



**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

**Strategic Housing Investment Plan  
2025/26-2029/30**

**February 2025**

## COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR

### DRAFT STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN 2025/26-2029/30

FEBRUARY 2025

#### INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The main purpose of the Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) is to set out the Comhairle's affordable housing investment priorities in relation to the aims and objectives of its Local Housing Strategy (LHS). A new Local Housing Strategy is in preparation for the Outer Hebrides and will be published in 2025. This SHIP is based on the current LHS.
- 1.2 The SHIP demonstrates the Comhairle's commitment to the Scottish Government's '*More Homes Scotland*' (MHS) initiative to deliver 100,000 affordable homes by 2032.
- 1.3 The SHIP identifies proposals for the priorities for investment through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP).
- 1.4 The SHIP should be treated as an operational document, rather than a policy document, and one that:
  - reflects and aligns with the housing policies and outcomes set out in each local authority's Local Housing Strategy (LHS) and LHS Outcome Action Plan;
  - reinforces the role of the local authority as the strategic housing authority;
  - informs Scottish Government investment decisions; and
  - informs the preparation of a Strategic Local Programme Agreement that sets out the planned programme across the local authority and, where required, informs the preparation of Programme Agreements to individual providers setting out their planned programme.
- 1.5 The SHIP has been produced by the Comhairle in line with the revised guidance issued by the Scottish Government in summer 2023 and in partnership with Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP), the main Registered Social Landlord in the Outer Hebrides.
- 1.6 In summary, the Comhairle's 2025 SHIP identifies a potential programme for £16.1m AHSP funding for the provision of an estimated 243 new affordable houses from the core programme. Further homes could be provided through the Partnership Support for Regeneration element of the SHIP, and through the Empty Homes Project, as well as from the Rural and Islands Housing Fund.
- 1.7 The SHIP covers a five-year period from 2025/26 to 2029/30.

#### HOUSING TO 2040

- 2.1 In March 2021, the Scottish Government (SG) published its first long-term housing strategy '*Housing to 2040*' which outlines what it wants housing and communities to look and feel like for the people of Scotland, with actions on how to get there.

- 2.2 Delivering more homes in great places across Scotland will contribute to the Housing to 2040 Vision and Principles.
- 2.3 Through a continuation of the 'More Homes Scotland' approach, the Scottish Government intends to increase the supply of homes across all tenures through a range of measures including:
- the Housing and Planning Delivery Framework, which reinforces the links between planning and housing requirements to support the provision of the right homes in the in the right places to create and sustain thriving communities;
  - the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP);
  - Rural and Islands Housing Fund;
  - the use of innovative financing models; and
  - making best use of existing homes including bringing empty homes back into use
- 2.4 Housing to 2040 sets out the Scottish Government's ambitions for how it wants the housing and communities of the future to be, with actions on how to achieve that. The strategy shows how integral housing is to the Scottish Government's objectives of tackling poverty and inequality, creating and supporting jobs, meeting energy efficiency and decarbonisation aims as well as delivery of fuel poverty and child poverty targets, and creating connected, cohesive communities. The SG's 'A Fairer, Greener Scotland: Programme for Government 2021-22' commits that 110,000 affordable homes will be delivered across Scotland by 2032, with at least 70% of these in the social rented sector and 10% in remote, rural and island communities.

## **LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY**

- 3.1 A new Local Housing Strategy for the Outer Hebrides, covering the period 2025 to 2030, is in preparation and, following Comhairle approval, will be published in 2025.
- 3.2 The new LHS will set out the Comhairle's housing aims and objectives for the period 2025-2030 and will focus on a number of strategic outcomes still under consideration.
- 3.3 The over-arching theme of the current LHS is:

*'Housing provision and services in the Outer Hebrides should make a strong contribution to health and well-being, encourage population retention, and support the sustainability of our communities.'*

- 3.4 Within the current LHS there are four Strategic Outcomes:

### **Outcome 1: Housing Quality**

Communities are sustained and re-vitalised through improvements to housing quality, condition, and energy efficiency

### **Outcome 2: Housing Supply**

Housing supply is sufficient to support people's needs and aspirations and assist wider corporate aims

### **Outcome 3: Homelessness**

Homeless clients can access a range of advice, support, and appropriate accommodation to suit their needs

### **Outcome 4: Independent Living**

People can access services and accommodation which promotes and extends independent living

- 3.5 The Comhairle's current LHS also sets out the aspirational goal that 55% of all new affordable homes should be developed in rural areas. The purpose of this goal is to support population growth and retention in the most fragile rural communities.
- 3.6 The SHIP sets out the Comhairle's approach to meeting the affordable housing aspects of Outcome 2, Housing Supply, which will also facilitate progress with the objectives of the other themes. The Comhairle's SHIP is therefore in alignment with the current LHS.

