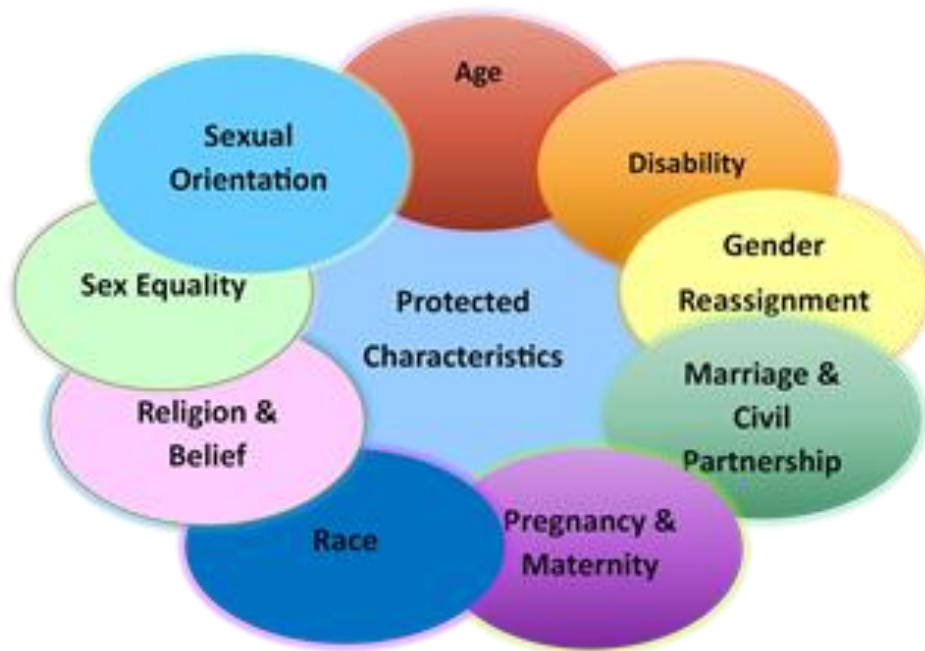


# COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

## EQUALITY OUTCOMES AND MAINSTREAMING PROGRESS REPORT 2023



## 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 2021 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

There have been no complaints regarding the accessibility of Council buildings in recent years.

#### 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](mailto: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 [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

Popular services and information is also accessible via the [Council Website](#).

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.

The Community Learning & Development (CLD) Service promotes and provides opportunities throughout the Western Isles for community-based learning and development services where people are included, participating, achieving and progressing. CLD in partnership with Sport & Health, Schools and Voluntary Groups provide a range of accredited awards that provide young people with transferrable skills to take into further education and the workplace. The Accredited Training Team provides a wide range of employability programmes, apprenticeships and accredited training both internally and with external employers. The Sport & Health Team works with partners in schools and in the voluntary sector to provide opportunities for young people to gain coaching experience in a range of activities.

The Community based services will 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.

The innovative teaching facility, [e-Sgoil](#), based in the Western Isles offers interactive digital learning across Scotland. Activities, training and education with support are also offered depending on the young person's needs; accessible libraries and library vans are also providing books in large print and audio books as well as tactile books for children with a variety of additional support needs.

The Governance and Elections Team ensure that every document which is uploaded to the public agendas for Committee meetings is checked for accessibility.

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## 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.

When the COVID-19 pandemic arrived on the islands, all Western Isles public bus services for April to June 2020 were suspended. Registrations for these Local Bus Services were suspended with the Scottish Traffic Commissioners. Key worker transport operated in most areas, but these numbers were not being logged on operator Electronic Ticket Machines (ETMs). Services resumed on a reduced service from July 2020 and full service resumed in most areas from August 2020.

During 2021/22, recorded passenger numbers are still lower than in 2019/20. Overall, the number of bus passengers has been increasing but, as Table 1 below illustrates, bus passenger numbers remain significantly lower than for the pre-COVID-19 period.

Selected Period Actuals	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Min	28464	0	15026
Max	326488	104175	232029

Table 1 – Bus Passenger Numbers

### **1.2.2 Number of accessible Taxis**

The number of wheelchair accessible taxis (designated for the purposes of Section 165 of the Equality Act) stayed at five 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.

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## **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**

Following the phasing in of nursery service extensions which started in 2017, the Early Learning & Childcare (ELC) Expansion was fully and successfully completed in October 2020. All nurseries in the Western Isles now have increased opening times in line with the demands of local parents and offer 1,140 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 – 9 of these offer a full-year service and 10 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. These services are being well used, 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

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

69.56% - 16 out of twenty-three nurseries are graded good or above.

