

Board Meeting 22.02.23
Agenda Item: 10.4.1 (23/36)
Purpose: For Awareness

Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report 2021-22

Delivery Update October 2021-2022



Comhairle nan Eilean Siar



Contents

INTRODUCTION	4
The Best Start, Bright Futures – Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26	4
Child Poverty Estimates	5
Covid-19 and the subsequent cost-of-living crises	5
Energy Price Cap and Fuel Poverty	6
Lived Experience	7
1. INCOME FROM EMPLOYMENT	8
CnES Employability Service:	8
Department of Works and Pensions:	9
2. COST OF LIVING	11
Fuel Poverty:	11
Housing and Fuel:.....	11
Hebridean Housing Partnership:.....	12
Tighean Innse Gall	12
Homeless Service:	12
3. INCOME FROM SOCIAL SECURITY AND BENEFITS IN KIND	13
• Social Security Scotland	13
• Financial Inclusion	14
• Western Isles CAB	15
• NHS Western Isles	17
• Challenge Poverty Week	18
• Food Availability & Distribution	18
• Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	19
• Impact on Partner Agencies and Community Services	23
• Impact on Business	23
• Lived Experience	24
• Target Groups	24
• Fuel Poverty	24
• Food Sustainability & Healthy Eating	25
• Transport Access and Infrastructure	25
• Housing Strategy	25

Abbreviations used in this report:

CAB – Citizens Advice Bureau

CNES – Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

HHP – Hebridean Housing Partnership

LCPAR – Local Child Poverty Action Report

NHSWI – NHS Western Isles (Health Board)

OHCPP – Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership

TIG – Tighean Innse Gall

INTRODUCTION

The Outer Hebrides Local Child Poverty Action Report (LCPAR) and multi-agency anti-poverty strategy was approved by the board of NHS Western Isles, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership in the Autumn of 2019 and implementation of the plan subsequently commenced.

The full 2019-20 Action Plan and Strategy can be accessed at [lcp-ar-2019-oh-poverty-strategy.pdf \(cne-siar.gov.uk\)](https://www.cnesiar.gov.uk/lcp-ar-2019-oh-poverty-strategy.pdf).

There is a requirement to report annually on progress and plan for the year ahead. The Action Plan is being reviewed and updated by partner agencies; a process that has been delayed previously by Covid-19. This delivery report for 2021/22 has been prepared for the Scottish Government and will seek approval through NHS Western Isles, CNES and the OHCPP ahead of a full update of publication.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 does not necessitate Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPARs) to be produced by a certain date. The Act requires that they are produced *'as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each reporting year.'* Our anticipated date of publication is December 2022.

The Best Start, Bright Futures – Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26

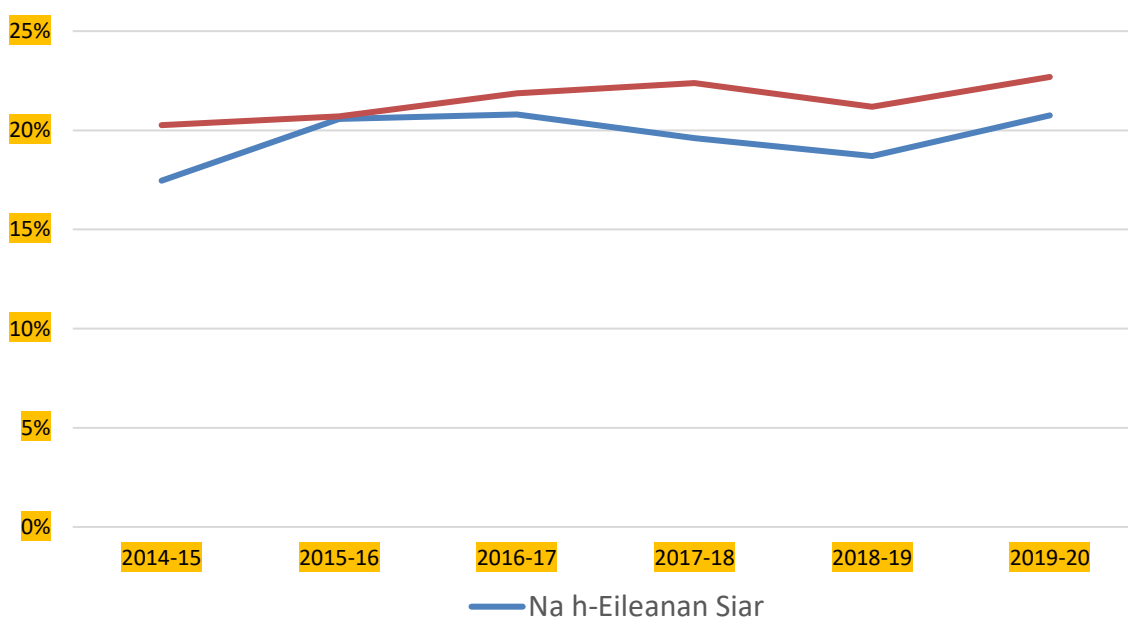
The Plan sets out the immediate action the Scottish Government will take to put cash in the pockets of families now. This includes further increasing the Scottish Child Payment to £25 per eligible child, per week, by the end of 2022, uprating eight Scottish social security payments by 6% to ensure these payments keep their real-terms values for families, and working in partnership with services to mitigate the benefit cap, as fully as it can within the limits of devolved powers.

The Plan also sets out the action the Government will take to drive progress in the medium to longer term to enable thousands of families to break the cycle of poverty. This includes significantly strengthening employment services to support parents to enter, sustain and progress in work, backed by up to £81 million in 2022-23, and further strengthening support to parents through a new £15 million Parental Transition Fund to tackle financial barriers parents face in entering the labour market.

Child Poverty Estimates

The latest datasets in relation to Relative Child Poverty 2015-21, Absolute Child Poverty 2015-21, Ward Level Relative Child Poverty and Ward Level Absolute Poverty have been published (<https://www.gov.scot/publications/local-child-poverty-statistics-january-2022/>). The data reflect a consistency in terms of the national picture, with a recognition that poverty levels had decreased during the pandemic, on an artificial basis, as households accessed temporary supports e.g., furlough. It was recognised that the datasets represented small numbers when compared to other areas of Scotland, but that the areas of Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas, and Sgir' Uige agus Ceann a Tuath nan Loch, and Steornabhagh a Tuath could be identified as areas for specific focus moving forward.

Child poverty estimates (% after housing costs)



Source: End Child Poverty Coalition child poverty estimates (after housing costs)

Covid-19 and the subsequent cost-of-living crises

Before the Covid-19 pandemic more than one in five people in the UK lived in poverty (Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK, 2020/21). The Institute of Fiscal Studies has found that inflation increases will hit those on the lowest incomes by 3% more than the wealthiest families. More people are going without food to use their money for rent, disconnecting gas/electricity to save money and not cooking food to save on energy costs. The cost of living has been increasing across the UK since 2021 with the annual rate of inflation reaching 9.9% in August 2022, the highest we have seen in almost 30 years.

