

# Appendix 5 – Thematic Online Focus Groups

Thematic online focus groups were held with

- a Public Health and Health & Social Care Partnerships cohort in February 2026
- TSO's from the Hebridean Islands, who couldn't attend the in person focus groups due to logistics / accessibility

Discussion Slide 1

## Discussion theme 1

*Understand what's working well, where organisations struggle, and what's changing in the local landscape.*

How can the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector in A&B be strengthened eg support with governance, finance, workforce development, digital tools and impact measurement?

What would the best way to develop a **coordinated approach to shared services**, e.g. HR, bookkeeping, digital support and evaluation systems - areas where demand is highest.

How can we make sure the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector is heard, so it helps shape local and regional planning?

**SUMMARY – STATE OF THE 3<sup>rd</sup> SECTOR - Key strengths to build on - Barriers to overcome - Needs**



## Key strengths to build on - Barriers to overcome - Needs

**Strengths** – highly adaptive sector. Moves quickly and responds, but to different funders. Intelligence therefore isn't collected by Statutory services, which therefore doesn't know what is needed, or impact if a service is removed.  
. Locally there is a holistic approach that is actioned quickly.  
Because of size of A&B, people are aware they need to network, encouraging co-working.

3<sup>rd</sup> Sector isn't homogenous – very small orgs to very large. Community end of spectrum is small. Mid section is really important delivering crucial stuff, but extremely under-resourced. Not enough staff, very operational. Target who needs support most!

**Challenges** – Statutory sector doesn't know the wealth of experience in each area and locally.  
Vast area with limited resources.  
Communication can be difficult between statutory sector and 3<sup>rd</sup> sector. Everyone wants the same thing. Orgs don't get round the table enough to ask where is the duplication / how can we support each other? Where do resources need to go?  
Getting boards together and retaining them is difficult in some areas. Need to give operational direction.

**Opportunities**- Local knowledge that each area brings should be captured. Data and stats should be shared in a collective way so it is clear what is in the area and financially what the area needs. For example, how much money is being brought in by 3<sup>rd</sup> sector, how many jobs are provided etc – a big economic influence in A&B.  
Enable groups to share data more easily (getting round GDPR) with appropriate training. Means everyone is working off the same platform.  
Mid section is really important delivering crucial stuff, but extremely under-resourced. Not enough staff, very operational. Target who needs support most!



## Key strengths to build on - Barriers to overcome - Needs

"No need to be in contact with TSI recently. But it is really helpful to have contact with TSSA (Petra). She's really helped with funding etc and now have 2 part time staff." Pat  
Playing fields were bought from Crown Estates – getting appropriate revenue funding is very hard. Cap funding is easier. £2.5m.

Chart Area

### Challenges –

Finances: Grant funding initially but follow up for an in place project is problem

Reliance on volunteers (eg board members, treasury) / retirement

Landownership – sometimes not supportive which is difficult

Digital challenges – nearest 'go-to' support is Oban. Training to use Excel etc would be helpful. Even signposting would help!

CC's find funding challenging. ABC have agreed in increase in funding but CC aren't aware what this will look like.

Members of the CC pay out of own pocket for some expenses.

Roddy's funding is for 3 years; set of objectives for that time but if there's not more funding available in future there will be a hole. (DTAS strengthening communities fund). Continuity issue.

Need funding for feasibility studies which is difficult to get.

## Discussion theme 2

### The Role of the TSI: What's Needed, What Works The Future: Vision, Ambition and Collaboration



What would you like the Third Sector in Argyll & Bute to look like in 5 years time?  
(focus on positive view)

How could collaboration across the area be strengthened?

What is the best way for the TSI to **increase its outreach into rural and island communities**, ensuring equal access to support.