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## 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 funding schemes (CERGS/ RLF/ FIS), 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 Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme (OHYES) was established to support and encourage young entrepreneurs in setting up in business. 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. Several changes have been introduced including higher grant amounts, intervention rates and removing age restrictions. The new scheme also became the Outer Hebrides Young Enterprise Support Scheme (OHYESS).

In 2021/22 Scottish Government funding was secured for a further phase of the 'DigitalBoost' programme. The aim of the Programme is to strengthen Scottish small and medium-sized enterprises knowledge and skills in digital technology, enabling them to enter new markets, trade internationally, increase business efficiency and increase employment opportunities. DigitalBoost is managed and delivered by Business Gateways across Scotland.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, along with the other Scottish Local Authorities, helped administer significant sums of hardship funding to businesses across Scotland. The critical goal for the Scottish Government was to get emergency aid into local economies rapidly. Most of this support was delivered by Business Gateway and the Revenues & Benefits teams.

In the year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (2019/20) 60% of business start-ups were female, which has since dropped to 40%. One reason may have been the requirement for home schooling during Covid-19. More females than males accessed OHYESS which suggests more female led businesses are operating in key sectors such as creative.

A significantly higher proportion of workshop attendees are female, 78% in 2021/22. On average 70-80% of workshop/ webinar attendees are female. During 2021/22 a similar number of males and females accessed Business Gateway services.

In 2021/22, OHYESS supported 17 young people to start up in business, of whom 59% were female and 41% were male - with similar number in the previous year (2020/21).

The past two years were impacted by the pandemic, hence the significant increase in enquiries and specialist support. There continues to be a good uptake of Business Gateway services, regardless of gender. Business Gateway achieved an overall customer satisfaction level of 91% against a Scotland-wide average of 81%.

#### 1.4.1 Number of new business enquiries dealt with

1,341 new business enquiries were dealt with in 2021/22.

#### 1.4.2 Number of jobs created / safeguarded

148.5 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

- Business Gateway and Revenues & Benefits distributed over £22m in Covid-19 grants to businesses across the Outer Hebrides.
- 41 existing businesses with growth potential received support to develop their businesses.
- 78 businesses received grant/ loan support (£744,516) to aid start-up/ growth.
- 5 fisheries investments.
- 1,051 businesses received expert help.
- 18 businesses benefitted from DigitalBoost 1-2-1 expert help.

#### 1.4.4 Number of young people supported in business

116 young people under 30 were supported.

#### 1.4.5 Number of new business start ups

Fifty-eight new Business start-ups were supported.

#### 1.4.6 Number of Business Enterprise Skills Workshops delivered

Sixty Business Skills webinars were delivered.

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

This is an annual Service Performance Indicator which is reported from centrally collated rather than locally recorded data. The most recent data for 2021 was not available at time of publication of this report.

New Business Starts per 10,000 Working Age Population	Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Scotland
2019	48	62
2020	45	51

Table 2 – Business Starts per 10,000 Working Age 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 5.2%, against a national figure of 3.7% compared to 6.4% and 4.2% respectively in 2021. In terms of Superfast Broadband, the percentage of premises able to access services in 2022 was 77% against a national average of 91%, this has improved since 2021 when 73.9% and 93.3% of premises respectively were able to access Superfast Broadband services.

Build for the remaining R100 infrastructure (R100 - bringing superfast broadband to Scotland) starts in 2025 and is scheduled to be completed by 2028.

## 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 (HPP) to deliver the Strategic Housing Investment Programme. In 2021/22, 78 new housing units were built throughout the islands. At 31 March 2022 there were 96 houses under construction across 5 sites with a further 85 houses either due to start or at tendering stage.

Further support for independent living is the development of 50 Houses with Extra Care at the Goathill site in Stornoway – 35 are being retained by HHP and 15 are being leased back to the Comhairle for Social Care purposes. These were under development during 2021/22 and continued through 2022/23. Handover is anticipated in Spring 2023.

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.

#### 2.1.1 CNES & HHP budget Annual budget level for Medical Adaptations Funding 2018/19 – 2022/23

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Total
<b>CNES Budget</b>	£450k	£450k	£400k	£350k	£1.825m
<b>CNES Actual</b>	£537k	£632k	£357k	£606k	£2.374m
<b>HHP</b>	£301k	£235k	£288k	£324k	£1.436m

Table 3 - CNES & HHP budgets for Medical Adaptations Funding 2018/19 – 2021/22

#### 2.1.2 Number of interventions provided by CnES and HHP

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
<b>CNES cases</b>	110	97	111	72	105
<b>HHP Adaptations</b>	264	292	119	129	152

Table 4 - Number of interventions provided by CnES and HHP



### 2.1.3 Strategic Housing Investments Plan 2018 – 2023

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 50,000 affordable homes nationally by 2021/22.

