



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S SERVICE: CORPORATE POLICY AND OUTCOME DELIVERY REPORT

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to advise on the progress of corporate policy matters and to present the half year progress report on the 2024/25 Strategic Priorities for the Chief Executive's Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides a half year progress report on the 2024/25 strategic priorities aligned to the Service. An update on key cross-service areas of strategic risk is included, with progress on the strategic outcomes and the resources identified to implement the Business Plan.
- 2.2 Strategic Risk is aligned with the Corporate Strategy 2024-2027. Strategic Risks that cover more than one department are allocated to the Chief Executive Department. Strategic risk is monitored on Interplan and reported externally via the Comhairle's website. Graphical representation of the strategic risk for the Service is provided at paragraph 6..
- 2.3 The Business Plan is aligned to three strategic priorities, and the Service contributes to the achievement of 11 Strategic Outcomes. Progress on the Outcome Delivery Plans is detailed in the main body of the report at paragraph 7.
- 2.4 Full detail in regard to Business Plan progress for the Chief Executive's Service can be viewed at: [Service Business Plan Progress Reports](#). In line with Audit Scotland's recommendations, Elected Members are also encouraged to access the Comhairle's online performance monitoring and reporting system Interplan, which contains all Service Business Plans. Interplan can be accessed at: [Interplan](#).
- 2.5 Due to the impact of the 2023 cyber-attack on the Comhairle's systems, it has not been possible to provide a mid-year Revenue Monitoring Outturn Report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle notes the half year progress of the 2024/25 Outcome Delivery Plans for the Chief Executive's Service.**

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IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	There are no financial implications associated with this Report
Legal	There are no legal implications associated with this Report
Staffing	There are no staffing implications associated with this Report
Assets and Property	There are no asset and property implications associated with this Report
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	Risk Management associated with the Chief Executive's Business Plan is identified at paragraph 6 of the Report
Equalities	There are no identified equality issues within this Report
Corporate Strategy	The 2024/25 Business Plan is aligned with the Corporate Strategy 2022-27.
Environmental Impact	There are no identified environmental impacts within this Report
Consultation	There is no consultation associated with this Report. The Business Plan and the quarterly progress updates are published on the Comhairle's webpages.

BACKGROUND

5.1 While previous quarterly reporting provided an update on Business Plan progress, this report is designed to provide Members with information on progress of the strategic priorities which are relevant to the Service. The report includes an update on key cross-Service areas of strategic risk, progress on the strategic outcomes to which the Service contributes, and the resources identified to implement the Business Plan.

5.2 The Corporate Strategy has 4 Strategic Priorities and 20 Strategic Outcomes.

RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 The Comhairle has identified 15 strategic threats, 6 of which are monitored by the Chief Executive Department:

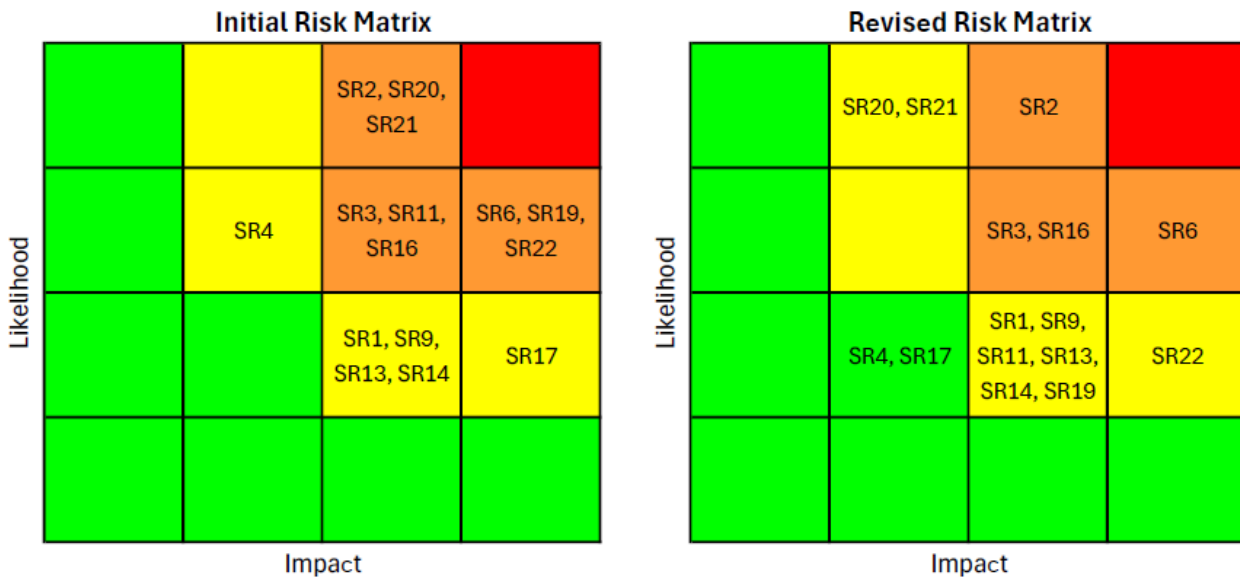
- SR1 There is a change in external political leadership with different priorities;
- SR9 Partnership working failure (excluding the Adult Health & Social Care Integration Bill addressed at SR6);
- SR13 The Comhairle fail to deliver high quality continuously improving services that are reflective of local needs;
- SR14 The Comhairle does not have the capacity, or a sufficient workforce, to deliver services. Rapid reduction of workforce;
- SR17 Disruption to services and to the wider community; and
- SR21 Cost-of-living pressures.

6.2 SR21 Cost-of-living pressures is assessed initially as a High Risk reducing to Medium once controls have been put in place.

6.3 The full risk register details can be accessed via the [Interplan Risk Management Module](#).

STRATEGIC RISK MATRICES - September 2024

THREATS



OUTCOME DELIVERY PLANS

- 7.1 The department is aligned to three Strategic Priorities and contributes to the fulfilment of 11 Strategic Outcomes and progress on the Outcome Delivery Plans are reported below under each of these.

Priority 1.1: Strengthen the local economy

Outcome 1.1.2: Digital investment delivers outcomes for the community.

- 7.2 An annual progress report on the Digitalisation Strategy was presented to Members at the September Committee series. Following the criminal cyber-attack to which the Comhairle was subject in November 2023, priorities of the Strategy were accelerated in a number of areas as part of the planned response to the attack, with the Incident Management Team (IMT) agreeing to ensure all actions are in alignment with the principles of the Strategy.
- 7.3 Recovery from the cyber-attack continues at pace, with most Services now leading their system progress with IMT involvement reducing to the extent that the IMT held its last meeting on 26 November. The new website is expected to be active in early December 2024, with new branding for the Comhairle also to be launched at that time. The PSN compliance health check is underway, with no difficulties anticipated. The latest estimated costs from the cyber-attack are one-off costs of £778K, with ongoing revenue costs of £297K. £598K of the one-off costs can be attributed to the cyber-attack with some of the other costs likely to be considered an escalation of the Comhairle’s digitalisation.
- 7.4 An IT Working Group has been convened with the purpose of appointing Digital Champions who will be responsible for promotion and support in applying digital solutions across Comhairle Services to enabled more enhanced and streamlined working.
- 7.5 Only five out of thirty-one Actions from the Digitalisation Strategy have yet to commence, with the vast majority now under way. Only those relating to more strategic, multi-partner collaborative approaches within our communities remain to be commenced, and these are scheduled for delivery towards the end of the Strategy’s programmed timeline.

