

**VOLUNTEER CENTRE WESTERN ISLES**

Report by Chief Officer Education and Children's Services

**PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek approval for the payment of grant for 2025/2026 to Volunteer Centre Western Isles (VCWI).

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is a partner in the local Third Sector Interface, TSIWI (Third Sector Interface Western Isles), and they currently employ seven members of staff covering the whole of the Western Isles. The Centre works closely with the Comhairle's Community Learning and Development Service and local Councillors to promote volunteering and to support volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers.
- 2.2 The Volunteer Centre produces an annual workplan, in consultation with Comhairle staff, focusing on how outcomes, both short and medium-term, will be achieved. The activities to support volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are broken into the following categories, as defined by Scottish Government:

- Building Intelligence;
- Connect;
- Voice;
- Build Capacity.

Underpinning all activities are actions ensuring that the Volunteer Centre Western Isles is committed to excellence in all that they do and sound governance.

- 2.3 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles receives Scottish Government funding through the interface partnership TSIWI, and this has been supplemented by financial support from the Comhairle. Payment of grant is subject to production of a satisfactory workplan. Provision of this core funding of £22,000 has been made within the Departmental cash planning limits.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle:
- (a) **extend the Service Level Agreement between Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and Volunteer Centre Western Isles to 31 March 2026; and**
  - (b) **approve the payment of grant to Volunteer Centre Western Isles of £22,000 for 2025/2026**

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Appendix: Service Level Agreement  
Background Papers: None



## IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The proposal requires allocation of funding of £22,000 to the Volunteer Centre Western Isles which has been included in departmental budgets.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
	<b>Implications/None</b>
<b>Strategic Implications</b>	None
Risk	None
Equalities/Child Rights	None
Corporate Strategy	Support for Volunteer Development/Voluntary Groups
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	

## BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is a partner in the local Third Sector Interface, TSIWI (Third Sector Interface Western Isles), and they work closely with the Comhairle's Community Learning and Development Service to promote volunteering and to support volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers.

## DETAIL

- 6.1 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles receives Scottish Government funding through the interface partnership TSIWI, and this has been supplemented by financial support from the Comhairle. Payment of grant is subject to production of a satisfactory workplan. Provision of this core funding of £22,000 has been made within the Departmental cash planning limits. The paragraphs that follow provide an update on the work of the Volunteer Centre Western Isles.

### 6.2 NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING NETWORK

The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is part of the national Network of Third Sector Interfaces, which is supported by the Third Sector Unit of the Scottish Government. The role of the Volunteer Centre was defined by the Scottish Government as working at local authority level the length and breadth of Scotland, acting as one-stop shops providing information, guidance and support to enable people from all walks of life to volunteer. Their functions include working with volunteer involving organisations in the public and voluntary sectors to improve the practices of those working with volunteers.

### 6.3 VOLUNTEER CENTRE WESTERN ISLES

The Volunteer Centre Western Isles currently employs seven members of staff in the following locations:

- Barra – Part-time Development Worker (including youth work).
- Uist – Part-time Development Worker (including youth work).
- Harris – Part-time Development Worker (including youth work); and
- Lewis – Full-time Manager and 2 part-time Development Workers (including youth work); 1 part-time Administrator.



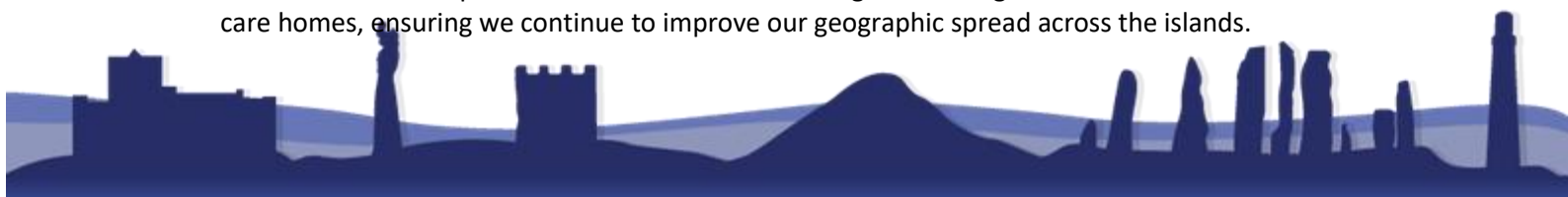
6.4 The Volunteer Centre have made the following submission. Highlights of the last year are:

