

Work well. Work smart. Work sustainably.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-2030



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INTRODUCTION

Organisational Development can be defined as a planned and systematic approach to improving an organisation's effectiveness through the alignment of strategy, processes and the involvement of its people. At its core is the drive to improve the functioning of individuals, teams and the entire organisation. It is a long-term, on-going process which organisations must continually address if they are to be healthy and effective. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) is the professional body for Human Resources (HR) and People Development.

The Comhairle's HR, Strategy and Performance Service lead on this area of work and includes people professionals from HR, Learning and Development, Organisational Development, and Resilience and Training. Together, they champion better work and working lives to set the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development with the support of CIPD Practices.

The Comhairle hopes to celebrate, in 2025, 50 years of local government in and for the communities of the Outer Hebrides, and it is as important now as in 1975 for the Comhairle, as the elected representative authority for our islands, to be clear and confident about our strategic ambitions for the immediate future. The Comhairle delivers a wide range of services to the public across the Outer Hebrides. To do this, we have a dedicated workforce of over 2,000 employees with extensive and varied skills. From senior managers to front line officers, our employees are supported to develop the skills, qualifications, behaviours and experience that enable us to deliver quality services to our customers.

The Comhairle, along with the rest of local government, is currently facing a time of unprecedented change in a climate that is seeing real reductions in available finance. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work, accelerating moves towards flexibility, responsiveness and remote working. Closer integration across our partnership organisations, shared services, resource alignment, shared outcomes ensuring the experience of working is mentally and physically rewarding, ensuring safe working practices and ensuring all employees, especially key workers, feel valued are some of the drivers that are shaping the way that we manage our council to deliver quality public services. Technology is also a major driver of change and is likely to impact many jobs, therefore, it is important that employees have the skills to adapt to new and future working environments.

During the pandemic, our dedicated and hardworking workforce not only continued to deliver services effectively but also delivered services in innovative and in ever changing ways. It is therefore now important to continue to create a truly agile and adaptable workforce that is no longer confined to a fixed location and helps us to make the best use of our most valuable assets and resources. The Organisational Development Strategy, therefore, includes a review of the current organisational structure, policies, strategies and plans, and the external environment to look ahead at our future needs. The cross-cutting themes of sustainability, and fairness and equality are integral to all the functions and activities carried out by the Comhairle to deliver good outcomes and achieve Best Value.

The Organisational Development Strategy aims to develop a Dynamic Working environment through three integrated frameworks to Work Well, Work Smart and Work Sustainably.



STRATEGIC CONTENT

The Comhairle's strategic vision is to work with our partners and Government to have socially and economically thriving communities with a focus on sustaining our quality of life, natural heritage, and Gaelic language and culture. The Comhairle's overarching vision is detailed in our refreshed [Corporate Strategy](#) for the period 2024-2027. To deliver the Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle need to have their services adequately equipped with the appropriate assets, including IT infrastructure and digital services, and prepared with a workforce that has the right training and skills to deliver a high-quality service.

We are committed to improving the level of skills across our workforce, investing in our workforce, developing our workforce, and the health and wellbeing of our workforce. To work sustainably, the Comhairle will engage with employees to ensure that working conditions support them to remain in work, evaluate factors that may discourage them from being a part of the workforce, encourage them to upskill to help meet skill-demands, continue to introduce sustainability practices in the workplace to help save money and reduce our carbon footprint, and ensure equality of opportunity continues to be a key area for service prioritisation.

The pandemic had significant effects on our employees and how we delivered Comhairle services from 2020 to 2022. It confirmed how resilient, innovative and collaborative our employees are and how they worked in partnership to support the Outer Hebrides communities, businesses and organisations. With working from home having been 'the new normal' during the pandemic, many of our employees will continue with a more flexible 'hybrid' approach to working between home and the office. Moving away from work being a place that you go to, to being about what you do, provides a mix of new possibilities, especially as we move towards increased technology and digitalisation. There will be opportunities for the Comhairle to become more flexible and to deliver our priorities in innovative ways. The introduction of new ways of working will require a significant organisational culture shift and establishing new ways of working as the Comhairle continue to address short, medium, and long-term needs, aims and objectives.

It is envisaged that full implementation of the Organisational Development Strategy will positively impact on service improvement and support the achievement of [Best Value](#) Theme 3 - Effective Use of Resources.

Strategic Links

In their [Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023](#) report (May'23), the Accounts Commission highlighted that *"Leaders must think radically and make fundamental changes to how councils operate in future, building on the collaborative and innovative ways of working many demonstrated during the pandemic. Leaders need to be open with their staff, communities and local partners about the difficult decisions ahead and be clear about how change will be achieved. The level of volatility, uncertainty (such as plans for a national care service) and immediate financial pressures make planning and delivering sustainable change more difficult"*.

The Comhairle faces significant challenges in realising the potential of this Strategy. There is a necessity to balance the needs of our stakeholders and the Comhairle while embracing and adapting to external factors to successfully meet strategic objectives.

Listed below are the key drivers that will help inform the implementation of this Strategy.