From August 2021 to August 2022 domestic gas prices have risen by 96% and electricity by 54%, increasing by this level after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine with levels continuing to rise due to cuts in Russian supply. Electricity prices are linked to gas prices so have followed a similar trend. A detailed explanation of the issues can be found in the recently published Briefing document 'Rising cost of living in the UK' (September 2022), found on the following link: [CBP-9428.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#)

In response to the crisis the Scottish Government have asked the Poverty and Inequality Commission to provide advice on action it could take to address the emerging issues. The Commission believes that this crisis needs to be treated with the same urgency as the recent pandemic and have produced detailed advice in the following

document: <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/poverty-and-inequality-commission-cost-of-living-advice-to-scottish-government/>.

The impact of Covid-19 on the delivery priorities has been considerable in terms of the needs of our communities, families, and individuals as well as the service priorities for the Comhairle, Health Board and all our community partners. Services and businesses have been significantly disrupted and have had to adapt to new ways of working and meeting rapidly changing and developing needs of our community.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we are now facing a cost-of-living crisis associated with the recent war in Ukraine. This has led to increased fuel prices and a consequent increase in prices in inflation rates to double figures. This places additional pressure on Islands with already high levels of poverty in an area where the cost-of-living prices are already amongst the highest in the UK. The recent publication of 'The Cost of Remoteness' reported the significant variation in prices compared against urban UK. Food prices are between 13% (supermarkets) to 27% (local shops) higher. Clothing is between 12% and 34% higher, household goods 10% to 22% higher, travel and transport between 28% and 185% higher, social and cultural activity is 1% to 45% higher. Overall depending upon the household constitution there is a cumulative 15% to 30% additional cost. Single pensioners are the hardest hit. It is, therefore, anticipated that the coming price increases will have a significant negative effect on our community.

Energy Price Cap and Fuel Poverty

The OHCPP Anti-Poverty Group has been active in lobbying OFGEM and Scottish Government for fairer and more equitable costs and services. This includes representation through the Highlands & Islands Housing Associations Affordable Warmth (HIHAAW) group. There has been representation on the unfair impact and discrimination on off-gas energy consumers. The majority of island's households cannot access mains gas, which has led to the area's high levels of extreme fuel poverty. There is a huge price distortion that exists between Mains Gas and Electricity which has been exacerbated by the recent price caps. The focus has been on capping the average price for dual fuel direct debit customers. The current CAP for such a dual fuel consumer is around £2000 annually. If your consumption is higher, you will pay more - if you do not have Mains Gas you will pay more, if you use electricity for heat, you will pay more and if you have an unregulated fuel like heating oil you will pay more. The islands are firmly in the "Pay More" category – with limited access to mains Gas and the majority of homes use either electricity, heating oil, LPG (Liquefied Petroleum Gas), or solid fuel for heating. The unit costs of electricity and heating oil are much higher than Mains Gas currently, so consumers end up having to pay more – to buy less energy. It costs £1000 a year more for electrical heat, to buy 33% less energy than a typical dual fuel household resulting in a bill of £3,000.

Recent research in relation to fuel poverty had identified that the 2p per unit surcharge on North of Scotland consumers compared to those living in the south of the country had now fallen to just under 1p but continued to represent an inequality for those living in the North of Scotland.

We highlighted the electricity tariff differences between North and South unit surcharge in the North for a single rate meter. Looking for equity and a just transition in resolving that situation did not work – fuel poverty campaigners in the central belt would not sanction a slight increase in energy prices in the south to allow the delivery of a lower price in the north, the removal of the northern location burden and a resultant cross Scotland equality in electricity pricing.

Further issues raised included: suppliers levying charges for replacing a meter; direct debits should not be amended either up or down on estimated readings; estimate readings causing bill shocks and the removal of meter readers within the islands.

This year Government regulations have led to reduction in locally provided Energy efficiency services through TIG with 14 well paid jobs removed – with a further 20 to 30 in the supply chain. In addition, through the work of TIG and partners, Home Energy Scotland included, a further three will not be started, which relate to secondary measures of micro wind and PV with storage and due to be funded by Energy Redress and Area Based Scheme special projects.

TIG and local partners developed the Gluasad Còmhla principle – moving together – and have established and nurtured links between health services, third sector support agencies such as Western Isles Citizens Advice Service, Uist Council for Voluntary Services and many others, education and of course energy. We recognise education attainment amongst children in poverty is considerably lower than those not. Health expenditure is higher when people live in cold damp homes, and there is a danger to public health when a significant number of householders will be left with uninsulated, expensive to heat homes.

More homes in the Outer Hebrides are referred for Warmer Homes Scotland and subsequent installations per 1000 population than any other region in Scotland. This is due to TIG and partners referring to Home Energy Scotland Inverness office. So, partnerships are key to helping achieve the aims of Scotland become energy efficient, eradicate fuel poverty and decarbonise.

This delivery update for 2021/22 will consider the additional impact of the present cost-of-living crisis and the effects of energy price rises will have on our already fuel poor communities.

Lived Experience

Workshops using the Get Heard Scotland (GHS) toolkit have been carried out involving over fifty participants from the Stornoway North area, which has been identified as being more deprived than other areas in the Outer Hebrides. Throughout this document, reference will be made to particular case studies from this process as well as case studies from a variety of agencies. Pseudonyms are used to protect identities. A variety of methods were used to collect evidence including face-to-face and telephone interviews, focus groups and the use of the Mentimeter interactive tool. This allowed facilitators to build an interactive presentation using an easy-to-use online editor and enabling participants to respond anonymously to questions. From the responses it was apparent that lack of money contributed to a great deal of stress amongst households.

“Making ends meet is a constant struggle and I worry how I’m going to pay my bills as well as feed us all!” (Young family with 2 children under 10 and husband working in hospitality).

“I don’t know how we’d survive without the Foodbank parcels they’re a godsend!” (Single mum with 2 children).

At local level, tackling child poverty and mitigating the impact of poverty on families remains central to our agenda by:

- Ensuring our most vulnerable children have been supported through emergency childcare and free school meals;
- Establishing mechanisms to deliver food in communities;
- Providing families with energy, money and welfare rights advice, access to crisis grants, replacement essential home appliances such as fridges, cookers, and support to sustain tenancies.

Much of this has been built on the strong foundations and extensive work undertaken to tackle child poverty to date and the strong working partnerships formed through our work on the LCPAR meant that a strong collaborative response was possible.

Our shared focus on the key drivers of poverty: **income from employment; costs of living; and income from social security and benefits in kind** will remain as important as we move beyond the initial response phase.

1. INCOME FROM EMPLOYMENT

Catherine is a widow who earns £13,550 per annum as a teaching assistant. She is mum to two primary school age children and receives universal credit. She is entitled to free school meals but is over the threshold to receive the school clothing grant. She finds it difficult to manage and is worried by the increases in fuel and energy prices. She admits that, without family help, she would not be able to manage and may have to get rid of her car although she depends on it to get to and from work.

CnES Employability Service:

The CnES Employability Service is anticipating receiving national funding to appoint a Co-ordinator to support individuals in poverty moving into employment. The co-ordinator will have an active role in supporting the work of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Group. CnES continue to receive a high volume of referrals and engage with existing support groups across the islands e.g., mother and toddler groups, to support people into/ returning to work. There are a significant number of employment opportunities available across the islands at present, but also concerns regarding the potential impacts of increased fuel costs across the island business network and the potential for significant job losses across multiple sectors.

