



## **TRUSTEES' REPORT DECEMBER 2024 – DECEMBER 2025**

### **Islay Connections : Introduction**

Islay Connections is a charity on the island of Islay which was registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in July 2023.

Islay Connections is led by the needs of the community and seeks to support those using health, mental health, social and support services and bring them together with local providers to improve their wellbeing.

Islay Connections wants to promote and help organise island appropriate local care. We aim to assess the needs of the population, to understand current overall provision on Islay, to make connections between existing voluntary and statutory organisations, to encourage co-operative working, to support the extension of existing services and help with the establishment of new providers.

This is our second Trustees' Annual Report. It continues the narrative of our first Trustees' report and describes our activities during our second 12 months of operation as a charity.

### **Islay Connections : our aims and activities**

In summary we believe that to be effective our Health, Mental Health and Social Care and Support Services must be community led and island appropriate. Islay Connections is for everyone who lives and works on Islay and aims to

- Work in health, mental health, social care and support services and with individuals, informal local groups, third sector charities and the statutory service providers of health, mental health, social care and support services.
- Collect evidence and opinion of what is needed on Islay and what is currently provided.
- Bring together those who use Health, Mental Health and Social Services with local voluntary and statutory service providers so that co-operative planning and provision can be led by the needs and wishes of the community.
- Provide practical support for the establishment of new services and service providers on Islay.
- Advocate locally and nationally for the cooperative planning and provision of Islay appropriate services

A detailed and comprehensive description of our aims and activities is given in our constitution, which is available on-line at the OSCR website.

## **Islay Connections : Trustees and organisation**

We are a single tier organisation : all our members are trustees and all are jointly responsible for the organisation and conduct of the charity. We invite all prospective trustees to work with us before they become trustees so that they familiar with the aims of the charity, with its organisation and with the responsibilities they will be undertaking and with the other trustees.

Six founding trustees appointed in July 2023 were reappointed at our AGM

**Angus MacTaggart**

**Andrew Burnham**

**Gill Chasemore**

**Sandra Taylor**

**Chris Abell**

**Pat McGrann**

Two new trustees were appointed at our AGM

**Tina Cunningham**

**Christianne Rennie**

Our Chairperson, Vice chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer are

**Pat McGrann** : Chairperson

**Chris Abell** : Vice Chairperson

**Sandra Taylor** : Secretary

**Pat McGrann** : Acting Treasurer

## **Islay Connections : What we have achieved to December 2025 how we intend to progress in the year ahead**

### **OUR CHARITY**

#### **Relationship building within the Islay Community**

During the last 12 months we have continued the work of building collaborative relationships with individuals, third sector organisations and statutory service providers on the island. We have worked with the Islay and Jura Medical and Dental Practices and Argyll and Bute HSCP to complete a patient travel survey. With the same partners, and with Cancer Support Group Islay (CSGI), we have written and published comprehensive travel advice for patients who have to leave the island to access medical care. Working with our sister charities Islay Seniors and Mid Argyll Transport Volunteers (MATV) we have established a volunteer transport service for Islay residents - Islay Transport Volunteers (ITV). Working with CSGI and Islay Seniors we hope to support the re-establishment of an Islay and Jura Patient Travel Forum. We are providing administrative and financial management support for newly formed group Islay First Responders while they become established. Working with HSCP, Islay Hospital and GortanVogie Residential Home we are developing a project to re-establish “Friends of Islay Hospital” and build a Polytunnel for therapeutic and social use by patients, residents and members of the community. Our RITA project has been working with the Islay Gaelic Centre (ICCI) and the Museum of Islay Life to build a

Gaelic Medium module with local Islay content to be incorporated into the software for local users. Working with sister charity South Islay Development we have begun to think about the need for an organised community resilience program for the island to ensure preparedness for community emergencies and to organise the response should one occur. We have received generous local funding from the Ardbeg All Islay Fund, from Islay Energy Trust, Sir John and Lady Helena MacTaggart, The Argyll and Bute Supporting Communities Fund, the Machair Wind Project and from donations from local individuals and events. We want to continue to build and justify a reputation as an honest and reliable partner organisation in identifying and quantifying community needs, advocating for Islay appropriate provision and supporting cooperative service provision on the island.

