



# **Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2025-2029**

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## Introduction

The overarching aim and ambition of the Comhairle's refreshed Corporate Strategy 2024-2027 is to retain and increase the population of the Outer Hebrides. The pandemic, which was the main focus from 2020-2022, has been largely overtaken by issues such as cost increases caused by, among other issues, high levels of inflation, particular increases in energy, food and construction costs, Brexit and the Ukraine war.

We have worked closely with our communities and partners to ensure the success of programmes providing housing and support to those displaced persons seeking refuge from Ukraine through the local management of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. This work is done alongside the work already in place to support refugees and asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Syria.

The rising cost of living has been particularly felt by individuals, families and communities throughout the Outer Hebrides, which as well as being a relatively low wage economy also has high levels of fuel poverty. The Comhairle responded by identifying funding to establish a support scheme in December 2022, supplemented by £360k from the Scottish Government's Islands Emergency Cost Crisis Fund to ensure that support went further and was longer lasting, supporting households and community groups.

Severe challenges with transportation infrastructure, primarily the lack of resilience with the ageing ferry fleet, are having a significant impact on island life and local businesses. Especially as we promote the islands as an attractive location to live and do business as well as a place to holiday, it is more important than ever that people are enabled to have confidence in our transport infrastructure.

The priorities going forward are geared towards effective financial and workforce planning, Public Sector Reform and direction of travel towards Single Island Partnerships, Community Empowerment and Governance, the Islands Act, the Islands Growth Deal, Energy and Climate Change, and Capital and Infrastructure.

***Our vision for this Corporate Strategy is to have a sustainable population and socially and economically thriving communities with a focus on sustaining our quality of life, natural heritage, and Gàidhlig language and culture.***

The Comhairle recognises that equality is key to achieving the Vision for the Outer Hebrides by promoting equality within our practices and services and valuing the diversity of our employees and communities. The Comhairle is committed to tackling discrimination; advancing equality of opportunity; and promoting good relations within our workforce and our communities. Mainstreaming equality, diversity and human rights is the process by which we will work towards achieving this as an organisation for all residents, visitors and businesses of the Outer Hebrides.

By considering and integrating equalities into the daily work and discharging of duties required by the Comhairle will assist the achievement of the vision set out above to the benefit of all those who live, work, visit and do business with the Outer Hebrides. We will take equality into account in the way we go about our business when acting as:

- an Employer
- a Policy Maker
- a Service Provider
- a Decision Maker
- a Buyer of Goods and Services
- an Education Authority
- a Licensing Board

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced a statutory framework for Best Value for local authorities and is framed around seven Best Value themes, including Fairness and equality. Fairness and equality is a cross-cutting theme that should be integral to all the functions and activities carried out by a local authority to deliver good outcomes and achieve Best Value. Furthermore, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Scotland) identifies a number of benefits to mainstreaming the equality duty which include:

- Equality becomes part of the structures, behaviour and culture of an authority
- An authority knows and can demonstrate how, in carrying out its functions, it is promoting equality
- Mainstreaming equality contributes to continuous improvement and better performance

The Comhairle is required to publish a mainstreaming report and set of equality outcomes by 30 April 2025. The Equality Outcomes are the results which we want to see happen over the next four years to make the Outer Hebrides a better place to live, work and do business.

## **The Equality Act 2010 and the General Duty**

The Equality Act 2010 (“the Act”) came into force on 1 October 2010 and brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. The Act introduced a new public sector general duty, this single duty replaced the three previous duties set out by race, disability and gender legislation. The purpose of the Act is to simplify, strengthen and harmonise legislation with a new discrimination law which protects all individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society. The Act aims to ‘integrate considerations of the advancement of equality into the day-to-day business of all bodies subject to the duty’. All individuals are protected by the Act as every person has one or more of the protected characteristics listed below so the Act aims to protect everyone against unfair treatment. The nine protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual Orientation

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 came into force in 2011 which introduced a new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED”) which became law across Scotland. The PSED has three parts which require listed public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it

The General Duty equips the Comhairle to:

- Take effective action on equality matters
- Make the right decisions first time
- Develop better policies, practices and procedures which are evidence based
- Be more transparent, accessible and accountable
- Improve outcomes for all

The Specific Duties of the Equality Act came into force on the 27 May 2012 with most of the reporting functions to be in place by 30 April 2013. The Specific Duties were introduced by the Scottish Government to assist public authorities like the Comhairle to meet the general duty. The specific duties are:

- Publish a set of equality outcomes and report on mainstreaming the Equality duty every four years. The Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report 2025 to 2029 requires to be published no later than 30 April 2025.
- Report on progress made to achieve equality outcomes every 2 years. The biennial Equality Outcomes Progress Report 2023 was published in April 2023 and the next progress report is required to be published no later than 30 April 2025.

