

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR
EQUALITY OUTCOMES AND
MAINSTREAMING PROGRESS REPORT
2025



INTRODUCTION

As one of the largest employers in the Western Isles, it is recognised that Equality and Diversity is key to the work which the Comhairle is both responsible for and involved in. As an employer and service provider the Comhairle aims to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 came into force on the 27 May 2012. The Specific Duties were introduced by the Scottish Government to assist public authorities like the Comhairle to meet the general duty. The specific duties are:

- Report on mainstreaming the Equality duty every four years, no later than 30 April
- Publish a set of equality outcomes every 4 years, no later than 30 April
- Report on progress made to achieve equality outcomes set out in the mainstreaming report every 2 years, no later than 30 April

Listed public bodies are also required to:

- Assess and review policies and practices
- Gather and use employee information
- Publish gender pay gap information
- Publish statements on equal pay
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement

The Comhairle's Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2021-2025 set out five Equality Outcomes to be measured. Some of the outcomes overlap the Equality Outcomes set out for 2017 to 2021 but an ongoing need for progress has been identified. The five Equality Outcomes are:

1. Make the Western Isles an accessible place to live and work
2. Support independent living and Initiatives which encourage people to continue living within the Western Isles
3. Be recognised as an equal opportunity employer with an employee profile reflective of the authority area
4. Equal opportunity to high quality learning and teaching in all education settings to develop skills for lifelong learning and working
5. Increase the opportunity to participate in public life and the democratic process.

As set out in the Specific Duties progress made since April 2023 is now being reported for the Comhairle, the Education Authority, and the Licensing Board.

EQUALITY OUTCOME 1 – MAKE THE WESTERN ISLES AN ACCESSIBLE PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK

1.1 WORK AND ACCESSIBILITY – COMHAIRLE BUILDINGS AND SERVICES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO EMPLOYEES AND VISITORS

Up until 2013 the percentage of public service buildings that were suitable and accessible to disabled people was recorded and formally reported. In 2013 the Comhairle reported 63.3%. All new building work and refurbishments undertaken are now required to comply with the relevant legislation including the Equality Act 2010.

1.1.1 Complaints

The Complaints Annual Report 2023/24 has been completed and is available on the Comhairle's [webpage](#). A total of 47 complaints were closed in 2023/24: 28 at Stage 1 and 19 at Stage 2. There were no complaints related to accessibility of the Comhairle buildings.

1.1.2 Number and ways service users access services

There are several ways for service users to access Council Services in person, by phone, email or online. Contact can be made by emailing enquiries@cne-siar.gov.uk or by telephoning 01851 600 501. BSL users can contact the Comhairle directly by using [Contact Scotland-BSL](#) and people can follow on [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) and [Facebook](#).

After the Cyber-attack in November 2023, the ICT department had set up a temporary Council Website to reestablish access to popular Council Services and information online. The new, permanent [Council Website](#) went live on 5 December 2024.

Buildings open to the public have adaptations to make them accessible, e.g., floor flush with outside street level or wheelchair ramp in place, automated doors, wheelchair accessible toilets, and a range of other accessibility adaptations at e.g., sports facilities.

Individual Services like Community Learning & Development, Accredited Training team, and Sport & Health team promote and provide a range of opportunities throughout the Western Isles, be it for community-based learning and development services, employability and apprenticeship programmes, or work with partners in schools and voluntary sector.

The Community Learning and Development and Regeneration Team meet with community groups at a venue suitable to local groups on request. In many cases the public will request an online meeting or choose Comhairle offices if more convenient for them.

Further opportunities are made available through e.g. e-Sgoil, using digital platforms, or accessible library vans which also provide books in large print, audio books, and tactile books for children with a variety of additional support needs.

Law and Governance are accessed by phone, email and in person. The Governance and Elections team ensure that every document which is uploaded to the public agendas for Committee meetings is checked for accessibility.

1.2 WORK AND ACCESSIBILITY – LOCAL TRANSPORT IS ACCESSIBLE, AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE

1.2.1 Number of bus passengers recorded on all Western Isles routes

It is a requirement of all Public Service Vehicle operators to comply with the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR). The regulations apply to vehicles of 22 seats and over, which provide a local or scheduled service. Accessibility requirements include the provision of space for a wheelchair with suitable safety provisions, the provision of a boarding device to enable wheelchair users to get on and off vehicles, priority seats are available for elderly passengers and service users with reduced mobility. All PSVAR compliant vehicles are fitted with high visibility handrails and step risers to assist visually impaired passengers.

All 22 seat and over buses and coaches that operate on “Registered Local Bus Services” accepted by the Scottish Traffic Commissioner have been fully compliant with the PSVAR regulations since 01 January 2020.

With the start of the revised Lewis and Harris contracts in October 2019, Public Transport Services were reduced between 15% to 20% in conjunction with falling passenger numbers over some years prior to the Pandemic.

Passenger numbers started increasing again from 2021/22 as passengers were gradually returning across all bus networks after the COVID-19 Pandemic. Bus services have since resumed their normal service, however, the financial restraints experienced by the Comhairle due to, the economic downturn, the cost-of-living crisis and the service redesign have impacted on bus services which in consequence were not provided at the same level as services pre-October 2019.

The after-effects of COVID-19 have seen a move to home delivery services on the Islands and an increase in working from home has also been identified as a contributing factor to falling passenger numbers. This has partly been offset by a steady increase in under 22 passengers use due to the introduction of the Young Persons Free Bus Travel scheme in January 2022.

Selected Period Actuals	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Total Passengers recorded	326488	104175	232029	282775	309694

Table 1

1.2.2 Number of accessible Taxis

As of April 2024, the number of wheelchair accessible taxis (designated for the purposes of Section 165 of the Equality Act) remains stable with five wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles registered across the Western Isles. Every new applicant for a taxi or private hire car licence is encouraged to consider wheelchair accessible vehicles, although it is not enforced. Unlike in more urban areas where large firms use

wheelchair accessible black cabs, in the Western Isles there are no black cabs and there are taxi operators who use their taxi/private hire car for private use which results in a lower number of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

1.3 WORK AND ACCESSIBILITY – CHILDCARE IS ACCESSIBLE FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT

1.3.1 Number of Local Authority Nursery hours available for Early Learning and Childcare

All nurseries in the Western Isles offered a total of 1,169,797 hours of free ELC in 2023/24, which equates to 1,144 hours of free ELC to all eligible children aged 2 to 5 years old. In addition, the ELC offer is flexible to meet the needs of parents, giving the choice of term-time or full-year placements and choice of attendance days and time.

19 Local Authority nurseries are spread throughout the islands – eight of these offer a full-year service and 11 offer a term-time extended day service. In addition, the Comhairle works closely with the three partner nurseries who also deliver the increased free hours. Each child including eligible 2-year-olds are entitled to 30 free hours a week term time and 22 hours a week full year. These hours can either be in a local authority setting or in one of the partner provider nurseries.

These services are being well used, children are taking advantage of additional time in nursery to support their development and feedback from parents has been very positive.

1.3.2 Number of publicly funded pre-school places

The number of funded places depend on the birth rates for approximately three years prior to funded pre-school places commencing as children's dates of birth is the only factor used to determine when children are eligible. Also, there may be more/less deferred entries to school applications. Therefore, figures vary slightly from year to year.