### **Organisation and Administration of Islay Connections**

Our Constitution gives a detailed and formal description of our aims and intended activities.

We have a single tier organisational structure. The number of trustees is limited to 15 and we do not have a separate members' category. The trustees are jointly responsible for the probity and work of the charity and equally liable for its actions. We continue to feel that this is the most appropriate organisation for our charity at the present stage of its development.

We have regular trustee meetings every 4 to 6 weeks for discussion, oversight and major decision making. We have appointed a professional minute taker to ensure accurate record keeping. Day to day leadership is provided by our Chairperson, assisted by the officers and email conversations between the trustees. Currently a small sub group of trustees meet to work more consistently to develop our ideas and work on transport issues. Our current projects are led on a day to day basis by the individual trustees most closely involved, with oversight by the Chairperson and regular reports to the trustees' meetings.

In our last Trustees' Report we recorded that we had two specific aims for the organisational development of Islay Connections during 2025.

The first was to establish a communication and information platform to keep the Islay Community, our patrons and others involved in our work informed about what we are doing and to develop our public identity. Our website ( <https://www.islayconnections.org/> ) went live in August and now carries a detailed description of our charity, our aims and objectives, our ongoing projects and our contact details. We have published our recent Travel Survey Report and our Travel Advice for Patients on the website. Over the next year we will continue to develop the website and add further detailed documentation about our charity and our projects, as well as links to other relevant on-line information and organisations.

The second was to consolidate the administration of our organisation and build slowly towards a sustainable expansion of Islay Connections. As our portfolio of active projects has grown individual trustees have taken leadership roles for specific projects which helps with continuity and focus and, after a further year of working together we are confident in our lines of communication between trustees and our process' for joint decision making. However, while we have developed as a close-knit and efficient team, we are now deeply engaged in several projects, each with its own challenges and complexities. Further possible new projects which fit our aspirations, aims and objectives, continue to present themselves. Added to this is the formal administration of the charity, an ongoing

task which is currently carried out by the three officers. While we are very satisfied with what we have achieved so far we are conscious that we now need to consolidate our portfolio of projects and recruit additional trustees to expand the capabilities of our team. Our immediate aim is to find a financial book keeper and following that, additional trustees to help take forward some of the projects that we would like to progress. We recognised these challenges in last year's trustees report : in the event the work of our charity has grown very satisfactorily but, while the paths to further expansion are clear, the size of the team has remained the same. Our organisational priority for 2026 will be to consolidate the workload of Islay Connections and increase the number of trustees.

## **OUR PROJECTS**

### **Note : Acknowledgment and Confidentiality**

**The Trustees of Islay Connections want to acknowledge and thank everyone with whom we have worked over the last year but to preserve confidentiality we have only identified Trustees by name in this narrative report.**

## **ONGOING PROJECTS**

### **Islay Journeys for Health and Wellbeing**

Islay is a large island with a widely scattered population and very poorly maintained mostly single track roads. There is a very limited bus service and limited availability of private taxis. Travel on the island is difficult, time consuming and expensive. Travelling off the island to access care services which are only available in Glasgow or other mainland locations is even more challenging : journey times one way are 4 to 6 hours, require multiple means of transport, and return journeys often require an overnight stay . Delays and cancellations are common and all travel off the island is frequently compromised by the weather. Last year we set up a transport sub-group of 4 trustees to look at these issues and develop some constructive responses. As a result, during the last year, we have set up three separate but related projects : the Patient Travel Survey Islay and Jura 2025; Patient Travel from Islay - Everything You Need To Know ; Islay Transport Volunteers.

