**RESPONSE ON THE VISITOR LEVY (SCOTLAND) BILL FROM TIREE COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

Following a call for evidence from the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee of the Scottish Parliament, Tiree Community Council (TCC) discussed the matter as an agenda item at its virtual August public meeting but did not vote on a motion. We decided to invite responses and run an online survey to gauge public opinion on the proposed Visitor Levy. This ran for 12 days using the monkey survey platform. There were two reminders on local social media platforms.

There were just three members of the public at the meeting, although 250 had viewed at least part of the meeting live on Facebook. 47 people responded to the Survey Monkey site, 36 of whom were resident on the island. The low number reflects the short time scale caused by the announcement of the survey during the TCC summer recess, the complex implications of the proposed legislation and the lack of national discussion. The small response must make us cautious in interpreting the results as ‘island opinion’.

64% of all the respondents (and 70% of island residents) supported the introduction of a Visitor Levy.

There was strong support (89%) for exempting people who came to the island for work reasons, although it was acknowledged that policing the line between ‘workers’ and ‘tourists’ might be challenging.

There was almost universal agreement (95%) that the money raised on Tiree should be spent on the island and not elsewhere. Suggested possible projects, in order of preference, were: work on access to, and parking at, beaches; dog waste and general rubbish bins; signage and information to improve driving on single-track roads; an increase in the number of public toilets; increased Ranger time; better internet; campsites; roads and transport links. Some respondents thought that the money raised should be spent on things that islanders, rather than tourists, needed: for example, social housing.

There was a range of views as to who should control the spending of the Levy, with opinion divided equally between the Tiree Community Development Trust, Tiree Community Council and a new body of local people. This lack of consensus is a potential problem. Only 2% of respondents thought that Argyll and Bute Council were the best body to control the spending.

Given our remote island situation, almost half the respondents thought that ferry and plane operators were better placed to raise the Levy rather than accommodation providers.

Concern was expressed by some that the Levy would lead to raised prices and reduced visitor numbers at a time of increased cost of living pressure. Tourism is an important part of the island’s economy.

There were comments that a flat per-person rate, rather than a percentage, would be fairer.

Concern was also expressed that an unintended consequence of the legislation was that islanders might have to pay the Levy when they went to the mainland to access lifeline services not available on the island, like the dentist, a hospital clinic or a solicitor.

**Summary**

1. It would be fair to say that this is a new concept on the island, and islanders are still working out all the ramifications.
2. TCC did not take a position on the proposal, and councillors’ views varied. But our best estimate of current public opinion on the island is that it is generally supportive, with around one-third disagreeing with the proposal.
3. There is strong support that any money raised should stay on the island itself, and that local people should decide how it is spent. Looking after access points to the popular beaches was the most popular suggestion.
4. There was a concern that the Levy would put up prices and deter tourists, an important part of the economy.
5. There is a concern that an unintended consequence would be that islanders would have to pay the Levy when we travel to the mainland to visit essential services, and that essential workers would be caught up in it, too.

Dr John Holliday, Secretary, Tiree Community Council, 31 August 2023