



AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE:

9 MARCH 2022

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END OF TERM ASSESSMENT: POLICY DELIVERY 2018 - 2022

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide an overview of the Comhairle's policy delivery for the 2018 – 2022 period.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 introduced a statutory framework for Best Value for local authorities. The 2004 Best Value guidance was structured around ten Best Value characteristics. The guidance was refreshed in 2020. The Best Value: revised statutory guidance 2020 reconfigures these characteristics into seven themes that better reflect the significantly changed policy and public service delivery landscape within which local authorities now operate. Local authorities must be able to demonstrate a focus on continuous improvement in performance around each of these themes.
- 2.2 The Accounts Commission (the Commission) holds councils and other local government bodies in Scotland to account and helps them improve by reporting to the public on their performance. The Local Government Act 1992 requires the Commission to issue a Direction to local authorities to publish performance information across a broad range of services and to include performance comparisons and benchmarking, and does so in its Statutory Performance Information Direction.
- 2.3 An overview of the Comhairle's policy delivery in terms of its Corporate Strategies and Duty of Best Value forms the main body of the report under the seven Best Value Themes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle notes the policy delivery and progress under each of the Best Value Themes over the period of the Comhairle's current term of office.**

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Appendix: None

Background Papers: Best Value: Revised Statutory Guidance 2020
The Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) Direction 2018

IMPLICATIONS

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

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	As per the Accounts Commission for Scotland's Publication of Information (Standards of Performance) Direction 2018 under section 1(1)(a) of the Local Government Act 1992, Councils have a statutory duty to report their performance to the public. In the Direction, the term 'Best Value' shall be interpreted in accordance with the definition and requirements of Part 1 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. This includes reference to the <u>Best Value: revised statutory guidance 2020</u> and the Best Value themes.
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Local authorities must be able to demonstrate a focus on continuous improvement in performance around each of the seven Best Value Themes that underpin the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy 2017-21.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The **Local Government in Scotland Act 2003** introduced a statutory framework for Best Value for local authorities. The Best Value duties set out in the Act are:
- to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance (while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost); and, in making those arrangements and securing that balance, to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, the equal opportunities requirement and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development
 - to achieve break-even trading accounts, subject to mandatory disclosure
 - to observe proper accounting practices
 - to make arrangements for the reporting to the public of the outcome of the performance of functions.
- 5.2 Best Value guidance has been in place since 2004, identifying the characteristics of Best Value to help local authorities develop arrangements to demonstrate continuous improvement in their performance.
- 5.3 In recognition of the changes since 2004 to the environment in which local authorities deliver services, the guidance was refreshed in 2020 to reflect the current public service landscape in Scotland, with an increasing emphasis on citizens and personalised services, a focus on outcomes, and the need for innovation in designing public services for the future. The Best Value: revised statutory guidance 2020 was published 4 March 2020 and is framed around seven Best Value themes.
- 5.4 Local authorities must be able to demonstrate a focus on continuous improvement in performance around each of the best value themes listed below:

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|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Vision and leadership | 5. Working with communities |
| 2. Governance and accountability | 6. Sustainability |
| 3. Effective use of resources | 7. Fairness and equality |
| 4. Partnerships and collaborative working | |

5.5 A key objective of the approach to auditing Best Value is to allow the Accounts Commission to provide regular assurance to the public about how councils are performing in relation to their Best Value statutory duties. It is intended that this will be achieved by the Controller of Audit submitting a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) on each council at least once during the five-year audit appointment and by Best Value being reported in annual audit reports.

5.6 The BVAR report for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar was planned for 2021. However, the BVAR programme has been delayed due to Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The BVAR is now underway with reporting scheduled for September 2022.

DUTY OF BEST VALUE

6.1 The duty of Best Value lies with the Comhairle as a whole, and so it is equally important that both Members and officers fulfil their responsibilities to seek continuous improvement in the policy delivery and efficiency of the Comhairle for the good of its communities. Good political leadership exercised alongside effective implementation and support by officers help the Comhairle to set an effective and agreed Strategy and to make the necessary strategic decisions about how and where it needs to improve.

6.2 Sustainability (Theme 6) and Fairness and Equality (Theme 7) are cross-cutting themes that should be integral to all of the functions and activities carried out by a local authority to deliver good outcomes and achieve Best Value. An overview of the Comhairle's achievements under its Duty of Best Value 2018-2022 is provided in sections 7 – 13 below under the seven Best Value Themes.

1. Vision and Leadership

7.1 Effective political and managerial leadership is central to delivering Best Value, through setting clear priorities and working effectively in partnership to achieve improved outcomes. Leaders should demonstrate behaviours and working relationships that foster a culture of cooperation, and a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation.

Transformational Change

7.2 Since 2010 the Comhairle has realised over half of the £35m of savings it has had to find through efficiencies. In 2017/18, the Comhairle examined options to redesign services over the current five year term to ensure delivery of as many of its desired outcomes as possible, with continually reducing resources.

7.3 The Transformational Change Strategic Plan provided the strategies, templates, policies and guidelines required to support the transformation change process. The plan was split across the following six areas:

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| 1. Transformational Change Plans and Timescales | 4. Work and Wellbeing |
| 2. Workforce Demographics | 5. Communication and Consultation |
| 3. Management Processes | 6. Internal Audit |

7.4 In 2017, Heads of Department were required to draw up outline plans for presentation to the Budget Board and, in the first instance, indicate the areas in which they think savings might be realised by changing the way services are delivered, either within departments or across the Comhairle.

- 7.5 All service redesign projects were overseen by the Service Change and Improvement Sub-Committee, and later by the Budget Board, and the Corporate Management Team (CMT). Key actions and milestones in relation to the Service Redesign Programme were developed by the CMT leading to the identification and agreement of preferred options, together with approval by the Comhairle in October [2018](#).
- 7.6 From 2018/19 to 2020/21, budget savings of £4.1m were realised across Comhairle service areas, with the redesign of the Lewis and Harris bus service, a good example of how, through the interaction of the Budget Board with local contractors, service options and efficiencies were identified and implemented during the tendering process. Progress in some other areas was slower than desired, mainly due to unforeseen delays in implementing changes, such as in waste collection, and the introduction of harmonised timetables in schools. However, these areas continue to be considered and are included within the Business Plan savings being taken forward over the period 2021/22 to 2022/23, which overlapped with the final year of the redesign process. The implementation of these plans was impacted by the Covid Pandemic, but despite this, £1.5m of savings were achieved in the first year, with a further £1.4m planned for 2022/23.
- 7.7 During the term of this council, the education service has developed innovative and forward-thinking approaches to school leadership models with the introduction of Executive Headteachers and Heads of School across our primary estate. These strategic leadership innovations are equipping the service to be strong, adaptable and resilient as significant changes in national policy for the delivery of education evolve into the future. The new model provides robust and co-ordinated focus on key elements of quality improvement, raising attainment and delivery of better outcomes for learners and this is being done in a climate of strong collaboration between schools and learning communities.

Corporate Strategy

- 7.8 The Comhairle determines its strategic priorities in the wider context of the public sector financial environment, Community Planning, Community Empowerment, Health and Social Care integration, the Growth Deal for the Islands and the Islands (Scotland) Act. Its Corporate Strategy has been undertaken in parallel with the development of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) 2017-27.
- 7.9 The Comhairle's Corporate Strategy sets the strategic direction of the Comhairle in each council term. The [Corporate Strategy 2017-21](#) was approved December 2017 and refreshed in 2020 to update the priorities and strategic direction of the Comhairle taking account of the need to ensure recovery and renewal post Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The sections on Financial Strategy, Brexit and Health and Social Care were all updated and progress with implementation of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2020 was reflected and Local Democracy and Community Empowerment remain key priorities of the Comhairle. The [Corporate Strategy 2020-2022: Recovery and Renewal](#) was agreed in August 2020.
- 7.10 A new Corporate Strategy was approved September 2021 and takes account of the effects of the pandemic and of other external factors such as Brexit, but emphasises the importance of the next five years being not solely defined by current volatile external factors and considers national priorities and local needs. The [Corporate Strategy 2022-27](#) seeks to provide a clear strategic direction potentially for the next five years of the Comhairle, dependent on the policy aspirations and views of the Members elected in May 2022. To ensure continuous improvement, the new Strategy includes a set of outcome measures which will be used to report progress annually to the Comhairle.
- 7.11 The Comhairle's Corporate Strategy takes account of national priorities and local needs. As such their Service Business Plans are aligned to the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNSDGs) through the Corporate Strategy, the [LOIP](#) and [Scotland's National Performance Framework](#). This is often referred to as the 'golden thread'.

Budget Strategy

- 7.12 The Comhairle's forward budget projections 2017 anticipated that savings in the region of £12m could be required over the two year period 2018-20 or up to £20m by 2022/23, as there was considerable uncertainty about future Scottish Government funding for Councils with the likelihood of further reductions in resources offset by ring-fenced funding for new initiatives.
- 7.13 Medium to long term financial planning remains extremely challenging, given Scottish Government's continuation of the practice of one year budgeting, together with ongoing real terms reductions in the Comhairle's revenue budgets. For example, the 2022/23 settlement saw the Comhairle, along with Orkney and Shetland Islands Councils being one of only three local authorities in Scotland to receive a real term revenue budget reduction. The capital settlement was also extremely disappointing. The Comhairle's medium-term dependence on the Floor mechanism to ensure even these levels of funding bolsters the case for both islands-proofing of the Settlement and other Scottish Government budgets, as well as the need for a review of the entire funding formula for Local Government. Fiscal empowerment is one of the main strands of COSLA's blueprint, which follows very much the Comhairle's case for integration of public services, and its contribution to the Review of Local Governance. It has to be noted that ways open to other Councils to manage variations in revenue and capital budgets, such as outsourcing of services, centralisation of service points or further integration of public services are curtailed either by the lack of an external market, or by other organisations' constraints. The Comhairle will find it increasingly difficult to find funding to bridge future gaps in revenue funding particularly without a noticeably detrimental effect on either or both the public services which the Comhairle provides and on which our population relies, or the numbers and capacity of our employees not just to provide statutory services but to provide the community leadership which the Western Isles population expects of its Comhairle.

