Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Libraries Strategic Action Plan

2025-2027

DRAFT

LEABHARLAINN NAN EILEAN SIAR
WESTERN ISLES LIBRARIES

Leabharlainn nan Eilean Siar Strategic Action Plan --- 2025 - 2027

Am figh a' gaidhlig bas?, Niall Macleiod
"Cha'n fhàs an eachdraidh lag le aois,
'S cha'n fhaigh a' Gàidhlig bàs."

Libraries Strategic Action Plan
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For further information regarding the contents of this document or to discuss how actions and outcomes will be measured please contact:

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Introduction

Libraries are the heart of our communities.

In the face of an explosion of misinformation and a rapidly changing world, libraries are a rare beacon of trustworthy information where the community can build knowledge and skills with confidence.

Libraries are increasingly becoming community hubs – bringing people together and giving them access to a greater breadth and depth of services and support and operating as a gateway to physical and digital information; from public health to adult learning, employment advice, access to the police, and a broad range of business, community and cultural services.

What does this mean for our service? 'It is time to reconceptualise our libraries as the Comhairle's 'front door', delivering a whole range of services.

Thinking 'Libraries First' when planning all council services should help to identify opportunities and synergies for aligning libraries to the broadest range of public, voluntary and commercial services locally.

Libraries should be seen as an asset not a cost and viewed as integral to the delivery of the Comhairle's broader corporate strategies – libraries can add real value. Estimates suggest that every £1 invested in libraries returns between £5 and £7 – a staggering return of between £5bn and £6bn a year for the UK economy.

Libraries continue to be one of the few local spaces which offer a range of services at the heart of the community that are free of charge.

Our libraries are community lounge rooms that serve as a venue for patrons to connect and discover learning materials, information and skills.

The library service manages diverse collections and delivers consistent, inclusive programmes and services, to the community and visitors to the islands.

The library team aims to assist users to:

- **Relax** by providing vibrant and inclusive spaces to engage.
- **Learn** through participation in programmes and use of educational and recreational resources.
- **Connect** with one another, the wider community and the Comhairle.
- **Discover** opportunities and access information about our community.

This Strategic Action Plan is to provide direction for library service delivery while the draft Strategic Plan is under community consultation.

Strategic purpose

This strategy celebrates libraries in the Western Isles and our unique potential to deliver real and meaningful change.

It outlines the strength of Western Isles Library Service as vital social infrastructure – trusted public spaces that deliver on a range of outcomes for communities, and details how libraries deliver on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Corporate Strategy.

It establishes a platform for the future development and delivery of high-quality contemporary library services to the people who live and work in the Outer Hebrides, and makes a compelling case for sustained investment.

It never loses sight of libraries as vital public services—central to learning, wellbeing, and at the heart of a thriving local democracy.
It ensures that the contribution of libraries in delivering wider public outcomes is understood and built upon.

Rooted in our unique island culture and committed to supporting Gaelic, this strategy will guide library service decisions, inform our investments, and provide the framework for our annual plans and budgets.

This plan:

- Sets out the strategic direction for Leabharlainn nan Eilean Siar for the next 3 years
- Shows how we work with communities and partners
- Outlines the priorities we are working to improve, and how they align with local and national policies
- Details how we contribute to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Corporate Strategy 2024 – 2027 and outlines how we will monitor and measure our outcomes
- Details how our library service delivers on national priorities (Forward: Scotland's Public Library Strategy)
- Positions us for the next three years in the context of a continually changing social and economic environment

Strategic Alignment

The *Libraries Strategic Action Plan 2025-2027* aligns with the Comhairle's broader strategic plans, including the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027/Ro-Innleachd Chorporra. Elements from this plan have been incorporated into the vision, mission, values and strategic aims and guide our strategic priorities.