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 August 2018 and in partnership with Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP), the main Registered Social Landlord in the Outer Hebrides.

The Strategic Outcomes of the 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 for the period of the SHIP is set out in Table 5 below.

Years	Estimated SG Grant available
2019/20	8,520,000
2020/21	9,092,000
2021/22	5,000,000
2022/23	5,000,000
2023/24	5,000,000
Total	32,612,000

Table 5 – Strategic Housing Investment Plan

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

There are 210 housing units 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 2022 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 210 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.

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## 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

Number of Homeless Persons applications received who have come to the Comhairle as Homeless and are in Temporary Accommodation, waiting to get an allocation of an HHP house.

	2020/21	2021/22
<b>CNES applications received</b>	152 cases	153 cases
<b>HHP Waiting list</b>	481	515

Table 6 – Homelessness: Number of applications received & HHP Waiting List

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

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
<b>Number of Homeless Units</b>	65	65	66	68	68

Table 7 – Temporary Accommodation profile

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## 2.3 LIVING STANDARDS – SUPPORT INDEPENDENT LIVING

There are currently two funding agreements in place with partner agencies to assist the Comhairle with the delivery of its statutory duties and in meeting Local Housing Strategy objectives. These are with Western Isles Foyer for Homeless Support for Young People and with The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS), delivered by Tighean Innse Gall for the provision of Energy Efficiency Advice. Both funding agreements are longstanding ones.

The agreement between Western Isles Foyer and the Comhairle was established to assist in meeting the support needs of young people in the Western Isles who are either homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Western Isles Foyer works with young people aged 16 -25 who are homeless, in housing need or are subject to other significant social disadvantages. The Foyer delivers three main services:

- Independent Living Skills – Western Isles Foyer staff provide young people with support to develop their independent living skills.
- Drop-in Centre – a hub for young people to access support and advice on an informal and group basis. In 2021/22, support was given to 11 clients – there were fewer drop-in services available owing to Covid restrictions.
- Supported Tenancies – tenancy support for young people in Hebridean Housing Partnership properties. In 2021/22 Foyer were able to support 43 clients.

Key performance impacts in 2021/22 for TEAS include securing £235k of project and partnership funding and dealing with 1156 home advisory enquiries. Both agencies make an important contribution to Comhairle LHS priorities. Financial provision is in place for the continuation of Funding Agreements in 2022/23.

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 new care home Taigh Siophoirt opens its doors to residents and their families in April 2023 replacing 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 which they are most comfortable.

Since 2014 Self-directed Support (SDS) is 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 in order 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 2021/22 49% of older people with long-term needs were supported by the Comhairle so that they could remain at home.

% of People aged over 65 supported	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
<b>Western Isles</b>	65.89%	57.24%	59.36%	53.48%	48.99%
<b>Scotland</b>	61.75%	61.02%	60.68%	61.71%	62.34%

Table 8 – % of People aged over 65 receiving care at home

No. of Service Users	2020/21	2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	2021/22	2021/22
Age Group	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Over65	306	130	436	258	138	393
U65	23	21	44	26	19	45
Total	325	149	474	282	155	434

Table 9 – Number of Homecare Service Users by age and gender

### 2.3.2 Number of hours of care provided

CnES Home Care Service:

Planned Hrs	2020/21	2020/21	2020/21	2021/22	2021/22	2021/22
Age Group	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Over65	68,925.65	27,993.68	96,919.33	66,609.96	30,576.48	97,186.44
U65	7,411.13	5,157.19	12,568.32	9,755.95	7,732.49	17,488.44
Total	76,336.78	33,150.87	109,487.65	76,365.91	38,308.97	114,674.88

Table 10 – Number of hours of care provided

### 2.3.3 Number of Young Carers with plans

In the Western Isles, there currently are 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.

Children's Services has provided additional resources to assist with young carer statements. This will support the completion of statements for known young carers and will assist partner agencies to identify additional young carers.

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.

There is no cost to attending any of the groups, free transport and a hot meal is also provided. Although the numbers of young people attending are small, they have doubled since 2017/18.

#### **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, 7 of which are new.

Locally, within the Macmillan Benefits Service and Financial Inclusion Service staff assist with applications and advise claimants on all the current devolved benefits and as each one is being launched staff attend training as required.