### **Patient Travel Survey Islay and Jura 2025**

Working with the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, The Islay Medical and Dental Practices and the Jura Medical Practice, we organised a detailed survey to gather information about the journeys that Islay and Jura residents had to make to access medical and dental care both on the islands and to the mainland during May 2025.

We have published the results of the survey in a substantial report accompanied by a detailed contextual discussion, our conclusions and recommendations for the local, regional and national actions which we think are necessary to ameliorate the adverse effects of these journeys which residents describe. The report is published in full and available for download from our website.

We hope that the report will prompt collaborative work between the Islay and Jura Communities, patients, local third sector organisations, the Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership, NHS Highland and political representatives to further increase the understanding of the effects that these journeys have on patients and to find ways to improve the experience of the journeys, not only for patients but also for family members, community volunteers, transport providers and NHS staff who are trying to support them.

Over the next year we hope to take this work forward in collaboration with service and transport providers. In particular we want to continue to collect and publish information and analysis about travel of for health and wellbeing on Islay and to the mainland, to advocate for the streamlining and

simplification of the travel process for patients, and to re-establish a Patient Transport Forum, previously a quarterly summit meeting of community representatives, patient service providers and transport service providers which has not been operational since before the pandemic. The new Patient Transport Forum will meet to review the performance of patient travel services and to address deficiencies.

The Patient Travel Survey project has been led by Trustee Chris Abell.

### **Patient Travel from Islay : Everything You Need To Know**

Working collaboratively with our sister charity Cancer Support Group Islay (CSGI) we have put together a comprehensive leaflet of up to date advice to help patients organise their health and wellbeing journeys to the mainland. We have included information about how to book ferries and flights, what to look out for on the journey, what needs to be done about travel documentation at the hospital, how to cope with the return journey and what to do if things go wrong.

The advice leaflet is intended to make journeys easier to understand and plan and complement the professional help and support that is provided by the Patient Travel Team at Islay Hospital, from Islay Airport and LoganAir, from the CalMac port and ferry staff, from Glasgow Airport and from the NHS Hospital or Clinic which is providing treatment.

The leaflet is available to read and download from our website and paper copies are available in the medical and dental practices, at Islay Hospital and in Islay Pharmacy. We encourage users to comment and suggest improvements and during 2025 we have updated the leaflet twice so far to accommodate feedback. Over the next year we intend to continue to work with patients, service and transport providers to improve and extend and improve the advice and ensure that it remains relevant and easily available across the island.

The Patient Travel from Islay project has been led by Trustees Gill Chasemore and Sandra Taylor and supported by members of Cancer Support Group Islay.

### **Islay Transport Volunteers**

#### **Project on-going**

To alleviate difficulties encountered when having to travel for health and wellbeing Islay Connections have partnered with Islay Seniors and set up Islay Travel Volunteers (ITV) to match Islay and Jura residents who need help travelling for health and wellbeing with local volunteers who are willing to provide transport. Funding bids were made in early 2025 and grants were made by the Ardbeg All Islay Fund, Islay Energy Trust and further funding made available by Islay Seniors.

The Service went live in September 2025.

ITV is organised on a daily basis by our local co-ordinator who maintains a list of volunteers and brings them together with residents who need help with transport for their journeys. Residents can request help by phone or email and volunteer drivers using their own cars are matched with requests

according to geography and availability. Transport is provided on Islay for travel to the Doctor's, the Dentist's and to Islay Hospital or to the ferry port or the airport if residents are travelling onwards to the mainland for an appointment. If residents need help with transport on the mainland itself then ITV liaises with our sister charity, Mid Argyll Transport Volunteers (MATV), who may be able to help with onward travel from Kennacraig and the return journey after the appointment is completed.

Following initial recruitment of volunteers and publicity advertising the availability of help with transport on Islay the numbers of users has risen steadily over the last quarter of the year. Our aim for 2026 is to grow the numbers of users and volunteers, continue to build links with MATV and with service and transport providers to integrate ITV into the established organisation of journeys for health and wellbeing on Islay and beyond for the long term. We will need to consolidate and build on the organisation and administration of ITV and develop long term funding solutions with the aim of ensuring its longevity.

