

# Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar



**Building Standards Verification Service**

**Annual Performance Report**

**2023-2024 Q1**

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Annual Performance Report

The annual performance report is a strategic planning and management tool that provides information about the local authority building standards service, communicates the vision and strategy of the organisation and sets out performance against strategic goals and targets.

Building standards verifiers in Scotland are required to utilise the performance report as a means to manage, monitor, review and develop strategies for their business, and should focus on the performance framework's core perspectives and cross-cutting themes.

### 1.2. Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar geographic area by population & geographical size

#### 1.2.1. *Geography*

The Outer Hebrides chain runs roughly north to south and has an area of approximately 306,916 ha (289,798 ha excluding freshwater and inter-tidal areas) and an extensive coastline of approximately 2,700 km at the high-water mark (the result of numerous sea lochs, bays and inlets). The islands extend 210 km in length and are 60 km at the widest point. There are over 70 named islands spread throughout the chain, most of which have been temporarily or permanently inhabited in the past. 11 islands are now inhabited: Vatersay (953 ha); Barra (6,173 ha); Eriskay (754 ha); South Uist (32,094 ha); Benbecula (8,498 ha); Grimsay (1,146 ha); North Uist (35,479 ha); Berneray (1,056 ha); Scalpay (702 ha); Lewis and Harris (217,820 ha); and Great Bernera (2,240 ha).

The largest island in the Outer Hebrides is 'Lewis and Harris'. Although considered separate, as if they were two distinct islands, they are in fact connected. Northern Lewis and the southern Island chain (comprising the Uists, Benbecula and Barra) are relatively flat, covered by lochs, peat bog and machair. However, the central landmass of North Harris and South Lewis provides relief in the landscape with the majority of the higher land. The Clisham in the North Harris hills is the highest peak at 799 metres.

See map on next page.