Outcome 1.1.3: Investment in our buildings and infrastructure

- 7.6 Following the review of the National Islands Plan in November 2023, a Scottish Islands Survey was conducted to inform the Scottish Government's monitoring, evaluation and review of the National Islands Plan, and provide evidence for conducting Island Community Impact Assessments. The National Islands Plan review consultation analysis was published in April 2024 which identified that there should be a prioritisation of the strategic priorities, fewer outcomes, that there is a lack of performance monitoring, and a lack of focus and ability to measure performance at the island group level. A new National Islands Plan is to be published next year.
- 7.7 The Islands Growth Deal is underway in its second year of implementation which has resulted in the approval of £10.1m package of investment in the redevelopment of the Calanais Visitor Centre. A local contractor has been awarded to undertake the capital works, which will enable vital conservation of the site and allow the facility to welcome and support the increased footfall arising from Cruise ship tourism sector.
- 7.8 Officers have continued to work with community groups to identify funding to progress new community infrastructure throughout the Western Isles. Two Outer Hebrides applications have been successful at this year's Islands Programme Funds, totalling over £700k, which will allow for site investigation surveys to be undertaken at Taigh Chearsabhagh, North Uist, and support the delivery of Ionad Eilean h-Oige, Eriskay. It should be noted that Scottish Government has advised that there will be no further rounds of RCGF after 2024/25.
- 7.9 The Crown Estate Grants provide support to community groups many of which underpin usage of local infrastructure and facilities. Year 4 Crown Estate Funds were dispersed throughout the Western Isles during this period. The Comhairle announced £1.62m of funding from Crown Estate Revenues (CERF) to support community projects across the Western Isles, in addition to the competitive application bid process for multi-Ward applications from groups seeking to deliver benefits across wider areas.

Outcome 1.1.4: Increased level of skills across our communities and workforce

- 7.10 Following the announcement of the UK Budget on 30 October 2024 UK Government has confirmed that £20.25m will be made available for projects in the Western Isles. This sum will replace the Levelling Up Partnership funding announced in 2023 by the previous UK Government. . Engagement with UK Government has re-commenced on the process and criteria for use of the funding. The Comhairle resolved in April 2024 that the majority of this funding should be expended in Uist and Barra.
- 7.11 The Islands Growth Deal TalEntEd Programme has now received Full Business Case approval from Scottish and UK Government and will move into delivery phase in the coming Quarter. TalEntEd is being delivered in partnership between UHI North, West and Hebrides, Robert Gordon University, Heriot Watt University and the three Islands Deal partner Councils.
- 7.12 The TalEntEd Programme will deliver activity across Orkney, Shetland and the Outer Hebrides, with creative opportunities for people to remain in the Islands through study and work and through the attraction of new people to the Islands. The Programme aims to add value to the capital interventions of the Growth Deal project, creating new skills relevant to our Islands, providing upskilling opportunities and enabling a just transition within the decarbonisation sector.
- 7.13 There are ongoing internal governance meetings held regularly regarding the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), and the latest Monitoring Report has recently been approved. Following the 2024 Autumn Statement announcement, the UKSPF funding has been extended for a further year with a National additional funding allocation of £900 million. This will be a 40% reduction in overall funding for the next year. Following the recent financial and data return both People and Skills and Multiply are on track to full spend. The People and Skills element has exceeded initial forecasts with Multiply taking longer to meet outcomes. With dedicated staffing and a partnership approach Multiply is now embedded into the delivery model of Adult Services, Accredited Training and Cothrom.

- 7.14 Through the Charter and Local Employability Partnership (LEP), the Accredited Training Team and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) continue to work in partnership to support the employability needs of participants from the age of 14 years, with no upper age limit. Within the school structure, the SDS Career Advisers, DYW Coordinators and Guidance staff work collectively to offer support to school pupils. Through the implementation of the Employability Hub, the collective offer continues through joint planning and delivery of events and campaigns.
- 7.15 For progression from school to employability or apprenticeships, the Local Employability Action Plan has been developed in partnership with SDS. To support the Employability Partnership plan for the future, a deep skills analysis has recently been developed. The outcome will determine the future delivery model of all partners. The skills analysis will gauge the current and future skills gaps and challenges of the local economy. Historically, this has shown a return of only 5%. To support an accurate data set, this analysis is to be shared on all partnership platforms and a dedicated resource from the Comhairle and SDS will support the data gathering exercise. A snapshot will be gathered at the Career events in Stornoway and Lionacleit where 50 employers will be interviewed to provide the first set of data returns.
- 7.16 The SDS Modern Apprenticeship Contract is amended annually to reflect the changing skills and accreditation needs of the community. To support the outcomes of the Foundation and Modern Apprenticeship, the team has had a focus on career pathways and local progression. For example, the Automotive Foundation Apprenticeship has increased from an intake of 8 in 2022 to 42 this academic year. This was following a direct response to the needs of the local automotive sector. Progression onto the Modern Apprenticeship programme has never been so successful with 11 registered with Edinburgh College this year, more than 50% of the class.
- 7.17 The Training Kitchen continues to be a valuable first step for those with multiple barriers when moving into employment. The mentorship and daily support are instrumental for a bespoke support offer to be implemented. The Training Kitchen continues to support and upskill those with multiple barriers to employment. To ensure it supports an all-age service and progression pathway for school pupils, the Foundation Apprenticeship at Level 5 in Hospitality has been integrated into the delivery model.

