



COMMUNITY SAFETY BOARD

18 SEPTEMBER 2024

WESTERN ISLES CITIZENS ADVICE SERVICES – ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Report by Chief Officer, Assets and Infrastructure

PURPOSE

- 1.1 To note the Western Isles Citizens Advice Services Annual Report for 2023-24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Comhairle provides or funds various advice services for local residents including debt, welfare, consumer, housing and general advice. Some of these advice services are legally required, and historically these have been contracted to Western Isles Citizens Advice Service (WICAS).
- 2.2 The Comhairle funded contract is the main source of funding for WICAS and the service would be unable to continue in its current form without it. As a result of holding the Comhairle contract WICAS have been able to bid for and operate various additional advice services, “levering” in an additional £233,952 for the year. WICAS have also recorded a client financial gain of £1,262,398 for 2023-24, although in real terms the figure was anticipated to be well in excess of this amount.
- 2.3 Appendix 1 details the Western Isles Citizens Advice Service’s Annual Report for 2023/24
- 2..3 A summary of WICAS’s annual activity is also included in the Consumer and Environmental Services Annual review for 2022-23 which is detailed in a separate report to this meeting.
- 2.4 WICAS members will be giving a short presentation to the board on their activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle notes the Western Isles Citizens Advice Services Annual Report for 2023-24.**

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Appendices:	1.Western Isles Citizens Advice Services Annual Report for 2023-24	
Background Papers:	None	

IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Support children, families and young people and Support resilient communities and quality of life
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Comhairle provides or funds various advice services for local residents including debt, welfare, consumer, housing and general advice. Some of these advice services are legally required and have been historically contracted out with Western Isles Citizens Advice Service (WICAS) providing the services to allow it to provide such a Service.
- 5.2 Until 2008 this funding was generally provided by an annual grant. Since then, the Comhairle had subjected the Service to an open tendering process in order to test the market for other providers. Since 2008 WICAS have been the only provider that has submitted a tender or shown realistic evidence that the tender brief could be fulfilled. In discussion with procurement, in 2023-24, funding reverted back to a grant award based on the funding available and agreed terms with WICAS.

WICAS

- 6.1 WICAS have been operating since 1983 and are part of the Scottish Citizens Advice network. Advice is provided by a mixture of paid staff and volunteers throughout the islands, with offices in Stornoway, Tarbert, Balivanich and Castlebay. The Service provides advice through a variety of means, including an outreach service where people can attend any of the offices.
- 6.2 WICAS have continually been able to apply for and lever in additional funding to enhance and extend the range of advice and assistance to the most vulnerable members of the community, with the current examples including additional funded legal and fuel poverty related advisors. As a result of the Comhairle funding WICAS have been able to “lever” in an additional £233,952 for the 2023-24.
- 6.3 WICAS have achieved significant financial gain for their services users throughout the years, with a recorded financial gain for clients in 2023-24 of £1,262,398, although in real terms the figure was anticipated to be well in excess of this amount. In addition there are many other non-financial positive outcomes for their clients across a variety of advice areas from housing to health.

Conclusion

- 7.1 WICAS provide essential advice services to the most vulnerable residents of the Outer Hebrides, with a physical and staffing presence in each of the four main islands. Through the Comhairle funding they are able to secure significant financial and welfare related benefits for their service users.