive outcome to island communities. There will be a choice of venues available, within easy reach of public transport, for clients who wish to undertake face to face appointments at a neutral location, whilst further

appropriate options will also provide suitable mitigation against any transport barriers.

## 4.2 Cost of living

### 4.2.1 Evidence

**The Poverty in Rural Scotland Report** estimates that the cost of living is considerably higher in rural Scotland than in urban Scotland. Research has found that the cost of food, clothing, household goods, housing, transport and household fuel bills are higher in rural areas. Households in rural Scotland, therefore, require a higher income to attain the same minimum living standard as those living in urban areas.

It is estimated that the cost of living in rural Scotland is between 15 and 30% higher than urban parts of Scotland and the rest of the UK.  The main areas contributing to a higher cost of living are as follows;

- Weekly food, clothing and household goods costs are higher in the islands and remote rural Scotland, compared to urban areas in the UK.
- Individuals in remote rural areas pay substantially higher prices for home delivery than individuals in urban areas.
- Travel is the greatest source of additional costs for residents of remote rural Scotland and can add over £50 a week to costs for rural households.
- Residents in rural Scotland are more likely than those in the rest of Scotland to spend over £100 per month on fuel for their cars.
- A third of households in remote rural areas are classed as 'extreme fuel poor', compared to only 12% in accessible rural areas and 11% in the rest of Scotland.

**Weekly food costs in different Minimum Income Standard budgets, 2021**

| Urban UK | Remote rural mainland | % difference to urban UK | Island | % difference to urban UK | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Couple + 2** | £112.43 | £117.08 | 4% | £126.70 | 13% |
| **Working age single** | £49.69 | £50.60 | 2% | £52.06 | 5% |
| **Working age couple** | £83.13 | £84.64 | 2% | £87.06 | 5% |
| **Pensioner single** | £47.10 | £48.30 | 3% | £51.97 | 10% |
| **Pensioner couple** | £75.25 | £77.04 | 2% | £79.57 | 6% |

**Weekly travel costs in different MIS budgets, 2021**

| Urban UK | Remote rural mainland | % difference to urban UK | Island | % difference to urban UK | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Couple + 2** | £102.10 | £157.01 | 54% | £130.52 | 28% |
| **Working age single** | £43.30 | £74.73 | 73% | £60.78 | 40% |
| **Working age couple** | £86.65 | £144.78 | 67% | £117.34 | 35% |
| **Pensioner single** | £15.42 | £54.10 | 251% | £43.89 | 185% |
| **Pensioner couple** | £19.16 | £53.84 | 181% | £44.44 | 132% |

**Median return bus fare to essential services**
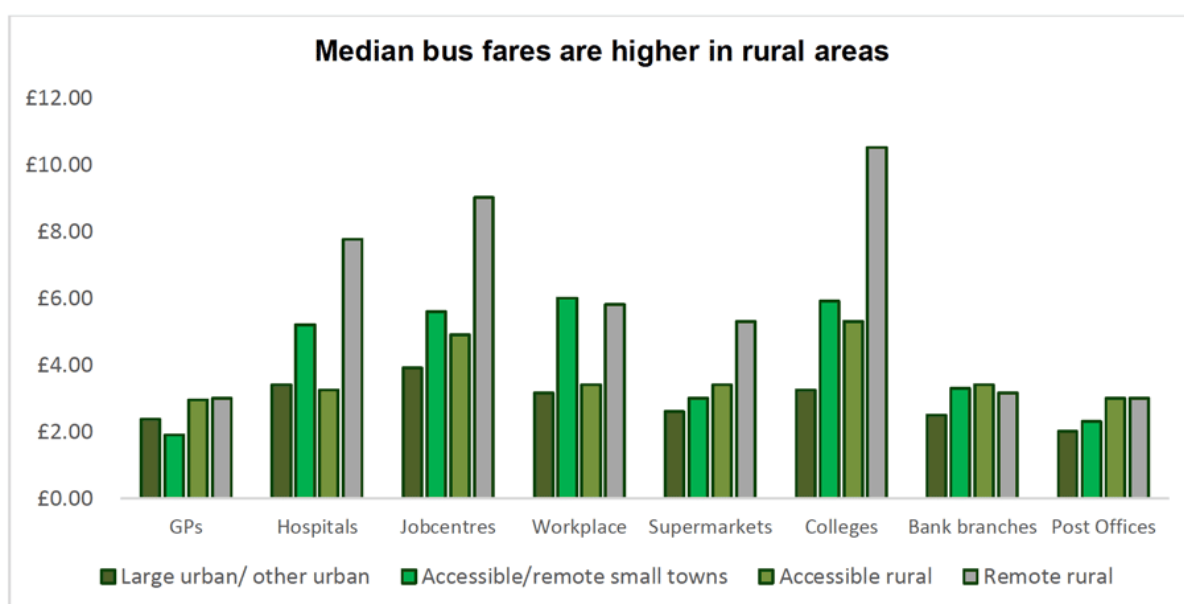


Data suggests that housing in rural Scotland is more expensive than housing in urban areas. Indeed, the average (mean) residential property price was £198,908 in remote rural areas (up by 6% since 2019) and £228,556 in accessible rural areas (up by 9% since 2019), compared to £171,362 in the rest of Scotland (up by 4% since 2019). This does not necessarily indicate that housing is unaffordable. Rather, household incomes may be substantial enough to cover higher housing costs. However, in the islands, for example, only a third of residents agree there is affordable housing locally.