Listed public bodies are also required to:-

- Assess and review policies and practices
- Gather and use employee information
- Publish gender pay gap information
- Publish statements on equal pay
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement

*In line with the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2021, this paper fulfils the Council's duty to publish a set of equality outcomes which it considers will enable it to better perform the equality duty at intervals of not more than four years.*

### **Mainstreaming Equalities in the Comhairle**

The process of mainstreaming the equality duty requires the Comhairle to give due regard to equality and diversity in all day-to-day activities which the authority is involved in. This means taking equality into account when conducting business as an employer, as a service provider and as a community partner. By integrating equality considerations into our day-to-day work we can improve the way in which we conduct business as an employer and when planning and delivering services. Everyone working for, or with, the Comhairle has a responsibility to promote equality of opportunity and build positive relationships between different groups.

As a service provider and employer the Comhairle aims to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

### **The Comhairle as an Employer**

As one of the largest employers in the Western Isles, it is recognised that Equality and Diversity is key to the work which the Comhairle is both responsible for and involved in.

The Comhairle has an Equal Opportunities Statement and Policy in place which sets out the statutory obligations placed on the Comhairle as a listed public authority, by the relevant legislation. The policy applies to Elected Members, employees, student placements and volunteers. The policy informs members of the public and relevant regulatory bodies about the Comhairle's commitment to equality of opportunity and sets out its roles and responsibilities.

The Comhairle is a Disability Confident Employer whereby Disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria of a vacant post are guaranteed an interview.

Post gradings, which are linked to salaries, are determined through the application of the Scottish Joint Council Job Evaluation Scheme which maintain the integrity of the Comhairle Local Government Employee grading structure.

Employee equality monitoring is undertaken on an annual basis. During 2023 the equality monitoring information of 2001 employees was reviewed. Most employees (74%) describe themselves as 'White Scottish', which is consistent with the population of the Western Isles where 83% of people describe themselves as 'White Scottish' (Census, 2022), albeit slightly below average.

The sex profile shows 77% of employees are female. In 2022 the largest number of employees fell within the 55 to 64 age category, this remains the case in 2023 with 590 employees falling within this category.

The disability profile shows 2.2% of employees disclosed themselves to have a disability.

Employees reporting their religion as The Church of Scotland accounts for 26% and Roman Catholic accounts for 9% of employees' religious beliefs. 12% of employees confirmed holding no religious beliefs.

In 2023 57% of employees declared that they were heterosexual. Less than 1% of employees declared they were lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), this is against the Scottish average of 2% of the population aged 16 or over in 2022 (Census, 2022).

It was reported that 46% of employees do not identify as transgender. No individuals identified as transgender; however, the non-disclosure rate is 54%.

### **Elected Members**

Councillors are elected by the public to serve and represent the individuals within the local area. Councillors have the opportunity to engage with the local community to identify the needs of constituents. They can provide leadership direction and support to compliance with the Equalities Strategy and provide a scrutiny role regarding the decision-making process.

### **Corporate Management Team**

The Corporate Management Team consists of all the Chief Officers who have the responsibility for progressing equality within their individual service areas.

### **Equality and Diversity Service**

The Organisational Development Section within Human Resources has responsibility for ensuring the co-ordination and mainstreaming of the equality agenda.

### **The Community Planning Partnership**

The Community Planning Partnership is an information and consultation channel for all community partners to enable two-way communication with groups within the Western Isles. The Comhairle is a key stakeholder in the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) and leads on key priorities for the Western Isles. Community Planning is about public sector organisations working together to improve and deliver better public services for the authority area.

## **The Education Authority**

The Comhairle's Education Authority is committed to the principle that the experience of being included, valued and respected is the right of every child and young person and their parents.

The Education Authority is also committed to creating children's services and educational opportunities that are fair and equitable regardless of disability, race, gender, social background, religion and belief/culture, age, sexual orientation or additional support needs. This is most likely to be achieved when diversity is recognised, valued, respected and regarded positively, and where planning takes place with equality and diversity in mind.

The Education Authority recognises the existence of other discriminatory factors such as ability, poverty, remoteness and mental health and seeks to ensure that these do not militate against the achievement of equal outcomes. The Education Authority strives to ensure that wherever possible education provision should be in a mainstream school, while recognising that appropriate support, advice and resources may be necessary to achieve this. However, it also acknowledges that parents and young people are entitled to express a preference for where that education should take place. In furthering this goal the Comhairle's Education Authority will:

- ensure that pursuit of the experience of inclusion for ALL underpins all local developments
- encourage and develop shared local responsibility and commitment to educating and providing for all the children and young people in their local area
- work with schools to develop inclusive cultures, policies and practices
- monitor progress towards enhanced inclusive practice

The Education Authority is committed to enhancing the capacity of its educational establishments and services to address all forms of discrimination and remove barriers to participation and achievement. For all children and young people, it will continue to seek to secure this by enabling choice and ensuring access to a full range of appropriate curriculum and learning opportunities within the local community. The digital learning service, e-Sgoil, provides a wider and more equitable choice of subjects for pupils across all secondary schools in the Isles, including the delivery of Nat5 and Higher Gaelic classes.

The Education Authority recognises that 'additional support needs' refers to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support for learning. It also recognises that additional support needs can arise from any factor which inhibits a child or young person's capacity to benefit from learning or education, whether these factors relate to the learning environment or to social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, ability, health or family and care dimensions. The way in which these factors impact on the child's learning and participation informs the level and type of support necessary. The authority has in place a continuum of assessment and a system of staged intervention based on these principles and works with partners to ensure early identification, effective intervention and well managed transitions in respect of those children and young people who may require support.