Work is ongoing in relation to the upskilling and retraining of individuals, but transportation remains a key barrier to employment, particularly in relation to Health and Social Care. Child friendly Drop-in

sessions have been arranged within Stornoway Town Hall to support parents and carers into employment, but enhanced outreach support is vital to ensure that no-one is left behind.

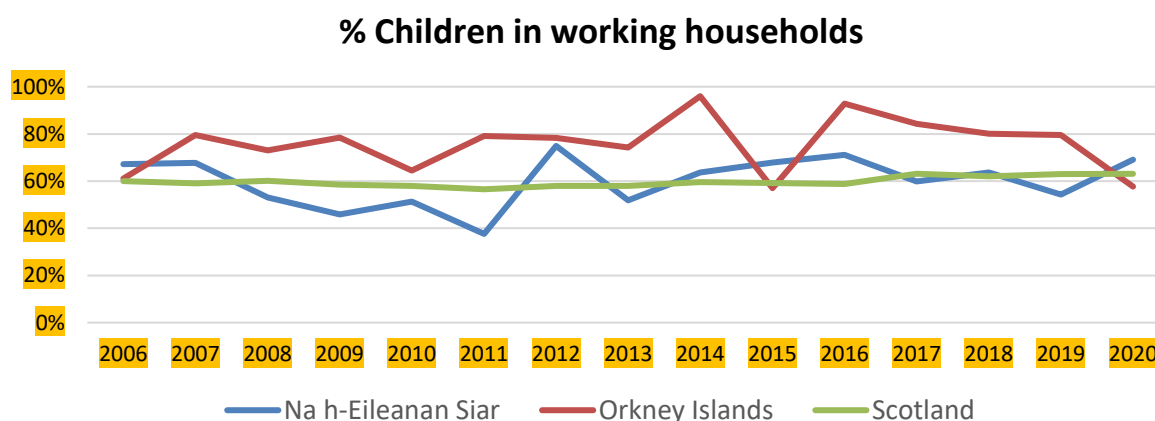
Support is available through One Parent Families Scotland – a national support service which aims to change lives and challenge poverty to enable single parent families to achieve their potential, to reach a decent standard of living and contribute to Scottish society. Parents and carers can access support workers immediately through online live chat functions, and helplines.

In discussion, it was recognised that there could be an opportunity to replicate this support service throughout the Outer Hebrides.

Department of Works and Pensions:

Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) report that there are significant employment opportunities across the Outer Hebrides at present, and that anyone who wants to work, should be able to. Employers across the islands are struggling to fulfil vacant posts.

DWP are working with just over 500 people experiencing barriers to entering employment and this includes those with mental health and wellbeing issues. There are over 1000 individuals on Universal Credit. It was recognised that those on Universal Credit and in employment, and those in low paid jobs, but earning over the threshold for additional supports, represented a significant risk of being in/entering poverty. A potential area of support which could utilise funding available through the Comhairle to address poverty.



Source: ONS Annual Population Survey, household economic activity status

Employment in 'lower paid' occupations

(% of all in employment)

Na h-Eileanan Siar	Orkney Islands	Scotland
28%	19%	27%

Source: ONS Annual Population Survey, year to Jun 2021

Median full-time gross weekly earnings

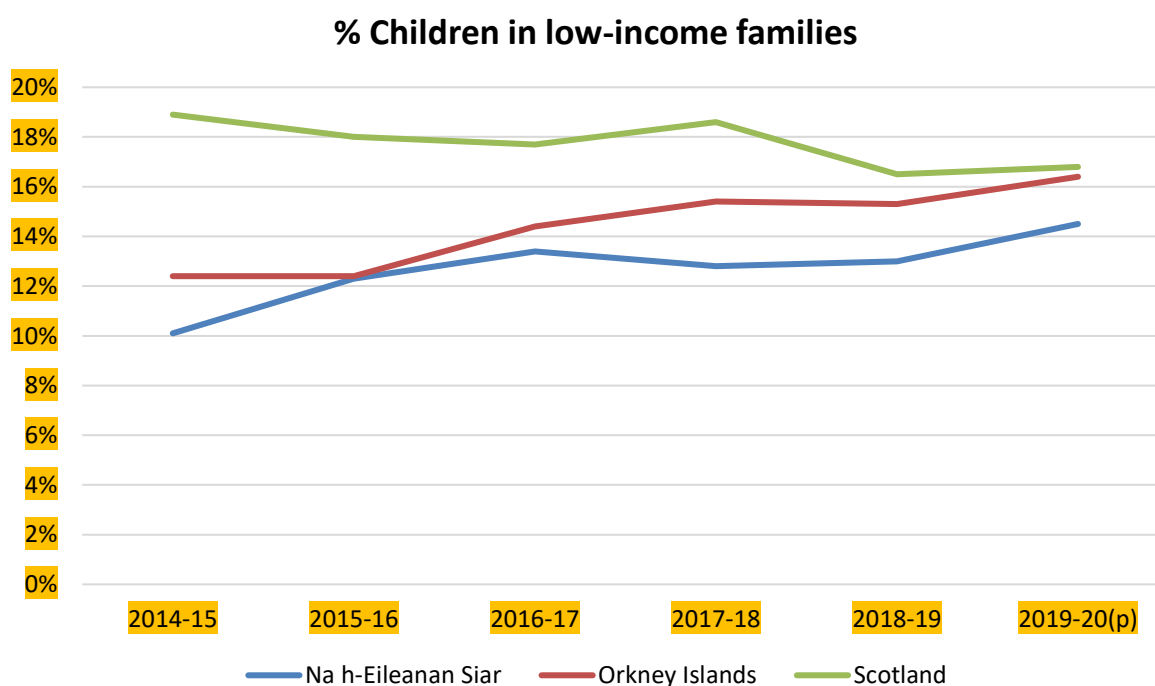
Na h-Eileanan Siar	Orkney Islands	Scotland	
£670.1	£565.2	£622.0	Resident analysis
£669.9	£540.9	£622.4	Workplace analysis

Source: ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2021 data

Jobs density

Na h-Eileanan Siar	Orkney Islands	Scotland
0.9	1.02	0.82

Source: ONS jobs density dataset, 2019 data



Source: DWP/HMRC children in low-income families local measure (before housing costs)

2. COST OF LIVING

Peter, who experiences mental health episodes, has received several food parcels through the local foodbank over the past year. He has expressed concern regarding energy price rises as presently he puts £10 per day into his meter and does not know how he will cope. During one trip to the Foodbank, he mentioned to the Development worker how he only had a kettle and did not have any white goods. The worker liaised with his social worker, and they were able to provide Peter with a cooker, fridge, microwave and washing machine. He was also put in touch with the housing association who provided him with a voucher for the local shop and CAB who issued a fuel voucher. This support network has helped to ease Peter's anxiety although he still worries about the coming winter.

Fuel Poverty:

The Pandemic had delayed the on-going Scottish House Condition Survey, which usually provides a range of housing statistics across a wide range of areas. The most recent were published in December 2020 and collected in 2019. This showed the Western Isles with 40% of households in fuel poverty (compared to the Scottish average of 24%).