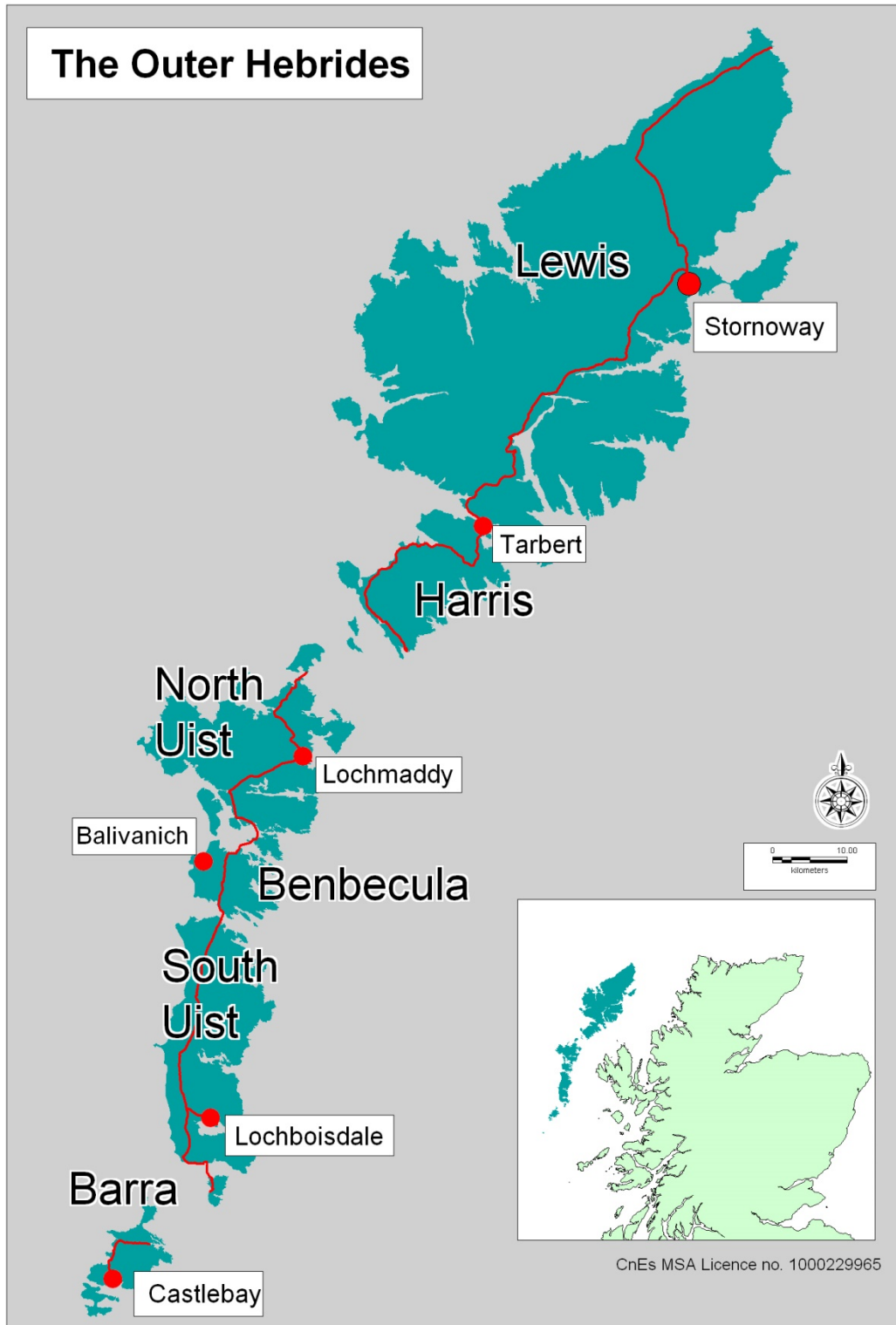
#### 1.2.2. *Population*

The 2011 Census estimated the population of the Outer Hebrides to be 27,684. Lewis, the largest of the Islands was the most populous with around 19,658 residents, while the other five main island areas (Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist and Barra) each had populations ranging from 1,264 to 1,916. The only large 'town' in the Outer Hebrides which can be described as having 'urban' characteristics is Stornoway, with approximately 6,273 residents. Almost 29% of the total population, nearly 8,000 people, live within the Greater Stornoway area encompassing Laxdale, Sandwick and Newmarket. The remaining population is scattered over 280 small townships spread throughout 14 inhabited islands. The mid 2018 population estimates show the population of the Outer Hebrides has decreased to 26,830, a decrease of 854 since the 2011 Census.

#### 1.2.3. *Employment*

The 2011 Census showed that of the 7,051 males aged 16 to 74 in employment 34% are employed in the 'skilled trades occupations', while 3% are employed in 'caring, leisure and other services occupations' and 3% are employed in 'administrative and secretarial occupations'. The majority of men, 21%, the highest in Scotland, are employed in the Construction industries

Of the 6,312 females aged 16 to 74 in employment 22% are employed in 'Caring, leisure and other service occupations' while 1% are employed in 'Process, plant and machine operatives'. The majority of women, 32%, the highest percentage in Scotland, are employed in the 'human health and social work activities industries',