**SUMMARY – TSI SUPPORT FOCUS - Priorities for improvements - Opportunities for innovation or change – Communications across A&B.**

## TSI SUPPORT FOCUS - Priorities for improvements - Opportunities for innovation or change – Communications across A&B



**Priorities for improvements-** quite a few forums are A&B wide, but local forums should feed into statutory in a way that they could. Eg Helensburgh and Oban are very different but put in the same pot, some some needs will be ignored. Dynamic between 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and statutory is a bit of a power struggle. TSI could advocate more locally? Scared to bite the hand that feeds you! Chase funding, so always want to say everything is a success = limited evaluation. Where is support for disappointed community to be supported? How does the TSI support an unhappy group? If you stick your head above the parapet there is issues, needs to be more inclusion / empowerment. Cultural point. TSI should be collective voice and empower those orgs in despair or isolated.

**Opportunities for innovation / change**  
Bring back more statutory cooperation between small orgs and statutory bodies.  
Sharing services eg back office services, fill in gaps that aren't currently being supplied.  
Pull our stories together, so that decision makers in A&B know what is going on and how big a part of the economy the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector is.  
Tsi and Statutory sector needs to get round a table together and talk more.

Third sector orgs and statutory bodies are completely asynchronous, very difficult to align with people on similar levels etc.

**All- Argyll Fund (eg wind fund / energy).**  
Some areas are betting at aligning funds / consulting eg money just given to households. Is there an opportunity to look at a fund across A&B that provides infrastructure etc.

**Communications-** some organisations won't know about ABTSI, how can knowledge be increase? Database of 1,300 groups, but needs regularly updated. A shared database  
Social media  
Road show type model? Requires a lot of resource but can be successful.  
PR – Oban Times, Dunoon Courier  
Groups that TSI already supports could promote / increase knowledge amongst other people.  
D&G model between 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and statutory sector could be replicated and drip fed through comms.  
Community Learning Dev't – formalise arrangement (Memo of Understanding?).  
No duplication because there's so much work to be done, but should be communicated better.  
Tsi should lobby more, but not become too 'shouty'! -

## TSI SUPPORT FOCUS - Priorities for improvements - Opportunities for innovation or change – Communications across A&B



### Priorities for improvements-

Digital training. Online training is really the only way on an island. Difficult to plan training – not sure what you need until you realise you can't do something. Maybe you should be told what you need eg pre-empt changes in policy, HR etc.

Coll looking at community dispersment via energy (wind or solar) but limited grid capacity.

Pat needed training for Zero. Need focused training rather than generic.

TSI isn't really on Pat's radar. Corporate social responsibility (9 distilleries on Isla which helps obtain match funding).

Isla has to be self-reliant which it is doing more and more. Maintain reliance. HR changes has to be kept on top of.

Succession planning – Isla has lots of young people who are interested but may not have the skills. TSI could help here, encourage young people to get involved.

Housing a big issue – why has ABC not become more involved? Volunteers have to take on a big role.

- Water supply. Argyll Community Association Housing (ACAH) won't have houses outside the main settlement because of water supply.
- Electricity has been an issue on Isla. Distilleries may have influenced decision making. Cost of acquiring land from Colonsay Estate is an issue for Colonsay.
- Cost of building and access to contractors.

### Opportunities for innovation / change – Shared resources?

#### All- Argyll Fund (eg wind fund / energy) –

Benefit to TSI organising this is that there could be direct communications and influenced by local communities to meet their needs.

**Example** = SSEN in A&B near to catchments, but very localised.

Other regional areas might be able to access funds, but A&B has such dispersed communities it makes it more difficult. Funding sometimes available to very specific areas.

All Isla Fund has been set up.

Islanders have to do things for themselves. Organisations have to be resilient and self-sufficient.

## Key Points - Public Health and Health & Social Care Partnerships

### Discussion 1

#### Sector Characteristics & Strengths

The 3rd sector in Argyll & Bute ranges from very small to very large organisations, with the mid-sized organisations delivering crucial services but being severely under-resourced.

The sector is highly adaptive, responding quickly to local needs, though this agility isn't always visible to statutory services because learning and data aren't systematically captured.

Local working cultures encourage networking and co-working, strengthening community-level collaboration.

#### Key Challenges

Statutory services often lack understanding of the sector's experience, capacity and local intelligence.

Geography creates challenges: vast area, limited resources, and communication difficulties between sectors.