It was also estimated that 24% of our households would be in Extreme Fuel Poverty (compared to 12% nationally). We are not expecting another update to be published until Feb 2023 and this will be from data collected in 2021. There is obviously uncertainty on current and future rates of fuel poverty. The fuel price cap will have an effect as will the cash support to households and individuals. However, it is estimated that fuel poverty rates in the Outer Hebrides will more than double

Housing and Fuel:

Communication continues to the Chair of Ofgem, on behalf of the Highlands & Islands Housing Associations Affordable Warmth (HIHAAW) group. This is in relation to Ofgem's clear discrimination against off-gas energy consumers. Representatives from HHP continue to lobby Ministers in relation to the energy prices for customers in the Outer Hebrides and there is recognition that our households require greater energy usage to heat homes in comparison to other parts of the UK. The standing electricity price for households had increased from 20p per to 50p per day. This is particularly concerning for those families who have a pre-payment meter.

Tighean Innse Gall have supported the installation of insulation to 700 households across the Outer Hebrides, through £1.5m funding per annum from the Scottish Government, but they have recently been forced to cease this area of work due to new requirements in terms of ventilation and trading standards, and a lack of access to relevant training. As a result of the changes in requirements, TIG could only draw-down £250k out of £1.5m in funding for households in 2021/22. It was noted that local contractors were unable to pick up this workload fully for similar issues experienced by TIG.

The Comhairle's Scheme of Assistance for private sector housing, which focusses primarily on mandatory adaptations for people with disabilities e.g., conversion of bathrooms to wet-rooms, installation of stairlifts etc is funded through the Comhairle's capital programme but has been significantly reduced in comparison to previous years.

This impacts on the funding available for medical adaptations and will result in the introduction of waiting times for adaptations, which could significantly impact individuals' quality of life and increase the need for hospital in-patient times.

Hebridean Housing Partnership:

There is no evidence that the cost of living is having a significant impact on tenants in terms of increased rental arrears, although this continues to be monitored. Contractors entering homes are being asked to report back on any concerns in relation to living conditions within households. Households were presenting as coping well with the increased cost of living at present, but there are significant concerns as to what impact increased fuel/ living costs will have in winter. Fuel vouchers had been well utilised to support those most in need where known.

HHP have secured £1.2m in Low Carbon funding to support heating and insulation works across properties, allowing the programme to double activity for 2022/23. In addition, HHP had secured funding to meet demand in terms of aid adaptation requirements within HHP properties.

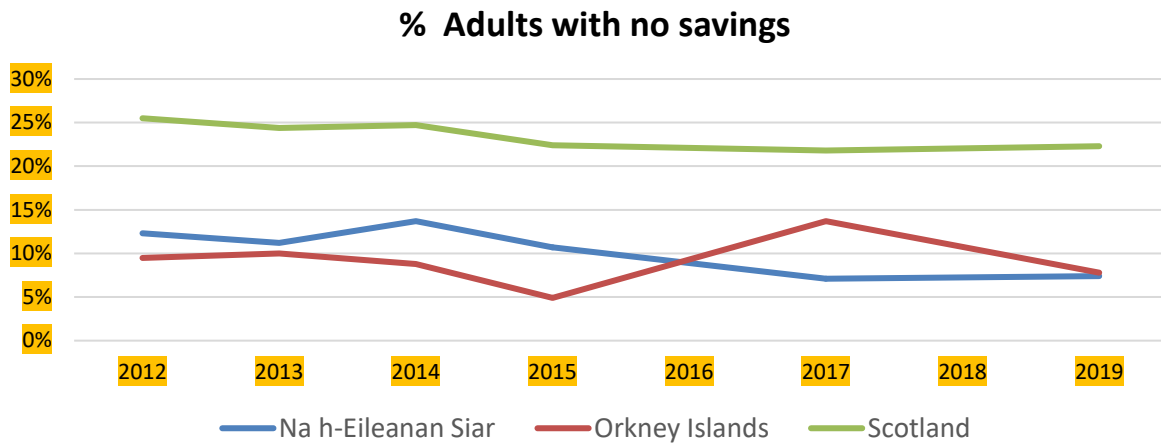
Tighean Innse Gall

TIG had a 100% success rate in applying to the Scottish Governments' Home Heating Support Fund on behalf of households. The Fund seeks to provide financial relief to energy consumers who are experiencing significant financial hardship and strives to provide this support to households regardless of the fuel or payment method used. The fund had been extended with an additional £8m available across Scotland.

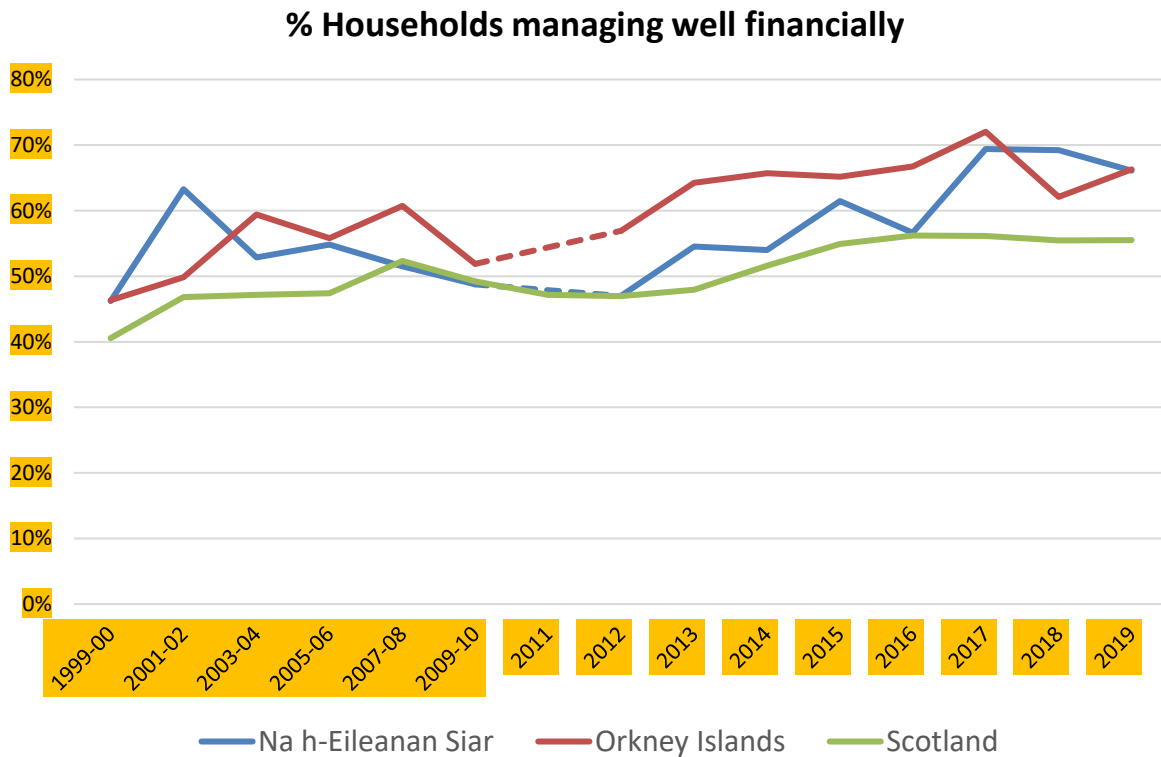
The Resilience Group had issued 1200 fuel vouchers to 380 homes through the Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme, and a bid to support the allocation of further vouchers would be submitted when bidding to the Scheme reopens in August 2022.