20/21 – 416 publicly funded pre-school places

21/22 – 421 publicly funded pre-school places

22/23 – 406 publicly funded pre-school places

23/24 – 381 publicly funded pre-school places

1.3.3 Percentage of funded early years provision which is graded good/better

There were no inspections in 2020/21 to 2022/23 due to COVID-19. During 2023/24, four nursery settings were inspected, and 50% were graded good or above. Since the beginning of 2024/25, inspection rates have increased again. It is hoped to get a more comprehensive picture of the quality of nursery provision going forward.

1.4 WORK AND ACCESSIBILITY – SUPPORT AND DEVELOP NEW AND EXISTING BUSINESSES

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is committed to improving the economic health and wellbeing of the Outer Hebrides by promoting innovation and diversity in the private sector and supporting local communities in their efforts to generate economic activity. In the context of challenging economic conditions for local authorities, the level of funding available and the way in which it is distributed must ensure that the local economy derives the maximum amount of benefit from any public expenditure.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Business Gateway service aims to stimulate local economic activity by supporting individuals to turn ideas into commercial reality. Through various Comhairle and joint funded scheme partner schemes, financial assistance is provided to assist applicants with the costs related to starting or growing a business, where these projects meet key eligibility criteria and will result in extensive local benefits.

The Outer Hebrides Young Enterprise Support Scheme (OHYESS) was established to support and encourage entrepreneurs in setting up in business or developing a business established within the last five years. The scheme is a collaboration between the Comhairle and Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) – funded by HIE and administered by the Comhairle's Business Gateway team. The scheme is aimed at key sectors and can provide capital grants of up to £7,500.

The Outer Hebrides Youth Enterprise Programme (OHYEP) is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and delivered by the Comhairle's Business Gateway team. The 2-year programme is due to end March 2025. The programme aims to support young entrepreneurs up to age 40 to start or grow a business. Along with revenue grants of up to £3,000, up to 20 hours of intensive mentoring one-to-one support is available

Over the past two years the gender split in male / female led startup businesses has almost been equal and this is similar to results achieved over the past eight years – 225 male and 214 female led business startups supported.

Over the past two years, over 80% of workshop/webinar attendees were female.

The number of people and businesses accessing Business Gateway services is reasonable evenly split between male and female. During 23/24 the number of pre-start enquiries received from males was slightly higher than from females and the number of existing business enquiries received from females was slightly higher than from males.

In 2022/23 the Outer Hebrides Youth Entrepreneurship Support Scheme (OHYESS) supported 11 people to develop their businesses, of whom 44.5% were female and 54.5% were male. In the 2023/24, 17 were supported, of whom 41% were female led and 49% were male led.

Overall, Business Gateway receive more engagement from females, primarily because of their engagement with the workshop/webinar programme.

1.4.1 Number of new business enquiries dealt with

374 new business enquiries were dealt with in 2023/24

1.4.2 Number of jobs created / safeguarded

109.5 FTE jobs were created or safeguarded as a result of support from Business Gateway.

1.4.3 Number of existing businesses supported to achieve growth

- 24 existing businesses with growth potential received support to develop their businesses.
- 46 grants were awarded (£104,642) and 6 loans awarded (£76,735) to aid start-up/ growth.
- Three fisheries investments.
- 58 businesses received expert help.
- Achieved overall customer satisfaction level of 88% against a Scotland-wide average of 79%.

1.4.4 Number of young people supported in business

90 young people under 30 were supported.

1.4.5 Number of new business start ups

51 new business start-ups were supported.

1.4.6 Number of Business Enterprise Skills Workshops delivered

16 Business Skills webinars were delivered.

1.4.7 Number of business gateway start-ups per 10,000 population

	Comhairle	Scotland
2019/20	21.3	16.4
2020/21	24.2	11.2
2021/22	21.4	14.3
2022/23	18	14.3
2023/24	19.6	13.6

Table 2: Number of businesses gateway start-ups per 10,000 population

Connectivity

The latest Scottish Local Authority Economic Development (SLAED) indicators regarding access to broadband show that the percentage of premises unable to access 10 M/Bit/s broadband was 5.1% in 2023, against a slightly decreased national figure of 3.5% compared to 5.2% and 3.7% respectively in 2022. In terms of Superfast Broadband, the percentage of premises able to access services in 2023 was 77.9% against a national average of 92%, nearly unchanged since 2022 when 77% and 91% of premises respectively were able to access Superfast Broadband services.

EQUALITY OUTCOME 2 – SUPPORT INDEPENDENT LIVING AND INITIATIVES WHICH ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO CONTINUE LIVING WITHIN THE WESTERN ISLES

2.1 LIVING STANDARDS – MAXIMISE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING FOR ADAPTATIONS PROVISION, CARE AND REPAIR AND RELATED SERVICES WHICH ASSIST INDEPENDENT LIVING

The Comhairle continues to work in partnership with the Scottish Government and Hebridean Housing partnership to deliver the Strategic Housing Investment Programme. In 2023/24, 6 new housing units were built throughout the islands. At 31 March 2024 there were 80 houses under construction across 2 sites with a further 44 houses either due to start or at tendering stage.

The Goathill development achieved completion on 16 May 2023, and its 50 Housing units with Extra Care flats further support independent living.

In 2018, the Comhairle's Capital Programme set a budget of £1.825m for Medical Adaptations for private sector housing for the five-year period 2018/19 to 2022/23. The new budget for 2023/24 to 2027/28 is set at £2,000,000, broken down as £400k per annum. It is likely that this budget will be fully committed well before the end of the 5-year Capital Programme.

2.1.1 CNES & HHP Annual budget level for Medical Adaptations Funding 2018/19 – 2023/24

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Total
CNES Budget	£450k	£450k	£400k	£350k	£175k	£1.825m
CNES Actual	£537k	£632k	£357k	£606k	£242k	£2.374m
HHP	£301k	£235k	£288k	£324k	£330k	£1.753m

Table 3: Budget for Medical Adaptations

2.1.2 Number of interventions provided by CnES and HHP

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
CNES cases	110	97	111	72	105	27	84
HHP Adaptations	264	292	119	129	151	135	104

Table 4: Number of interventions provided

2.1.3 Strategic Housing Investments Plan 2024 – 2029

The main purpose of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) is to set out the Comhairle’s affordable housing investment priorities in relation to the aims and objectives of its Local Housing Strategy (LHS) as well as to demonstrate the Comhairle’s commitment to helping meet the Scottish Government’s (SG) ‘More Homes Scotland’ (MHS) initiative to deliver 100,000 affordable homes nationally by 2032, with at least 70% of these in the social rented sector and 10% in remote, rural and island communities.

The SHIP primarily identifies proposals for the priorities for investment through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) and has been produced by the Comhairle in line with the revised guidance issued by the Scottish Government in summer 2023 and in partnership with Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP), the main Registered Social Landlord in the Outer Hebrides. The Comhairle’s 2023 SHIP identifies a potential programme for £31.8m AHSP funding for the provision of an estimated 234 new affordable houses from the core programme. It is intended to spread new housing development across all the Outer Hebrides with indicative targets for each island area as follows:

- Barra: 22
- Uist: 40
- Harris: 36
- Rural Lewis: 30
- Stornoway: 106

The Strategic Outcomes of the current LHS to improve housing quality, condition and energy efficiency; sufficient housing supply; access to advice, support and appropriate accommodation to suit the needs of homeless clients; access to services and accommodation promoting and extending independent living; are all facilitating aims within wider strategic contexts and support independent living and initiatives which encourage people to continue living within the Western Isles.