### **SPECIAL PROJECTS HOUSING**

- 3.7 There will be a significant deployment of Renewable Energy developers to the Outer Hebrides over the period covered by the new Local Housing Strategy. Starting in early 2026, a total of circa 1,500 workers (at peak) will deploy to the islands, engaged in the construction of a 1.8GW HVDC Converter Station, three Onshore Wind Farms and two Offshore Wind Farms. Each of these installations will connect to Grid in 2030/31 when the large construction workforce will depart, leaving a smaller, enduring Operations & Maintenance workforce.
- 3.8 Given that any new accommodation provided in response to this unprecedented development opportunity will benefit only the transient workforce until 2030/31, it is proposed that this provision be treated as 'Special Projects Housing', separately recorded from the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP). It may be that, at the conclusion of the construction programme in 2030/31, the properties provided pass to the RSL and become part of the AHSP stock at that point.

### **KEY WORKER: DEFINITION**

- 4.1 This SHIP will seek to take maximum advantage of the Scottish Government's Rural and Key Workers Fund and how a Key Worker is defined will be important. Currently there is no legal test or set definition for Key Worker and Local Authorities are given flexibility to define this in their policies to reflect local need. In its 'Affordable Housing for Key Workers Project Group' (2015), the Scottish Government adopted the following definition, "A Public Sector employee who provides an essential service. As well as workers in the Public Sector, this definition can also apply to low paid employees in the Private Sector / service industries who are also providing essential services".

- 4.2 During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the 2020 Scottish Government Guidance in respect of School and Early Learning Closures stated that the definition of Key Worker for these purposes would vary depending on the local circumstances. They expected, however, any local definitions to include consideration of, among others, those supporting our Critical National Infrastructure, without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused. This element of the definition has relevance to the Outer Hebrides where, over the lifetime of the SHIP, many people engaged in the delivery of critical national energy infrastructure will be seeking housing.

## **THE WIDER STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

- 5.1 The current LHS (and subsequently the SHIP) was prepared within a wider strategic context, both influencing and being informed by a number of key strategic documents which set out the high-level strategic direction of other evolving agendas.
- 5.2 As well as working towards the Scottish Government's national Housing priorities, the LHS and the SHIP have been developed taking account of the following local strategic documents:

### ***Community Planning Partnership Local Outcome Improvement Plan***

- 5.3 The Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCCP) is required to produce a long-term Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) which identifies key priorities and outcomes for the communities in the Outer Hebrides.
- 5.4 The LOIP is aimed at empowering communities to respond positively to the priorities and challenges identified in a particular community.
- 5.5 The over-arching OHCCP vision is:

***'to promote and realise the full potential of the Outer Hebrides as a prosperous, well-educated and healthy community enjoying a good quality of life, fully realising the benefits of our natural environment and cultural values'.***

- 5.6 The priorities for the OHCCP over the next 10-20 years as identified in the LOIP are:
1. The Outer Hebrides retains and attracts people to ensure a sustainable population
  2. The Outer Hebrides has sustainable economic growth and all our people have access to appropriate employment opportunities
  3. The islands offer attractive opportunities that improves the quality of life, wellbeing and health for all our people
- 5.7 The LOIP has identified a number of areas to facilitate achieving these priorities including ***'Our housing reflects the needs of a sustainable population by ensuring there is affordable housing across the islands.'***