Outcome 1.1.5: Growth in small and medium sized businesses demonstrated

- 7.18 The Procurement Team supports Community Wealth Building by engaging with local businesses in order to try to remove any barriers (or perceived barriers) for tendering for Comhairle contracts. That includes trying to streamline processes as far as possible for smaller businesses, the aim being to encourage as much local participation as possible in contract opportunities which in turn will benefit the local economy. The team always tries to promote the use of local suppliers wherever it is lawful to do so.

Priority 3.1: Support resilient communities and quality of life

Outcome 3.1.3: Planning and infrastructure meet the needs of our communities

- 7.19 Transport Scotland is currently developing an Islands Connectivity Plan (ICP) as the successor to the Ferries Plan 2013-22. The objectives of the ICP will be aligned with delivery of National Transport Strategy 2 (NTS2) and the National Islands Plan. The ICP aims to ensure that island ferry services align with the outcomes from Transport Scotland's wider, multi-modal Strategic Transport Project Review 2 (STPR2) which covers Transport Scotland's assets.
- 7.20 Transport Scotland's Public Consultation on the prioritised elements of the Plan (draft Long-Term Vessels and Ports Plan 2023-2045 and Strategic Approach Paper), closed on 6 May 2024. The public consultation report on the draft ICP Strategic Approach and the updated draft Vessels and Ports Plan was published on 3 September 2024. Transport Scotland will reflect consultation feedback through the ICIA and feed into a revised Strategic Approach and Vessels and Ports Plan and remaining work, with the publication of the revised Strategic Approach and Vessels and Ports Plan by end of 2024.

- 7.21 Development is progressing on the remaining ICP elements: Ferry Fares, Community Needs Assessments, Onwards and Connecting Travel, Low Carbon and associated impact assessments. The sharing of the data gathered regarding the first 3 steps of the revised Community Needs Assessments methodology is to be published shortly.
- 7.22 A public consultation regarding Clyde & Hebrides Ferry Services (CHFS3) was launched for 12 weeks to 8 March 2024. On 2 September 2024 Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop MSP's statement regarding CHFS indicated that direct award due diligence work continues at pace. A submission to the CMA is due imminently as the next key milestone towards a decision on direct award early next year. Following the outputs of Transport Scotland's extensive stakeholder engagement exercise and public consultation, Transport Scotland have worked collaboratively with CalMac to develop an Enhancement and Change Plan.
- 7.23 The Enhancement and Change Plan will bring in a number of changes to areas such as community engagement, local decision making and performance reporting; areas that the consultation evidenced would benefit from enhancement. CalMac have already started the process of recruiting additional area operations managers to enhance local decision making and communication with communities.
- 7.24 The Comhairle submitted a response on 26 February 2024 to the Scottish Parliament Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE1862: Introduce community representation on boards of public organisations delivering lifeline services to island communities. Despite this consultation, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop MSP, on 8 August 2024 announced the reappointment of Erik Østergaard OBE as Chair of the David MacBrayne Limited (DML) Board and the reappointment of Tim Ingram and Grant Macrae as Non-Executive Directors of the DML Board, with no islanders being appointed.
- 7.25 Following the publication of the Project Neptune report, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recommended that the Scottish Government give consideration to a CMAL-Transport Scotland merger, to create a "Ferries Scotland" as an arm of Transport Scotland. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport announced on 30 May 2024 that the current CHFS contract was to be extended for a further year to allow further consideration of complex options for future delivery. The Comhairle will continue to make representations in support of agreed policy objectives as opportunities present.

