

# Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report 2022/23

## Delivery Update November 2023



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar



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**Abbreviations used in this report:**

CAB – Citizens Advice Bureau

CNES – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

DWP – Department of Works and Pensions

HHP – Hebridean Housing Partnership

LCPAR – Local Child Poverty Action Report

NHSWI – NHS Western Isles (Health Board)

OHCPP – Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership

TIG – Tighean Innse Gall

## INTRODUCTION

The Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR) and multi-agency Anti-Poverty Strategy was approved by the board of NHS Western Isles, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership in the Autumn of 2019 and implementation of the plan subsequently commenced.

The full 2019-20 Action Plan and Strategy can be accessed at [Outer Hebrides Anti-Poverty Strategy 2019-2024.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](#).

There is a requirement to report annually on progress and to plan for the year ahead. The Action Plan is being reviewed and updated by partner agencies; a process that has been delayed previously by Covid-19. This delivery report for 2022/23 has been prepared for the Scottish Government and will seek approval through NHS Western Isles, CNES and the OHCPP ahead of a full update for publication.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 does not necessitate Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs) to be produced by a certain date. The Act requires that they are produced *'as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each reporting year.'* Our anticipated date of publication is December 2023.

## THE BEST START, BRIGHT FUTURES – TACKLING CHILD POVERTY DELIVERY PLAN 2022-26

The Scottish Government's second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (Best Start, Bright Futures) backed up by up to £113m extra investment this year, sets out bold action to drive progress on the national mission to tackle child poverty. The latest official statistics indicate that [24% of children in Scotland lived in relative poverty after housing costs in 2019-22](#). With the policies in the Delivery Plan included, it is projected that the child poverty rate will fall to around 17% by 2023/24. A large part of the increase in impact between 2019/20 and 2023/24 is due to the introduction and doubling of the Scottish Child Payment, followed by the further increase to £25 per child per week set out in the Delivery Plan.

The Plan sets out the immediate action the Scottish Government will take to put cash in the pockets of families now. This also includes uprating eight Scottish social security payments by 6% to ensure these payments keep their real-terms values for families, and working in partnership with services to mitigate the benefit cap, as fully as it can within the limits of devolved powers.

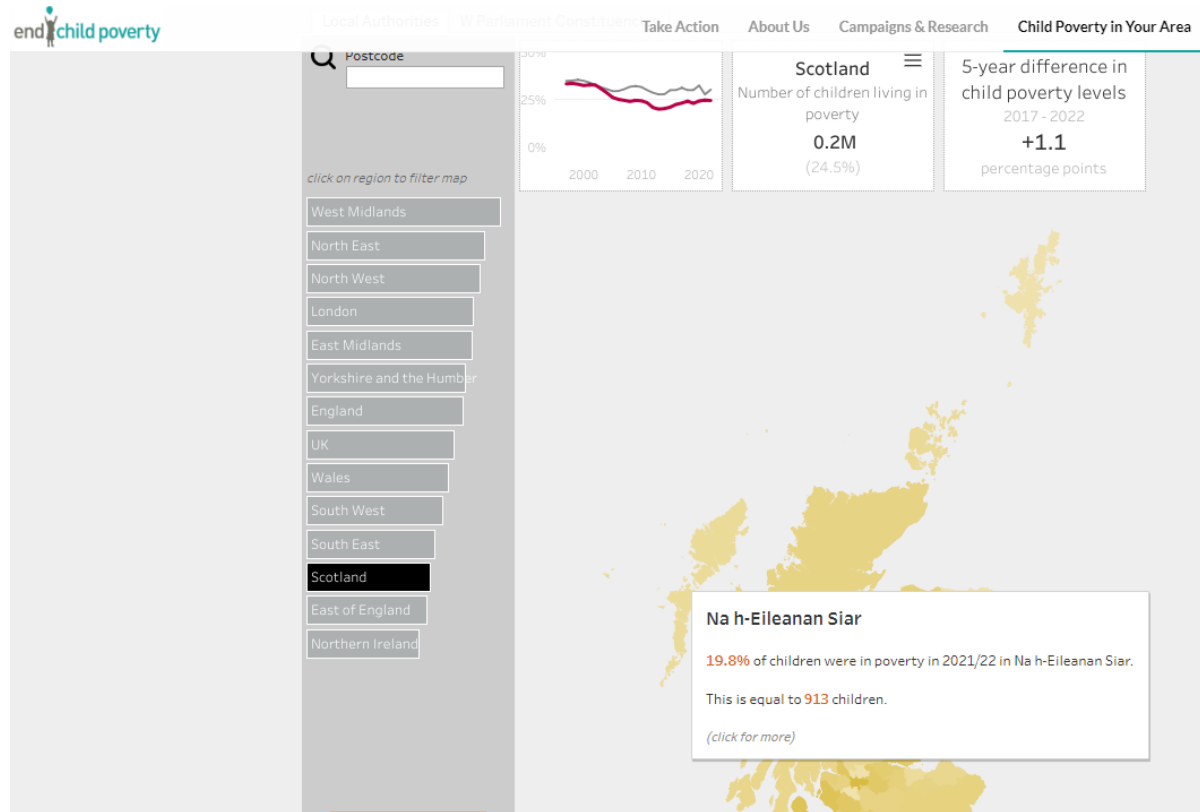
The Plan sets out the action the Government will take to drive progress in the medium to longer term to enable thousands of families to break the cycle of poverty. This includes significantly strengthening employment services to support parents to enter, sustain and progress in work, backed by up to £81 million in 2022-23, and further strengthening support to parents through a new Parental Transition Fund to tackle financial barriers parents face in entering the labour market, particularly over the initial period of employment, investing up to £15 million each year.

## CHILD POVERTY ESTIMATES

The latest datasets in relation to Relative Child Poverty 2015-21, Absolute Child Poverty 2015-21, Ward Level Relative Child Poverty and Ward Level Absolute Poverty were published in 2022: [Child poverty analysis - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). The data reflect a consistency in terms of the national picture, with a recognition that poverty levels had decreased during the pandemic, on an artificial basis, as households accessed temporary supports e.g. furlough. It was recognised that the datasets represented small numbers when compared to

other areas of Scotland, but that the areas of Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas, Sgir' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch, Point, Steornabhagh a Tuath, Taobh Siar agus Nis, could be identified as areas for specific focus moving forward.

There has been no further update of these datasets within the timeframe of this report. The headline estimate of child poverty in the Outer Hebrides is 19.8% compared to the Scottish average of 24.5%. This equates to 913 children.



Source: End Child Poverty, number and percentage of children in poverty (after housing costs) by constituency and Local Authority

## COVID-19 AND THE SUBSEQUENT COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Before the Covid-19 pandemic more than one in five people in the UK lived in poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK, 2020/21). The Institute of Fiscal Studies has found that inflation increases will hit those on the lowest incomes by 3% more than the wealthiest families. More people are going without food to use their money for rent, disconnecting gas/electricity to save money and not cooking food to save on energy costs. The cost of living has been increasing across the UK since 2021 with the Inflation rate for the Consumer Price Index (CPI), reaching 11.1% in August 2022, the highest we have seen in almost 30 years, only reducing to 10.1% in March 2023.

From August 2021 to August 2022 domestic gas prices rose by 96% and electricity by 54%. The UK's energy price cap has increased substantially. The cap, which limits what suppliers can charge consumers, reached £3,549 per year in October 2022, compared with £1,277 a year earlier. The price cap reduced over the year and currently sits at £1,834 (Oct-Dec 23). A detailed explanation of the issues can be found in the recently published Briefing document [‘Rising cost of living in the UK’ \(June 2023\)](#).

In response to the crisis the Poverty and Inequality Commission advised Scottish Government on action it could take to address the emerging issues. The Commissions detailed advice is available in the following [document](#).

The impact of Covid-19 and subsequent cost of living crisis on the delivery priorities has been considerable in terms of the needs of our communities, families, and individuals as well as the service priorities for the Comhairle, Health Board and all our community partners. Services and businesses have been significantly disrupted and have had to adapt to new ways of working and meeting rapidly changing and developing needs of our community.

This places additional pressure on Islands with already high levels of poverty in an area where the cost-of-living prices are already amongst the highest in the UK. The recent publication of [‘The Cost of Remoteness’](#) reported the significant variation in prices compared against urban UK. Food prices are between 13% (supermarkets) to 27% (local shops) higher. Clothing is between 12% and 34% higher, household goods 10% to 22% higher, travel and transport between 28% and 185% higher, social and cultural activity is 1% to 45% higher. Overall, depending upon the household constitution there is a cumulative 15% to 30% additional cost. Single pensioners are the hardest hit. These price increases will and are having a significant negative effect on our community.

Also, many of the areas most vulnerable to Brexit are in rural locations, in particular on the Scottish islands. Around half of communities in Na h-Eileanan Siar are amongst the most vulnerable communities in Scotland (20% most vulnerable datazones). In [Na h-Eileanan Siar there are nearly 14,000 people in the most vulnerable datazones in Scotland](#) - 53% of communities at datazone level are within the 20% most vulnerable communities in Scotland which is the highest in Scotland. Eight variables are used to construct the index, capturing factors such as Access to Services; Share of the Population of Working Age; and Income Deprivation.

## ENERGY PRICE CAP AND FUEL POVERTY

With the energy market improving over the last year the Energy Price Cap (default Tariff Cap) is now lower than the Energy Price Guarantee and so the £2500 Energy Price Guarantee in its current form is no longer required. Strikingly the main reduction is in gas prices so electric heat customers retain a higher disadvantage as they have a lower cost saving than dual fuel customers - this is not reflected in any policy remedy change. Whereas there has been a 16.4% reduction in typical dual fuel credit prices there is just a 7.4% reduction in electric heat prices. The reduction in dual fuel prices is greater than the discontinued £400 energy bill support, but the reduction for electric heat consumers is just around £250 - £300 annually on 10000 units so they will have higher costs this coming winter despite the overall reduction in prices. Calculations by the Highland and Islands Housing Associations

Affordable Warmth Group shows that in simple terms it can still cost well over £1000 a year more for electrically heated homes, to buy 33% less energy than a typical dual fuel household.

It is still important to remember that if your consumption is higher than “typical” you will pay more - if you don’t have Mains Gas you will pay more, if you use electricity for heat you will pay more and if you have an unregulated fuel like heating oil you will pay more. This is the position for the majority of customers in Remote and Rural communities.