### ***Our Islands Our Future***

- 5.8 Also developing in the background of the local strategic planning context is the 'Our Islands Our Future' campaign. This was launched in June 2013 by the three Island Councils (Orkney, Shetland and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) and set out a vision for the future of the Islands.
- 5.9 Both the Scottish and UK governments have recognised the potential of the islands and in 2014 made strong statements of support: the Scottish Government in "Empowering Scotland's Island Communities" and the UK Government in "A Framework for the Islands".
- 5.10 Both governments have since taken steps to honour those commitments: the Scottish Government with the Islands Act and the UK Government with the devolution of the Crown Estate. Both governments value the islands and the principles upon which the campaign is based, and the discussions have led to the development of a Growth Deal for the Islands.
- 5.11 The Islands Growth Deal focuses on the additionality which could be generated by a suite of unique projects, programmes and governance arrangements, and realised through the firm commitment and shared understanding of the three island groups, the UK and Scottish governments, and partners in the public, third and private sectors.
- 5.12 The Vision reflected in the Island Deal contains several aims to direct activity over the next 10 years, some of which can be supported through the LHS:
- Sufficient affordable and smart housing provision throughout the islands to accommodate our target population increases and meet 21st century requirements for home working, smaller households and ageing populations; and
  - Greatly reduced fuel poverty through measures addressing the cost and availability of fuel, low incomes and energy efficient housing.
- 5.13 The Islands Growth Deal is viewed as offering significant new development opportunities with new job creation potential. Housing solutions will be required to ensure that there is appropriate accommodation available for an expanding workforce.
- 5.14 The Comhairle and partners will work with community landowners to facilitate a range of community-based solutions to issues within particular communities. The Comhairle is keen to stimulate a pipeline of Rural and Island Housing Fund applications and over the five-year SHIP period we would be keen to see a total of 30 new units being delivered by communities and the Rural and Island Housing Fund.

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

- 5.15 The LHS and SHIP are prepared with regard to the Islands (Scotland) Act and this and future SHIP's will reflect this as appropriate.
- 5.16 The Comhairle will also participate in any Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIA) relating to affordable housing, as required.

### ***Comhairle Corporate Strategy 2022-2027***

- 5.17 The Comhairle's Corporate Strategy reflects the policy priorities of the Comhairle and the requirements of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 in respect of the development of the LOIP and related locality plans.
- 5.18 One of the key priorities in the Corporate Strategy is 'Communities and Housing', with an end objective of strengthening and maintaining rural communities by ensuring that population stability and balance is improved, that more younger people choose to stay in the Islands and that a good balance is achieved between pre-school, school, working age and retired residents.

#### ***Local Development Plan***

- 5.19 The current LHS was developed in tandem with the Comhairle's Local Development Plan (LDP), which was adopted in November 2018. A new Local Development Plan for the period from 2025 is in preparation and the life of this new Plan will increase from five years to ten years in line with the provisions of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. The Act also introduces the concept of the Local Place Plan which could be a helpful tool in the roll-out of the next LHS.
- 5.20 The LDP informs that Housing is a key development activity on the islands with 434 houses being completed in the previous five years, and that it is important to help ensure there is sufficient land available for future provision as determined through the Housing Need and Demand Assessment.
- 5.21 The LDP identified a number of housing sites which are safeguarded for the provision of affordable or mixed tenure housing development, and these are supplemented by a policy framework to best respond to the high incidence of individual self builds on 'windfall' sites that is characteristic of the Outer Hebrides and is evidenced in the Outer Hebrides Housing Land Audit 2021.
- 5.22 The LDP recognises that the siting and design of development is important in contributing to the quality and sustainability of the environment where people live and work and is also a practical means of achieving a wide range of social, economic and environmental goals - making settlements that can be both successful and sustainable.

#### ***Health and Social Care Partnership Framework 2024-27***

- 5.23 The Outer Hebrides Health and Social Care Strategic Framework is intended to:
- provide the conceptual framework as to how the IJB approaches population health challenges, informs the commissioning plan and ensures our focus remains outcome focused for our communities;
  - guide decisions we make in the short term, such as annual delivery plans;
  - inform the longer-term programme of work;
  - enable the Board (IJB) and our communities to assess actions against our strategic ambition; and
  - provide a basis for more detailed and engaged conversation with the two parent bodies and wider partners about the challenges ahead, supporting wider achievements of integration of health and social care services.

- 5.24 An updated Housing Contribution Statement to support the new Local Housing Strategy will detail the areas of work the Housing and Social Care Partnership undertake, which may require a housing involvement.
- 5.25 The development of Housing with Extra Care (HWEC) will remain a key component of the LHS and SHIP in the coming years. The HWEC development at Goathill Farm has recently completed.

#### ***Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans***

- 5.26 The on-going changes to Homelessness leading on from the recommendations of the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Action Group and the preparation of the Comhairle's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan (RRTP) have also been considered in the development of the SHIP.
- 5.27 The Comhairle's strategic housing priorities will be aligned and consistent with the RRTP's priorities.

