

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S SERVICE: CORPORATE POLICY AND OUTCOME DELIVERY REPORT

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to advise on the progress of corporate policy matters and to present the end of year progress report on the 2023/24 Strategic Priorities for the Chief Executive's Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides a 2023/24 end of year progress report on the strategic priorities aligned to the Service. An update on key cross-service areas of strategic risk is included, with progress on the strategic outcomes and the resources identified to implement the Business Plan.
- 2.2 Strategic risk is aligned with the Corporate Strategy 2024-2027. There are four key cross-service areas of strategic risk identified with a High rating, and six risks rated Medium. Two risks remain High after risk actions have been implemented and these are in relation to tackling climate change and the cost-of-living crises. Strategic risk is monitored on Interplan and reported externally via the Comhairle's website. Graphical representation of the strategic risk for the Service is provided at paragraph 6.
- 2.3 The Business Plan is aligned to three strategic priorities, and the Service contributes to the achievement of 11 Strategic Outcomes. Progress on the Outcome Delivery Plans is detailed in the main body of the report at paragraph 7.
- 2.4 Full detail in regard to Business Plan progress for the Chief Executive's Service can be viewed at: [Service Business Plan Progress Reports](#). In line with Audit Scotland's recommendations, Elected Members are also encouraged to access the Comhairle's online performance monitoring and reporting system Interplan, which contains all Service Business Plans. Interplan can be accessed at: [Interplan](#).
- 2.5 Analysis of the budgets at end of year shows that Service budgets are within tolerances. Financial performance is detailed in paragraph 8.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle notes the end of year progress of the 2023/24 Outcome Delivery Plans for the Chief Executive's Service.**

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IMPLICATIONS

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

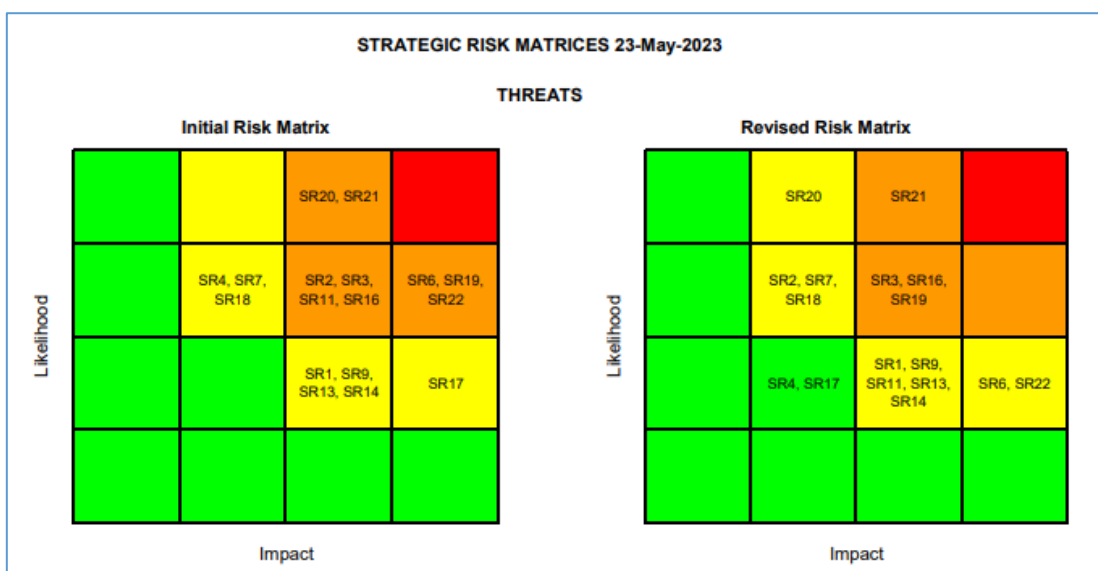
Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	There are no financial implications associated with this Report
Legal	There are no legal implications associated with this Report
Staffing	There are no staffing implications associated with this Report
Assets and Property	There are no asset and property implications associated with this Report
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Risk Management associated with the Chief Executive's Business Plan is identified at paragraph 6 of the Report
Equalities	There are no identified equality issues within this Report
Corporate Strategy	The 2023-24 Business Plan is aligned with the Corporate Strategy 2022-27.
Environmental Impact	There are no identified environmental impacts within this Report
Consultation	There is no consultation associated with this Report. The Business Plan and the quarterly progress updates are published on the Comhairle's webpages.