We are particularly grateful to MATV for generous and continuing advice and support.

The ITV project was initiated and has been led throughout by Trustee Gill Chasemore.

### **The Reminiscence Interactive Therapy and Activities (RITA) project**

#### **Project on-going**

RITA is a cognition support system widely used across the NHS and in private health care settings to provide support for people with dementia or other neuro-cognitive disabilities. The project started in spring 2024 with the intention of purchasing RITA equipment and supporting its use in Islay Hospital, GortanVogie Residential Home and in the Community. Initial fundraising in the Community was supplemented by a grant from the Islay Energy Trust in September 2024. Fundraising has continued throughout this financial year with further donations ensuring that by February 2025 RITA equipment was available for use in the hospital, the residential home and in the community.

During the summer of 2025 project leaders Tina and Christianne suggested a collaboration with The Museum of Islay Life and the Ionad Chaluim Chille Ile to develop an Islay specific Gaelic module for RITA featuring historical photographs, films, speech and music to provide an accessible memory archive of Islay life and culture. This initiative was fully supported by "My Improvement Network" who develop and supply the RITA program. Multi-media materials have been collected and we hope that the Islay Gaelic Medium module will go live early in 2026.

The aim is that over the next year Islay Connections will continue to support NHS staff and carers to use RITA consistently in the care of patients both in the community and hospital and residential care and to support the provision and development of this service in the community.

The project was initiated and continues to be led by Trustees Tina Cunningham and Christianne Rennie.

## **Islay First Responders**

### **Project on-going**

In remote and island locations like Islay getting immediate help and treatment for sudden medical emergencies can take a considerable time. In many places volunteer first responder groups plug the gap between the 999 call and the arrival of the ambulance, helping their neighbours when they need it most and providing life saving first aid that might otherwise come too late.

Two Islay residents, both experienced first responders, approached Islay Connections for help and support to make their intention of setting up an Islay First Responder Group (IFR) a reality. They already had an outline plan and a clear vision of IFR growing into an independent, self-supporting organisation once it was securely established. We agreed that Islay Connections would provide administrative support, advice and help with fundraising and safe and documented financial accounting for donations and grants while IFR was being established. We signed a formal memorandum of understanding describing these arrangements in October 2025.

We have successfully applied for funding grants from Islay Energy Trust and from the Argyll and Bute Council Community Resilience Fund. IFT have raised further funds from donations from community organisations and individuals. Volunteers have committed to the scheme and successfully made application to be included in the scheme by the Scottish Ambulance after formal training which will take place in early 2026. Equipment lists for emergency response bags have been finalised and the first sets of kit will be purchased in early 2026. IFT have designed their own logo, have set up their own Facebook page, website and dedicated email.

During 2026 the main aims of the project are for the first group of volunteers to complete training and for the service to go live as soon as possible. Substantial amounts of funding need to be raised to purchase fully equipped emergency response bags for each volunteer. In parallel IFT will develop a regular schedule of training and update meetings to maintain and develop the skills and capabilities of volunteers. Islay Connections will continue to support the administrative and fund raising needs of IFT over the next year and beyond as it becomes a stable and established organisation in its own right.

The Islay First Responders project has been led by Trustee Pat McGrann for Islay Connections.

## **Ambulance Emergency Response and What3words**

### **Project on-going**

When calling emergency services clear and understandable information about the location of the emergency is required : postcodes are often too vague in rural and island locations and street names and addresses confusing when call handlers have no knowledge of local geography or Gaelic. Discussions with the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) led to the understanding that a quick and accurate method of giving exact locations was provided by using the free app What3words. Although this is used by all the emergency services it is not well publicised.

