



OUTER HEBRIDES BAIRNS' HOOSE (AN TAIGH-SHOLAIS) PROJECT

Report by Chief Social Work Officer

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to update Members on the progress to date of the Outer Hebrides Bairns' Hoose (An Taigh-Sholais) Project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Bairns' Hoose is a transformational, whole-system approach to delivering child protection, justice, and health support and services to child victims and witnesses of abuse and harm. The overall vision of a Bairns' Hoose in Scotland is that all children in Scotland who have been victims of, or witnesses to, abuse or violence, as well as children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused significant harm or abuse, will have access to trauma informed recovery, support and justice.
- 2.2 Comhairle na Eilean Siar was chosen as one of the initial six pathfinder authorities in Scotland following a successful application process. The Comhairle's Bairns' Hoose project has now been branded as 'An Taigh-Sholais' (The Lighthouse).
- 2.3 Whilst the location of An Taigh-Sholais is fairly unique in terms of the approaches taken by the other five Pathfinders in Scotland, being located in a town centre setting, within the same building space as a library service, the concept has been met very favourably by the Scottish Government and experts in the field, including from Bragi Guðbrandsson, founder of Barnhaus model in Iceland.
- 2.4 In terms of access to provision in Uist and Barra, the Rowantree Centre will be used as a satellite service for An Taigh-Sholais, with the installation of fixed visual recording equipment and improved furnishings and décor, meaning children from Uist and Barra will have less requirement to travel to Stornoway. There may still be some cases where children may need to use of An Taigh-Sholais in Stornoway in terms of gaining 'best evidence'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle note the progress made with *An Taigh-Sholais* and the achievements to-date across the workforce for designing a Bairns' Hoose model that has achieved national and international interest and support and in our overall journey towards achieving all 11 Standards.**

Contact Officer:	Jack Libby – Chief Officer for Children's Services/CSWO
Appendix:	1 – Proposed Development Plan for An Taigh-Sholais in the EDC 2 – Visualisations of the enhanced Children's Library at An Taigh-Sholais
Background Papers:	An Taigh-Sholais (Bairns' Hoose) Update Report – 18 June 2024



IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	An application for £640k funding has been made for 2025-26. (£242 Revenue and £398k Capital). At the point of writing the Report we are awaiting confirmation of grant award.
Legal	n/a
Staffing	All staffing costs to date dedicated towards An Taigh–Sholas have been covered by the Scottish Government. Should our funding application for 25/26 be met in full, an additional Policy Officer post will be established for 12 months to progress the relevant policies relating to An Taigh–Sholais.
Assets and Property	
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Despite the Letter of Comfort, there remains a small risk that the funding required to development An Taigh–Sholas may not be met in full. Knowing that the Comhairle will be notified of the outcome of their funding application by the 2 nd week in April does mitigate this risk given tendering submission deadline is not until 28 th April 2025.
Equalities/Child Rights	n/a
Corporate Strategy	Protecting the most vulnerable throughout the Outer Hebrides.
Environmental Impact	n/a
Consultation	<p>The Bairn’s Hoose Participation Partnership are actively engaged in work with both Care Experienced children and Promise Champions. The Promise Champions and Care Experienced children and young people are working in collaboration with the local Arts Groups and plan to create wall art and soft furnishings to ensure the space feels welcoming, cosy, and safe.</p> <p>Children and young people have visited the site and have reported they are excited that their views and involvement in the project is central to the planning, design, and overall ethos of An Taigh–Sholais.</p> <p>Children’s Services staff are also actively engaged in discussions with individual children and their families through their day-to-day work to ensure wider participation in the development of An Taigh–Sholais.</p> <p>To further extend the participation work other groups will include The Young Islanders Network, Action for Children, Extended Learning Resource and Community Learning and Development.</p>



BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Bairns' Hoose is a transformational, whole-system approach to delivering child protection, justice, and health support and services to child victims and witnesses of abuse and harm. The overall vision of a Bairns' Hoose in Scotland is that all children in Scotland who have been victims of, or witnesses to, abuse or violence, as well as children under the age of criminal responsibility whose behaviour has caused significant harm or abuse, will have access to trauma informed recovery, support and justice.
- 5.2 Comhairle na Eilean Siar was chosen as one of the initial six pathfinder authorities in Scotland following a successful application process. The Comhairle's Bairns' Hoose project has now been branded as '*An Taigh-Sholais*' (The Lighthouse).
- 5.3 *An Taigh-Sholais* will be more than just a physical environment where interventions with vulnerable children take place, having the right physical space is critical in terms of fulfilling the partner services' responsibilities towards trauma informed practice.
- 5.4 Whilst the location of *An Taigh-Sholais* is fairly unique in terms of the approaches taken by the other five Pathfinders in Scotland, being located in a town centre setting, within the same building space as a library service, the concept has been met very favourably by the Scottish Government and experts in the field, including from Bragi Guðbrandsson, founder of Barnhaus model in Iceland. Mr Guðbrandsson visited the proposed site at the Education Development Centre, viewed the technical plans, learned about the concept of using the library as an extension to the Bairns' Hoose concept to aid with recovery, attainment, and achievement, and fully endorsed the Comhairle's model of delivery.
- 5.5 In terms of access to provision in Uist and Barra, the Rowantree Centre will be used as a satellite service for *An Taigh-Sholais*, with the installation of fixed visual recording equipment and improved furnishings and décor, meaning children from Uist and Barra will have less requirement to travel to Stornoway. There may still be some cases where children may need to use of *An Taigh-Sholais* in Stornoway in terms of gaining 'best evidence'.
- 5.6 In addition to the physical environment, there are eleven Standards that are being worked towards with the support of Health Improvement Scotland and the Scottish Government's Bairns' Hoose Team. Current reporting indicates that our *An Taigh-Sholais* project is making good progress in terms of achieving the standards.
- 5.7 The key values through which the vision of *An Taigh-Sholais* will be achieved are that:
 - we are child-centred, trauma-informed, and always respect the rights and wellbeing of the child.
 - we provide consistent and holistic support, which enables children to have their voice heard, access specialist services and recover from their experiences.
 - we aim to prevent children being retraumatised and to improve the experience of the justice process for children and families.
 - we demonstrate connectedness and leadership to uphold children's rights to protection, support, participation, and recovery
- 5.8 These same values are founded on Scotland's legislative and policy approach to improve outcomes for children, young people and families - [Getting it right for every child \(GIRFEC\)](#). This recognises the importance of early and preventative support, so that children receive the right help, at the right time.



- 5.9 *An Taigh–Sholais* provision will fall within the definition of a children’s service and will therefore be an integral part of planning and delivery of services set out in the Outer Hebrides Integrated Children’s Services Plan going forward. The aims of a Children’s Services Plan are that services in the area are provided in the way which best safeguards, supports and promotes wellbeing and that families experience support as integrated and with a focus on early intervention and prevention and best use of resource. In the context of *An Taigh–Sholais*, future children’s services plans and the reports on these will consider the impact of local service provision in addressing the specific wellbeing needs of children in recovery from experiences of trauma, abuse, and neglect.
- 5.10 This approach will ensure consistency in the experiences of children and their families, with flexibility for local delivery partners to adapt the model to suit circumstances in the Outer Hebrides. This recognises that co-location of all relevant services may not always be feasible, whilst still retaining the Bairns’ Hoose principles of a child-friendly setting and delivery of joined-up support as part of the team around the child.

DETAIL

- 6.1 Children’s Services have worked alongside the Comhairle’s Building Projects Team to design and cost the project within the opportunities and constraints of the first floor of the Education Development Centre. The agreed design meets all the Bairns’ Hoose Standards with the added value of incorporating the vision and values of Stornoway Library staff in making the library as welcoming and inclusive for all children and families entering the building.
- 6.2 The vision for the new Stornoway Children’s Library is to create a haven for children of all ages—an inclusive, vibrant space that fosters learning, creativity, and community. Designed as a welcoming ‘third space’ beyond home and school, the library will be a destination where children can explore, socialise, and grow. With purpose-built furniture and a biophilic design that brings the outdoors in, the space will provide a safe and nurturing environment. Sensory-friendly areas, multilingual resources, and adaptive technologies will ensure that every child, regardless of background or ability, feels welcome and represented.
- 6.3 Whilst *An Taigh–Sholais* focuses on providing integrated services for child victims and witnesses of abuse, the Children’s Library extends this support by offering access to resources and programs that aid recovery and development, reinforcing a holistic approach to child wellbeing. Libraries play a crucial role in preventative social care, providing early support that can reduce the need for more intensive interventions. The new space will also be a catalyst for partnerships, fostering collaboration between libraries, Adult Learning, Early Years Family Support, local primary schools, and Social Care to create a stronger, more supportive network for children and families.
- 6.3 A ‘Letter of Comfort’ has been received by the Comhairle from Scottish Government indicating security of capital grant funding for 2025-26 allowing the Building Projects Team to proceed with initiating the tendering process, with a deadline of 28th April for tender returns. The proposed internal plan for the development of *An Taigh–Sholais* within the first floor Cromwell Street end of the Education Development Centre is included in Appendix One.
- 6.4 To assist in understanding how the children’s library may look immediately adjacent to *An Taigh–Sholais* on the first floor, a number of visualisations have been provided in Appendix Two.



CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Significant progress is now being made in advancing *An Taigh-Sholais* and the partnership with the Library Service now that the Letter of Comfort regarding the funding for 2025-26 has been secured. It is hoped that the capital works phase of the project will be completed by late 2025.