The Strategic Action Plan does not sit in isolation but links with other local and national plans to ensure that our priorities and services contribute to wider ambitions. The library service has sought to complement these by aligning our actions to support their implementation:

Overarching Plans

- CnES Corporate Strategy 2024-27
- CnES Gaelic Language Plan
- Forward: Scotland's Public Library Strategy 2021-25 [SLIC]
- Vibrant Libraries - Thriving Schools Strategy [SLIC]
- National Gaelic Language Plan 2023-2026

Partnered Plans/Documents

- Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership
- Outer Hebrides Local Development Plan
- Education & Children's Services Service Business Plan
- Integrated Children's Services Plan 2023-2026
- ScotGov: Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)
- ScotGov: A Culture Strategy for Scotland
- Tasglann Forward Plan 2024-28

Council's Role

Relative to other forms of intervention, libraries offer LAs a low-cost, high-impact investment in their communities, which delivers a huge return in terms of social, economic and cultural capital.

As a core community resource, libraries contribute directly to the Comhairle's strategic objectives by supporting education and lifelong learning, promoting digital inclusion, and safeguarding Gàidhlig language and island heritage.

Libraries advance key CnES priorities: tackling inequality, enhancing digital connectivity, and strengthening the local economy by supporting skills development and providing essential services in remote areas.

Libraries are places where democracy, freedom and equality are not only respected but celebrated. The unique added value of a library is that it makes these outcomes universally accessible and relevant on equal terms to all members of the community in a way that is highly cost-effective for the local authority.

In turn, the Comhairle's strategic focus on community leadership, public service reform, and partnership working ensures that library services are integrated into wider efforts to improve quality of life, support vulnerable individuals, and foster inclusive, thriving island communities.

The library service is funded by the Local Authority [Statutory Act] and the delivery of library services in Na h-Eileanan an Iar is the responsibility of Leabharlainn nan Eilean Siar..

The library service is part of the Education & Children's Services Department and administered by a Libraries Manager based in Stornoway. The library service works in partnership with other services in the EC&S Department to support an island-wide approach to service delivery and resource provision.

This Libraries Strategy 2025-2027 outlines how libraries will support the Comhairle's strategic objectives to address community needs and aspirations.

DELIVERY PARTNER

Libraries play a key role in implementing CnES ambitions across education, culture, health, digital access, sustainability, community empowerment and social cohesion. Libraries offer significant reach into communities and a cost-effective way of ensuring that local people are connected to the services they need, when they need them.

Global
Sustainable Development Goals

Libraries are proven, cost-effective partners for advancing development priorities. Through a diverse range of programmes and services tailored to the needs of their community, libraries are already supporting progress toward the SDGs, in particular:

Vision

To be the welcoming heart of our communities - reflecting the language, culture and identity of the Outer Hebrides - where all island residents will feel inspired, connected and supported to reach their full potential through the provision of a vibrant, thriving, library service

Mission

Community & Inclusion: To provide free and inclusive spaces, services, and resources that connect people, inspire learning, provide enjoyment and celebrate the unique identity of the Western Isles.

Literacy & Learning: To empower residents of all ages through universal access to knowledge, literacy, information and lifelong learning opportunities, supporting personal growth and community resilience.

Gaelic & Cultural Heritage: To preserve and promote the rich cultural heritage of *Innse Gall*, with Gaelic language and culture at the core of our library services, ensuring they remain vibrant and accessible for future generations.

Values

Caring | Trusted | Responsive | Inclusive

Library
Strategic Aims

The strength of public libraries is in our ability to build on our core offer and evolve to meet changing needs. Despite unprecedented budget reductions and tight fiscal constraint, we face increasing customer demand, and remain integral to the effective delivery of a wide range of the Comhairle's strategic outcomes. Old ways of working are being challenged, and new models of service delivery must be developed. This strategic framework will guide service delivery and development, ensuring libraries remain vital, relevant, and resilient in the years to come.

Eight Strategic Aims from *Forward: Scotland's Public Library Strategy* have been identified by staff and stakeholders to be adapted based on community feedback during the consultation process. These Aims will shape the core business of the library service: **Collections**, **Programmes** and **Services**; and define the outcomes the library service will deliver on behalf of the Comhairle.