#### ***Empty Homes Project***

- 5.28 The Comhairle appointed an Empty Homes Officer, jointly funded by the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, in October 2018. Part of the role of this post is to identify empty houses, where the property may not be saveable, but the associated land could have potential for small housing developments of one or two units.
- 5.29 This project has proved to be very successful, with a much higher level of engagement from homeowners than anticipated.
- 5.30 A number of long-term empty properties with land potential have also been looked at, and although none have been suitable for affordable housing to date, this exercise will continue.

#### ***Child Poverty Strategy***

- 5.31 The Comhairle's Child Poverty Strategy was published in June 2019. Within the strategy there are several actions relating to Housing and Energy Costs, aimed at improving the supply and condition of housing to ensure children have the best possible start in life. This Strategy is currently being updated and will align with the work of the Community Planning Partnership's Strategic Anti-Poverty Group.
- 5.32 The delivery of the SHIP will play an important role on meeting actions arising from the Child Poverty Strategy and the work of the Strategic Anti-Poverty Group.



## ***Economic Development***

- 5.33 A Skills Assessment produced by Skills Development Scotland for the Outer Hebrides in December 2020 assessed the future demand for skills and job openings in the area. This showed there would be a need to encourage young people to stay and work and a need to attract talented new workers to the islands. There are an anticipated 900 job openings for this period, 200 of which are expansion demand and 700 of which are replacement demand, with a greater requirement for people with higher education qualifications. The workforce is expected to grow by 1.4% over this period with a 1.5% increase in Scotland.
- 5.34 A major obstacle to attracting and retaining talent is access to housing for those moving to work in the islands. Access to housing will become more of an issue as, post Covid, more people may look to retire to the islands for its safe healthy environment and other people moving to home working in island locations. There is a risk that local young people and families are outpriced as housing prices increase to meet demand. The Comhairle's Social Care Service is currently having to employ several agency staff over the coming months due to increasing demand. The Service requires accommodation for these agency staff, but accommodation is at a premium and extremely difficult to source.
- 5.35 Similarly, the Islands Deal will invigorate the island economy and will also require an increased housing supply to support the various initiatives, again necessitating a more ambitious housing supply figure. The Islands Deal of £100m benefiting the three Islands authorities will lever in a further £235m and is anticipated to create over 1,300 sustainable jobs throughout the islands, with requisite new housing need and formation.
- 5.36 In the Outer Hebrides the Islands Deal proposals are based around a suite of five projects:
1. Outer Hebrides Energy Hub
  2. Outer Hebrides Destination Development
  3. Spaceport 1
  4. Primary Industries Development
  5. Outer Hebrides Campus Development
- 5.37 The profile of the various elements of the Islands Deal concentrates significant investment and outcomes in years three to seven of the 10-year programme, again reflected in future housing requirements and newly forming households.
- 5.38 A number of innovation projects linking the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland are also being developed. These three joint-islands projects are under the following themes:
- Skills, Talent Attraction and Entrepreneurial Support;
  - Island Centre for Net Zero Carbon; and
  - Creative Islands and Wellbeing.
- 5.39 These will create wealth and opportunity throughout the islands, attract and helping to retain an economically activity population, and create further housing demand.

- 5.40 A further suite of investment and growth initiatives including the post Brexit Shared Prosperity Fund and town centre and infrastructure investment through the Levelling Up Fund should realise growth and development and resultant economic opportunities and aligned housing requirement. These schemes include transformational transport and connectivity projects which will lever additional investment; have 'Place' at their core and will generate housing need.
- 5.41 Significant accommodation demand is now coming forward from economic sectors most particularly in Harris and Uist. The demand for additional worker accommodation is evident from the tourism and food processing sectors with several businesses reporting being unable to employ additional staff due to the lack of affordable housing opportunities. Finding ways to develop staff and Key Worker accommodation solutions will be a focus over the next period.
- 5.42 As referenced in section 3 above, an unprecedented wave of development is coming to the Isle of Lewis in particular as Renewable Energy construction contracts to the value of £6.2bn are rolled out from 2026 to 2031 (a 1.8GW HVDC Converter Station, three Onshore Wind Farms and two Offshore Wind Farms). A transient workforce of circa 1,500 at peak will require accommodation across all tenure types, giving way to a smaller Operations & Maintenance workforce once construction is complete. A Major Developments Forum has been established to align timelines for worker accommodation, supply chain, skills, freight etc and the Accommodation Sub-group of that Forum is engaged with developers, local housing agencies and Scottish Government to ensure that sufficient accommodation is provided and that, critically, a significant proportion of 'legacy' housing is left behind in 2030/31. While the accommodation provided by developers will be occupied by workers over the construction period, it is likely that those units will transfer to the RSL on completion of contracts and will become part of the current AHSP stock.

