

COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

Consumer and Environmental Services

Service Plan 2023/24 –Year End Review

General Overview

Business and Service Plan

The Section had one action in the [Departmental Business Plan](#): completion of the Service plan. The action was generally on target up until the cyber-attack in November 2023 where priorities shifted to recovery and responding to day-to-day issues. The cyber-attack affected the majority of systems used to record performance and progress with various inspection plans and licences, which has impacted on what can be reported in this review.

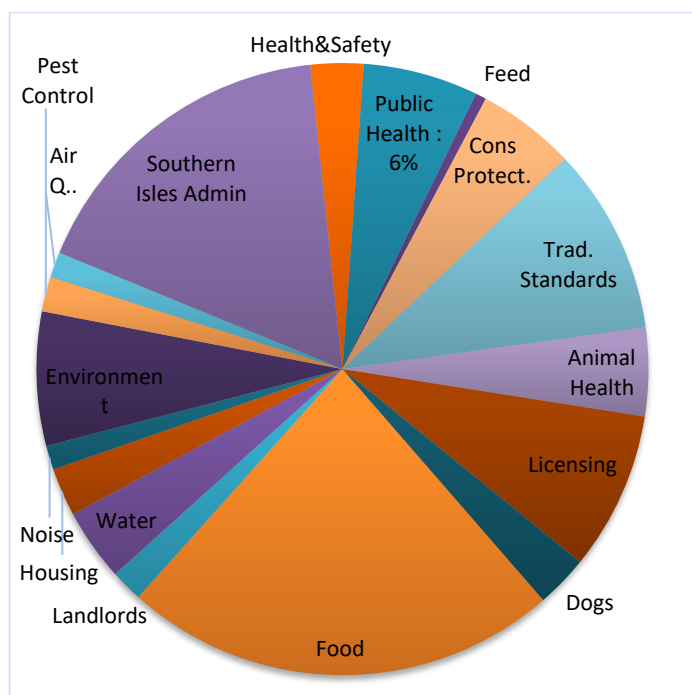
All figures detailed in the review are as accurate as possible but are taken from limited and varied resources due to the cyber-attack, therefore they may not be truly reflective of Service activity.

The 2023/24 Service Plan was approved by the Comhairle in February 2023.

Staffing

The full-time equivalent staffing of the section for the year was 13.44. Two environmental health officers and one Service support assistant left within the year and the posts, although vacant for periods, were all subsequently filled.

All officers continued to be involved in a wide range of activities and functions across the Services. An approximate split of the work of the Services is detailed below based on categories linked to those used by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) for benchmarking.



Workstreams

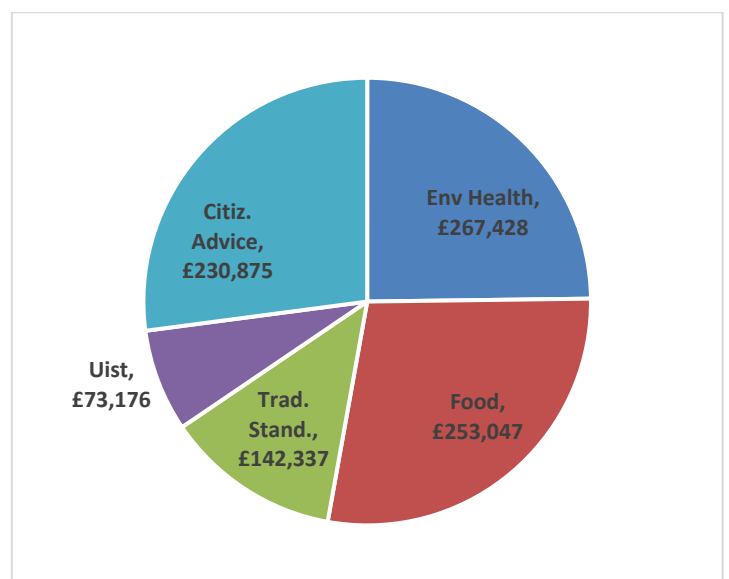
A large part of the Service's work is reactive which impacts on programmed activity. In addition, the time taken for many programmed activities has increased from what was planned. Although all the figures in the review may not demonstrate it there was a lot of reactive work and more complex complaints and interventions across several service areas, which took up more officer time. Since November a large part of the workstream across all services has been trying to rebuild systems and process, including associated documentation (i.e. templates for licences).