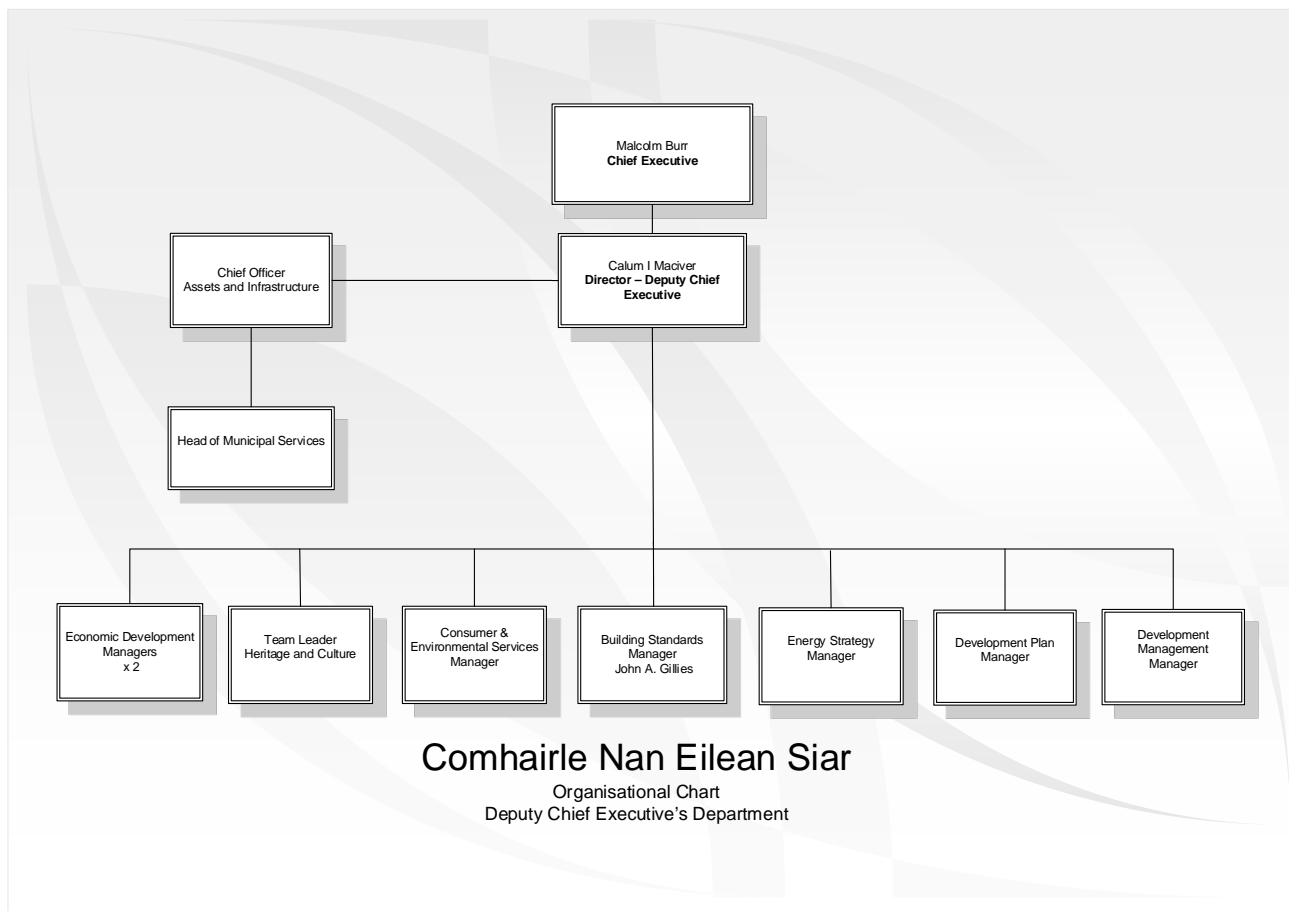


### 1.3. Building Standards Services

The Building Standards team is responsible for determining Building Warrants and Certificates of Completion; ensuring the making safe or removal of dangerous buildings; providing a Building Standards advisory service to customers; supporting the Comhairle's Private Sector Housing Scheme of Assistance and, promoting improvements to sustainable building techniques and access for the disabled.

The Building standards service is also consulted on the suitability of premises and venues before licenses are granted under the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005.

### 1.4. Organisational chart



## Building Standards Verification Service Information

### 1.5. Public Interest Statement

The purpose of the building standards system is to protect the public interest. The system sets out the essential standards that are required to be met when building work or conversion of a building takes place in order to meet building regulations.

The building standards system checks that proposed building work or conversion of a building meets standards; inspections are limited to a minimal necessary to ensure that legislation is not avoided. The control of work on site is not down to the system but is a matter for contracts and arrangements in place between a builder and client.

Verifiers, appointed by Scottish Ministers are responsible for the independent checking of applications for building warrants to construct or demolish buildings, to provide services, fittings or equipment in buildings, or for conversions.

### 1.6. Verification Services Delivered

Building Standards Officers scrutinise building warrant applications plans for proposed development to ensure compliance with current Building Regulations. Site inspections may be carried out during the construction process and at completion, when, if the building complies with the regulations and the Completion Certificate is accepted by the Verifier.