- Best Value – Councils have a statutory duty, introduced in the [Local Government \(Scotland\) Act 2003](#), to make arrangements to secure [Best Value](#) and demonstrate a focus on continuous improvement across seven themes, including Effective Use of Resources. The Best Value statutory guidance was revised in March 2020.
- Strategic Priorities – The overarching aim and ambition of the [Corporate Strategy](#) is to retain and increase the population of the Outer Hebrides. The Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 was approved in October 2021 and reviewed in 2023 to ensure that it continues to state and communicate the ambition, aspirations and commitments of the Comhairle. The Corporate Strategy 2024-2027 was approved in December 2023. .
- Digitalisation – Our vision is to transform our digital culture, and the way we work and live through digital thinking; operating technology in a secure, efficient and user centred way that is inclusive and supports wellbeing and enables economically thriving and sustainable communities. Our Digitalisation Strategy 2022 - 2027 was approved in December 2022.
- Gaelic – The Gaelic Language Plan 2023 - 2028 sets out our aims and measurable objectives across our entire spectrum of services, including encouragement and support for our Elected Members and our employees, to lead by example in using and learning Gaelic skills and was approved in November 2023.
- Resilience – The vision of the Comhairle’s Resilience Strategy is that “The Outer Hebrides are resilient, with the Comhairle and our communities empowered to plan and prepare for challenges, and capable of managing adverse events to recover quickly from disruption, enabling our islands to flourish and prosper”. Training is vital to ensure our Resilience Team and the wider network of employees who may be involved in resilience or emergency planning activities are informed, skilled and capable of responding competently and appropriately in the event of an emergency. The Resilience Strategy 2023-2028 was approved in April 2023
- Climate Change – By making climate change integral to everything we do and engaging with our employees and communities on climate change, the Comhairle aims to ensure that individuals, businesses, and other groups throughout the islands are empowered to act and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to benefit from opportunities such as green jobs and improved quality of life that a Just Transition to Net Zero can provide. The Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 was approved in September 2022.
- Communication – The Communications Strategy ensures that the Comhairle’s communications make use of modern techniques and make information more accessible to the public. The Strategy sets out the Comhairle’s approach to external and internal communications with stakeholders including employees, members of the public and the media. The Communications Strategy 2024-2028 will be presented to the Comhairle for approval at the September 2024 series of meetings.

Vision 2030

To create a healthy and sustainable workplace which will promote the achievement of corporate goals and personal development.

Mission

The Comhairle values people as our greatest asset and aim to support employees to deliver our strategic outcomes. We will retain, recruit, support and promote high quality and high performing resilient employees and create an environment that will allow them to succeed.

Key Objectives

- Support elected members to update and enhance their knowledge, skills, capacity and capabilities to deliver Best Value and perform their leadership roles.
- Support employees to improve their resilience skills to better equip themselves to cope with challenges they may face, to embrace change and to create an agile workforce.
- Engage employees in discussion, idea sharing, problem solving and cross service collaboration to support continuous improvement across the Comhairle, improve customer satisfaction and to create an organisational culture of inclusion and engagement.
- Embrace digital technology and data to deliver better services by developing a single sign-on for online services, making it easier for citizens to access the services they need, and improving data sharing across services and partnerships.
- Promote and develop apprenticeship programmes to ensure determined future workforce needs are met, for instance, in health and social care, Gaelic essential posts, professional posts and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) teaching.
- Invest in training for employees with a focus on Succession Planning; Leadership Training; Mentoring and Support and Work Skills Training to encourage continuous learning and skills development, and to create a sustainable workforce.

Equality and Diversity

The Comhairle recognises that equality is key to achieving the Vision for the Outer Hebrides by promoting equality within our practices and services and valuing the diversity of our employees. We are committed to tackling discrimination; advancing equality of opportunity; and promoting good relations within our workforce. Mainstreaming equality, diversity and human rights is the process by which we will work towards achieving this.

In 2019, during Challenge Poverty Week, the Comhairle became a Scottish Living Wage employer and is accredited for paying employees the real Living Wage, which is higher than the government minimum wage. This accreditation is part of the Living Wage Scotland initiative, which aims to ensure that employees earn a wage that reflects the cost of living. As well as paying the living wage to employees the Comhairle also pays the living wage rate to apprentices.

The Comhairle supports the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and believes that pay systems should be based on objective criteria. The Comhairle aims to eliminate any bias in its pay systems and conditions of service and understands that equal pay between men and women is a legal right. The Comhairle has a robust analytical job evaluation scheme in place and grading structure ensuring that there is equal pay for work of equal value.

The gender pay gap is a key area for service prioritisation and is an area where the Comhairle has low performance measured against the relevant Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) Family Group. The Comhairle has completed equal pay audits biennially since 2013 to measure this in detail and, from 2020/21, the gender pay gap is calculated annually. Further action to support a reduction in the

Gender pay gap includes a continued focus on the promotion of the flexible working policies and on promoting skills and training.

Table 1 demonstrates that the gender pay gap reduced by 5% in comparison to the base year (2015/16) and Table 2 demonstrates the positive 14.5% increase in the number of women employees in the top 5% of earners, which is anticipated to rise to over 50% in 2023/24 due to the increasing number of part-time roles being held by women within the top 5% of earners. Service prioritisation for improvement targets have been set for both measures towards achieving the LGBF Family Group average by 2030.

CORP03c - Gender pay gap (%)								
	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Local Authority	16.4%	13.7%	13.7%	14.4%	14.4%	13.5%	14.1%	11.4%
FG Average	7.7%	7.2%	7.1%	7.0%	6.6%	6.8%	6.3%	5.0%
Scotland	4.5%	4.2%	3.9%	4.2%	3.4%	3.7%	3.5%	2.5%

Table 1: Gender Pay Gap

CORP03b - Proportion of the highest paid 5% of employees who are women													
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Local Authority	34.0%	33.9%	34.9%	32.5%	36.3%	36.6%	39.3%	37.8%	48.8%	46.3%	51.5%	48.9%	48.3%
FG Average	38.8%	40.7%	39.6%	40.5%	42.1%	43.1%	45.6%	46.1%	46.0%	48.5%	50.7%	51.1%	51.5%
Scotland	46.3%	48.5%	48.7%	50.7%	51.7%	51.9%	52.9%	54.6%	55.5%	56.7%	58.1%	59.0%	58.9%

Table 2: Proportion of the highest paid 5% of employees who are women

Our mainstreaming report (which includes employee information); equality outcomes, prepared using involvement and evidence; gender pay gap information; and a statement on equal pay and occupational segregation in relation to gender are made available within our Equality and Diversity web pages.

WORK WELL



The Comhairle is committed to ensuring a healthy workplace by improving the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce and by identifying issues in a structured and productive way to create a supportive working environment. Sickness absence is a key area for service prioritisation and is an area where the Comhairle has low performance measured against the relevant LGBF Family Group. In comparison to the base year (2010/11),

Table 3 demonstrates an increase of 4.3% in sickness absence days per teacher and Table 4 demonstrates a 10.6% increase in non-teaching employee absence. Service prioritisation for improvement targets have been set with a view to reducing the actual result year on year towards the national tolerance level by 2030. An annual overview of sickness absence statistics for 2023/24 revealed that the cost of Statutory Sick Pay was £2.21 million and stress related absence and mental health are in the top four reasons for absence.