Apprenticeship Strategy

- 7.14 The Comhairle's apprenticeship strategy is not only a strategy for Comhairle apprenticeships; it is a strategy that aims to support the development of skills and therefore apprenticeships across the public and private sector in the Outer Hebrides. It seeks to go beyond the accredited training schemes funded by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and embraces the principles set out by the Scottish Government's strategy, Developing the Young Workforce.
- 7.15 The Comhairle developed a number of apprenticeship programmes as an investment in an effort to "grow our own talent". The programmes were designed to create a career path to retain talent. The post graduate diploma in education programme is a separate strand of apprenticeship and aims to fill posts in difficult to recruit subjects.
- 7.16 During the period 2015/16 – 2020/21, the number of apprenticeships available across the Western Isles increased from 16 per annum to 53, and as the number of employability schemes developed by both the UK and Scottish Government has increased, so has the number of places available, increasing from 46 in 2015/16 to over 200 in 2020/21. There has also been the successful development of the Foundation Apprenticeship programme which began in 2019/20 with 56 places and in 2020/21 there were 72 places on offer.
- 7.17 Over the last five years, the Education, Skills and Children's Services Department has had a strong focus on achieving the best possible post-school destinations for our young people, the ultimate outcome measure of our education system. This has been in the context of recognition that provision of strong and diverse post-school options, especially linked to local training and employability, are critical to population retention and strengthening of the local economy. Throughout this period, the Comhairle has maintained some of the highest positive post-school destination rates in Scotland with 98% of school leavers being in a positive post-school destination. Significantly for the Western Isles, our percentage of leavers going into employment is significantly higher than on the rest of Scotland, with up to 41% going into post-school employment / work-based training against a national average of 23%.

This indicates that a greater number of our young people are staying in our islands, training and working locally and contributing to the economy.

- 7.18 The Comhairle and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have formalised a framework to work together and invest in supporting a thriving education, learning and skills sector in the Western Isles. This joint [Charter Agreement](#) demonstrates a commitment to jointly develop, deliver and monitor services to ensure they meet the needs of our islands' communities, in the spirit of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, and its commitment to a National Islands Plan. This includes the support of young people, schools, adults and the business sector to ensure that businesses have access to the right apprentices with the right skills for their sector and that apprentices have the best possible experience and access to qualifications when undertaking an apprenticeship.

Gaelic Language Plan

- 7.19 The Comhairle continues to work closely with national Gaelic development agency, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in delivering the Comhairle's Gaelic Language Plan. This ensures that key strategic priorities in terms of Gaelic development in the communities of the Isles remain on-track, that outcomes are achieved, and that continuous improvement is attained. These three strategic priorities are: to strengthen Gaelic as a language in the family in the Western Isles; to strengthen Gaelic as a community language in the Western Isles; and to increase the number of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles.
- 7.20 The Comhairle will prepare its fourth Gaelic Plan this year, after thoroughly scrutinising the outcomes of the previous Plan for 2019-2022. Bòrd na Gàidhlig funding is also used to support community initiatives which assist in the delivery of the Plan, in terms of the Gaelic Language Act Implementation Fund (GLAIF). This funding has become vital in terms of delivering, for example, a range of Gaelic classes using different methodologies across the Isles for adult learners, tailored to suit the individual learner, whether face-to-face or online. The total funding received in terms of GLAIF for all projects from 2018/19-2021/22 is £452,617. This includes £138,950 of this year's funding (2021/22) that is subject to change depending on projects achieving their targets or desired outcomes, some projects not requiring their 2nd instalment of funding or projects that may not come to fruition, etc.

Gaelic Medium Education

- 7.21 The Comhairle has developed policies, procedures and support for parents and pupils with the aim of increasing uptake and growth in Gaelic Medium Education (GME). This has been most significantly evidenced in the adoption of our 'Gaelic First' policy that presumes all enrolment will be into GME. Over the five-year period, GME enrolment has grown from 46% in 2017 to a projected 59% in 2022. This growth has been supported by strategies focusing on initial language acquisition, GME curriculum, staff recruitment and development and support of additional learning needs in Gaelic. Positive growth in GME has also been supported through provision of more Gaelic nursery capacity as part of Early Years expansion.

Communication and Consultation

- 7.22 The Comhairle's Transformational Change Strategic Plan focused on community engagement and consultation and the Comhairle approved a new Community Engagement and Participation Strategy in December 2020. All communities affected by change have an opportunity to express their views and have them considered by the Comhairle as it enters each phase of budget restraints including, where required, the transformation of services.
- 7.23 [Community Councils'](#) are set up by statute by the Local Authority and run by local residents to act on behalf of its area. As the most local tier of elected representation, Community Councils play an important role in local democracy. The Comhairle supports Community Councils through a variety of ways. Community councils are kept informed (by e-mail) of all information supplied by the Improvement Service, Police Scotland, the Comhairle (generally press releases) and various other bodies who request that the information is circulated to all community councils. Community Councils are consultees in areas such as planning, Comhairle consultations including Corporate Strategy etc.

- 7.24 The Comhairle has encouraged the formation of Area Forums or their equivalent, following its successful approach to consultation on budget and other strategies, which was centred around bringing together all organisations and individuals within natural communities to give a view on budget and other strategic issues. The Barra and Vatersay Area Forum is up and running, although its activities have been inevitably constrained by the COVID pandemic, and there is clearly expressed wish in South Uist and Eriskay to take forward an Area Forum. The Comhairle will continue to support these initiatives wherever these are wanted, supported by modest but effective funding to ensure that such Forums are not dependent on voluntary effort alone, as part of our strategy of community empowerment and, where it is wanted, community governance.
- 7.25 The Comhairle has assisted Community Councils to establish Associations covering Lewis and Uist/Barra (Harris Community Councils are part of the Harris Forum) in order to encourage information sharing, joint lobbying etc. The Comhairle also pays for insurance cover for Community Councils. The Comhairle audit Community Council accounts on an annual basis and issue an annual grant of £1000 per Community Council for administrative costs. Community Councils can also apply for challenge funding with the current amount of funding available totalling circa £20K per annum.
- 7.26 The Comhairle's strategic priorities have been developed in partnership with its citizens, employees, key partners and other stakeholders and in parallel with the development of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership's LOIP 2017-27. The Comhairle is one of the five "lead" partners of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP), together with NHS Western Isles, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The OHCPP consists of key local, regional and national public agencies as well as local third sector and community representation. The Comhairle is the only partner providing financial resource to the CPP through 1.5FTE.
- 7.27 The OHCPP undertook an extensive public consultation throughout the islands early in 2017. Community Engagement and analysis through the 'How Good Is Our Place' survey enabled residents in the Islands to identify their priorities and ways in which improvements could be delivered for the next ten to twenty years. In response to this Community Engagement, the OHCPP identified a small number of priorities which focus on tackling these issues going forward and they are presented in the LOIP, which replaced the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA).
- 7.28 In May 2017, the Comhairle undertook a public consultation on what would make Stornoway a better place to Visit, Live, Work, Study and Invest. A Stornoway Masterplan is being developed which aims to develop a clear vision for the physical development of Stornoway, and sets out proposals to address the key strategic challenges and opportunities facing the town. This has been identifying small, medium and large level strategies to improve the local environment and infrastructure for residents and visitors.
- 7.29 In light of the wider LOIP context and as part of the development of the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy 2017-21, the Comhairle facilitated a Members' Seminar in June 2017. Based on the outcomes of that seminar, the Comhairle prepared a draft Corporate Strategy which it issued as a consultation document to the Public, Press, Community Planning Partners, Community Councils and Locality Planning Groups in October 2017. The consultation yielded 7 responses, none of which were from the public. Respondents included HHP; NHS Western Isles; Uist Locality Planning; Historic Scotland; Harris and South Lochs Councillors; and the Comhairle's elected Members from the SNP Group. An analysis of the responses was outlined in the Report presented to the Comhairle's Policy and Resources Committee in December 2017.
- 7.30 A framework consultation paper on the Comhairle's future strategic priorities over the next term was developed for public consultation and made available to the public via the Comhairle's 'Have Your Say' web pages. It was also circulated to the Community Planning Partners and the Community Councils.

We asked for your views on the Comhairle's Draft Corporate Strategy for the period 2022 – 2027. There were six responses to the [consultation](#): two from individuals and four from organisations. The feedback has been constructive and wherever possible suggestions and further narrative has been included within the draft Corporate Strategy that was presented to the Policy and Resources Committee and approved by Comhairle 29 September 2021.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

7.31 The national 'lockdown' was imposed on 23 March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support to communities

7.32 The Comhairle was quick to respond to the pandemic with the local, multi-agency Care for people Group leading the development of its local solution for a Shielding Centre. The initial focus was to develop a local solution for registering volunteers and community organisations. The voluntary sector was approached to undertake this work but was unsure it had the capacity locally.

7.33 The Comhairle set up a volunteer registration scheme on 27 March 2020 with a helpline and online registration form. Volunteer guidance and registration forms were developed and placed on the Comhairle's website. This pulled together advice from Environmental Health and Trading Standards, Social Work guidance on Child and Adult Protection and guidance from our NHS Public Health colleagues. The Comhairle sent out press releases and updates on social media to promote both the volunteer registration and the helpline. The helpline and online registration scheme went live on 30 March 2020. By 31 March 2020 there were 136 local groups and individuals registered and almost 20 requests for assistance - largely support with shopping and medication.

7.34 The Health and Social Care service, who are responsible for ensuring support of Shielded individuals in the community, undertook the matching of volunteer and helpline information. The Comhairle worked (and continues to work) with NHS analysts to identify vulnerability gaps. This collaboration ensures that the centre has been both a shielding centre and a resilience hub to support anyone in the community who is vulnerable. This system has robust data protection in place and seeks permission before passing information on to volunteers.

7.35 The Comhairle's Resilience Team worked with local supermarkets to ensure that there was capacity and priority to get shopping for those calling the helpline and in priority need. The establishment of the Shielding Centre, co-ordinated from Stornoway but servicing the Western Isles, has provided a model that can be replicated in each of the Islands if required.

7.36 The LEADER team liaised closely with the Scottish Government, and other Scottish Local Action Groups (LAGs), to ensure applicants were provided with appropriate advice & support. The also supported existing LEADER projects with additional Scottish Government COVID Recovery Funding to support their sustainability and capacity to undertake and complete projects.