To help clients access benefits they are entitled to, staff visit people in their own homes or wherever best suits that client. Some people are dealt with via telephone call and/or email depending on the circumstances. This service is customer led as to how staff handle the application process, but the preferred method is visiting the client.

A new, [annual publication](#) contains the Scottish Government's latest estimates of take-up of the Scottish benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland, including:

- 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. Existing data for benefit payments is not always comparable for the same time frame or indeed available for individual years. Hence this is a general introduction of the new benefits and compares authorised applications and payments made for the Western Isles with rates of Scotland overall.

Scottish Child Payment – Percentage of Processed Applications authorised (2019 – May 2022)  
(Breakdown for fiscal years not available)

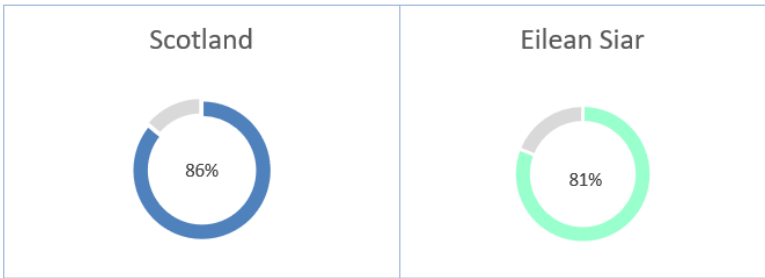


Figure 1 - Scottish Child Payment - Authorised Applications – Scotland and Western Isles

The number of applications for Scottish Child Payments considerably exceeds all payments made for other benefits. In the Western Isles, over 3,000 payments have been made for Scottish Child Benefit, whereas some other benefits have very small numbers of payments, sometimes less than 10. However, this is in line with the Scottish Government estimated take-up rates, e.g., in relation to Funeral Support and Job Start Payment.

Best Start Grant

The percentage of authorised applications for Western Isles (70% in 2021/22) has been similar to the overall authorisation rate Scotland-wide (69% in 2021/22).

The largest number of payments are going towards Best Start Foods payments, followed by Pregnancy and Baby Payment. Annual data is not available for Best Start Grant benefits. The overall distribution rate includes payments made since 2019 and up to October 2022.

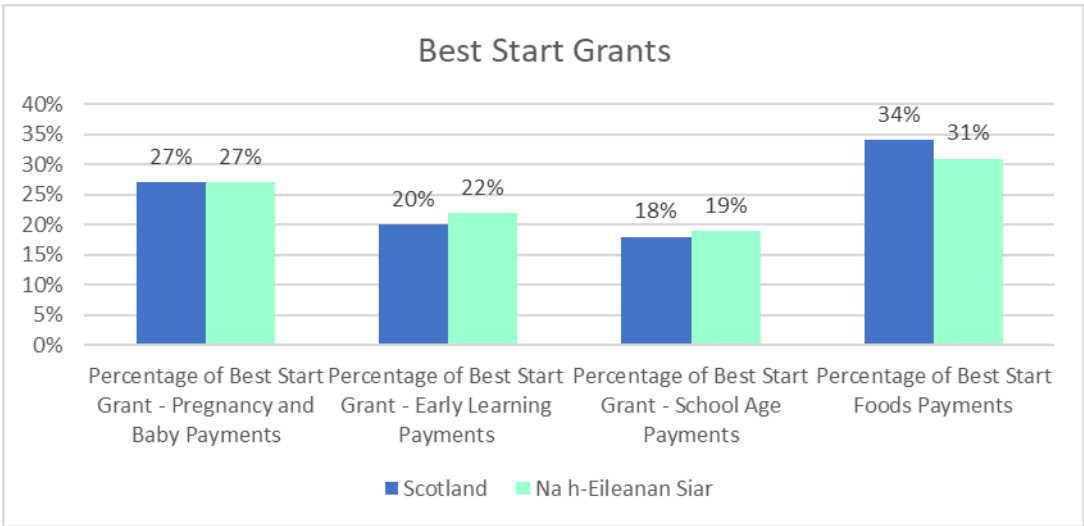


Figure 2 - Best Start Grants – Payment distribution

### Young Carer Grant

This is a yearly payment of £326.65 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. As there are currently less than ten young people with statements, the number of payments made closely reflect the number of young carers in the Western Isles.