CORP06a - Sickness absence days per teacher													
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Local Authority	8.7	7.8	7.2	5.8	9.6	8.4	6.8	7.3	7.3	8.7	5.1	7.6	9.1
FG Average	7.2	6.7	6.7	6.1	7.1	6.9	6.1	6.8	7.1	7.1	4.4	6.3	7.1
Scotland	6.6	6.2	6.6	6.1	6.3	6.1	6.1	5.9	6.2	6.4	4.1	5.8	6.8

Table 3: Sickness absence days per teacher

CORP06b - Sickness absence days per employee (non-teacher)													
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Local Authority	13.0	13.8	10.4	10.5	12.6	14.8	12.9	11.2	12.9	13.7	10.9	16.5	14.4
FG Average	10.9	10.7	10.7	10.2	11.0	10.9	10.5	10.8	11.5	11.4	9.2	11.7	12.3
Scotland	10.8	10.4	10.9	10.3	10.8	10.6	10.9	11.4	11.5	11.9	9.6	12.2	13.2

Table 4: Sickness absence days per employee (non-teacher)

The Comhairle also has an Occupational Health service which provides support to employees and a referral system to Occupational Health Physicians if required. The Occupational Health service will develop health promotion publications to support health and wellbeing. The Employee Health & Wellbeing Strategy supports this area of work. In 2020, the Comhairle introduced the Employee Self-Appraisal Form to give employees the opportunity to reflect on progress, review objectives and identify development and wellbeing needs throughout the year. Open discussion and collaboration relating to health and wellbeing is encouraged and, where relevant, employees can complete a Wellness Action Plan (WAP), which is a tool that helps employees manage their mental health and wellbeing at work.

Healthy Working Lives



Supported by NHS Health Scotland, the Healthy Working Lives (HWL) Award Programme was introduced to help organisations to develop clear and robust policies; set high standards of health, safety and wellbeing for employees; and find ways to be socially responsible and care for the environment. The programme offered three levels of recognition: bronze, silver and gold. The Comhairle achieved their HWL Silver Award in 2013, which was renewed in 2019, and were working towards their gold award in 2020 when the programme was paused due to the impact of the pandemic. Subsequently the National HWL Award Programme ended in 2023.

Employee Assistance Programme

A reduction in sickness absence could have a significant impact on Comhairle productivity and is a workforce priority. To support this priority, the Comhairle introduced the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) in 2019 to strengthen our wellbeing provision for employee. The EAP aims to promote good mental health and wellbeing and to reduce absences related to depression, stress and anxiety. The service is provided by Health Assured and is a free 24 hour and confidential service. It is available to employees and immediate family members to help deal with personal and professional problems that could be affecting home life and work life, including the impact of cost of living pressures on health and general wellbeing. The EAP provides support for the areas illustrated in Figure 1. Details on how to access the Health Assured portal is available to employees on the Health and Wellbeing intranet pages.



Figure 1: EAP service areas

Carer Positive Scheme

The [Carer Positive](#) Scheme is operated by Carers Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government and is awarded to employers who introduce working practices that aims to make life easier for those who have caring responsibilities. A carer is someone who provides unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner. The 'Carer Positive Employer' award incorporates three levels from 'engaged' to 'established' through to 'exemplary'.

The Comhairle is working towards Carer Positive Status and recognises that employees may at times in their working lives have caring responsibilities and require flexible working. The Comhairle receives approximately 40 requests for flexible working each year and the majority of these requests are approved. The Comhairle's Special Leave Policy was updated in May 2024 and provides unpaid carers leave to support employees who are required to give or arrange care for a dependant. The Comhairle is focussed on progressing through each stage of the 'Carer Positive Employer' award to achieve Carer Positive Status and to embed an organisational culture of support for employees who are working carers.



Building Resilience in our Workforce

The Comhairle is focussed on a more proactive approach to the management of sickness absence through promoting wellbeing and improving employee engagement. The WAP is an innovative and proactive way that helps employees manage their mental health and wellbeing at work. The WAP opens up a dialogue between an employee and their line manager, in order for them to better understand the employee's needs and experiences and ultimately better support their mental health, which in turn leads to greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction. The WAP can also be used as a proactive tool, for instance, employees who may have neurodiverse conditions can use the WAP to map out what needs to be in place for them to be mentally well at work and, therefore, are encouraged and empowered to improve their resilience in the workplace.

Employees also have access to other self-support material, for instance, the 'How to stay resilient' podcast, the 'Wellbeing Reservoir' YouTube video, and a variety of Health Assured fact sheets within the Health and Wellbeing Resilience Intranet page. Additionally, employees are not restricted to completing one self-appraisal per year and are therefore empowered and liberated to request a meeting with their managers when the need arises, and to choose the method of communication most suited to their working environment and their needs.

The Comhairle recognises that work-related stress is harmful and are committed to taking all reasonable and practical steps to prevent stress and where that is not possible to minimise its effects and ensure that all its employees, at all levels, are aware of the steps that they can take to minimize its effects on themselves and their colleagues. The Stress Prevention Policy supports the Comhairle's determination to tackle the effects of workplace stress on its employees.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as *“the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.”* This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. The Comhairle acknowledges its legal duty to protect workers from stress at work by undertaking risk assessments and acting on them. To support this area of work and to audit the level of stress in the workplace, work has been undertaken with the Health and Safety Team and Organisational Development Team to integrate stress indicator questions, in line with HSE requirements, into the corporate triennial employee survey. This will enable the Comhairle to ascertain working conditions now and enable future improvements to be monitored. The Comhairle will also use the results of the survey to undertake a prioritised programme of service level reviews on the management of stress. An Employee Resilience Programme will also be developed to enable managers to support employee’s health and wellbeing.