The total estimated Scottish Government investment requirement for the period of the SHIP is set out in Table 5 below.

Year	Estimated SG Grant available
2023/24	£8,343,000
2024/25	£8,372,000
2025/26	£5,000,000 (est.)
2026/27	£5,000,000 (est.)
2027/28	£5,000,000 (est.)
Total	£31.883m

Table 5: SG investment requirement

2.1.4 Annual number of new housing units and tenure options specifically targeted at young people

There are 234 housing units provisionally planned for the next five years. These are built where need and demand can be established, and not specifically targeted at young people. However, on 31 March 2024, more than half (54%) of HHP's Waiting List was for 1 bedroom/single person homes, and there will be a percentage of these who can be classified as young people, but HHP do not collate data for age bands. The Affordable Housing Programme has added 77 one-bedroom homes to the housing stock since 2016 to service the demand for 1-bedroom homes, and a percentage of the 234 in the current SHIP will also be 1 bedroom. This is demand led and determined by HHP.

Shared Equity is also an option available to young people. Since 2011, eighty-six Shared Equity units have been added, most of which are in Stornoway. In addition to these, four Shared Equity properties were developed with West Harris Trust.

2.2 LIVING STANDARDS – AN ADEQUATE RANGE OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION FOR HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS IN TERMS OF SIZE, LOCATION AND ACCESSIBILITY

2.2.1 Homelessness: Number of applications received

The number of homelessness applications made to the Comhairle and the total number of housing applications made to HHP were as follows:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
CNES applications received	152	153	136	150
HHP applications	362	405	438	391

Table 6: Number of applications

2.2.2 The temporary accommodation profile reviewed in Annual Homelessness Report included:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of Homeless Units	65	65	66	68	68	68	67

Table 7: Number of Homeless Units

2.2.3 The number of homeless households requiring temporary accommodation (TA)

Homeless households provided with TA is shown in table 8 below:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Households requiring TA	104	128	102	114
Numbers provided with TA	104	128	102	114

Table 8: Households provided with temporary accommodation

2.3 LIVING STANDARDS – SUPPORT INDEPENDENT LIVING

The Comhairle provides The Energy Advice Service (TEAS) with a grant of £39k each year towards the provision of energy advice. TEAS is delivered by Tighean Innse Gall, the local housing agency. This funding enables TEAS to bid for additional funding (£250k in 2023/24) and this in turn helps TEAS deliver advice to over 1000 households.

The Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) continues to support vulnerable people across the Western Isles and has progressed with several transformational workstreams to ensure an ongoing focus remains on maintaining independence.

The Lewis Residential Care Home (Taigh Shiphoint) and Housing with Extra Care provision (Valtos and Bremner Court) have been completed and occupied by the former residents of the Dun Berisay and Dun Eisdean Care Homes.

A home first approach has been adopted to ensure people are discharged without delay from hospital to an environment in which they are most comfortable.

Since 2014, Self-directed Support (SDS) has been the way that care and support is delivered, making the principles of choice and control central to care and support, and giving individuals full opportunity to take control of their support and their lives. SDS is therefore about how a support plan is put into action so that children, adults, and their carers receive the help they need to meet agreed personal outcomes. There are four main options or ways of directing support. When making these choices, a supported person can choose direct control over their care and support or choose to leave most of the decisions and work to the local authority or choose a mix of these. Some individuals choose externally commissioned services to support their needs and others select council run provider services.

The HSCP continues to maintain its assessment and care management capacity to meet its statutory duties. Additional resources have also been invested in care and support options for carers to continue in their caring role.

The Locality Groups which were established across the islands continue to enable partnership working between the statutory and third sector services to develop a common practice framework for engaging with communities across the Western Isles.

2.3.1 % of population receiving care at home, breakdown of age, gender, disability

In 2023/24, 55% of older people with long-term needs were supported by the Comhairle so that they could remain at home. There are some fluctuations each year regarding the number of people supported due to recruitment status of internal and external providers. Across Scotland the marketplace for such services provides more commissioning options for Partnerships. Western Isles services operate consistently at capacity.

% of People aged over 65 supported	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Western Isles	65.89%	57.24%	59.36%	53.48%	48.99%	54.8%	54.8%
Scotland	61.75%	61.02%	60.68%	61.71%	62.34%	64.8%	64.8%

Table 9 : % of population receiving care at home.

No. of Service Users	2020/21			2021/22			2022/23			2023/24		
Age Group	Female	Male	Total									
Over65	306	130	436	258	138	393	213	123	336	232	152	382
U65	23	21	44	26	19	45	26	17	43	23	13	36
Total	325	149	474	282	155	434	239	140	379	255	165	418

Table 10: Number of Service Users

2.3.2 Number of hours of care provided

CnES Home Care Service:

Planned Hrs	2020/21			2021/22			2022/23			2023/24		
Age Group	Female	Male	Total									
Over65	68,925.65	27,993.68	96,919.33	66,609.96	30,576.48	97,186.44	55,328.31	30,097.17	85,425.48	52,431.63	30,161.41	82,593.04
U65	7,411.13	5,157.19	12,568.32	9,755.95	7,732.49	17,488.44	9621.6	12,289.95	21,911.55	8598.72	11,349.35	19,948.07
Total	76,336.78	33,150.87	109,487.65	76,365.91	38,308.97	114,674.88	64,949.91	42,387.12	107,337.03	61,030.35	41,510.76	102,541.11

Table 11: Number of hours of care provided

2.3.3 Number of Young Carers with plans

In the Western Isles, there are currently less than 10 young people with statements.

It is widely recognised that unpaid carers of all ages provide a vital contribution to our society. It is important that carers are given the support they require and access to services that they need. They should also have the opportunity to achieve a better life balance. With regards to young carers, it is of paramount importance that they are given the opportunity to be children first and foremost and carer second. Children should not take on inappropriate caring tasks or caring which is inconsistent with their age and maturity.

Staff work with carers to complete an Adult Carer Support Plan or Young Carer Statement (ACSP/YCS) that identifies their individual needs and personal outcomes. These are then assessed in line with the agreed local eligibility criteria to ensure that the right level of support is delivered at the right time.

Those carrying out plans/assessments of an individual's needs ensure that the appropriate carer eligibility criteria are satisfied before support is provided. In all cases, those carrying out plans/assessments ensure that carers are encouraged, and where necessary supported, to access mainstream public services, and local community services and supports. Priority is given to carers who are assessed as being within the critical and substantial impact categories.

Pointers Drop-in-Centre is a purpose-built youth centre for 12 – 25-year-olds funded by the Comhairle. Pointers Drop-in-Centre was opened in 2000 and since then has attracted a growing number of young people to take part in its activities and benefit from the services on offer. One of them is the Pointers Young Carers Project, aiming to give the young people a break from their caring roles to have fun and relax with other young carers. The aim is that young people increase their confidence, self-esteem and mental health wellbeing through attending the group.

Through Pointers Young Carers groups, support is currently available to young carers in Lewis and Harris, but it is planned that the project should be rolled out across the Western Isles by March 2025. This is for Young Carers from primary 4 to secondary 6 or 18 years old. To tie in with the rollout, there will be increased advertising and contacting all schools in the Western Isles and partner agencies to identify more carers to make them aware of support available, and to encourage completion of young carers statements.

2.3.4 Uptake of support and benefits

Social Security Scotland (SSS) is responsible for delivering several benefits that have been devolved to Scotland. So far, SSS has delivered 12 benefits. There has been no change in the types of benefits administered since the last progress report in 2023.

