

# Equitable postal services for island communities

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# Background and Context

- 94 inhabited islands, population c. 100,000 with significant variation in characteristics
- Small businesses and heritage businesses
- Wider challenges – island premium, disruption to transport and depopulation in some areas
- Low levels of Quality of Service



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## Isles have the slowest first-class post in Scotland

By Shetland Times - [editorial@shetlandtimes.co.uk](mailto:editorial@shetlandtimes.co.uk)

Published: 10:05, 09 June 2025

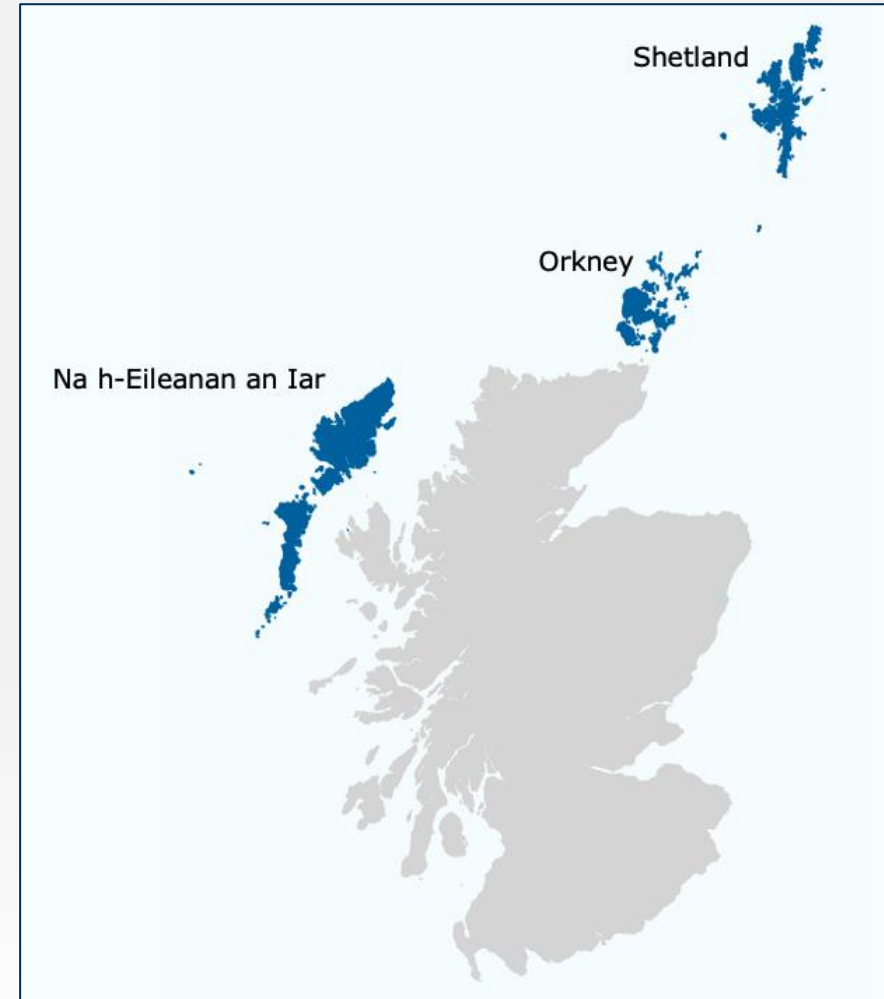
# Research Design: What we did and where

**We conducted in-depth qualitative research with postal users across three island regions.**

We wanted to understand challenges consumers experience when sending and receiving post and explore potential policy solutions.

The island groups of focus:

- Shetland
- Orkney
- Na h-Eileanan an Iar



**Our qualitative approach was designed to achieve as in-depth an understanding of the postal user experience as possible. An overview is below:**

**Postal Diary:** Ahead of their workshop/interview, consumer and small business participants were instructed to keep a diary of all the post that they sent and received, capturing real-life interaction with the postal service.