Work Well Action Plan

The Comhairle is committed to empowering employees to become a more resilient workforce. The draft Work Well Action Plan at Table 5 outlines some of the actions needed to reach this goal. The Action Plan will be reviewed periodically to assess how the Work Well change programme is progressing, amended where necessary, and the transition progress reported to ensure that planned development continues to advance the achievement of this goal.

Work Well Action Plan		Complete By
1.01	Review and update employee survey to include measures on how working conditions affect workers well-being.	December 2024
1.02	Develop an eLearning Resilience Training course to provide employees with the tools needed to build resilience to better manage challenges and maintain good personal wellbeing.	December 2024
1.03	Develop an Employee Resilience Programme to enable managers to support employee’s health and wellbeing.	September 2025
1.04	Develop an eTraining course based on the Comhairle’s ‘Management Guidelines Regarding Stress Prevention’.	September 2025
1.05	Develop health promotion publications to support health and wellbeing.	March 2026
1.06	Refresh wellbeing training material and roll out training to management to support sickness absence, stress and wellbeing initiatives.	March 2026
1.07	Undertake a prioritised programme of service level reviews on the management of stress with the aim to reduce sickness absence and build resilience in the workplace.	March 2027
1.08	Progress the ‘Carer Positive Employer’ award to help embed an organisational culture of support for employees who are working carers and to achieve Carer Positive Exemplary Status.	March 2030

Table 5: Work Well Action Plan

WORK SMART



The Organisational Development Strategy is aligned with the Comhairle's Digitalisation Strategy 2022-2027 that was approved in December 2022. The Comhairle aim to provide a place-based and smart working environment where needed. Where required, employee will be provided with smart devices and digital equipment to enhance their work experience, and achieve greater productivity, better performance and increased job satisfaction. Through our Strategic Learning and Development Programme, we will work with Chief Officers to ensure that our workforce is digitally enabled and confident in utilising digital tools. Digital methods will continue to be explored to 'connect' employees with each other and to 'convey' key messages to the workforce.

The Comhairle experienced a criminal cyber incident on 7 November 2023 that impacted our Information Technology (IT) systems and an Incident Management Team (IMT) was established to lead on the response to this incident. The incident accelerated our digital transformation programme, both internal and external. The IMT is exploring potential digital efficiencies where Services can gain additional benefits from the rebuilding process by updating our legacy systems with technology that will support the delivery of our day-to-day services and allow us to operate more effectively in an up to date modern, accessible and efficient way. Due to the impact of the incident, smart working requirements will require significant capital and revenue investment and structures are in place to prioritise the available resources into where the greatest needs are required.

There are few precedents to follow in creating a Work Smart Framework that focuses on creating a flexible and adaptable work environment; emphasises agility, real-time problem-solving, and continuous improvement; and incorporates principles like remote working, flexible hours, and empowering employees to make decisions quickly. It is likely, therefore, that some experimentation will be required to determine just what will work in a particular context and to ensure working practices meets the needs of citizens. The Service will also explore other innovative working practices to further enhance service provision whilst supporting employees work life balance in line with best practice.

Hybrid Working

Pandemic home working escalated the move to alternative ways of working and, with some employees adapting to home working well whilst others were keen to return to the office, the experience has been different for everyone depending on home situation, type of work and individual circumstances. The Comhairle's aim is to give employees greater choice with working arrangements in the future and promote flexible working for all whilst providing the best service to our community.

The HR & Performance Service undertook an employee survey in 2020 to evaluate their preferences of office, home and hybrid working. The survey achieved a response rate of 41%, which is in line with previous year's surveys and ensures confidence in the survey results. It is very positive to note that 866 employees took the time to engage and complete the survey. The Isle of Lewis was reported as the locality for 78% of respondents and 840 disclosed the service area they worked within. In total 660 respondents reported working from home, this includes employees who work between an office, hub and school and those who work from home and whose duties are restricted. Just over 29% of respondents working from home report that all their work can be undertaken. A further 40% report most of their work can be undertaken from home. As per the survey, working from home provided some flexibility around working

routines. Overall, the majority of respondents' preference would be a combination of office and home working, 23% report wanting to continue working from home on a regular basis.

In 2022, the Assets and Infrastructure Service, in partnership with the Corporate Management Team (CMT), undertook an employee survey to further evaluate employees preference of office, home and hybrid working. The survey revealed that of the 416 employees working across 17 locations, 53% preferred a more flexible 'hybrid' approach of working between home and the office, 43% preferred to work in the office and 4% preferred to work at home. Employees were also asked if they would be interested in working in a Hub location and 6% indicated yes and 14 separate hub areas were suggested.

As per the survey, employees have predominantly opted for hybrid work arrangements and the Assets and Infrastructure Service is undertaking a review of the property estate in the context of devolved and flexible working, including options for shared space. Discussion on how the future office environment will be reconfigured requires ongoing discussion with Chief Officers as phased implementation of Office reallocation based on service needs progresses.

The policy for hybrid working will provide guidance on hybrid working arrangements.

Communication



The Comhairle's Best Value Assurance Report ([BVAR](#)) in 2022 advised that *"service performance and public satisfaction with services has declined overall in the past five years."* To support continuous improvement across the Comhairle and improve customer satisfaction, the Comhairle will engage with employees in discussion, idea sharing, problem solving and cross service collaboration. The Employee Forum supports this area of work and encourages employee-led continuous improvement. The Employee Forum constitution was updated in October 2023 in line with the recommendations approved by Comhairle in February 2023. Meetings of the Employee Forum will be held quarterly with a focus on strategic issues. Chief Officers will, on occasion, undertake a presentation on their service area to help inform employees and shape discussions on opportunities and challenges for services and the Comhairle.



It is envisaged that involving employees in decision-making processes and providing opportunities for development and collaboration through the Employee Forum may fundamentally embed organisational culture throughout the Comhairle, as they, more than most, recognise the demands and challenges the Comhairle face in delivering public services. With fostering a collaborative environment where real-life examples and solutions are discussed, we aimed to equip employees with the knowledge and tools needed to implement effective operational resilience strategies across services. The aspiration is that employee-led initiatives will positively impact on service improvement, public satisfaction with the services provided, and support the achievement of [Best Value Theme 3 - Effective Use of Resources \(Staff\)](#). Feedback from Exit Surveys also informs service improvement and, where relevant, is used to enhance organisational development. Consideration will also be given to developing a Workforce of the Future Employee Forum to strengthen engagement with our younger workforce, aged 16-24.