New benefits were launched in the autumn of 2024, but no detailed information is available at time of completion of this report:

[Carer Support Payment](#) – this was piloted in Na h-Eileanan Iar area and was rolled out across Scotland in November 2024.

[Pension Age Disability Payment](#) - From 21 October 2024, Pension Age Disability Payment – the replacement for Attendance Allowance – is being piloted in Argyll & Bute, Highland, Aberdeen City, Orkney and

Shetland. The benefit will become available in 13 more local authority areas on 24 March 2025 before becoming available across Scotland by 22 April 2025.

Locally, support is available through the Macmillan Benefits Service and Financial Inclusion Service staff to assist with applications and advise claimants on all the current devolved benefits.

This service is customer led as to how staff handle the application process. The preferred method is visiting the client, but some people are dealt with via telephone call and/or email depending on the circumstances.

The latest [annual publication](#) of estimates of take-up of the Scottish benefits delivered by [Social Security Scotland](#) was published in November 2024, covering:

- Scottish Child Payment
- Best Start Grant
 - Pregnancy and Baby Payments
 - Early Learning Payments
 - School Age Payments
 - Foods Payments
- Young Carer Grant
- Job Start Payment
- Funeral Support Payment

This report looks at actual Percentage of Processed Applications authorised. Unlike in the 2023 progress report, breakdowns of processed applications authorised are now available for fiscal years. Therefore, authorisation rates in Eilean Siar can now be directly compared to Scotland overall.

Scottish Child Payment

Percentage of Processed Applications authorised (2020/21 – 2023/24. First available breakdown for fiscal years.)

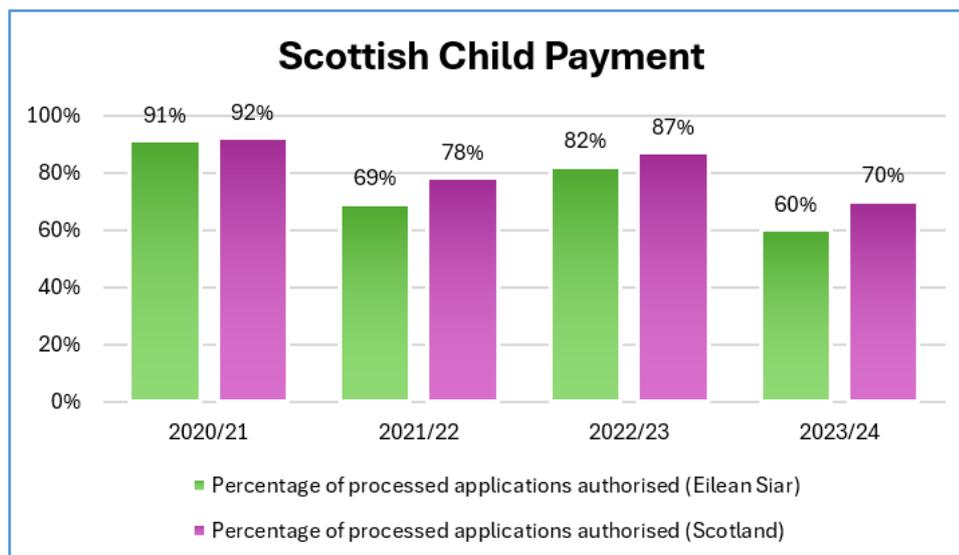


Figure 1

Scottish Child Payment was initially introduced for low-income families with children aged under six. The payment was extended to eligible low-income families with children aged under 16 on 14 November 2022.

It is intended to provide regular, additional financial support for families already in receipt of qualifying benefits to assist with the costs of caring for a child.

In the 2024/25 financial year to date, applications were received from people living in all 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The highest number of applications were 3,980 from Glasgow City, 1,860 from North Lanarkshire, and 1,605 from both City of Edinburgh and Fife. Na h-Eileanan Siar was one of three authorities for which take-up rate estimates were not included because the number of recipients is below 1000 children, deemed to be below the minimum threshold required for confidence in estimates.

Best Start Grant

The percentage of authorised applications for Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods is shown in figure 2. The payment supports low-income families to buy healthy food for children under the age of three.

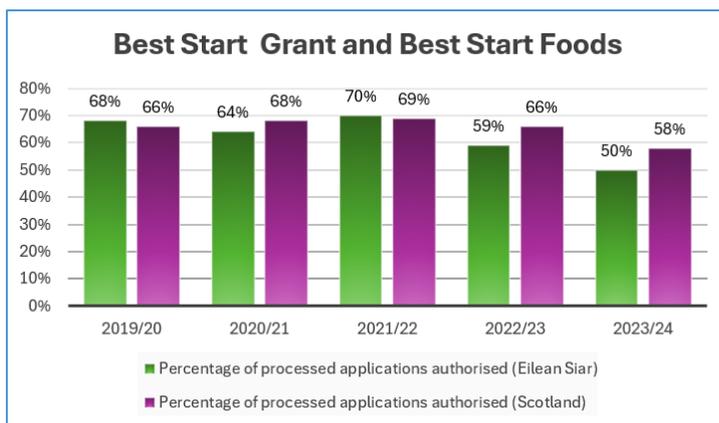


Figure 2

Young Carer Grant

This is a yearly payment of £383.75 for young carers aged 16 to 18 who live in Scotland and care for people for an average of 16 hours a week or more. Numbers for 2019/20 for Eilean Siar were suppressed for disclosure control.

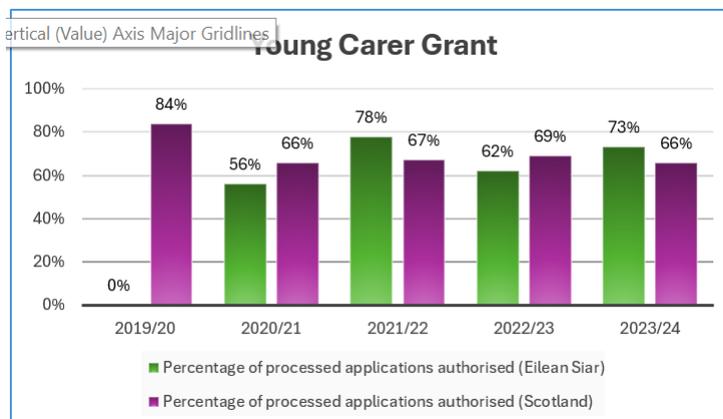


Figure 3

Job Start Payment

Job Start Payment (previously Job Grant) is a new payment to help young people with the costs associated with the transition into employment, after a period out of paid work.

Job Start Payment is a one-off payment of £314.45; £503.10 for a young person with children. It is available to those between the ages of 16 and 24 who have been out of paid work and receiving a low-income benefit for six months prior to finding employment. The number of applications received and processed for 2023/24 were suppressed for disclosure control.