### 1.7. Location of Offices

Most of the Building Standards Staff are located in the main Council Offices in Stornoway. One Building Standards Officer and one Building Standards Assistant are located in the Council Offices in Balivanich in the Southern Isles.

Snapshot of Staffing Position – April 2023

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
<b>Head of Building Standards Verification Service</b>				1 FTE

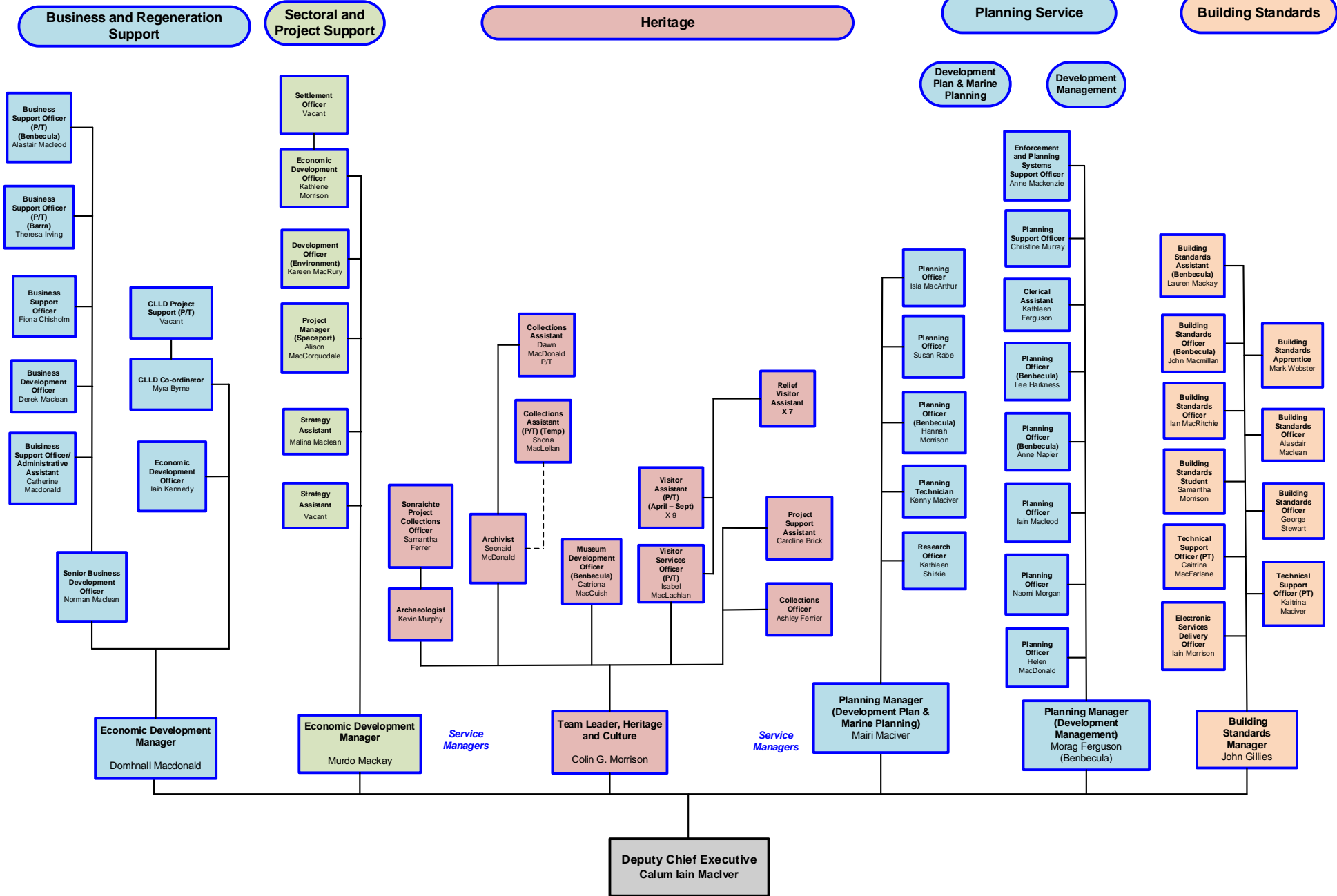
Note: Tier 1 = Chief Executive; Tier 2 = Directors; Tier 3 = Heads of Service; Tier 4 = Managers.