In March 2022, Government regulations led to a reduction in locally provided Energy efficiency services through Tighean Innse Gall (TIG) with 14 well paid jobs removed – with a further 20 to 30 in the supply chain.

In addition, through the work of TIG and partners, Home Energy Scotland included, a further three were not started, relating to secondary measures of micro wind and PV with storage, due to be funded by Energy Redress and Area Based Scheme special projects. The TIG service was a key part of the strategy to alleviate fuel poverty.

Modelling by York University in early 2022 found that 57% of households in the Western Isles were experiencing fuel poverty, and they estimate that this has now risen to over 80% of island households in fuel poverty in the winter – the highest in Scotland: “In October 2022 and April 2023 the households most likely to be in fuel poverty will be larger families with children, and lone-parent families with two or more children.” Work is ongoing through the Comhairle and Tighean Innse Gall to address fuel poverty in the islands.

Tighean Innse Gall (TIG) and local partners developed the Gluasad Còmhla principle – moving together – and have established and nurtured links between health services, third sector support agencies such as Western Isles Citizens Advice Service, Uist Council for Voluntary Services and many others, education and of course energy.

We recognise education attainment amongst children in poverty is considerably lower than those not. Health expenditure is higher when people live in cold damp homes, and there is a danger to public health when a significant number of householders will be left with uninsulated, expensive to heat homes.

More homes in the Outer Hebrides have been referred to Warmer Homes Scotland and subsequent installations per 1000 population than any other region in Scotland. This is due to TIG and partners referring to the Home Energy Scotland Inverness office. So, partnerships are key to helping achieve the aims of Scotland become energy efficient, help eradicate fuel poverty and to decarbonise.

This delivery update for 2022/23 will consider the additional impact of the present cost-of-living crisis and the effects that energy price rises will have on our already fuel poor communities. For example, Stornoway Town Hall being utilised as a ‘warm space’ for members of the public to access if they are unable to heat their homes over Winter, with family play areas and hot meals available and assistance from partner agencies welcomed.

It was noted that public libraries would also be used as warm spaces and a community fridge is available.

Further warm meeting places are provided via the [‘Cruinnich’](#) initiative.

## LIVED EXPERIENCE

Workshops using the Get Heard Scotland (GHS) toolkit were carried out. During the period 2022/2023 a total of **87 people** participated in this initiative. The interviewing took place in the Tigh Ceilidh, Cearns, the Cearns Resource Centre and over the telephone.

The aim of the project remained the same, to identify issues affecting individuals and groups within the communities. Participants were from a number of communities throughout Lewis and Harris with telephone interviews used for Harris individuals. The breakdown for Harris was:

- 15 people in total – eleven women and 4 men.
- Groups will now be run in Tarbert and Leverburgh and these will be run in partnership with the Harris CLD worker.

Issues identified were the rising cost of foodstuffs, rising energy prices and the fear of coping during the winter months. Ferry disruptions were also highlighted and concern raised as to how they would operate over the winter.

The breakdown for Lewis was:

- 72 people in total – 48 female and 24 men
- This will continue but will be tied onto the Place Standard work if possible.

There were similar issues identified in Lewis with a great deal of concern about the approaching cold weather and their ability to pay their energy bills. The significant rise in prices in Tesco and the Co-op were again highlighted:

***“I usually go to local supermarkets, but noticed that the prices are going up a lot each week. It’s crazy! I really have to watch my money and I’ve stopped getting any luxuries” (female, single mother of 2).***

***“I go to the local shop as they give me tick and I will pay what I have in the book when I get my universal credit, but I’m always owing money and it’s getting me down!” (unemployed single male, aged 63).***

A short video has been put together giving details of the Get Heard Hebrides project, its aims and the questions to be answered. It has been sent to local groups in Uist and Barra including Tagasa Uibhist and Cothrom and they are going to facilitate discussion with their groups. In addition individual phone calls will be made and Teams used if required.



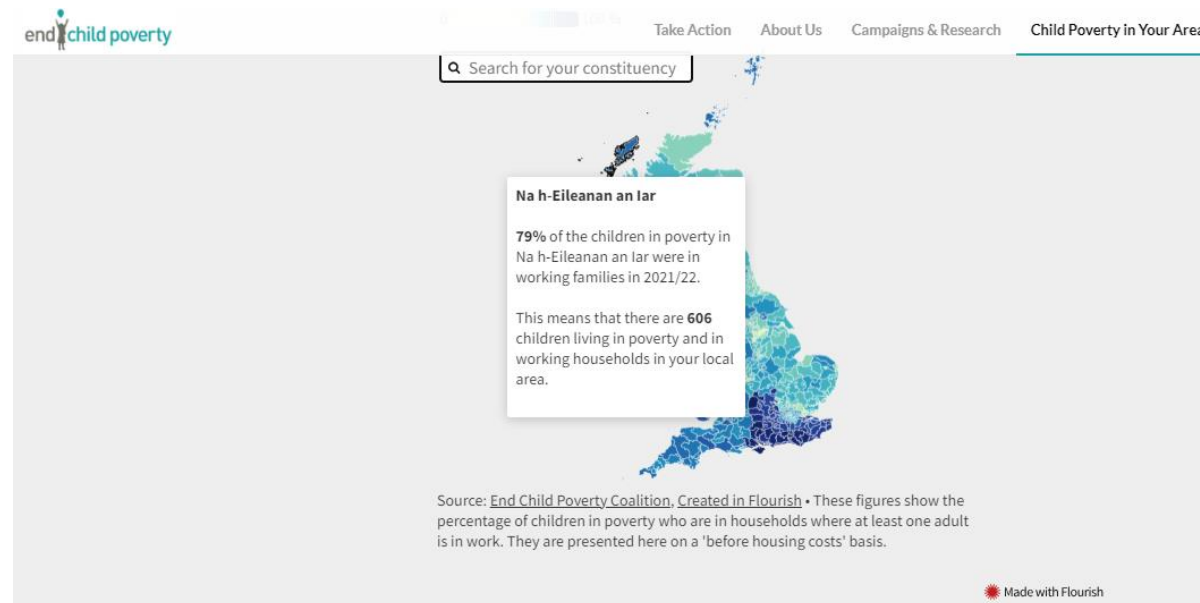
## OUR PURPOSE

At local level, tackling child poverty and mitigating the impact of poverty on families remains central to our agenda by:

- Ensuring our most vulnerable children have been supported through emergency childcare and free school meals;
- Establishing mechanisms to deliver and have access to food in communities;
- Providing families with energy, money and welfare rights advice, access to crisis grants, replacement essential home appliances such as fridges, cookers, and support to sustain tenancies.

Much of this has been built on the strong foundations and extensive work undertaken to tackle child poverty to date and the strong working partnerships formed through our work on the LCPAR meant that a strong collaborative response was possible. Our shared focus on the key drivers of poverty: **income from employment; costs of living; and income from social security and benefits in kind** will remain as important as we move into the recovery phase.

## 1. INCOME FROM EMPLOYMENT



For data estimates relating to After Housing Costs in 2021/22, there was an Eilean Siar poverty rate of 19.8% (number of children is 913), and this was a percentage point change of 2.3% (2015-22): [Child Poverty-AHC-Estimates-2015-22](#).

**COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR EMPLOYABILITY SERVICE**

The Comhairle Employability Service is receiving national funding to appoint a Co-ordinator to support individuals in poverty moving into employment. The co-ordinator will have an active role in supporting the work of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group. CnES continue to receive a high volume of referrals and engage with existing support groups across the islands e.g., mother and toddler groups, to support people into/returning to work.

There are a significant number of employment opportunities available across the islands at present, but also concerns regarding the potential impacts of increased fuel costs across the island business network and the potential for significant job losses across multiple sectors.

Work is ongoing with the Comhairle's Parental Employability Support Training officer alongside the Financial Inclusion team to identify opportunities for enhanced engagement with young people/families for standardised pathways to be introduced, which will outline available support and entitlements available to people from across different services. These could be shared with individuals/families when single services are involved, or aware of the need for additional supports.

Work is ongoing in relation to the upskilling and retraining of individuals, but transportation remains a key barrier to employment, particularly in relation to Health and Social Care. Child friendly Drop-in sessions have been arranged within Stornoway Town Hall to support parents and carers into employment, but enhanced outreach support is vital to ensure that no-one is left behind. Work is ongoing to collate local contacts and public information in relation to available supports.

Support is available through One Parent Families Scotland – a national support service which aims to change lives and challenge poverty to enable single parent families to achieve their potential, to reach a decent standard of living and contribute to Scottish society. Parents and carers can access support workers immediately through online live chat functions, and helplines. In discussion, it was recognised that there could be an opportunity to replicate this support service throughout the Outer Hebrides.