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 While previous quarterly reporting provided an update on Business Plan progress, this report is designed to provide Members with information on progress of the strategic priorities which are relevant to the Service. The report includes an update on key cross-Service areas of strategic risk, progress on the strategic outcomes to which the Service contributes, and the resources identified to implement the Business Plan.
- 5.2 The Corporate Strategy has 4 Strategic Priorities and 20 Strategic Outcomes.

RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 The Comhairle identified 17 strategic threats in 2023/24 and 10 are monitored by the Chief Executive's Service. Four risks were rated High and six risks rated Medium.
- 6.2 The two risks remaining as High after controls were implemented are:
- SR21: 3.1.5. Cost-of-living crisis.
 - SR16: 4.1.2. The Comhairle is unprepared for tackling Climate Change.
- 6.3 These risks were aligned to two of the Comhairle's strategic priorities: to support resilient communities and quality of life and to be a sustainable and inclusive Council.
- 6.4 The strategic risk register is currently being updated for 2024/25 and will be reported to the Comhairle in due course. The full risk register details can be accessed via the [Interplan Risk Management Module](#).



OUTCOME DELIVERY PLANS

- 7.1 The department is aligned to three Strategic Priorities and contributes to the fulfilment of 11 Strategic Outcomes and progress on the Outcome Delivery Plans are reported below under each of these.

Priority 1.1: Strengthen the local economy

Outcome 1.1.2: Digital investment delivers outcomes for the community.

- 7.2 The Comhairle's Digitalisation Strategy has been incorporated within Interplan with key related actions and Projects now being linked to the delivery of the Digitalisation Strategy. Following the unforeseen criminal cyber-attack on the Comhairle at the end of 2024, a number of priorities from the Digitalisation Plan have been accelerated, including the widespread promotion, usage and training on collaborative digital platforms.
- 7.3 A number of Services have been improving their digital presence and accessibility including the Library Service which launched a new website in Q2 providing an e-library and reporting an increase in e- books. The Eclipse Care Management System has been implemented across Health and Social Care to streamline recording and data sharing practices and cloud-sharing platforms to support a number of key services are being considered for implementation following the cyber-attack.
- 7.4 Increasing facilitation of digital inclusion, the Accredited Training Team have a bank of laptops to support training participants with their learning, improving access to the job market.

Outcome 1.1.3: Investment in our buildings and infrastructure

- 7.5 The Comhairle provided a response to the consultation on the review of the National Islands Plan in 7 November 2023. In addition, the survey on the National Islands Plan which initially took place in 2020 was repeated in November 2023. The Scottish Islands Survey 2023 was conducted by the James Hutton Institute on behalf of Scottish Government and was sent to 20,000 residents of Scotland's islands to inform the Scottish Government's monitoring, evaluation and review of the National Islands Plan, and provide evidence for conducting Island Community Impact Assessments. The National Islands Plan review consultation analysis was published in April 2024 which identified that there should be a prioritisation of the strategic priorities, fewer outcomes, that there is a lack of performance monitoring, and a lack of focus and ability to measure performance at the island group level. A new National Islands Plan is to be published next year.