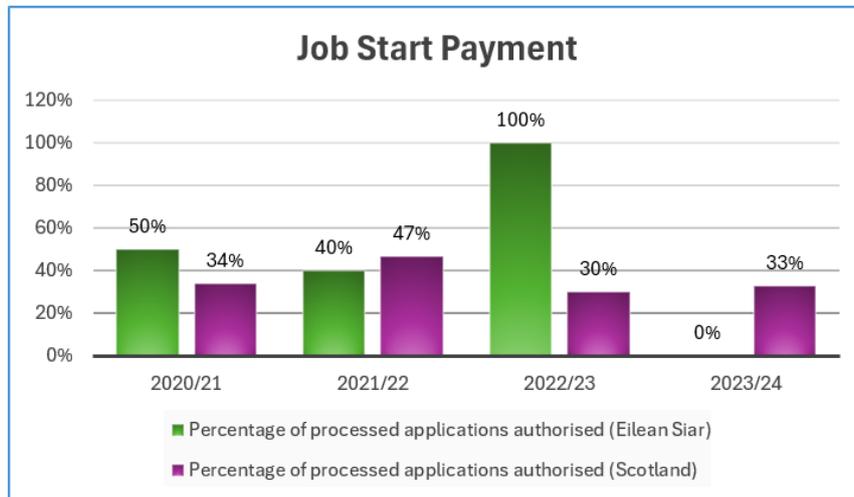


Figure 4

Funeral Support

Social Security Scotland delivers the Funeral Support Payment supporting eligible individuals in receipt of certain low-income benefits with a payment to help in paying for a funeral. The one-off payment is a contribution towards the costs of the funeral. It helps pay for the reasonable burial or cremation fees, some travel costs, and includes a standard flat rate for “other expenses”.

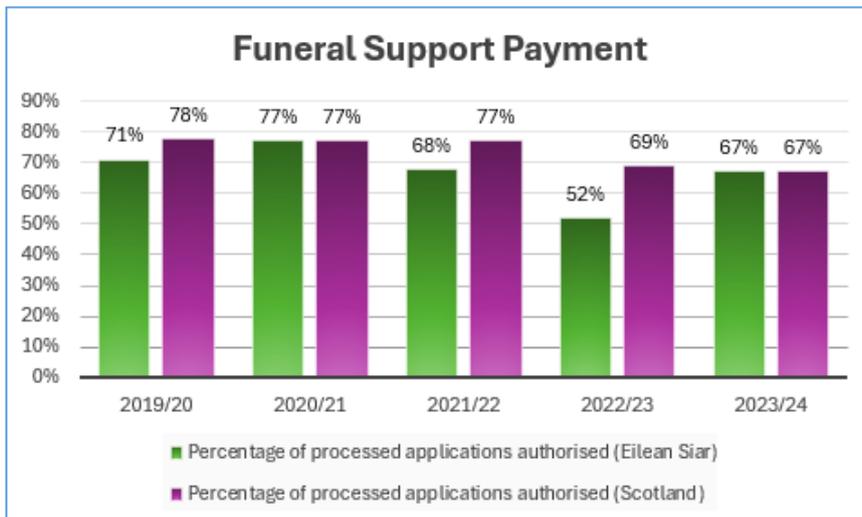


Figure 5

2.3.5 Percentage of Households in Fuel Poverty in the Outer Hebrides

The [Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\)\(Scotland\) Bill](#) was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 26 June 2018 and the [Fuel Poverty \(Targets, Definition and Strategy\)\(Scotland\) Act 2019](#) received Royal Assent on 18th July 2019. This includes a new definition of fuel poverty based on advice from an independent panel of experts and further scrutiny and amendment by the Scottish Parliament.

As set out in section 3 of the Fuel Poverty (Targets, Definition and Strategy) (Scotland) Act, a household is in fuel poverty if, in order to maintain a satisfactory heating regime, total fuel costs necessary for the home are more than 10% of the household's adjusted net income (after housing costs), and if after deducting fuel costs, benefits received for a care need or disability and childcare costs, the household's remaining adjusted net income is insufficient to maintain an acceptable standard of living. The remaining adjusted net income must be at least 90% of the [UK Minimum Income Standard](#) (MIS) to be considered an acceptable standard of living, with an additional amount added for households in Remote Rural, Remote Small Town and Island (RRRSTI) areas.

Extreme fuel poverty follows the same definition except that a household would have to spend more than 20% of its adjusted net income (after housing costs) on total fuel costs to maintain a satisfactory heating regime. ([Scottish House Condition Survey: 2022 Key Findings - gov.scot](#))

In 2022, 791,000 households (31% of all households) in Scotland were estimated to be in fuel poverty, of which 472,000 (18.5% of all households) were in extreme fuel poverty. This is higher than the 2019 estimates of 24.6% (613,000 households) and 12.4% (311,000 households) respectively. ([Scottish House Condition Survey: 2022 Key Findings - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#))

The new definition of fuel poverty affects how it is to be defined and measured. The Scottish House Condition Survey figures published in February 2024 are a best estimate of fuel poverty rates under the new definition. A new Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for RRRSTI areas is yet to be defined. The latest local authority analysis is for the 2017-2019 period. A new baseline target needs to be set under the new definition. New data is not expected to be available until 2026.

The latest Scottish House Condition Survey data on fuel poverty by local authority is from 2017-2019. ([Scottish House Condition Survey: Local Authority Analysis 2017-2019 - gov.scot](#)). This shows that 40% of households in the Western Isles were in fuel poverty, and 24% were in extreme fuel poverty during this period. These rates are significantly higher than the Scottish average and the highest of any local authority in Scotland.

More recent work suggests that rates of fuel poverty in the Western Isles may now be even higher. The key finding from a Fuel Poverty Survey of every household in the area commissioned by Tighean Innse Gall, and published in summer 2024, was that 80% of households were in Fuel Poverty. The data gathered from this exercise will provide valuable information to help shape the Comhairle's future Fuel Poverty Strategy.

The primary causes of Fuel Poverty are poor energy efficiency; high fuel costs; and low incomes and the Outer Hebrides are severely impacted on all three dimensions. Many island homes are large, inefficient buildings with a third of homes built before 1945. 23% of homes are of solid wall construction, extremely difficult to treat with energy efficiency measures, and a further 20% are of mixed construction, for example a solid wall home with cavity wall extension.

As part of the Outer Hebrides Fuel Poverty Strategy, the key activity during quarters one and two in 2023/24 was the tendering and appointment of the Managing Agent for the Energy Efficient Scotland (EES) programme (formerly known as HEEPS). The EES programme will deliver a range of insulation and energy efficiency measures to private sector households throughout the islands. The Comhairle appointed Warmworks to the Managing Agent role in July, with a range of 'roll-out' activities subsequently being carried out such as recruiting local members of staff, engaging with local contractors, and establishing supply chains. The Comhairle was awarded EES funding of £1.609k for 2023/24 and £1.610k for 2024/25.

The Comhairle has also completed its first Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES). The LHEES was approved by Comhairle in September 2023 and submitted to the Scottish Government. The purpose of the LHEES is to set out the long-term plans for the decarbonisation of heat and improving the energy efficiency as a drier of fuel poverty is the highest priority of the LHEES.

The Comhairle led on the development of the Outer Hebrides Fuel Poverty Strategy and Action Plan (2015-2025) to co-ordinate efforts to address this. A multi-agency Fuel Poverty Group supports the implementation of the Action Plan, particularly in seeking to improve the energy efficiency of the local housing stock and to reduce the cost of fuel. While progress has been achieved in the first 5 years, challenges, such as rising fuel costs, changes to national home efficiency specifications, Covid-19 and issues with installers persist.