Similarly, according to a recent report - 'Rural Lives- Understanding financial hardship and vulnerability in rural areas' - a lack of affordable housing in rural areas has meant that it remains difficult for financially vulnerable groups to access suitable housing in rural areas. The report argues that rural residential housing stock is often not appropriate for the needs of young people and single person households, and there are issues with the quality of private rented accommodation.

The table below shows that around a third of households in remote rural areas are classed as 'extreme fuel poor'. This compares to only 12% in accessible rural areas and 11% in the rest of Scotland. Between 2018 and 2019, rates of fuel poverty increased in remote rural areas (from 33% to 43%), increasing the gap when comparing overall urban (24%) to overall rural areas (29%). Similarly, levels of extreme fuel poverty increased in remote rural areas (from 23% to 33%), meaning that extreme fuel poverty rates in rural areas (19%) were higher than in urban areas (11%).

Research in Scotland's islands showed that 73% of islanders agreed that their heating bills have increased in the past year, with 13% stating that they could not afford to keep their home warm in the past year. Over a third of island residents also stated that their home sometimes feels uncomfortably cold in the winter, with 8% having had to choose between keeping their home warm and buying food or essential items for themselves and their family.

**A third of households in remote rural areas are classed as extreme fuel poor**
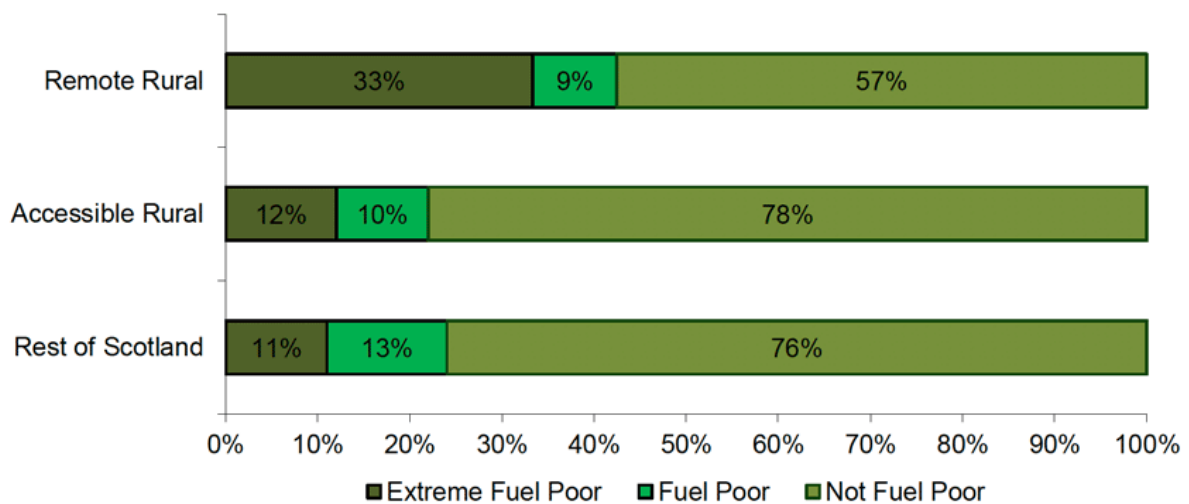


The Island Communities Assessment Impact workshops confirmed that the cost of living across rural, remote and Island communities is considerably higher than urban areas of Scotland.  Average income on the islands is low which creates a barrier to accessing essentials such as fuel, food, travel, household goods etc.  In general, disposable income is greatly reduced meaning a much higher cost of living is apparent.

### 4.2.2 Impact

In summary the cost of living is higher across rural, remote and island communities and this could present a barrier to some citizens having less disposable income and funds to access key services and support where required. This means the financial impact of clients accessing our face to face services in island, rural and remote communities could be greater than experienced by those living in other parts of Scotland.

With the higher overall cost of living, lower incomes and less disposable funds, we recognise there is a likely to be an increased need for residents from island, rural and remote communities to access the services of Social Security Scotland in ways that are accessible and inexpensive. To mitigate against potential barriers such as the cost and unreliability of public transport and increased fuel costs, Social Security Scotland will work to ensure we provide suitable accommodation within well populated community areas and within easy access of public transport.