- 7.6 The Islands Growth Deal agreement was signed by both Scottish and UK Governments, and the three Islands Councils in January 2023. There was £4m committed against the Islands Programme in 2023/24 to help improve infrastructure. Bids to the fund were invited on a competitive basis. Successful bids totalling £383k include: £250,000 - Stornoway Campus, Lewis; £78,350 - An Taigh Mor, Lewis; and, £55,000 - Seallam! Hebrides People Visitor Centre, Harris.
- 7.7 The Full Business Case for the UHI Outer Hebrides Campus Redevelopment in Stornoway has now been fully approved with construction works underway since August 2023. This intervention aims to provide a more modern, high-quality learning and training facility that will support innovative approaches to digital and distance learning, tailored to the specific needs of the communities of the Outer Hebrides.
- 7.8 Just under £500k of funding was approved from Islands Growth Deal and UKSPF to undertake remedial works at Acarsaid Pier, Eriskay, and to support the installation of gear storage bay facilities in Vatersay which will facilitate in growing the capacity and diversification of the fishing industry in these areas.
- 7.9 Officers have continued to work with community groups to identify funding to progress new community infrastructure throughout the Western Isles. Successful funding bids to the Scottish Governments' Islands Programme Fund, RCGF and Islands Infrastructure Fund has enabled this work to progress during the period. It should be noted that Scottish Government has advised that there will be no further rounds of RCGF after 2024/25.
- 7.10 The Crown Estate Grants provide support to community groups many of which underpin usage of local infrastructure and facilities. Year 4 Crown Estate Funds were dispersed throughout the Western Isles during this period.

Outcome 1.1.4: Increased level of skills across our communities and workforce

- 7.11 Meetings were held with UK Government officials in May 2023 during a three-day visit to the Western Isles to discuss the economy, information on the next Levelling Up Fund (LUF) Round, and an update on the Islands Growth Deal. In the Autumn Statement, the UK Government committed £80 million for the expansion of the Levelling Up Partnerships programme to Scotland, for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, Argyll and Bute, Dundee, and the Scottish Borders. Engagement with UK Government is ongoing regarding the £20m LUP award to the Comhairle. A series of meetings with UK Government planned for early June was postponed by UKG on account of the UK Parliament Election and will be re-arranged as soon as possible.
- 7.12 The Islands Growth Deal funded Islands Centre for Net Zero project has been underway since April 2023 and has seen the creation of posts which help to equip communities with the required knowledge and skills to support them to decarbonise.
- 7.13 There are ongoing internal governance meetings held monthly for the UKSPF and the first End of Year full report was submitted in early May including a Credible Plan to address 2022/23 underspend. These were subsequently approved and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allocation for 2023/24 was released in June. The submission for November 2023 has also been approved, and the latest Monitoring Report has recently been submitted for the Reporting Period 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024.
- 7.14 Through the Charter and Local Employability Partnership (LEP), the Accredited Training Team and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) continue to work in partnership to support the employability needs of participants from the age of 14 years, with no upper age limit. Within the school structure, the SDS Career Advisers, DYW Coordinators and Guidance staff work collectively to offer support to school pupils. Through the implementation of the Employability Hub, the collective offer continues through joint planning and delivery of events and campaigns. In 2023/24 the DYW Coordinators and Career Advisers worked in partnership to deliver one to one interviews to all those leaving school who were looking to undertake CV, work readiness

workshops, work experience, employment or further education applications. Of the 120 interviewed they requested the following:

63- Work Experience
28 – Interview Skills
23 – Summer Placements
15 - Introduction to Employers
31 – Support with Job Applications
12 – Volunteering to support UCAS applications
50 – CV Support

The team has undertaken workshops with the pupils and worked with employers to meet the needs of the pupils.