Islay Connections started a publicity campaign called “Using What3words to get help in an emergency” in March 2024 which was supported by SAS and used a poster supplied by them and slightly modified by us. We have publicised the use of What3words generally through the use of posters and advertisements. We have had discussions with individuals and carers, including

statutory and third sector organisations, advocating having the What3words location of vulnerable individuals easily available in their homes and on their case records.

We believe that deficiencies in the local emergency response remain and we will continue do what we can to address this over the coming year. We are seeking ways to improve the integration of the ambulance service with locally available services and skills. We want to ensure that call handlers are aware in real time of the location of Islay and of the very limited services available on the island. We will continue to play a positive role in the establishment of a local first responder service as described above.

The What3Words project has been led by Trustee Sandra Taylor.

## **PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT**

### **Polytunnel at GortanVogie Residential Home**

#### **Project in Development**

This project was suggested by HSCP management at GortanVogie : knowing that growing vegetables, fruit and flowers is great for maintaining physical health and wellbeing and good for learning about the environment, and knowing that multigenerational activity has well proven health and wellbeing benefits for young and old alike, they suggested using available ground adjacent to Islay Hospital and GortanVogie Residential home to establish a horticultural polytunnel project. In discussion with HSCP staff and managers and local primary schools they developed the concept of a multigenerational project envisaging groups of all ages working and talking together, keeping seniors engaged and active and allowing juniors to lend their strength and enthusiasm and learn from the store of experience on offer. Once established the project would be ideal as a component of the wider community health and wellbeing collective.

Islay Connections were approached for help with administration, planning, fundraising and financial management and we are very pleased to be working with HSCP staff and management to try and get the project off the ground. Currently the project is in the exploratory stage, looking at permissions, costings and planning and we have successfully applied for a small grant from Machair Wind Farm Community Fund to take this work forward.

We believe this project could have significant benefits for GortanVogie residents, local primary schoolchildren and the community as a whole. Over the coming year we will be looking to develop a detailed plan for the project and seek sufficient funding to purchase a polytunnel and carry out groundworks and installation.

### **Friends of Islay Hospital**

#### **Project in Development**

In previous years the “Friends of Islay Hospital” was an active community organisation working with the HSCP to provide community support and acting as a conduit for donations which ensured that any such funds were spent directly on improvements and equipment to benefit patients, staff and residents. In response to suggestions from community members we are exploring with HSCP staff and management whether the “Friends of Islay Hospital” can be re-constituted and how it could be organised to best achieve these aims.

This project is currently in the early stages of discussion. Over the next year we intend to develop a more detailed prospectus and potentially move forward with its implementation depending on progress.

### **Islay Resilience Response**

#### **Project in Development**

During the Covid Pandemic the Islay Resilience response was built on the identification and organisation of community volunteers who were prepared to give their time and labour to fulfil social needs in the community which would otherwise be neglected. Volunteers collected and delivered shopping, distributed foodstuffs, helped with household repairs, provided support and companionship.

In the case of future emergencies, particularly transport breakdowns involving ferries and flights, infrastructure failure such as electricity grid, water or communication failure, weather related incidents or major disasters affecting many residents or visitors, many non specialist responses could be provided by a similar community network of volunteers prepared to offer their services as the need arises and organised to do so. Over the coming year Islay Connections intends to review what current arrangements are in place for organising such a community response and maintaining community readiness to actuate it if required. We will try and establish the numbers of volunteers who would be prepared to offer their services and the types of services that might be required across the island, taking the organisation of the Covid Resilience Response as a starting point. If permanent community resilience response seems needed and viable we will investigate the possibilities of establishing a formal role for an Islay Volunteer Community Response to work in conjunction with the professional disaster response organised and co-ordinated by the emergency services.