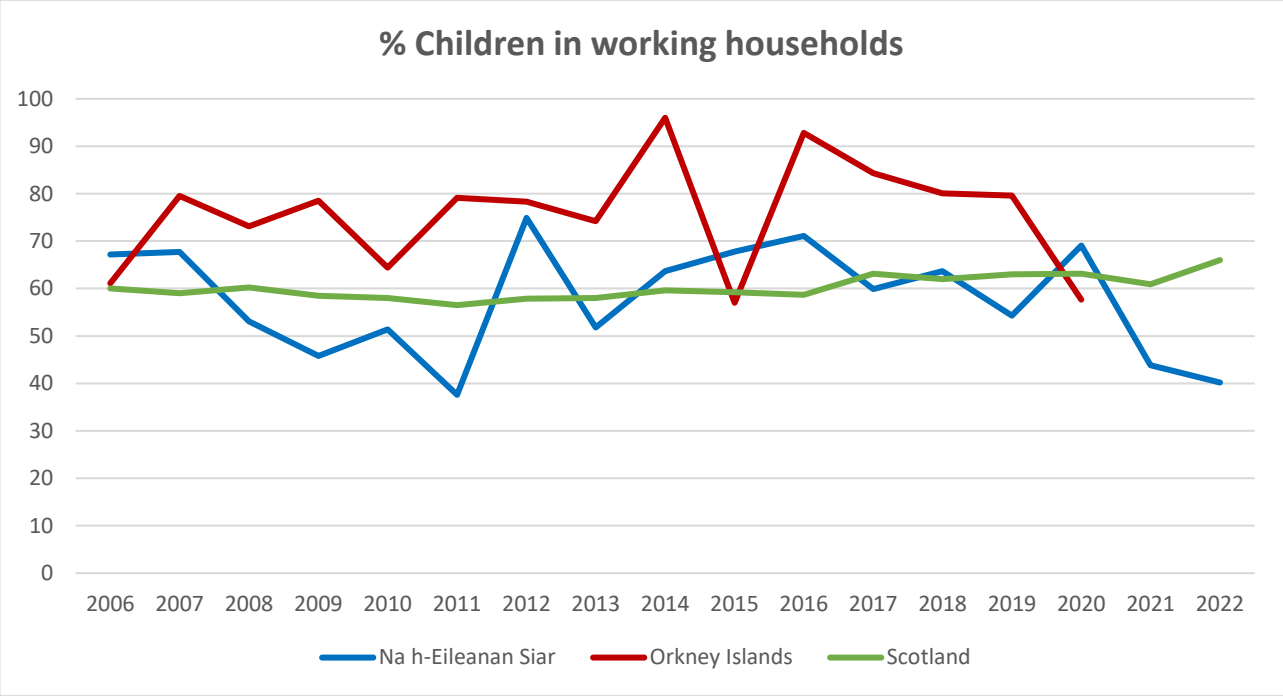
**DEPARTMENT OF WORKS AND PENSIONS**

Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) report that there are significant employment opportunities across the Outer Hebrides at present, and that anyone who wants to work, should be able to. Employers across the islands are struggling to fill vacant posts. DWP Officers continued to signpost parents and carers to available entitlements.

DWP are working with just over 500 people experiencing barriers to entering employment and this includes those with mental health and wellbeing issues.

There are over 1000 individuals on Universal Credit. 328 families are currently in receipt of Universal Credit, and do not require any additional supports. It was recognised that those on Universal Credit and in employment, and those in low paid jobs, but earning over the threshold for additional supports, represented a significant risk of being in/entering poverty. 34 individuals in social housing and in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance are unable to access the Warm Homes Discount (£150) through SSE.

Individuals and families are expressing significant concerns in relation to increased energy and living costs. An additional £324 would be issued to households most in need by November 2022 as part of the UK Government's Cost of Living support package, following the initial £324 payment in June 2022.



Source: ONS Annual Population Survey, by combined economic activity status of household members, 2022

**Employment in 'lower paid' occupations  
(% of all in employment)**

Na h-Eileanan Siar	Orkney Islands	Scotland
31.5% (up from 28% in June 2021)	19% (full data not available for June 2023)	31.1% (up from 27% in June 2021)

*Source: ONS Annual Population Survey, year to Jun 2023*

**Median full-time gross weekly earnings**

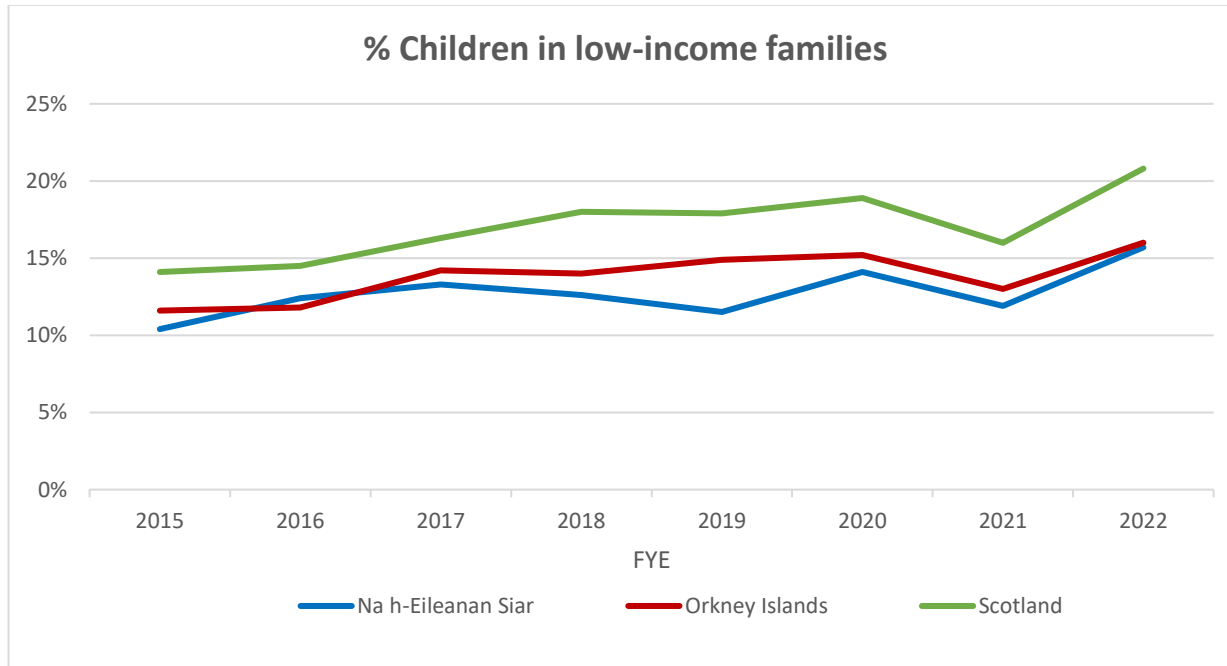
Na h-Eileanan Siar	Orkney Islands	Scotland	
£560.90 (down £109.20 from 2021)	£660.50	£640.3	Resident analysis
£562.60 (down £107.30, from 2021)	£657.70	£640.5	Workplace analysis

*Source: ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2022 data*

**Jobs density**

Na h-Eileanan Siar	Orkney Islands	Scotland
0.93	1.03	0.81

*Source: ONS jobs density dataset, 2021 data*



*Source: DWP/HMRC Children in low-income families: local area statistics 2014 to 2022 (before housing costs)*

## 2. COST OF LIVING

### FUEL POVERTY

The Pandemic had delayed the on-going Scottish House Condition Survey, which usually provides a range of housing statistics across a wide range of areas. The most recent were published in December 2020 and collected in 2019. This showed the Western Isles with 40% of households in fuel poverty (compared to the Scottish average of 24%). Due to the restrictions the 2020 SHS and the 2021 SHS were undertaken using a push to telephone/video approach. It was not possible to resume the 2020 SHCS but the 2021 SHCS was undertaken using an external+ approach. However, due to the change in approach for the 2021 SHCS, the results are not directly comparable with the National Statistics from previous waves of the survey.

It was also estimated that 24% of our households would be in Extreme Fuel Poverty (compared to 12% nationally). We are not expecting another update to be published until May 2023 and this will be from data collected in 2021, where these estimates pre-date the large increases in energy prices that occurred in 2022. There is obviously uncertainty on

current and future rates of fuel poverty. The fuel price cap has had an effect as has the cash support to households and individuals. The most recent research carried out into fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides was a mapping exercise undertaken by Energy Action Scotland. This mapping exercise was done after the price increase of March 2022, and again in October 2022. Therefore, Tighean Innse Gall (TIG), the local housing agency, estimates that currently 70% - 80% of the homes in the Outer Hebrides are in fuel poverty.

The uplifts that were applied to the UK MIS for households in Remote Rural, Remote Small Towns, and Island Areas (RRRSTI) are based on those reported in [The Cost of Remoteness: Reflecting higher living costs in remote rural Scotland](#).

The uplifts range from 14% to 37% depending on household type and location. The RRRSTI uplifts and base MIS amount by household type, 2021 for a household comprising a couple with children, indicates an island uplift of 16%, and for a single pensioner this rises to 37%.

#### HEBRIDEAN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

Rent arrears levels have remained fairly stable despite the cost of living and energy price crisis. However, many tenants are struggling with the cost of heating homes and the great majority that responded to a survey report having reduced heating or stopped heating rooms. HHP are also identifying a number of cases of major welfare concerns and where people are struggling to cope. Some of these have involved children and concerns have been passed on. HHP have been successful in obtaining funding to provide vouchers for food and fuel and also to provide lower cost cooking facilities e.g. air fryers and microwaves.

HHP have successfully secured funding of £100k from the Scottish Government's Social Housing Fuel Support Fund to provide the most vulnerable tenants with 'warm packs' to help stay warm as their energy costs continue to rise beyond affordable levels during the current energy crisis. The aim is to help as many vulnerable tenants as possible and to work with local partners such as, foodbanks and Citizen's Advice to identify the most vulnerable households. In the first instance, the focus is on those known to be struggling financially and may be unable to fully heat their home such as those the elderly or housebound due to a disability, and also those with young children.

Contractors entering homes continue to be asked to report back on any concerns in relation to living conditions within households, and training has been provided to raise awareness of safety and vulnerability issues.

HHP secured £1.2m in Low Carbon funding to support heating and insulation works which enabled 146 heating systems to be replaced during 2022/23. A further application has been submitted for 23/24, and work is continuing to improve the energy efficiency of homes. Funding has also been secured for 23/24 to provide assistance with aids and adaptation where required within HHP properties. A joint bid with Tighean Innse Gall to fund an Energy Support Worker for the islands was submitted.

#### POINT AND SANDWICK TRUST AND MUIRNEAG

Muirneag Consulting Ltd on behalf of Point and Sandwick Trust developed a mechanism to assess the household income and energy efficiency status along with the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) to determine the families and household's Fuel poverty status. This has resulted in over £120k being distributed to clients in 9 months.

Households are assessed to determine the depth of fuel poverty (against revised Scottish Definition) and the fuel poverty gap which exists (i.e. Effectively the amount of money required or amount bills need to drop by to raise the household out of fuel poverty). There has been a significant financial and practical benefit to the households that were assessed. These assessments have also helped demonstrate the financial disparity between Island and mainland families in order to better inform policy, develop the local poverty action plan and improve its implementation. From a local island project currently being undertaken in 2023 by Muirneag Consulting the fuel poverty figures established from a cohort of 200 homes is approximately 92%. This is against the revised Scottish definition and more worryingly the extreme fuel poor is estimated around 80%. The median fuel poverty gap being evidenced at circa £2,400 is significantly higher than mainland families which were estimated at around £1,000 in 2019 and according to Muirneag Consulting are likely to be now around £1800.