- 7.15 For progression from school to employability or apprenticeships, the Local Employability Action Plan has been developed in partnership with SDS. Through the outlined actions and the Employability Hub co-location of services there has been a real improvement in the Employability Pipeline offer. The pipeline provides a pathway to an *all age all stage* service. This ensures all Employability Participants are being upskilled - gaining accreditation and work experience in areas where local skills gaps have been identified. This allows employers to recruit the right skills at the right time. With the success of the pipeline and engagement from local employers, 2024/25 events have been oversubscribed. To support all sectors, the team has conducted sectoral specific events focusing on key local sectors. This has taken the form of social media campaigns, school and community-based events and live recruitment sessions.
- 7.16 The SDS Modern Apprenticeship Contract is amended annually to reflect the changing skills and accreditation needs of the community. As a direct ask from industry, this has enabled the implementation of Distilling and Creative Media apprenticeships. The amendment of contracts allows the progression from Employability programmes or Foundation Apprenticeships onto the Modern or Graduate Apprenticeship programmes. The amendment of these annual contracts has proved to be instrumental in the implementation of accredited skills in the local community. 2023/24 saw the successful accreditation of the Distilling Qualification, with two apprentices successfully completing their MA- one in the Harris Distillery and one in the North Uist Distillery. Both were female apprentices who are among the first in Scotland to achieve this new accreditation. In 2023/24 the Accredited Training team supported 42 Modern Apprenticeships, 116 Employability placements and 52 workforce development opportunities.
- 7.17 The Training Kitchen continues to be a valuable first step for those with multiple barriers when moving into employment. The mentorship and daily support has been instrumental to allow a bespoke support offer to be implemented. In 2023/24 the emphasis of support has been up-skilling, volunteering and work experience which has equipped participants with the confidence, skills and accreditation to reengage with the workplace and move into employment.

Outcome 1.1.5: Growth in small and medium sized businesses demonstrated

- 7.18 The Procurement team support Community Wealth Building by engaging with local businesses in order to try to remove any barriers (or perceived barriers) for tendering for Comhairle contracts. The aim is to encourage as much local participation as possible in contract opportunities which in turn will benefit the local economy. In addition, the team tries to promote the use of local suppliers wherever it is lawful to do so. It has recently engaged with external agencies on a community wealth-building working group with the aim of forging closer links between stakeholders.

Priority 3.1: Support resilient communities and quality of life

Outcome 3.1.3: Planning and infrastructure meet the needs of our communities

- 7.19 Transport Scotland is currently developing an Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) as the successor to the Ferries Plan 2013-22. The objectives of the ICP will be aligned with delivery of National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) and the National Islands Plan. The ICP aims to ensure that island ferry services align with the outcomes from Transport Scotland's wider, multi-modal Strategic Transport Project Review 2 (STPR2) which covers Transport Scotland's assets.
- 7.20 Transport Scotland's Public Consultation on the prioritised elements of the Plan (draft Long-Term Vessels and Ports Plan 2023-2045 and Strategic Approach Paper), closed on 6 May 2024. Further consultation will follow on other delivery elements of the plan. The Comhairle's response to the Public Consultation was approved at the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on 24 April 2024. The ICP Key Stakeholder Group continues to meet, and the Comhairle is represented on the group.
- 7.21 Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services play a crucial role in our transport system, providing vital links for residents, businesses, and tourists across the west coast of Scotland. A Public consultation regarding CHFS3 was launched on 15 December 2023 for 12 weeks to 8 March 2024. The Comhairle submitted a response which was approved at the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on 7 February 2024.
- 7.22 The Comhairle submitted a response on 26 February 2024 to the Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities.
- 7.23 Following the publication of the Project Neptune report, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommended that the Scottish Government give consideration to a CMAL-Transport Scotland merger, to create a "Ferries Scotland" as an arm of Transport Scotland. The *Project Neptune: Communities Report on Future Management of Ferries* has now been published and recommendations include: Integration of CMAL and the DML may provide the opportunity to streamline the Governance structure and improve transparency; Ministers should consider introducing a Commissioner or Regulator to provide independent oversight; Communities should be consulted before any changes are made; Further detailed consideration of any integration of existing structures will be required. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport announced on 30 May 2024 that the current CHFS contract was to be extended for a further year to allow further consideration of complex options for future delivery. The Comhairle will continue to make representations in support of agreed policy objectives as opportunities present.
- 7.24 The Leader and Chief Executive attended the fourth UK Government Islands Forum in Ynys Môn on 7 and 8 May 2024, chaired by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Michael Gove MP, with the agenda focused on housing issues for islands. The Islands Forum was developed as a way to encourage island collaboration on common challenges such as skills, connectivity and infrastructure, as well as exploring shared opportunities between communities. The issues arising from the costs of purchasing or building new houses, and the percentage of vacant and second homes in the Outer Hebrides, significantly higher than the national average, were presented during the meeting, alongside the success of the Goathill Project, which built 74 affordable homes, 50 Houses with Extra Care and the 52-bed residential Care Home, Taigh Shipoirt, and of the Comhairle's work on bringing empty homes back into use.
- 7.25 The discussions demonstrated, once again, that island authorities throughout the UK share the same issues and difficulties with the availability and affordability of housing. It also demonstrated that with sufficient funding and policy support, local authorities can make a significant difference to the challenges faced with housing.
- 7.26 The Comhairle's response to the Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee: 'Call for Views on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill' highlighted matters that were replicated and supported by many other respondents, and it is clear that there remain significant