## **PROJECTS COMPLETED OR IN ABEYANCE**

### **Islay Health and Wellbeing Needs Assessment (IHWNA)**

#### **Project completed in November 2024**

This detailed qualitative needs assessment and situational survey was carried out over a period of 18 months from late 2022. The project was conceived and initiated by the informal discussion group before it became Islay Connections SCIO in July 2023 and the trustees of Islay Connections remain grateful to the chairperson and the trustees of Islay Link Club at the time who gave this project a formal home to allow the work to be carried out. The researcher and author is a senior and experienced social scientist, who was formally commissioned to undertake the work by Islay Link Club. The project was supported by a grant of £21,000 from The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund administered by the Third Sector Interface, Argyll and Bute Council.

The IHWBA reviews the life experiences of the current community through birth, childhood, youth, adulthood, old age and death from the perspectives of education, health, social work and social care, and the voluntary and third sector activities on the island. The report identifies 12 clear community priorities of unmet need on Islay and gives strategic suggestions for the development of care delivery. It will continue to influence and inform specific practical projects and the development of island appropriate care for the immediate future. The final report is formally published by Islay Link Club and is available on our website.

## **Documenting Social Work and Care Provision on Islay**

### **Project in Abeyance**

We know from the IHWNA, from the HSCP and from other sources that the levels of provision of social services, residential and home care are compromised on Islay. However there is no formal description of the current provision in the public domain either in absolute terms or measured against statutory service standards or measured against actual community need. The lack of such a description means that advocating for improved provision is difficult because of the absence of formal evidence of need and lack of provision.

Our intention for 2024 - 25 was to collate existing information about social need and Social Services provision on Islay with the intention providing a more extensive evidence base, making it available for public discussion and commencing a programme of advocacy for increased provision where deficiencies are demonstrated.

We continue to believe that this is a very important subject requiring further research. However, given the expansion of our other projects we did not feel that we had sufficient numbers of trustees to carry out this project internally or lead a project to raise funds to employ a researcher to do so during 2024 - 25. We do not believe that we will have the resources to attempt it during 2025 - 26 but we will consider doing so should circumstances change.

## **Patient Carer Advocacy Forum**

### **Project in Abeyance**

The report of the IHWNA identified the lack of social support for the parents and carers of those with neurodiversity as one of the 12 priorities of community need on Islay. To address this Islay Connections proposed a short term project to establish a patient carer support group by providing organisation and support from an experienced facilitator supervised by two trustees with knowledge, skills and experience necessary for this undertaking. The aim was that the members of the forum would grow their competence in the skills necessary to run the group and would become a self supporting organisation. The project was supported by a grant of £4,900 the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund made in July 2024.

Following the review of our strategy and personnel changes in October 2024 we reviewed our involvement in this project. Given the rapid development and expansion of other projects and the resignation of two trustees who had the skills and experience required for this project the trustees felt that we would not be able to progress this project satisfactorily. We therefore returned the grant received to the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund to make it available for other organisations.

We believe that the project that we proposed continues to be needed and would establish a valuable community resource. We will continue to support the concept but will not be looking to develop it further ourselves for the immediate future.

## **Islay Connections : Accounts to year end July 2025.**

Our accounts for year ending July 31<sup>st</sup> 2025 are appended to this trustees' report.

## **Islay Connections : Policy on Reserves**

Over the financial year July 2024 to July 2025 several projects (ITV, RITA, IFR) attracted specific restricted funding. The remainder of our income has been unrestricted. For this financial year the ratio of restricted funding to unrestricted funding has been 80% to 20%. This ratio reflects the receipt of several substantial grants to fund major projects but the absolute amount of unrestricted funding has ensured that we have been able to press ahead with developing our website, improving our administration and record keeping and developing new projects. For the next year we will look to maintain the current levels of unrestricted funding to ensure that this work continues

## **Islay Connections : Contact Details**

Islay Connections can be contacted through our website

<https://www.islayconnections.org/>

## **Islay Connections : OSCR Registration**

The register entry for Islay Connections can be viewed on the website of the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator

## **Trustees' report prepared by**

**Chris Abell**  
**Vice Chair Islay Connections SCIO**

**December 2025.**