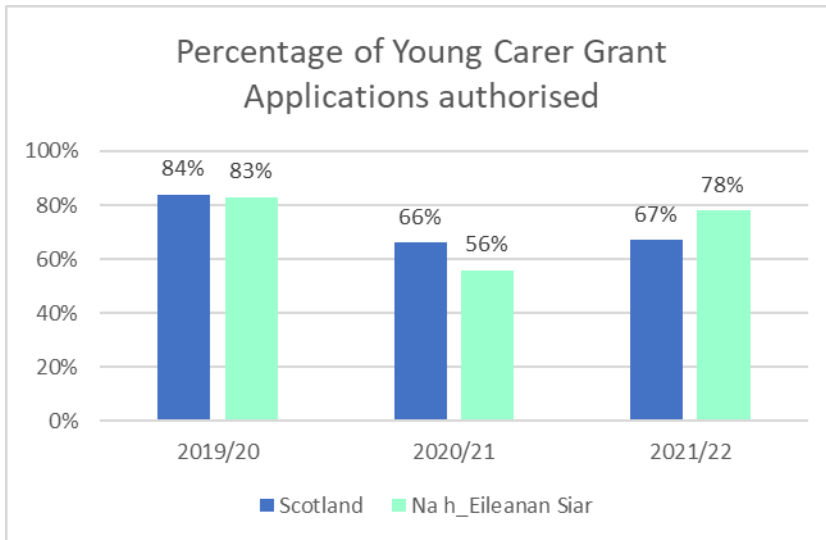


Figure 3 - Young Carer Grant - Number of Payments

### 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 cash payment of £252.50; £404 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.

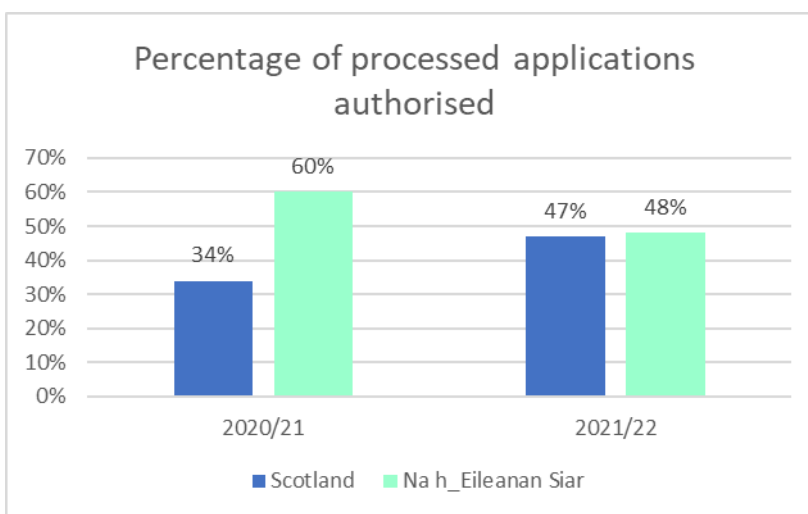


Figure 4 - Job Start – Authorised Applications (%)

## 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'.

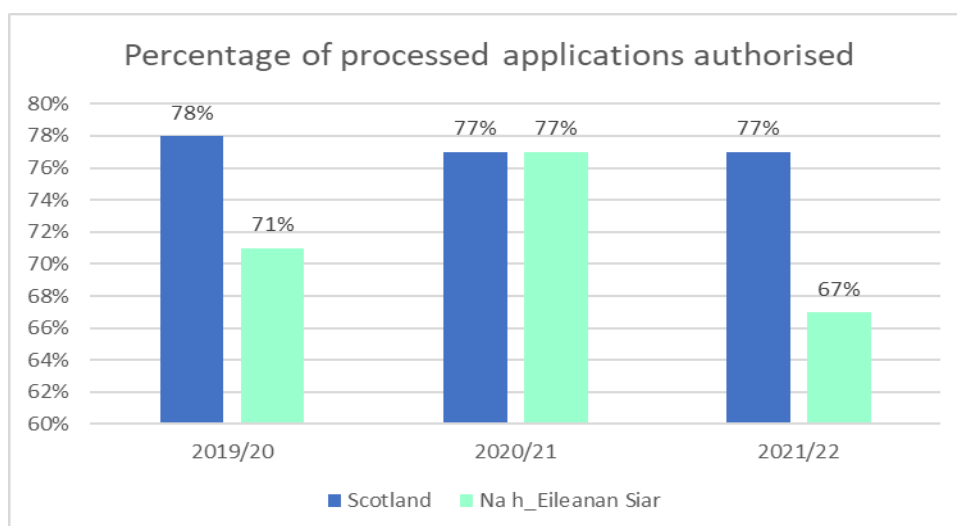


Figure 5 - Funeral Support – Authorised Applications (%).