- Staff registered 123 volunteer opportunities across the Western Isles registered on MILO and marketed through [www.volunteercentrewi.org](http://www.volunteercentrewi.org) search and Volunteer Scotland.
- 70 volunteers placed with volunteering opportunities.
- 15 new organisations registered for support from the Volunteer Centre.
- 105 organisations provided with volunteer guidance, one to one training or support on volunteer management and developing placements over 1,358 interactions.
- Youth volunteering developed and supported.
- Working in partnership with schools, colleges and other educational settings across the islands.
- Various schools have been signed up for Saltire and Callanish award schemes island wide with a school in Perth hearing about our Callanish awards and asking if they can use it. Something we are interested in developing.
- 201 Volunteer Centre Callanish Youth Awards issued.
- 59 new Saltire registrations.
- 185 Saltire Awards.
- The Volunteer Centre has run 5 awards ceremonies with a further 11 ceremonies being directly supported.
- 2 new Saltire award eligible organisations have been registered.
- We continue to facilitate the YPI programme on behalf of the Wood Foundation with each of the 4 secondary schools this term.
- Intergenerational work continued and further developed within primary schools and community groups.
- Short term volunteering opportunities developed with various craft projects to support charity appeals.

6.5 The statistics on volunteering have increased significantly from the previous year. This has required a lot of hard work over the past two years, but it is now beginning to pay dividends. We strongly believe that taking time to fully support volunteers is essential in order to ensure the most isolated and vulnerable people are protected. This is time intensive and requires staff time to develop and invest in volunteers and their potential.

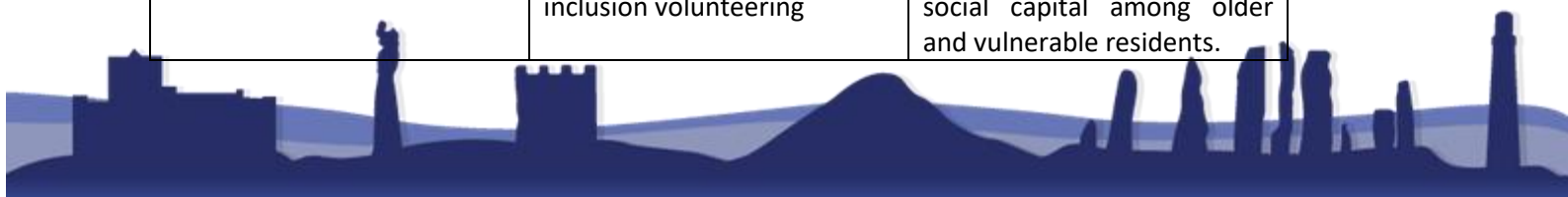
6.6 We are in no doubt that the requirement for volunteers to come forward and support their communities is now greater than ever. However, coupled with this is the fact that the current cost of living crisis means that this is getting more difficult with volunteering still under considerable threat. The Community Life Study 2023/24 revealed a worrying decline in volunteer participation among Scotland's adults. The seismic societal events of recent years have taken their toll on volunteers and the organisations that involve them. Given the contribution of volunteers to a range of essential services, this is a significant concern for our community and for policymakers.

6.7 Despite these challenges, the past four years have also contributed to a shift in volunteer motivations and behaviours. Volunteering has become more local or hyperlocal in nature, with many volunteers preferring to help organisations focused on their community or neighbourhood. This is likely a result of the focus on community that emerged during the pandemic, with people spending more time in their homes and neighbourhoods. We should also note that, whilst the statistics above show some cause for concern, volunteering in rural parts of Scotland are 9% above the national average suggesting this move to increased community volunteering is something to capitalise on. From our current work in volunteering, we have evidence that it provides reciprocal benefits for people of all ages and aids social cohesion and builds community capacity and resilience. Volunteering helps to bridge social divides, forms bonds of trust and solidarity whilst simultaneously combating ageism and inequality. We would like to expand our work in this area through our intergenerational work with schools and care homes, ensuring we continue to improve our geographic spread across the islands.