Outcome 3.1.4: Our communities are safe, inclusive, and resilient

- 7.26 The Comhairle continues to implement the Resilience Strategy 2023-28, Action Plan, with notable activities including the multi-agency SGN Gas Plant exercise, which saw Category 1 and Category 2 responders participating in a live exercise at the gas plant, and the Western Isles Emergency Planning Coordinating Group convened to test aspects of the Emergency Plan, including call-out procedures, communications and multi-agency arrangements. This provided staff at all participating agencies with the opportunity to build competencies. The Resilience Team continue to develop and deliver a training and exercising programme and review emergency plans on a rolling basis, with the focus moving to Winter Planning over the coming months. Progress in delivering the Comhairle's Resilience Strategy will be reviewed and reported on in full to Committee in 2025/26.
- 7.27 The Strategy Team has worked with the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's (OHCPP) Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) to develop a Climate Rationale and Case for Action. These documents aim to provide an overview of the climate challenge for the Outer Hebrides and enable priorities for climate change adaptation in the islands to be identified and were approved by the OHCPP Board. The Outer Hebrides Climate Rationale collates evidence of how the climate is changing in the Outer Hebrides and the impacts this is having or is expected to have on people, businesses, and ecosystems in our islands, whilst the accompanying Case for Action sets out the CCWG's vision, purpose and priorities for action to adapt to the climate impacts identified and improve climate resilience in the Outer Hebrides. The Strategy Team continues to collaborate with the CCWG to progress work on climate adaptation action with the aim of ensuring our communities are resilient to the effects of a changing climate. Next steps for the CCWG include seeking funding to develop a Climate Change Adaptation Plan for the islands.

Outcome 3.1.5: Reduce inequality and poverty and promote social mobility

- 7.28 The Comhairle utilised approximately £475k, in addition to the £150k of funding already made available to Third Sector partners, to assist with Cost-of-Living pressures. Proposals for use of the principal sum were at a stage of near conclusion when Scottish Government announced the welcome establishment of a fund of £1.4m to assist with the cost-of-living crisis including energy costs for island residents. A sum of £257k was allocated to the Comhairle from the Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Fund for 2023/24 to help support food and fuel costs for those in need, along with an increased allocation for free school meals and the identification of Warm Spaces hubs within our communities. Policy and Resources Committee noted at its meeting in June 2024 that additional Scottish Government Islands Cost Crisis Emergency Funding in the sum of £1.028m had been made available in 2024/25 to mitigate cost pressures of the delivery of services in island communities. A further £1m ICCEF funding round for the six island authorities has been allocated for 2024/25, and the Comhairle share is expected to be c.£257k. £1 million was also announced for a new scheme aimed at supporting closer involvement with island authorities in collaboration with communities around the Scottish Government's Carbon Neutral Islands project.
- 7.29 The Strategy Team works with NHS Western Isles on the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy by developing and publishing statutory Annual Reports on progress. Work is underway on the Annual Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report for 2023/24 which will be reported to the Comhairle at this series of meetings. While the Anti-Poverty Strategy is due for renewal in 2025, work on it is delayed to establish whether a separate strategy for Child Poverty will be required. At the June 2024 series it was agreed to support Anti-Poverty and related corporate policy work, in the sum of up to a maximum of £120k be awarded to secure recruitment to a part-time post, for a period of three years, to give some stability to the Comhairle's leading work on anti-poverty support, and cost of living mitigation.
- 7.30 Through Scottish Government Child Poverty funding, the Accredited Training Team is working with partner agencies to support those living in poverty gain access to the full range of support services and funding to enable them to move out of poverty and into Employment. With a focus on maximising the income of those unemployed and underemployed, the team are undertaking an outreach service working with partner agencies to ensure the employability offer is shared across all communities from the Butt to Barra. This takes the form of partnership events and joint communication through community roadshows.