### 2.3.5 Percentage of Households in Fuel Poverty in the Outer Hebrides

The 2019 Fuel Poverty Scotland Act contains a new definition of fuel poverty which affects how it is to be defined and measured. The [Scottish House Condition Survey 2017 – 2019](#) (SHCS) figures published in February 2021 are a best estimate of fuel poverty rates under the new definition. Under the new definition<sup>[2]</sup>, 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 to be considered an acceptable standard of living, with an additional amount added for households in remote rural, remote small town and island areas.

In the period 2017-2019, the fuel poverty rate varied from 13% in East Renfrewshire to 40% in Western Isles compared to the average in Scotland of 24%.

			CNES (%)	Scotland (%)
SHCS 2017-2019	Fuel Poverty	Householders	40	24
		Older Householders	52	27
	Extreme Fuel Poverty	Householders	24	12
		Older Householders	34	14

Table 11 – Fuel Poverty SHCS 2017-2019



Fuel Poverty is a significant issue for householders in the Outer Hebrides, who experience the highest levels of Fuel Poverty in Scotland. The most recent Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS 2017-2019, published February 2020) shows that levels of fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides are significantly higher than the Scottish average.

Fuel poverty is more prevalent in households with elderly residents. According to the most recent figures, 52% of 'older' households were in fuel poverty in Western Isles area (27% Scotland), and 34% of 'older' households were in extreme fuel poverty in the Western Isles area (14% Scotland)

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.

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, e.g., by conducting home visits and inter-agency referrals that aim to tackle the factors which contribute to fuel poverty. The Comhairle was allocated £1.7m of Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland (HEEPS) funding by the Scottish Government for 2020/21 and £1.9m in 2021/22.

## **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 corporate Employee Engagement Survey undertaken in 2017 provided an insight into individuals' opinions of how they are treated as employees within the Comhairle. Over 59% of respondents agreed that they are treated with fairness and respect with a further 18.8% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Over 58% reported that the health and safety of employees is given a high priority with a further 23.4% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic an employee survey was undertaken in July 2020 with the specific aim of gaining a better sense of current working practicalities and to gauge the impacts on employees both on a personal and professional level. Respondents included employees continuing to work as normal and employees whose working practices had changed including working from home, alternative or restricted duties and alternative working locations. The survey included health and wellbeing, health and safety and communication related questions and a full set of equality monitoring questions. The results of the survey informed how the Comhairle planned for the future to support the development of sustainable working practices and to ensure that employees feel comfortable in their working environment.

The next Employee Engagement Survey is scheduled for 2023.

#### **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 Audit's biennially since 2013.

The most recent [equal pay audit](#) was undertaken in 2021, the next is scheduled to be undertaken during 2023.

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 workers within the lower grades 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 13.5%, for Local Government Employees it is 12.65%.

### **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 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 and technical jobs are largely occupied by male employees.

The Comhairle offers various measures to support women in the workplace (e.g., flexible working, special leave). However, external factors can impact on career choices and make occupational segregation a very complex issue.

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

In 2022, 50% of employees in the highest paid 5%; 30% of the highest paid 2% and 53% 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.

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

### **3.2.1 Census and local data compared with employee profile across protected characteristics**

The 2011 census found that:

- 86.9% of the population in the Western Isles identified as White – Scottish
- 10.5% identified as 'White: Other British', and 1.7% as White – Other (incl. Irish and Polish)
- 0.5 % of the population identified as Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British; 0.4% identified as Other ethnic groups
- 29.5% of the population in the Western Isles stated that they have a disability.
- The largest age group in the Western Isles were 45- to 59-year-olds (22.1%), followed by 60- to 74-year-olds (19.4%) and 30- to 44-year-olds (18.3%).

76% of Comhairle employees describe themselves as 'White – Scottish'. Data of the 2021 census is not yet available, however, similar to the last Scottish census in 2011, this reflects the local population, where 86.9% of the Western Isles describe themselves as 'White Scottish'.

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

2% of Comhairle employees reported having a disability. The 2011 Census found that 29.5% of the authority's population were limited by a disability or health condition. 28% 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 and 35 to 44 years.

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

The Comhairle have a self-service facility in place called 'MyView' which is linked to the authority's HR/Payroll system. All employees with access to the internet can 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**

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Staff in Education Skills and Children's Services worked in partnership to meet the needs of vulnerable children. Hubs, led by school staff, were set up during term time to enable staff to work directly with young people, ensuring the continuity of services to those deemed vulnerable. The daily contact with staff supported wellbeing and anxiety issues as well as core learning.