### ***Population Retention Agenda***

- 5.43 The Outer Hebrides are facing a serious and on-going population challenge. Over the past half century, the population of the islands has declined by 15%. Forward projections anticipate continuing decline with projections to 2041 anticipating a further loss of 14% reducing the population to 23,100. The 2021 Census has shown a 5.5% decrease in population since 2011, the sharpest decrease in Scotland.
- 5.44 Decline, however, isn't evenly distributed with growth evident around the greater Stornoway area and the main losses being sustained in the more rural areas.
- 5.45 The Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) has, over the past period, been exploring issues around population and has been developing the concept of Repopulation Zones. This repopulation initiative is a 'place-based approach' to demography that creates linkages between the national population strategy and a more localised approach to population issues. The overall aim is to address the unique demographic challenges felt by fragile communities on the north and west periphery of Scotland through targeted, place-based interventions.
- 5.46 In the Outer Hebrides Uist had been identified as the most appropriate locality to pilot some of the ideas being developed under this concept. Housing has featured heavily in the discussions and advanced housing solutions are viewed as a critical component to stimulating repopulation in the most challenged communities.

- 5.47 It is important to note that despite population losses the number of households in the Outer Hebrides has continued to grow and to grow broadly in line with the Scottish average. Households in 2020 were estimated at 12,849 an increase of 13.9% since 2001 when households were estimated at 11,276. This trend in growing households is anticipated to continue and will require the availability of additional supply.
- 5.48 Over the past period the Comhairle has sought to assist population retention and growth in the more peripheral parts of the Hebrides by seeking to focus housing development in rural areas with 55% of all new build targeted for completion in rural areas. Over the five-year period of this SHIP, it is proposed to maintain that 55% target.
- 5.49 It is also viewed as critical to ensure that new housing development is spread across all of the Outer Hebrides and as such it is proposed to build 243 houses from the core and supporting funding programmes over the five-year period with indicative targets for each island area as follows:

Barra:	13
South Uist:	34
Benbecula:	5
North Uist:	11
Harris:	32
Rural Lewis:	28
<u>Stornoway:</u>	<u>120</u>
Total:	243

#### **STRATEGIC LOCAL PROGRAMME AGREEMENTS**

- 6.1 With regard to the recent development of affordable housing, HHP has delivered over 700 new homes since it was established in 2006. The provision of these new homes has been directed by the five-year SHIP and the more operational three-year Strategic Programme Agreement.
- 6.2 At the time of preparing this SHIP there are 84 units on site and a further 38 units going through the appraisal stage.

#### **INVESTMENT PRIORITIES OF THE STRATEGIC HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN**

- 7.1 The SHIP aims to align with and meet the aspirations of the LHS as well as contributing towards the aims of a number of wider Corporate Initiatives.

#### **AFFORDABLE HOMES SUPPLY PROGRAMME**

- 7.2 The proposed SHIP is based around a programme to increase the effective housing supply on the islands, through the provision of affordable Housing (housing that is affordable for people on modest incomes). The proposed housing is primarily Social Rented accommodation, to be developed and managed by HHP with the support of the Affordable Homes Supply Programme (AHSP).

- 7.3 Other delivery mechanisms, alongside AHSP, will be deployed in the SHIP to deliver new housing.

#### RURAL AND KEY WORKER FUND (RAKWF)

Two Rural and Key Worker Fund (RAKWF) projects are proposed in the SHIP. In one project, five units will be repurposed into housing and, in the other project, four units will be purchased on the open market. All units will be offered for social rent and the projects will be managed by Tighean Innse Gall.

#### ISLANDS HOUSING FUND (IHF)

Eight Islands Housing Fund (IHF) projects are proposed in the SHIP. Through these projects, three units will be procured through market purchase, six will be provided through collaboration with community land-owning estates, eight will be provided on former Church land and a yet-to-be-defined number will form part of a larger housing scheme.

#### PARTNERSHIP FOR REGENERATION SCHEME (PSR)

Partnership Support for Regeneration (PSR) scheme will support collaboration with local developers to deliver new houses for sale, principally through the Stornoway Airport scheme. This approach will be delivered in partnership with Tighean Innse Gall and, given the inherent risk, each intervention will have to be accompanied by a robust exit plan.