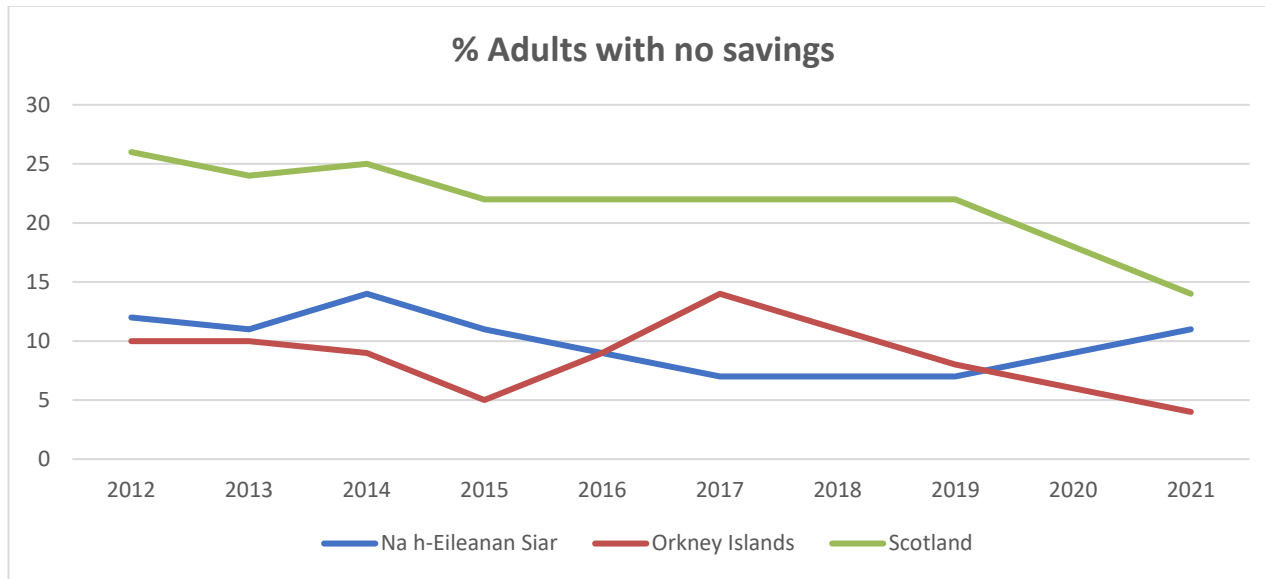
#### TIGHEAN INNSE GALL

TIG had a 100% success rate in applying to the Scottish Governments' Home Heating Support Fund on behalf of households, submitting 42 applications providing a client financial gain of £35,799. The Fund seeks to provide financial relief to energy consumers who are experiencing significant financial hardship and strives to provide this support to households regardless of the fuel or payment method used. The fund has been extended into the year 23/24, and therefore anyone struggling to pay for heating or are in debt with a utility provider are encouraged to get in touch and TIG can support with an application where possible. The Resilience Group issued 1354 fuel vouchers to 466 homes, £125,352 worth of grant support for prepayment vouchers through the Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme and the British Gas Energy Trust Fund, and a bid to support the allocation of further vouchers was successful in receiving £30,000 from British Gas Energy Trust and a further £30,000 from CnES through the cost-of-living funding for the year 23/24.

#### HOMELESS SERVICE:

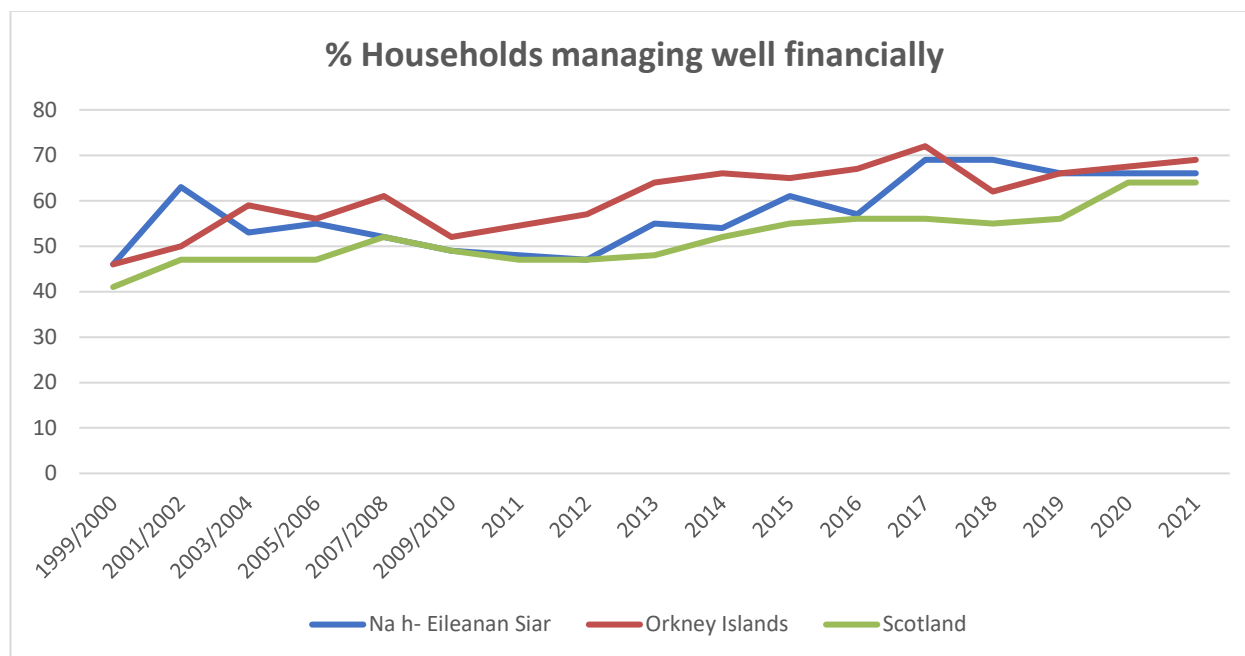
During the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 136 homelessness applications were made to the Comhairle consisting of 160 adults and 49 children. This is an 11% decrease on last year's figure of 153: <https://cne-siar.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Homelessness-Annual-Report-2022-23.pdf>

The Homeless service does not have a budget to cover increased fuel costs across the service (anticipated to be £50k per annum). Consideration would be made to increased charges for electricity being passed to those in homeless accommodation. It was recognised that many individuals in homeless accommodation elect not to pay current charges, particularly those with addiction issues. Some individuals/families residing in homeless accommodation are concerned to move into permanent accommodation due to worries around how they will manage household bills.



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey - Adults dataset, 2021





**Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey - Adults dataset, 2021**

Around 3,000 households were interviewed for [the SHS 2020 telephone survey](#), compared to around 10,500 for the SHS 2019. Due to the smaller sample size, it was not possible to provide 2020 data broken down for individual local authorities. Nationally in 2020, 64% of All Households reported managing well financially, 29% gets by, and 7% reported that they did not manage well financially. 18% of households whose main income was from benefits reported that they did not manage well financially. 57% of Households with children reported that they were managing well financially, and 62% of households without children, 10% of households without children reported that they did not manage well financially, which was higher than for households with children (6%) and older households (1%). 74% of owner occupiers reported that they were managing well financially. This was higher than for households in the private rented (48%) and social rented (32%) sectors.

The [SHS 2021 Annual Report Tables Finance Local Authority Level 20-06-2023](#) for All Households managing well financially reports 64% for Scotland, (gets by at 31%, doesn't manage well at 5%), 66% for Eilean Siar ( gets by at 29%, doesn't manage well 6%), and 69% for Orkney (gets by at 29%, doesn't manage well 2%).

### 3. INCOME FROM SOCIAL SECURITY AND BENEFITS IN KIND

#### SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government replaced the DWP Cold Weather Payment (CWP) with a new Low Income Winter Heating Assistance in winter 2022. This guaranteed annual payment of £50 to around 400,000 low-income households currently eligible for Cold Weather Payment. Payments were made in February 2023 and then expected in each November. There is evidence that some individuals/ families are electing to heat one room within their home only as a means of reducing heating costs.

Best Start Grant School Age Payment is open from the first of June in the year that the child is first old enough to start school until the last day in February of the following year. The Payment (£294.70) is issued to help with the cost of preparing for school and can be used for anything. The Best Start Grant was promoted well by Early Years, but there would be merit promoting this across wider services.

As of May 2022, there had been 650 successful claims for the Best Start Grants/Foods to a total value of £246,949. The proportion allocated to Best Start Foods has increased significantly since May 2020. For 22/23 there were 745 authorised applications for Best Start Grants/Foods from the 1145 processed at a value of £294,350.

Applications for Best Start Grant - Pregnancy and Baby Payment 22/23 – 410, value £79,892.

Applications for Best Start Grant - Early Learning Payment 22/23 – 390, value £64,245.

Applications for Best Start Grant - School Age Payment 22/23 – 315, value £57,096.

Applications for Best Start Foods 22/23 – 665, value £93,117.

Social Security Scotland (SSS) work in close partnership with organisations across the Western Isles to maximise the take-up of these benefits. The Comhairle's Education service has produced leaflets promoting the payments, and how to apply and these will be issued to parents and carers.

Clients can book in-person meetings with SSS Client Support Advisers at home or in their local community, at a time and location that suits them best, face-to-face, by video call or by phone.

Regarding the Scottish Child Payment (high level statistics to 31 March 2023) for Eilean Siar, there were 7,045 payments at a value of £726,795 since the SCP February 2021 launch. In 22/23 there were 3,870 payments at a value of £558,705, up from 2,901 and £158,230 in 21/22.

[Children \(aged under 16\) in relative low income families local area statistics 2015 to 2022](#) for Eilean Siar, before housing costs indicates percentages and numbers of children as at 10.4% (459) in 2015, and as at 15.7% (639) in 2022.

## FINANCIAL INCLUSION

The Financial Inclusion (FI) service continued to support people to ensure they are in receipt of their full entitlements and report that the majority of people will happily engage and appreciate the service, but there is a minority who will not engage, and are often the people who are most in need of any help that is available to them. There has been a substantial increase in the number of referrals to Financial Inclusion as more households reach crisis in terms of their ability to pay increased energy costs. A significant number of families have applied to the Scottish Child Payment fund. Financial Inclusion should be contacted in the first instance if any household could benefit from additional support.