Embed libraries as lead contributors to reading and literacy by closing the learning gap in communities, through national programmes and local initiatives [1.1]

Encourage active citizenship through access to trusted, accurate information which empowers communities to make informed decisions [1.3]

Reflect our rich and diverse communities in both library resources and programming to make them accessible to all [1.5]

Design library services which reach the heart of communities and engage with new audiences [2.2]

Curate a diverse cultural offer which celebrates local and national heritage and encourages community led experiences [2.4]

Amplify the voice of public libraries through inclusive communication to ensure key messaging reaches all stakeholders [3.2]

Explore sustainable investment opportunities and preventative spend impact whilst demonstrating libraries return on investment [3.4]

Develop a service improvement culture which embeds consistent data measurement and self-evaluation practices [3.5]

https://scottishlibraries.org/forward-scotlands-public-library-strategy-2/

Library
Service Profile

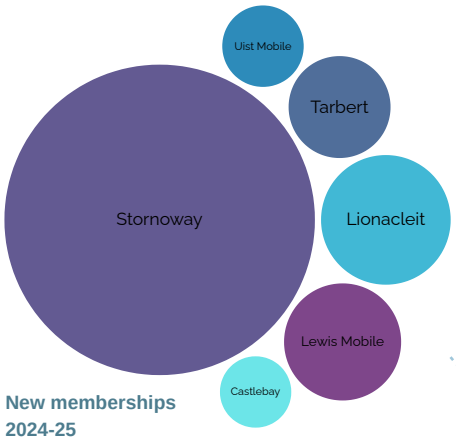
The Western Isles Library Service / Leabharlainn nan Eilean Siar serves the Outer Hebrides in the northwest of Scotland. The population of around 26000 is widely dispersed across Lewis, Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay and Barra. This geography presents unique challenges, with remote, rural communities often separated by sea and limited transport links.

Library visits 2024-25

	Visits 2024 - 2025
Castlebay (Barra)	2203
Lionacleit (Uist)	13562
• Uist Mobile*	2487
Tarbert (Harris)	5574
Stornoway (Lewis)	57665
• Lewis/Harris Mobile*	3770
Total	**85261**

The Library Services operates through a network of branch libraries in key population centres including Stornoway, Tarbert, Lionacleit and Castlebay, along with mobile and digital services to ensure accessibility across the islands. The demographic profile includes a higher-than-average proportion of older adults, making the two Mobile Libraries a priority service.

Library services support education, adult learning, digital inclusion and cultural and linguistics preservation. Libraries collaborate with schools, community groups and local agencies to deliver tailored programmes and user-driven collections.



New memberships 2024-25

The service also plays a critical social role, providing welcoming spaces that combat isolation and promote wellbeing.

Gaelic

Gaelic is an inalienable part of the lives, identity and heritage of the inhabitants of the Western Isles, but as an official language of Scotland, Gaelic is also an integral part of the country's heritage, national identity and cultural life.

Around half the population have Gaelic skills and the library service plays a key role in supporting the preservation and growth of Gaelic language and culture.

Library
Collections Profile

The library service collections are professionally managed by qualified staff guided by the Library Collection Development Policy. This sets the standard for all collection-related resource acquisitions and their management across the library service and is made publicly available on the library website.

The library collection includes resources in various formats:

Physical resources are rotated regularly to allow equal opportunity for members to borrow resources. Members can also loan items and place reservations from any branch in the Western Isles.

All branches offer access to resources such as Book Club sets, as well as resources in the following formats; large print, adult fiction, adult non-fiction, young adult fiction, junior fiction, junior non-fiction, picture books, board books, spoken word, CDs and DVDs.

Electronic resources are offered by the library service through applications such as BorrowBox, Libby, ComicsPlus, and Newsbank. These portals house ever-growing collections of ebooks, audiobooks, magazines and comics, free to access for all library members.

The library website hosts **databases and electronic subscriptions** including Britannica, GoCitizen, Which? Magazine, and SCRAN.

We have an extensive **Local History** collection including maps, newspapers, community newspapers, crofting records, and photographs. The local history collection is housed across multiple branches and includes microfiche Census records and Find My Past.

EDC Library

The library service supports schools by providing access to a wide range of educational resources, curated book collections and professional guidance. EDC Library staff work closely with educators to promote literacy, enrich learning, and ensure pupils across the islands benefit from a high-quality, responsive library service.

Gaelic

We hold an extensive range of Gaelic resources to support speakers and learners, from literature, history, poetry, CDs, ebooks and children's resources. It has been described as one of the best public Gaelic lending libraries in the world.