Support to Vulnerable Children

7.37 Staff in Education Skills and Children's Services worked in partnership to meet the needs of vulnerable children during the COVID-19 lockdown. Hubs, led by school staff, were set up during term time to enable staff to work directly with young people, ensuring the continuity of services to those deemed vulnerable and direct work to avoid family breakdown. The daily contact with staff supported wellbeing and anxiety issues as well as core learning.

7.38 CLD staff led six holiday hubs operating over the summer months, providing activities for the children of Key Workers and Vulnerable Pupils, on a weekly basis from 8.30-3.30. Parents reported that their children enjoyed the summer programme, with the main benefit being that it gave them the opportunity to see friends. Young people participating in the hubs reported increased confidence, feeling happy and include.

- 7.39 Children's services staff worked with multi-agency partners at various levels of the emergency planning process including the Pandemic Resilience Group and Care for People Group. Staff also worked with partners supporting the Psychological Wellbeing Hub and triaging referrals which emerged from this and other help lines.
- 7.40 All nurseries continued to provide a service through the second lockdown to key worker and vulnerable children. The Comhairle worked with Education Scotland, Northern Alliance Colleagues, Island colleagues and e-Sgoil to provide equity and extend the offer in schools. e-Sgoil's Gaelic ASN programme is supporting learners who have suffered language regression as a result of lockdown.
- 7.41 School staff were provided with mobile phones to allow them to remotely contact and keep in touch with vulnerable families. Learning materials (e.g., books, paper, pencils, art material, etc.) were positioned in local areas for families to collect as they needed them. Support and assistance with online learning was provided along with signposting to other support services available during the pandemic. A device lending service was set up to ensure that children in vulnerable families were able to access a computer to support remote learning. Where vulnerable children lived in homes without internet access, routers or 4G connection devices were provided. This significantly increased inclusion and participation in learning from children who were supported with the provision of devices and internet connections.
- 7.42 Appropriate school staff checked in with families on a very regular basis to ensure that any barriers to learning were addressed. In some incidences, children and young people were encouraged to access the hubs if they were struggling with learning at home.
- 7.43 Emergency Free School Meal payments (£11 per week per child) were implemented in March 2020 up to June 2020 and an additional payment for the summer holiday period was made to families who had children P4 – S6 in receipt of Free School Meals. P1 – P3 pupils in receipt of Clothing Grant also received this payment. Emergency EMA payments were made to all pupils in receipt of EMA for the period March 2020 – June 2020. All female pupils P6 – S6 have were issued with a 3 month supply of sanitary products to ensure they had access to these products. Work also took place to set up and allocate 1 to 1 laptops for secondary pupils.

Support to businesses

- 7.44 The economic challenges anticipated during and post-COVID19 will have far reaching consequences for local, national, and international economies over many years. Shortly after a national 'lockdown' was imposed all Local Authorities were required by Scottish Government to deliver the following 13 financial support packages, principally through their Business Gateway (BG) service teams:
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| 1. 'Small Business Support Grant' | 9. 'Small Accommodation Provider (Paying Council Tax) Fund' |
| 2. 'Retail, Hospitality, Leisure Support Grant' | 10. 'Large Self-Catering & Exclusive Use Fund' |
| 3. 'Newly Self-employed Hardship Fund' | 11. 'Local Business Discretionary Fund' |
| 4. 'Bed & Breakfast Hardship Fund' | 12. 'Strategic Framework Business Fund (incorporating the 'Island Equivalent Payment')' |
| 5. 'Contingency Fund (Soft-play)' | 13. Transition Payment & Restart Grant' |
| 6. 'Business Hardship Fund' | |
| 7. 'Contingency Fund Plus (Brewers & Travel Agents)' | |
| 8. 'Taxi & Private Hire Vehicle Fund' | |
- 7.45 In addition, the Comhairle also created its own fund to provide additional financial support to the local business community: 'COVID-19 Local Business Support Scheme' (C-LBSS). As per the BG [Report](#) to the Sustainable Development Committee June 2021, over £20m approved funding for all the schemes listed above was distributed across the Outer Hebrides over the year between April 2020 and April 2021 to:

Lewis	Harris	N. Uist	Benbecula	S. Uist	Barra	Total
£11,923,520	£3,567,659	£1,878,039	£1,116,117	£1,566,796	£973,037	£21,025,168

2. Governance and Accountability

- 8.1 Effective governance and accountability arrangements, with openness and transparency in decision-making, schemes of delegation and effective reporting of performance, are essential for taking informed decisions, effective scrutiny of performance and stewardship of resources.

The Committee System

- 8.2 The [Committee system](#) allows Members to develop a particular interest in an area of the Comhairle's work, formulate and monitor policy at a strategic level, and examine the administration of a Comhairle service. All Committee agendas are made available to the public on the Comhairle's website within the requisite statutory notice period and, from 2021, all agendas and reports are accessible.
- 8.3 All Members have the opportunity to attend Committee's, even if non-members, and question officers. The Chairs Group provides a discussion forum for Chairs and the Chief Executive to discuss corporate policy and to act as a sounding-board for policy matters. The Budget Board is a non-decision making body that has representation from each ward and registered political group in order to consider the detail and implementation of the budget throughout the year.
- 8.4 The Corporate Standards Working Group has promoted the need for Committee Reports to be compliant with accessibility legislation, and a further check is carried out by the Governance and Elections team prior to the agenda being uploaded.
- 8.5 The Constitutional Documents define the decision-making processes of the Comhairle and regulate the structure and control of the Comhairle and its members. A review of constitutional documents takes place towards the end of every Comhairle term and is now complete. The [constitutional documents](#) are made available to the public on the Comhairle's website.
- 8.6 The Comhairle has always taken the view that, in addition to the dedicated work of Audit and Scrutiny Committee, review, monitoring and scrutiny forms part of the role of every Service Committee, and Policy and Resources Committee. Audit and Scrutiny Committee undertakes a specialist function considering all constitutional, ethical standards, health and safety and, naturally, internal audit issues on behalf of the Comhairle, and has always had a very full agenda consisting mostly of Internal Audit Reports and follow up reports, in addition to a small number of investigation reports, with the remainder of the agenda comprising reports on either the constitution, complaints and SPSO matters, or Best Value and related policies or information such as the National Benchmarking Framework. It has been very pleasing to see the generally very high attendance at, and commitment to, Audit and Scrutiny Committee from both Members and Officers.

Internal Audit

- 8.7 Internal Audit promotes best value through undertaking audits of service areas using a risk-based approach and making recommendations including assessments of where value for money can be enhanced.
- 8.8 Since April 2019, Internal audit have issued 61 final reports containing 514 recommendations, 61 follow up reports were issued, and the service has continued to provide a fraud and irregularity investigation service carrying out a number of investigations. Internal Audit have reviewed key areas of governance by carrying out audit reviews including "Reporting Concerns at Work (Whistleblowing)", and "Anti-Fraud, Corruption and Serious Organised Crime arrangements" and making recommendations as to how improvements can be made in these areas.

- 8.9 The opportunity to learn is very important and issuing client satisfaction surveys gives an understanding of what can be improved as part of continuous improvement. The majority of surveys received over this period were positive. With regards to continuous improvement, the section reviews all feedback and learns and develops where appropriate.
- 8.10 In 2020, Internal Audit obtained a “fully compliant” External Quality Assurance Review through an independent analysis of compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and International Practices framework.

Whistleblowing

- 8.11 The Comhairle is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty and accountability and the Reporting Concerns at Work (Whistleblowing) Policy aims to reassure employees that it is safe and acceptable to speak up and to enable employees to raise any concern they may have at an early stage and in the right way. Therefore, any serious concerns about aspects of service provision, or the conduct of officers or members of the Comhairle, or others acting on behalf of the Comhairle, can be reported under this policy.
- 8.12 In line with best practice the Comhairle regularly reviews key policies. A review of the Reporting Concerns at Work (Whistleblowing) Policy was completed and approved in September 2020. A standard application form has been introduced and LearnPro training modules for staff and managers have been created. That has all been with a view to improving awareness and accessibility of the process among staff. The Monitoring Officer now keeps a record of reported concerns and reports annually to Audit and Scrutiny Committee, thereby increasing transparency and accountability.
- 8.13 The revised policy was presented to the Local Government Employee Joint Consultative Committee in June 2020 and the Policy and Resources Committee in September 2020. The Comhairle approved the revised Policy 30 September 2020. This policy will be reviewed every 3 years.

Performance Management

- 8.14 The Accounts Commission has a statutory responsibility to define the performance information that Councils must publish. In turn, Councils have their own responsibility, under their Best Value duty, to report performance to the public. Audit Scotland reviewed arrangements at the Comhairle to meet our responsibilities to report in public and their Management Report in 2019/20 found that these were appropriate. They confirm that these remain unchanged in their Annual Audit Report 2020/21. The Comhairle published its Annual Public Performance Report on its website in March 2021 in accordance with reporting guidelines.
- 8.15 The Comhairle’s Strategic Priorities are supported by robust governance arrangements and underpinned by action plans and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are reported through service business plan (SBPs). SBPs are monitored through the Comhairle’s performance management system (Interplan) and through Directors’ performance monitoring presentations to Service Committees at each series of meetings. It is encouraging to the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service how engaged Members are in performance monitoring, reflected by the number of questions and comments on these items. SBPs are periodically reviewed and progress with the Comhairle’s Corporate Strategy is reported to the public through quarterly SBP Progress Reports published within the Comhairle’s performance web pages and made available in other formats on request.
- 8.16 Delivery of SBPs, as reported in the year-end progress reports, is mixed. Communities; Education, Skills and Children’s Services; and the Chief Executive’s department all saw the number of completed actions and number of KPI's on-track rising in 2020/21. Assets, Finance and Resources’ actions completed reduced from 73% in 2019/20 to 51%. KPIs have, however, remained in line with prior year outcomes. COVID-19 has impacted on the delivery of the SBP, with a large increase in work required to process business support grants, increased demand on the payroll section to process the £500 ‘thank you’

payments to Social care staff and demands placed on the IT section to support home-working for staff. While never being accepted as a reason for poor performance, the ongoing reductions in the Comhairle's employee numbers and capacity inevitably have an influence over time on performance delivery.