The Lewis and Harris Service received 209 referrals to have their circumstances and entitlements reviewed, but only 25 of these were from households with any dependent (or expected) children. Those who engaged and who were informed they were receiving all entitlements, felt greatly reassured of this. Nine of the 25 referrals came via the Maternity ward at the Western Isles Hospital who have been very proactive in assisting mums-to-be to refer themselves to the service as well as informing them about the SSS Best Start Grants. Referrals remain on record and can be contacted whenever initiatives such as the Redress Fuel Voucher or White Goods schemes become available. Sadly, many of those who, it would appear, needed the most support did not follow through and simply did not engage. This was despite offers of assistance with applications and reassurance that the majority of the work would be completed by the FI service.

The Uist and Barra service has been actively supporting 18 families with children or expected children over 22/23. Historically, maintaining any form of meaningful engagement with families has been very difficult. However, over 22/23, the service has been working closely with colleagues in Early Years, Training and Development and the Health Visitor, holding community events such as Meet and Greet sessions for parents and children. This has proved to be very successful in opening the service up to families as they are very informal and relaxed events. Word of mouth has spread amongst families, and as a result people who had not necessarily attended events are now contacting the service.

## WESTERN ISLES CAB

Western Isles CAB noted a dramatic increase in demand for services and the complexity of cases. Advisors had been recognised to bring in £4-5 in financial gain for clients for every £1 received in funding. Every £1 received in funding is matched by £2.

WI CAB has introduced a Food Insecurity Pilot scheme being run by Citizens Advice Scotland, on behalf of the Scottish Government, to research how the provision of a holistic advice service alongside the provision of financial help in the form of cash or shopping gift cards. As part of the scheme, the Western Isles Citizens Advice Service have been selected to be a part of the pilot, and have funding to provide financial assistance at a value of £25 per person in the household. This is in the form of cash vouchers that can be redeemed at any PayPoint location, or shopping gift cards – CAB have Tesco vouchers for clients based in Lewis and Harris, and Co-op vouchers for clients in North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra. There are no barriers to receiving a voucher other than a person being in need of assistance with food costs; a client does not need to be in receipt of any benefits, can be in work or not. Assistance from [fip@uistcab.casonline.org.uk](mailto:fip@uistcab.casonline.org.uk). The Western Isles CAS are based out of four bureaux across the islands: Westview Terrace in Stornoway, Pier Road in Tarbert, in the UHI building in Lionacleit, and on the Street in Castlebay.

**WESTERN ISLES CANCER CARE INITIATIVE (WICCI)**

WICCI have developed a unique partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to address needs and provide support for specific issues faced by cancer patients and their families throughout the Western Isles. [WICCI](#) main areas of work includes a Social Fund, which are grants of up to £500 to individuals who are going through treatment to help with some of the costs associated with that time.

To date WICCI have supported over 710 individuals and distributed over £373,000 in grants through their Social Fund.

**UIG CHURCH OF SCOTLAND BABY BANK**

The Baby Bank is a well-used service within the local community and operates on an anonymous basis. The Baby Bank has been extended to support older children and adults.

**BRITISH RED CROSS**

The BRC Scottish Crisis Fund is provided by the Scottish Government and is being delivered in partnership by the British Red Cross. This BRC Scottish Crisis Fund operates with referral agencies to support vulnerable people at risk of becoming destitute, including those who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) status. The program ran until 31 December 2022.

**ACTION FOR CHILDREN**

Over the past three years Action for Children (AFC) have accessed internal grants for food vouchers and white goods. They were given out to both families and vulnerable people (plus some families known to Social Work) across the whole of the Western Isles. These vouchers, some up to the sum of £400, were distributed in stages and based on family size and need. Across all the Islands approximately £60,000 has been distributed in total over 3 years. There are ongoing annual grants such as Turner & Townsend grants for school resources, emergency funding, and hardship funding.

All the white goods were purchased locally and included washing machines, cookers, tumble driers and freezers. Money was also available for household goods, food and clothing. Beds, cots, and warm clothes were also purchased with families receiving up to £100 per child. Food vouchers have also been distributed to a large number of families. This year AFC were able to purchase electricity tokens for some families with meters. There was also huge local support from a local business (The Grillburger), who offered free transportation of white goods to Uist & Barra, and this support allowed for more money to go direct to families rather than on transportation.

At Christmas, John Lewis was a major sponsor of Action for Children, and they provided clothing, presents and Christmas decorations for both Hillcrest Children's home and Bayhead and all AFC service users across all services receive these. There were numerous local donations and a 'Santa Sled' in the Co-op. AFC are well supported by the local Foodbank for the families that are being worked with.

## EARLY YEARS SERVICES

Family Support Workers hold pop up events at parents meetings, where they offer to meet with the parents/carers and complete a Financial Health Check which will inform them if they are claiming all they are eligible for and will support them to complete an online application. This is also provided with identified family support cases on a 1-1 basis when they visit the home, but this initiative is to make sure that families do not fall through a gap and lose out on the financial help they are entitled to. A comprehensive advice and contact leaflet has been developed specifically to provide Financial Help for Parents & Carers. An information leaflet had previously been circulated which noted available food delivery and supports.

Drop-in sessions included one in Stornoway Primary Nursery which was successful and one in the café space in Stornoway Library where no one attended. Two sessions were held in Uist along with partners – Comhairle Financial Inclusion officers, Health Visitors, Training Officers – it is hoped to continue these going forward. These sessions were focussed on new mum/dads and they were very well attended and succeeded in signposting a number of families on to other services for support and/or complete online applications for benefits, Warm Home discounts etc that they were eligible for.

Moving forward the service took the decision to go out to groups in the community as this more proactive approach seemed to work better than waiting for people to come to them. A timetable was devised of groups for visiting e.g. mum and tots groups, and contact made with Social Security Scotland who joined for the sessions.

Unfortunately, the timetable (Lewis & Harris) paused in January as one of the family support workers was seconded to provide managerial support to An Cotan Nursery. It is hoped to be able to resume the sessions in the new term as the secured funding through the Whole Family Wellbeing Fund (WFWF) for another 1.5 Family Support Workers will enable continuation of the sessions. The WFWF of £161k outputs include funding 'The Shed' to provide intergenerational work (basically using volunteers to support vulnerable children and families); Additional post in ELR, to work with children on the edge of care; Additional support for children pre-birth – 2 years who have a parent with a learning disability or mental health difficulty; and, Additional Family Support Workers in the Early Years Service to prepare children for when they enter an early years setting.

## NHS WESTERN ISLES

The NHS is working with Education and Children's services on the updated guidance for early learning, childcare settings, and schools' food regulations to give children more access to nutritious food.

Referral systems have been put in place for Health Visitors and other children's services including maternity who refer new mums to CAB for a financial health check and ensure they are claiming all the benefits to which they are entitled. This may include providing access to the Best Start Grant via Social Security Scotland or providing access to foodbanks through the distribution of vouchers. Health Visiting, Children's Services and the Education Department have been actively supporting the most vulnerable families and children. Recent statistics on Best Start Grants; Pregnancy and Baby Payment, Early Learning Payment, School age payments show that these are now above the Scottish average, Foods is slightly below. Referral systems are being introduced for Community Nursing Teams which will enable access for those with current health conditions and target a wider age group.

Our breastfeeding rates are above the Scottish average with over 20 businesses signed up locally to the Breastfeeding Friendly Scotland scheme to promote, support and protect breastfeeding. Financial Inclusion structures and procedures are already in place for Maternity and Health Visiting, and electronic recording is being introduced for referrals.

Issues relating to poverty are raised through provision of a poverty awareness training programme for front line workers to help them to identify any families who may need support. A shorter, more general on-line session will be delivered in partnership with CAB and will be open to the public. Both these sessions will address the stigma around benefits and the use of foodbanks, especially amongst the older members of our community who let pride get in the way of them claiming what they are entitled to.

Considering the impact on low-income families, the NHS Western Isles has prepared guidance and advice for employers, including details of support agencies. Further publications on the cost of living will be distributed directly to GPs, Libraries, Leisure Centres, and Community Centres.

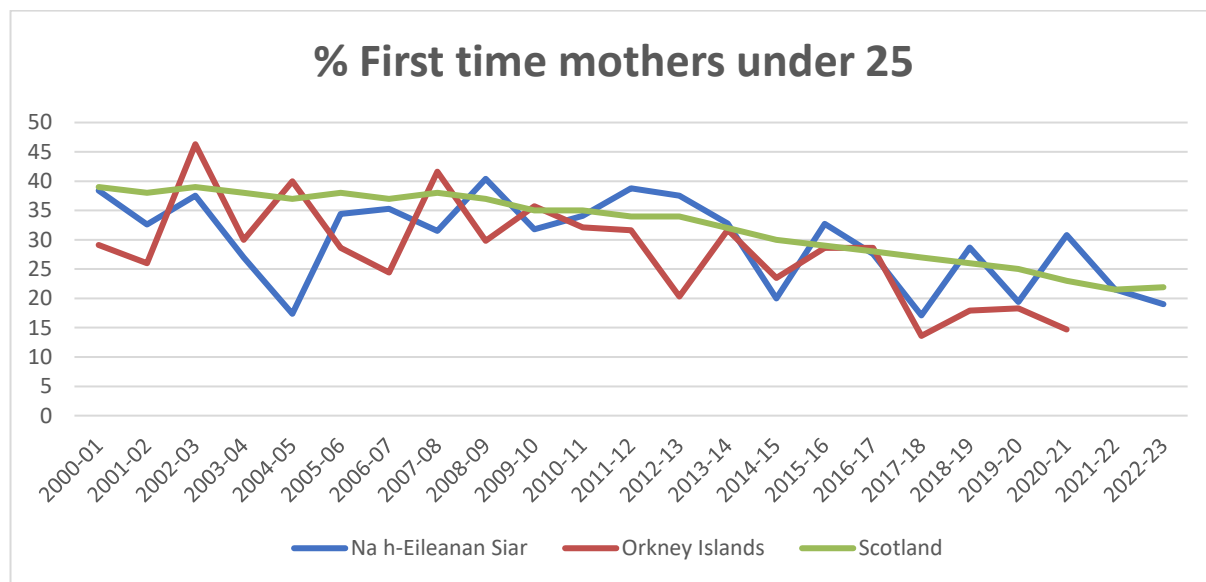
Several officers have a remit for locality work and are at times based in the centre of the community, working with local agencies and partners. They actively source funding for childcare, employment workshops and signpost residents to appropriate agencies, such as CAB. They also hold 'Healthy Eating on a Budget' workshops and encourage communities to grow their own fruit and vegetables. An example of such an initiative can be found in the middle of the largest social housing estate on the Western Isles – the Cearnns. Led by the Residents Association, their community development team have erected two large Polycrubs and allocated members of the scheme with their own mini allotment for the provision of fresh produce. The project was so successful over lockdown that they are now hoping to expand the project and source funding for a further two Polycrubs. The waiting list they have reflects the concern around rising food prices and includes several young families. Photo below of polycrubs, © instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cearnscommunity/>