#### EMPTY HOMES AND OTHER INITIATIVES

A project to bring long term Empty Homes back into use, building on the work of the Comhairle's Empty Homes Officer and Tighean Innse Gall's Empty Homes Unit, is also featured within the SHIP. The SHIP also proposes a new Housing With Extra Care development on Barra.

### **RURAL HOUSING**

- 8.1 One of the key priorities taken into account in developing the SHIP, is the aspiration to retain and grow the population in remote rural areas. The Comhairle's LHS 2017/18-2021/22 sets out the Comhairle's aspirational target that new affordable housing should be provided on a ratio of 55% in rural areas and 45% in the Stornoway area in support of the population and regeneration agendas.
- 8.2 Housing an unprecedented concentration of transient workforce in and around Stornoway over the period 2026 to 2031, for construction of SSEN Transmission's HVDC Converter Station and Lewis Wind Power's Stornoway Wind Farm, has the potential to skew this rural / Stornoway percentage so developer housing will be treated in the SHIP as 'Special Projects' housing and not as part of the ASHP provision. Having said that, there is the aspiration that this newbuild 'Special Projects' housing will pass to the RSL when the transient workforce departs, as part of a Community Benefit agreement.
- 8.3 The Comhairle has worked with community landowners, grazings committees and local Churches to identify suitable land in rural areas. Community landowners now account for around 70% of the land area of the Outer Hebrides.

- 8.4 The community landowners and grazings committees have been able to use local knowledge about land availability, as well as on housing need, to help inform this process but it should be noted that community ownership is not a panacea for the rapid delivery of rural housing; most community-owned land remains in crofting tenure with all the challenges of resumption.
- 8.5 Feasibility Studies have also been carried out to help identify suitable land for housing development.
- 8.6 Acknowledging the substantial demand for housing in and around Stornoway, the SHIP has also made provision for a number of other sites in and around the town.
- 8.7 As well as the strategic priorities set out above, the proposed SHIP has taken the following factors into consideration:
- the Scottish Government new build benchmark figures (£95,500k grant per unit);
  - the scope and support provided by the More Homes Inverness team to negotiate an increased benchmark figure for remote areas where appropriate;
  - the Resource Planning Assumptions anticipated for the period of this SHIP;
  - supporting the longer-term programme by looking for land banking opportunities;
  - the capacity of the local construction sector, particularly over a period when large Renewable Energy and Islands Growth Deal projects require to be delivered;
  - substantially higher tender returns in rural areas;
  - the difficulties encountered in identifying and acquiring land in rural areas;
  - engagement and partnership work with Community Landlords;
  - opportunities arising from the Comhairle's Empty Homes Project to purchase properties to back in to use. Work is currently underway in partnership with Tighean Innse Gall;
  - Hebridean Housing Partnerships Housing Need study;
  - challenges in securing accommodation for existing Key and Seasonal Worker sectors;
  - the potential use of the Partnership Support for Regeneration scheme;
  - the units in the SHIP will be delivered through traditional construction methods, but scope for the use of different methods of construction, such as modular build, will be considered if appropriate;
  - the SHIP also looks at opportunities for town centre regeneration by including two possible developments for Stornoway Regeneration; and
  - opportunities for future Key Worker housing related to major capital projects will also be considered during the lifespan of this SHIP.

## **IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITISATION OF SITES**

- 9.1 The Comhairle works very closely with Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) to identify suitable sites for housing development. Feasibility Studies are commissioned (and jointly funded) on all potential sites, and the findings of these studies help inform the prioritisation of the affordable housing programme.

- 9.2 The Feasibility Studies examine a range of factors including:
- Location;
  - Ownership;
  - Infrastructure;
  - Utilities;
  - Ground Conditions; and
  - Development Costs.
- 9.3 The Feasibility Studies also involve consultation with other agencies such as Planning and utility companies.
- 9.4 The Comhairle and HHP use initial desk-based studies as a starting point, and if a particular site has potential, a more detailed study is carried out.
- 9.5 The on-going Empty Homes initiative will also assist with the identification of sites, particularly in rural areas.
- 9.6 The Comhairle does not currently have any submissions with the SG's Vacant and Derelict Land Programme or the Housing Infrastructure Fund, but will consider these Programmes should any suitable opportunities arise.