Priority 4.1: Be a sustainable and inclusive Council.

Outcome 4.1.1: Communities are empowered and continue to be at the heart of our decision making to support the delivery of the Comhairle's Strategic Priorities

- 7.31 The Community Engagement team has supported the Leader and Members with consultation meetings in each of the ward areas, discussing the Corporate Strategy, the Budget and key priorities and concerns. The meetings have now been held in all ward areas; they were well attended and received positive feedback.
- 7.32 The Comhairle considered distribution of Crown Estate Funding for 2024/25 at the April 2024 series of meetings and established a fund for Western Isles-wide projects in addition to ward area funding and a number of specific funding allocations.
- 7.33 The Community Learning and Development Partnership has developed a new plan for 2024-27 which was approved by the Comhairle in September 2024. The plan was developed in conjunction with a range of partner agencies and progress will be reported through the Comhairle committee structures and Community Planning Partnership. The CLD Steering Group has also commenced self-evaluation to identify strengths and areas of improvements.
- 7.34 The new Communications Strategy was approved by the Comhairle in June 2024.

Outcome 4.1.2: Reduction in our carbon footprint and development of an island route map to net zero

- 7.35 The Comhairle's Climate Change Strategy, approved in September 2022, sets out how the Comhairle will work to decarbonise our estate, assets, and services; and how we will work with partners to support the islands towards Net Zero, and build resilience to the effects of a changing climate. The Climate Change Strategy aims to embed climate change across the Comhairle, with consideration of climate change a central theme throughout our strategies and plans across all services. Substantial progress has been made towards implementing the Comhairle's Climate Change Strategy, with most actions in progress or completed, and only a small number of actions not yet started. A separate report will be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee (November 2024), providing additional detail on delivery of the strategy. A further report seeks approval for submission of the annual Comhairle's Public Bodies Climate Change Duties report, which seeks to provide an overview of the Comhairle's compliance with Climate Change Duties, covering Governance, Emissions and Projects, Climate Change Adaptation, Procurement and Wider Influence across the local authority area. The report shows a small reduction in the Comhairle's carbon footprint in 2023 compared to 2022 and lists further carbon reduction projects which are planned over the coming year.
- 7.36 The Comhairle also continues to work with the OHCPP Climate Change Working Group to coordinate, plan and deliver climate change action across the Western Isles. To mark Scotland's Climate Week on the 23rd-29th of September, an "Outer Hebrides Conference of the Parties", or OH-COP1 was organised by Climate Hebrides, supported by the OHCPP Climate Change Working Group. The event took place at an Lanntair, with Young People's voices featuring throughout the day. The Comhairle's primary and secondary schools also participated in e-Sgoil and OH-COP Climate Assemblies, in addition to a range of climate change challenges to mark Climate Week. The climate challenges were designed to encourage young people to have conversations about the climate and local climate issues, commit to climate change action and take part in climate activities. The Comhairle's Strategy Team also presented an overview of the Comhairle's Climate Change Strategy, commitments and strategic priorities relating to Climate Change at the event.
- 7.37 The Strategy Team continues to support Barra and Vatersay as part of the Scottish Government's Carbon Neutral Islands Programme, which aims to see six islands, including Barra and Vatersay, become Carbon Neutral by 2040. Following collaboration with the CNI Community Development Officer for Barra and Vatersay, the Comhairle is awaiting information on its bid for £127,022 from the Carbon Neutral Islands Capital Fund to decarbonise Cobhair Bharraigh.
- 7.38 A Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) and Delivery plan for na h-Eileanan Siar was approved by the Comhairle in November 2023 following public consultation. The Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy sets out the long-term plan for decarbonising heat in buildings and improving energy efficiency across the Western Isles. The Strategy is driven by Scotland's statutory targets for greenhouse gas emissions reduction and fuel poverty and is informed by local priorities. Decarbonisation of heat for domestic and non-domestic properties on and off the gas grid; energy efficiency and fuel poverty; and historic and mixed-use buildings are considered in the LHEES. Focus is now on implementation of the Action Plan and monitoring progress against the targets and actions set out in the LHEES.