questions and misgivings about the cost, delivery and effect on other public services of the proposed National Care Service (NCS).

- 7.27 The National Care Service Bill has now reached Stage One within the Scottish Parliament. The Comhairle continues to be involved in the Islands Engagement Group on the details of the Bill, although many of these still require substantive clarification. COSLA has agreed that its participation in the next stages of the Bill is conditional on SG removing certain proposals from the Bill, reflecting Local Government's view that additional services such as Children's and Families', and Community Justice, Services should only be transferred to a future National Care Service if agreed by the relevant organisations and agencies at local level. There is also ongoing concern within Local Government about the focus on delayed discharge figures as a measure of the health of Health and Social Care Partnerships without there being any proposals to assist with improvements.

Outcome 3.1.4: Our communities are safe, inclusive, and resilient

- 7.28 Crown Estate Funding was available in financial year 2023/24 each ward area to the sum of £100,000. Over 130 applications to the £1.1 million of funding from Crown Estate Revenues Fund (CERF) Year 4 were received, many of which have been supported. Applications are agreed by a panel of local representatives including local elected members, ensuring community ownership is at the forefront of decision making. The Comhairle considered distribution of Crown Estate Funding for 2024/25 at the April 2024 series of meetings and established a pan-island fund for Western Isles-wide projects in addition to ward area funding and a number of specific funding allocations.
- 7.29 An HMIE Progress Visit took place in February 2024 working with CLD and partners and the Report was published in April 2024. While three areas for development have been identified, overall, the feedback was positive. To progress this, the CLD Steering Group have begun a self-evaluation exercise in relation to the CLD Partnership Plan to identify strengths and areas of improvements. The session, attended by partner agencies identified key strengths and a further session focusing on other key indicators has been agreed.
- 7.30 The Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development Local Action Group (OH CLLD LAG) in 2023-24 was awarded a total of £434,135.74 by the Scottish Government (SG). All CLLD activity had to demonstrate it supported the SG priorities of: Helping families and services through the cost-of-living crisis; eradicating child poverty; transforming the economy to deliver Net Zero; and Creating sustainable public services. Projects also had to advance inclusion, equality and diversity. The LAG identified and implemented the following project strands: Admin & Animation; Youth LAG; Design Grant; Small Grants Scheme awarded using Participatory Budgeting; Capital Fund; Community Transport Network; and LAG Development. Between the four grant schemes, community projects were awarded a total of £330,148.38 and the LAG managed to allocate £431,254.61 of its overall budget, equating to 99.3%. The LAG also participated in two collaboration projects, supporting the development of its YLAG as part of a national YLAG network and commissioning a study into the potential impacts of changes in agricultural subsidies with the LAGs and Councils for Orkney and Shetland.
- 7.31 A Resilience Strategy 2023-28 setting out the Comhairle's strategic approach to building resilience was approved by the Comhairle in April 2023. The Resilience Strategy aims to ensure that the Comhairle and communities throughout the islands are prepared for challenges and capable of managing adverse events to recover quickly in the event of disruption. The strategy aims to achieve this through working together with partners and communities to anticipate risks, prepare for response and recovery, and communicate effectively with all stakeholders. An Action Plan accompanying the Resilience Strategy sets out the Actions the Comhairle will undertake to meet Strategic Priorities and Outcomes on resilience. Progress will be reviewed and reported in 2025/26.