<b>Number of Posts - Breakdown</b>			<b>Staff age profile</b>	<b>Number</b>
Managers	No. posts (Vacant)	1 (0)	Under 30	1
Main grade posts	No. posts (Vacant)	5 (1)	30-39	1
Technicians	No. posts (Vacant)	1 (0)	40-49	0
Modern Apprentice	No. posts (Vacant)	1 (0)	Over 50	9
Office Support	No. posts (Vacant)	3 (0)		

### 1.8. Economic Development & Planning Organisational Chart

An organisational chart showing the staff employed by each of the six sections, including building standards, of the Economic Development & Planning section is shown on the next page.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING – JUNE 2023





## **2. Strategic Objectives**

### **2.1. Strategic Objectives at Corporate level**

The Comhairle's strategic objectives are focused on supporting the local communities to thrive and prosper and to ensure that we provide quality services to enable delivery of top priorities. The five-year plan sets out the approach the Comhairle is taking to ensure all services and activities work together to deliver on the Comhairle's ambitions to ensure this is the best place to live, work and learn.

These priorities are to:

- Strengthen the local economy
- Support children, families and young people
- Support resilient communities and quality of life
- Be a sustainable and inclusive Council

### **2.2. The Overarching goal/vision of the service**

The service areas from the former Department for Communities have recently been integrated into the Chief Executive's Department, following a recent restructuring of the Comhairle. With a focus on the regeneration and on-going development of the economy and communities of the Outer Hebrides, these Business Units work together with the existing sections of the Chief Executive's department to support business, community organisations and the wider community to achieve their development objectives in a sustainable manner. The department has an important role in leading on key priorities and initiatives on behalf of the Comhairle.

### **2.3. Departmental issues to be addressed in the coming year**

Over the coming year the Building Standards section will be seeking to work effectively, along with the wider Comhairle Services, to support business, community organisations and the wider community. Building Standards will particularly be focused on assisting stakeholders and customers to pursue their development objectives in a safe, sustainable, and energy efficient manner.

### **2.4. Key strategic objectives for Building Standards over the coming year**

As we look forward into the coming financial year the building standards team will seek to set clear objectives as part of the process of supporting the local community, both for the local construction industry and the individuals and businesses forming the broader economy.

These objectives will focus on the following:

1. Continuing to provide a high-quality customer focused service to assist with recovery of local development both in the public and private sectors.
2. Focusing on new technology to achieve increased efficiency of resources, improved response to remote customers and resilience in service delivery, despite unforeseen disruptive events arising at national or local level, as was experienced in the past two years.

In addition, over the coming year, the Building Standards section will continue to pursue the following objectives and targets, in line with the national agreed KPOs 1-7 as set out in the table in Section 4 of this document: "Key Performance Outcomes and Targets".

### 3. Key Performance Outcomes and Targets

The national verification performance framework is based on three core perspectives:

- Professional Expertise and Technical Processes;
- Quality Customer Experience; and
- Operational and Financial Efficiency.

There are also three cross-cutting themes, comprising:

- Public interest;
- Continuous improvement, and;
- Partnership working.

