

Our vision is to have a sustainable population and socially and economically thriving communities with a focus on our quality of life, natural heritage, and Gàidhlig language and culture.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN

For the Period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

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INTRODUCTION

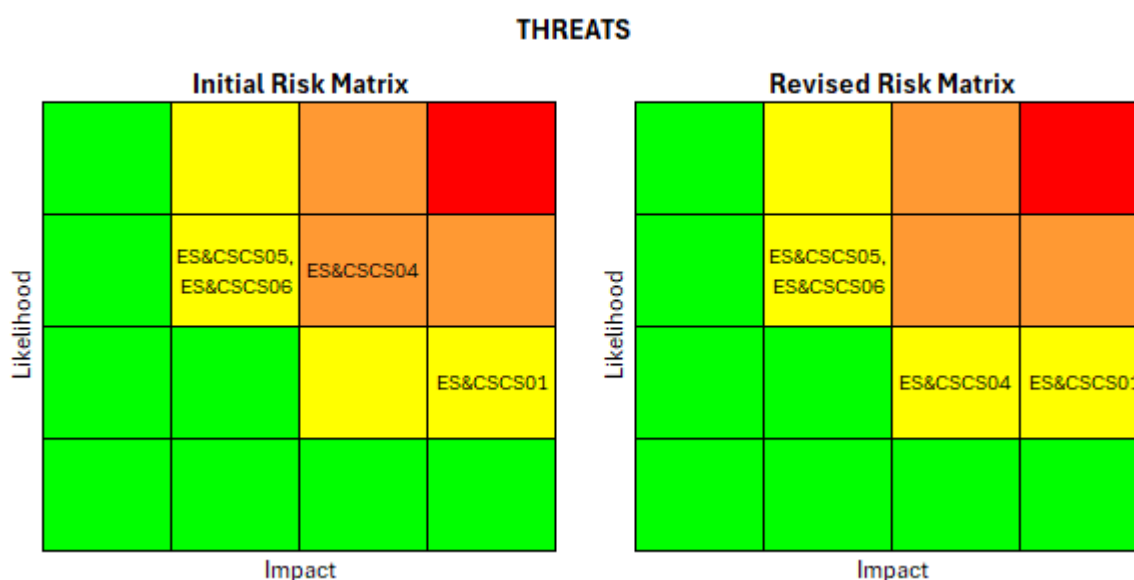
- 1.1. I am pleased to introduce the Service Business Plan (SBP) for 2025/26 which sets out our outcomes and priorities for the coming year. The SBPs are the main annual business planning document for Children's Services. It reflects the Comhairle's key priorities as set out in the Corporate Strategy 2024-2027 and provides an overview of the Service's main areas of activity.
- 1.2. Children's Services have a statutory responsibility to deliver targeted services to ensure that the Comhairle 'Gets it Right for Every Child'. The Service aspires to provide very good if not better support and protection to vulnerable children and young people through targeted interventions. This will be achieved through good partnership working. The Service will further embed a culture of continuous improvement.
- 1.3. There are three service areas within the Service, Children & Families, Fostering & Adoption and Extended Learning. All three services help to ensure that the Comhairle operates successfully in an increasingly complex and challenging environment, and although diverse, each service is essential to the running of the council and the delivery of its vision, values and priorities.
- 1.4. Children's Services will respond to emerging issues such as the response to supporting and protecting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people.
- 1.5. Children's Services covers the provision of responding to child protection concerns; services for children with/and affected by disabilities; throughcare and aftercare services; services that help to reduce offending and support children disengaged from mainstream education; management and delivery of Kinship, Fostering and Adoption, Residential, Respite, Throughcare and Aftercare and Supported Lodgings Services; and the day to day co-ordination and delivery of additional support needs through the Extended Learning provision.
- 1.6. Keeping The Promise, adhering to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and taking a trauma informed approach to all areas of work will be key priorities for the Service going forward.