Satisfaction levels with council services is nationally benchmarked through the LGBF and 11 indicators are measured across seven service areas based on data gathered in the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) and the Health and Care Experience Survey. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the satisfaction of Comhairle services in 2022/23. In the SHS, not all people are users of the service directly but they are asked to express their satisfaction of the service. Although some Comhairle services undertake local customer satisfaction surveys, a review will be undertaken to develop a standardised survey for all services to use so that the

Comhairle can measure service satisfaction levels of those that actually use Comhairle services. The corporate feedback received from service users will inform the development of improvement plans.

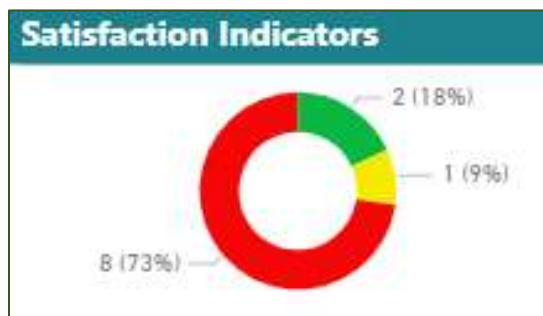


Figure 2: Change in most recent year

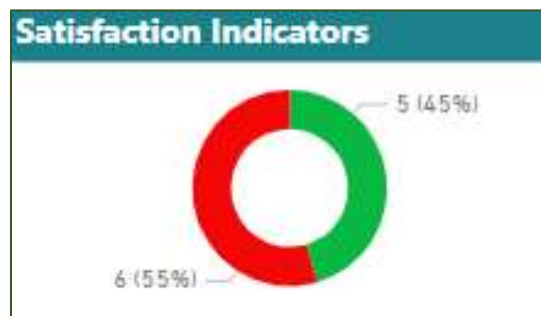


Figure 3: Change from base year

The Comhairle's Communications Strategy 2024-2028 builds on the previous policy to ensure that the Comhairle's communications make use of modern techniques and make information more accessible to the public. The Strategy sets out the Comhairle's approach to external and internal communications with stakeholders including employees, members of the public and the media. To communicate effectively with the public and other key stakeholders the Comhairle makes use of social media platforms, their website, and engages directly with media organisations. Through the updated Communications Strategy, the Comhairle will continue to investigate and research the best methods for communications, including its devices, connectivity resources, online services, and telephony system to improve organisational coherence and engagement.

The [Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations](#) came into force for public sector bodies on 23 September 2018 and requires local authorities to make websites (intranet and extranet) and mobile applications more accessible by making them 'perceivable, operable, understandable and robust'. From September 2020, the Regulations were updated and require all documents to be published on the web to be accessibility compliant. The Comhairle's Corporate Standards Working Group (CSWG) developed guidelines and new accessibility compliant templates as per the updated Regulations. In 2022, the Regulations were amended again to ensure they can continue to operate once the UK left the European Union. Communicating effectively with the community and our workforce is a key objective of the Communications Strategy and the Communications Team will take forward this area of work to ensure compliance with the accessibility Regulations.

Digital Transformation

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is a subscribed member of the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government and the Comhairle aim to become a digital first council with a digitally skilled workforce. To become a digital council involves moving away from technology led strategies and become more outward looking, focusing on how digital technology can deliver better outcomes for citizens, communities, and employees. It involves understanding the needs of service users and employees, involving them in the process and creating a culture that embraces change and collaboration. Being a digital council requires investment in Information and Communication (ICT) infrastructure (hardware, software and cloud services), council employees and digital leadership.

The Comhairle is committed to the provision of purchasing predominately mobile computing equipment to ensure maximum versatility using and operating equipment in relation to smarter working and home learning for schools. In 2017, British Telecom announced that the existing analogue telephone network will be switched off and everyone will receive a digital internal protocol (IP) voice service enabled by 2025.

With increased members of the workforce now undertaking hybrid working, a digital telephony service will be explored within the Comhairle, streamlining accessibility and removing the requirements of 'idle' phones based at desks. A full review of the equipment implications of this will be undertaken.

The Comhairle started using Microsoft 365 in May 2020 it took approximately 1 year to transition all mailbox users from the on premise exchange environment into online exchange. The Comhairle mostly use Microsoft 365 desktop applications with a handful of users preferring the web apps. The Comhairle use all the standard applications in addition to SharePoint and Teams, The Comhairle has yet to look fully into the usage of PowerBi or Power Automate but will do so as part of their digital transformation.

The digital transformation objective is to include digital administration of systems and introduce a diverse range of communication and advice options, such as, interactive web pages, e-forms and dedicated apps for specific service needs, with a view to developing and implementing a 'digital choice' for citizens to access services. Digital Champions will be appointed within each service to support digital transformation and they will work closely with the IT, Communications, and Training sections.

Digital Champions will also be responsible for liaising and utilising resources in the Digital Office to identify a shared approach to developing and delivering common systems and platforms that improve digital working within the Comhairle and increase capacity among employees growing the ability to capitalise on opportunities for providing a transformative service. Where new software and technology are introduced, we will ensure that our employees are fully trained and confident in their operation. Employees will become knowledgeable on everyday software applications and their capabilities and will be able to identify improved service delivery options as a result of their usage and create opportunities for exploitation. Employee digital skills will be aligned with the Competency Framework, currently in development by the Society of Personnel and Development Scotland, the Scottish Digital Academy and the Digital Office.

Training with Elected Members to establish a digital way of thinking about how they engage with their communities and making services and data more accessible will provide governance to our digital approach. Digital Champions will drive forward utilisation of resources, improved capacity, shared ways of working, and opportunities for upskilling within their services.

Progress on digital transformation will be reported through the Digitalisation Strategy 2022-2027.