- 8.17 The Comhairle established a Best Value Action Planning (BVAP) Team in August 2019 to achieve greater accountability Comhairle-wide around continuous improvement and best value performance reporting. The BVAP Team are selected by Heads of Service and comprises of officers who have an overall or part responsibility for service performance, business planning and continuous improvement. The BVAP Team meet virtually after each committee series to ensure they are informed of what support they may need to provide to services to ensure continuous improvement.
- 8.18 Since procuring Interplan, the main focus has been to embed a performance management culture throughout the Comhairle and to demonstrate the impact of its work on outcomes through the performance management system. Elected Members are encouraged to monitor and scrutinise the Comhairle's performance through Interplan at each committee series. Significant progress has been made since the 2011 Audit of Best Value and Community Planning in developing a culture of performance management and continuous improvement, including the development of a more balanced and transparent performance report to the public by including underperformance and areas of improvement.
- 8.19 The adoption of the Scottish Government's 'We Asked, You Said, We Did' consultation process improved community engagement and, by publishing the outcomes, ensured that participants could see how their contribution was considered.
- 8.20 The Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) is a high-level benchmarking tool designed to support senior management teams and elected members to ask questions about key council services. The Comhairle use the LGBF data to compare their performance against a suite of efficiency, output and outcome indicators that cover all areas of local government activity and to learn from previous performance and from the performance of other local authorities to inform the review and development of strategies and plans to address areas of underperformance. The Comhairle has a responsibility to report on 89 LGBF indicators.
- 8.21 The Comhairle adopted the format of the LGBF metadata forms to introduce a requirement for Responsible Officers to provide a narrative to support any change in performance greater than +/- 10%. This provides an opportunity for services to consider their performance and to understand why there may be underperformance (and test where this could be countered in future years), or it could be used to evidence achievements. This also provides an opportunity for Members and the public to better understand service performance. Without narrative and explanation, performance data can be dry and difficult to understand; this information aims to make it more accessible.
- 8.22 The LGBF data is also used for service prioritisation to support delivery of corporate strategies and targets have been set. Services have been requested to set achievable milestones to assess progress towards meeting targets for these prioritised SPIs and report their progress in the performance update reports to their respective committees.
- 8.23 The Comhairle approved a recommendation to include key improvement outcomes from external audits and internal audit follow-up reviews in a Continuous Improvement Action Plan (CIAP) in December 2016. These are recorded in "Interplan" as Service Business Plan (SBP) actions. The CIAP ensures that audit recommendations not implemented by the time a first follow-up review is completed are still monitored and are only removed from the CIAP once achieved.
- 8.24 Self-assessments have been used to assess progress and to prioritise and direct future improvements. The inclusion of these in the business plans, gives the Members confidence that they are being kept

informed on where progress has been made and where areas of development are outstanding. This also allows Officers the opportunity to explain reasons for outstanding actions. Publishing the self-assessments provides transparency to the public on the findings of self-assessments and where priority actions are being taken. The areas for future development and priority recommendations are also made available to the public in the annual performance report.

- 8.25 To ensure continuous improvement, the priority recommendations, and areas for future development from the themed self-assessments have been added to Interplan and the CIAP from September 2021 and will be presented to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee for challenge and scrutiny bi-annually.

Risk Management

- 8.26 Effective risk management is an essential element of good corporate governance which, in turn, supports effective decision making and ultimately contributes to improved performance. The Comhairle's operational risk management process includes ongoing review of identified risks and consideration of emerging risks. Services are asked to review high risks on a quarterly basis, and lower risks at least annually.
- 8.27 The Strategic Risk Register is aligned to the Corporate Strategy and approved at Committee on an annual basis. The Comhairle's approved Committee Report Template includes a risk implication section to help ensure risk has been considered. Identified Risks are held on the Comhairle's risk management system, cammsrisk, which is linked with performance management. A summary or risk and risk action progress is published on the Comhairle's [website](#) on a quarterly basis, alongside the Service Business Plan Progress Reports. The Risk Management Policy and Strategy are updated every two years.
- 8.28 Revised and streamlined Business Continuity (BC) templates are in place which are fully aligned with the Comhairle's risk processes. The risk management Intranet page is kept up-to-date with templates and guidance, and contains a Business Continuity Management (BCM) pack. This pack should be used to ensure consistent and efficient BCM across the Comhairle. Services are asked to review and update Business Continuity Plans (BCPs). From 2022/23 onwards, BCPs are to accompany business plans and operational risk registers for approval. A corporate BCP has been established for the Comhairle's most critical services. Services are asked to review plans every 6 months, store them on their operational risk management page, and from here the Corporate Plan can be kept up to date.
- 8.29 Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Comhairle has maintained a risk-based approach to ensuring the health and safety of all employees and those affected by our work. In line with updated legislation. COVID risk assessments were implemented across all services and premises to ensure an effective response in dealing with the pandemic, these continue to be reviewed, considering updated guidance and best practice.
- 8.30 COVID Health and Safety Committees were established, in collaboration with union representatives, to support each service in managing risk throughout the pandemic and in preparation for a safe return to work. The ongoing work of the committees ensures that risks are reduced for all employees, regardless of their work situation and that necessary control measures are put in place to protect employees at high risk or more vulnerable members of the local authority.

3. Effective Use of Resources

- 9.1 Making the best use of public resources is at the heart of delivering Best Value. With clear plans and strategies in place, and with sound governance and strong leadership, a local authority will be well placed to ensure that all of its resources are deployed to achieve its strategic priorities, meet the needs of its communities and deliver continuous improvement.

Financial management and planning

- 9.2 The Comhairle's prudent budget strategy and, in particular its planned use of reserves as a part of the budget setting process, has ensured that budget savings have been achieved in a measured fashion, without significant fluctuations from year to year. In the context of one-year financial settlements and diminishing funding, the availability of reserves continues to be an important element of the planning process. Over the period of this Comhairle, the agreed budgets have included the use of £5.5m of reserves, in conjunction with service redesign savings and efficiencies. Inevitably, unplanned events, delays with implementing change etc. has resulted in additional funding requirements during this period and again this has been managed through the management of reserves.
- 9.3 Current indications are that the medium term will continue to be challenging for Local Government finances, with funds targeted at government priorities reducing resources available for other service areas. With high inflation levels, utility price increases and the prospect of reduced funding, 2023/24 is likely to utilise most, if not all, reserves currently available to support the budget.




Asset Management




- 9.4 In the current financial climate, and in dealing with pandemic restrictions, the most effective use of resources is essential. Pre-COVID the Comhairle was exploring different way of utilising accommodation and providing services through a Hub and Satellite model. Utilisation of MS Office 365 was being trialled and investment was already underway in upgrading the Council Chambers and associated technology for improving communications with outlying offices. This forward thinking enabled a relatively quick transition to home and remote working during the pandemic.
- 9.5 The pandemic has enabled significant insight into different ways of providing services, which when reviewed will open up co-location opportunities and improved work practices for the Comhairle and partner organisations. Pre-COVID, co-location was already an established best practice for the Comhairle in that HIE, Social Security Scotland, Police Scotland and Voluntary Sector Groups were co-locating in Comhairle buildings. Throughout the Pandemic Comhairle services and individual employees were focussed on supporting priority activities. This was coordinated through a senior management group who would assess prevailing conditions and guidance ensuring that resources were directed to the most vulnerable groups and services.
- 9.6 The Comhairle's Capital Resources for 2018-2023 were committed by the Comhairle based on asset management principles. Due to the reductions in budgets difficult choices had to be made based on the implications. For example, £2.5m investment for Scalpay bridge was deferred to 2024 in the knowledge that the structural integrity would not fail in the intervening period. Major projects in Health and Education were prioritised for progression with limited amounts being allocated for capital maintenance of the building, roads and marine infrastructure.
- 9.7 Capital investment requirements for 2023-2028 are currently being compiled based on service requirements, asset condition and Government priorities (Net Zero, Levelling Up, Islands Deal, Universal Free School Meals, Road Safety, etc.). Demand will again outstrip financial resource and it will again be important for informed decisions to be made based on priority and the knowledge of implications. Various funding pots are becoming available and it is important that these are accessed to enable maximum investment in local infrastructure and services.
- 9.8 It is not always possible to be prepared with "Shovel Ready" projects however having background data on condition and investment priority worked well for the Comhairle when bidding for funding from the Local Bridge Maintenance Fund, £6.667M was secured towards six structures, including Bernera Bridge, which had a weight restriction imposed following specialist inspection. The funding will also deal with investment requirements at Scalpay bridge alleviating some pressure from competing capital requirements.

- 9.9 Asset Management Plans have been compiled. However, static documents are quickly out of date. To this end dynamic plans have been compiled with service departments that track condition and suitability information on a regular basis. These plans can quickly adapt to service requirements arising from national priorities.
- 9.10 Scottish Government has made commitments to Early Years Education and Universal Free School meals which required an assessment of school's capacities to deliver based on changing operational practices or investment required in buildings. From direct contact with Government Agencies the Comhairle has been able to demonstrate pragmatic solutions to meeting these objectives and has in general been successful in securing additional funding for projects such as the Stornoway Primary Early Years Expansion.
- 9.11 The Comhairle, also based on asset management and place-based principles, have managed to develop a community campus project on the island of Barra to such a stage where delivery of the project can almost be confirmed. This required the coordination between Scottish Government Health and Educational directorates together with the vision of what can be achieved through collaborative working. COVID impacts on material availability and cost have added a further dynamic on affordability which is being tackled.
- 9.12 Whilst large scale capital investment features highly when ensuring the effective use of resources, it is important to have a focus on all spend. The Property and Infrastructure team in their regular meetings with service departments will challenge the actual need for a request, seeking to assist in the delivery of requests in the most effective means. Building requests are challenged with alternative means of utilising space and interventions assessed on a risk assessed basis. It has been important through this process however to be able to understand service professionals' points of view and adapt solutions to suit.
- 9.13 The Property and Infrastructure and Investment Delivery Sections are where construction professional advice can be found within the Comhairle. These sections ensure that the Comhairle is compliant with all relevant construction legislation and practices, such as the Construction Design and Management Regulations. Delivery of projects follow rigorous governance and project management procedures to ensure that budgets, timescales and output are delivered.
- 9.14 Revenue budgets and staff resources have been reduced progressively over the last ten years. It has become increasingly difficult to provide services that customers have been used to in the past. The Roads Maintenance Team are responsible for roads surface repairs, water management (ditching), winter treatment, emergency response, amongst other duties associated with roads ancillary works. Budgets have to be closely managed and balanced throughout the year as the winter season can have a significantly detrimental effect on road surface condition. A balance has been reached on which activities are undertaken internally by Comhairle resources and which are contracted out, where local contractors have resources and the professional capacity to deliver.
- 9.15 The delivery of services is undertaken under risk assessments appropriate to the tasks. Marine services are undertaken in a high-risk environment where activities and assets are operated under a strict Port Marine Safety Code. Compliance with the code is subject to internal and external audit. Phased implementation of the Crown Estate Scotland Local Asset Management Pilot was approved by the Comhairle in June 2021 and an Implementation Plan is now being developed with Crown Estate Scotland.
- 9.16 Property Maintenance and Management Staff have assisted services in managing accommodation requirements and through the pandemic led on ensuring the adequacy of risk assessments in complying with government guidance on managing occupation and the environment. This has been particularly challenging across the educational and social care estate where technical issues such as the provision of adequate ventilation and access control respectively have required implementation.