As a result of the above there were continual challenges in prioritising workload and ensuring staff remain competent across the wide range of subjects covered by the small team.

The workload on the Southern Isles admin team is largely related to the demands of the Planning Service and the Building Standards Service.

Budgets

The provisional annual Spend for 2023/24 is shown. These figures don't include the core costs of running the Comhairle assigned to the Services. The Environmental Health and Food Safety budgets are closely interlinked, with some general costs being shared across budgets. There is also some cross over with these budgets and Trading Standards. The Food Safety budget also includes Animal Health. Spend is lower than the profiled budget as a result of staff vacancies and additional income, however final spend figures are not available at the time of this report and will be reported as part of the Department's overall figures.



Health and Safety

In line with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance premises are not subject to pro-active inspections unless they are classed as high risk or the subject of a complaint.

All 14 [RIDDOR](#) notifications were investigated, where it was shown the Comhairle were the Enforcing Authority.

Due to the cyber-attack there is very limited other information on activity. Electrical safety in hospitality settings continued to be highlighted as part of the publicity and webinars around short-term let licensing.

Animal Health

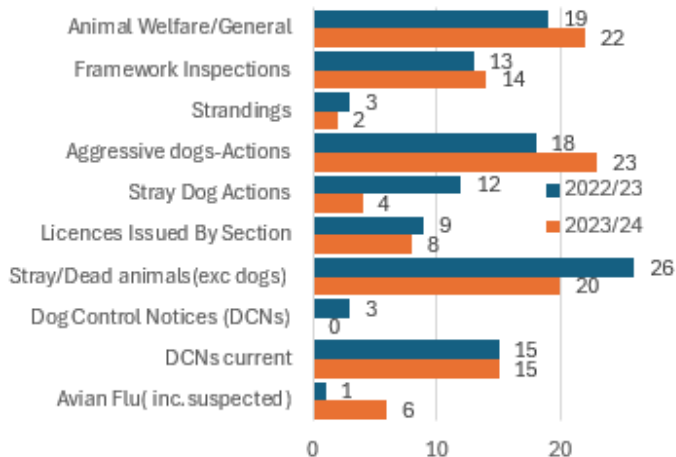
Proactive animal health activity was on target (100% against a 75% target) and other delivery was in accordance with the plan other than there was no participation in industry liaison groups as none had been held.

All animal premises subject to licence, except one, were visited and all were found to be satisfactory.

The Service was heavily involved in the five avian influenza protection and surveillance zones put in place in Lewis. This included numerous visits including doorstep visits within protection zones with up to 6 staff involved some days.

The Service also dealt with several stranding cases including the mass stranding of whales in Tolsta where over 50 whales had to be removed and disposed of.

Due to the cyber-attack there is limited other information on activity, however there has been a notable increase in dog complaints within the year.



Environmental Health

The Comhairle's 2023 Annual Air Quality Progress Report was completed and there were no significant changes including no significant new air pollution sources identified, although the new deep water port development was noted. The Service carried out 12 months of NOx sampling in 2022, using diffusion tubes around Stornoway to check on background levels and to see if there had been any increase since 2007. There was no statistically noticeable increase in levels. These results were detailed in the 2023 Annual Air Quality Progress Report.

The Comhairle has 56 private water supplies, 16 of which are regulated (which means they have to be monitored and sampled at least annually). The Service has to submit annual returns to the Drinking Water Quality Regulator for Scotland (DWQR) summarized below (the figures are from the calendar year 2022)

Type	No	Sample	Population
Regulated	16	33	262
Type B	40	0	161*
Total	56	33	423*

*Estimated

The Service continues to have one of the higher levels in Scotland for bacterial failures; this is related to the equally high failure rate for colour, primarily due to peaty water. The colour can reduce the efficiency of UV treatments systems, which are the most commonly used. The service is continuing to work with those failing supplies to try and improve them in the long term.

Service Requests

Due to the cyber-attack there is limited other information on Service Requests for the year with the Service rebuilding its database for recording activity.