Review

Key Achievements 2024-2025

Relative to other forms of intervention, libraries offer local authorities a low-cost, high-impact investment which delivers a huge return in terms of social, economic and cultural capital.

Highlights for 2024-25:

- **Digitisation** of maps and *Highland News: West Coast Edition* by the NLS.
- Appointment of **new Libraries Manager** in June 2024
- Successful application for **SLIF Funding** to implement the Scottish Book Trust's *Reading Schools* programme across the authority
- Successful application for **PLIF Funding** to develop Gaelic programmes & build staff capacity to deliver for Gaelic
- Appointment of **new Senior Librarian Gaelic & Outreach** in January 2025
- Appointment of **Gaelic Arts Officer** in partnerships with An Lanntair & Employability
- Bairns Hoose **Children's Library** funding secured and furniture delivered in preparation for opening in Winter 2025
- EDC Library **partnership with Early Years** to develop sensory storytime kits and improve Bookbug access and training, particularly for Gaelic
- Western Isles **Bookbug Steering Group** established
- Sold out 'Libraries After Dark' Storytimes at Stornoway, Tarbert and Lionacleit
- Partnership with An Lanntair to deliver **Faclan Book Festival** including bilingual events in the library and Libraries Manager chairing at An Lanntair
- **"Challenging Poverty"** Collection created to support the OHCPP
- Re-commencing work on **Ar n Aite digital archive** website lost in the cyberattack
- National Library of Scotland's Love Libraries Day 100-year anniversary campaign launch with visit from MP Torcuil Crichton. Mobile Libraries case study for NLS.
- **Digital drop-ins** re-introduced post-cyberattack across all library branches

ISLANDS LITERACY SYMPOSIUM

March 2025 the library team hosted an "Islands Literacy Symposium" in Stornoway Town Hall. Scotland's Makar, Peter Mackay, opened the symposium with presentations from local literacy champions and a panel chaired by Agnes Rennie on 'Strengthening Gaelic Reading Culture'.

We hosted the Scottish Book Trust who visited local schools and provided library training and professional learning for teachers. They also assisted library staff to carry out a makeover of the Stornoway Primary library.

The Reading Schools project pilot phase is now complete, with the Western Isles going from no pins on the map to 4 schools: Bun Sgoil Steornabhagh, Sgoil MhicNeacail, Sgoil Lionacleit and Sgoil Bagh a Chaisteil.

The full Annual Report will be available on the library website in June 2025.

We welcomed over

85,261

visitors

(that's 25k more than cruise ships)

65,094

total loans

(that's over 275 loans per day)

2024-25 IN NUMBERS

33,988

visits to our website

5000+

reference queries

3261

computer bookings

319

programmes

with over 3000+

participants

Services

Review 2024-25

- VISITOR STATS
- REFERENCE QUERIES
- SLIC COMPARISON E.G. ACTIVE MEMBERS, LA SPEND
- MILES DRIVEN BY THE MOBILE LIBRARIES