- 7.32 The Strategy Team has worked with the Community Planning Partnership's Climate Change Working Group to develop a Climate Rationale and Case for Action. These documents aim to provide an overview of the climate challenge for the Outer Hebrides and enable priorities for climate change adaptation in the islands to be identified and were approved by the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership Board. The Outer Hebrides Climate Rationale collates evidence of how the climate is changing in the Outer Hebrides and the impacts this is having or is expected to have on people, businesses, and ecosystems in our islands, whilst the accompanying sets out the OHCPP Climate Change Working Group's vision, purpose and priorities for action to adapt to the climate impacts identified and improve climate resilience in the Outer Hebrides.
- 7.33 The Western Isles Youth Climate Action Group received the Environment and Conservation Award at the Youthlink Scotland National Youth Work Awards in Glasgow in June 2023. The Group, which has representatives from across the Western Isles, received the national award in recognition of their actions in raising awareness of climate issues affecting their communities.
- 7.34 Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) Elections have been held with two candidates, (one from Lewis and one from Barra) being elected to represent the Western Isles in the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Outcome 3.1.5: Reduce inequality and poverty and promote social mobility

- 7.35 The Comhairle utilised approximately £475k, in addition to the £150k of funding already made available to Third Sector partners, to assist with Cost of Living pressures. Proposals for use of the principal sum were at a stage of near conclusion when Scottish Government announced the establishment of a fund of £1.4m to assist with the cost-of-living crisis including energy costs for island residents. A sum of £360k was allocated to the Comhairle in 22/23, and for 23/24 a sum of £257k was allocated. Today's meeting of the Committee will consider a report on distribution of the Islands Costs Crisis Emergency Fund (ICCEF), increased in 2024/25 to mitigate cost pressures of the delivery of services in island communities.
- 7.36 The Strategy Team has worked with NHS Western Isles on the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy, by developing and publishing the statutory Annual Report on progress in the form of the Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report 2022/23, as required by the Scottish Government. Work has already commenced on the Annual Report for 2023/24 which will be reported to the Comhairle before the end of the year. While the Anti-Poverty Strategy is due for renewal in 2025, work on it is delayed to establish whether a separate strategy for Child Poverty will be required. Additional resource is required to support development of the Comhairle's Anti-Poverty Strategy and other key priorities as resources from elsewhere within the Community Planning partnership have failed to materialise. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) made a one-off contribution to the Community Planning budget in 2023/24.
- 7.37 Through Scottish Government Child Poverty funding, the Accredited Training Team is working with partner agencies to ensure those living in poverty gain access to the full range of support services and funding to enable them to move out of poverty and into Employment.
- 7.38 The Accredited Training team support a range of programmes to support those furthest from the job market and work to ensure participants are offered comprehensive work experience and training. They work with participants offering bespoke timetables, courses and activities that are aimed to improve their confidence, self-esteem, motivation, employability skills enabling them to gain the right qualifications and sectoral based certificates to successfully move them into employment, training or further education. Through the Local Employability Partnership Delivery Plan, 73 individuals have been supported with barrier removal. From these 73, 21 have been moved into employment through a supported employment initiative, and a further 27 into employment through key worker support. The remaining 25 are those furthest from the job market who require additional support. Through the Child Poverty funding, 37 families have been

supported into employment or better paid employment. Five of those funded through the Child Poverty Funding undertook a 12-week training course delivered in partnership with Harland and Wolff, and on completion all successfully moved to contracted employment.

Priority 4.1: Be a sustainable and inclusive Council.