#### **POTENTIAL SITE AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS**

- 10.1 The use of detailed Feasibility Studies helps identify any potential physical site constraints at an early stage in the process. The Studies can also highlight potential financial constraints through the carrying out of an initial financial assessment.
- 10.2 This approach has helped reduce abortive costs and provides a greater degree of certainty prior to a site being submitted to the SG for approval.
- 10.3 The preparation of the SHIP has also taken account of the high cost of delivering affordable housing in rural areas. Costs have always been high outwith Stornoway, but recent tender returns received by HHP have presented very challenging financial appraisals.
- 10.4 The Scottish Government has been very supportive in increasing benchmark grant levels where possible in order to make developments work financially. In many cases the grant level awarded to a development has been substantially higher than the £95,500k per unit benchmark.
- 10.5 HHP also increased its borrowing capacity in 2021 to meet the needs of the on-going affordable housing programme and HHP Officers have sought HHP Board approval to go above agreed levels in order to make developments work.
- 10.6 Recent tender returns for rural areas have been very high and have required detailed financial appraisal to assess whether or not these developments are feasible. As well as the financial challenge, the additional time required to carry out appraisals has added substantial amounts of time on to the overall affordable housing programme.

- 10.7 If the cost of developing in rural areas continues to present these challenges, it will have an adverse impact on the Comhairle and HHP's ability to deliver the Programme.

### **PARTNERSHIP APPROACH AND CONSULTATION**

- 11.1 A partnership approach was once again taken by the Comhairle in the production of the SHIP document. The Comhairle has a close working relationship with HHP (the only mainstream Registered Social Landlord in the Outer Hebrides). This has assisted with the preparation of the SHIP document. The Comhairle and HHP, along with the Scottish Government Inverness More Homes Team, meet on a monthly basis to discuss the affordable housing programme.
- 11.2 The Comhairle's Housing Services Team works closely with the Comhairle's Planning Service in the preparation of the Comhairle's Housing Land Audit and the Local Development Plan, a key Comhairle strategic document. The Housing Land Audit proved to be a useful tool in the development of the SHIP. Local Place Plans, introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 will enable the community themselves, in collaboration with the Comhairle's Planning Service, to identify sites for housing and other community infrastructure.
- 11.3 The Housing Services Team has also worked in partnership with colleagues in Community and Social Services and the Health and Social Care Partnership, particularly in relation to the re-provisioning of Care Homes and HWEC agenda.
- 11.4 The Comhairle and HHP have also had on-going contact with community landowners in respect of land availability and exploring other housing opportunities. There is a commitment from all partners to work closely together to examine housing opportunities that could be developed through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.
- 11.5 The Comhairle also has on-going engagement with local Grazings Committee in the Outer Hebrides as part of the on-going land identification process.

### **ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND REDUCTION OF FUEL POVERTY**

- 12.1 The Outer Hebrides has the highest level of Fuel Poverty in Scotland. The proposed new properties set out in the SHIP will all maximise the opportunities for increasing energy efficiency and reducing Fuel Poverty.

### **WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING**

- 13.1 The Scottish Government issued Guidance to Local Authorities in 2019 on setting targets in the LHS to support the delivery of Wheelchair accessible housing. The Comhairle set a target of 5% of all new Affordable Homes should be built to Wheelchair accessible standard.
- 13.2 The Comhairle's Housing Need and Demand highlighted the potential requirement for additional wheelchair accessible housing due to the changing demographics of the area.
- 13.3 The proposals in the SHIP for 10 HWEC units in Castlebay, Barra and the recent development of 50 HWEC units at Goathill Farm in Stornoway, will help address this demand.

- 13.4 For planning purposes, in addition to the 10 HWEC units in the SHIP, a further 11 units will meet wheelchair accessible standard, giving an anticipated target of 21 units.

## RESOURCES AND INVESTMENT

- 14.1 The total estimated Scottish Government investment requirement for the period of the SHIP is £16.1m. At the time of preparing this SHIP, the Scottish Government is not in a position to set long term Resource Planning Assumptions. This information will be provided as the SHIP progresses.