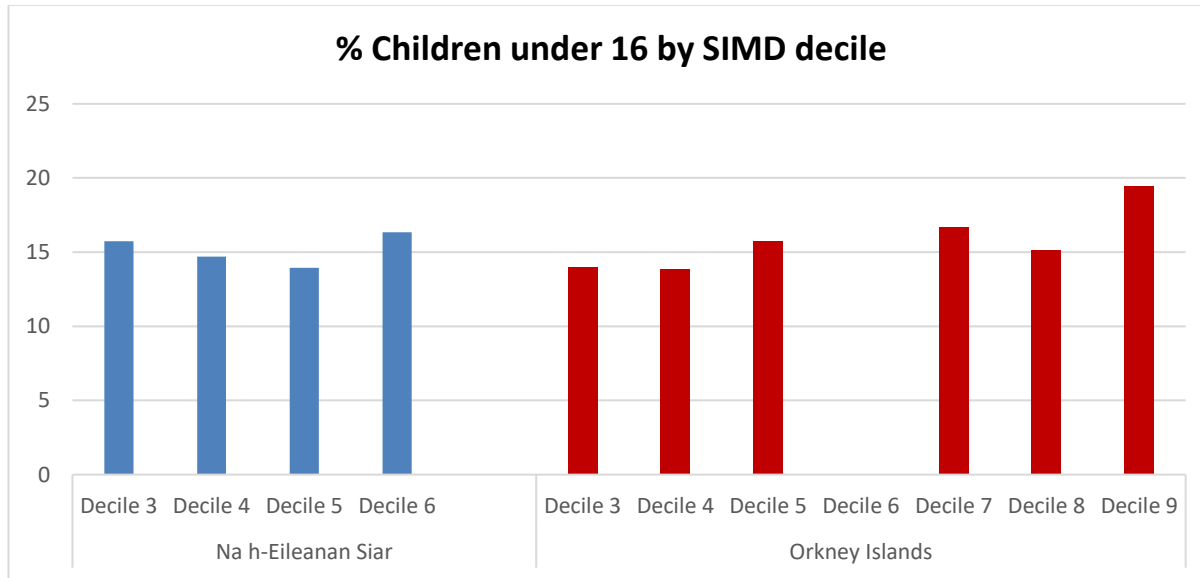
The Stornoway West Locality Group secured funding to offer fuel vouchers to those most in need within the locality, and 150 referrals have been made to the fund. Police Scotland have provided funding as part of the areas ‘Grow Your Own’ and Community Fridge initiatives. There have been 153 users of the free Community Fridge which is open to all Stornoway residents (also has been used by those residents outwith Stornoway), with over half a tonne of food avoiding landfill.

The Community Fridge is a space where surplus food is shared for free, bringing people together to eat, connect, learn new skills and reduce food waste. The Taigh Ceilidh (Community Fridge location) would be used as a ‘warm space’ and offer warm meals, internet access and activities for the community. As stated, plans are in place to enhance the number of polycrubs within the Cearns area and extend this initiative into the Manor area of Stornoway.

Also, £100k has been allocated for wider distribution to community projects through Crown Estate Funding, and 15 projects which will support people in the locality were currently being considered. An application submitted to the CORRA Foundation was successful, and used to provide food and clothing vouchers to residents in the Stornoway West Locality.



Source: Public Health Scotland, Scottish Morbidity Record 02, IR2023-00852



**Source: National Records of Scotland (NRS) Population by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2020v2) decile, council area, sex and single year of age: mid-2001 to mid-2021**

**CHALLENGE POVERTY WEEK**

A public information campaign took place during Challenge Poverty Week, comprising daily media releases and the promotion of locally developed material on the themes of families and children; money worries; energy advice; employer advice; and food. Some volunteers agreed to share information why they volunteer – [Helen’s story](#).

**FOOD AVAILABILITY & DISTRIBUTION**

Practical action on food distribution continues to be a major focus. There are several strands that have been working together to increase the quantity and distribution of food to those most in need. This includes FareShare, Foodbanks, fresh support, and Community Groups.

FareShare continue to deliver significant volumes of surplus food to the islands on a regular basis. The food is across the Outer Hebrides. Funding for the Stornoway facility that provided fresh and frozen food as well as parcels has been extended by CnES to April 2023. Local retailers have continued to support foodbank agencies and offer support to vulnerable groups, e.g., homelessness service.



In the meantime, partners continue to issue vouchers and food parcels to those in need. Information in relation to Food Support for the Western Isles has been updated. School staff are promoting available entitlements to parents and carers through newsletters, discussions, leaflets etc

There are a number of local food distribution projects across the islands. As an example, within the largest social housing estate on the Western Isles – the Cearns – runs a small, localised foodbank covering the Stornoway North area. The project has also secured funding to establish a Hub in partnership with the Scottish Coop – the first on the Western Isles. This has added a community fridge element, to enable fresh food to be incorporated into the food distribution process whilst also reducing food waste.

In October 2022 the Comhairle, NHS Western Isles and Hebridean Housing Partnership endorsed the formation of the Western Isles Food Partnership, led by Tagsa Uibhist, to work with Nourish Scotland's, Sustainable Food Places programme. The Western Isles Food Partnership aims to unite our Communities, Public, Private and Third Sector stakeholders to reform all aspects of the Outer Hebrides food system; tackling the social, environmental, and economic issues surrounding food, to ensure that the Outer Hebrides is a Sustainable Food Place. The consultation on the Outer Hebrides Food Growing Strategy will ensure our Communities, Public, Private and Third Sector stakeholders have their views incorporated into the final Outer Hebrides Food Growing Strategy.

Funding has been secured to develop a Western Isles Food Partnership. The Partnership is in the process of building a stakeholder network, and establishing a map of existing food sources which will have a coordinating role in relation to emergency food and voucher provision. This will be particularly important in the coming winter months when cost of living increases take effect.

#### COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

The Local Authority identified £150,000 from Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery funding and this has been distributed to the Third Sector Interface who are looking at local provision and activity around winter resilience. It was noted that a Co-ordinator would be employed on a part-time basis to ensure a joined up and co-ordinated approach is delivered.

A further £475,000 of unused Covid-19 funding was identified for direct action to address increased fuel and living costs. This was spent through a mixture of direct contributions to existing known vulnerable people by using the mechanisms already in place around, Council Tax reduction/Rebate; Children/Education Benefits; Scottish Welfare Fund; Discretionary Housing Payment and Hardship Payments, to target those most in need. There was also an element of funding set aside for projects identified in communities by a simple application process e.g. support for foodbanks, provision of vouchers, warm spaces for people to meet up, meals etc. as well as a further element to identify those in work who are struggling and who would benefit from assistance with fuel costs. The Revenues and Benefits Section noted that frontline employees were dealing with a significant increase in relation to the number of individuals requiring crisis grants, and some people faced exceptionally challenging circumstances, and significant pressures.

The Comhairle received £360,000 from the Scottish Government's Islands Emergency Cost Crisis Fund. This was added to the Comhairle's Cost of Living Support, to make the support go further and last longer. Cost of living payments of £100 from the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund to those on Council tax reduction were made and £176,200 was paid out from the £360k awarded, and letters to gain further information were sent where bank account details were unavailable. For Property Bands A to D there was support from Scottish Government (Cost of Living allowances credits to Council Tax bills) of £150.00.

The Scottish Welfare Fund to December 2022 includes 297 children within the applications, comprising Community Care grants of £110,677, and Crisis grants paid of £20,545 for immediate financial hardship (three crises' grants can be received in a year). Discretionary Housing Payments of £222,812 were also paid.

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund £241,000 is available to be used as 'Support for Low-Income Households' over 3 years to March 2025 with an allocation of £36.5k for 22/23. This funding has supported young people with additional support needs to attend a specialist college.

The UK Islands Forum where the Comhairle is represented considered the impact of increased energy costs when they met in Orkney in September 2022. Representatives from Ofgem were in attendance, and it was agreed that a follow-up in depth discussion would be held when the Forum next meets on the Isle of Wight in May 2023.

A further key area to work on is transport. In a rural community, access to suitable transport is a critical element of poverty reduction and influences all three of the national drivers of poverty. Current and projected cuts in public services will impact on the availability of readily-accessible transport in some communities and the plan will need to address options for how access to employment, education, shopping and leisure can be maintained. The Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development Group commissioned a Rural Community Transport Scoping Study of the Outer Hebrides – to identify what support is required to reduce isolation and alleviate poverty: [Baseline Mapping](#); [Consultation and Engagement](#); [Final Report to the OH CLLD LAG](#).

## EDUCATION, SKILLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**Free School Meals:** Although all pupils in P1-5 are eligible for receipt of free school meals, applying for school meals has additional benefits including bridging payments issued during the holiday periods. Last session there were just over 300 families across our island communities who applied for free school meals. The Team of Educational Attainment Apprentices (EAA) based within all schools in the Western Isles support young people who are eligible for Free School Meals primarily, however there are usually other young people added who may need further help if there are issues of poverty or care experienced. Schools continue to promote the benefits of free school meals through newsletters, school websites, discussion with parents and carers etc. It was recognised that there could be merit in removing the free school meal aspect from application forms for pupils in primary 1 to 5, and rebranding this as an Entitlement Check Form. CnES raised the threshold to £20k for free school meals eligibility, and holiday payments are also included, however every new year a new application is required.

**Clothing Grants:** All schools continue to promote clothing grants across the school community. As with free school meals, the forms can be accessed online. There are Uniform swap shops for all schools and privacy is afforded in the foyers for this, and Xmas jumpers are donated. Breakfast clubs (Primary Level) are run where needed and supported by Education Attainment Apprentices.