Our commitment to inclusivity and diversity includes a recognition of the importance of Gaelic language and culture in the lives of the people of the Western Isles. As the council area in Scotland with the most speakers of Gaelic, the Comhairle, through the implementation of its Gaelic Language Plan and Gaelic Policy, is committed to mainstreaming the promotion, learning and use of the language in its day-to-day activities and in its educational provision. This includes the implementation of the Comhairle's Gaelic First policy for Nursery to P2 enrolments from 2020/21 onwards, which entails that Gaelic medium education (GME) is deemed the default choice for parents enrolling their children. This has led to a substantial rise in GME



enrolments across the 19 out of 21 primary schools in the Isles where GME is available. Three Principal Teachers (two Full Time Equivalent (FTE)) of GME have also been appointed in Isles secondary schools to enhance curricular provision, and to foster a stronger Gaelic ethos in those schools.

### **The Licensing Board**

The regimes under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Gaming Act 2005 set out broad aims which the Board must and will support in all its functions, which are:

- The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005
  - Preventing crime and disorder
  - Securing public safety
  - Preventing public nuisance
  - Protecting and improving public health
  - Protecting children from harm
  
- The Gambling Act 2005
  - Preventing gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime
  - Ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way
  - Protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling

### Constitution

The Board is constituted in terms of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005. The Board is entrusted with the administration of liquor licensing and with certain other statutory duties. The Board is comprised of eight elected members of the Comhairle, elected at the first Comhairle Meeting after each ordinary Council election. A Licensing Board must consist of at least five members. Board meetings are held in public, but deliberations can be made in private. All decisions taken by the Board must be made in public. Following the Local Government Elections in May 2022 a new Licensing Board was elected.

All revenue received by the Board from licence application fees must be transferred to the Comhairle. The Comhairle is charged with the responsibility for providing accommodation for meetings of the Board and all necessary expenses in respect of the proceedings of the Board. Meetings are held in venues that are fully accessible.

### Work of the Board

- Accept and process to grant, vary, transfer, review or refuse all applications for liquor licensing premises.
- Accept and process to grant, vary, review or refuse all applications for personal licences.
- Accept and process to grant, vary or refuse all applications for occasional extensions and occasional licences.
- Accept and process to grant, vary, transfer, review or refuse all applications for gaming premises licences.

- Accept and process to grant, vary, transfer, review or refuse all applications for automatic entitlement to gaming machines and gaming machine permits for licensed premises and registered clubs.
- Accept and process to grant, vary, review or refuse registrations for the promotion of Small Societies' Lotteries.
- Hear certain complaints against licence holders for example, if they are breaking the licence conditions.
- Consult on and adopt policies in relation to the Board's licensing functions.
- Provide general support and guidance to the trade and the community on the above.

The Board has to formulate a number of policies to ensure consistency and fairness in the operation of its licensing functions. The Board also has a Scheme of Delegation to allow the Clerk to grant some routine requests without the need for formal hearings.

#### Licensing Forum

The Licensing Forum ('the Forum') is the medium through which the Board can engage with representatives of all parts of the community and ensure community views are taken into account in the development of Board policies and guidelines.

The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 lays down statutory groups that must be represented within the Forum, these being:

- Holders of premises licences and personal licences
- The Chief Constable for the area
- Persons having functions related to health, education and social work
- Young persons
- Person's resident within the Forums area
- Licensing Standards Officer

#### Premises Licences, Staff and Training

There are currently 100 premises licences issued by the Board, which includes six clubs. Licensed premises, excluding clubs, must have a premises manager. 53 premises managers are male and 47 are female. The work of the Board is carried out by the Clerk to the Board and the Licensing Standards Officer. Members and staff will attend seminars and briefing on Equalities run by the Comhairle.

#### Equality Policy

The Board has adopted the Comhairle's Equal Opportunities Statement and Policy to enable it to assist us in mainstreaming equalities into the licensing process. It will act as a tool giving us due regard to our equalities duties, both in setting licensing policy and procedures and, in determining licensing applications. Therefore, the Licensing Board has adopted the following mission statement:

'Our mission is to serve the licensing needs of the Western Isles as quickly and efficiently as possible, striking a balance between the business needs of our customers and the interests of the community as a whole, in order to protect the public and further the licensing objectives set out under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 and the Gambling Act 2005.'

To achieve our mission:

- We will reach out to all parts of our society and genuinely reflect their interests in determining policy.
- We will have open and honest exchanges of information in customer-friendly settings and make decisions in a fair and reasoned manner based around agreed and published policies.
- We will promote fairness in all we do, thereby ensuring that equality considerations are central to the administration of the licensing system.
- We will work in partnership with a wide range of other public bodies, including the Comhairle and its various services, statutory consultees, licence holders and the public to achieve our objective. They too should work towards eliminating any unlawful discrimination and protect equality of opportunity and good relations between persons from all sections of society.
- We will strive to reflect the interests of people from all sections of the society we serve.