Digital Strategy

- 9.17 Information Technology was and is a huge enabler to flexible working and achieving efficiencies in business processes, pre and post COVID. It also creates a tremendous business reliance on connectivity and continuity of service. Recent attacks on large businesses have highlighted vulnerabilities to cyber-attack, data loss and the impact on these organisations. The Comhairle has disaster recovery processes and infrastructure in place, and regularly audits systems to ensure that they are as secure as possible. The Comhairle's IT helpdesk and management has managed throughout the pandemic to maintain service useability of IT functions, gaining valuable experience in how to keep improving facilities to users now and in future hybrid working scenarios.
- 9.18 The Scottish Government's 'A Changing Nation: How Scotland will Thrive in a Digital World' Strategy (Mar'21) provides an overview of the Scottish Government's new Digital Strategy. This National Strategy set out the outcomes necessary for delivery and is aligned to the national performance framework. As the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy and Business Plans also align to the national performance framework and there is a clear framework for the measurement and reporting of performance against objectives, the Comhairle agreed in June 2021 to adopt rather than develop a separate Digital Strategy.
- 9.19 However, since the adoption of the Digital Strategy, the Comhairle's Digital ambitions have been reviewed. Once a new Strategy Officer is in post, the aim is to develop a Comhairle specific Digital Strategy using Audit Scotland's Good Practice Guide based on their six key characteristics listed below of what they would expect to see in a digital council, including a section on Digital workforce: Workforce planning and developing digital skills.

-  Digital leadership
-  User focused
-  Digital workforce

-  Collaborative
-  Technology and data enabled
-  Innovative

- 9.20 An electronic case management system was recently introduced for Legal Services and Licensing in accordance with the Service Business Plan and worked is underway on developing the capability of the Human Resources system; the corresponding reduction in use of paper files and physical storage space will improve efficiency and accessibility whilst at the same time improving security of confidential data.
- 9.21 An update of the Council Chamber and Comhairle Offices throughout the Western Isles, to encourage remote engagement and participation was undertaken. Those premises have received thorough upgrades of IT equipment so as to facilitate their use to access meetings remotely, which has resulted not only in the continuity of the Comhairle's business throughout the pandemic but also has enabled adaptation to the post-COVID, hybrid meeting, situation and also wider participation, for example for community consultation and engagement.

Workforce Planning

- 9.22 As highlighted in the annual audit report ([2018](#)), the Comhairle has had problems with recruitment in selective areas which can affect performance in vulnerable service areas. The number of people of working age living in the Western Isles over the next 20 years is expected to continue to fall. Measures to address workforce issues are being implemented through Comhairle strategies such as the Corporate Workforce Plan and the Apprenticeship Strategy. There is a focus on employee engagement and an Employee Forum was formed in 2018 to engage with staff and exchange information.
- 9.23 The Comhairle has supported the Comhairle's management of the workforce and recruitment with the development of a Corporate Workforce Panel and equivalent Panels in both Education, Skills and Children's Services and Health and Social care.

- 9.24 The close working relationship that the Comhairle has developed with Skills Development Scotland, particularly with the development of a Charter, and the commitment to apprenticeships and employability has been beneficial in supporting the Comhairle's workforce planning commitments and in supporting positive local destinations for young people.
- 9.25 The Comhairle continues to encourage other Community Planning Partners to participate in the approach to apprenticeships which can support young people who wish to remain on the Islands or those returning with a local career.
- 9.26 The Comhairle is committed to continuous improvement in Health and Safety and has developed procedures and controls to achieve this; these are regularly reviewed in line with statutory and HSE guidance. This helps achieve the aim of reducing risks to our employees, those affected by our work, our assets and the environment. The Comhairle's Health and Safety Management System remains compliant with the HSE's 'Plan, Do, Check, Act' model. Competent advice is delivered to each department from the Health and Safety Team, particularly ongoing throughout the COVID response with regards to Risk Assessments and Premises Safety.
- 9.27 The Health and Safety team work collaboratively with service managers, union representatives and employees to ensure clear competent health and safety advice and guidance is given and to implement and review workplace risk assessments. Throughout the COVID pandemic, procedures were put in place to assist services adapt to home/remote working. This included delivering training remotely, sharing updated procedures and guidance through electronic methods and managing the reporting of incidents electronically.
- 9.28 Employee performance is regularly assessed through the performance appraisal and development process. It is designed to ensure that all employees have the opportunity to receive feedback about their job performance on a regular basis; discuss their job role; talk about how they do their job and their future career plans; discuss how their job contributes to the success of the team and wider organisation; and plan key areas of focus and development activity for the period ahead.
- 9.29 Due to COVID-19 and on-going changes across the workplace it is acknowledged that there has been some disruption to the undertaking of formal annual employee appraisal meetings. In October 2020, the Corporate Recovery Team approved an amendment to the annual performance appraisal process and introduced an interim Employee Self-appraisal Form (ESAR) for employees to complete. This ensures that all employees are afforded the opportunity of a form of appraisal. The ESAR includes a section for employees to identify wellbeing needs.
- 9.30 The Corporate completion rate for performance appraisals (exc. Teachers and Directors) in 2020/21 is 71%, up 13 percentage points in comparison to 2019/20. Of the performance appraisals completed 70% (833) were ESARs.
- 9.31 The Comhairle undertakes regular employee surveys to gain employee perspective on what is being done well and areas for development. In 2020, the Comhairle undertook a further survey to gain an understanding of how employees were managing working from home. To ensure wellbeing remains at the forefront, the Comhairle has procured the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) – providing free and confidential service available to employees and immediate family members to help them deal with personal and professional problems that could be affecting their home life, work life, health and general wellbeing, including counselling.
- 9.32 The Comhairle, as an employer, has a legal duty to assess the risks to employee health from stress at work and to share the results. In consideration of the impact of the pandemic, homeworking and change on its employees a programme of stress audits across service areas using the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Management Standards risk assessments will be undertaken. A Report would be

submitted to the Human Resources Sub-Committee on the completion of the programme to update Members on the key findings.

Satisfaction with Services

- 9.33 The Scottish Household Surveys and the Health and Care Experience Surveys are used to provide customer satisfaction measures. The LGBF data is presented in 3-year rolled averages to deliver the required level of precision at a local level. It represents satisfaction levels for the public at large rather than for service users. Evidence shows there are differences between satisfaction levels for the wider public and service users, with satisfaction levels for service users consistently higher than those reported by the general population. While local analysis of service user experience and satisfaction is important, it is also useful to look at the wider perception of the public. The 2020/21 satisfaction data is not currently available, due to the changed methodology used in 2020 in the Scottish Household Survey.
- 9.34 The LGBF provides evidence of trends in the level of public satisfaction with the major services provided and commissioned by councils. The 2019/20 LGBF national report includes 10 years of LGBF data to provide an evidence-based picture of where Local Government had reached pre-COVID. The 2019/20 data indicates that some signs of strain in performance, satisfaction, and system capacity are beginning to emerge. Performance improvements gained in recent years are now beginning to slow or decline, a general pattern emerging across all key service areas and the Improvement Service report that this is unsurprising given the long-term funding pressures on councils and local services.
- 9.35 In comparison to 2019/20, public satisfaction rates have fallen for all services since 2010/11, with the exception of refuse collection and street cleaning. Satisfaction with schools has fallen year on year by over 20 percentage points from 86.03% to 61.67% since 2010/11, and the ranking fell 20 places from 11 to 31 out of 32 councils. The LGBF Family Group average is 73%. The service carries out user surveys and is looking to examine differences in service satisfaction responses between this measure and internally conducted user surveys. The service will use available information to examine measures to build on the existing service user feedback to identify areas for further scrutiny and improvement.
- 9.36 Satisfaction with care services in relation to quality of life, independent living, choice and control, and support for carers all reveal a decline across the period 2013/14 to 2019/20 between 5.67 and 13.12 percentage points. The deterioration in perceived support for carers is most significant, showing a 13.12-percentage point reduction from 52.49% to 39.37% across the period. A consistent challenge for the IJB has been to improve delayed discharge performance. A key action to address and better understand satisfaction with the service include the collation of service satisfaction measures to build on the existing patient and service user feedback to identify areas for further scrutiny and improvement.
- 9.37 Public satisfaction rates have fallen for all culture and leisure services since 2010/11 in comparison to 2019/20. Since the base year, satisfaction with libraries has reduced by 40.9 percentage points. Actions to address and better understand satisfaction with the libraries service include:
- Undertaking a library staffing restructure, delayed since 2015, to tackle the professional and skills shortage in the service and establishing a more robust and sustainable staffing structure;
 - Improve staffing resources across the islands to ensure equitable delivery and allow the service to deliver on its statutory duties and the aims of the national school and public library strategies;
 - Develop an improved library catalogue and integrated website to promote library services more efficiently and improve access to its online resources;
 - Promote access to the service's unique digitised historical and cultural collections through the development and launch of the Ar n Àite website; and
 - Consult with users and non-users to ascertain the needs of individuals and local community groups to inform the development of a library forward plan for 2022 to 2025