Jack Libby
Chief Officer, Children's Services and Chief Social Work Officer

KEY AREAS OF RISK FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

- 2.1 The Comhairle currently recognises three levels of risk: Strategic risk aligned to the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy; Operational risk aligned to SBPs; and Project risk concerned with specific projects.
- 2.2 Operational risks represent threats that may affect the achievement of SBP actions, and the Service has identified significant risks for the coming year which shall be reviewed periodically.
- 2.3 The Initial Risk Matrix at Figure 1 represents the current risk profile of Children's Services, and the Revised Risk Matrix represents the target risk profile once risk actions have been successfully implemented. 2.4 contains a list of identified risks, categorised by risk treatment.

Figure 1: Children's Services Operational Risks



- 2.4 The Service has identified 4 threats, and these are listed below categorised by Risk Treatment:

Risks retained (acceptable level of risk)

3 risk identified is at an acceptable level and will continue to be monitored:

- ES&CSCS01 Clients are at risk of significant harm.
- ES&CSCS05 Statutory assessments are not completed in time.
- ES&CSCS06 Elements of a Child's Plan fail to be delivered.

Risks reduced (action will be taken to reduce the risk to an acceptable level)

- ES&CSCS04 Lack of sufficient local placements
 - Risk Action: Review existing service delivery model through the use of WFWF in order to manage and reduce the number of referrals coming to Children & Families.
 - Risk Action: Review the current fee paid fostering scheme.

- 2.5 Elected Members can view the full risk register in the Comhairle's performance management system, Interplan, within the Integrated Risk Management (IRM) module.

DELIVERING THE SERVICE BUSINESS PLAN AND ACHIEVING BEST VALUE

Strategic Outcomes

- 3.1 Children's Services contribute to strategic outcomes 2.1.1 Attainment rates continuously improve and 2.1.2 Early intervention in place to keep our most vulnerable children safe. Both outcomes support the delivery of the Comhairle's Strategic Priority 2.1 Support children, families, and young people.

Best Value

- 3.2 In working towards the two strategic outcomes, the service aims 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 and to make arrangements for the reporting to the public of the outcome of the performance of its functions. Table 1 lists the service outcomes established to support the delivery of the SBP and to achieve Best Value.

Table 1: Service Outcomes

Delivering the SBP and achieving Best Value
Service Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Care experience children in the Western Isles to have loving, supportive, and nurturing relationships which act as the foundation stone for a sense of safety, healthy development and mutual respect.• Young people are able to overcome barriers and achieve their full potential.• Children and young people's rights are respected.• All children and young people are supported to maintain good physical and mental health and wellbeing.• There is a concentration on the strengths and assets of children, young people and their families, with an awareness of adverse traumatic experiences, helping them find solutions that work for them.

MEASURES AND ACTIONS

- 4.1 The next Best Value thematic focus is transformation, and the Accounts Commission will be auditing councils' plans for transformation as part of the 2024/25 annual audit. As set out in their [Transformation in councils](#) report (2024), "councils must prioritise and progress the delivery of their plans for transformation." The Commission's [Local government in Scotland: Financial bulletin 2023/24](#) (2025) highlights that "Scotland's councils continue to face severe financial pressures. The need to consult with communities, clearly communicate the impact on local services, whilst working together to shape and deliver urgently needed transformation, is more important than ever."
- 4.2 In December 2024, the Account's Commission published a new Statutory Performance Information Direction. [Direction 2024](#) requires the Comhairle to report information about its performance in a way that enables the council to draw comparisons and make judgements in relation to the Comhairle's performance over time in comparison to other councils. The performance measures for the Service are detailed in Tables 2 - 3.
- 4.3 The Corporate Strategy was reviewed in 2023 to ensure that it continues to state and communicate the ambition, aspirations and commitments of the Comhairle. The overarching aim and ambition of the Corporate Strategy 2024-2027 is to retain and increase the population of the Outer Hebrides. It takes account of national priorities and local needs but does not include actions to achieve its strategic outcomes as these have been developed by the Corporate Management Team and included in the

appropriate SBP for monitoring and reporting to ensure that the Comhairle's mission is achieved. The actions for the Service are detailed in Table 4.