#### Translation and Interpretation Services

We will use interpreters at Licensing Hearings where it is known that the applicant for a licence does not have English as a first language. We will also provide policy documents and procedures in alternative formats on request.

#### Equality Impact Assessments

To ensure consistency across the Western Isles we have adopted the Integrated Impact Assessment framework developed by Comhairle.

## The Outer Hebrides

### Population

The most recent mid-year population estimates by National Records of Scotland 2023 for the Outer Hebrides gives a population of 26,030. Over the last ten years, between 2013 and 2023, the Outer Hebrides has seen a decrease of 1,320 persons (-4.8%) while Scotland overall saw an increase of 3.25%.

The birth rates as reported by National Records of Scotland across the Western Isles is shown in table 1.

Year of Births Registration	Annual Births
2010	235
2011	235
2012	237
2013	246
2014	226
2015	222
2016	238
2017	215
2018	206
2019	200
2020	183
2021	181
2022	182
2023	174
2024	151

Table 1

Using 2018 as a base and considering key assumptions (mortality, fertility and migration); National Records of Scotland predict that the total population of the Outer Hebrides is projected to fall to 22,709 by 2043. This is a projected decline of 16% or 4,021 people between 2018 and 2043. The equivalent figure for Scotland over the same period is an increase of 2.5%.

The islands are being perceived as a low risk, clean, attractive relocation opportunity for businesses and individuals, however, even after the pandemic, net migration is still negative overall, supporting the trend of population decline predicted by National Records of Scotland.

### Age

Demographically, the population of the Outer Hebrides is ageing. There are now more people aged 65 and over than people under 15. The total fertility rate is now at the lowest recorded level, which is one of the lowest in Europe.

Based on the Scottish Census 2022, the median age in the islands was 51 years, an increase of 1.5 years since the last Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report developed in 2019, compared to the unchanged Scottish average of 42 years. According to the National Records of Scotland as of 2022 approximately one in four people (27%) living in the Outer Hebrides are aged 65 and over, in comparison to the Scottish average of 20%. The population continues to age with 14.8% of the population aged under 16 (16.4% nationally) and 58% of the population of working age (64% nationally) while 24% are pensionable age (17% nationally).

### Age groups as a proportion of Scotland's population, 1971 - 2022, Scotland

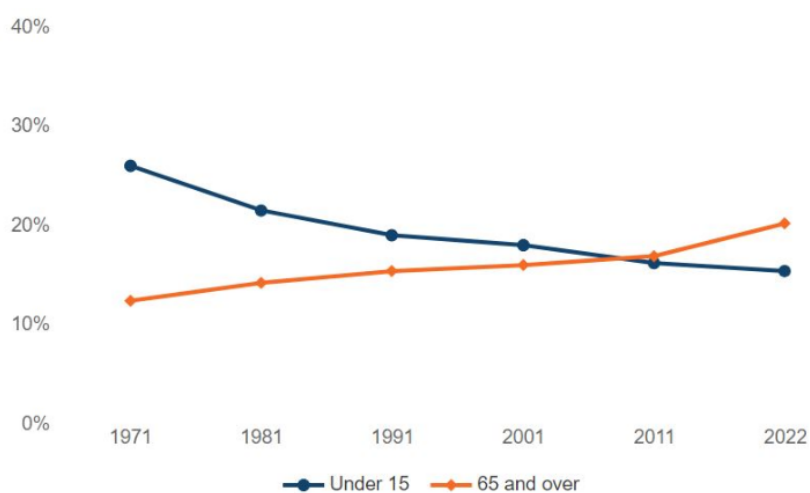


Figure 1: Scotland's population is ageing

Table 2 summarises the data according to the 2022 Census.

AGE	Eilean Siar	Scotland
All people	26,035	5,440,821
% 0 to 4 years old	3.7	4.6
% 5 to 15 years old	11.1	11.8
% 16 to 29 years old	11.7	16.9
% 30 to 44 years old	15.6	19.1
% 45 to 59 years old	22.4	20.8
% 60 to 74 years old	22.6	17.9
% 75 years old and over	12.9	9.0
Median age - Females	51	43
Median age - Males	50	41

Table 2

### Sex

Table 3 below summarises the data according to the 2022 Census in relation to the sex breakdown across Scotland and the Western Isles.

Sex	Eilean Siar	Scotland
All people	26,200	5,436,600
% Males	49.6	48.6
% Females	50.4	51.4

Table 3

## **Language**

Scotland's Census found that 2.5% of people aged 3 and over had some skills in Gaelic in 2022. This is an increase of 43,100 people since 2011 when 1.7% had some skills in Gaelic. In 2001 1.9% had some Gaelic skills, similar to 2011.

In Na h-Eileanan Siar the majority had some Gaelic skills (57.2%). This was far higher than the next highest council areas, Highland (8.1%) and Argyll and Bute (6.2%). In all other council areas less than 3% of people aged 3 and over had some Gaelic skills.