Additionally, appropriate school staff checked in with families on a regular basis to ensure that any barriers to learning were addressed. In some incidences, children and young people were encouraged to access the hubs if they were struggling with learning at home.

Over the summer months, Community Learning & Development (CLD) staff led six holiday hubs, providing activities for the children of Key Workers and Vulnerable Pupils, on a weekly basis from 8.30-3.30. Young people participating in the hubs reported increased confidence, feeling happy and included.

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### **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 2021-22 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 Comhairle's Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) supports children and families from birth to 18 years old. Early years staff are advised to seek Comhairle support when it is identified that they will be working with a child or parent that is a user of BSL.

If a Deaf pupil joins a nursery in the local authority, then the Comhairle's TOD will have been informed by Audiology although the nursery can contact the TOD directly. There are no pupils in the authority who currently use BSL as their first language. The Comhairle has bought a BSL pack from The Highlands Council which is an excellent 1+2 resource for primary schools.

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)

The Participation Rate measures the percentage of 16–19-year-olds participating in education, employment or training. In 2021/22, 96.22% in Western Isles were participating in learning, training or work against a Scottish average of 92.35%. That is a slight increase to the participation rate of 95.6% in 2020/21 for Western Isles and a Scottish average of 92.2% respectively.

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.

Significant caution must still be taken when drawing comparisons between performance in 2022 and other years. With no examinations in 2020 or 2021 and changes made to course delivery, internal assessments, exam content and grade boundaries in 2022, the data for each of the last four years stands alone in terms of seeking trends and patterns.

- 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.

Percentage of ASN pupils (in S4, S5 & S6) participating in 2021/22:

In 2021/22 the percentage of S4 ASN pupils participating stood at 97.27% which was above both the Virtual Comparator (95.82%) and the National establishment (96.38%).

In 2021/22 the percentage of S5 ASN pupils participating stood at 98.51% which was above both the Virtual Comparator (95.67%) and the National establishment (94.40%).

In 2021/22 the percentage of S6 ASN pupils participating stood at 91.49% which was below both the Virtual Comparator (93.40%) and the National establishment (93.77%).

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

Scotland-wide, positive destinations for school leavers fell from 95.1% to 93.3% in 2020, with a sharper reduction for young people in the most deprived SIMD group. The percentage of leavers in employment fell to a record low in 2020, reflecting the impact of COVID-19 on school leavers' choices and opportunities, and while uptake of higher education increased for all SIMD groups, it did so at a faster rate for the least deprived. In 2021 however, destinations recovered to pre-pandemic levels, increasing from 93.3% to 95.6%. This reflects an increase in the proportion of leavers entering employment in 2021, which returned to 22.6%, on par with pre-pandemic levels. While this pattern is true for all SIMD groups, the increase was largest for pupils in the most deprived areas, resulting in a narrowing of the deprivation gap to its smallest

size since 2011/12. The participation rate increased in 2020/21, which was due to an increase in young adults remaining in or re-entering education (particularly school). 16 – 19-year-old participation and school leaver destinations continue to be positive in Western Isles. The percentage of school leavers in the Western Isles entering a positive destination continues to outperform the Scottish average of 95.48%.

#### **4.2.1 Percentage of pupils entering positive destinations**

In 2020/21, 97.1% of pupils entered into positive destinations after leaving school. That is above the national average, and 4<sup>th</sup> highest among all Scottish local authorities. This number has remained stable and above average for years, however the number for 2021/22 is not yet available.

#### **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. FAs can be taken over one or two years for S4-S6 pupils. Pupils spend time out of school with local employers and complete the FA alongside their school subjects. The Comhairle offer nine Foundation Apprenticeships to all 4 of the secondary schools within the Western Isles.

Modern Apprenticeships (MA) support 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).

People enrolling to Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) throughout one year may not complete their training in the same year. The same applies to Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) which run with the school year.

In 2020, 86.89% of those who had enrolled completed their apprenticeships, with 90.14% of those who had enrolled completing their FAs in 2021.

Completion rate for MAs in 2020 was 78%, and 95% in 2021.

#### **4.2.3 Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 5**

In 2020/21 72% of secondary pupils achieved 5+ awards at level 5 compared to the Scottish average of 67%.

In 2021/22, there was a slight decrease in Western Isles to 70% of secondary pupils who achieved 5+ awards at level 5, whereas the Scottish average increased slightly to 69%.

#### **4.2.4 Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 6**

In 2020/21 39% of secondary pupils achieved 5+ awards at level 6 compared to the Scottish average of 41%.