How we will measure our performance

- 4.4 The tables below are grouped by Strategic Priority and include the Corporate Strategy 2024-27 'Measures of Success' Strategic Outcome KPIs that the service contributes to, the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) SPIs that the service have prioritised for improvement, and the LPIs chosen by the service to strengthen its focus on improvement.
- 4.5 Each performance measure includes the baseline year and data, the target for 2025/26, and the aspirational target for 2030. The latest corporate performance reports are available on the Comhairle's [Best Value Performance Reporting](#) web page.

Strategic Priority 2.1 Support children, families, and young people

Strategic Outcome: 2.1.1 Attainment rates continuously improve.

Table 2: Performance Measures

Measure (KPI title)	Baseline	Target 2025/26	Target 2030	Service
2.1.1.CS04 - ECS131 (LGBF: CHN19b): School Attendance Rates (Looked After Children).	2021/22 87%	90%	94%	Children's Services

Strategic Outcome: 2.1.2 Early intervention in place to keep our most vulnerable children safe.

Table 3: Performance Measures

Measure (KPI title)	Baseline	Target 2025/26	Target 2030	Service
2.1.2.CS05 – ECS191: Percentage of children (0-17) with LAC status per 1,000 population. Figure for Scotland was 13.9 in 2020.	2020 10.4%	10%	9%	Children's Services
2.1.2.CS06 – ECS192: Number of children referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA), per 1,000 population aged under 16 years.	21/22 15.8	15	10	Children's Services
2.1.2.CS07a – ECS193: Number of children referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) on care and protection grounds (non-offence), per 1,000 population aged under 16 years.	21/22 10.8	10	8	Children's Services
2.1.2.CS07b – ECS194: Number of children referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) on offence grounds, per 1,000 population aged under 16 years.	21/22 10.9	5	5	Children's Services
2.1.2.CS08 – ECS195: Number of Children's Hearings held, per 1,000 population aged under 16 years.	21/22 25.9	23	20	Children's Services
2.1.2.CS09 -ECS196: Number of children with a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO) in force at 31 March, per 1,000 population aged under 16 years. (Trend)	2019/20 7.1	N/A	N/A	Children's Services

Measure (KPI title)	Baseline	Target 2025/26	Target 2030	Service
2.1.2.CS13 – ECS128: Percentage of child protection re-registrations within 18 months.	2019/20 22.2%	10%	10%	Children's Services
2.1.2.CS14 - ECS129 (LGBF: CHN23): Percentage Looked After Children (LAC) with more than 1 placement in the last year (Aug-July).	2019/20 20%	17%	13%	Children's Services
2.1.2 ECS002 (LGBF: CHN9): Balance of Care for looked after children: Percentage of "Looked After Children" (LAC) being cared for in the Community.	2020/21 80%	86%	90%	Children's Services
2.1.2. ECS197: Percentage of children who through the use of outcome measurement tools, have shown an improvement in their wellbeing after 6 months.	2024/25 77.50	80%	90%	Children's Services

What actions we will take

- 4.6 The SBP strengthens the links with the Corporate Strategy and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP). The actions take into consideration the key areas of focus identified at section two whilst focusing on progressing the strategic outcomes.

Strategic Priority: 2.1 Support children, families, and young people

Strategic Outcome: 2.1.2 Early intervention in place to keep our most vulnerable children safe.

Table 4: SBP Actions

Action	Service
2.1.2.1 Ensure delivery, quality assurance and development of services that meet statutory duties and support the outcomes of the Integrated Children's Services Plan.	Children's Services

RESOURCING THE PLAN

- 5.1 The funding and staffing resources identified to implement our SBP is summarised at 5.2 and 5.4 as per the budget approved by Comhairle in February 2025 and the annual budget setting salary estimates exercise.

Revenue Budget 2025/26

- 5.2 Children's Services has a Net Revenue Budget of £4,670,394.

Capital Budget 2025/26

- 5.3 There is no Capital Budget for Children's Services.

Service Employees

- 5.4 Children's Services have 29.6 FTE employees working across the service. We support these employees to deliver their duties through a range of policies including personal appraisal and a robust training framework.