The percentage of people aged 3 and over with some skills in Scots also increased, to 46.2% in 2022 from 37.7% in 2011. The percentage with Scots skills was higher in the northeast of Scotland. Aberdeenshire had the highest percentage with some Scots skills (64.1%) and Na h-Eileanan Siar had the lowest (30.7%). ([Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion | Scotland's Census](#))

The council areas with the highest proportions able to speak Gaelic were Eilean Siar (45%), Highland (5%) and Argyll & Bute (4%).

Scotland's Census found that 117,300 people can use British Sign Language (BSL), 2.2% of people aged 3 and over. It was reported that the Western Isles had a total of 523 BSL users in 2022.

The census included a new question on the use of BSL in 2022. This means we do not have comparable data for previous censuses. The new question asked whether people can use BSL. In the previous census information on BSL use was only collected through the question "Do you use a language other than English at home?".

## **Personal Wellbeing**

The Office of National Statistics Personal well-being reporting in the UK for April 2021 to March 2022 estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety at the UK, country, regional, county and local authority level. Average ratings are out of 10 and are summarised in Table 4

<b>April 2021 to March 2022</b>	<b>Outer Hebrides</b>	<b>National average</b>
<b>Life Satisfaction</b>	8.0	7.54
<b>Worthwhile</b>	8.3	7.77
<b>Happiness</b>	8.0	7.45
<b>Anxiety</b>	2.8	3.12

Table 4

Average ratings of personal well-being in the UK have improved across all indicators in the year ending March 2022; but remain below pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels (the year ending March 2019). ([Personal well-being in the UK - Office for National Statistics](#))

### **Gender Reassignment**

94% of the population aged 16 or over answered questions regarding gender identity in both the 2021 UK Census and the 2022 Scottish Census. The Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) states that in the 2021 UK Census, 0.5% of people answered with 'No' to the question whether the gender they identified with is the same as their sex registered at birth. That corresponds with 0.4% in the Scottish Census 2022 stating they are Trans or have a trans history. ([Information on Prevalence, Incidence and Monitoring – Gender Identity Research & Education Society](#))

### **Marriage and Civil Partnership**

The Census 2022 statistics of marriage and civil partnerships as shown below in table 5.

<b>Marriage and Civil Partnerships</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>All people aged 16 and over</b>	<b>22,174</b>	<b>4,548,589</b>
% Single (never married or never registered a same-sex civil partnership)	32.3	38.1
% Married or in a registered civil partnership	48.0	44.0
% Separated, but still legally married or still legally in a civil partnership	2.5	2.5
% Divorced or civil partnership dissolved	7.9	8.4
% Widowed or surviving civil partnership partner	9.3	7.0

Table 5

### **Sexual Orientation**

The Census 2022 statistics of sexual orientation are shown below in table 6.

<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>All people aged 16 and over</b>	<b>22,174</b>	<b>4,548,589</b>
% Heterosexual	90.1	87.8
% Gay, lesbian or bisexual (GLB)	1.6	3.5
% Other	0.3	0.5
% Not answered	8.0	8.2

Table 6

### **Ethnicity**

Scotland's Census asked people to choose the option that best described their ethnic group or background. The majority of people in Scotland chose 'Scottish' (77.7%) or 'Other British' (9.4%) within the White category. In 2022 these groups together made up 87.1% of the population. 'Minority ethnic group' is used here to refer to all other ethnic groups. This includes some ethnic groups that were in the White category on the census form such as Irish, Polish, Gypsy/Traveller, Roma and Showman/Show woman.

The increase in people from minority ethnic backgrounds was driven by increases across several different groups.

The percentage of people in Scotland with a minority ethnic background increased from 8.2% in 2011 to 12.9% in 2022. This is a larger increase than over the previous decade (from 4.5% to 8.2%). ([Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion | Scotland's Census](#)) A breakdown of the data from the 2022 Census can be found within table 7.

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>All people</b>	<b>26,140</b>	<b>5,439,842</b>
% White - Scottish	83.44	77.7
% White - Other British	12.70	9.4
% White - Irish	0.49	1.05
% White - Polish	0.30	1.67
% White – Gypsy/Traveller	0.03	0.06
% White - Other	1.37	3.0
% Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	0.59	3.9
% Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	0.62	1.12
% African or Caribbean	0.13	1.2
% Other ethnic groups	0.33	0.9

Table 7

### **Religion**

For the first time in Scotland's Census, most people said they had no religion. In 2022 51.1% of people had no religion, up from 36.7% in 2011. The religious group that saw the largest decrease since the 2011 census was the Church of Scotland. The percentage of people with no religion increased across all age groups since the 2011 census. ([Scotland's Census 2022 - Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion | Scotland's Census](#)). Table 8 below summarises the religious breakdown of the Western Isles and Scotland according to the 2011 Census.

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>All people</b>	<b>26,140</b>	<b>5,439,842</b>
% Church of Scotland	35.34	20.4
% Roman Catholic	12.08	13.3
% Other Christian	16.20	5.1
% Muslim	0.22	2.2
% Other religions	1.06	1.7
% No religion	29.95	51.1
% Not stated	5.15	6.2

Table 8



## **Disability**

Table 9 below summarises the data according to the 2022 Census relating to people with long-term health problem or disability across the Western Isles and Scotland.