- 9.38 Satisfaction with museums and galleries has reduced by 35.4 percentage points. However, TripAdvisor rate Museum nan Eilean as the number 1 of 18 things to do in Stornoway and out of 172 reviews, 89% rate it as excellent or very good. As part of the preparation for Accreditation, the Heritage Service are planning to do an audience survey for museum and archive.
- 9.39 Satisfaction with leisure facilities have reduced by 30 percentage points. The LGBF Family Group average is 67%. 280 adults responded to the question in 2019 and 38% were either Very or Fairly Satisfied however when the question was responded to by service users within the last 12 months 70 adults responded with 96.7% stating that they were either Very or Fairly Satisfied. Between April 2015 and February 2020 (pre lockdown) there was an increase of 4% in Slainte Mhath memberships from 2837 to 2953. The responses would suggest that those who use local authority leisure services rate them very highly. Given the geographic spread of our islands and the location of our facilities access may be a significant factor.
- 9.40 Satisfaction rates have improved for environmental services in both refuse collection and street cleaning. Since the base year, satisfaction with refuse collection increased by almost 3 percentage points to 91.23% in 2019/20, ranking 1st out of 32 councils. The LGBF Family Group average is 81%. Actions to improve performance and better understand the improved satisfaction with the service included ensuring that consistent, reliable service delivery is maintained and good levels of communication with service users, including any service changes, are supported. All residual waste and recycling kerbside service were maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with collection staff following Waste Industry Safety and Health forum guidance at all times. Future service improvements include the extension of kerbside recycling services to all areas of the Western Isles, thanks to a grant award from the Recycling Improvement Fund. This service change is planned for roll out in 2022/23 and will increase recycling collection frequencies and bring residual waste collections into line with the Household Recycling Charter Code of Practice. This is expected to make it easier for householders to recycle and result in increased recycling rates.
- 9.41 Since the base year, satisfaction with street cleaning increased by almost 8 percentage points to 73.03% in 2019/20, ranking 5th out of 32 councils. The LGBF Family Group average is 68%. Actions to improve performance and better understand the improved satisfaction with the service include the use of the LEAMS Street Cleanliness score to assess performance of street cleaning operations. The Comhairle is part of Club 1, which also includes Argyll and Bute, Shetland Islands, Highland, Orkney Islands, Scottish Borders, Dumfries and Galloway and Aberdeenshire. Thanks to efficient use of mechanical street and pavement cleaning, the Comhairle consistently scores +95% in this measure.

4. Partnerships and Collaborative Working

- 10.1 The public service landscape in Scotland requires local authorities to work in partnership with a wide range of national, regional and local agencies and interests across the public, third and private sectors. A local authority should be able to demonstrate how it, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders, provides effective leadership to meet local needs and deliver desired outcomes. It should demonstrate commitment to and understanding of the benefits gained by effective collaborative working and how this facilitates the achievement of strategic objectives. Within joint working arrangements, Best Value cannot be measured solely on the performance of a single organisation in isolation from its partners.
- 10.2 Over the last two years integrated working within the Integration Joint Board and with the parent organisations has been focused on the response, recovery and remobilisation of services to support the community. Following national and local guidance, services were reconfigured to prioritise sustaining statutory service provision and enhance collaborative working for our most vulnerable members of our community.
- 10.3 The service has continued to deliver services throughout the pandemic and has been progressing the Goathill complex. This complex was commissioned for the IJB in partnership with the Comhairle and

the Hebridean Housing Partnership, in partnership with the Scottish Government 'More Homes Scotland' funds. The plan is to deliver a large strategic housing site in the Goathill area of Stornoway with the objective to deliver large scale strategic housing site, 'Housing with Extra Care', and a care home hub as part of the re-provisioning of housing to meet the needs of the elderly population. The model that was agreed upon will provide a 52-bed care home, 4 wings of 13 beds and 50 Housing with Extra Care flats. Of the 50 extra care flats, 11 will be for respite care, 10 Housing with Extra Care and 4 for intermediate care. In total, this will result in an extra 25 beds for the care of the elderly, available in the Stornoway area of Lewis.

10.4 The Goathill complex is due to be operational by Summer 2022.

Islands Growth Deal

10.5 The Islands Growth Deal has strong governance arrangements and a united sense of purpose across the three islands councils. There is a Legal and Governance Group comprising senior legal Officers from the councils which has advised on those governance arrangements. The [Heads of Terms for the Islands Growth Deal](#) was signed 17 March 2021 by UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart, Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Michael Matheson, and leaders of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, and Shetland Islands Council.

10.6 The Islands Growth Deal consists of 18 proposals which will capitalise on the Islands unique assets and which will deliver an investment of £50 million each from the Scottish and UK Governments, and an anticipated £235 million from project partners, subject to final approval of robust Business Cases. The 10-year programme of investment has the ambitious target of creating up to 1,300 jobs.

10.7 The first three Growth Deal Business Cases were approved by the Islands Growth Deal Joint Committee in November 2021. The three projects referred to are being funded as follows:

- The Islands Centre for Net Zero project will be supported with joint investment of up to £16.5 million from the UK Government and Scottish Government (UKG £16 million/SG £0.5 million).
- The Shetland Campus Redevelopment project will be supported with investment of up to £2 million from the Scottish Government.
- The Outer Hebrides Campus Redevelopment project will be supported with investment of up to £1.5 million from the Scottish Government.

Lewis Castle College

10.8 The Comhairle works closely with the biggest tertiary education provider in the Isles, Lewis Castle College (LCC). From a Gaelic development point of view, this is a vital partnership, because it strongly supports the delivery of the three strategic objectives of the Comhairle's Gaelic Plan. In particular, the third of these strategic objectives (increase the number of Gaelic speakers in the Western Isles) could not be delivered as effectively without this close working relationship. This is because the College provides Gaelic tutors necessary to assist in delivering a range of Gaelic adult learning classes across the Isles, including for Comhairle employees, with funding the Comhairle receives from national Gaelic development agency Bòrd na Gàidhlig (BnG) for that purpose.

10.9 The Comhairle and LCC are also working closely in partnership to produce a tutor-training course, designed by LCC, with funding received from BnG as a joint Comhairle/LCC bid, which it is hoped will produce a larger pool of Gaelic tutors from which to deliver the new "[SpeakGaelic](#)" course, and other community-based classes. More work is required with UHI on provision for Gaelic medium teachers, in both primary and secondary sectors. Monitoring of targets and outcomes from this collaborative working is achieved through twice-yearly reporting to BnG.

LEADER

10.10 LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale), whilst also being part of the SRDP (Scottish Rural Development Programme), is a European funding initiative and therefore is no longer delivered in the UK due to Brexit. The Outer Hebrides LEADER programme was a bottom-up

method of delivering support for rural development. Its main principle of community-led local development ensured the benefits and participation of the local community in projects was central in securing LEADER funding.

10.11 The programme supported projects to build and develop new facilities, host events, develop new initiatives, provide employment opportunities and supported many more lasting legacies to both businesses and communities throughout the Outer Hebrides and information on these projects can be found on the [Outer Hebrides LEADER](#) website. Between 1991-2020 the Outer Hebrides have benefited immensely from the various LEADER programmes. The programme allocated £11.64m across 782 projects, and with £16.81m public and £6.07m private funding, the total programme value was £34.52m.

Business Gateway

10.12 A comprehensive overview of the Outer Hebrides, Business Gateway (OHBG) activity is detailed in the report presented to the Sustainable Development Committee [June 2021](#). The performance report is also made available to the public on the Comhairle's Economic Development and Planning performance web page.

10.13 Given the economic conditions over the 2020-21 financial year, most targets were exceeded. The number of local start-ups supported (64) during the pandemic is extremely encouraging. OHBG performance continues to compare favourably against other Business Gateway areas across the Highlands and Islands. The Outer Hebrides achieved the highest Business Start-ups supported per head of population.

10.14 The 'Outer Hebrides Young Entrepreneurs Start-up Scheme' (OHYESS) was open from July 2019 to June 2021 to entrepreneurs planning to set up a new business venture, and extended to March 2022. The OHYESS is a collaboration between the Comhairle and Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE). HIE agreed to invest up to £80,000 over two years and recipients received their OHYESS funding directly from the Comhairle. The main aim of the scheme is to support business start-ups in key sectors. Although the original scheme was aimed at young local entrepreneurs aged 18 to 40, the age restriction was subsequently removed.

10.15 Grants of up to £2,500 for the purchase of capital equipment for businesses operating or linked to key sectors are available, with no age restriction, though priority is given to young applicants. The OHYESS supported 30 new business start-ups across a range of key sectors, including: food and drink; creative industries; tourism; leisure; manufacturing; traditional and textiles. The total project cost of the investments was almost £300k - of which OHYESS invested over £55k (18%). The total annual turnover of these businesses was expected to be just over £2m in year one, increasing to over £4m by year three. A total 31 jobs were expected to be created (22 FT, 18 PT) from these applications in year one. As businesses can be up to two years old, there are several jobs safeguarded (7 FT and 7 PT).

10.16 A scheme to replace OHYESS is due to launch in April 2022 to support new and young companies to develop.

5. Working with Communities

11.1 Local authorities, both individually and with their community planning partners, have a responsibility to ensure that people and communities are able to be fully involved in the decisions that affect their everyday lives. Community bodies – as defined in the [Community Empowerment Act 2015](#) (section 4(9)) – must be at the heart of decision-making processes that agree strategic priorities and direction.

11.2 The Comhairle's [Customer Service Strategy](#) has four key strategic aims: to provide a consistent, corporate approach to customer service delivery, guided by our [customer care standards](#); to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction and to use customer views to help improve and shape future

service delivery; to increase the range of services provided through a corporate team, based on convenience to the customer; and to provide customers with the most cost effective channel for the service they need.