**Table 1: Investment Summary**

Year	SG RPA
2025/26	£4.080m (est)
2026/27	£3.07m (est)
2027/28	£ 6.3m (est)
2028/29	£2.60m(est)
2029/30	tbc
<b>Total</b>	<b>£16.1m</b>

- 14.2 In terms of the Comhairle’s contribution towards the affordable housing programme, £10K per annum of Additional Council Tax Income from Second Homes (ACTISH) funding is committed towards the cost of Feasibility Studies.
- 14.3 The Comhairle has also in the past made available surplus assets (such as old schoolhouses and unused land) in order to support the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and it is the intention to continue this support when suitable assets become available.
- 14.4 As there are no speculative builders operating in the Outer Hebrides, there are no contributions (land or commuted sums) toward the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

## EQUALITIES

- 15.1 The Comhairle has a statutory obligation through the Equalities Act 2010 and other legislation to advance equality of opportunity and ensure that all its functions and activities are fair and non-discriminatory and carried out in terms of the Act.
- 15.2 The Comhairle has developed new Equality Outcomes which are intended to assist in meeting the general equality duty. In relation to Housing the strategic outcome is to achieve **“Support independent living and initiatives which encourage people to continue living within the Western Isles.”** This will specifically benefit the protected characteristics of Age, Disability, Maternity/ Pregnancy and facilitate meeting the public sector equality duty to eliminate discrimination and advance opportunity.



- 15.3 The Comhairle and local partners will endeavour to achieve equality in service provision by acknowledging and adapting to the increasingly diverse and changing needs of our local communities.
- 15.4 The Comhairle will ensure that periodic reviews of the LHS and SHIP include a monitoring of any national housing related equality developments and that any assessed required changes are implemented.
- 15.5 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was carried out on the LHS to ensure that the objectives and associated actions (such as the SHIP) fulfil statutory duties and are in line with the Comhairle's Equality Policy.

#### **SUMMARY**

- 16.1 The Comhairle's draft SHIP identifies the need for an estimated £16.1m of Affordable Housing Supply Programme funding over the five-year lifespan of the SHIP (2024/25-2028/29). This would provide 243 new affordable housing units, of which 200 would be affordable housing for rent and 43 for Low-Cost Home Ownership.

**Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar - Strategic Housing Investment Plan 2025/2026 to 2029/2030**

Project name	Area	Programme	Client	Tenure				YR OF PROJECT COMPLETION (TO BE INCLUDED IN SHIP)					Estimated grant draw down from RPA (£Ms)						
				Social Rent	MMR	LCHO	Total Project Units	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30		
Stornoway, Blackwater	Lewis	AHSP	HHP	72			72	72											
Leverburgh	Harris	AHSP	HHP	12			12	12						0.900					
Rubha Bhuailt	South Uist	IHF	TIG			10	10	10											
Grimsay	North Uist	AHSP	HHP	8			8	8						1.180					
Barra, Cleit Road ph2	Barra	AHSP	HHP	6			6	6						1.100					
Winfield Way	Benbecula	RAKWF	TIG	5			5	5											
Open market purchases		RAKWF	TIG	4			4	4											
OTS - Stornoway	Lewis	IHF	TIG	1			1	1											
OTS - Bayhead , N Uist	North Uist	IHF	TIG	1			1	1											
OTS - Stornoway	Lewis	IHF	TIG	1			1	1											
Stornoway, Airport site ph1 - PSR	Lewis	AHSP	PD			16	16		16					0.900	0.380				
Stornoway, Airport site ph1	Lewis	IHF	TIG			6	6		6										
Gravir, South Lochs	Lewis	AHSP	HHP	4			4		4						0.600				
Bernera, Breacleite Glebe	Lewis	AHSP	HHP	4			4		4						0.600				
Miavaig	Harris	IHF	Community	2			2		2										
Tarbert, Scott Road	South Uist	AHSP	HHP	12			12			12					0.200	1.950			
Leanish - PSR	Barra	AHSP	PD			7	7			7					0.490				
Daliburgh, CoS site	South Uist	IHF	TIG	6			6			6									
Iochdar	South Uist	AHSP	HHP	6			6			6									
Cross Skigersta Road	Lewis	AHSP	HHP	4			4			4								0.600	
Balivanich, Low Flyer	Harris	AHSP	HHP	4			4			4						0.600			
Galson Trust	Lewis	IHF	Community	4			4			4									
Stornoway, Melbost	Lewis	AHSP	HHP	20		4	24				24				0.800	2.100			
Point	Lewis	AHSP	HHP	8			8				8					1.200			
Tarbert, Scott Road ph2	Harris	AHSP	HHP	14			14				14					0.500	2.000		
Carinish, CofS	North Uist	IHF	TIG	2			2		2										
							0												
							0												
							0												
			<b>Sub-totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4.080</b>	<b>3.070</b>	<b>6.350</b>	<b>2.600</b>	<b>0.000</b>		