- 6.8 We currently work with approximately 200 volunteers per year and over 100 volunteer involving organisations per year across the Western Isles. The demand for service is increasing each year. We regularly hold Volunteer Network meetings to discuss emerging issues affecting local volunteer organisers and service users. We link to local care homes, elderly groups, the NHS and youth networks, listening to volunteers and responding to their needs.
- 6.9 Volunteering practice is also changing as people have learned through the covid pandemic to interact in different ways, and we observe how technology has played an increasingly important role in volunteering since 2020. Volunteering online or over the phone is now the third most common place to volunteer. 31% of those who volunteered in the last 12 months did at least some of it online or over the phone. Whilst we welcome the return of face-to-face contact, we have also seen how the technology can aid us in much of what we do as an organisation and how our community has quickly adapted to make sure virtual volunteering was safe and rewarding. The team have also reported that the technology has bound them together as a closer team as they have used ways of communicating that hadn't been used before. These results are testament to their hard work over a very difficult period. We mustn't lose sight of these positive factors as we move to a more hybrid model of working and begin to think in different and more innovative ways.
- 6.10 As we do this, we are developing more up to date volunteering opportunities to meet a wide range of needs, ages and interests. Over the last year Volunteer Centre Staff have supported organisations to develop new volunteer opportunities, actively promoted volunteering roles, registered new volunteers and matched volunteers into suitable opportunities. We are keen to continue to proactively engage with volunteers and other organisations throughout the islands to promote our services and ensure organisations are aware of the services the Volunteer Centre can offer. Significant time has gone into developing youth volunteering and raising awareness of volunteering by having a voice on local strategic forums in order to heighten its profile and ensure it is supported and developed in the coming years by local partners. As mentioned above, we are also keen to develop our intergenerational work with the community as we see this strand of our work already producing dividends for both the young and the elderly.
- 6.11 The work undertaken through the Volunteer Centre across the Western Isle makes direct links to the Western Isles LOIP and directly addresses some of the key priorities as follows:

LOIP Priority Area	VCWI Activity	Volunteer Outcome
Population Retention & Growth	Supporting youth and employability skills	Helping young people gain confidence and experience in their own communities to encourage them to stay or return to the islands; Help in familiarising new residents to our culture, community and encouraging friendships and connection.
Sustainable Economic Growth	Promoting volunteer pathways into paid work	VCWI helps bridge the gap to employment, particularly for those facing barriers, including long-term unemployed, disabled people, or carers.
Health & Wellbeing	Intergenerational programmes and social inclusion volunteering	Reduces loneliness, supports mental health, and builds social capital among older and vulnerable residents.



Community Empowerment	Enabling and supporting community groups and volunteer-led action	Strengthens community resilience and supports grassroots action aligned with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act.
Education and Skills	Volunteer Awards, Saltire, Callanish, Kisimul and Clisham Awards, and signposting and supporting with accredited training	Promotes lifelong and life wide learning and recognises skill development through volunteering.

- 6.12 We also work in direct partnerships with Community Learning and Development and have a good working relationship with the Stornoway North and South Development Workers as well as having close links with a range of professionals across all our islands. In addition, we have direct links to the local area plan for Stornoway North where we are responsible for delivering on several of the KPIs (Key Performance indicators). It is our desire to be more intricately linked with area plans spanning the Western Isles and it is hoped that 2025/26 will see us making greater inroads to ensure this happens.
- 6.13 To promote volunteering opportunities, our website [www.volunteercentrewi.org](http://www.volunteercentrewi.org) is being constantly updated and refreshed, with all volunteer opportunities listed in the searchable database. We are also increasing our use of social media such as Instagram and Facebook to try to get our message out and raise our profile. This year we hope to develop our YouTube channel and TikTok to heighten awareness and promote the work we do.
- 6.14 As we now look forward, we are aware that there are significant challenges ahead as we try to regain some of the ground lost over the last five years but we remain optimistic as we see how technology can aid us in new and innovative ways and how the lessons learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has equipped us with new skills and made us more agile in our approach to volunteering. We look forward to working with the Comhairle, the TSIs, local businesses and the community in the years ahead as we engage and encourage the community in this valuable and essential service.

## CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Report seeks to extend the Service Level Agreement with the Volunteer Centre Western Isles to 31 March 2026 and to approve the payment of grant funding.