Work Smart Action Plan

The Comhairle is committed to making workspaces more flexible and responsive to people's needs. The draft Work Smart Action Plan at Table 6 outlines some of the actions needed to reach this goal. The Action Plan will be reviewed periodically to assess how the Work Smart change programme is progressing, amended where necessary, and the transition progress reported to ensure that planned development continues to advance the achievement of this goal.

Work Smart Action Plan		Complete By
2.01	Undertake a review of other innovative working practices to further enhance service provision whilst supporting employees work life balance in line with best practice.	March 2030
2.02	Explore digital efficiencies that will support the delivery of services to operate in a more effective, accessible and efficient way.	March 2026
2.03	Identify capital and revenue budgets for smart working.	March 2026

Work Smart Action Plan		Complete By
2.04	Develop a 'Future Office Environment' plan, in partnership with Chief Officers, to finalise and inform hybrid working arrangements.	March 2025
2.05	Review and update the Corporate Standards Guidelines and Templates to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations.	March 2025
2.06	Ensure websites (intranet and extranet) and mobile applications are compliant with the Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations.	March 2026
2.07	Undertake a review of service's customer satisfaction surveys and develop a standardised survey for all services to use.	March 2026
2.08	Develop a policy for hybrid working, in partnership with Chief Officers, to provide guidance on hybrid working arrangements.	March 2025
2.09	Continue to provide feedback from Exit Surveys periodically to Chief Officers to inform service improvement and enhance organisational development.	March 2030
2.10	Develop a 'Workforce of the Future' Employee Forum to strengthen engagement with the Comhairle's younger workforce, aged 16-24.	March 2030
2.11	Align employees digital skills with National Competency Frameworks.	March 2026

Table 6: Work Smart Action Plan

WORK SUSTAINABLY



The Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 sets out how the Comhairle will work to decarbonise our own estate, assets, and services, as well as how we will work with partners to support the islands towards Net Zero and to build resilience to the effects of a changing climate. By making climate change integral to everything we do and engaging with our employees on climate change, the Comhairle aims to ensure that individuals are

empowered to act and are equipped with the skills and knowledge to benefit from opportunities such as green jobs and improved quality of life that a Just Transition to Net Zero can provide.

The Comhairle is committed to working sustainably and have implemented cost-effective and environmentally friendly changes such as working from home, video conferencing to cut down on travel, cycle to work scheme to promote healthier journeys to work and to reduce environmental pollution, and also provide electric vehicles which can be utilised by employees undertaking duties as part of their employment in support of Net Zero targets.

The Outer Hebrides working age population has decreased by 7% between 2005 and 2020 and the cumulative effect by 2028 is predicted to be a 12% reduction. This ongoing reduction in working age population combined with the increasing needs of an ageing population is having a significant impact on current and future service delivery, particularly in Health and Social Care. Ensuring a sustainable population is a priority for the multi-agency Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP). The Comhairle, as a lead member of the OHCPP, is committed to developing sustainable models of service delivery and working in partnership where required.

We value our Gaelic culture. As per Scotland's Census 2022, Na h-Eileanan an Iar has the highest proportion of people with any Gaelic skills, at 57%, followed by Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, at 12% (Scotland Census 2022). Table 7 provides the breakdown of Gaelic language skills for people aged 3 and over in Na h-Eileanan Siar. The Comhairle has put in place the necessary structures and initiatives in its

Gaelic Language Plan 2023-2028, which aim to ensure that Gaelic has a sustainable future as an economic, social and cultural asset for the Outer Hebrides. As part of our drive to create a bilingual workforce we offer our apprentices supported Gaelic tuition and will ensure Gaelic is in the desirable or essential column for all employment.

People aged 3 and over with Gaelic language skills	14,632	57.3%
Speaks, reads and writes Gaelic	6,977	27.3%
Speaks but does not read or write Gaelic	2,957	11.6%
Understands but does not speak, read or write Gaelic	2,852	11.2%
Speaks and reads but does not write Gaelic	1,492	5.8%
Reads but does not speak or write Gaelic	248	1.0%
Other combination of skills in Gaelic	106	0.4%

Table 7: Scotland's Census 2022 - National Records of Scotland, Council Area: Na h-Eileanan Siar by Gaelic Language skills

The Comhairle aim to effect sustainable change through workforce development, education and training across the council. In doing so, the Service will create a strategic Learning and Develop Programme aligned to our strategic priorities with the aim to improve outcomes across education and training for the transformation of our workforce and create leaders of the future. The Work Sustainably Framework will, therefore, focus on developing skills, supporting education and training, and building a sustainable workforce and is aligned to the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy's Strategic Outcome 1.1.4: Increased level of skills across our communities and workforce.

Corporate Workforce Plan

Employees who have good quality jobs and are managed well, will not only be happier, healthier and more fulfilled, but are also more likely to drive productivity, better products or services, and innovation (CIPD).

The Corporate Workforce Plan 2024-2027 was approved by the Comhairle in September 2023 following consultation with the Recognised Trade Unions. The Plan has been developed following analysis of the Comhairle's workforce data and examination of areas such as recruitment, hard to fill roles and future needs. The Plan promotes and supports career entry routes through open recruitment and apprenticeships, skills development and career progression for employees and flexible working conditions to support employees through all of life's transitions. We also have an employee profile reflective of the local demographic of an ageing population. We value youth as much as experience and have been working on sustaining our services and supporting recruitment, apprenticeships and career grades in hard to fill areas. The Plan is informed and driven primarily by the Corporate Strategy and the Budget Strategy and helps to inform employee performance appraisals and training plans.

Internal training

Internal training is a key area of the Comhairle's business that carries out mandatory training with employees and statutory training required under Health & Safety. In [2023/24](#), the Training Team delivered 228 training courses to 1,091 employees and delivered 1,102 hours of training. Training is delivered across all the Islands with the Training Officers travelling to deliver face-to-face training on a regular basis. Through the online training platform, LearnPro, 4,024 training courses were completed by 747 unique participants across 43 courses. This includes employees undertaking numerous courses and gives a positive indication of engagement with internal training.