Boards are difficult to form and retain in some areas, affecting organisational direction and governance.

Organisations struggle to collaborate enough to avoid duplication and identify shared needs.

#### Opportunities

Better capturing and sharing local knowledge, data and financial impact (e.g., funding brought in, jobs provided) to demonstrate the sector's economic importance.

Creating shared platforms and improving GDPR-compliant data sharing to work from unified information.

Targeting support toward the under-resourced mid-sized organisations delivering essential services.

### Discussion 2

#### Priorities for Improvement

Need for better local-to-statutory feedback channels: local forums often fail to influence area-wide statutory structures because differing local needs get blended together.

A perceived power imbalance between the sector and statutory bodies; TSIs could advocate more, but organisations fear jeopardising funding.

Limited evaluation due to pressure to present everything as a success when applying for or reporting on funding.

Difficulty aligning 3rd sector and statutory bodies due to asynchronous ways of working.

### **Opportunities for Innovation & Change**

Strengthening cooperation between statutory bodies and smaller organisations.

Expanding shared back-office services (HR, bookkeeping, digital support, evaluation systems).

Collecting and using shared stories and data to better communicate the sector's economic and social contribution to decision-makers.

Developing area-wide funding models (e.g., All-Argyll Fund) and improving alignment in grant-making and consultation practices.

### **Communications Improvement**

Increasing awareness of the TSI, as many organisations still do not know about it despite a database of 1,300 groups.

Enhancing communication efforts through:

- A shared database

- Social media

- Roadshow models and PR (local media)

- Partner organisations amplifying the TSI's presence

- Models from other regions (e.g., Dumfries & Galloway)

## **Key Points - TSO's from the Hebridean Islands**

### **Discussion 1**

#### **Strengths**

Strong local support networks, including help from TSSA (e.g., Petra) with funding and staffing.

Communities successfully securing assets (e.g., buying playing fields) and delivering projects.

#### **Challenges / Barriers**

Sustainability of funding: Revenue funding is difficult; capital funding easier. Follow-on funding for ongoing projects is a struggle.

Volunteer dependency: Heavy reliance on volunteer board/treasury roles; volunteer burnout and retirement risks.

Land ownership issues: Some landowners are not supportive, causing delays or blockages.

Digital barriers: Limited local support (nearest help in Oban). Need training in practical tools such as Excel and better signposting.  
Funding difficulties for community councils (CCs): Funding increases not yet understood; members self-fund some expenses.  
Short-term roles: Posts funded for fixed terms (e.g., 3 years) create continuity gaps.  
Feasibility studies: Hard to secure funding for early-stage project scoping.

### **Needs / Opportunities**

More support for feasibility funding.  
Reducing reliance on volunteers through capacity-building.  
Accessible digital and operational training.  
Clearer funding pathways and communication from local authorities.

## **Discussion 2**

### **Priorities for Improvement**

Digital training: Online options needed for island communities; desire for proactive training (e.g., HR, policy changes).  
Energy & infrastructure issues:  
    Grid capacity limits renewable projects.  
    Water supply issues affecting housing development.  
    Electricity reliability concerns.  
Skills & succession:  
    Need targeted training (e.g., Xero accounting).  
    Young people interested but need support to build skills.  
Engagement with TSI: Limited awareness of the TSI in some areas.  
Housing challenges: Shortage impacts ability to retain volunteers and staff.  
Contractor access & land costs: Cost and availability hinder development.

### **Opportunities for Innovation / Change**

Shared resources across communities and organisations.  
All-Argyll Fund concept:  
    A shared energy-related fund managed at TSI level to improve communication and align funding with local needs.  
    Addresses dispersed communities and uneven access to funding.  
Local successes:  
    The “All Isla Fund” shows potential for community-directed models.

### **Implications for TSI Support**

There is an appetite for the TSI to play a greater role in:

- Improving communication and visibility across islands
- Providing targeted, needs-led training
- Supporting succession planning and youth involvement
- Facilitating shared resources and coordinated funding approaches
- Enhancing equity of access to support across rural and island communities