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Collections

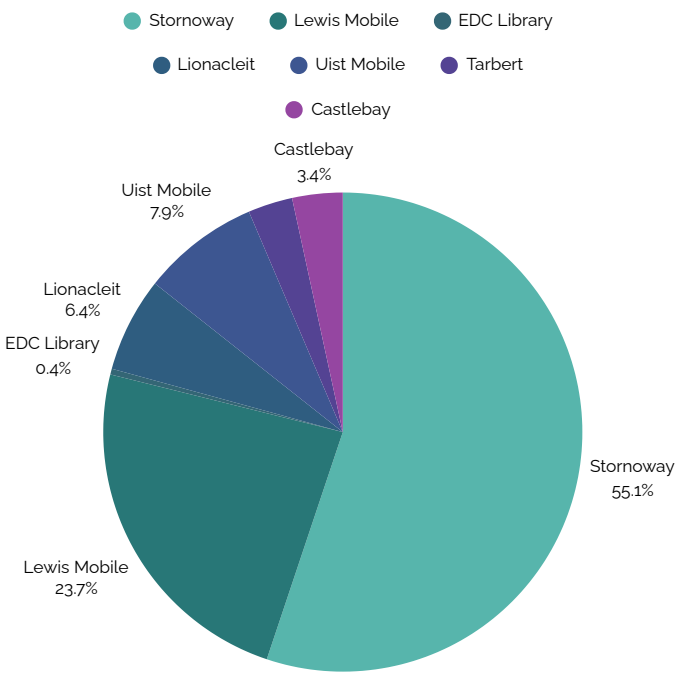
Circulation Analysis 2024-25

	Castlebay	Lionacleit	Uist Mobile	Tarbert	Stornoway	Lewis & Harris Mobile	EDC Library	TOTAL [Physical Loans]	Digital Library	TOTAL LOANS
Adult Loans	1179	2215	2753	1043	19114	8225	135	**34664**	5741	**40405**
Junior Loans	1250	2150	588	1950	10773	843	5795	**23349**	1340	**24689**
TOTAL LOANS	**2429**	**4365**	**3341**	**2993**	**29887**	**9068**	**5930**	**58013**	**7081**	**65094**

Physical books continue to dominate with Stornoway Library issuing over 50% of all loans but notably our Mobile Libraries remain vital, collectively contributing over 12,000 loans, reinforcing the value of this outreach to our rural communities.

Adult loans significantly outnumbered Junior loans, indicating the need for investment to further develop and promote children's collections and programming. Digital lending continues to grow steadily but still modest in proportion, which could be improved with increased budget for e-resources.

Overall, the data highlights strong community engagement, particularly in main branches and mobile services. Continued emphasis on digital services and targeted support for junior readers through school library services could further enhance reach and impact across the region.



Programmes

Review 2024-25

Each library branch is unique. Our branch library staff work hard to engage with community organisations and build partnerships for delivery. Based in our Library Headquarters in Stornoway, our Senior Librarian Gaelic and Outreach as well as our Libraries Manager build strategic partnerships to improve public programmes, with a focus on quality and equity.

	Castlebay	Lionacleit	Tarbert	Stornoway	TOTAL
Child sessions	1	46	60	83	190
Child participants	*22*	*497*	*429*	*1350*	***2298***
Adult sessions	5	84	10	30	129
Adult participants	*12*	*723*	*72*	*237*	***1044***

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Action Plan

Priority Areas

Six strategic priority areas have been identified to provide a framework for delivering actions that will help us to achieve our Vision and Mission.

1 Gaelic Improve Gaelic services, programmes and collections.

2 Library staff learning & training Develop library service personnel skills to improve delivery of community events, programs, services and training workshop courses, as well as improve efficiency and effectiveness in day-to-day operations.

3 Community Partnerships Collaborate with the community to build relationships and partnerships to support delivery of programmes and services, and encourage social connectedness including virtual communities.

4 Programmes & Services Create service level standards to support consistent delivery of programmes and services, ensuring all community demographics are represented and equity across branches.

5 Schools Create service level standards (SLAs?) to support consistent delivery of programmes and services to schools.

6 Branding & marketing Build the library service's profile by promoting and creating awareness of library Collections, Programmes and Services.

Glossary

Implementation & Reporting

Glossary

BorrowBox / An electronic application that provides free access to eBooks and eAudio books to library members.

Business Plan / shows what projects, services and activities are current for the financial year and the progress of each as at the end of each quarter

Collection / A group of items, resources, or stock within the library

CnES Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

eBook / Refers to electronic books read from a computer or device.

PAC / Public Access Computer

Programme / A planned series of ongoing future events, performances, training or workshops

Resources / Tools or materials that can support a person or organisation to function effectively

Service / A system supplying or delivering a public need

Implementation and reporting

The library service strategy actions will be delivered from 2025 to 2027.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar library service will provide biannual departmental updates to the Comhairle, highlighting activities and statistics within the plan.

In addition, the library service will provide quarterly reports against the Comhairle's annual operational plan performance indicators.

The library service will undertake an bi-annual community survey to provide ongoing avenues for people to provide feedback about the changes being implemented.

References and Acknowledgements

References

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CnES: Education & Children's Services Service Business Plan
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Acknowledgements

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