Food Safety

The Food Service is mainly carried out in accordance with the [Food Law Code of Practice \(Scotland\)](#) issued under the Food Safety Act 1990. Although parts of it are out of date, recognition is also taken of the [Practice Guidance](#) issued by Food Standards Scotland.

The Service lost the majority of its own data and inspection records for food premises, including the data needed to generate future inspections. The Service had uploaded some data to Food Standards Scotland's (FSS's) Scottish National Database (SND) just prior to the attack and has been working with FSS to use the SND database going forward for recording basic inspection details, although there is still work to be done tidying up the data.

The service had initiated implementation of the new [official control verification](#) (OCV) inspection programme for the 37 Approved food premises; however, progress was limited, partially due to resource implications.

The Service has been unable to update details for both the Food Hygiene Information Scheme (FHIS) and Eatsafe scheme since the cyber-attack, however, aim to resolve this in 2024/25.

Other activities of the food service include:

	2022/23	2023/24
Food visits/interventions	326	306
Microbiological Samples	63	22
Composition & Labelling Samples	25	13
Shellfish-closure notices	2	2
Shellfish Registration Documents	1142	305*
Export Health Certificates	111	86
Attestations for Export Hubs	37	21

*since cyber-attack

Monitoring and management of the Food Standards Scotland sampling results for the 23 shellfish sites in the area continues to cause seasonal workload, particularly in the summer months, however the toxin levels were lower throughout the year, resulting in less closures.

Trading Standards

The Service continues to deal with ongoing issues concerning scams and itinerant traders in conjunction with agency partners including campaigns to increase awareness.

There have been additional challenges with the increase of social media and online based businesses; the Service continued to ensure businesses based in (or targeting the islands population) were operating in a legal and fair manner.

The service continued to be involved in national projects, these included bulk fuel checks, pricing, NVP's and an ongoing safety project involving the 21 candle/wax melt businesses in the area (some of these continued from 2022/23).

The Service also carried out joint inspections of firework retailers with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS).

The team also led on delivering the Food Standards Scotland (FSS) feed contract, which included 32 interventions.

The Service also continues to contribute towards national intelligence gathering and working with Trading Standards Scotland and other local authorities to ensure fair trading.

Recorded service requests are shown below:

Service Requests	2022/23	2023/24
Business Advice	12	8*
Consumer Complaints	11	4*
Advice Scotland Notifications	117	128
Advice Scotland Referrals	18	12
Metrology	41	1*
General Requests	7	3*
Tobacco and NVPs	3	4*
Petroleum	2	
Product Safety		2*
Cold Calling	6	4*

*since cyber-attack

Licensing

The Service continued to administer and issue a variety of licences which mainly range from one to three years in duration. The main focus throughout the year continued to be related to the new short-term let licensing scheme, The cyber-attack affected all licence/registration management systems with some still needing re-built.

The deadline for existing hosts to applying for a short-term let (STL) licence was 1 October 2023. There were just under 800 applications in the year with over 400 of these being made in September, placing significant short-term strain on the team. Luckily the Service had managed to initially

process most of the applications prior to the cyber-attack so had a snapshot for each prior to the cyber-attack, allowing us to rebuild the data and begin progressing licences again issuing 626 STL Licences in the year.

The service also held 2 further webinars on the scheme with around 35 participants.

The Service continued to see an increase in the number of applications for caravan site licences, partially due to new operators but also due to unlicensed operators applying as a result of the short-term let scheme.

The current known licences and registrations issued by the Services are detailed below (where blank the data has not been collated yet from emails etc.) .

Licence Type	Issued		Live
	2022/23	2023/24	
Animal Boarding	6	6	4
Dog Breeding	1	2	1
Horse Riding	3	2	2
Pet Shop	1	0	1
Acupuncture - Electrolysis	1	0	
Ear Piercing	2	2	
Tattooing etc.	3		
Petroleum Registrations	3	7	
Explosives	3	2	4
Knife Dealers	0	1	2
Second Hand Goods	1	0	3
Second-hand Car	3	3	
Street Trader	2	3	5
Street Trader- Food	11	15	
Venison Dealers	1	2	5
Metal Dealers	1	0	4
Late Hours Catering	0	2	3
Market Operator	3	0	5
House in Multiple Occupation	17	2	19
Caravan Site	26	4	
Short-term Lets	87	626	713
Landlords Registered	193		697
Rented Properties	225		717
Expired Registrations			32
Pending Registrations			3

The table shows the licences issued in the financial year as well as those that are live at the end of the reporting period.