## **3 x 3-hour face-to-face workshops**

- An in-person workshop was held in each of Orkney, Shetland, and Na h-Eileanan an Iar
- Each workshop was attended by up to 17 participants, including consumers, small business decision makers, and relevant local stakeholders

## **10 x 1-hour telephone depth interviews**

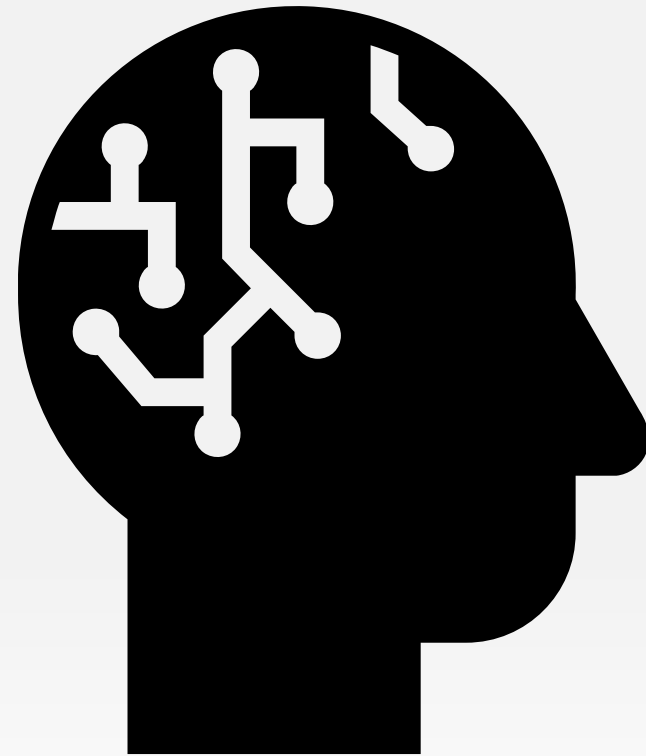
- Held with those in the most remote locations who could not easily attend a face-to-face workshop

# Key issues



# Overall impacts

- A higher mental load and having to spend much more time thinking about the logistics of post than people living in mainland Scotland usually would.
- Greater costs for certain goods and services which are impacted by surcharges.
- A lack of choice when it comes to selecting goods and services.
- Lesser access to essential goods and services.
- Impacts on small business production, making essential items more expensive and causing delays.



## Principles from participants

Participants wish to see the following principles prioritised in any solutions to address their postal challenges:

01

### FAIRER FOR ISLAND COMMUNITIES

Recognising unavoidable geographic challenges, the postal service should not disadvantage island communities



02

### LEARNING FROM WHAT WORKS

Participants are most enthusiastic for solutions that harness Royal Mail which is already embedded in the community



03

### MUST NOT DILUTE ROLE OF ROYAL MAIL AND POST OFFICE

Any solutions have to be added to the services provided and not rely solely on the community to deliver them



04

### TAKE A LOCAL APPROACH

Understanding local context and relying on local expertise is key - tailoring to each island