#### Summary of Key Performance Outcomes (KPOs)

##### Professional Expertise and Technical Processes

**KPO1** - Minimise time taken to issue a first report or issue a building warrant or amendment to building warrant.

**KPO2** - Increase quality of compliance assessment during the construction processes

##### Quality Customer Experience

**KPO3** - Commit to the building standards customer charter

**KPO4** - Understand and respond to the customer experience

##### Operational and Financial Efficiency

**KPO5** - Maintain financial governance

**KPO6** - Commit to eBuilding Standards

**KPO7** - Commit to objectives outlined in the annual verification performance report

## Summary of Key Performance Targets

<b>KPO1 Targets</b>
1.1 95% of first reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).
1.2 90% of building warrants and amendments issued within 10 days from receipt of all satisfactory information – all building warrants and amendments (not including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).
<b>KOP2 Targets</b>
2.1 Targets to be developed as part of future review of KPO2.
<b>KPO3 Targets</b>
3.1 National customer charter is published prominently on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least quarterly).
3.2 95% of BSD requests for information on a BSD 'Verifier Performance Reporting Service for Customers' case responded to by verifier within 5 days.
<b>KPO4 Targets</b>
4.1 Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10.
<b>KPO5 Targets</b>
5.1 Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).
<b>KPO6 Targets</b>
6.1 Details of eBuilding Standards to be published prominently on the verifier's website.
6.2 75% of each key building warrant related process being done electronically <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan checking</li> <li>• Building warrant or amendments (and plans) being issued</li> <li>• Verification during construction</li> <li>• Completion certificates being accepted</li> </ul>
<b>KPO7 Targets</b>
7.1 Annual performance report published prominently on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).
7.2 Annual performance report to include performance data in line with KPOs and associated targets (annually covering previous year).

## 4. Professional Expertise and Technical Processes

### 4.1. Professional Expertise and Technical Processes

#### 4.1.1. *Protocols for dealing with work*

The Staff Handbook which is available to staff in a hard copy and also online through the Comhairle internal network, contains the following protocols for dealing with different aspects of the verification role:

1. Receipt and processing of Warrants – Protocol
2. Warrant application fast track procedure
3. Protocol for extension of period of validity
4. Late submission of completion protocol
5. Risk Protocol for plan Assessment
6. Risk Protocol for site inspection
7. Procedure for non-certified electrical work
8. Procedure for dealing with non-certified structural work.

#### 4.1.2. *Performance Management Systems*

To enable the Comhairle to monitor and report its performance it has adopted 'Interplan' by CAM management solutions, as it's electronic performance management system.

An electronic performance management software application, Interplan, has been used to track the progress of the Comhairle service business plans and to report on progress made.

Because it provides a real time integrated business planning and performance monitoring system within the Comhairle it facilitates more frequent and flexible reporting and a commitment has been made to provide quarterly reporting of business plans and performance.

#### 4.1.3. *Training and development / CPD*

As part of the Performance Appraisal Process training and development needs are identified. These needs are then recorded and fed into the training programme for the department. The financial resources needed to meet these training needs are then identified and included in the departmental budget for the year.

In regard to CPD requirements the section seeks to ensure that CPD events are organised periodically and that staff have opportunities to gain the CPD that they require.

Through the performance appraisal process performance is monitored on a regular basis to highlight where staff may need further support, coaching or training.

#### 4.1.4. *Benchmarking / Shared services / Partnership work*

The Comhairle Building Standards Service engages in benchmarking with it's Consortium Partners in the Highlands and Islands Consortium. There are also opportunities from time to time to benchmark with other authorities outside this grouping. This occurs most commonly when situations arise where the manager and team feel that it would be wise to ensure a consistency of approach with other verifiers when tackling a specific issue or problem for example, when a non-standard solution is proposed by an applicant.

Benchmarking with other verifiers, when developing protocols and procedures, helps to develop a more standardised approach and ensures that customers who engage with different verifiers from time to time, receive a more consistent experience in the service that they receive.

#### 4.1.5. *Commitment to work together on technical issues*

A commitment to work together on technical issues is vital for all verifiers in Scotland. This will ensure consistency and a more standardised approach. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Building Standard service is committed to working with the other 31 members of LABSS and also through the local consortium group to ensure a common approach is promoted.

#### 4.1.6. *Succession Planning*

In total there are six Building Standards Officer posts. At present one of these posts is vacant but a building standards modern apprentice post has recently been created. This has been on the back of the Building Standards Futures Group initiative to increase training opportunities and encourage new entrants into the profession. This should help in future years to facilitate succession planning. At present, in addition to the Building Standards Manager, there are two Buildings Standards Officers who are fully qualified members of relevant professional bodies and who have demonstrated sufficient advanced knowledge and experience to progress to the top of the career grade path.