The Training Team undertake rigorous self-evaluation through the use of satisfaction surveys. In 2023/24 they received feedback from 468 participants and overall satisfaction was at 97.4%. 96.2% of participants who responded to the survey felt their learning objectives had been achieved, 96.6% felt their understanding of the subject has been improved and 95.3% felt their skills in the subject had been improved as a result of the training.

Online learning have been invaluable in 2023/24 and has given employees ready access to information and training as well as maintaining records of training undertaken. Online courses are reviewed and refreshed periodically to ensure the material remains up to date. To develop this method of training further, new courses will be added as resources permit.

Strong leadership

The Comhairle have a duty of [Best Value](#) to ensure that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public. The Comhairle supports continuous improvement for elected members and employees.

In September 2023, the Comhairle authorised the Chief Executive to undertake a review of Senior Management Structures. The Review of Organisational Structures report was present to the Policy and Resources Committee in April 2024 and approved by Comhairle in May 2024. The focus of the review is to create a sustainable structure which ensures the Comhairle has capacity to perform its statutory duties and to fulfil its role as a community leader in all aspects of the Comhairle's work, and as an effective external advocate for the Outer Hebrides. The programme of training for line managers will be reviewed in line with the new workplace changes.

When discussing the [Local Government in Scotland Overview 2022](#), the Chair of the Accounts Commission noted that "Councils are operating in a complex and increasingly volatile, unprecedented and unpredictable environment. Strong leadership from councils is needed now more than ever, with new and returning Councillors being able and willing to make difficult decisions about where and how to spend highly pressurised resources."

The Comhairle has an appropriate approach to ensuring there is sufficient knowledge at a member level to support decision making and scrutiny. Elected members were provided with a wide-ranging training programme as part of the formal induction process following the local government election in May 2022. The three-day programme covered all aspects of the Council and in more complex areas such as treasury management, more regular briefing sessions were provided. Sessions were generally well attended, with an average attendance of 89% of members across the various sessions. Regular training has continued through the term.

The Improvement Service developed an [Elected Member Webinars Series](#) to provide elected members with further development opportunities. The Comhairle's Members' Support section circulates notification of the webinars to elected members to encouraged them to join in and participate on the day. Although webinars are held live, they are also recorded to enable members to access and view the content when convenient to them. The Comhairle also have a continuous improvement training programme in place for elected members and they are encouraged to maintain their own personal development plans. The uptake of training will continue to be a focus for the Law and Governance Service.

No One Left Behind - Digitally

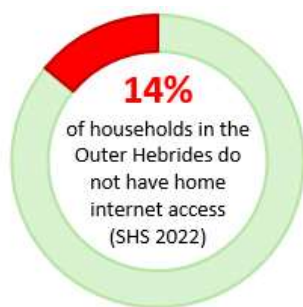


Figure 4

The recent pandemic highlighted and heightened our reliance on digitalisation as it provided us a vital connection to the 'outside' world to keep us up to date on current affairs, but more importantly at that time, in touch with friends and family, ensuring older family and community members were reached out to via video-calling, and enabled our young people to continue with their education, providing even the youngest school children with an introduction to the digital world and its capabilities. At the same time, the experience of the pandemic laid bare the digital divide between those who have access to and are competent users of digital technology, and those who are not. Achieving 100% high-speed broadband coverage throughout the Outer Hebrides is a strategic priority for the Comhairle and a key action from the joint Comhairle / HIE Economic Recovery Strategy. The Comhairle continue to lobby government for full fibre rollout to every community.

The Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission's [publication](#) (Aug'2024) on tackling digital exclusion highlights clearer leadership and focus is needed to tackle digital exclusion as more key services move online, all public bodies must deliver on their responsibilities to ensure everyone can access the services they need. This includes the one in six Scottish adults who lack the digital skills needed for everyday life. The audit took a human rights-based approach, involving people with lived experience, and recommended a clear action plan to tackle digital exclusion. Figures 4 to 6 illustrate key statistics on digital exclusion in the Outer Hebrides.

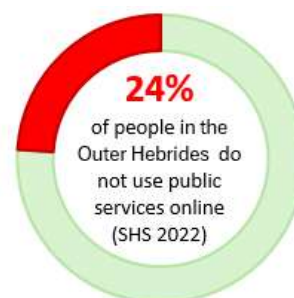


Figure 5

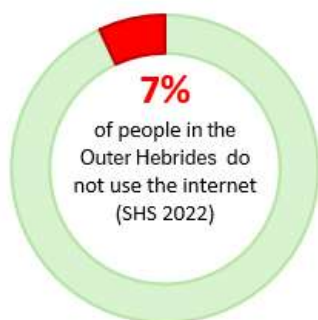


Figure 6

Digital exclusion means a lack of access, capability or confidence needed to engage with devices or digital services that help people participate in society. Digital exclusion can contribute to poverty through reduced educational attainment, limited job opportunities, worse access to public services and the poverty premium, which often sees households paying more for products and services if they cannot access them online. As digital technology increasingly shapes many facets of everyday life, those without access to digital devices or lacking essential digital skills face exclusion from critical services and opportunities.

Technology is one of the main drivers of change and is likely to impact many jobs, therefore, it is important that employees have the skills to adapt to new and future working environments. The Service will support services to upskill employees with the skills to manage technology and data and to acquire basic digital skills, including Microsoft 365 productivity apps (Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneDrive, PowerBi, and Power Automate).

The future of education is rapidly evolving, and integrating skills like Microsoft 365 productivity apps and artificial intelligence (AI) into school curriculums is becoming increasingly important. A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world (Scottish government, Mar'21) sets out the measures which will ensure that Scotland will fulfil its potential in a constantly evolving digital world. The Strategy notes research which indicates that in Scotland 75% of all advertisements for jobs classified as 'low-skilled' now require baseline digital skills such as the ability to use spreadsheets and word processing applications, but

only 77% of people in Scotland aged over fifteen can complete all seven tech skills considered to be “foundation” level, compared to the UK average of 84%.