Outcome 4.1.3: Equality of opportunity is increased

- 7.39 The Corporate Workforce Plan was approved by the Comhairle in September 2023 following consultation with the Recognised Trade Unions. The Plan promotes and supports career entry routes through open recruitment and apprenticeships, skills development and career progression for employees and flexible working conditions to support employees through all of life's transitions. The Annual Report, alongside an updated action plan are the subject of a concurrent report.

- 7.40 The Comhairle approved a new Hybrid Working Policy, alongside an updated Business Travel and Expenses policy and Post-Entry Training and Education policy. Work is currently underway on a revised Organisational Development Strategy and Equality Mainstreaming Report for 2025-30.
- 7.41 The Comhairle's Integrated Impact Assessment documentation was updated to include new legislation including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and the Consumer Scotland Act 2020 (Relevant Public Authorities) Regulations 2024. This ensures that the Comhairle is taking full account of relevant equality and related legislation when considering the development of policies and plans or planning service changes.
- 7.42 The Employee Survey was circulated to employees on 1 November 2024 and a corporate report on the findings will be presented to the Comhairle in early 2025. The Comhairle's Occupational Health Service which provides a comprehensive service to employees, also includes the Employee Assistance Programme offering employees access to a 24/7 helpline. A new Wisdom App has been promoted to employees to encourage uptake of the service.

Outcome 4.1.5: Effective governance of the Comhairle is in place to support the delivery of the Comhairle's Strategic Priorities

- 7.43 The Scottish Government has continually emphasised and renewed its commitment to the Review of Local Government and to exploration of single island models and a preliminary meeting at political level took place on 9 March 2023. An initial workshop meeting of Local Government, COSLA, NHS and other Scottish Government officials was held in May 2023. The First Minister confirmed Scottish Government's commitment to this work at the COSLA Conference in September and the work also forms part of the Programme for Government. A two-day Workshop, attended by Ministers and a team of senior SG officials, was held in late March 2024, to consider advantages, issues and working options of a single island model.
- 7.44 At the COSLA Conference in late September concerns were also expressed about Councils' capacity not just to fund their services and retain employees, but as to how communities are to be supported in the medium term. External speakers made clear the essential nature of Local Government to the wellbeing of any community and the pressing need for Public Service Reform. The Single Island Authority (SIA) model received strong political and academic endorsement and remains a focus for the Service in 2024/25. The fourth priority in the Programme for Government 2024-25 (Ensuring High Quality and Sustainable Public Services) includes the action to: 'Continue to make progress towards concluding the joint review of local governance by the end of this Parliamentary session – this includes developing single authority models with local government and health partners to strengthen and streamline local decision making and support a shift towards more preventative public services.' A further meeting of Councils, Scottish Government and NHS representatives will take place with the Minister for Public Finance in early December 2024. The Comhairle has produced a research paper setting out successful models of integration in other jurisdictions and has continued to emphasise, as have Audit Scotland and the Finance and Public Administration Committee of the Scottish Parliament, the need for Government to lead urgent action to move public service reform forward at pace.
- 7.45 Following the BVAR Report completed by Audit Scotland in 2022, the Comhairle developed an Action Plan to address the priority areas highlighted. An annual update on progress was presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee at the September 2024 series of meetings. Six of the nine recommendations have been completed and the Action Plan is scheduled to conclude in March 2025.
- 7.46 The Strategic Risk Register has been updated and was approved by the Comhairle in September 2024. The updated Risk Strategy is the subject of a concurrent report at this Committee. Work on the operational Risk Registers, Business Continuity Plans, Business Plans and Training Plans will be prepared for the commencement of 2025/26.

CONCLUSION

8.1 The Chief Executive's Service has continued to maintain good controls on business planning, governance, and budget management at the half year point in 2024/25. In addition to its core functions and responsibilities in supporting the good governance of the Comhairle, the Service has led significant progress on a number of key strategic and political policies both at local and national level.