**Poverty Proofing Schools:** Across all schools, staff are poverty proofing schools. Following the pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis, many family circumstances have changed and schools limit what they request from parents/carers. If any payments are required, parents/carers are given notice and options to pay. Schools are continuing to review initiatives such as Free Dress Friday, and donations are optional. All schools use their discretion and support pupils to access school trips etc. to ensure that all pupils have an equitable experience. Some schools host fundraising events, and Parent Councils provide support to schools. Several Community Councils provide vouchers for families. SPAR

and Engebret's provide some vouchers for families for fuel. The Education Attainment Apprentices deliver food parcels pre-Xmas and at other times. Galson Estate Trust subsidise some Sports Clubs during the year to assist children to attend.

#### PUPIL EQUITY FUND

The Team of Educational Attainment Apprentices attends Parent Evenings and School Events to promote the Pupil Equity Fund and the work they do, encouraging engagement and access to all those eligible for support.

The funding for 22-23 is £340,375 including a top up of £8,400. In addition, a Strategic Equity Fund (SEF), to support children from low-income families has been established with an allocation to the Outer Hebrides of £100,000 for 2022/23. School headteachers can apply to the SEF to support those on the PEF list, and this can pay for school trips, breakfast clubs etc. Point and Sandwick Trust paid for residential trips where Stornoway and Sandwick pupils also benefitted from these trips.

**Summer activity programme:** established to support children, young people and families experiencing poverty. The Team worked with Community Learning Development to organise Summer Activities, including the provision of food, across the Outer Hebrides. The Scottish Government provided £47,000 of funding to support this work. This is an excellent opportunity to give the young people access to activities/events that they may not be able to attend due to financial and family constraints. During 2022 there were approximately 180 children throughout the islands who took part. The Team also works during the Easter and October holidays to provide further activities for the children.

**Food:** The Team Supervisor facilitates food parcels and delivery in Lewis, and over a monthly period around 23 families are supported. There is an ad hoc provision as well as the monthly support. There are two volunteers who help to deliver the parcels, as well as support from the Apprentices. The schools also receive donations from local organisations which are used to purchase gift vouchers from the local supermarkets, and these are usually distributed around Christmas time.

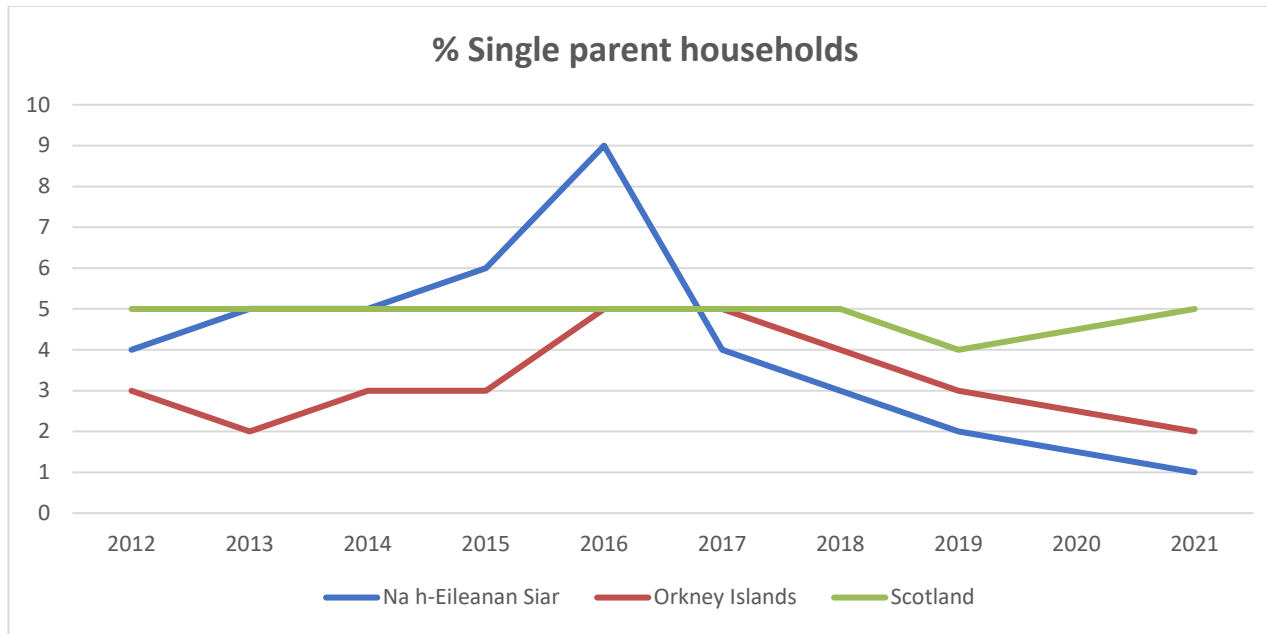
**Transport:** The Local Authority continues to provide school transport for all those pupils who are eligible. Following the universal removal of cost, no families are charged for the use of school transport.

**Uniform:** The Educational Attainment Apprentices Team promotes the Local Authority Free school meal and clothing grants and are able to help families/carers to apply and support them. This has been a help to a number of families who find form completion a challenge.

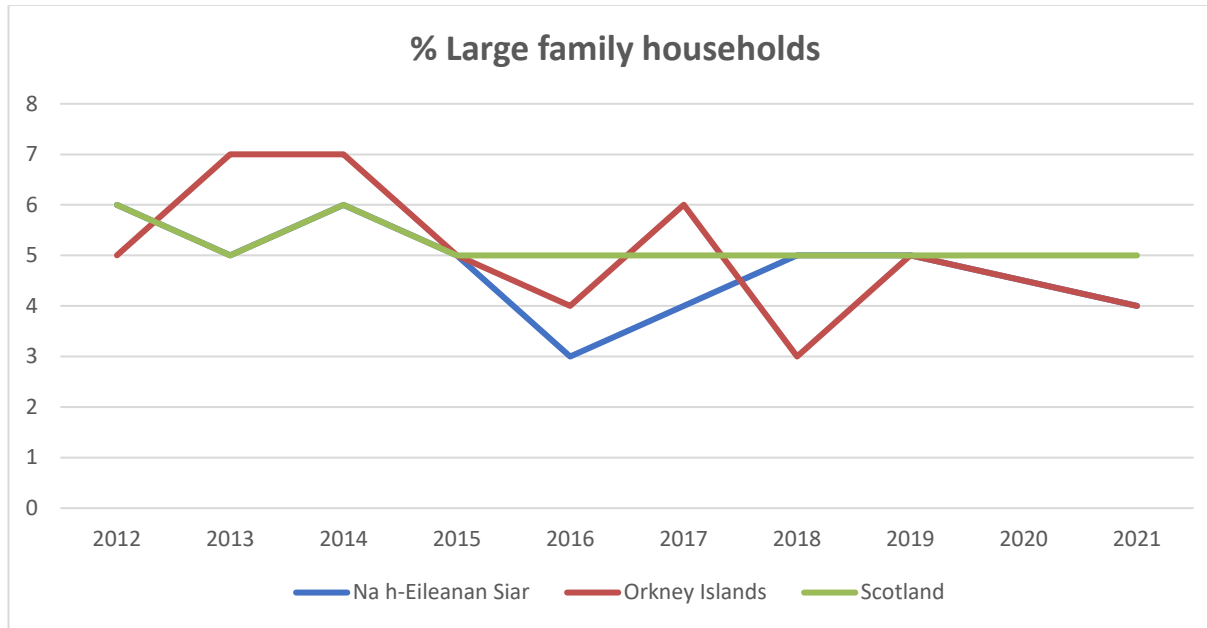
**Care Experienced Children and Young People Grant 2022-2023:** The Care Experienced Children and Young People Grant is there to support young people who have experience of being in care. The support worker has been able to support (in conjunction with Who Cares? Scotland) a trip to Inverness as part of a National Care Day event.

Fully paid for, including meals, this gave a group of seven young people the opportunity to take part in events to help them give their voice to Corporate Parents.

The grant assists in supporting young people in education, providing them with laptops for their schoolwork, and to enable access to the same opportunities as their peers.



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey (SHS) Housing data tables, Local authority level, 2021



**Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey (SHS) Housing data tables, Local authority level, 2021**

*The results of the SHS 2020 telephone survey are not directly comparable to SHS results for previous years due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and data for individual local authorities was not provided. For 2021 Eilean Siar Single Parent Households was 1%, versus 2.1% (2019) and Large Family Households 4%, versus 4.7% (2019). Orkney reported at 2% and 4%, and Scotland at 5% for both: [Scottish Household Survey \(SHS\) Housing data tables, Local authority level, 2021](#)*

*A single parent household contains one adult of any age and one or more children. A large family household contains two adults of any age and three or more children, or three or more adults of any age and one or more children.*

Local Authority [note 2]	Area Code	Ward [note 2]	Area Code	Number of children FYE 2015	Number of children FYE 2016	Number of children FYE 2017	Number of children FYE 2018	Number of children FYE 2019	Number of children FYE 2020	Number of children FYE 2021	Number of children FYE 2022 [p]	Percentage of children FYE 2015 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2016 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2017 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2018 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2019 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2020 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2021 (%) [note 3]	Percentage of children FYE 2022 (%) [p] [note 3]
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas	S13002600	78	62	87	89	67	90	79	91	14.2%	11.6%	16.8%	17.1%	12.6%	17.0%	14.9%	16.9%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Beinn na Foghla agus Uibhist a Tuath	S13002601	36	56	72	59	65	62	55	63	7.7%	12.0%	15.3%	12.1%	12.9%	12.8%	11.8%	13.7%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Na Hearadh agus Ceann a Deas nan Loch	S13002602	41	48	36	51	47	38	30	55	10.0%	12.5%	9.5%	13.0%	12.3%	10.1%	8.4%	15.5%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Sgir' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch	S13002603	41	41	50	54	42	73	59	59	12.2%	12.8%	16.7%	16.7%	12.8%	23.2%	18.0%	17.3%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Sgìre an Rubha	S13002604	45	40	37	43	30	49	26	56	12.1%	10.9%	10.1%	11.5%	7.9%	13.8%	7.5%	17.2%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Steornabhagh a Deas	S13002605	32	73	54	61	74	87	74	84	5.3%	11.8%	8.8%	9.7%	11.8%	13.2%	11.7%	13.4%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Steornabhagh a Tuath	S13002606	94	102	117	99	90	98	87	97	12.9%	14.7%	16.9%	14.2%	13.5%	15.5%	14.2%	16.8%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	Loch a Tuath	S13002607	40	48	60	38	37	42	41	67	7.2%	8.5%	10.4%	6.7%	6.9%	7.9%	8.1%	14.0%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	S12000013	An Taobh Siar agus Nis	S13002608	51	66	56	60	49	50	45	64	12.5%	16.7%	14.4%	15.8%	13.2%	13.7%	12.7%	17.9%

[Children in low income families local area statistics 2014 to 2022](#) (Table 7: Number and Percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in Relative low income families, Ward, FYE 2015 to 2022, United Kingdom), before housing costs. Overall, in Eilean Siar FYE 2022, there are 639 children (15.7%) living in Relative low income families.