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>All people</b>	<b>26,140</b>	<b>5,439,842</b>
% Limited a lot	10.5	10.8
% Limited a little	13.8	13.3
% Not limited	75.7	75.9

Table 9

## **Mental Health**

[New figures](#) from Scotland's Census show the number of people who reported having a mental health condition more than doubled between 2011 and 2022 and was the second most common condition reported in the census.

In 2022 617,100 people reported in the census that they had a mental health condition. The census form described this as a condition that affects your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.

The increase from 4.4% to 11.3% of the population was the biggest change across the range of categories listed in the census question on health conditions. In Eilean Siar, population with a mental health condition increased from 3% in 2011 to 8% in 2022.

A large increase in the number of younger people reporting mental health conditions is behind the increase. In 2022 15.4% of people aged 16 to 24 reported having a mental health condition up from 2.5% in 2011. Females in this age group were twice as likely to report having a mental health condition at 20.4% compared to males at 10.5%.

There were also increases in older age groups, but the biggest increases were seen in younger groups, and it is now more common for younger people to report a mental health condition. This is the reverse of what we saw in 2011.

Table 10 below summarises the data according to Scotland's 2022 Census

<b>Mental Health Condition</b>	<b>Eilean Siar</b>	<b>Scotland</b>
<b>All People</b>	<b>26,140</b>	<b>5,439,842</b>
Does not have a mental health condition	92.0	88.7
Has a mental health condition	8.0	11.3

Table 10

### **Early Years**

Currently, there are 21 childcare provision settings on Eilean Siar made up of 19 local authority nurseries and two partner providers. Nine settings are offering 52-week childcare from 8.30am – 5.30pm. Of the remaining 12 term-time settings, four are open from 8.30am-5.30pm and the others close at 3.30pm or 4.30pm.

After consultations in some rural areas, hours were reduced in some of the services (at beginning and/or end of day/holiday provision) due to the lack of demand, but 1,140 funded hours of childcare are still provided in these settings.

Further consultations with parents and employees are planned in other areas in the future to ensure that services meet the needs of families.

The service will keep monitoring demand in the different locations and attempt to adjust provision as changing needs require.

### **Finance**

The Comhairle, like other local authorities, continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment, with one-year financial settlements and uncertainty about funding levels from the Scottish Government, making future planning difficult. The Scottish Government's Medium-Term Financial Strategy, published in 2023, indicated that spending on public services was projected to increase at a faster rate than the funding available over the next few years. Health and Social Care and Education continue to be priorities for the Government, and there is a risk that ring fencing of funds for these areas will impact on other council services.

Recent years have seen reductions in the Settlement, and the Comhairle has been required to make significant savings, through service changes and cuts, transformation of how services are delivered and the revision of charges. The Comhairle's Medium-Term Financial Strategy indicates a significant funding deficit over the next three years, and it is acknowledged that bridging this gap will be challenging. However, work has commenced on an in depth look at how services are delivered, with a view to identifying alternative delivery models and opportunities for transformation of services.

The Financial Settlement for 2025/26 did include a welcome increase in funding, but not at the level required to address the budget deficit, and work will continue to identify savings over the coming years.

The Comhairle's Budget Strategy in recent years has included a planned use of reserves, along with savings and income generation, to set a balanced budget. This means that, although diminishing, there are still some reserves remaining to support the budget, at least in the short term.

### **Islands (Scotland) Act 2018**

In the latest 2024 update to the national Islands Plan Implementation Route Map, the Scottish Government set out tangible actions and investments that they intend to put in place going forward to support island communities and empower them to thrive.

The Strategic Objectives concern the population; sustainable economic development; transport; housing; fuel poverty; digital connectivity; health, social care and wellbeing; environment wellbeing and biosecurity; climate change and energy; empowered communities and strong local partnerships; arts, culture and language; education; and implementation and measurement of the National Islands Plan.

Commitments and actions have been identified to support achieving these objectives and are laid out in detail on the Scottish Government [webpage](#). A new National Islands Plan will be published in 2025.

### **Equality Outcomes 2025 to 2029**

Equality Outcomes are described as 'results' which are intended to achieve specific and identifiable improvements in people's life chances by:

- eliminating discrimination,
- advancing equality of opportunity
- fostering good relations

The specific duty requires the Comhairle, the Education Authority and the Licensing Board to publish a set of equality outcomes which will operate within each of the listed bodies existing corporate systems and framework for business planning and public performance reporting. The purpose of these outcomes is to improve the life chances of those who experience discrimination and disadvantages.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (Scotland) identifies that preparing and publishing equality outcomes will help the Comhairle to:

- Increase transparency by establishing a clear link between the evidence and the action taken to advance opportunity
- Ensure the right issues are being addressed
- Make better, fairer decisions, which are communicated and understood by those affected by them
- Become more accountable to those who the Comhairle deliver services to or employ
- Demonstrate that the Comhairle will bring tangible benefits for communities and employees

Whilst it is recognised that this is a challenging period for the public sector, particularly in managing community expectations with fewer resources, these circumstances can also provide opportunities for exploring new ways of delivering services and make things more equitable for different groups of people