In 2021/22, this figure decreased to 27%, compared to the Scottish average of 40%.

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. As with all attainment measures the cohort at the time can make a significant impact.

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### **4.3 EDUCATION – POSITIVE SCHOOL LEAVER DESTINATIONS FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE**

The percentage of leavers in the Western Isles in 2020/21 entering employment stood at 38.97% which was significantly higher than both the Virtual Comparator ([Insight](#)) and the National Establishment.

#### **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.

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### **4.4 EDUCATION – SUPPORT THE GAELIC LANGUAGE AND CULTURE**

#### **4.4.1 Gaelic medium education enrolment levels**

In 2022 54% 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 classes**

Ùlpan classes have been delivered and promoted across the Western Isles by Gaelic teaching staff at University of the Highlands and Islands Outer Hebrides (UHI OH), and independent tutors trained by UHI



OH, since 2007. The classes are open to all Gaelic adult learners regardless of their level of pre-existing fluency. The classes are largely funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and because of this, all Comhairle and WI Health Board staff can attend classes free of charge. Typically, prior to the pandemic, classes across the Isles were attended by 60-80 adult learners per year.

In 2020/21, a total of 8 attended a pilot of a new online version of the course, developed by UHI OH because lockdown made it impossible to hold face-to-face classes. After trialling successfully, it has been added to the roster of Ùlpan learning options available.

In 2021/22, a total of 28 attended Ùlpan classes. The disruptive effects of Covid and lockdown are still evident, and, in consequence, it has not yet been possible to achieve pre-pandemic attendance figures for Ùlpan classes. In addition, a new Gaelic course has been developed called “SpeakGaelic”, which began in 2021/22, as well as new Conversation classes and Gaelic for Work Purposes classes. Because all new formats remain available, there is now a variety of Gaelic learning options. It is likely that consequently fewer people have enrolled for Ùlpan classes since 2021.

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## 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

In 2020/21 64.47% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieved the expected CFE level in literacy against a Scottish average of 66.88%

In 2021/22, P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving the expected CFE level in literacy increased to 74.06%. The Scottish average increased to 70.54%.

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

In 2020/21 71.22% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieved the expected CFE level in numeracy against a Scottish average of 74.69%.

Achievement levels in 2021/22 increased to 78.69%, against a Scottish average of 77.95%.

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

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

### 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 Learning 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

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### 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

The Comhairle's [Digitalisation Strategy](#) 2022-2027 was approved in December 2022. Strategic Priorities have been defined for three main areas and a suite of indicators have been developed and will be input to the Comhairle's Performance Management System (interplan) for monitoring and reporting from 1 April 2023. This includes place-based and Smart working environments for all, that promote equality and to deliver a collaborative, efficient service that is customer-focused and accessible.

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### 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.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Community engagement events were postponed during 2020-22. There is a new Community Engagement Team with the remit to take forward the Community Engagement Strategy. Actions for immediate implementation have been agreed, including a refresh of the area forum membership throughout the Western Isles, and a programme of engagement and support for those areas which have, or intend to have, constituted Area Forums.

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### 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 2019 there were nine online consultations undertaken with a further ten undertaken in 2020 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. Individual Services undertake satisfactions surveys on a regular basis including the Council Tax Section and the Planning Service.

### **5.3.1 Percentage of customers satisfied with quality of Customer Services**

The Comhairle has a Customer Services Strategy and Customer Care Standards in place. Customer Services is the first point of contact if individuals wish to pay, book, apply, report, or enquire about a wide range of Comhairle services. CnES fully supports Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) set out by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). These guidelines aim at ensuring websites are accessible by all users including those with disabilities. All CnES web content complies with or is in the process of being made compliant with the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) 'AA' standard.

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, face-to-face consultations and the use of paper questionnaires were suspended. Services were being provided in line with Scottish Government guidance and the level of restrictions in place which varied over the period. Previous years indicated a high satisfaction overall - between 2013 and 2019 continuously, a minimum of 90% of customers indicated they were very satisfied with services received.

Customers can access a [Customer Satisfaction Survey](#) online.

### **5.3.2 Requests for information in other formats**

During 2018 the Comhairle involved BSL users and those who represent them in the drafting a BSL Plan for 2018-2024. Feedback was gained through an online consultation and a face-to-face participation event. A progress report and updated BSL Plan will be published in 2024.

Customer Services have not had any requests for information in BSL or other languages recorded in 2020/21 or 2021/22.

Language Line is still in use. The numbers have always varied and there was no discernible trend over the last 10 years.

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

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