### 4.2. **Quality Customer Experience**

#### 4.2.1. *Customer Communication Strategies*

An effective communications strategy that reflects the needs of the customer is important to ensure that customer service is of high quality and highly rated by the customer.

The Comhairle's 'Customer Service Strategy' sets out all aspects of Customer Service including communication with customers.

The Building Standards service aims to communicate with its customers in a number of ways. The Building Standards webpage provides useful advice and guidance on Building Standards and is regularly updated. A quarterly stakeholder newsletter is produced jointly with Development Management and keeps stakeholders abreast with any developments or changes in Building Standards related issues or when local events or meetings are taking place.

#### 4.2.2. *Customer Charter*

A Customer Charter is available to stakeholders and sets out the minimum standards that we seek to meet in delivering our service. This Charter includes aims, values and commitments which are common to all Building Standards verifiers throughout Scotland and, in addition, the Charter sets out the Comhairle's own local standards in terms of the performance to be expected of its services.

The Customer Charter is available at this link:

[Comhairle nan Eilean Siar - Customer Charter](#)

#### 4.2.3. *Customer Engagement and Feedback*

Ensuring customer satisfaction is an essential part of Building Standards.

Customers are able to provide feedback online through the Building Standards webpages where a link to an online national survey is available. A link to this survey is also being made available through e-mailed communication with customers.

On an annual basis, utilising external consultants, the Scottish Government Building Standards Division contacts building standards customers on a national basis in order to obtain customer data for research purposes.

We will use any information that arises from this process and is passed on to us to identify and make improvements to the service we offer to our customers and enhance the 'customer experience' for them.

#### 4.2.4. *Accessibility of Services*

Building Standards Officers are available to speak to customers during working hours between 9.00am and 5.00pm each week day. Where a customer wishes to speak to a particular officer they should telephone the dedicated Building Standards number, 01851 822692 or the Comhairle's customer service team at 01851 600502 to make an appointment.

Officers are available to discuss any aspects of an application or potential application with customers.

#### 4.2.5. *Verification Performance*

Building Standards verifiers in Scotland are committed to meeting customer expectations and predictability of performance. One area where it is very important to customer expectations is in the time taken to achieve a first technical plan check and provide the associated report to the customer.

Because of the importance of this, a nationally agreed target of 20 days has been set for the majority of building warrant applications. Large and complex developments may need to be individually assessed and a project target agreed with the applicant. This is formally known as a 'customer agreement'.

Where targets for a first report are not met and customers are not happy with the service that is being provided there is an option of reporting the verifier to Building Standards Division (BSD). This is known as 'Verifier Performance Reporting' and each verifier must report on how many cases have been referred to BSD on a quarterly basis in addition to reporting at the year end.

#### 5.2.6 *Dispute Resolution*

There are situations where applicants may have concerns about decisions taken by the Building Standards section on a technical or procedural matter, but it would not be appropriate to register these concerns as a complaint. In these circumstances, in the first instance, the matter can be discussed with and reviewed by the Building Standards Manager who could, if necessary, contact the Building Standards Division to clarify the intent of the guidance and thereby seek to find agreement on a satisfactory way to resolve the issues raised.

If matters cannot be resolved by this means the LABSS Dispute Resolution Process could be invoked, details of which can be found on the LABSS website.

#### 5.2.7 *Recognised External Accreditations*

The Development Department promotes an ethos of openness and continuous improvement. During 2011, Investor in People 'bronze' status was retained through a highly satisfactory mid-term review. At present, the Development Department has no participation in any external accreditation scheme.

### 4.3. **Operational and Financial Efficiency**

#### 4.3.1. *Team Structures (e.g. Area splits/specialist teams)*

The geographical area covered by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is covered (supported) by two area offices, in addition to the headquarters in Stornoway. One officer and a Building Standards Assistant cover the Southern Isles and are based at Balivanich and another officer who covers the north of Lewis is based in Ness. Five officers and administrative and IT support are based at the headquarters in Stornoway.