Have Your Say

- 11.3 The Comhairle's first self-assessment in 2016 using PSIF addressed the cross cutting theme of customer services and concluded with the approved recommendation that departments use the Scottish Government's consultation approach of "We Asked, You Said, We Did" to inform the business planning processes and evidence improvement planning. A subsequent self-assessment was on 'Engagement and Consultation with Stakeholders', which resulted in the approval of all consultations, including surveys, to be hyperlinked from one Corporate Consultations web page that includes a "We Asked, You Said, We Did" Consultations Outcomes section to communicate back to participants and the wider community. Over the six year period 2016/17 – 2021/22, the Comhairle has consulted with the local community and its partners in 56 consultations.
- 11.4 The Have Your Say web page was developed to provide links to consultations, comments, complaints, community participation requests, and to the corporate customer satisfaction survey. Customer Satisfaction Surveys are undertaken to help us understand how we can better serve our customers and improve the customer experience. A corporate customer satisfaction survey was approved by CMT and added to the Comhairle's main website in 2021. This is not to replace, but to complement other service's customer satisfaction surveys – such as: the Planning Service Customer Satisfaction Survey and the Customer Experience Survey for the Council Tax Section.
- 11.5 The Act aims to enhance community involvement in community planning by a number of means including the creation of new opportunities for influencing public service provision and decision-making. Part 3 of the Act (Participation Requests) is focused on extending and improving community participation in improving outcomes for communities. Under section 22 of the Act a community participation body may make such a request to a public service authority to permit the body to participate in an outcome improvement process. Public service authorities must then publish in a Decision Notice the decision it has taken in respect of any such request. Community Participation Requests (CPR), CPR Annual Reports and Decision Notices issued by the Comhairle under the Act have been made available to the public on the Comhairle's 'Have Your Say' web pages since 2017/18.
- 11.6 As part of the review and development of the Comhairle's Corporate Strategy 2017-21, CMT facilitated a Members' Seminar in June 2017 and issued a draft Corporate Strategy October 2017 as a consultation document to the public, Community Planning Partners, Community Councils and Locality Planning Groups. The consultation was made available on the Comhairle's 'Have Your Say' consultation pages and on e-Sgìre, the Comhairle's communities web site. The consultation yielded 7 responses and an analysis of the responses was made available to the public as part of the 'We Asked, You Said, We did' consultation process.
- 11.7 A community consultation on the draft Corporate Strategy 2022-27 was also undertaken via the Comhairle's 'Have Your say' consultation pages and through the Community Planning Partnership. There were six responses to the consultation and wherever possible, suggestions and further narrative was included within the final draft Strategy.

Participatory Budgeting

- 11.8 Participatory Budgeting (PB) was trialled for the public bus service tenders in Uist, which provided a much better opportunity for engagement with the public than normal processes. It required a significant level of staff support and the service left it to operator design – with recognition of what had been learned from the PB process - for the current contract

Community Conversations

- 11.9 In recognition of the need to find nearly £10m of savings over the next four years the Comhairle agreed a service redesign programme as part of its [2018/19 Budget](#) in February 2018. Between March and September 2018 the Comhairle worked to develop options that were considered and approved by the Comhairle in October 2018 alongside budget updates considered by the Comhairle in [May](#), [June](#) and [October](#) 2018. The agreed model is based on the opportunity for community partnerships and income generation to maximise the benefit of Comhairle resources. It included the development of charters for the delivery of services, particularly across public agencies. A series of community conversations in respect of service redesign, based around a [Discussion Document](#), was held across the islands in November and December 2018, and the outcome of these community meetings formed the basis for proposals to the Comhairle in December 2018.
- 11.10 Community conversations was also the preferred method of community engagement for the Transport / Bus Services Redesign in 2019 to ensure that all communities affected had an opportunity to express their views and have them considered by the Comhairle at its meeting in June 2019. It was also used to seek the public's views on the proposed budget savings for 2021/22 and suggestions for efficiencies. 55 responses were received providing suggestions for efficiencies and the results of the consultation were reported to Policy & Resources Committee as part of the Business Planning and budget considerations.

COVID Cèilidhs

- 11.11 The Comhairle established cèilidhs as a mechanism to keep people and communities engaged and connected during lockdown restrictions and to reach the hard-to-reach older population demographic. As a result, the Comhairle's following on Facebook almost doubled since the project started and it helped to tackle isolation and loneliness ([Examples of Comments](#)) through the use of music, assisted by local artists.
- 11.12 The Comhairle worked alongside local artists to produce weekly music content for all Care Homes across the Western Isles. A wide geographical spread of artists performed the live cèilidhs from Lewis, Harris and Uist. Barra representation has proven more challenging despite there being a number of talented musicians. This media provided a unique platform to share Comhairle messages and for the dissemination of key health and safety advice and messages to a much wider audience.
- 11.13 For people in homes and people with mental health conditions, the opportunity to engage with a live music session helped engender a sense of control and involvement. The cèilidhs broke down barriers and encouraged a sense of social inclusion (feedback from care staff). A total of 63 live cèilidhs took place on the Comhairle Facebook page during the period – April 2020 to April 2021. Total viewing figures were in excess of 1.6 million across 22 countries and 51-65 year olds were the main audience.

6. Sustainable Development

- 12.1 Sustainable development is commonly defined as securing a balance of social, economic and environmental wellbeing in the impact of activities and decisions, and seeking to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The [UNSDGs](#) provide a fuller definition and set out an internationally agreed performance framework for their achievement. Sustainable development is a fundamental part of Best Value. It is reflected in the Comhairle's vision and strategic priorities, highlighted in all plans at corporate and service level, and a guiding principle for all of its activities through its SBPs. Every aspect of activity, from planning to delivery and review, contributes to achieving sustainable development.

Economic Development

- 12.2 Economy and Jobs is a strategic priority for the Comhairle, supported by the aspirational outcome that economic investment, development and research is increased within the Outer Hebrides and people are provided with a safe, sustainable and healthy environment in which to live, work, visit or do business.

- 12.3 Over the course of the current Corporate Strategy, the Comhairle has work with partners, Scottish and UK Government to identify and support new energy sector opportunities for the Outer Hebrides. For instance:
- Outline Business Case and Technical Feasibility Study for the proposed Outer Hebrides Energy Hub have been completed and were presented to the Comhairle in June 2021.
 - Funding of £11m has been allocated to the Energy Hub through the Islands Growth Deal Heads of Terms.
 - The Comhairle has been successful in its application to the Scottish Government / Scottish Futures Trust Green Growth Accelerator (GGA) programme for 'Pathfinder' status for the Net Zero Hub. This provides year 1 funding for Master Planning and Business Planning and should enable access into the main, £10m per project, GGA Fund.
- 12.4 The Comhairle also provide, in partnership with the OHBG service, business and regeneration support to businesses contributing to local economic growth. For instance, the 'Small Business Support Grant' was administered by the Comhairle's Non-domestic Rates (NDR) team. It was targeted at businesses receiving the 'Small Business Bonus Scheme' or other NDR support/relief. Grants were available of up to £10,000; the Retail, Hospitality, Leisure Support Grant, which was also administered by the NDR team, was targeted at businesses if their rateable value was between £18,001 and £51,000. Grants of up to £25,000 were available. Support provided by both these grant funding schemes, which are now closed, yielded £9,190k approved funding across 877 approved applications. The detailed 2020-21 performance [report](#) is made available to the public on the Comhairle's website.

Recycling

- 12.5 The main theme of the Comhairle's [Waste Strategy](#) approved 2012 is to use the resources available to maximise recycling opportunities and divert wastes from landfill. The current availability of ferry capacity and the cost of haulage limits access to mainland Energy from Waste facilities, and the scale of waste production limits options for local residual waste treatment other than landfill. However, all alternative treatment technology options are being considered to allow compliance with the 2025 ban on landfill disposal of biodegradable municipal waste.
- 12.6 Every house and business in the Uists and Barra have access to Twin- Stream kerbside recycling services for Paper and Card and Plastics and Cans. Every house and business in Lewis and Harris have access to food and garden waste collections and 80% have kerbside recycling services available (this will increase to 100% in 2022/23 thanks to funding support from the Scottish Government Recycling Improvement Fund).
- 12.7 The Creed Park Anaerobic Digester, built in 2006, was the first dry AD Plant in Scotland and allowed food and garden waste to be treated locally using anaerobic digestion. When compared to alternative in-vessel composting technology, this captures significantly more carbon and produces a biogas that is used to generate electricity. The recent achievement of PAS110 for this plant allows the digestate produced to be directly applied to land and greatly increases the recycling performance rate for the Western Isles; currently at 34.6%, increased from 21.0% for the previous year before PAS110 was achieved.
- 12.8 The addition of a 300kW wind turbine at the Creed Park Waste Management Facility has allowed the development of the Outer Hebrides Local Energy Hub (OHLEH), a Circular Economy project that produces hydrogen from a combination of food and garden waste and wind power. This hydrogen is generated from the electrolyser and is used to fuel the waste collection vehicle that brings food and garden waste to the AD Plant using the on-site refueller. A unique element of this project is the capture of the oxygen produced by this process. This has high purity and has significant potential for local applications in the fish farm industry and in health care.