The Services also chair and administer the multi- agency Safety Advisory Group (SAG) which reviews public events and provides advice on public safety. This was more resource intensive than previous years due to events getting back to normal after the pandemic and a planned large and new event, with the SAG meeting numerous times throughout the year.

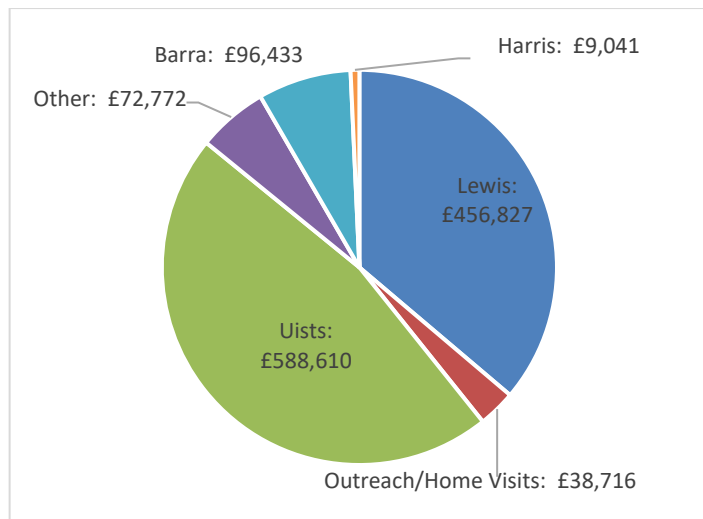
Citizen & Money Advice Services

The Comhairle funds citizen and money advice in the Western Isles through a grant to [Western Isles Citizens Advice Service](#) (WICAS), monitored by Consumer and Environmental Services. This includes general information and advice to the public as well as advice on welfare benefits, housing advice, homelessness advice, debt advice, general advice and specialised money advice.

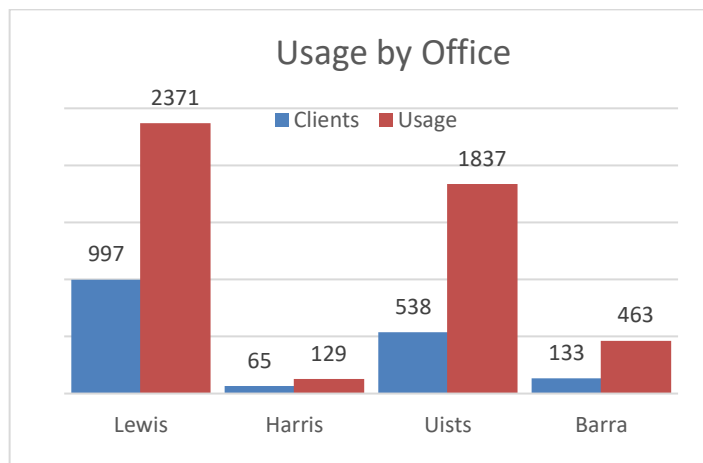
WICAS have offices in Stornoway, Tarbert, Linclate and Castlebay as well as staff providing an outreach service.

The Comhairle 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 Comhairle funding WICAS have been able to bid for and operate various additional and enhanced advice services, “levering” in an additional £233,952 for the year.

The recorded financial gain that WICAS achieved for its clients was £1,262,398, representing nearly £6 gain for every £1 of Comhairle funding, although in real terms the figure was anticipated to be well in excess of this amount.



The following chart show the number of clients and usage of the four main offices. Clients living in one area can and often use an office in another area for advice, especially specific advice, so the figures don't necessarily correlate with the number of clients living in a particular area.



There were also a further 247 Clients through outreach and home visits.

WICAS continue to get requests for advice and assistance across a broad range of subjects. The main area is still benefit related but there continues to be high numbers for debt and energy advice.