The [National Progression Awards \(NPA\) Digital Skills SCQF level 3 - SQA](#) is designed to deliver the foundation skills and to help learners develop essential digital skills. In 2021/22, the Comhairle’s Education Service explored if individual digital literacy skills units across SCQF 2-6 were being offered locally. Although none of the four secondary schools at that time were delivering digital literacy skills, the Nicolson Institute has been investigating offering NPA Digital Literacy SCQF level 3 as a choice. The achievement of this award is a digitalisation outcome measure within the Corporate Strategy. The rollout of this qualification to all four secondary schools may help prepare the next generation of Comhairle employees digitally.

The Comhairle is committed to strengthening the digital inclusion infrastructure and the Digitalisation Strategy 2022-2027 supports this area of work.

Learning and Development Programme

Training needs are identified through Performance Appraisals and incorporated into departmental training plans with the costs of any training delivered approved by departments. The Comhairle anticipates that continued reductions in funding and increasing costs will be a challenge. Action to meet future demand will focus on supporting organisational change; developing skills in areas where there can be recruitment challenges; continuing to ensure the Comhairle has a quality offer of employment; supporting apprenticeships and career grades and continuing to support employee development through internal recruitment and career change offers.

The Service will develop a strategic Learning and Development Programme to ensure that the Comhairle’s workforce and relationship with partners are aligned to the delivery of outcomes set out in our corporate policies, strategies and plans. It will also focus on ensuring that the Comhairle is equipped to meet the challenges of future service delivery. To build a sustainable workforce, the Comhairle is committed to:

- Supporting strategic thinking and leadership with elected members;
- Investing in training for employees with a focus on succession planning; leadership training; mentoring and support, and work skills training;
- Promoting and developing apprenticeship programmes to ensure determined future workforce needs are met, for instance, health and social care; professional posts; and STEM teaching;
- Establishing opportunities for secondments within the Comhairle for employees to gain experience in other areas of work before considering an internal career move; and
- Introducing a skills training programme for all employees to empower them to work towards promoted posts in their chosen area of work and / or to encourage a change in career within a different Comhairle service, especially hard to fill posts. For example, care and support assistants, social care workers, and special carers; Gaelic essential posts; posts requiring post specific qualifications / skills; professional posts; and some teacher posts.

Work Sustainably Action Plan

The Comhairle is committed to supporting a skilled and balanced workforce across all services. The draft Work Sustainably Action Plan at Table 8 outlines some of the actions needed to reach this goal. The Action Plan will be reviewed periodically to assess how the Work Sustainably change programme is progressing,

amended where necessary, and the transition progress reported to ensure that planned development continues to advance the achievement of this goal.

Work Sustainably Action Plan		Complete By
3.01	Develop an Elected Members Training and Development Programme to enable elected members to update and enhance their knowledge, skills, capacity and capabilities to deliver Best Value and perform their leadership roles.	May 2027
3.02	Develop a refresher resilience training programme to ensure employees are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to carry out their role effectively.	March 2026
3.03	Review and update the Performance Management Framework to ensure that the key drivers and objectives of the new Organisational Development Strategy are entrenched in the Framework.	March 2027
3.04	Continue to develop and review employment policies annually ensuring equal pay compliance.	March 2030
3.05	Identify revenue budgets annually for corporate training needs.	March 2030
3.06	Promote and develop apprenticeship programmes to ensure determined future workforce needs are met.	March 2026
3.07	Develop a skills training programme to empower employees to work towards promoted posts or to encourage a change in career within the Comhairle, especially for hard to fill posts.	March 2026
3.08	Establish opportunities for secondments within the Comhairle for employees to gain experience in other areas of work.	March 2026
3.09	Review, refresh and update online courses periodically to ensure the training content is up to date.	March 2030
3.10	Review and update the programme of training for managers in line with the new workplace changes.	March 2026
3.11	Support services to upskill employees with the skills to manage technology and data and to acquire basic digital skills, including Microsoft 365 productivity apps.	March 2026
3.12	Rollout NPA Digital Literacy SCQF level 3 as a choice qualification to all four secondary schools to help learners develop essential and accredited digital skills in preparation of future employment opportunities.	March 2027
3.13	Develop a Strategic Learning and Development Programme to help the Comhairle build a sustainable workforce.	March 2027

Table 8: Work Sustainably Action Plan

DELIVERY PLAN AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Making good use of performance data to plan and improve services is a key aspect of the duty of Best Value that applies to all Scottish councils and local government bodies. Best Value matters because it focuses on improving lives and services for local people, alongside using resources effectively. To deliver Best Value, councils need to report to local communities in a clear and balanced way on how well services are performing and plans to address areas of poor performance. The [LGBF](#) plays a key role delivering Best Value and effective and transparent reporting of performance. (Accounts Commission, [Aug'24](#))

There is a strong organisational culture of performance management embedded in the Comhairle. To strengthen this, the Performance Management Framework will be reviewed to ensure that the key drivers and objectives of the new Organisational Development Strategy are entrenched in the Framework.

The Organisational Development Strategy includes some of the actions to 2030 that aim to support the delivery of the three Frameworks to Work Well, Work Smart and Work Sustainably and build a Dynamic Working environment. New actions will be added to the action plans as our new hybrid practice evolves. In collaboration with Responsible Officers, key performance indicators and milestones will be set and regularly evaluated to assess how the change programme is progressing, identify issues (adapt or mitigate) and to measure if the outcomes have helped towards the achievement of the Strategy's Key Objectives.

To turn this Strategy into reality, the action plans will be input to the Comhairle's electronic performance management system, Interplan, to enable Responsible Officers to systematically monitor and measure all areas of activity, effectively address areas of underperformance, identify the scope for improvement and put in place remedial actions. Performance reports will be presented to the Corporate Management Team biannually and annually to the Policy and Resources Committee for scrutiny.

Throughout the delivery of the Strategy, the HR, Strategy and Performance Service will engage, encourage, prepare, enable, inspire and empower our workforce at all levels to drive continuous improvement. In doing so, the Service will support the Comhairle to ensure that there is good governance and effective management of resources, with a focus on improvement, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the public, support the realisation of the Comhairle's priorities and ensure the long-term sustainability of the workplace.



Engage



Encourage



Prepare



Enable



Inspire



Empower