EQUALITY OUTCOME 3 - BE RECOGNISED AS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER WITH AN EMPLOYEE PROFILE REFLECTIVE OF THE AUTHORITY AREA

3.1 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER – EMPLOYEES FEEL VALUED AND ARE TREATED WITH EQUITY AND FAIRNESS

3.1.1 Employee Survey results

The latest corporate Employee Engagement Survey was undertaken in November 2024 with the intention to gain an insight into individuals' opinions of how they are treated as employees within the Comhairle. The results were not available at completion of this report. However, main insights will be reported on in the next Equality Outcomes Progress Report

3.1.2 The gender pay gap (%)

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 Equality Act 2010](#) sets out specific requirements of named public authorities, including the Comhairle, to publish information on gender pay gaps through an equal pay audit. The Comhairle has completed Equal Pay Audits biennially since 2013.

The most recent [equal pay audit](#) was undertaken in 2023, the next is scheduled to be undertaken during 2025.

Estimation of pay gap information demonstrates that no significant gap exists within grades. The pay gap between men and women is due to there being a larger proportion of female employees within lower graded posts and more male employees in higher graded posts (known as vertical segregation) rather than differences in pay between men and women within each grade.

The Comhairle's grading structure is robust in terms of equal pay as there are no significant equal pay disparities within the grades.

- The Comhairle's pay gap for all employees is 12.34%, a decrease from 13.5% since the last Equal Pay Audit.
- The Comhairle's pay gap for Local Government Employees is 14.82%.
- The Comhairle's pay gap for Teachers is 4.08%
- The Comhairle's pay gap for Chief Officers is 6.75%

3.1.3 Corporate Occupational Segregation Report

The Comhairle has applied an analytical job evaluation scheme, which is agreed nationally, to assess the relative 'worth' of all local government jobs. The job evaluation scheme has recently been updated in line with legislative developments and continues to be monitored and applied using best practice.

Examination of data shows a predominance of women in roles such as care, catering and admin/clerical, while jobs such as cleansing are predominantly occupied by male employees.

Tackling occupational segregation is a significant challenge given the complexity of the issue with external factors such as gender stereotyping from birth; career choices through school/vocational education; availability of childcare etc. which all have an impact, as well as employment factors such as opportunities for flexible working.

3.1.4 Percentage of the highest paid 5% employees who are women.

In 2023/24, 55% of employees in the highest paid 5%; 38% of the highest paid 2% and 58% of the highest paid 10% were women. Overall, the percentages are all moving in a positive direction. The Comhairle will continue to measure the data set over the 3 percentage points. The Job Evaluation pay grading model continues to be applied consistently to ensure that employees are paid for work of equal value.

3.2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER – HAVE AN EMPLOYEE PROFILE REFLECTIVE OF THE AUTHORITY AREA

Census and local data compared with employee profile across protected characteristics

The 2022 census found that:

- 83% of the population in the Western Isles identified as White – Scottish
- 13% identified as 'White: Other British', and 2.2% as White – Other (incl. Irish and Polish)
- 0.6% of the population identified as Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British; 0.5% identified as Other ethnic groups
- 24.3% of the population in the Western Isles stated that they have a disability.
- The largest age group in the Western Isles were 65 and over (26.6%), followed by 50- to 64-year-olds (24.9%) and 35- to 49-year-olds (16.9%).
- 16 – 24-year-olds are now the smallest age group with 7.2%.

75% of Comhairle employees describe themselves as 'White – Scottish'. Data of the 2022 census shows that 83% of the local population in the Western Isles describe themselves as 'White Scottish'.

Less than 1% of Comhairle employees are of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) origin.

2% of Comhairle employees reported having a disability. The 2022 Census found that 24.3% of the authority's population were limited by a disability or health condition. 35% of Comhairle employees have

not disclosed their disability status, therefore it is possible that the actual figure of employees who have a disability may be higher.

The Comhairle Employee Age Profile shows that most employees are aged between 55 to 64 years, closely followed by 45 to 54 years.

3.2.2 Encourage employees to share their equal opportunity information – disclosure levels on MyView

The Comhairle's self-service facility called 'MyView' which is linked to the authority's HR/Payroll system has been restored since the cyber-attack in November 2023. All employees with access to the internet can again log onto MyView from work or home to update their Equal Opportunity data as and when required. Employees are being reminded of this provision on an annual basis. Paper forms have been provided for all employees who do not have access to the internet. This process will continue with the aim of reducing the levels of non-disclosure across all protected characteristic groups.

EQUALITY OUTCOME 4 – EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO HIGH QUALITY LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ALL EDUCATION SETTINGS TO DEVELOP SKILLS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AND WORKING

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the Comhairle worked with colleagues from Education Scotland, Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council with the aim of developing an effective poverty gap measure for rural island communities that creates more sophisticated and granular data. It is hoped that this will be implemented during the 2024/25 session.

A Quality Improvement Officer (QIO) for Attainment has been appointed and is currently reviewing the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) across the Comhairle. New guidelines to support the efficacy and evaluation of PEF spending will be issued to schools in session 2024/25. This will support schools to ensure decisions about identification of learners and support systems to track and monitor interventions and/or approaches, whilst keeping a clear focus on delivering equity through improving outcomes for learners impacted by poverty.

As part of Northern Alliance funding a QIO was appointed to implement the Northern Alliance Learning and Teaching Toolkit. This programme has supported schools to self-evaluate their learning, teaching and assessment, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

4.1 EDUCATION – EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CHOICE THROUGHOUT THE AUTHORITY AREA IMPROVING THE LIFE CHANCES OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Across the stages of the Curriculum for Excellence, learners in the Western Isles saw important success and achievements in attainment in the 2023-24 academic year. As well as focusing on attainment, schools aim to recognise achievement and success in all aspects of learners' growth and development and try to foster strong participation and engagement for all.

The data for Gàidhlig and English writing has been aggregated together to form a common improvement aim due to the small number of Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) learners registered for Free School Meals (FSM). The issues identified in writing attainment are equally evident in both language streams, but at different stages, as detailed above. It should be noted that Gàidhlig Medium Education pupils have literacy levels recorded in both Gàidhlig and English and data for both is included in this analysis of writing at P7. At P1 and P4, literacy levels are only recorded for the relevant medium of education.

There has been improvement across these language streams and year groups. The target reduction of the attainment gap is 7.1%. The most significant intervention being used by schools is the Children & Young People's Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) National Writing Programme. More primary schools joined this programme in 2023-24 and all primary schools will join during session 2024/25. The first pilot cohort of two schools demonstrated an improvement in writing attainment at P4 of an average 16% compared to teacher estimates at the beginning of the programme.

The Virtual Comparator: The monitoring system 'Insight' allows schools to compare their performance to the performance of a virtual comparator. The virtual comparator data is made up of pupils from around

Scotland who go to schools with a similar background. This gives a fair way of comparing a school's performance to that of a similar group of pupils, showing where performance is strong and where it might be considered as needing improvement.

4.1.1 Participation rate for 16 – 19-year-olds (per 100)

Each year, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) works with Scottish Government to collate and report on participation of all young people aged 16 to 19. The measure is defined as the percentage of young adults aged 16-19 participating in education, training or employment. It is a key national measure of the success of participation and outcomes for young people.

For young people in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the Annual Participation Measure reports for 2023-24 that 96.8% of 16–19-year-olds are participating in education, training or employment, a slight decrease by 0.4% from 2023 (97.2%). This compares positively to the national participation rate of 92.7%.