Homeless Service:

The Homeless service does not have a budget to cover increased fuel costs across the service (anticipated to be £50k per annum). Consideration would be made to increased charges for electricity being passed to those in homeless accommodation. It was recognised that many individuals in homeless accommodation elect not to pay current charges, particularly those with addiction issues.



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey - Adults dataset



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey - Adults dataset

3. INCOME FROM SOCIAL SECURITY AND BENEFITS IN KIND

- Social Security Scotland

The Scottish Government will replace the DWP Cold Weather Payment (CWP) with a new Low Income Winter Heating Assistance in winter 2022. This will make a guaranteed annual payment of £50 to around 400,000 low-income households currently eligible for Cold Weather Payment. Payments will be made in November of each year.

Best Start Grant School Age Payment is open from the first of June in the year that the child is first old enough to start school until the last day in February of the following year. The Payment (£252.50) is issued to help with the cost of preparing for school and can be used for anything. The Best Start Grant was promoted well by Early Years, but there would be merit promoting this across wider services.

As of May 2022 there had been 650 successful claims for the Best Start Grants/Foods to a total value of £246,949. The proportion allocated to Best Start Foods has increased significantly since May 2020.

Mr A lives alone in a small, one-bedroom HHP property. He had approached the Financial Inclusion Service for advice with regards to a huge debt SSE claimed he had built up. He had been to HHP and CAB but no-one there could help him. The service does not usually deal with debt issues, but he had received help to apply for PIP, so it was decided to proceed with the case. There was no way a property so small could build up that level of debt! He was asked to take meter readings every day for two weeks. Once his average usage was calculated, colleagues at TIG were contacted to investigate. It turned out that his boiler was running constantly in the background and his meter was faulty. TIG arranged to have this fixed, and his "debt" was wiped. Mr A also benefited from a £147 top-up through Resilience Group funding.

- **Financial Inclusion**

The Financial Inclusion service continued to support people to ensure they are in receipt of their full entitlements. The majority of engagement with individuals/ families involved older people, and that there is a significant concern that young people/ families are electing not to engage with services. Work is ongoing with the Comhairle's Parental Employability Support Training officer to identify opportunities for enhanced engagement with young people/ families. Therefore, standardised pathways will be introduced, which will clearly outline available support and entitlements available to people from across different services. These could be shared with individuals/ families when single services are involved, or aware of the need for additional supports.

Most referrals to the Financial Inclusive service have come from the Maternity ward at the Western Isles hospital who have been very pro-active in assisting mums-to-be to refer themselves to the service as well as informing them about the SSS Best Start Grants.

Out of 156 referrals received in the year April 21 – March 22 only 21 of these were for households with any dependent (or expected) children. It was ensured that these families were receiving all entitlements, which reassured them a great deal. They also remain on record and can be contacted whenever initiatives such as the Redress Fuel Voucher or White Goods schemes become available. The service reports that the majority of people will happily engage and appreciate the service, but there is a minority who will not engage, and they are often the people who are most in need of any help that is available to them.

A gentleman who had been hospitalised following a stroke was referred to the Financial Inclusion team just prior to being discharged. The stroke nurse discovered that he had no central heating and only had a very inadequate electric fire to heat himself with in addition to this he had no running hot water. He had some level of learning disability, lived on his own and although his brother lived next door to him, they did not have a good relationship. Added to this was the fact that he lived in an extremely remote area of Lewis. He had not really been known to his GP prior to taking the stroke.

The team applied for an Adult Disability Payment for him, which can be a fairly lengthy process. Once in receipt of this qualifying benefit and after some persuasion, an application was made to Home Energy Scotland who installed a free heating system. The gentleman also qualified for a Council Tax exemption as he was deemed as having a “Severe Mental Impairment” by his GP. This all required quite a bit of cajoling from partners, but in the end his living conditions were vastly improved.

- **Western Isles CAB**

A pensioner and full-time carer approached WICAS for assistance with heating their home. They had been forced to wear additional clothing and hats to sleep at night. The advisor was able to refer them to Home Energy Scotland, and as a result they benefited from the installation of a £13k air source heating system, and made a £1000 annual saving on their bills

Western Isles CAB noted a dramatic increase in demand for services and the complexity of cases. Client numbers have remained high with over 1292 clients dealing with 1851 cases over 5690 contacts. The main areas of advice given relates to benefits, energy, debt, and housing. Overall, in the reporting year, there has substantial client financial gain of £913,194.63 although the true figure is likely to be much higher as many gains go unrecorded. CAB report that there is some help for those on benefits, but nothing to help the ‘squeezed middle.’ Working families just above the benefit cap appear to be using the service more and this includes use of the foodbank. Western Isles CAB anticipate the situation will get worse in the coming months especially with the cost-of-living increases and the energy hikes. In addition to internal support available to advisors, WICAS have accepted an offer of online ‘Mental Health in the workplace’ training from Healthy Working Lives.

In one case a CAB advisor was able to help a client process her Universal Credit application, leading to a lump sum payment of £993 and a continuing weekly saving of £31.

Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative (WICCI)

WICCI has three main areas of work:

- Social Fund, which are grants of up to £500 to individuals who are going through treatment to help with some of the costs associated with that time.
- WICCI Centre – offers free complementary therapies and professional counselling to those affected by cancer as well as support, (non clinical) advice, information and signposting
- WICCI Care Boxes, which are gift boxes available to anyone going through treatment with a mix of comforting and practical items to help.

As a snapshot in September WICCI supported over 60 individuals throughout the Western Isles with complementary therapies, counselling, support or advice and 22 applications for financial support.

As a result of an initial enquiry about a disability payment, A CAB advisor was able to carry out a benefits check, resulting in additional benefits of £50 per week for the pensioner and £30 per month reduction in telephone bills by accessing BT home essentials, plus £350 from the Home Heating Fund.

Action For Children: -

Over the past two years Action for Children have accessed internal grants for food vouchers and white goods. They were given out to both families and vulnerable people (plus some families known to Social Work) across the whole of the Western Isles. These vouchers, some up to the sum of £400.00 were distributed in stages and based on family size. Across all the Islands approximately £40,000 has been distributed.

All the white goods were purchased locally and included washing machines, cookers, tumble driers and freezers. Money was also available for household goods and clothing. Beds, cots, and warm clothes were also purchased with families receiving up to £100 per child. Food vouchers have also been distributed to families.

There was also huge local support from The Grillburger who offered free transportation of white goods to Uist & Barra and this support allowed for more money to go to families rather than transportation.

Early Years Services

Family Support Workers are holding pop up events at parents meetings, where they offer to meet with the parents/carers and complete a Financial Health Check which will inform them if they are claiming all they are eligible for and will support them to complete an online application. This is also provided with identified family support cases on a 1-1 basis when they visit the home but this initiative is to make sure that families do not fall through a gap and lose out on the financial help they are entitled to.