05

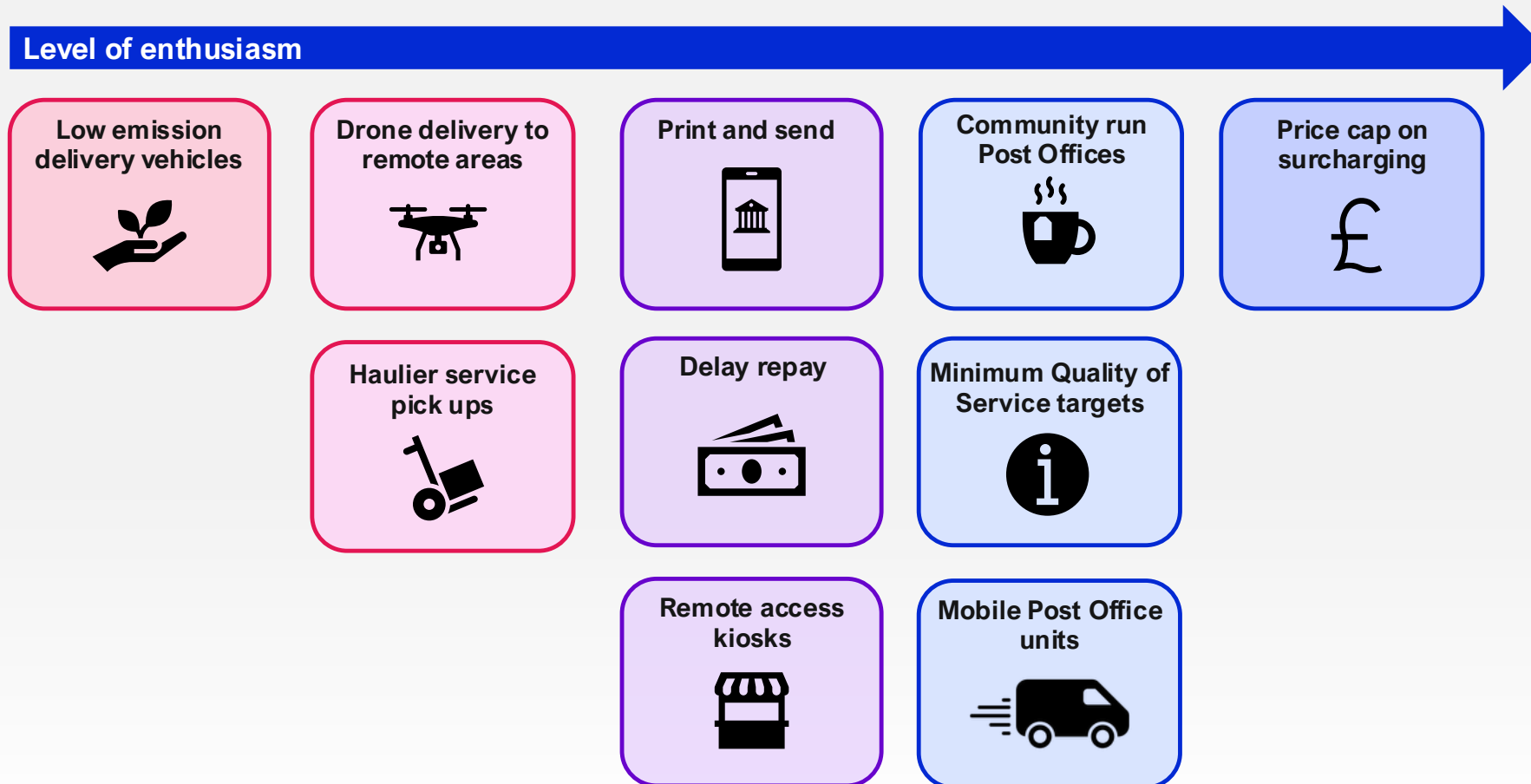
### RESOLVE ISSUES WITH KEY SERVICES

Before trialling technological solutions, addressing staffing issues and lost and extremely delayed parcels - especially with better tracking



# Policy solutions

Participants showed a range of enthusiasm for the different policy solutions they were presented with, with a price cap on surcharging seeing highest levels of support:



## **5. How Consumer Scotland has used these findings**

## Consumer information and fairness:

Collective work is needed by postal services operators, consumer groups and regulators to develop:

- Clear, accessible information on consumer rights when third-party couriers are used
- Transparent and fair parcel surcharges, including exploration of surcharge caps
- Clear, upfront delivery time information before purchase

## Quality of service and accountability:

- Ofcom to reconsider postcode-level Quality of Service standards for Royal Mail 1<sup>st</sup> class deliveries to island communities
- Ofcom and Royal Mail to develop improved systems to identify and respond to localised disruption
- Ensuring future Post Office reforms, overseen by the Department of Business and Trade, deliver good outcomes for rural and island consumers



# Recommendations

## Innovation:

- Operators to expand provision of postal lockers in island communities where appropriate
- Operators to conduct strong community engagement when deploying new delivery technologies



# What Consumer Scotland has already done

## To date, we have

- Challenged Royal Mail on the delivery speeds for the islands
- Engaged in ongoing media and parliamentary advocacy for the introduction of fair and equitable Quality of Service standards for island regions
- Worked collaboratively with Royal Mail to improve transparency and provision of information regarding slower delivery speeds for time-bound products impacting around 100,000 island consumers
- Worked with Scottish Government to include an outcome on improved postal services within the National Islands Plan
- Conducted advocacy with Ofcom, the UK Government and other key stakeholders on the issues raised in the report

# **Exploring MSP experiences**

Thanks for listening