## PRIORITIES FOR 2023-24

It is expected that both the direct and indirect impact of the cost-of-living increases will, in part, shape the priorities for the 2023-24 Action plan. Other factors that will also feed into shaping the plan will be feedback received from local and national stakeholders, projects to be carried forward from last year and uptake of new policy initiatives.

- **Lived Experience**

An important element omitted from the previous reports has been the presence of case studies taken from members of the community who have a lived experience of poverty. This plan features examples taken from the GHS workshops and capture the real and practical lived experience of children and adults in poverty within our own community. The responses are important in that they determine the approaches and priorities in the plan and will contextualise some of the issues being experienced within our diverse island community that can be different from other areas.

The Get Heard campaign has now come to an end nationally; however, the NHS will continue with the work under the auspices of Get Heard Hebrides (GHH), which will continue with a similar format and gather evidence from the community on lived experiences of poverty.

- **Target Groups**

Child Poverty rates in the areas of Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas, Sgir' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch, Point, Steornabhagh a Tuath, and, Taobh Siar agus Nis are higher than other areas:

([Children in low income families: local area statistics 2014-2022](#), Number and Percentage of Children (aged under 16) living in Relative low income families, Ward, FYE 2015 to 2022, United Kingdom). Rates have increased in all the wards from 2021 to 2022, (except Sgir' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch, 0.7 % decrease), doubled in Point, and almost doubled in Harris and South Lochs.

There is a need to explore our datasets and partner knowledge to identify if we can target the six priority groups identified in the national strategy. This year the Anti-Poverty Group will establish if the geographical locations and vulnerable groups could be identified as areas for specific focus moving forward.

Representatives from the Anti-Poverty Working Group have met with representatives from the Poverty Alliance - Scotland's network of organisations and individuals working together to end poverty – to consider the impacts of the increased cost-of-living. The Poverty Alliance have agreed to support the Anti-Poverty Group in future. The Poverty Alliance is asking that the Scottish Government identify additional resources to invest greater amounts in terms of the Scottish Welfare Fund, and that recent cuts to employability schemes announced through the budget are reversed. For example, for the Comhairle Employability Service, the Young Person Guarantee funding has ended, however confirmation and eligibility in terms of formal renewal notification are awaited from Scottish Government. UKSPF funding of £272,000 has been received by the service for the period April 2022 - March 2025, aligning with Employability Programmes/Advice and No One Left Behind Programme.

For the Department of Works and Pensions in terms of priorities the focus is on working with 500+ customers to get them into sustained employment. In Work Progression is also high on the agenda - this is helping customers who are on low incomes find alternative employment, additional employment or to increase their hours in the job that they are in with a view to moving them off Universal Credit. This is a potential area of support which could utilise funding available through the Comhairle to address poverty.

The Scottish Government's Islands Emergency Cost Crisis Fund is to be re-run in 23/24. The fund targets immediate support to those who are struggling due to the cost-of-living crisis, either through existing schemes or new support, and recognises the cost of living on islands is higher when compared to the mainland. Funding is being allocated directly to the Comhairle to support the needs of communities. The Comhairle received £283,000 resource and £77,000 capital in 22/23, and a resource allocation of £257,000 for 23/24.

The Financial Inclusion service (Lewis & Harris) received a high number of referrals over the winter months reducing the opportunity to be proactive in targeting children/families – this will be addressed in 23/24 by contacting all schools in the hope of breaking down some barriers. The Uist and Barra service plan to continue to hold the very successful informal community events, as well as attendance at Parents Evenings to ensure that families receive as much financial support as possible.

Cash First Referral Leaflets to find advice and support to maximise income through the local 'Worrying About Money?' resources are available for both the areas of [Lewis/Harris](#) and [Uist /Barra](#).

- **Fuel Poverty**

As the winter months approach, there is a clear priority for the first six months of the plan to reference a focus on mitigating fuel poverty. With the increased costs of fuel and energy it is reasonable to forecast that a greater number of families will experience the effects of fuel poverty during the winter of 2023-2024 and the plan will need to document the actions available to address this, focussing on building on the previous Comhairle ESF fuel poverty work, along with measures available through Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland: Area Based Scheme.

TIG has been successful in receiving a British Gas Energy Trust grant of £89,989, to help fund its vital work in 2023-2024, following the increased demand locally amid the cost-of-living crisis. TIG can continue to provide support and advice to vulnerable households across the Western Isles, with the Southern Isles also now enabled to have full year access to a dedicated adviser who can undertake home visits.

Through TIG the Home Heating Support Fund seeks to provide financial relief to energy consumers who are experiencing significant financial hardship and strives to provide this support to households regardless of the fuel or payment method used. The fund has been extended into 23/24, and therefore anyone struggling to pay for heating or are in debt with a utility provider are asked to please get in touch and TIG can support with an application where possible.

A bid to support the allocation of further vouchers was successful in receiving £30,000 from British Gas Energy Trust Fund and a further £30,000 from the Comhairle through the cost-of-living funding for the year 23/24.

In 23/24 TIG will continue to support families with energy advice and offer the installation of small energy efficient measures such as air fryers, chimney balloons, radiator panels, boiler service and LED lighting, if eligible for the Energy Measures project, these small measures can make a substantial saving to many homes.

You can apply through this link: <https://forms.microsoft.com/r/6diFy244S1>

- **Food Sustainability & Healthy Eating**

The recently established Food Partnership led by the Third sector will make proposals for food sustainability across the islands. The Healthy Living Programme aimed at local community stores will be promoted as well as 'Grow your own' grants within locality priority areas. We will develop online solutions to improve the skills of pregnant women and low-income families around a healthy diet through providing cooking on a budget demonstration across the islands, and develop the Healthy Hebridean Kids project as an online programme.

The draft Food Growing Strategy for the Outer Hebrides has received Comhairle approval. The strategy is intended to increase provision for community growing, in areas which experience socioeconomic disadvantage. To strengthen local entrepreneurial ecosystems, a Food Coordinator has been appointed and is being hosted by Outer Hebrides Tourism.

The Comhairle is currently working with two Third Sector organisations to support local food growing and marketing initiatives aimed at increasing supply and availability of locally sourced food.

Best Start Foods uptake will be increased as income thresholds for the qualifying benefits are removed in April 2023. The Comhairle has been consulted to help inform Scottish Government with their Island Communities



Impact Assessment for the proposed amendments to Best Start Food to be delivered via new regulations in 2023-24.

- **Transport Access and Infrastructure**

In a rural community, access to suitable transport is a critical element of poverty reduction and influences all three of the national drivers of poverty. The Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development Group commissioned a Rural Community Transport Scoping Study of the Outer Hebrides – to identify what support is required to reduce isolation and alleviate poverty. The [Report and Action Plan has been published](#), and recommended that community transport policy should consider community transport that mitigates poverty and social disadvantage.

- **Housing Strategy Local Level Data collation**

A recent Internal Audit of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan process had recommended an annual review of the aspirational rural and urban targets for new affordable housing. At present the focus of the affordable housing programme was on rural areas, with an aspirational target of 55% of new affordable housing to be in rural areas and 45% in and around Stornoway. The Housing Member Officer Working Group (HMOWG) met to discuss the issue and took a view that priority should be given to maximising the draw down of Scottish Government funding by accelerating projects in the Stornoway Housing Market Area, while ensuring continued development and new build within the Rural Housing Market Area. Subsequently, in June 2023, the Comhairle agreed to the following actions:

<i>Item Title</i>	<i>Agenda Number</i>	<i>Committee's Decision</i>
Affordable Housing: Review of Housing Market Area Targets	4	It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agree: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) to amend the Stornoway Housing Market Area to incorporate solely the town of Stornoway comprising the two Stornoway Wards – Steornabhagh a Tuath and Steornabhagh a Deas, subject to the conclusion of stakeholder consultation; and</li> <li>(2) that a further meeting of the Housing Member Officer Working Group be arranged to discuss priorities in relation to the future focus of the Comhairle's affordable housing programme.</li> </ol>

The 'Support for Access to Housing' programme (£250,000) funded under the UKSPF over the current and next financial year, offers potential to deliver a different type of housing intervention, aimed at stimulating home ownership and self-build, outwith the traditional Affordable Homes Programme. This approach will widen housing tenure choice in pressurised rural areas. Demands for this type of approach to home ownership have been coming increasingly from young people. The solution would be to work with a community-owned estate and assist them with the delivery of serviced plots, to help young people gain initial entry to home ownership.

- **Community Wealth Building (CWB) and [Outer Hebrides Community Wealth Building Plan](#)**

The Draft Final Report lays out the context to Community Wealth Building in the Outer Hebrides, outlines the activities that are currently being undertaken, and provides 21 recommendations for how the agenda should be taken forward. The recommendations are aimed at identifying achievable, evidence-based actions to deepen and develop an approach to Community Wealth Building across the Outer Hebrides. The Action Plan in Section 8 identifies short, medium and long-term recommendations.

- **Local Level Data collation**

Currently, representatives from Public Health Scotland are supporting the work of Health Promotion, and Community Learning and Development in relation to local level data collation and analysis at a targeted level.

By utilising the Place Standard Tool for Children and Young People, consideration of the physical, social and economic elements of the Outer Hebrides can be assessed collectively with children and young people. The outcomes of this will be used to inform the Integrated Children’s Services Plan (ICSP) and the revised Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP). The OHCPP Anti-Poverty Group has also considered the methodology for targeted data sets, including data collation on a geographical basis for within the islands. This will focus on fuel poverty, healthy eating, and access to transport and infrastructure.