The tables below provide a summary of current and historic data from the Annual Participation Measure, including a breakdown by each category:

Year	CNES % Participation Total	National % Participation Total
2024	96.8	92.7
2023	97.2	92.6
2022	96.2	92.4
2021	95.6	92.2
2020	95.5	92.1
2019	95.5	91.6

Table 12

Year	CNES % in Education	CNES % in Training	CNES % In Employment	National % in Education	National % in Training	National % in employment
2024	65.4	1.5	30.0	71.2	1.9	19.6
2023	65.8	1.5	29.9	71.4	1.7	19.6
2022	63.8	1.8	30.6	73.1	1.7	17.5
2021	70.2	2.6	22.9	74.8	1.8	15.5
2020	69.9	2.0	23.7	72.0	1.8	18.3
2019	69.9	1.4	24.3	71.5	2.0	18.2

Table 13

Closing the Poverty-related attainment gap is a national priority and features in the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework. It is also a local priority, and schools are tasked with ensuring resources are being deployed to support and address poverty-related attainment issues.

Following discussions with learners, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, there was a return to full course assessment in 2024 after a three-year period of disruption to the methodologies for examination and certification during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, it remains the case that extreme caution must be taken on making year-on-year comparisons in data from 2019 through to 2024.

- 2019 – Full traditional SQA exam timetable for all courses
- 2020 – Exams cancelled: Awards submitted by schools and then adjusted using an SQA algorithm. Scottish Government then adjusted awards lowered by SQA again post-release
- 2021 – Exams cancelled: All awards made based on teacher judgement of evidence and subject to local moderation and quality assurance checks.
- 2022 – Full diet of SQA examinations but with important changes to course delivery, assessments, exams and grade boundaries.
- 2023 – Full diet of SQA examinations but with adjustments to courses and grade boundaries but not to the same extent as in 2022.
- 2024 – Most courses that had modifications to assessment during 2021/22 and 2022/23 have now returned to full assessment.

Percentage of ASN pupils (in S4, S5 & S6) participating in 2023/24:

In 2023/24 the percentage of S4 ASN pupils participating stood at 94.64% which was below both the Virtual Comparator (96.34%) and the National establishment (96.51%).

In 2023/24 the percentage of S5 ASN pupils participating stood at 96.05% which was above both the Virtual Comparator (95.79%) and the National establishment (94.66%).

In 2023/24 the percentage of S6 ASN pupils participating stood at 96.30% which was above both the Virtual Comparator (92.59%) and the National establishment (94.28%).

4.2 EDUCATION - YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THE CONFIDENCE AND SKILLS TO MOVE ON TO EMPLOYMENT, VOLUNTEERING, FURTHER EDUCATION OR TRAINING

4.2.1 Percentage of pupils entering positive destinations

In 2023/24, 97.8% of pupils entered into positive destinations after leaving school. That is above the national average, and 4th highest among all Scottish local authorities.

4.2.2 Percentage of apprentices achieving target qualifications

The Comhairle offers a range of apprenticeships:

Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) are work-based learning opportunities for senior phase secondary pupils. They provide young people with the appropriate underpinning knowledge and experience to enable them to progress to employment, and modern and graduate apprenticeship programmes. Locally, Foundation Apprenticeships are closing the gap between the classroom and the workplace, with pupils realising the benefits of work-based learning.

Since 2019, the Comhairle has supported 507 pupils to undertake a Foundation Apprenticeship at SCQF level 4-6 in the following areas:

- Automotive
- Business Skills
- Creative Digital Media
- Engineering
- Food & Drink Technologies
- IT Software Development
- Hospitality
- Social Services Children and Young People
- Social Services and Healthcare
- Construction

Modern Apprenticeships (MA) supporting individuals to learn and achieve qualifications whilst they are in employment. MAs are a joint investment between employers and public funding. Although primarily aimed at supporting young people between the ages of 16-24 years old, MAs can be undertaken by individuals of all ages. The Comhairle offer is directly linked with the economic needs of the island and is adapted to follow the ask of employers. This is crucially important to be able to support the islands micro-businesses.

Graduate Apprenticeships (work-based learning opportunities up to master's degree level for new and existing employees created in partnership with industry and the further and higher education sector). These Apprenticeships provide a new way into degree-level study for individuals who are currently employed, or who want to go straight into work.

Bespoke Apprenticeships (tailored Apprenticeship routes developed by the Comhairle Accredited Training Team in areas linked to current and future skills shortages by identifying the needs of the employers and individuals and building a package of training around their ask).

4.2.3 Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 5

In 2021/22 66% of secondary pupils achieved 5+ awards at level 5 compared to the Scottish average of 68%.

In 2022/23, there was a decrease in Western Isles to 60% of secondary pupils who achieved 5+ awards at level 5, as well as in the Scottish average 66%.

4.2.4 Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 6

In 2021/22, 25% of secondary pupils achieved 5+ awards at level 6 compared to the Scottish average of 39%.

In 2022/23, this figure increased to 29%, compared to the Scottish average of 38%.

The Comhairle focuses on meeting the needs of young people in a wide range of ways and level 6 awards are not necessarily the best way of meeting needs. Rather than sitting 5 Highers some pupils will sit less

Highers along with Skills for Work courses at national 5. This approach has resulted in a high percentage of leavers achieving Positive destinations.

4.3 EDUCATION – POSITIVE SCHOOL LEAVER DESTINATIONS FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

The percentage of leavers in the Western Isles in 2023/24 entering employment stood at 44.64% which was significantly higher than both the Virtual Comparator (Insight) and the National Establishment.

Proportion of pupils entering positive destination:

	Comhairle	Scotland
2020/21	97.1%	95.5%
2021/22	97.6%	95.7%
2022/23	98.3%	95.9%
2023/24	97.8%	95.7%

Table 14

4.3.1 Percentage of adults participating in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision achieving one or more of their learning outcomes per annum

Percentage of adults participating in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision achieving one or more of their learning outcomes per annum has been consistent at 100% over the last 4 years.

4.4 EDUCATION – SUPPORT THE GAELIC LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

4.4.1 Gaelic medium education enrolment levels

In 2024, 42% of pupils enrolled into Gaelic Medium Education in P1. All children have access to Gaelic Medium Education (GME) education in each island and in each learning community. GME is available in 22 out of 24 schools.

4.4.2 Numbers attending Ùlpan /Gaelic classes

Ùlpan classes have been delivered and promoted across the Western Isles by Gaelic teaching staff at University of the Highlands and Islands North, West and Hebrides (UHI NWH), and independent tutors trained by UHI NWH, since 2007. The classes are open to all Gaelic adult learners regardless of their level of pre-existing fluency. The classes are funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and because of this, all Comhairle and WI Health Board staff can attend classes free of charge, in addition to parents of children in Gaelic medium education (GME). In 2023/24, a total of 27 attended these classes, two of whom worked at the Comhairle.

SpeakGaelic classes, which began in 2021/22, cater for all learners, including those who have some Gaelic skills already and complete beginners. They provide a comprehensive framework for Gaelic language learning across TV, iPlayer, and BBC Sounds, reinforced by face-to-face classes, again delivered by UHI NWH tutors, and again, free for Comhairle and Health Board staff in addition to parents of children in GME. In 2023/24, 58 attended the two courses which were delivered, five of whom were Comhairle employees.

Gaelic Conversation classes, for speakers needing to develop their confidence in using Gaelic, and free for all Comhairle and WI Health Board staff, in addition to parents of children in GME. Two classes ran in 2023/24, delivered by UHI NWH, and were attended by 35 students, including seven Comhairle employees.