Electric Vehicles

- 12.9 The Comhairle is currently developing a Net Zero strategy that includes transport. In addition to the hydrogen fuelled refuse collection vehicle (RCV), the Comhairle has built up a reasonably significant number of zero emissions electric vehicles on the car and small van fleet. This was helped by access to Switched on Fleet funding from Transport Scotland. Work is currently being carried out to extend charging infrastructure for fleet vehicles so that the transition to electric cars and vans can be facilitated. This is a limiting factor as none of the pool vehicle users currently have access to a home charger. The price differential between Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) is also a significant barrier, with two internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles available for the price of one BEV. However, it is anticipated that this will change as BEVs become mainstream.
- 12.10 Electric and hydrogen power is being considered for Heavy-Duty Vehicle (HDVs), such as Refuse Collection Vehicles and Passenger Carrying Vehicles (PCVs) buses. With the distance of travel and the weather conditions in the Western Isles, the current technology available for electric HDVs restricts application. Trials of an electric RCV have indicated that current range performance limits use to the routes in and around Stornoway, the only town. Electric PCV buses would also be difficult to manage. It is considered more likely that green hydrogen will provide a more viable solution for island HDV use and work is currently being carried out to significantly grow the Outer Hebrides Local Energy Hub (OHLEH) project to increase hydrogen production and make it available for transport applications.
- 12.11 There are no commercially viable public bus services in the Western Isles, and only operate because of subsidy provided by the Comhairle. The current focus is to maximise the availability of services to all users by allowing operator designed routing that, where practicable, can respond to changes in need. As part of the conditions of contract, all operators are required to operate Public Services Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) compliant services.
- 12.12 The Comhairle first received grant funding from the Scottish Government's Switched on Fleets (SOF) grant in 2016/17. The initial grant conditions were aimed at low or zero emissions vehicles, including hybrids, and could be used to fund the cost difference between a petrol/diesel vehicle and a low or zero emissions vehicle or pay for the lease of a new vehicle. The funding was used to lease electric and hybrid vehicles, with the aim of replacing grey fleet mileage. The first electric vehicles (EVs) were introduced to the fleet in 2018 on a 3-year lease, with 20 EV or hybrid vehicles leased since then. These included BMW i3 with range extenders, Nissan E-NV200, Vivaro-E and Peugeot E-2008s.
- 12.13 Initially most of the EVs were designated as pool vehicles, available for Comhairle employees to book for business use. However, as COVID-19 restrictions came into force in 2020, it was decided that a pool booking system with multiple users was no longer practical due to the measures required to ensure hygiene standards. Electric vehicles were allocated to individuals and teams on an as need basis, as a short-term measure.
- 12.14 From 2022, management of the EVs has moved over to the Chief Executive's Department. A review of vehicle utilisation and costs will be carried out to determine how this will be managed as a corporate resource going forwards. SOF grant funding in the current year is no longer available for vehicles and is only available for charging point infrastructure. The 3-year leases of the first four vehicles procured using SOF funding ended at the beginning of the year, however these have now been taken over by Health and Social Care who have extended the leases for a further year.
- 12.15 The table below provides details of grant funding received from Switched on Fleets for electric vehicles and charging points. 2018/19 funding included grants that were allocated to HHP for a BMWi3 and NHS Western Isles for two Renault e-Kangoo vans.

Period	Vehicles	Charging Points	Total
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2016/17	£19,200.00	£0.00	£19,200.00
2017/18	£19,200.00	£0.00	£19,200.00
2018/19	£123,059.79	£0.00	£123,059.79
2019/20	£70,415.28	£0.00	£70,415.28
2020/21	£70,000.00	£32,000.00	£102,000.00
2021/22	£0.00	£52,000.00	£52,000.00
TOTAL	£301,875.07	£84,000.00	£385,875.07

12.16 The initial conditions of grant were aimed at low or zero emissions vehicles and included hybrids. The grant could be used to fund the cost difference between an internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle and a low or zero emissions vehicle or pay for the lease of a new vehicle. As the main target was a reduction in grey fleet mileage, funding was used to pay the lease costs of vehicles. It was also helpful to dispel the range anxiety problems caused by the poor performance of the two series on Nissan Leaf cars which did not perform well in local conditions.

12.17 More recent grants were only available to fund Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) and the 2021/22 grant was split between vehicles and charging points. For the current year, funding is only available for charging point infrastructure.

7. Fairness and Equality

13.1 Tackling poverty, reducing inequality, and promoting fairness, respect and dignity for all citizens should be key priorities for local authorities and all their partners, including local communities. The Comhairle has responsibilities as set out in the Equality Act (Scotland) 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Comhairle is inclusive and supportive of all within the community and aims to ensure that it provides equality of opportunity.

13.2 As part of the Equality Act (Scotland) 2010 Duty the Comhairle is responsible for the publication of an Equality Outcomes & Mainstreaming Report every four years. In addition to this, every two years, a report is published which outlines the progress made to achieve the equality outcomes. Mainstreaming the equality duty requires the Comhairle to give due regard to equality and diversity in all the activities the authority is involved in. As an employer the Comhairle undertakes employee equality monitoring on an annual basis. During the recruitment process an equality monitoring form should be completed by all applicants. In addition to this the Comhairle is a Disability Confident Employer, therefore all disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria of a vacant post are guaranteed an interview.

13.3 The Comhairle's Corporate Strategy, reviewed in 2020, aims to ensure the Comhairle becomes increasingly agile and responsive in order to deliver their aspirations to adapt to the "new normal" post COVID-19. The vision of the Corporate Strategy is that through partnership and reform the island's communities and economy can be strengthened by supporting a strong and socially inclusive recovery. The key to achieving this vision is equality within the Comhairle's practices and services, whereby the diversity of employees and communities are valued.

13.4 The Comhairle's Education, Skills and Children's Services (ES&CS) Department is committed to creating educational opportunities and services which are fair and equitable regardless of disability, race, gender, social background, religions and belief/culture, age, sexual orientation, or additional support needs. This is only possible to achieve when planning takes into consideration equality and diversity. The ES&CS Department's Children and Young People's Strategic Data Set 2021 [report](#) contains up to date data to support the development of Integrated Children's Services Planning. The report also supports Community Planning Partners to identify the major health inequalities and what can be done about them.

- 13.5 Over the last five years, e-Sgoil has developed from a small project focused on addressing staffing shortages via remote delivery of learning in the Western Isles to becoming a sector-leading innovation at the forefront of the development of digital learning in Scotland; a success that is recognised well beyond our own shores, with several nations and international education organisations expressing interest in the project. E-Sgoil has been pivotal in creating equity of opportunity across the Western Isles and is major driver in the development and strengthening of Gaelic Medium and Gaelic learner education across the islands. It has also been a critical cornerstone of learning provision, both locally and nationally, during the last two years of the pandemic as it developed and provided courses and became a founding element of the National e-Learning Offer (NeLO) for Scotland.
- 13.6 The Comhairle has worked closely with Scottish Government to successfully achieve full expansion of Early Learning and Childcare to be able to now offer complete access to 1140hrs per week of funded pre-school learning and childcare in every community in the Western Isles. This represents a more than 50% growth in this service over the period and has brought very significant benefit to our youngest learners as well and their parents/carers. This expansion has seen the Comhairle lead of development and construction of new buildings, refurbishment of existing facilities, recruitment and training of staff, growth in Early Years and Play curriculum and strengthening of work with partner providers.
- 13.7 In 2020, 22.5% of Primary pupils and 29% of Secondary pupils in the Western Isles were identified as requiring Additional Support Needs (ASN). Although schools have seen the second largest decline in rolls in Scotland with a drop of 7.76% (280 pupils) in the period from 2010 to 2020, they have the fifth highest attendance rate in Scotland at 94.03% (2018/19), the highest in their LGBF Family Group. The attendance rate for Looked after Children is the highest in Scotland at 90.94% and is continuing to improve steadily.
- 13.8 The proportion of school leavers achieving 5+ awards at SCQF 5 have continued to increase over recent years from 56% in 2011/12 to 67% in 2019/20, the highest in its LGBF Family Group. These measures of considerable success may be attributed in part to the positive and welcoming learning environments in our schools which encourages students to do well and to stay on at school or to move to another positive destination. The support from parents and other members of our communities also plays an important part. In recent years, a notable enhancement to the curriculum in our schools resulting from the development of E-Sgoil and from other providers within our community helps to ensure that most students are given good opportunities to succeed widely across diverse areas of the curriculum. The percentage of pupils entering positive destinations increased from 95% in 2011/12 to 97% in 2019/20 and was the highest in its LGBF Family Group throughout the nine-year period.
- 13.9 The Comhairle revised their impact assessment processes in October 2019 and introduced an integrated approach. Under previous arrangements Equality Impact Assessments and Fairer Scotland Impact Assessments were undertaken to assess the impact of applying new or revised policies. An integrated approach avoids the need to undertake and report on separate assessments and provides an opportunity to actively consider wider impacts and further reduce inequality of outcomes.
- 13.10 As set out in the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 the Comhairle also has a duty to produce Island Communities Impact Assessments, this duty came into force in December 2020. All relevant authorities must consider the effect of policies, strategies and services on their island communities. An Island Communities Impact Assessment must be prepared if it is considered that a policy, strategy or service will have a significant effect on an island community.
- 13.11 Completing Impact Assessments aims to ensure that the Comhairle is reducing inequalities of outcomes as a result of socioeconomic disadvantages when making strategic decisions. This is a legal requirement placed on the Comhairle under the Fairer Scotland Duty. The implementation of the duties is designed to continuously improve outcomes for the Western Isles. The Comhairle's Integrated Impact Assessments, Equal Pay Audits and Equality Monitoring Statistics are made available to the

public through the Comhairle's Equality and Diversity web page. All reports can be made available in alternative formats or languages on request.

CONCLUSION

- 14.1 The Chief Executive and colleagues apologise for the extreme length of this Report but believe that it provides a comprehensive summary of the Comhairle's performance and policy delivery when measured against Corporate Strategies, National Performance Frameworks and Local Performance Indicators. The Comhairle has done so against a backdrop of ongoing reductions in real terms revenue funding, constrained capital capacity and a relentless reduction in employee numbers and capacity. It is suggested that the Comhairle should be pleased with its achievements and delivery over its last term and, while recognising that services can always improve, efficiencies can always increase and that increased budgets and more employees are not the answer to every issue, or their lack a bar to innovative thinking and practice, the context of this Report is very relevant to consideration of future delivery and achievement.
- 14.2 The comments made in Paragraph 7.12 and 7.13 above reflect representations recently made on the urgent need for island proofing of financial provision and support for the Islands and it is submitted that the Comhairle's funding levels and employee numbers are now at such a level that no further reduction is possible without either revisiting employee numbers themselves or considering detrimental reductions to the Comhairle's provision of statutory and discretionary services. The Western Isles stands on the brink of seeing its renewable energy development and capacity come to fruition, with Growth Deal projects also steadily progressing, and it would, it is suggested, be immensely regrettable were those developments to be simultaneous with depleted public services within the Islands, and with the organisations which serve them reduced in capacity to such an extent that supporting developments of these kinds in future might no longer be possible.
- 14.3 This Report is, however, about the Comhairle's performance and delivery in its last term and is submitted to Members as a positive statement of our adherence and commitment to our Corporate Strategies, good performance of our statutory and discretionary services and our continuing leadership for the Western Isles in areas which are not, strictly speaking, within the Comhairle's remit, but on which the Comhairle is expected, trusted and is pleased to lead.