In developing the equality outcomes set out in this report consideration has been given to the advice and guidance documents published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (Scotland), information and evidence available at a local and national level across the functions of the Comhairle. The following information and evidence has also been considered:

- Existing evidence and data available through the reporting of the 2021 to 2025 equality outcomes
- Data on the profile of equalities and protected groups (Census; Health and Wellbeing profiles)
- Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership strategies and plans
- Corporate Comhairle strategies and plans
- Equality Impact Assessments
- Employee monitoring information
- Gender Pay Gap information

Internal consultation with the Corporate Management Team, Chief Officers and officers with a Service interest in the Equality Outcomes were undertaken in the development of the Equality Outcomes. An online public consultation was held for four weeks, closing on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2025. Democratic Services also circulated the link to the consultation to the Community Planning Partnership and Community Councils.

Individuals were invited to comment on the Comhairle's proposed equality outcomes for the period 2025 to 2029 by submitting a response to the consultation. No individuals responded to the consultation. Feedback was received from one organisation which was considered in the development of the report.

Five Equality Outcomes have been developed. A number of the actions and outcomes from 2021-2025 continue to be relevant and progressed on an ongoing basis, these have been refreshed and continued through to the 2025-2029 outcomes.

The protected characteristic which each outcome is intended to benefit and which aspect of the general duty it will help the Comhairle meet is set out in the outcomes. Proposed actions that will be taken to achieve these outcomes are also detailed. The Equality Outcomes are intended to be strategic and provide a degree of flexibility in achieving them as local and national priorities, legislation and budgets continue to change.

## Action Plan 2025-2029

<b>Theme 1</b>	<b>Work and Accessibility</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Make the Western Isles an accessible place to live and work</b>
<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>Age, Sex, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity</b>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Key Actions</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Lead Service</b>	<b>Corporate Strategy Priority</b>
1.1	Comhairle buildings and services are accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complaints</li> </ul>	Assets and Infrastructure	4.1.5 Effective governance of the Comhairle is in place.
1.2	Ensure that local transport is accessible, reliable and affordable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of accessible taxis</li> <li>Number of concessionary fare passes issued (disabled / visually impaired, incl. companion)</li> </ul>	Municipal Services	4.1.3 Equality of opportunity is increased.
1.3	Childcare facilities in place to meet the needs of working parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of Local Authority Nursery hours available for Early Learning and Childcare (by ward)</li> <li>Percentage of funded early years provision which is graded good/better</li> <li>Number of publicly funded pre-school places</li> </ul>	Education	2.1.5 Childcare facilities in place to meet the needs of working parents.
1.4	Support and develop new and existing businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of new business enquiries dealt with</li> <li>Number of jobs created/safeguarded</li> <li>Number of existing businesses supported to achieve growth</li> <li>Number of young people supported in business</li> <li>Number of new business start-ups</li> <li>No of business gateway start-ups per 10,000 population</li> <li>Number of sustainable jobs (FTE) created in the Outer Hebrides from Islands Growth Deal projects</li> </ul>	Economic and Community Regeneration	1.1.5 Growth in small and medium sized businesses demonstrated.

<b>Theme 2</b>	<b>Living Standards</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>An improved range of housing models and related services to promote independent living and to support initiatives which encourage people to continue living in the Western Isles</b>
<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>Age, Sex, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity</b>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Key Actions</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Lead Service</b>	<b>Corporate Strategy Priority</b>
2.1	Communities are sustained and re-vitalised through improvements to housing quality, condition, and energy efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CnES &amp; HHP improvement Budgets</li> <li>• Number of medical adaptations applications responded to within statutory timescale.</li> <li>• Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2024/25 - 2028/29</li> <li>• % of all new Affordable Homes built to wheelchair accessible standards</li> </ul>	Economic and Community Regeneration	3.1.3 Planning and infrastructure meet the needs of our communities.
2.2	Ensure an adequate range of temporary accommodation for homeless households in terms of size, location, and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homelessness: Number of applications received.</li> <li>• Average total time (days) spent in temporary accommodation</li> <li>• Number of households with children or pregnant women in temporary accommodation.</li> </ul>	Economic and Community Regeneration	3.1.5 Reduce inequality and poverty and promote social mobility.
2.3	Support Independent living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percentage of people aged 65 or over with long term care needs receiving personal care at home.</li> <li>• Care at Home - Number of hours of care provided</li> <li>• Number of Young Carers with plans</li> <li>• Percentage of households in fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides.</li> <li>• Percentage of households in extreme fuel poverty in the Outer Hebrides</li> </ul>	Health and Social Care (IJB)  Economic and Community Regeneration	3.1.2 People receive the care and support they need to live healthy and independent lives.  3.1. 5 Reduce inequality and poverty and promote social mobility.