As stated previously, Social Security Scotland will also provide a variety of options for clients to access our services in the way that best suits their needs. If a client cannot travel to a face to face appointment, or would rather not do so, then telephone and online appointments are available, as well as the option for a home visit. This will mitigate against any unwanted and unnecessary expenses.

Therefore by adopting an approach which deliver services in convenient locations, and also by offering choice as to how our services are accessed, we will provide a positive outcome to island, rural and remote communities.

## 4.3 Technology

### 4.3.1 Evidence

At the Island Communities Impact Assessment workshops the general view was that island, rural and remote communities were very accepting of technology and the benefits this can bring. Citizens within the island communities regularly receive digital appointments in health care settings and are familiar with this approach. However a lack of internet access, mobile phone coverage, unsuitable or outdated equipment and/or a lack of digital skills can often present a barrier to accessing services in this manner too.

General access to broadband and internet services can vary geographically leaving some areas with unreliable coverage and this can vary significantly even across a few miles.

Citizens often access digital services through central points, such as Community Hubs, Health centres, Local Authority premises and 3rd sector organisations rather than their home environment.

The National Plan for Scotland's Islands advises that Scottish Government's Reaching 100 programme is implementing the rollout of broadband services throughout remote, rural and island communities across Scotland, however

connectivity isn't just about broadband and access to 4G and 5G is crucial in ensuring complete coverage across these geographical areas.

The table from The National Plan for Scotland's Islands below shows the percentage of premises within rural, remote and island communities with access to broadband;

| LA | Percentage of premises with access to superfast broadband (2014) | Percentage of premises with access to superfast broadband (2019) | Percentage of premises with access to fibre broadband (2014) | Percentage of premises with access to fibre broadband (2019) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Orkney[1] | 11.1 | 65.7 | 12.0 | 82.5 |
| Shetland[2] | 28.9 | 74.2 | 35.1 | 86.3 |
| Comhairle nan Eilean Siar | 1.3 | 76.5 | 1.6 | 89.8 |
| Argyll and Bute | 0.9 | 83.3 | 0.9 | 92.5 |
| Highland | 20.3 | 80.1 | 21.8 | 93.6 |
| North Ayrshire | 40.9 | 96.3 | 43.3 | 99.3 |

The Scottish Household Annual Survey 2019 provides the following information;

Table 1. Households with internet access by Urban Rural classification

| | Large urban areas | Other urban areas | Accessible small towns | Remote small towns | Accessible rural | Remote rural | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Home internet access** | 88 | 86 | 87 | 92 | 90 | 87 | 88 |
| **No home internet access** | 11 | 14 | 13 | 7 | 10 | 13 | 12 |
| **Don't know** | 0 | - | - | 0 | - | - | 0 |
| **All** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| *Base* | *950* | *1010* | *270* | *180* | *320* | *280* | *2990* |

### 4.3.1 Impact

Digital connectivity across rural, remote and island communities has improved greatly over the years, however there is still work to be done. Access to good quality broadband and 4/5G coverage varies from place to place. However, there are also places where coverage is good and digital/virtual appointments work well with overall support from citizens accessing required services.

We recognise that island, rural and remote communities have, in recent years, become more familiar and comfortable with using technology, especially in care settings. However there are still potential barriers such as access to broadband and mobile phone coverage. Therefore, citizens often access digital services through central points, such as Community Hubs, Health Centres, Local Authority premises and 3rd sector organisations rather than their home environment.

Social Security Scotland aims to provide an inclusive and accessible service by recognising the different ways through which people may access our services. We therefore offer choice through utilising a range of communication channels, such as, post, telephone, face to face and also through a presence in community based spaces which offer online access.

## 4.4 Awareness of Social Security Scotland

### 4.4.1 – Evidence

Social Security Scotland has a national campaign to promote the services offered to ensure maximum uptake of benefits for eligible citizens. At the Island Community Impact Assessment workshops participants had a mixture of views regarding client awareness, and perception, of the services Social Security Scotland provides. Some clients and organisations are very aware of our work, whilst others know very little or nothing at all.

Some participants advised that the approach to advertising isn't as successful on some of the Islands. For example there is little radio signal on Orkney so this channel of communication isn't as successful as it is in other communities across Scotland. Utilising local newspapers, community groups, poster campaigns in local shops and national TV advertising may be more successful.

Other participants felt that the engagement sessions delivered by Local Delivery colleagues across a wide variety of groups was successful in raising awareness of our services and building relationships with stakeholder groups. There are good relationships within communities between our Local delivery staff and local organisations which can help target and signpost clients to the appropriate services or information. Word of mouth is seen as a critical source of giving and receiving information across our island communities.

Local Delivery colleagues also advised that some targeted events aren't as successful as citizens of Islands communities can be reluctant to attend for fear of people in the local community knowing their business. Alternative methods of

communication, through local advertising and partnering with larger events could be more successful.