Outcome 4.1.1: Communities are empowered and continue to be at the heart of our decision making to support the delivery of the Comhairle's Strategic Priorities

- 7.39 The Community Engagement team supported the Leader and Members to hold consultation meetings in each of the ward areas, discussing the Corporate Strategy, the Budget and key priorities and concerns. The meetings, held in nine of the eleven wards at the time of writing, were well attended and received positive feedback.
- 7.40 Area Forums were visited in 2023/24 to introduce the Community Engagement Unit and to discuss the application process for Crown Estate Year 4 Ward funding. This was delivered online for the first time.
- 7.41 The team will work on the *Our Work Your Comhairle* campaign during 2024/25 engaging directly with services to inform the public both of the good work being undertaken and the specific challenges to service delivery.

Outcome 4.1.2: Reduction in our carbon footprint and development of an island route map to net zero

- 7.42 A Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and Delivery plan for na h-Eileanan Siar was approved by the Comhairle in November 2023 following public consultation. The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy sets out the long-term plan for decarbonising heat in buildings and improving energy efficiency across the Western Isles. The Strategy is driven by Scotland's statutory targets for greenhouse gas emissions reduction and fuel poverty and is informed by local priorities. Decarbonisation of heat for domestic and non-domestic properties on and off the gas grid; energy efficiency and fuel poverty; and historic and mixed-use buildings are considered in the LHEES.
- 7.43 The Comhairle's Climate Change Strategy, approved in September 2022, sets out how the Comhairle will work to decarbonise our estate, assets, and services; and how we will work with partners to support the islands towards Net Zero and to build resilience to the effects of a changing climate. The Climate Change Strategy aims to embed climate change across the Comhairle, with consideration of climate change a central theme throughout our strategies and plans across all services. Performance monitoring on implementation of the Strategy is ongoing and will be reported later in 2024. The Comhairle also continues to work with the OHCPP Climate Change Working Group to coordinate, plan and deliver climate change action across the Western Isles.
- 7.44 The Comhairle submits an Annual Report on compliance with climate change duties to the Scottish Government, as required by the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties. The Report seeks to provide an overview of the Comhairle's progress on Climate Change, covering Governance, Emissions and Projects, Climate Change Adaptation, Procurement and Wider Influence across the local authority area.

Outcome 4.1.3: Equality of opportunity is increased.

- 7.45 The Corporate Workforce Plan was approved by the Comhairle in September 2023 following consultation with the Recognised Trade Unions. The Plan promotes and supports career entry routes through open recruitment and apprenticeships, skills development and career progression for employees and flexible working conditions to support employees through all of

life's transitions. Work is underway with services to ensure operational workforce plans can effectively support service delivery.

- 7.46 The Comhairle published its Fair Work First Statement in September 2023 following approval of the statement by the Recognised Trade Unions. This sets out the Comhairle's working practices against seven set criteria. The Comhairle is required to display this Statement if seeking grants, other funding and/or public contracts.
- 7.47 The Comhairle's Occupational Health Service provides health surveillance and support to employees and also promotes health and wellbeing through the Employee Assistance Programme. This programme offers advice, support and counselling and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This aims to remove barriers and promote employee wellbeing.
- 7.48 The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 requires Public Authorities to publish a Local Plan every 6 years which demonstrates how they will work towards implementing the National Plan in their areas and report on its progress made every 3 years. The Comhairle approved its new British Sign Language Plan (BSL) in March 2024 which is available on the Comhairle's interim website.