A comprehensive advice and contact leaflet has been developed specifically to provide Financial Help for Parents & Carers.

- **NHS Western Isles**

The NHS is working with Education and Children's services on the updated guidance for early learning, childcare settings, and schools' food regulations to give children more access to nutritious food.

The NHS are leading on the Caring for People initiatives around Food distribution, ensuring all geographical areas throughout the Western Isles are covered; this includes coordinating, distribution, data collection, food, and fuel vouchers.

Referral systems have been put in place for Health Visitors and other children's services including maternity who refer new mums to CAB for a financial health check and ensure they are claiming all the benefits to which they are entitled. This may include providing access to the Best Start Grant via Social Security Scotland or providing access to foodbanks through the distribution of vouchers. Health Visiting, Children's Services and the Education Department have been actively supporting the most vulnerable families and children. Recent statistics on Best Start Grants; Pregnancy and Baby Payment, Early Learning Payment, School age payments show that these are now above the Scottish average, Foods is slightly below. Referral systems are being introduced for Community Nursing Teams which will enable access for those with current health conditions and target a wider age group.

Our breastfeeding rates are above the Scottish average with over 20 businesses signed up locally to the Breastfeeding Friendly Scotland scheme to promote, support and protect breastfeeding. Financial Inclusion structures and procedures are already in place for Maternity and Health Visiting, and electronic recording is being introduced for referrals.

Issues relating to poverty are raised through provision of a poverty awareness training programme for front line workers to help them to identify any families who may need support. A shorter, more general on-line session will be delivered in partnership with CAB and will be open to the public. Both these sessions will address the stigma around benefits and the use of foodbanks, especially amongst the older members of our community who let pride get in the way of them claiming what they are entitled to.

Considering the impact on low-income families, the NHS Western Isles has prepared guidance and advice for employers, including details of support agencies. Further publications on the cost of living will be distributed directly to GPs, Libraries, Leisure Centres, and Community Centres.

Several officers have a remit for locality work and are at times based in the centre of the community, working with local agencies and partners. They actively source funding for childcare, employment workshops and signpost residents to appropriate agencies, such as CAB. They also hold 'Healthy Eating on a Budget' workshops and encourage communities to grow their own fruit and vegetables. An example of such an initiative can be found in the middle of the largest social housing estate on the Western Isles – the Cearns. Led by the Residents Association, their community development team have erected two large Polycrubs and allocated members of the scheme with their own mini allotment for the provision of fresh produce. The project was so successful over lockdown that they

are now hoping to expand the project and source funding for a further two Polycrubs. The waiting list they have reflects the concern around rising food prices and includes several young families.

Mary is a single mum with 3 young children and has been working a section of the Poly grub project over the past year. She has described her experience as “amazing! The kids love it, and we are hoping it can save us money by giving us a supply of fresh vegetables. The wee ones are more likely to try eating the veg because they have been involved.” She is now hoping to secure a second plot and through horticultural workshops will expand on what she has already grown.

- **Challenge Poverty Week**

There will be a public information campaign during Challenge Poverty Week. This will consist of daily media releases and the promotion of locally developed material on the themes of families and children; money worries; energy advice; employer advice; and food.

There will also be a round table discussion taking place during Challenge Poverty week which will take place week beginning 3-9 October. Poverty Alliance Scotland will be attending via video link. Discussion will be around the proposed increases in energy prices and the impact it will have on the population of the Western Isles.

The discussion will also, hopefully, alert Poverty Alliance to issues relating to the extensive insulation and boiler replacement work required throughout the Western Isles and the need for a bespoke approach if we are going to combat fuel poverty. Local construction firms have said they are concerned re. the large sums of money being wasted on schemes that are ineffectual; electricity bills are being forced up by the installation of air source heat pumps in houses that are inadequately insulated. In addition, the removal of open fires also deprives fuel-poor households of a sometimes less expensive means to heat their homes. The existing schemes are designed to meet the needs of those living in the Central Belt where most properties are brick-built and not the concrete and stone you find on crofts.

- **Food Availability & Distribution**

Practical action on food distribution continues to be a major focus. There are several strands that have been working together to increase the quantity and distribution of food to those most in need. This includes FareShare, Foodbanks, fresh support, and Community Groups. Communities have reported a significant increase in demand for food parcels with half of the requests coming from working families who are just above the threshold for claiming benefits.

FareShare continue to deliver significant volumes of surplus food to the islands on a regular basis. The food is collated in Stornoway and distributed across the Outer Hebrides. Funding for the Stornoway facility that provided fresh and frozen food as well as parcels has been extended by CNeS to April 2023. In addition to this a new Food Partnership proposal to coordinate Food and Nutrition services and agencies is currently in development, which will have a coordinating role in relation to emergency food and voucher provision. This will be particularly important in the coming winter

months when cost of living increases take effect. In the meantime, partners continue to issue vouchers and food parcels to those in need.

Supermarkets and other food outlets work well to manage access to supplies following the pandemic shortages. Local retailers have continued to support foodbank agencies and offer support to vulnerable groups, e.g., homelessness service.

There are a number of local food distribution projects across the islands. As an example, within the largest social housing estate on the Western Isles – the Cearns – runs a small, localised foodbank covering the Stornoway North area. The project has also secured funding to establish a Hub in partnership with the Scottish Coop – the first on the Western Isles. This will add a community fridge element, which will enable fresh food to be incorporated into the food distribution process whilst also reducing food waste.

The public, community and third sector remain proactive around the provision of food within the community. Many community groups established pools of volunteers to support with shopping for the elderly, vulnerable or those in self-isolation. A number of community bodies have accessed HIE's Supporting Communities Fund to further deliver throughout their respective communities.

Sandra is in her early 20,s has lived in supported accommodation and suffers from ongoing mental health issues. She has been supported by the development worker, CLD (Community Learning and Development) worker and Health Promotion Officer responsible for her area. They have helped her back into part-time employment and even volunteering on a regular basis as well as helping her to fill any forms required.

Sandra has benefited from the use of the food bank in the area, which she describes as "a lifeline." Sandra was also supported to access Hygiene products and toiletries through the Hotspot Intervention Team and through ongoing support is better able to manage her finances. However, the cost of food and electricity are a constant cause for stress and anxiety although she tries to remain positive and states that "there are people much worse off than me."

- **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

- The Local Authority have identified £150,000 from Local Authority COVID Economic Recovery funding - this has been distributed to the Third Sector Interface who are looking at local provision and activity around winter resilience
- A further £475,000 has been identified for direct action to address local issues. The intention is that it will be spent through a mixture of direct contributions to existing known vulnerable people by using the mechanisms already in place around, Council Tax reduction/Rebate; Children/Education Benefits; Welfare Fund; Discretionary Housing Payment and Hardship Payments, to target those most in need

There will also be an element of funding set aside for projects identified in communities by a simple application process, as well as a further element to identify those in work who are struggling and who would benefit from assistance with fuel costs.