Some Local delivery colleagues believe that awareness of our work is increasing and more local engagement would further assist with this. It is also important to continue offering choice to clients to ensure that they can access services in the way that makes them feel most comfortable.

There are figures available advising of the number of applications received for the live benefits but no information to gauge the awareness of services, or to gauge the difference between the number of people who are eligible for benefits and those who do apply.

### 4.4.2 Impact

A lack of awareness of our services, and how these are delivered, and / or a lack of awareness of the benefits to which individuals are entitled can manifest into a number of impacts and these impacts can be exacerbated in island, remote and rural areas.

Clients can potentially suffer financial loss and fail to access a benefit due to a lack of understanding or simply through a reluctance to "claim" something to which they are entitled. It is therefore vitally important that we communicate effectively at a local level through partnering with trusted local organisations who know the area and the community in order to remove these barriers.

From a physical presence perspective, those based in smaller communities can be apprehensive that other people locally will be aware of them interacting with us and this could lead to a reluctance to engage. Our drive to position ourselves in familiar local locations will increase our clients' comfort levels and provide a degree of discretion which will encourage interaction and take up of our services.

All Social Security Scotland communications should recognise the different challenges in island, remote and rural areas and the various demographics of those with whom we engage. We should endeavour to make full use of a wide range of channels, local partner organisations and locally based media in order to successfully reach our clients.

## 5. Overall Assessment

The Place Project has been tasked with providing national premises in appropriate locations from which to deliver our client facing Consultation Services and Fraud and Error Resolution Services.

The project aims to deliver locations which are accessible to clients. These will be located with suitable partners within local communities and within easy reach of public transport and other joined up services, where possible. This involved working

extensively with internal and external stakeholder groups to identify suitable partners and locations from which to deliver our services.

The place project completed analysis to determine where our services should be located. We looked at the following;

- Geographical make up of Scotland
- Population per Local Authority area
- Population per Council Ward area
- Number of benefit recipients per Local Authority/Council ward area
- Public transport availability per local authority area
- Location of existing Social security services within each Local Authority area
- Accessibility requirements

Following this internal analysis, the project set key criteria for each location and worked extensively with partners and experts to deliver against this requirement.

In terms of delivery for Island, rural and remote communities the deliverables are consistent with the rest of Scotland. To mitigate against any potential barriers the project will aim to deliver suitable accommodation within each centre of population, within easy distance of suitable public transport options and with suitable partners to minimise negative perception. We will aim to provide accommodation within each of Scotland's council wards in the future. This will provide even more accessibility to our services, particularly to clients within our island communities.

It is clear that island and remote communities are impacted by factors such as availability and reliability of public transport, digital connectivity and access to information. In addition, the increased cost of living in island and rural communities cannot be over stated. Virtually all aspects of life come with an increased cost premium in these communities. The additional costs which will impact us all over the coming months will undoubtedly be felt more greatly in island and remote communities.

It is therefore imperative that we, as an organisation, continue to seek opportunities to enhance our offering to our clients in these areas. Partnering with other organisations in order to reduce transport requirements, being involved in discussions around rural hub opportunities and seeking to play our part in these going forward and continuing to ensure we have adequate staff available across all 32 local authorities will help to provide the required support going forward.

The findings from the Island Community Impact Assessment have influenced the design of the Place Project, directing us to ensure our deliverables are tailored to the

unique make up of Scotland's geography and population, recognising the challenges islands, rural and remote communities face on a daily basis.

The Place Project has recognised the feedback received from the survey that was issued and from the participants who attended the Island Community Impact Assessment workshops.  This has been invaluable in designing a service which recognises the challenges faced by island, rural and remote communities and will guide the future design and delivery of our services.

The overall approach to the Place Project will provide a positive outcome for island, rural and remote communities across Scotland.  Feedback on services will continue to be gathered by Social Security Scotland through formal, and informal, channels with necessary actions planned an implemented as we enhance our services going forward.

## 6      Publishing your island Communities Impact Assessment

6.1     Has the final Island Communities Impact Assessment been signed off by the relevant Deputy Director?

Yes

6.2     Have you presented your Island Communities Impact Assessment in an Easy Read format?

Yes

6.3     Does it need to be presented in Gaelic or any other language?

No

6.4     Where will you publish your Island Communities Impact Assessment and will relevant stakeholders be able to easily access it?

Yes, stakeholders will access this document via the Social Security Scotland Website.

Island Communities Impact Assessment completed by:  Jane Callaghan, Social security Scotland, Place Project Governance & Reporting Lead.
Date completed: 07 October 2022

Island Communities Impact Assessment approved by: James Wallace, Social Security Scotland, Deputy Director Finance & Corporate Services
Date completed: 07 October 2022