Outcome 4.1.5: Effective governance of the Comhairle is in place to support the delivery of the Comhairle's Strategic Priorities

- 7.49 The Scottish Government has continually emphasised and renewed its commitment to the Review of Local Governance and to exploration of single island models and a preliminary meeting at political level took place on 9 March 2023. An initial workshop meeting of Local Government, COSLA, NHS and other Scottish Government officials was held in May 2023. The First Minister confirmed Scottish Government's commitment to this work at the COSLA Conference in September and the work also forms part of the Programme for Government. A two-day Workshop, attended by Ministers and a team of senior SG officials, was held in late March 2024, to consider advantages, issues and working options of a single island model.
- 7.50 At the COSLA Conference in late September concerns were also expressed about Councils' capacity not just to fund their services and retain employees, but as to how communities are to be supported in the medium term. External speakers made clear the essential nature of Local Government to the wellbeing of any community and the pressing need for Public Service Reform. The Single Island Authority (SIA) model received strong political and academic endorsement and will remain a focus for the Service in 2024/25.
- 7.51 Following the BVAR Report completed by Audit Scotland in 2022, the Comhairle developed an action plan to address the priority areas highlighted. The first Annual Report on progress was presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee at the February 2024 series of meetings. While good progress has been made, the cyber-attack in November 2023 delayed work and the completion date for the action plan has been moved to March 2025.
- 7.52 A series of self-assessments have been undertaken during 2023/24. This includes both operational level assessments completed by the Best Value Action Group and strategic assessments undertaken by Corporate Management Team. A Report on these assessments is scheduled for Audit and Scrutiny Committee in June 2024.

SPI PERFORMANCE

- 8.1 The Comhairle has previously approved prioritisation of two LGBF indicators for the Chief Executive's Service. These are areas where the Comhairle has low performance measured against the relevant family groups. The two priorities are sickness absence and the gender pay gap:
- CORP6a - Sickness Absence Days per FTE Employee (Teachers).

- CORP6b - Sickness Absence Days per FTE Employee (exc. Teachers).
- CORP3c - The gender pay gap between average hourly rate of pay for male and female council employees.

- 8.2 Initial analysis of the sickness absence data for 2023/24, shows a decrease in absence with Teacher's absence at 8.2 days per FTE (9.1 days per FTE in 2022/23) and an increase in absence with non-teaching staff at 15.1 days per FTE (14.4 days per FTE in 2022/23). This data excludes covid related absence. This data has still to be subject to quality assurance checks prior to submission to the Improvement Service.
- 8.3 Overall employee absence including Teachers increased from 12.5 days per employee in 2022/23 to 13.8 days per employee in 2022/23. The main reasons for absence continue to be musculoskeletal, stress (work-related and non work-related) related absence, surgery/post op and mental health.
- 8.4 The Scottish average for 2022/23 excluding Teachers was 13.2 days and for Teachers was 6.8 days. It is likely to be late autumn 2024 before the Scottish average data for 2023/24 figure is available.
- 8.5 The Comhairle supports the proactive management of sickness absence, through sickness absence review meetings, Occupational Health referrals and return to work interviews. The Comhairle also provides support for employees through the Employee Assistance Programme. HR will continue to monitor the data and will report the verified 2023/24 data in due course.
- 8.6 The gender pay gap between average hourly rate of pay for male and female council employees is an LGBF indicator and an Equal Pay Audit is completed every two years to measure this in detail. The 2023 Equal Pay Audit, covering financial year 2022/23, demonstrated that the gender pay gap reduced to 12.3% from the 14.1% detailed in the 2021 Report. Analysis of the pay gap for 2023/24 shows that this has reduced further to 9.6%. 8.7 The Comhairle has a robust analytical job evaluation scheme in place and grading structure ensuring that there is equal pay for work of equal value and there are policies which support flexible working. Further action to support a reduction includes a continued focus on the promotion of the flexible working policies and on promoting skills and training.

RESOURCING THE PLAN

Financial Performance

- 9.1 The Comhairle is unable to provide a forecast for the end of year Reports however it is expected that the Chief Executive's services will a positive variance within tolerance levels for 2023-24.

CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Chief Executive's Service has maintained good controls on business planning, governance, and budget management during 2023/24. In addition to its core functions and responsibilities in supporting the good governance of the Comhairle, the Service has led significant progress on a number of key strategic and political policies both at local and national level.