A further key area to work on is transport. In a rural community, access to suitable transport is a critical element of poverty reduction and influences all three of the national drivers of poverty. Current and projected cuts in public services will impact on the availability of readily-accessible transport in some communities and the plan will need to address options for how access to employment, education, shopping and leisure can be maintained. The Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development Group have commissioned a Rural Community Transport Scoping Study of the Outer Hebrides – to identify what support is required to reduce isolation and alleviate poverty. Report and Action Plan by April 2023

Education, Skills and Children's Services

This work included:

- **Free School Meals** - *Free School Meals: Provision of a continuous payment of a financial allowance to families with children entitled to free school meals. Eligibility for the criteria include the following:*
 - Children of families who receive Income Support
 - Children of families who receive Income Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
 - Children of families who receive Income Based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA)
 - Children of families who receive Child Tax Credit and Working tax Credit with an income below £20,000
 - Universal credit with an earned income below £20,000.

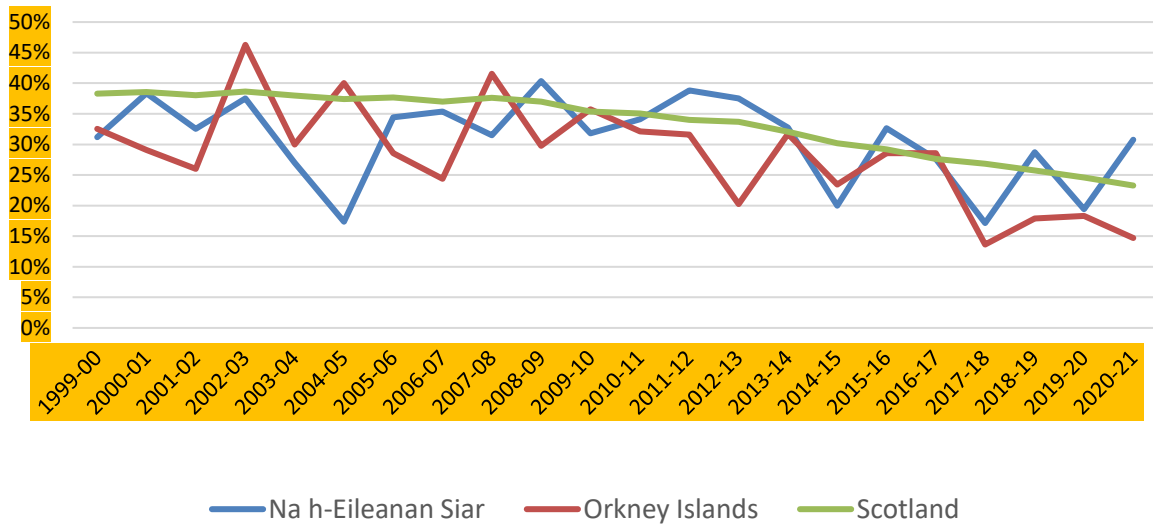
Although all pupils in P1-5 are eligible for receipt of free school meals, applying for school meals has additional benefits including bridging payments issued during the holiday periods. Last session there were just over 300 families across our island communities who applied for free school meals. Schools continue to promote the benefits of free school meals and encourage all those who are eligible to apply.

- **Clothing Grants:** All school continue to promote clothing grants across the school community. As with free school meals, the forms can be accessed online. Eligibility criteria for Clothing Grants are granted to children from families in receipt of the following:
 - Income Support
 - Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
 - Any income related element of Employment and Support Allowance
 - Child Tax Credit, but not Working tax Credit, with an income of less than £17,005
 - Both Child Tax Credit and Working tax Credit with an income of up to £7,920
 - Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
 - Universal credit with a monthly earned income of not more than £660

Pupil Equity Fund

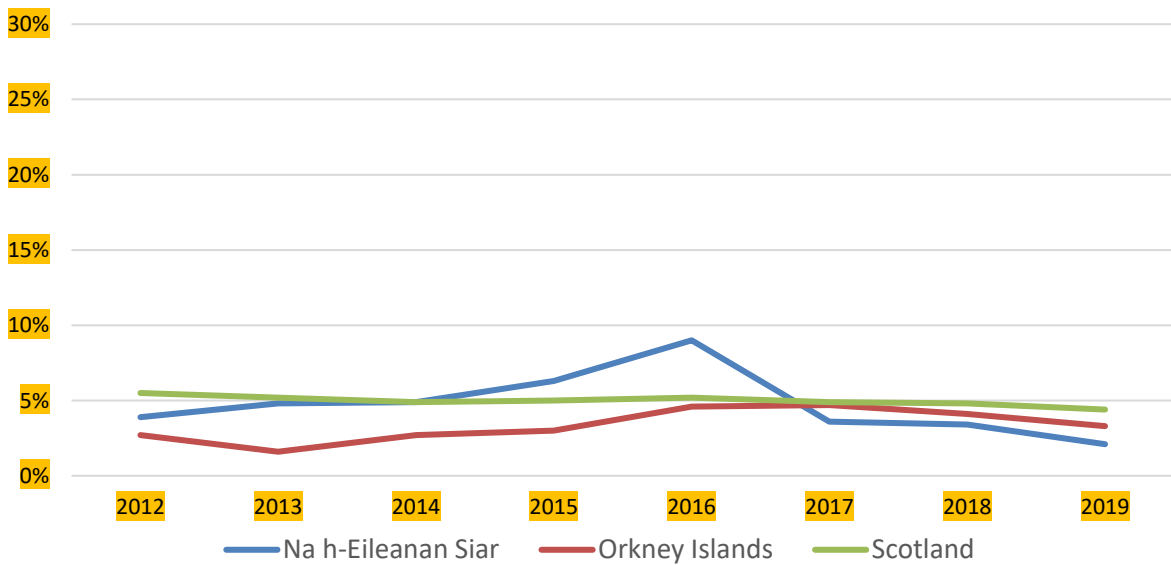
- In 2021 there were 180 pupils eligible to attend the summer holiday provision. Pupils across the islands were provided with opportunities to access a range of activities and events for the duration of the summer holiday period. Over 2021/22 families were supported with clothing, (non uniform including shoes, outdoor jackets etc.) to enable their child to attend school and nursery. This was funded through the Care Experienced Children and Young People Grant, as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Across the authority, young people have been provided with laptops which has been supported through grant applications from CECYP.
- **Food:** The Education Attainment Apprentices were tasked with providing family support instead of the work they regularly undertook in schools. This included distribution of food parcels from the fare share scheme and the purchasing of some food via a small number of direct grants.
- **Transport:** The Local Authority continues to provide school transport for all those pupils who are eligible. Following the universal removal of cost, no families are charged for the use of school transport.
- **Uniform:** As identified previously, families eligible for clothing grants are outlined above. In addition to clothing grants almost all schools across the Western Isles have set up uniform swap shops where parents/carers have the opportunity to have school uniforms that have been donated to schools. To date the uniform swap shops have been well received and are accessed and replenished on a regular basis. The swap shops are often at the school foyer/reception area and parents can access this provision whilst the school building is in operation.
- **Cost of the school day:** Across all schools, staff are poverty proofing schools. Following the pandemic, many family circumstances have changed and schools limit what they request from parents/carers. If any payments are required, parents/carers are given notice and options to pay. Schools are continuing to review initiatives such as Free Dress Friday and donations are optional. All schools use their discretion and support pupils to access school trips etc. to ensure that all pupils have an equitable experience.