2.4	Digital and data solutions meet the needs of our communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities have increased awareness of digitalisation, its uses, and opportunities</li> <li>• Increased Access to digital support and technology are available locally</li> </ul>	Assets and Infrastructure	1.1.2 Digitalisation supports the local infrastructure, customer engagement and business development.
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<b>Theme 3</b>	<b>Equal Opportunity Employer</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Be recognised as an equal opportunity employer with an employee profile reflective of the authority area</b>
<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>All protected characteristics</b>

No.	Key Actions	Evidence	Lead Service	Corporate Strategy Priority
3.1	Employees feel valued and are treated with equity and fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee survey results (KPIs to be developed)</li> <li>• The gender pay gap (%)</li> <li>• Corporate Occupational Segregation Report</li> <li>• Percentage of the highest paid 5% employees who are women</li> </ul>	HR, Strategy and Performance	4.1.3 Equality of opportunity is increased.
3.2	Have an employee profile reflective of the authority area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Census and local data compared with employee profile across protected characteristics</li> <li>• Encourage employees to share their equal opportunity information - disclosure levels on MyView</li> </ul>	HR, Strategy and Performance	4.1.3 Equality of opportunity is increased.

<b>Theme 4</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Equal Opportunity to high quality learning and teaching in all education settings to develop skills for lifelong learning and working</b>
<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>Age, Sex, Disability, Gender reassignment, Race, Religion or belief, Sexual orientation</b>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Key Actions</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Lead Service</b>	<b>Corporate Strategy Priority</b>
4.1	Equality of access to academic and vocational education choice throughout the authority area improving the life chances of our young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participation rate for 16-19-year-olds (per 100)</li> </ul>	Community Engagement Unit	1.1.4 Increased level of skills across our communities and workforce.
4.2	Young people have the confidence and skills to move on to employment, volunteering, further education, or training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of Pupils Entering Positive Destinations.</li> <li>Percentage of apprentices achieving target qualifications.</li> <li>Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 5</li> <li>Percentage of pupils gaining 5+ awards at level 6</li> </ul>	HR, Strategy and Performance  Education	2.1.1 Attainment rates continuously improve. 2.1.3 Schools are centres for lifelong learning and key assets for the community.
4.3	Positive school leaver destinations for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of UASC attending ESOL classes achieving one or more of their planned Learning Outcomes</li> </ul>	HR, Strategy and Performance	3.1.5 Reduce inequality and poverty and promote social mobility
4.4	Support the Gaelic language and culture by providing bespoke Gaelic classes for adults at various levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of participants attending Gaelic Family Learning (GFL) classes</li> <li>Percentage of participants attending GFL achieving one or more of their planned Learning Outcomes</li> <li>Number of participants attending Gaelic classes in the community (Community Based Adult Learning – CBAL) classes</li> </ul>	Economic and Community Regeneration  Community Engagement Unit	3.1.1 The Gaelic language, natural heritage and culture of our communities is supported and promoted.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of participants attending CBAL Gaelic classes achieving one or more of their planned Learning Outcomes</li> </ul>		
4.5	Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CFE level in Literacy</li> <li>% of P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined achieving expected CFE level in Numeracy</li> <li>Percentage of P4-P7/S1-S6/SP pupils registered for free school meals.</li> </ul>	Education	<p>2.1.3 Schools are centres for lifelong learning and key assets for the community.</p> <p>2.1.4 People are healthy and active.</p>
4.6	Promoting Lifelong Learning by encouraging and supporting adult learning, including upskilling and reskilling opportunities, to enhance employability and personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percentage of Community Based Adult Learning learners achieving one or more of their learning outcomes per annum.</li> <li>Accredited Training: Number of businesses supported to upskill their current workforce with the skills to manage technology and data.</li> </ul>	<p>Community Engagement Unit</p> <p>HR, Strategy and Performance</p>	2.1.1 Attainment rates continuously improve.

<b>Theme 5</b>	<b>Communication, engagement, and participation</b>
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Increase the opportunity to participate in public life and enhancing social Inclusion</b>
<b>Protected Characteristics</b>	<b>All protected characteristics</b>

<b>No.</b>	<b>Key Actions</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Lead Service</b>	<b>Corporate Strategy Priority</b>
5.1	Continue to engage with employees, communities and Community Planning Partners to improve organisational coherence and ensure equal access for all service users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No. of times Elected Members engaging with Community Councils</li> <li>Equality Monitoring Survey</li> <li>Staff surveys</li> <li>Sickness absence days per FTE</li> <li>Number of 'Have Your Say' Consultations completed</li> <li>Percentage of Community Groups supported who have achieved one or more community capacity building outcomes.</li> <li>Number of adults and young people taking part in influence and engagement activity through CLD</li> </ul>	<p>Law and Governance</p> <p>HR, Strategy and Performance</p> <p>Community Engagement Unit</p>	4.1.1 Communities are empowered and continue to be at the heart of our decision making.
5.2	Council Services and data are accessible through digital options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in online service usage</li> <li>Support services are available to assist with digital access and learning in communities</li> </ul>	Assets and Infrastructure	1.1.2 Digitalisation supports the local infrastructure, customer engagement and business development.
5.3	Provide a range of contact channels to ensure equal access for all service users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback from customers, e.g., customer surveys</li> <li>Requests for information in other formats (BSL, Gaelic...)</li> <li>Number of customers accessing services through the different channels</li> </ul>	Finance	4.1.1 Communities are empowered and continue to be at the heart of our decision making.

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