#### 4.3.2. *Time Recording System*

A time recording system which is based on a Microsoft Access database table has been developed and has been adopted to enable staff to log their time. This supersedes a spreadsheet based system which had been in use for a number of years. This has given greater flexibility both in terms of operation and interrogation of the system.

The system allows monitoring of time spent on different work activities, principally to differentiate between verification and non-verification work. The system also has the facility to record the breakdown between time spent on-site inspections and office based work.

#### *4.3.3. Financial Monitoring/Government*

The Building Standards service finances are monitored on a monthly basis by the service manager. If income or expenditure deviate significantly from the budgeted amount this is reported to the Finance department. The Finance Department officers assist the department and seek to ensure that all departments come in on budget.

Building Warrant fee income is recorded in the CAPS IDOX Uniform IT System. The service manager is able to query the database via a standard set of reports to enable an ongoing monitoring of income.

#### *4.3.4. IT Systems*

The Development Department makes extensive use of IDOX 'Uniform' system software for Building Standards. This will be increasingly the case with the introduction of e-Building Standards in 2016. The 'Building Control' module is utilised to register and process applications and to track income from fees.

IDOX Building Control is a case management and information control solution. It also uses the single IDOX database of textual and spatial property information to create a visual approach to locations.

#### *4.3.5. Internal Communication Strategy*

Team Meetings are held regularly and give the opportunity for the team to raise any issues that have arisen either from a procedural or technical point of view. This helps to ensure a consistent approach to work throughout the team. The team meetings also allow the service Manager and the Head of Service to address the team on corporate or departmental matters.

The Staff Forum allows staff to share views on departmental matters and also provides the staff with a way of inputting into different aspects of departmental policy that may directly or indirectly influence them.

## 5. Service Improvements and Partnership Working

(To be completed at 2023/24 year end)

## 6. Building Standards – Additional Data

Verifiers provide returns to Scottish Government on their verification performance and workload. The performance data relates to the building standards verification performance framework and the workload data relates to the numbers of building warrant applications; completion certificates; fees; costs; certificates (certification, energy performance; sustainability); enforcement cases.

### Additional Data – Quarter 1, 2023-24

Description	Measure	Number in Q1	2023-24 Total
Building warrants and amendments to building warrant	Applications	75	75
Building warrants and amendments to building warrant	Decisions	79	79
Completion certificates	Submissions	127	127
Completion certificates	Decisions	103	103
Certification	Certificates of design submitted	23	23
Certification	Certificates of construction submitted	0	0
Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)	Copy certificates received (domestic)	73	73
Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)	Copy certificates received (non-domestic)	1	1
Statements of Sustainability	Copy certificates received (domestic)	17	17
Statements of Sustainability	Copy certificates received (non-domestic)	1	1
Enforcement	Notices served under sections 25 to 30	0	0
Enforcement	Cases referred to procurator fiscal	0	0
Enforcement	Cases where LA has undertaken work	0	0



## 7. APPENDIX A

### 7.1. Summary of KPO Targets – Previous 4 Quarters

TARGETS	1.1	1.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	6.1	6.2	7.1	7.2
	95% of first reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	90% of building warrants and amendments issued within 10 days from receipt of all satisfactory information – all building warrants and amendments (not including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	National customer charter is published prominently on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least quarterly).	95% of BSD requests for information on a BSD 'Verifier Performance Reporting Service for Customers' case responded to by verifier within 5 days.	Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10	Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).	Details of eBuilding Standards are published prominently on the verifier's website.	75% of each key building warrant related processes being done electronically (Plan checking; BWs and amendments (and plans) issue; Verification during construction; CC acceptance)	Annual performance report published prominently on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).	Annual performance report to include performance data in line with KPOs and associated targets (annually covering previous year e.g. April 2016 – March 2017).
Quarter 4 (2022-23)	98.69%	98.00%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	9.7	89.27%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Quarter 3 (2022-23)	97.61%	92.69%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	8.7	54.17%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Quarter 2 (2022-23)	98.65%	93.33%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	8.7	67.73%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Quarter 1 (2022-23)	100.00%	82.22%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	8.7	123.73%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data