% First time mothers under 25

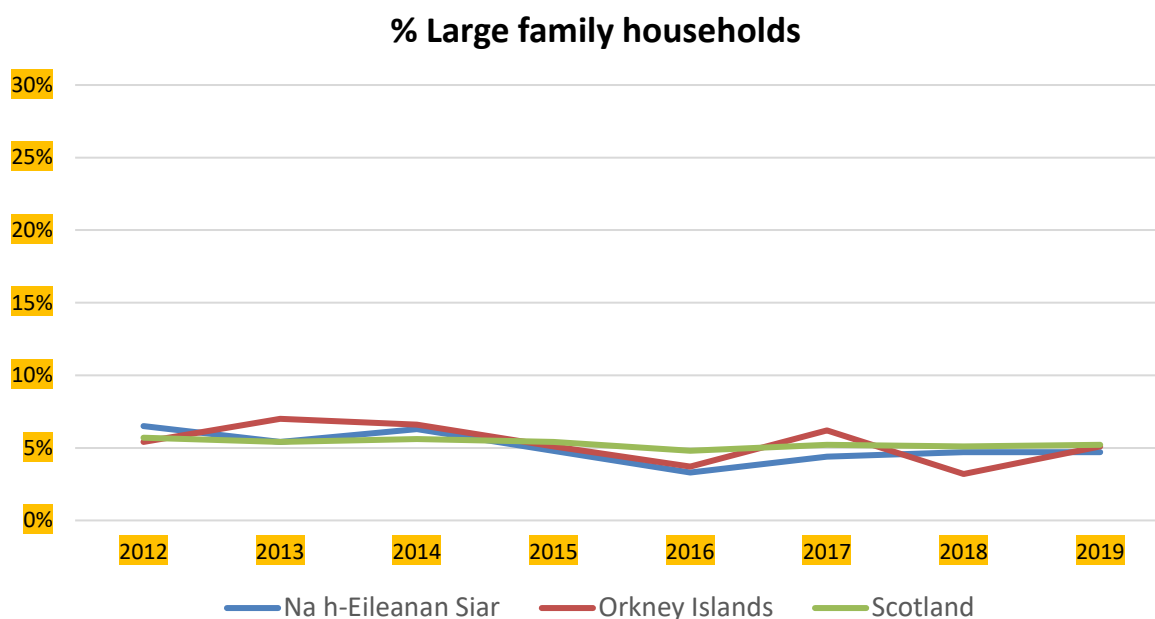


Source: Public Health Scotland, Scottish Morbidity Record 02

% Single parent households



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey



Source: Scottish Government, Scottish Household Survey

- **Impact on Partner Agencies and Community Services**

Many agencies such as CAB, TIG, HHP and DWP have seen an increase in the number of clients with employment, financial and fuel poverty concerns. There has been capacity within these organisations to address these issues though services were delivered in new and innovative ways. Other Third Sector and Community Agencies have managed to secure funding to support individuals and families. Additional resources have been secured to extend the Financial Inclusion Services and Fuel Poverty initiatives.

Referral systems for multi-agency working with individuals are in place and more regularly utilised. Estimates of ongoing need and feedback from clients are being assessed as part of the Anti-Poverty Action Plan.

- **Impact on Business**

Inflationary pressure will impact on the majority of sectors across the Outer Hebrides. Impacts are likely to occur in the service sector, in industries such as transport, retail sales, entertainment, tourism, and personal services, professional, ICT, and financial services. Over time secondary impacts such as reduced spending power are likely to spread to other parts of the local economy with the consequent effect of more people becoming poorer over time. Rising costs will also affect the public sector by increasing the pressure on staff wages and the impacts on staff who are on lower wage brackets.

Key sectors for the Outer Hebrides of fisheries, aquaculture, and food & drink (when seen in the context of tourism along with export of products) are outward facing and dependent on transport connectivity. Therefore, in a situation where connectivity has reduced and access to markets

severely affected through national and global lockdowns, there has been a substantial impact and limited scope for these sectors to be able to mitigate this.

The interventions available through UK and Scottish Government on fuel caps and grants provide a temporary and essential lifeline for many businesses and individuals in the islands, including those operating in these sectors.

PRIORITIES FOR 2022-23

It is expected that both the direct and indirect impact of the cost-of-living increases will, in part, shape the priorities for the 2022-23 Action plan. Other factors that will also feed into the shaping of the next plan will be feedback received from local and national stakeholders, projects to be carried forward from last year and uptake of new policy initiatives.

- **Lived Experience**

An important element omitted from the previous reports has been the presence of case studies taken from members of the community who have a lived experience of poverty. This plan features examples taken from the GHS workshops and capture the real and practical lived experience of children and adults in poverty within our own community. The responses are important in that they determine the approaches and priorities in the plan and will contextualise some of the issues being experienced within our diverse island community that can be different from other areas.

The Get Heard campaign has now come to an end nationally; however, the NHS will continue with the work under the auspices of Get Heard Hebrides (GHH), which will continue with a similar format and gather evidence from the community on lived experiences of poverty.

- **Target Groups**

Child Poverty rates in the areas of Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, EirisgeighagusUibhist a Deas, and Sgir'UigeagusCeann a Tuathnan Loch, and Steornabhagh a Tuath are higher than other areas.

There is need to explore our datasets and partner knowledge to identify if we can target the six priority groups identified in the national strategy. This year the Anti-Poverty Group will establish if the geographical locations and vulnerable groups could be identified as areas for specific focus moving forward.

- **Fuel Poverty**

As the winter months approach, there is a clear priority for the first six months of the plan to reference a focus on mitigating fuel poverty. With the increased costs of fuel and energy it is reasonable to forecast that a greater number of families will experience the effects of fuel poverty during the winter of 2022-2023 and the plan will need to document the actions available to address this, focussing on CnES ESF fuel poverty work, along with measures available through Home Energy Efficiency Programme Scotland: Area Based Scheme.

- **Food Sustainability & Healthy Eating**

The recently established Food Partnership led by the Third sector will make proposals for food sustainability across the islands.

The Healthy Living Programme aimed at local community stores will be promoted as well as ‘Grow your own’ grants within locality priority areas. We will develop online solutions to improve the skills of pregnant women and low-income families around a healthy diet through providing cooking on a budget demonstration across the islands and develop the Healthy Hebridean Kids project as an online programme.

Best Start Foods uptake will be increased.

- **Transport Access and Infrastructure**

In a rural community, access to suitable transport is a critical element of poverty reduction and influences all three of the national drivers of poverty. Current and projected cuts in public services will impact on the availability of readily accessible transport in some communities and the plan will need to address options for how access to employment, education, shopping, and leisure can be maintained. The Outer Hebrides Community Led Local Development Group have commissioned a Rural Community Transport Scoping Study of the Outer Hebrides – to identify what support is required to reduce isolation and alleviate poverty. Report and Action Plan by April 2023.

- **Housing Strategy**

HHP have secured £1.2m in Low Carbon funding to support heating and insulation works across properties, allowing the programme to double activity for 2022/23. In addition, HHP had secured funding to meet demand in terms of aid adaptation requirements within HHP properties.