Gaelic for Work Purposes classes, suitable for beginners and post-beginners. Students are given the opportunity to develop basic skills needed to communicate in everyday, vocational and professional contexts. Once again, free for all Comhairle and WI Health Board staff, in addition to parents of children in GME. Four classes were delivered by UHI NWH in 2023/24, and were attended by 13 students, including one Comhairle employee.

Sgilean Cànan classes (Gaelic for Fluent Speakers), suitable for fluent speakers of Gaelic who wish to improve their written Gaelic skills. Once again, free for all Comhairle and WI Health Board staff, and parents of children in GME. Two classes were delivered by UHI NWH in 2023/24, attended by eight students, one of whom was a Comhairle employee.

4.5 EDUCATION – CLOSING THE ATTAINMENT GAP BETWEEN THE MOST AND LEAST DISADVANTAGED

4.5.1 % of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CFE Level in Literacy

	Comhairle	Scotland
2021/22	74.1%	70.5%
2022/23	78.4%	72.7%
2023/24	78.5%	74.0%

Table 15

4.5.2 % of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CFE Level in Numeracy

	Comhairle	Scotland
2021/22	78.7%	77.9%
2022/23	82.2%	79.6%
2023/24	78.7%	80.3%

Table 16

4.5.3 Literacy Attainment Gap (P1,4,7 Combined) - percentage point gap between the least deprived and most deprived pupils

There are several planned interventions in place to support the continued reduction of the gap between the least deprived and most deprived pupils. In 2023-24, most primary schools engaged successfully in a

National Improving Writing Programme with the Scottish Government Children & Young People’s Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC). Across Comhairle primary settings, 26% more learners in receipt of PEF were on track to achieve or had achieved first level in writing than was predicted. When planning and undertaking engagement in the CYPIC programme, LA officers and our Attainment Advisor worked together using data and quality assurance information to prioritise engagement from specific schools where support from the programme was most required.

4.5.4 Numeracy Attainment Gap (P1,4,7 Combined) - percentage point gap between the least deprived and most deprived pupils

We are committed to raising attainment for all learners. Improvement work is identified to target universal improvement as well as having an enhanced focus on learners living in poverty. Numeracy and mathematics working groups (early to second level) have led the review and further development of our numeracy pathways and associated professional learning opportunities. The implementation of the pathways is resulting in improvements in learner experiences and increased expectations for progression in numeracy. Executive headteachers delivered professional learning to teachers in the areas of pace, challenge and assessment at the planning stages. This was identified as an area for improvement in inspections in our schools by Education Scotland. We will continue to embed our refreshed pathways to improve further the quality of the experiences we provide for all our learners. We will continue to prioritise action on raising attainment of learners affected by poverty.

	Full Cohort	FSM	Not FSM	Indicative Gap
2023-24	78.7%	66.7%	79.6%	12.9pp

Table 17

4.5.5 Percentage of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas gaining 5+ awards at level 5

4.5.6 Percentage of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas

The Additional Support Service provides support to schools to minimise and close the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged. Evidence based decisions, by administering a range of educational and social assessments, are made to determine the appropriate level of advice and suitable interventions to be put in place. A staged assessment and intervention model of identifying children’s needs and the resources required to meet those needs is in place across the authority. An annual ASN audit of children’s needs is undertaken to provide data and determine resource allocation to schools.

The Western Isles, Shetland and Orkney have no areas among the 20% most deprived in Scotland as per Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), however, this does not mean there are no people experiencing deprivation living there. In the Western Isles it is not possible to determine whether there are children in either most or least deprived group; therefore, reporting on Performance Indicators referring to these data zones (4.5.3 – 4.5.6) is not applicable.

EQUALITY OUTCOME 5 – INCREASE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC LIFE AND THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

5.1 COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION – GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHALLENGES FACING INDIVIDUAL TO ACCESS SERVICES IN CHANGING TIMES

5.1.1 Digital inclusion

A key focus of the Comhairle's [Digitalisation Strategy 2022-2027](#) which was approved in December 2022, is to ensure our communities have access to digital means and are sufficiently equipped to utilise it, helping reduce digital exclusion. Communication through digital means has now become ingrained into daily lives, with every Comhairle service increasing their provision of digital accessibility and communication options to enhance engagement.

Outreach work through Adult Learning Services and their provision of digital literacy courses and application of the Social Practices approach which allows more tailored learning, is now underway. The Community Learning and Development Team leading the funded scheme have distributed digital devices to those most in need to help address inequalities and exclusion. Work is ongoing within Education and Care Homes to increase people's ability to participate in online interactive activity in all age groups, and businesses continue to be supported to increase their digital skills.

The Comhairle's ICT section is working with partners to ensure digital security and resilience going forward.

5.2 COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION – EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVING INDIVIDUALS WITH PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS IN THE SHAPING OF OUR PUBLIC SERVICES

5.2.1 Number of Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) community engagement events held.

The Comhairle is committed to work with communities and partners to find ways to protect public services. A process of community engagement and empowerment is aimed at identifying those issues that are important to local communities, in addition to investigating ways that could reduce the demand for some services, identify other services that could be more efficiently provided by communities, and agree which services could be changed.

After the disruption due to COVID-19 by the end of 2023 there were area forums in each of the Ward areas throughout the islands. They are made up of representatives of Community Councils, active groups in the area along with Elected Members.

The Community Engagement Team has resumed face-to-face meetings with the individual forums and a further programme of visits by the Leader is being prepared to engage with forums in individual Ward areas.

5.3 COMMUNICATION, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION – BETTER UNDERSTAND THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF SERVICE USERS

Based on the information received through an internal self-assessment exercise the Scottish Governments consultation approach of “We Asked, You Said, We Did,” was adopted to support the gathering of direct and indirect customer comments primarily through surveys and consultations. In 2022/23 there were 11 online consultations undertaken with a further six in 2023/24 using this format.

Service users can provide compliments, comments, criticisms via an online form. Feedback can also be provided in writing, by telephone or e-mail. A link to the online [Enquiry Form](#) is available on the footer of every Comhairle web page.

5.3.1 Percentage of customers satisfied with quality of Customer Services (Town Hall, Stornoway)

The updated [Customer Service Strategy](#) was approved in September 2024. Its aim is to develop common standards of service so that customers should have a common experience and level of service regardless of which service they are seeking or how they choose to contact the Comhairle. Our Customer Care Standards were also updated and outline our commitment to the consistent delivery of good customer service. CnES website adheres to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 at the AA level. This ensures that our content is accessible to a wider audience, including individuals with disabilities. We are committed to providing an inclusive online experience so everyone can access all our services without barriers and strive to continually improve our accessibility measure.

During Covid, customer contact moved primarily to phone and, more recently, to electronic forms and online communication. The Comhairle operates an appointment system for face-to-face contact to ensure that all channels remain accessible. Feedback is encouraged and links to the [Customer Satisfaction Survey](#) are prominently displayed within service areas and in the Have Your Say section of the new website.

5.3.2 Requests for information in other formats (BSL, Gaelic...)

During 2023/24, the Comhairle involved BSL users and those who represent them in the drafting a BSL Plan for 2024-2030. Feedback was gained through an online consultation. A progress report will be published in 2027.

Customer Services have not had any BSL or requests for information in other languages recorded in 2022/23 or 2023/24.

This document may be provided in alternative formats or languages upon request. You can make request by emailing enquiries@cne-siar.gov.uk or by telephoning 01851 600 501.